

Cultural alienation

Concern

Alienated, negative attitude and behavior characterized by truancy, lack of effort, continual conflict with teachers, putting down peers, disconnection from school environment.

Description

These students skip school, continually challenge authority and attribute failure to cultural insensitivity, disconnect, discrimination or injustice. These experiences may be real or perceived. They are often members of marginalized groups including ethnic or racial groups, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious or political minorities, and/or students who look or act differently than the “norm.” In many, if not most cases, these students are caught in a chicken-and-egg dance of perceived lower expectations and disproportionate discipline by adults, and student reactions that seem to confirm those negative preconceptions.

The overall goal with these students is to break through a shell of cynicism, getting them engaged in school and providing them opportunities to serve others. From a practical perspective, the easiest way to do that is to leverage their interest in social dynamics and power, so that alienation can be transformed into responsible activism. It is neither a good, nor fair, solution to simply try to talk these students out of their complaints. As long as there is the perception of inequality, there is some injury.

As students feel empowered to change the things they believe are unfair, they are less likely to drop out, or transfer their anger and frustration onto others, or become disengaged. When they begin to identify what they have in common with their peers, they are more likely to form positive social bonds that overcome isolation. When they realize they have something to give, and learn skills for giving, their self-worth is confirmed. Finally, as they are able to look at cultural differences and take pride in their own legacy, they can look at how their attitudes toward school are linked to historical community experiences and make conscious decisions about how to rewrite that history going forward.

Goals of intervention - students will:

- Appreciate their own heritage
- Appreciate individual differences in themselves and others
- Develop greater appreciation for cultural diversity
- Analyze perceived discrimination and injustice
- Understand motives
- Take others' point of view
- Identify positive contributions they can make to the community
- Become active participants in the democratic process
- Deepen their understanding of social justice
- Learn constructive ways to confront injustice
- Learn how to make complaints

A suggested scope and sequence - Teens

Background - family	Discrimination	Picked on by peers
Background - community	Justice	Power
Curiosity	Respect - getting it	Community
Ethnic diversity	Respect - showing it	Restitution
Diversity - appreciating	Effort	Poor
Cultural differences	Gay	Social values
Religious diversity	Self-efficacy	Pride - national
Identifying with others	Democracy - doing	Rude - online
Perspective taking	Confronting injustice	Internet - expressing yourself
Understanding motives	Making complaints	Resentment
Risk and protection	Helping others	
Expectations	Ignored	
Stereotypes	Isolated	