Cultivating Self in Context as Responsive Educators:
Engaging Boundaries, Borderlands and Border Crossings
~ Student Success Institute Journey Guide ~

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?

Those insistent voices are calling for empathy-grounded educators who proactively stand in other persons’
perspectives in order to responsibly engage in socioculturally appropriate and effective communications
and social relations. In Intercultural Competence, Lustig and Koestner designate these as twin criteria
for intercultural competence.

Emerging Your Best SELF: Commit to investing quality time & energy!
Effective self-presentation and appropriate uses of the self, vis-à-vis others, forge critical pathways
towards ethical practice, inclusive excellence and social justice. These competencies are especially
important in communications-based professions like education, evaluation, social research and health.
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 deep knowledge, understandings and facility
in responsive uses of self vis-à-vis others. This is interpersonal validity-enhancement work: notably, the
soundness and trustworthiness of the uses of self as knower, inquirer and engager of others.

Please give yourself permission to engage in ongoing Self-in-Context development work.
Self-in-Context responsiveness is grounded in one’s capacity to engage in empathic perspective taking:
notably, mindfully standing in one’s own perspective while consciously shifting and imaginatively standing
in others’ perspectives—beyond simply sympathetically standing in their positions (Milton Bennett’s
Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity). More specifically, Self-in-Context work summons us to
deliberately engage in cognitive frame-shifting (border-crossing in one’s head) and affective frame-
shifting (border-crossing in one’s feelings). Doing so requires knowing and anchoring in one’s own center—
core values, beliefs, expectations—while knowingly extending one’s borders, i.e., the boundaries of the self.
With expanded intercultural and other cross-boundary awareness and understandings, one can
demonstrate appropriate and effective behavioral code-switching.

Doing the right things right from multiple vantage points.

Boundary-spanning competencies expand prospects for mutual trust, respect, credibility and confidence
that one is in good hands. Mindfully assess and discern SELF in the structure and flows of your life journey—
past, present, future—vis a vis the education and evaluation work you are summoned to do.

Who are you? * How do you know? * To what extent do stakeholders agree?

Use the Integral Educator Quadrant Model as a systematic inquiry and reflective practice protocol*. This empathy-grounded model—self-empathy and social empathy—focuses on three multi-level
developmental strands as resources for discerning and providing Helpful Help: Calibrating SELF-In-
Context, Knowing SELF-In-Context and Activating SELF-In-Context. Helpful Help represents services that
are helpful from the vantage points of the persons being helped, given the intended success vision.

Calibrate Self in Context
Who are the right people/voices/vantage points and What are the right places, things and timings that
help enliven and enact Why a programmatic intervention has been created? Mindfully map, monitor
and track your Educator SELF in 4 key contexts: Relational (WHO is or should be present and involved—
primary stakeholders?), Situational (WHAT is the work agenda and success vision?), Temporal (WHEN—
time/timing?) and Spatial/Geographic (WHERE—physical and/or virtual environments?).
**Know Self in Context**

Who we are as knowers, inquirers and engagers of others matters: not simply as we know ourselves but also as others “construct” us. We need not own others’ images of us and our work; yet, we surely need boundary-spanning awareness to start cultivating authentic communications and social relations from a place that resonates.

- 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 be some reasons for the likely disparities? What implications do such gaps have for appropriate and effective communications, social relations and services delivery? How do you know what you believe you know about yourself and others and how does that impact your trust and relationship-building capacities? 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.

To live up to and into normative expectations, educators need to appropriately and effectively discern, invite and engage the relevant spectrum of stakeholder voices, views and vantage points. Responsive educators cultivate themselves as clear channels in order to look and actually see, to listen and actually hear, to touch and actually feel from multiple stakeholders’ vantage points. **They serve as *mirror-time stewards* who use double-sided mirrors to dynamically assess self while assessing others, interventions, environments.**

**Activate Self in Context**

To move beyond the above assessment inventory-type tasks and infuse some dynamism into this work, we will use my adaptation of Kurt Lewin’s forcefield model. His framework arrays change expediters/enhancers versus detractors. Given a particular situational, relational, temporal and spatial/geographic context, how do the assets and resources in your Educator Portfolio counterbalance your needs/issues/triggers/shortfalls? What do you have available to Work-WITH versus Work-ON? Given the intervention and the education agenda needs and requirements, which attributes should you foreground and amplify in order to foster boundary-spanning engagement and efficacy? To what extent would which stakeholders agree: who says so, given multiple voices, views and vantage points? And, how do you really know?

