



Education Support Professionals (ESPs): Professional Growth Continuum (PGC)

Cultural Competence: Cultural Self-Awareness *Proficient Level*

Competency

The ESP demonstrates awareness of how their own culture (e.g., race, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, beliefs, and other differences) shapes their preferences and perspectives and understands how to become conscious of previously unconscious biases going forward.

Key Method

The ESP demonstrates how cultural self-awareness shapes their experiences and effectiveness at work.

Method Components

This micro-credential is based on the Universal Standard of Cultural Competence from the [NEA's ESP Professional Growth Continuum \(PGC\)](#) which defines cultural competence as the ability to examine one's own cultural context, to understand the cultural contexts of others, and to interact across cultural contexts with sensitivity to differences (e.g., their experiences, background, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, interests, etc.) in PK-12 schools/systems, institutions of higher education, communities, worksites, or the education system as a whole.

Cultural competence for education support professionals can be broken into three skill areas:

1. Valuing diversity
2. Being culturally self-aware
3. Understanding the dynamics of cultural interactions

This micro-credential focuses on *cultural self-awareness*.

Words to Know

Behavior: how you act and how you interact with others

Bias: an interest in one thing more than others; a strong feeling in favor of or against one group of people, or one side in an argument, often not based on fair judgment

Culture: systems of beliefs, values, and assumptions about life that guide behavior and are shared by a group of people. It includes customs, language, and material artifacts. These are transmitted from generation to generation, rarely with instructions

Cultural Self-Awareness¹ is:

- Understanding that your own culture shapes **who you are, how you are a part of** your family, school, community, and society, and **how**

¹ (Cross, 1988, p. 2)

you interact and work with students, co-workers, family and community members, and administrators.

- Understanding the many ways culture impacts human behavior, especially your own.
 - **Being aware** how your day-to-day behaviors have been shaped by cultural norms and values and reinforced by family, peers, and social institutions;
 - **Being aware** how you define family, identify desirable life goals, view problems, and even say, ‘hello,’ are all influenced by the culture in which you function; and
 - **Anticipating** when your own cultural limits are likely to be pushed, foreseeing potential areas of tension and conflict with specific groups and then accommodating them².

Conscious: noticing with a degree of controlled thought or observation

Unconscious: not knowing or perceiving; not aware; not consciously held or deliberately planned or carried out

Implicit Bias: the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These implicit biases:

- Encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments.
- Are activated involuntarily without an individual’s awareness.
- Lead to feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance.
- Develop over a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages.

Self-Awareness: the ability to be aware of your emotions, thoughts, behaviors, values, preferences, goals, strengths, challenges, attitudes, mindsets, and how they impact your behavior and choices.

NEA’s ESP Professional Growth Continuum

Let’s take a look at examples of proficient-level cultural self-awareness in the NEA’s ESP Professional Growth Continuum. There are many ways for ESPs to demonstrate cultural self-awareness at a proficient level. Demonstrating skills and knowledge in this standard may look different depending on

² (Cross, 1988, p. 2)

one's unique role, worksite, community, and experience. The following language, adapted from the PGC, provides examples (indicators are bold, descriptors are sub-bullets):

- **Recognize one's reaction to individuals or groups who are different from oneself.**
(For All Career Families)
 - be aware of your implicit and explicit biases
 - manage your reactions to differences and expand your ability to work with others

- **Understand how one's own culture—all experiences, background, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests—shapes one's sense of self, how one fits into family, school, community, and society, and how one interacts with others.**
(For All Career Families)
 - reflect on your own experiences (e.g., race, social class, gender, religion, etc.) to identify generalized social norms and expectations
 - reflect on how worksite/district policies and practices match or are different from your own experiences and expectations

- **Understand the impact of racial and cultural differences in educational and work environments.**
(For All Career Families)
 - recognize the impact of your own behavior on others regardless of intent, and modify your behavior when the impact is revealed
(For Clerical Services, Custodial and Maintenance, Paraeducators, Security Services, Skilled Trades, Technical Services, Transportation Services)
 - apply cross-cultural communication skills (e.g., different ways of showing respect, seeking assistance, sharing personal information, etc.)
(For Food Services)
 - apply cross-cultural communication and sensitivity knowledge (e.g., difference in cultural/religious dress and uniforms required by school nutrition department, religious fasting, dietary restrictions, ways of showing respect, etc.)

