

CULTIVATING SELF AS RESPONSIVE INSTRUMENT FOR INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE AND SUCCESS FOR ALL

Hazel Symonette, Ph.D.

There are voices from the future and they are calling your name.
Whose voices do you hear? Whose voices do you heed and how do you know?
To what extent would which voices agree with your self-assessment?

Effective self-presentation and appropriate uses of the self, vis-à-vis others, forge critical pathways towards ethical practice and inclusive excellence. These competencies are especially important in communications-based professions like education, social research and evaluation. Having a well-endowed professional toolkit is surely necessary but not sufficient. Even if top of the line, that expert toolkit is all for naught if not complemented by *interpersonal validity-enhancement work*: notably, the soundness and trustworthiness of the uses of self as knower, inquirer and engager of others. The vitality and efficacy of the toolkit can be eclipsed by problematic perceptions of the person. So, who do the persons that you seek to communicate with and engage perceive you as being? Such questions are at the heart of bridge-building border crossings which over time and adaptive praxis culminate in one becoming a more effective border-spanning bridge builder and excellence-grounded educator. In fact, this kind of journey is essential for all social relations-grounded professions.

- ◆ **DYNAMIC MULTI-LEVEL SCANNING, TRACKING AND FANNING: Self-to-Self, Self-to-Others, Self-to-Systems.** Who are you as knower, inquirer and engager of others? Our lenses, filters and frames exert critical influences on our leadership orientations, on the service delivery processes we design and implement and on our assessment processes and evaluative judgment-making. Inclusive excellence and ethical practice demands diversity-grounded awareness and continuous assessment of one's own conceptual, perceptual and meaning-making/meaning-shaping prisms: most notably, the particular ways they are informed and shaped by multiple social identities and sociopolitical roles, diverse life paths, sociocultural and other experiences.
 - **CONCEPTUAL PRISM: *Who and What matters When and Where?***
 - **Lenses:** Your sensing portals through which you connect with the physical, social and spiritual worlds—*What is the nature of your pathways for perceiving and receiving the *VOICES* as well as other data?*
 - **Filters:** Your sifting and winnowing processes and protocols based upon your operational definitions of what is substance and worthy of attention (“signal”) versus noise and extraneous variation—*What do you look at and actually see, listen to and actually hear, touch and actually feel versus not fully and accurately seeing, hearing or feeling?*
 - **INTERPRETIVE PRISM: *Why, How and How Much “It” matters?***
 - **Frames:** Your meaning-shaping/meaning-making resources and “infrastructure”—*What are your personal thinking and feeling practices, perspectives and processes, i.e., your constellation of relevant values, beliefs, attitudes, orientations as well as social-structure locations?*

These dynamics occur whether intended or desired or not. What matters most is interpersonal *IMPACT* not personal *INTENT*. Expanding one's self-awareness is especially crucial when engaging and working across diversity divides—notably, salient human differences that make a socially-patterned difference for access, process and success. Such interpersonal relations vary widely in their impacts on the quality, accuracy and trustworthiness of observations and interpretations.

- ◆ **Empathy-Grounded Communications and Work Agendas.** Mindfully move beyond simply understanding who you see yourself as being and what you believe you bring to a situational, relational and spatial/geographic context—i.e., unilateral self-awareness. Most importantly, regularly and mindfully probe: *Who do the persons that I am communicating and working with perceive and receive me as being and what attributes am I perceived as having that have relevance (positive or negative) in educational and other service delivery processes?* For example, how do these attributes show up in me/as me—both from my own as well as others' vantage points: trusting/trustworthy, respectful/respectable, caring ("in good hands"), credible, competent? *To what extent is the help that I provide perceived and embraced as helpful? How do I know what I think I know about this and who says so?*
- ◆ **Lifelong-Journey Mindframe.** Recognize the need to dynamically embrace the mastery of intercultural/multicultural competencies as a lifelong journey. It is a process and stance and not simply a destination or fixed state of being. For example, culture is itself dynamic, organic and ever changing; so, this is a continuous learning and reflective practice pilgrimage which recognizes that *yesterday's multiculturally-competent practitioner can become tomorrow's incompetent.*

WHO ARE YOU? Addressing these questions requires vigilance and clear-eyed honesty to assess the ways in which one is aided or hindered by one's own voice, social identities, experiences and perspectives. Who we are as knowers, inquirers, and engagers of others matters! We need to understand who we are and how we know what we believe we know about ourselves:

- Who is the I that I know and believe myself to be?
- Who is the I that others perceive and believe they know me to be?

