Culturally Responsive Evaluation as a Resource for Helpful-Help by Hazel Symonette, Ph.D.

Our perceptions yield culturally conditioned data that hold meanings which are not self-evident. The ultimate impact of these data is influenced by the clarity and depth of understandings of self-in-action within a particular sociocultural/sociopolitical context at a specific point in time. It is also influenced by understandings of the contexts embodied in the self—notably, one's social identities and roles that are derived through socialization and societal status allocation/distribution processes across time (Harro, 2010). Effectively doing SELF-in-Context development work requires a prioritizing focus on human differences that make a socially patterned difference—most importantly, those associated with privileged social identities. Consequently, one needs to hold in high consciousness the fact that privilege, like oppression (its tag-team partner), is a feature of a social system and not an intrinsic attribute of individuals.

> People have or don't have privilege depending upon the system they're in and the social categories other people put them in..... Privilege exists when one group has something that is systematically denied to others not because of who they are or what they've done, but because of the social category they belong to. (Johnson, 2001, p. 38)

Culture is a key meta-contextual framework that informs and shapes all other major contexts—the relational, situational, temporal and spatial/geographic contexts. As we engage in our work, how do we decide which sociocultural practices and processes within a service-delivery environment should be the focus of our attention: notably, which ways of being/thinking/saying/engaging inform doing the right things right from multiple vantage points? For example, which choices among teaching/learning strategies and resources gain our focus given the sociocultural predispositions we bring, whether by default or by design? Whose ways of being/doing/thinking/engaging are foregrounded and, thus, privileged? What messaging emerges as a result regarding WHO matters and belongs, or does not, whether it is intended or not?

Boundary spanning is a foundational skill for service-sector practitioners—especially persons committed to helping individuals/groups/communities bring forward their best selves to do their best learning, best engaging and best work. Regularly ask yourself:

➢ Who do I need to be in order to provide Helpful-Help?

➢ In what ways do I need to cultivate myself as a responsive instrument in order to help stakeholders live into their success vision, given the relational, situational, temporal, and spatial/geographic contexts?

➢ What is my personal Forcefield of Readiness and Preparedness for that work agenda: notably, attributes that I embody or have available to build on (enhancers) versus work on (detractors).

Such assessments need to be conducted from both my vantage point (unilateral self-awareness) and from the vantage points of the stakeholders I am seeking to serve (multilateral self-awareness). The critical initial use of Forcefield assessments involves discerning patterns of convergence and divergence regarding one's Evaluator Portfolio: notably, variations in the relevant attributes that one is perceived to have, both to Work-<u>WITH</u> and to Work-<u>ON</u>.

Investing in SELF-in-Context development work helps us become a dynamic social relations barometer and compass for navigating and negotiating complex, often turbulent, human systems dynamics. Because cultures and contexts are constantly morphing, this is a lifelong systematic-inquiry and reflective-practice pilgrimage. During my intensive work in this domain for over 30 years, I have resolved—like many others—that sociocultural responsiveness and competence is a stance rather than a destination-status or fixed state of being. Yesterday's competent could potentially become tomorrow's incompetent. And so, for practitioners, this involves ongoing reflective conversations with self—and others—about one's ongoing journey path towards culturally- and contextually responsive evaluation processes and practices. This is a special application of "Talking-My-Walk" vis-a-vis "Walking-My-Talk." (http://www.heartintelligencecoach.com/walking-your-talk-or-talking-your-walk/)

I envision evaluators mindfully using their Forcefield of Readiness and Preparedness assessments to discern what the context is summoning from them vis-a-vis what their current Evaluator Portfolio has available to provide Helpful-Help. Systematically contrasting what is available versus needed/envisioned can help evaluators (and other service sector practitioners) more systematically "diagnose" and scaffold a personal development agenda: notably, a capacity-building bridge for emerging a more culturally- and contextually-responsive Evaluator Portfolio.

