

INTERSECTION OF SELF AND SYSTEMS

PERSONAL LEARNING GUIDE

This resource is intended to provide essential questions and critical reflection questions in order to support individual educators and other school stakeholders in learning about their own identity as well as their positionality within social systems.

Essential Questions

- Personal:** How deeply have I explored the social constructs in our society, especially the aspect of identity and its complex impact on educational systems and achievement?
- Conditional:** How and to what extent has my school district prioritized courageous conversations about equity as part of its professional culture?

Time Required

Varies; individual reading work varies in length; suggested reflection process

Who Should Use This Guide

Any identity-focused process works best for individuals working at their own pace to deepen their own learning alongside congruent group activities. This particular set of resources is aimed at those early in their journeys.

Preparation

Reading about the Critical Driver “Intersection of Self and Systems” or a similar professional development topic is an important precondition to provide sufficient context to the readings and questions within this tool.

Process

1. Select one of the suggested resources included within your chapter, professional development module, or the guide below to read or watch, individually or in an ad hoc reading group, to support a deepening your understanding of personal identity (including dominant and subordinate aspects of identity) or one’s positionality within social systems. Read/watch the chosen resource. *Duration varies; readings of longer than an hour are best broken into multiple sessions.*
2. Begin a short, sacred period of open personal reflection related to the resource, which should include journaling on paper or electronically. *10–20 minutes, depending on length of resource.*
3. Engage with the prompts and questions provided by this tool (if applicable) to guide deeper and more targeted reflection and learning.

Please note:

While group discussions and activities are often beneficial, they are not described above. These discussions may be challenging to navigate with considerations of equity and are best facilitated by consultants well-versed in issues of equity, positionality, and anti-bias work. Many schools and districts find that professional development focused on this Critical Driver is a sine qua non for supporting sustainable growth in educator mindset and practice.



Some Recommended Early Resources with Reflective Questions

Stages of Racial Identity Development^a

Growth in all aspects of our lives is developmental. How we understand our position in the larger context of society is very much related to how we understand the significance of difference and the impact our racial identity has on us. The RID stages give insight into how individuals come into awareness of their own racial identity and their indicators.

- Locate yourself on the RID table based on your racially identify, then, as you read each stage, think about what age you were when you were in that stage of development and reflect on what lived experience you recall related to that time in your life.
- Find where you are at this time on the RID chart based on your racial identity and consider if you have moved in and out of the stage earlier in life or if you are at the stage for the first time and how you know. Consider what questions come up for you at this time. If you are able, talk with someone who has also gone through this exercise and for whom you have enough comfort to share how you are feeling.

“White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” by Peggy McIntosh^b

This classic article has been used in diversity and race work for decades. Peggy McIntosh demonstrates the privilege she and her children have every day to be affirmed in society and in their school experiences.

- Reflect on the power and privileges you possess or those you do not. How are these relevant to your role as an educator? How do you think your students experience the classroom based on this reading?
- How does the way we are socialized impact our values and beliefs about ourselves, students, and their families and communities? How do these beliefs impact our teaching approach?

“How to Overcome Our Biases? Walk Boldly toward Them,” by Vernā Meyers^c

In this 2014 TED Talk, Vernā Meyers gives attention to the plight of violence black males face in our society, connecting this to the engrained and unconscious biases that all humans possess, and provides suggestions on how one can improve awareness and challenge one’s own biases.

- What examples does Meyers offer that give evidence to the reality that Black males are treated with bias? How does her example transfer into our school communities and classrooms?
- For each of the three suggestions Meyers offers toward decreasing or reassociating one’s biases, how can you take personal action? Are there actions you can take that will impact your school, classroom, or school community?

^a This document, developed by the Interaction Institute for Social Change, is available at the Racial Equity Tools website, racialequitytools.org.

^b This essay is available at Racial Equity Tools website, racialequitytools.org, and is excerpted from Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women’s Studies,” Working Paper 189, Wellesley College Center for Research on Women (1988).

^c Video available at TED.com: https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them?language=en.