(For Health and Student Services)

- apply cross-cultural communication and sensitivity knowledge (e.g., different ways of showing respect, cultural/religious health practices, share personal or health information, etc.)

- **Model cultural competence in interactions with students, parents/guardians, staff, visitors, and the community.**

(For All Career Families)

- express awareness of your own implicit and explicit biases
- ask questions to determine if any missing perspectives have been sought and included in decisions
- use protocols and skills in cross-cultural and interracial interactions

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn this micro-credential you must receive a proficient score in Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, and Part 4.

If any Part of the micro-credential is incomplete or left blank, the submission will be scored “Incomplete,” and you will receive an email with a note of encouragement to complete all Parts of the micro-credential and resubmit your work to NEA.

Please read the “How to earn a proficient score” section at the end of each Part below to make sure your micro-credential submission is complete and meets the requirements.

For each Part, you may choose to submit your response:

- in WRITING (created in Microsoft Word, Google Docs, or another word processing software; acceptable file formats are .doc, .docx, .pdf, .rtf); OR
- through an AUDIO RECORDING (created on a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet, or on audio recording equipment; acceptable file formats are .mp3, .wav, .aiff); OR
- through a VIDEO RECORDING (created on a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet, or on audio recording equipment; acceptable file formats are .mp4, .mov, .wmv, .avi)

Video or audio recordings for each Part should be one single file. You may complete all of the responses in one clip, or you may edit multiple clips together as one file to submit per Part.

IMPORTANT:

ESPs are strongly encouraged to take time to explore the links in the *Supporting Rationale and Research* and *Resources* section at the end of this document.

Do this before working on Part 1 of your micro-credential submission.

Part 1: Skill Area Learning – Learn About Cultural Self-Awareness

Directions:

1. Watch these 3 videos:
 - [Why is cultural self-awareness important to me, as an ESP?](#) by ESP leader Shasta Rosales
 - [How self-awareness helps me help others](#) by ESP leader Cara Martin Howard
 - [How racial bias works - and how to disrupt it](#) by Dr. Jennifer Eberhardt
2. Think about what you heard in the videos and make notes. Write down your thoughts or full responses to the 5 questions/prompts below.
 1. What were 3 important points or insights that you heard when you watched the videos by ESP leaders Shasta Rosales and Cara Martin Howard?
 2. What was the most interesting thing that Cara or Shasta shared in their videos, and why is it of interest to you?

3. Name 3 specific examples of how bias can appear in daily life that Dr. Eberhardt shared in her video.
4. What did you learn from the story about Dr. Eberhardt's son on the airplane?
5. What did Dr. Eberhardt say are the best ways to disrupt your biases?

You may choose to submit a **written response** for Part 1. If you do this:

- Create a new Word document.
- Type or copy and paste your responses from your notes to questions/prompts #1 – 5. This should include answers/responses to all of the above questions and prompts. Save the document.
- Upload the document file to the NEA Certification Bank submission page section for Part 1.

OR

You may choose to submit an **audio or video response** for Part 1. If you do this:

- Use a mobile device (e.g., smartphone or tablet) to make an audio or video recording of yourself answering all of the questions/prompts #1 – 5. Feel free to refer to any notes you have made during your exploration of the topic. Save your recording.
- Upload the file of the recording to the NEA Certification Bank submission page section for Part 1.
- The audio or video recording should be no more than 7 minutes in length. If a submitted recording for Part 1 is longer than 7 minutes, only the first 7 minutes will be reviewed.

Submission Checklist:

- Upload your written, audio, or video recording to Part 1.
- Completely answer each question/prompt;
- Include specific examples from the videos in each of your responses; and
- If you submit an audio or video recording: make sure the total length of your responses for Part 1 is no longer than 7 minutes.

- If you submit a written response: make sure the total length of your response for Part 1 is 350 words minimum and no longer than 1000 words.
- *If you have a job description, please upload a copy of it along with the rest of your files in Part 1 of the NEA Certification Bank submission page for this micro-credential. This will help NEA learn more about how employers view ESP roles, and will not affect your score. Submitting your employer-created job description is not required to earn a proficient score on this micro-credential.