The focus of **Forcefields of Readiness & Preparedness** may range from micro to the more macro levels: notably, from the intrapersonal → interpersonal → systemic. These dynamic developmental evaluation processes correspond to the Integral model’s quadrants and core schema: Self-to-Self * Self-to-Others * Self-to-Systems respectively.

**Recap.** Our perceptions yield culturally-conditioned data and their meanings are neither self-evident nor they speak for themselves. The same observational data can conjure up dramatically different meanings and interpretations depending upon our beliefs, values, views and vantage points. To avoid inadvertently doing violence to other folks’ truths, we must mindfully calibrate and cultivate SELF in context as responsive instrument—notably, in situational, relational, temporal and spatial/geographic contexts. How responsive, sound and trustworthy are your uses of SELF as knower, inquirer and engager of others? Doing this interpersonal validity-enhancement work honors the sacred trust embodied in our professional roles so doing this work represents an ethical as well as an excellence imperative.

**Education and Evaluation as Tag-Team Partners.** How do I best activate SELF to provide Helpful-Help, given the success vision? More specifically, How do I design and provide education services in ways that leave my students better off—both from their perspectives as well as my own? Mindfully using the Integral Educator model can help you serve as a communications and social relations barometer: i.e., in more accurately *discerning and reading* the relevant sociocultural/sociopolitical terrain. This *systematic inquiry and reflective practice protocol* guides assessments of your readiness, preparedness and responsiveness for complex, interdependent—and often conflicting demands—in order to competently...
make judgments that are honest, respectful, fair, accurate, useful and responsive to the general and public welfare: i.e., that equitably serve the greater good. Such expectations are congruent with the ethical and excellence expectations embodied in the American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles and the Joint Committee on Standards Program Evaluation Standards.

**Multiple Voices, Views and Vantage Points**

*What is right and good for whom and who says so?* Socially just answers to this question are neither simple, formulaic nor uniform and, thus, not programmatically preordained. Ethically addressing this question demands that we regularly examine our conceptual and interpretive prisms while expanding and/or reframing our potential reception- and communication-channels:

- **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?

Our prisms are informed and shaped by multiple social identities and sociopolitical roles, diverse life paths, sociocultural and other experiences. These dynamics occur whether intended or desired or not. And so, what matters most is vigilant, clear-eyed discernment of interpersonal IMPACT, not personal INTENT.

Self-in-Context work challenges us to recognize and move beyond our default presumptions and perceptions, especially those shaped by power- and privilege-blinders. To honor this resolve, ask yourself these questions. How do I respectfully and responsively navigate, negotiate and facilitate often contentious deliberations, especially across diversity divides? Whose voices and perspectives do I hear and heed? **How do I effectively help others, as well as myself, to bring forward our *BEST SELVES* in full voice to these deliberations so that we each can do our best learning, our best engaging and our best work?**  
Responsive developmental assessment and evaluation undergird the Integral Educator model and they provide powerful resources for engaging these questions. The model enables both the envisioned intervention as well as the interveners via systematic capacity-building in self-empathy and social empathy.

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 educational interventions and the assessment/evaluation designs we craft as well as the tools, techniques and strategies that 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. Because culture, like context generally, is dynamic, organic and ever changing, this is a continuous learning and reflective practice pilgrimage. Without an open, learning-centered stance, yesterday’s culturally competent practitioner could become tomorrow’s incompetent.

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, social justice and success for all.

*It works if we work it! So, let’s get busy!*