Dynamic SELF-In-Context assessments involve systematic calibration and understandings of SELF within relevant sociocultural/sociopolitical contingencies vis-a-vis key aspects of the intervention and service delivery environment. This involves three developmental strands.

1. CALIBRATE SELF-In-Context
Who are the right people/voices/vantage points and **What** are the right places, things and timings that help enliven/enable/enact **Why** a programmatic intervention has been created? This framework is informed by the ubiquitous Journalism and Quality Improvement protocol—the 5 W's and the 2 H's. My model zeros in on the 4 that represent contexts among the 7:
- Relational Context: Who?
- Situational Context: What?
- Temporal Context: When?
- Spatial/Geographic Context: Where?

2. KNOW SELF-In-Context
Who we are matters not simply as we know ourselves but, as importantly, as others "construct" us. We need not own others' images of us and our work; yet, we surely need boundary-spanning awareness in order to start cultivating authentic communications and social relations from a place that resonates.

3. ACTIVATE SELF-In-Context
The above inventory-type tasks lay a rich contextualized foundation for moving from discerning relevant information → insights → actions using dynamic multi-level assessment—micro/macro Forcefields of Readiness & Preparedness.

Dynamic Developmental Evaluation

The Integral Evaluator model provides a holistic grid for succinctly arraying key sensitizing concepts and questions. The embedded inquiry protocol guides us in systematic data-grounded assessments. It promotes regularly checking in with ourselves while doing boundary-spanning work to increase prospects for contextually-/culturally-responsive processes/practices that are both effective and appropriate: notably, providing Helpful-Help from multiple relevant vantage points.

Such iterative assessments need to occur before, after and during intervention development processes to check out one's self-in-action while being and doing self vis-à-vis one's service delivery and evaluation agenda. Most importantly, what are the relevant assets and resources in the **Evaluator Portfolio**—professional, intercultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal—as well as the needs, challenges, blankspots and blindspots? My adaptation of Kurt Lewin's Forcefield change framework fuels ongoing inquiry that infuses some dynamism into these assessments.

Zeroing in on the Inside/Out and Outside/Out Quadrants of the Integral Evaluator SELF-in-Context Model: What is the status of one's Forcefield of Preparedness and Readiness for the sociocultural context as well as for the tasks embodied in the intervention/evaluation agenda? This would be from the evaluator's own perspective and from his/her evaluative "read" of others' perspectives (see Figure 2).

Given a particular situational, relational, temporal and spatial/geographic context, how do the assets and resources in one's Evaluator Portfolio counterbalance the needs/ challenges/ shortfalls? What does one have available to Work-<u>WITH</u> versus Work-<u>ON</u>? Given the intervention and the evaluation, which attributes should be foregrounded and amplified to foster boundary-spanning engagement and efficacy? To what extent would others agree? Who says so, given multiple voices, views and vantage points. And, how does one really know?

Figure 2. Expanded Integral Evaluator Quadrant model

Calibrating and Cultivating An Integral Evaluator-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~	**Inside/In** **SELF-TO-SELF/INWARD** *** Self-Awareness *** * What is my vision of who I *be*/am becoming calling for from me—*unilateral self-awareness*? * How am I showing up in my own intrapersonal world of self? * What does my life journey prepare and lead me to value, sense and readily engage? * What is the availability of my personal energetics—physical, emotional, spiritual, etcetera? * WHO AM I? *** Subjective*** **I**	**Inside/Out** **SELF-TO-SELF/OUTWARD** *** Evaluation Task Management *** * What is the situational context--the evaluation agenda--calling for from me? * How am I showing up in that evaluation context and related tasks—my perceived Work-WITH versus Work-ON Forcefield? * WHAT MATTERS? **IT** *** Behavioral ***
Collective — Mindfully standing in the perspectives/vantage points of multiple relevant collectives, reference groups and social systems — ~SOCIAL EMPATHY~	**WE** **Outside/In** **SELF-TO-OTHERS** *** Social Awareness *** * What is the sociocultural/relational context calling for from me—*multilateral self-awareness*? * How do I perceive 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? * To what extent is there congruence in my affinity-perceptions with persons I aim to serve and persons that I need to partner with in order to provide those services—my operative Work-WITH versus Work-ON Forcefield? * WHO BELONGS? ***InterSubjective/Cultural***	**ITS** **Outside/Out** **SELF-TO-SYSTEMS** *** Relationship/Process Management *** * As evaluator, 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 intervention and the evaluation agenda? * For and with whose rhythms and ways of being, doing and engaging is the programmatic intervention and evaluation system congruent—a *mirror* versus a *window* experience? * WHO MATTERS—AUTHORIZES/DECIDES AND HOW? *** Social Systems***

