



Active Adult Allyship: Supporting *All* Students/Youth

Presented by:

DJ Ralston, M.A. - GWU, CRCRE

Contributions from:

**Melissa Diehl, M.Ed., CRC, Sandi Miller, M.S., & Nichole Tichy, M.A.,
CRC – GWU, CRCRE**

Disclaimer

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Learning Objectives

At the end of this training, participants will be able to:

- Describe the inherent power differential that exists within all helping relationships
- Explain why the power differential is compounded when working with students and youth
- Describe the difference between intersectionality and intersecting identities
- List strategies to facilitate critical reflection and deconstruct our bias(es)

Bio: DJ Ralston – Pronouns: they/them/theirs

Trans-Masculine/Non-Binary, Queer, Geriatric Millennial, & Muppet Fanatic

Professional Background

- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Public Workforce Development
- Technical Assistance – Disability and Employment

Education

- Certified (Partner) Work Incentive Coordinator
- Masters Degree – Rehabilitation Counseling
- Doctoral Candidate – Human and Organizational Learning

Areas of Expertise

- Supporting LGBTQIA+ Populations including LGBTQIA+ Students & Youth
- Social Security Work Incentives and Financial Empowerment
- Relationship Building, Partnership Development, and Training Development



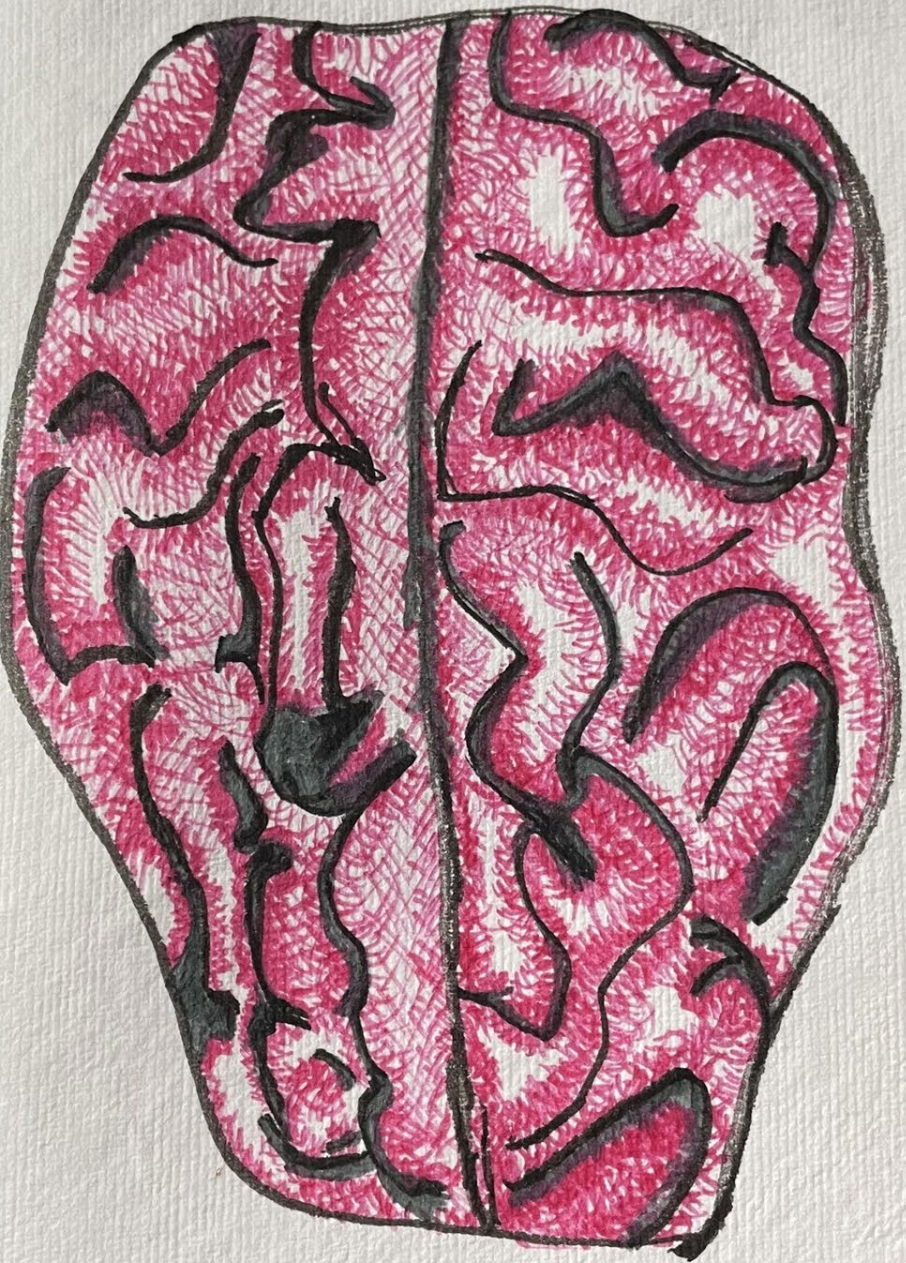
Let's Play a Game

- “Because I said so”
- “As long as you’re under my roof, you will live by my rules.”
- “I’m not asking, I’m telling”
- “When you pay the bills, you can do whatever you want”
- “Teenagers think they know everything”

Surfacing Assumptions through Critical Self-Reflection

Reflect on your own experience of adolescence and young adulthood.