To what extent and in what ways do these beliefs converge or diverge? What might account for likely disparities? What are the implications of gaps for appropriate and effective communication, education and other service delivery processes? Bottomline: Excellence and ethical imperatives challenge each of us to regularly examine what I am perceived and received as bringing to a situational, relational and spatial/geographic context as assets and resources to WORK WITH and as attributes to WORK ON—blankspots, blindspots, triggers, issues. This context-grounded *FORCEFIELD* ASSESSMENT constitutes an ongoing lifework agenda which is needed to calibrate and cultivate self as diversity-grounded, equity-minded responsive instrument for ethical practice and excellence for all.

LIFELONG JOURNEY: MULTILATERAL SELF-AWARENESS. Living in a complex social world summons us to recognize and work with the frequent tensions between one's own self-image and others' image of us. Regardless of the truth-value of others' perceptions, they still rule until authentically engaged in ways that *speak-into-their-listening*. Of course, knowing others' images of who they think we are does not compel us to embrace and own such views. Nevertheless, we do need full awareness of such views since they inform and influence how people relate to us, or not.

Expanding our self-awareness is especially crucial when engaging and working across diversity divides where interpersonal relations can strongly impact the accuracy and trustworthiness of observations and interpretations; the responsiveness of educational interventions and, thus, the quality of evaluative judgments. Our perceptions yield culturally-conditioned data and their meanings are neither self-evident nor do they speak for themselves. The same observational data can conjure up dramatically different meanings and interpretations depending upon our lenses, filters and frames. They are informed by our knowledge and understandings of self in dynamically diverse contexts within power and privilege hierarchies (particular point in time) and our understandings of the contexts embodied in the self—notably, one's social identities and roles derived through socialization and status allocation/distribution processes across time.

IN SEARCH OF AN INTEGRAL EDUCATOR-SELF. We enhance prospects for operating at our educator best when we deliberately and intentionally embrace a culturally- and contextually-responsive *action researcher stance*. This involves constantly engaging in systematic data-grounded inquiry as a resource for critically- and creatively-reflective cycles of educational planning, development and improvement. This evidence-framing dialogue with self as educator—vis a vis one's students and what the *educational success vision and context* is summoning from us—fosters ethical practice and inclusive excellence.

For any research process, validity issues are pivotal. **To what extent are we observing/measuring/ discerning what our knowledge claims declare?** Ethical practice and inclusive excellence commands us to deepen our awareness of "*interpersonal validity*" as a critical, yet severely underdeveloped, complement to other more conventional forms of validity. This includes the soundness and trustworthiness of understandings warranted by one's uses of the SELF vis a vis one's uses of educational tools, techniques and strategies. To what extent are you looking and actually seeing; listening and actually hearing; touching and actually feeling? How do you know and who says so?

FOUNDATIONAL EDUCATOR RESPONSIBILITIES. Identify the array of salient and impactful diversity dimensions in a given context. Then, design and implement processes that will *appropriately and effectively* challenge, engage and support the full spectrum of students. Most notably, how responsive and broadly engaging are your curricular, cocurricular and instructional processes and practices? To what extent do they reflect hearing and heeding the voices of all students in full voice and to what extent would which students agree with your self-assessment? How do you know?