TASK 1. Priming Empathic Perspective-Taking: Inside/Out Reflections and Deliberations

The Integral Evaluator SELF-in-Context model offers a systematic inquiry and reflective practice protocol that fosters self-empathy and social empathy via mindfully discerning and standing in one's own perspective in addition to standing in and imagining relevant perspectives of primary stakeholders. Follow-on deliberative conversations with significant others would enhance and enrich these self-grounded assessments via opportunities to cross-verify and validate one's self-assessment insights. This would involve boundary-spanning dialogue and deliberations regarding patterns of convergence and divergence in one's own read of the relational and situational context vis-a-vis others' reads.

I encourage you to work from the inside/out—immersing oneself and gaining conscious clarity via self-grounded inquiry and reflections before expanding into broader deliberative circles for sharing, cross-validating and elaborating insights. Lay the foundation with private brainstorming and reflections to excavate, honor and harvest one's own insights and wisdom. Start with the Upper-Left *Who-Am-I?* Quadrant in preparation for mindfully walking around the quadrants to address the questions posed at the intersections (cross-roads) of Individual and Collective Levels, for both the Interior and Exterior Environments.

Engaging in a systematic awareness-building, sensitizing process regarding one's own intrapersonal self should provide a robust foundation for more responsively discerning and exploring the WHO? agenda—the boundary-spanning work with human systems contours and dynamics—in the context of the What? agenda.

TASK 2. Mapping the Human Systems Dynamics

Identify the key "WHO?" constituencies—notably, your intervention's primary stakeholders and their interconnections. Collaboratively brainstorm and prioritize among potential stakeholders. A 2x2 *High/Low* Stakeholder Mapping grid is a useful resource for prioritizing across the domain of persons who care about and can influence, positively or negatively, a programmatic intervention's destiny: *Levels of Investment* (time, money, etc.) X *Levels of Expected Impact.*

> ➢ **Who** are the persons served through participation in the intervention: notably, who is being engaged and transformed in what ways under what conditions?
> ➢ **Who** is crafting and providing the intervention activities? Who discerns and determines what is—and should be—learned/developed/transformed by whom based upon what?
> ➢ **Who** is doing the evaluative judgment making regarding the quality and depth of learning/development/transformation?

TASK 3. Engaging the Integral Evaluator Quadrant Model

The 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. The Integral Evaluator model is a systematic inquiry and reflective practice protocol for mindfully assessing and enhancing ethical praxis and inclusive excellence via increases in "interpersonal validity:" notably, the soundness and trustworthiness of understandings warranted by one's uses of SELF as knower, inquirer and engager of others vis-a-vis one's uses of evaluation tools, techniques and strategies. To what extent is the evaluator looking and actually seeing; listening and actually hearing; touching and actually feeling? How does one know and who says so? The prospects for culturally responsive, socially just and inclusively excellent observations and evaluations are greatly enhanced with serious, ongoing consideration of these issues.

Use insights from one's *Who-Am-I?* Brainstorming to systematically walk around the quadrants vis-a-vis their sociocultural/sociopolitical meanings and implications for one's intervention agenda and associated assessment/evaluation processes, practices, protocols and products.