How to earn a passing and proficient score in Part 1:

Part 1 Passing: At least three terms from the “Words to Know” section must be integrated accurately into your responses.

Part 1 Rubric: Responses to direction 2, questions/prompts 1-5.

Score:	Developing	Proficient
Direction #2, Questions/Prompts #1-5:	Provide answers to some or all questions/prompts but little to no detail illustrating the points shared.	Provide answers to all questions/prompts, using details from the videos for each question, and demonstrate an understanding of the cultural self-awareness concepts shared in each video.

Part 2: Worksite Activity

Directions:

1. Download this document: [Cultural Self-Awareness Worksite Activity Sheet](#).

2. Follow the directions on the activity sheet. You will upload the written response OR the video or audio recording you created for this activity as part of your micro-credential submission.

Submission Checklist:

- Upload your written, audio, or video recording to Part 2 of the NEA Certification Bank submission page.
- Completely answer each question/prompt;
- If you submit an audio or video recording:
 - make sure the total length of your recording for Experience #1 is no longer than 5 minutes
 - make sure the total length of your recording for Experience #2 is no longer than 5 minutes.
- If you submit a written response:
 - make sure the length of your response for Experience #1 is 350 words minimum and no longer than 750 words;
 - make sure the length of your response for Experience #2 is 350 words minimum and no longer than 750 words

How to earn a passing score in Part 2:

Part 2 Passing: Written, audio, or video responses for Experience 1 and 2 are complete with detailed responses to all questions and prompts.

- For Experience 1, responses focus on an experience with a student, co-worker, administrator, family or community member that involved a cultural difference in one or more of the following “unspoken” aspects of culture:
 - o concept of time
 - o personal space, or
 - o body language.
- For Experience 2, responses focus on an experience with a student, co-worker, administrator, family or community member that involved a cultural difference in one or more of the following “unconscious” aspects of culture:

- o beliefs about roles (what someone should be responsible for, do, or not do) in relation to age, gender, or job title;
- o preference for cooperation or competition; and
- o definition of obscenity.

Part 3: Interview

Directions: Follow the steps below, make an audio or video recording or written transcription of the interview, and save it to upload as part of your submission.

Identify one person from your ESP career family with whom you feel comfortable having a conversation about cultural self-awareness. Do not have the interviewee share any personal information that could be used to identify them (e.g., name, school, district, etc.) as they should remain anonymous.

Before the interview, provide the interviewee with a copy of the questions and the PGC indicators and descriptors listed above. The recording should be 5-10 minutes in length. If a submitted recording for Part 3 is longer than 10 minutes, only the first 10 minutes will be reviewed. Written transcriptions should be no longer than 1000 words.

Interview the person using only questions #1-6 below and include their responses. After conducting the interview, answer all of the questions yourself:

1. What is one behavior that was celebrated when you were growing up?
2. What is one behavior that was discouraged when you were growing up?
3. What does cultural self-awareness mean to you?
4. Can you give me one example of a blind spot you have noticed in your work environment (e.g., worksite, school, community, district, or institution of higher education)?
5. Do you think that we, at our worksite, are encouraging adults to develop and use their cultural self-awareness?

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- a. If yes, provide a specific example of what we are doing well to make this happen, and how you know it is working.
 - b. If no, what do you think we could do differently?
6. What have you learned from talking with a co-worker or colleague about cultural self-awareness?

Submission Checklist:

- Upload your audio or video recording or written transcription of your interview to Part 3 of the NEA Certification Bank submission page.
- Include complete and relevant responses to all five questions from the interviewee AND from the submitter/you.
 - Answer 1,2,3,4; then
 - Answer either 5a or 5b.
- For question 4, provide a specific and relevant example of a blind spot observed at work.
- For question 5, provide relevant specifics on how school/worksite/community staff and/or leaders are encouraging the development and usage of cultural self-awareness, or provide achievable ideas for what could be done differently to do better in this area.
- Make sure the length of your recording is no longer than 10 minutes and the length of a written transcription is no longer than 1000 words.