To move beyond do's-and-taboos checklists, we must dynamically scan, monitor and read *CONTEXTS*—relational, situational and spatial/ geographic—both within as well as beyond the classroom. Like other social relations, it matters WHO is carrying WHAT and HOW in determining the extent to which educational opportunities and development processes will be embraced as a resource, rejected or suspiciously tended to in perfunctory ways. Dynamic awareness and knowledge of the social topography, *vis-à-vis* one's own and others' boundaries, lays the groundwork for working the borderlands (communications free-flow zone) and ultimately for engaging in appropriate border-crossings. These are necessary prerequisites for border-spanning communications, service and leadership for the greater good.

EMERGING AN INTEGRAL EDUCATOR-SELF: AN ACTION RESEARCH AGENDA. My evolving quadrant model offers the beginnings of a holistic educator framework for calibrating and cultivating self as responsive instrument. Crafted from the vantage point of an individual educator, the model builds upon Ken Wilber's *Integral Quadrant Model*. My work focuses on the most underdeveloped and untended dimensions of an integral model: notably, the interconnections among interior environments, both the individual and the collective. Moving beyond the typical "flatland" frameworks, I have mapped my self-as-instrument concepts across the 4 quadrants, e.g., unilateral self-awareness in the upper left quadrant and multilateral self-awareness, in the lower left.

My model offers a framework of sensitizing concepts and questions for mindfully scanning, tracking and monitoring WHO factors in context—notably, the *human systems dynamics*. These items speak to the multiple dimensions of diversity that live in the interpersonal interface among human beings: e.g., the educator and those who are educated; the information-providers and the information-seekers.

As you move into a new educational context, the sensitizing concepts and questions associated with each quadrant provide the beginnings of a comprehensive self-assessment framework, with heads-up alerts, for checking in with ourselves. Such assessments need to occur before, after and during the education process in order to check out one's self-in-action while being and doing self. Most importantly, what are the relevant assets and resources in your **Educator Portfolio**—professional, intercultural, interpersonal, intrapersonal—as well as your needs, challenges, blankspots and blindspots? What is the status of your *forcefield of preparedness and readiness* for the sociocultural context as well as the tasks embodied in the educational development agenda before you? Who says so and how do you know?

Calibrating and Cultivating An Integral Educator-Self As Responsive Instrument

Agent/Actor Vantage Point/Stance	Interior Environment	Exterior Environment
Individual Mindfully standing in one's own vantage point/ perspective (self-empathy)	<p>Inside/In Self-to-Self/Inward</p> <p>* Self-Awareness *</p> <p>* What is my vision of who I <i>be</i>/am becoming calling for from me—unilateral self awareness? * How am I showing up in my own intrapersonal world of self? * WHO AM I?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">I</p> <p>* Subjective*</p>	<p>Inside/Out Self-to-Self/Outward</p> <p>* Education Task Management *</p> <p>* What is the situational context--the teaching/learning agenda--calling for from me? * How am I showing up in that educational context and related tasks? * WHAT MATTERS?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ITG</p> <p>* Behavioral *</p>
Collective Standing in the perspectives/vantage points of multiple relevant collectives and reference groups	<p style="text-align: right;">WE</p> <p>Outside/In Self-to-Others</p> <p>* Social Awareness *</p> <p>* What is the sociocultural/relational context calling for from me—multilateral self-awareness? * How am I perceiving others as perceiving/receiving me showing up in a world of many We's and They's? * What cues and clues telegraph the message "one of us" versus "not one of us"—however, US-ness is defined? * WHO BELONGS?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">*InterSubjective/Cultural*</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ITGS</p> <p>Outside/Out Self-to-Systems</p> <p>* Relationship/Process Management *</p> <p>* As educator, how am I interfacing and engaging with the collective intentions and diverse sociocultural orientations organized and manifesting in the world in ways that impact implementation of the teaching/ learning agenda? * For and with whose rhythms and ways of being, doing and engaging is the educational system congruent—a <i>mirror</i> vs a <i>window</i> experience? * WHO MATTERS—AUTHORIZES/DECIDES—AND HOW?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">* Social Systems*</p>

NOTE: Adapted from my chapter in the Sage *Handbook of Social Research Ethics*, 2008