Upper Left Quadrant: Mapping Self as You Know Self

Individual <u>Interior</u> Environment—Unilateral Self-Awareness/Relational Context 1

Who Am I?

Self Empathy 1. Self-to-Self/Looking Inward

- What does my life journey prepare and lead me to value, sense and readily engage?
- What is the <u>availability</u> of my personal energetics—physical, psychological, spiritual?
- What are my core Affinity-Discernment Criteria (informal/formal kinship and belonging) and my core Valuing-Judgment criteria?
- For which personal attributes and social identities do I hold a more ethnocentric versus a more open ethnorelative orientation? (Bennett, 1986)
- Who does my living persona radiate and message that I be and who/what I value?
- How do I know—cues, clues signposts?

Lower Left Quadrant: Mapping Self as You Perceive & Believe Others Know Self.

Collective <u>Interior</u> Environment—Multilateral Self-Awareness/Relational Context 2

Where and With Whom do I Matter and Belong among Stakeholders?

Social Empathy 1. Self-to-Others

- How do I perceive 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?
- For which personal attributes and social identities am I discerning and experiencing an ethnocentric versus an ethnorelative orientation among primary stakeholders? More specifically, in what ways and to what extent do my Affinity-Discernment Criteria (Who belongs?) and my Valuing-Judgment criteria (Who Matters?) converge ←o→ diverge with the configuration operating among primary stakeholders?
- What is the living operationalization of mattering and belonging—and thus community—within the relational context of the work agenda: e.g., the "Psychological Climate" and the Behavioral Climate." (Milem et al, 2005; Hurtado et al, 2013)
- To what extent is there congruence in my affinity-perceptions with persons I aim to serve and persons that I need to partner with in order to provide those services—my operative Work-WITH versus Work-ON **Forcefield**?

Upper Right Quadrant: Mapping Self in Self-Constructed Work Context.

Individual <u>Exterior</u> Environment—Situational Context 1

What Work Am I Being Called To Do?

Self Empathy 2. Self-to-Self/Looking Outward

- What is the **situational context**--the evaluation agenda--calling for from me?
- How am I showing up in that evaluation context and related tasks—my perceived Work-WITH versus Work-ON **Forcefield** ?

Lower Right Quadrant: Mapping Self In Self/Other-Constructed Work Context

Collective <u>Exterior</u> Environment: Institutional Structures & Social Systems—Situational Context 2

Whose Ways of Being/Doing/Engaging Matter and are, thus, Privileged?

Social Empathy 2. Self-to-Systems

- As evaluator, how am I interfacing and engaging with the collective intentions and diverse sociocultural orientations organized and systemically manifesting in the world in ways that impact implementation of the intervention and the evaluation agenda?
- For and with whose rhythms and ways of being, doing and engaging is the programmatic intervention and evaluation system congruent—a *mirror* versus a *window* experience? (Style, 1996)

The Integral Evaluator Model is a dynamic developmental evaluation resource that enhances the mindful uses of SELF-in-context as a boundary-spanning, responsive instrument primed to provide Helpful-Help that more fully supports stakeholder success.

TASK 4. Embracing SELF-In-Context Work As A Lifelong Pilgrimage.

The Integral Evaluator model is a developmental evaluation resource for ongoing systematic data-based inquiry and reflective conversations with self and others about alignment of aspirations/intentions and actions. This ongoing process would enable and enact an emergent intervention process—{Activities + Outputs= Transformation Bridge}—as well as the intervener. As noted earlier, this quadrant model provides a framework for sitting in the tensions of "Talking One's Walk" (giving voice to one's regular living realities) vis-à-vis "Walking One's Talk"—progress relative to aspirational intentions/success agendas such as becoming a Culturally Responsive Evaluator. The model is likely to be especially helpful in facilitating and supporting an emergent and evolving success-development process within complex, often turbulent, environments: one in which stakeholders are relatively far from agreement about what is desirable and there is relatively little certainty about what needs to be done. (The Stacey Matrix, 2007)