How to earn a proficient score in Part 3:

Part 3 Rubric:

Score:	Developing	Proficient
Interviews	Interview of co-worker and self do not provide answers to all questions, or provide answers to all questions but only with general examples (no specifics provided) about what cultural self-awareness means to each interviewee, an	Interview of co-worker and self provide answers to all questions, demonstrating understanding of cultural self-awareness with specifics provided about what cultural

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	example of a blind spot; and whether adults are encouraged to develop and use their cultural self-awareness skills on the job; and what was learned about cultural self-awareness in the interview.	self-awareness means to each interviewee, examples of a blind spot, and whether adults are encouraged to develop and use their cultural self-awareness skills on the job and how this could be improved if needed; and identify understanding of co-worker's experiences with cultural self-awareness to inform the submitter's knowledge about the skill area.
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Part 4: Reflection

Directions: Read all of the text in the three numbered prompts/questions below.

Then respond to all three prompts/questions through a written response, OR through an audio or video recording of yourself.

- If you submit a written response: make sure your Part 4 response is 350 words minimum and no longer than 750 words.
- If you submit a recording (audio or video): make sure your recording for Part 4 is no longer than 5 minutes.

Prompts/Questions:

1. Describe one missed opportunity at your worksite, when you or others could have been more culturally self-aware. (*Your response describing a missed opportunity will not negatively impact your score and will not be shared.)
2. What action step or small change can you make in the next seven months to strengthen your cultural self-awareness skills? How could you put those stronger skills to use at your worksite, school, community, district, or institution of higher education?

Some examples:

- *Be curious about yourself!* As Dr. Eberhardt suggests, take a moment to slow down, pause, and ask yourself questions before reacting to situations. Some of those questions to ask yourself might be:
 - Who do I usually not pay attention to? Why might that be? How can I change that to brighten someone's day?
 - Why is this bothering me? What baggage around this topic might I bring into the situation?
 - Why do I gravitate to certain people at my worksite and not others?
 - How can I step out of my comfort zone today?
 - Talk about your exploration of cultural self-awareness with another member of your worksite community. Share what you've learned or realized, and ask them about their thoughts on the topic.
 - Change how you approach one task or part of your day where you have realized you could be more inclusive or welcoming to others.
3. Describe who will benefit from your steps to develop and deepen your own cultural self-awareness skills. Tell us how and why they will benefit.

Submission Checklist:

- Upload your written, audio, or video response to the NEA Certification Bank submission page for Part 4.
- Include relevant, complete, and specific responses to all three prompts/questions.

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- Make sure your responses reflect an understanding of what proficient cultural self-awareness means for ESPs.
- Make sure your written length is 350 words minimum and no longer than 750 words; or your recording length is no longer than 5 minutes.

How to earn a passing score in Part 4:

Part 4 Passing: Your reflection identifies an action step/change you can make to strengthen your cultural self-awareness skills, how you will put those stronger skills to use at your worksite, school, community, or institution of higher education, and who will benefit and how they will benefit.

Supporting Rationale and Research

Moule, J. [*Cultural Competence: A primer for educators*](#). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth and Cengage Learning. 2012.

NEA. [*ESP Professional Growth Continuum*](#).

Mayfield, V. [*Cultural Competence Now*](#). ASCD. 2020.

NEA. [*Racial Justice in Education Framework Principles*](#). 2021.

Renkly, S. and K. Bertolini. [*Shifting the Paradigm from Deficit Oriented Schools to Asset Based Models: Why Leaders Need to Promote an Asset Orientation in our Schools*](#). Empowering Research for Educators (Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.) 2018.

Resources:

The PGC: What it is and how to use it

- [English video](#)
- [Spanish video](#)
- [Spanish resources](#)

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[Promoting Educators' Cultural Competence to Better Serve Culturally Diverse Students](#) by NEA

[Implicit Bias, Microaggressions, and Stereotypes Resources](#) by NEA

[Whole Child Approach to Education](#) by ASCD

[Cultural Proficiency Continuum](#) by The Center for Culturally Proficient Educational Practice

[Diversity, Equity, and Cultural Competence](#) by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

[How racial bias works - and how to disrupt it](#) (VIDEO) by Dr. Jennifer Eberhardt