CONNECTING THE DOTS AND KEEPING OUR EYES ON THE ULTIMATE PRIZE *Linking Assessment/Evaluation Agendas with Diversity/Equity Agendas and Educational Excellence Agendas*

Assessment and evaluative judgments are inextricably bound up with culture and context so *engaging diversity* provides an essential resource for ethical practice and inclusive excellence. Excellence is the prize and diversity, a necessary prerequisite for its attainment in ethical ways. Excellence demands that we *know the prize* from multiple vantage points so that we can keep our eyes more fully and accurately focused—both the mind's eye as well as one's ordinary eyes. The ultimate prize resides in students and others who receive our services or products vis a vis our outcome promises. What does their and our success vision picture them experiencing, learning, being able to do, etc.? To what extent are your curricular, cocurricular, pedagogical and other intervention activities breathing life into success visions for all segments of the target population? How do you know what you have accomplished—evidential cues, clues and signposts—and to what extent do others agree? Which others? How fully do your evaluative judgments resonate with the lived realities of persons that you educate, assess and evaluate—experiential validity?

WHO AT THE CENTER. Higher education and most professional development initiatives are preoccupied with *What's* and *How To's*: notably, expanding the storehouse of facts and figures and know-how-doings. My approach starts with and remains grounded in *human systems dynamics*—the WHO. The most foundational *who* is the persons to be educated and served. *Who* is doing the learning and development? *Who* is providing the teaching and other intervention activities and *Who* is doing the evaluative judgment-making regarding the quality and depth of learning/development? ***Who discerns and determines what is—and should be—learned and developed by whom based upon what?*** How do we know what we claim to know? What judgment criteria and protocols inform those decisions and, thus, what are presumed to be the appropriate evidential cues, clues and signposts?

ASSESSMENT FOR INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE AND ETHICAL PRACTICE. Let us actively embrace the challenge to expand multilateral self-awareness through engaging *interpersonal validity* issues--the soundness and trustworthiness of the uses of SELF as knower, inquirer and engager of others. When mindfully addressed as a complement to more conventional validity considerations, we enhance the quality of understandings and praxis resulting from the assessment/evaluation designs we craft and the tools and techniques we choose. For sustainability, let us ensure that this work becomes a vibrantly responsive process which *informs* and *improves* as well as *proves* at multiple micro/macro levels: self-to-self, self-to-others and self-to-systems. Embracing such contextually-grounded work as an iterative, reflexive process offers valuable resources for relevant knowledge creation and continuous development towards excellence as well as for conventional accountability compliance verification. Let us commit to making assessment/evaluation work for the greater good through a life commitment to calibrating and cultivating self as a diversity-grounded, equity-minded responsive instrument for inclusive excellence and success for all. **It works if we work it! So, let's get busy....**

❧ **INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE-ENHANCING QUESTIONS** ❧

- ***Given what a particular service delivery or evaluation setting is calling for from you, what are you bringing to that situational and relational context as assets and resources to WORK WITH and what are you also bringing that you need to WORK ON—blankspots, blindspots, triggers, issues? To what extent would others agree with your self-assessment? Which others? Consider both the diversity of persons that you serve—as defined by salient dimensions of human difference that make a socially-patterned difference for access, process and success—as well as the diversity of persons who are current or potential “partners” in providing those services. This includes partners within as well as beyond the classroom or other organizational contexts.***
- ***Students (and other participants/service recipients) come to us with many SEEDS of provocative possibility. In your interactions and involvement with them, do you (and your intervention) primarily operate as a GROWER or a WEEDER? In what ways are you mindfully providing culturally- and contextually-responsive CHALLENGE and SUPPORT as generative success pathways for all? To what extent would your students and others agree with your self-assessment? Which others? Is there full-spectrum representation from across the relevant diversity among voices, views and vantage points? If not, why not and what are possible implications?***

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PLANNING & DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION SPIRAL

HAZEL SYMONETTE, PH.D.

