CULTURAL RESILIENCE: 5 ESSENTIAL 21ST CENTURY COMPETENCIES

Educational institutions & corporations have acknowledged the need for individuals to demonstrate a proficiency in “21st century skills” or have a “Global Mindset” in competencies such as innovation, adaptability, critical analysis, cross-cultural communication, and teamwork.1 Research on resiliency proposes that resilient individuals who rise above challenges also obtain similar types of skills in adapting quickly to new circumstances, thriving in constant change and most importantly expect to bounce back.2 “Cultural Resilience” is defined as competencies (inner strengths) acquired through life experiences that often come from navigating a diverse and often challenging environment and using one’s own tradition & culture background to overcome such factors.3 The competencies developed from these lived experiences are often overlooked by institutions or unacknowledged by the individual. In addition, research identified that high levels of these competencies were found in the research of low-income, students of color undocumented youth4. These skills are also known in the corporate environment as a Global Mindset; in the education field as Common Core; and in the Psychology field as Social Emotional Intelligence. These 5 essential competencies align with some of the 21st century skills expressed by organizations and researchers such as Partners for 21st century Skills, Ken Kay and Dr. Tony Wagner.

The goal of E3 is to assist educators to recognize these competencies in their students in order to engage them in learning. Each of the following five competencies are derived from life experiences and can be correlated to 21st century skills:

1. Acculturation (Ser Americano)
   The ability to survive one’s environment by analyzing two or more cultural contexts that show various perspectives, observations, and experiences.

   This stems from the experience when immigrants adapt to the host country’s cultural values while maintaining their own cultural values. It also refers to analyzing one’s own cultural values in relation to those of social, familial, and educational environments as a survival mechanism. One example is a student from a rural community who is able to acculturate in an urban school setting. The corresponding 21st century skill is: Critical Analysis

2. Navigation of borders (Jaula de Oro)
   The ability to survive and navigate a continually changing environment.

   This stems from an oppressed experience in which the individual must constantly navigate a hostile environment. An individual must be flexible to navigate a constantly changing cultural environment. One example is a student who lives in low-income housing and must successfully avoid potential crime and threat. The corresponding 21st century skills: Adaptability & Agility

3. Inter/Intra cultural communication (Agringándose)
   The ability to effectively communicate with an individual from a different cultural background.

   This is the ability to go back and forth from one cultural language to another. One example is an African American’s ability to code-switch from Ebonics to “standard” English or an immigrant’s ability to speak in two languages. The corresponding 21st century skill is: Cross-cultural communication

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1 Global Achievement Gap, Tony Wagner, 2008, and Partnership for 21st Century skills
4 Jaula de Oro, Dissertation JuanCarlos Arauz 2007
4. **Teamwork (La Familia)**
The ability to place a priority on the needs of the group by effectively influencing and being influenced, while collaborating with others to accomplish a group task.
This stems from the ability to utilize networks in the community, often demonstrated in times of crisis. One example is living authentically in more densely populated neighborhoods or playing on team sports that require greater diplomacy and intimate interaction.
The corresponding 21st century skill is: Collaboration

5. **Creative Self-Expression (Cualidades de Don Quixote y ser listo): The ability to solve problems creatively that do not necessarily have a solution.**
This stems from the ability to demonstrate several forms of descriptive expression and ideas in order to navigate a seemingly hostile environment. This may be the response when a student is bullied or disapproved of because they live in the wrong area, are subject to abuse in the home or are being initiated into gangs. These children often find ways to survive their environment using creative or innovative thinking.
The corresponding 21st century skill is: Innovation & Imagination

Too often, traditional “low-end” academic achieving students are offered a “deficit approach” solution; that is, a solution that assumes their lack of ability and requires assimilation to “normative” cultural expectations. Attempts to work with these students have fallen short because there is little acknowledgement of the skill sets they have accumulated.

Ironically, traditionally high-achieving students are often provided external opportunities to engage in community service activities to enrich and develop their lived experience. Attempts to offer experiences in civic engagement or 21st century skill building are not meaningful or successful if these students are unable to translate these experiences into their learning.

Both groups - the under-achieving and high-achieving students - are in need of guided practice and assistance to learn how to acknowledge the competencies that are learned from lived experiences and how to translate them into an academic context.

### CULTURAL RESILIENCE: The FIVE ESSENTIAL 21ST CENTURY COMPETENCIES

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