- Think about the statements we just walked through – how many of those statements did you hear while you were a teenager (how many fingers could you put down)?
- How many of you were raised in an era where social norms dictated that the adult(s) were always correct (i.e., respect your elders) even when the adult(s) were not correct?
- Think about our major American institutions and their cultures (i.e., Schools, Social Services etc.), what are some of the underlying assumptions about adults and youth?



The Human Brain & Mental Models

Information Processing

- Consciously aware of only a very small portion of the millions of bits of data we process every second, so our brain creates cognitive shortcuts to help us process.

Subconscious Mind

- Categorizes
- Creates Associations
- Fills in the Gaps

Source: Institute for New Economic Thinking; HAAS Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society; and Powell, J. (2016). Healing Otherness: Neuroscience Bias and Messaging
(see https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/healing_otherness_ppt.pdf)

Recognizing and Unpacking Our Mental Models (Underlying Assumptions)

Mental Models are the frames we employ to help us make sense of and navigate the world. Largely based on our cultural and social experiences and interactions, they shape our:

- reasoning
- what we think
- how we understand
- how we simplify complexity

In essence, **mental models**, often play a big role in **what and how we “know”** something, however, mental models can also mistake experience for objective fact. In other words, mental models also contribute to underlying assumptions.



Implicit Bias

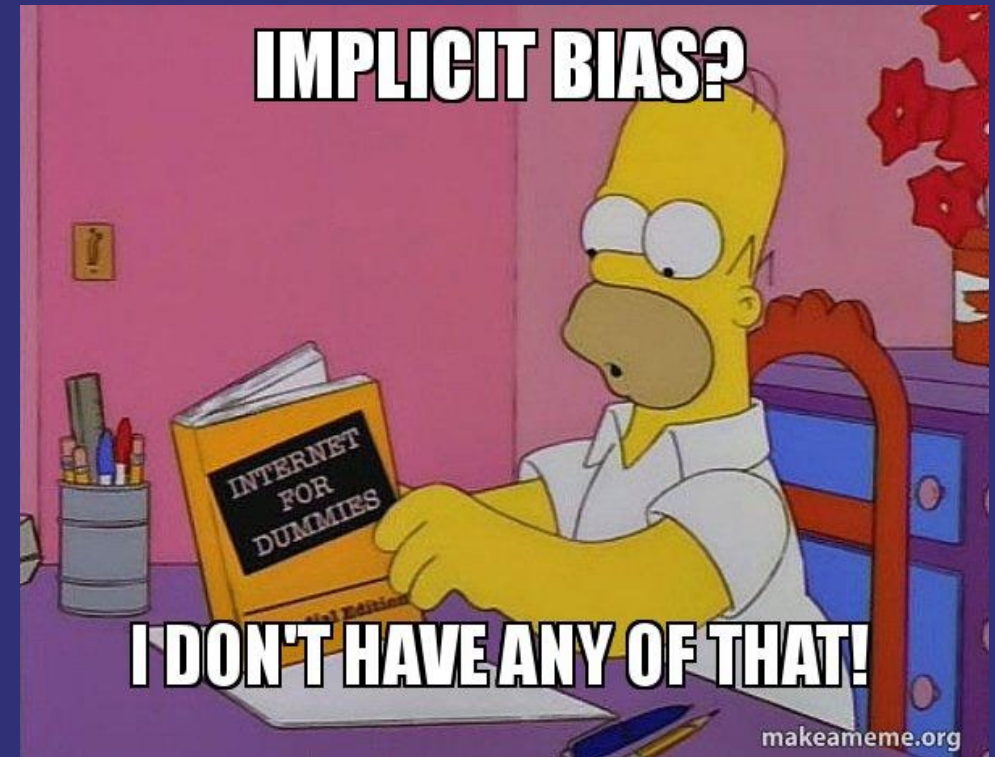


Implicit bias, like other forms of bias, is an inclination or preference towards or away from someone/something but it occurs automatically and unintentionally and is often shaped by experiences and learned associations

- Unconscious Bias is the result of our limited cognitive capacity
- It is our unintentional preferences formed by our socialization and experiences, including exposure to (social) media
- There are an overwhelming number of studies that have shown the significant impact unconscious bias can have on human cognitive processes

Harvard Project: Implicit Association Test(s)

- An invitation for you to try one (or as many as you'd like)
- Harvard Project Implicit
- Disability IAT
- Race IAT
- Sexuality IAT
- Age IAT
- Religion IAT



Early Social Identity Research - 1

Henri Tajfel, the founder of social identity theory, defined social identity as a person's sense or understanding of who they are in relation to group membership.

Group membership is our connection to the social world and helps individuals develop their social identities – the groups people belong to often give persons a sense of pride and self-esteem.

Social Identities not only describe who people are, they can also prescribe people's behavior based on those social expectations associated with the group.



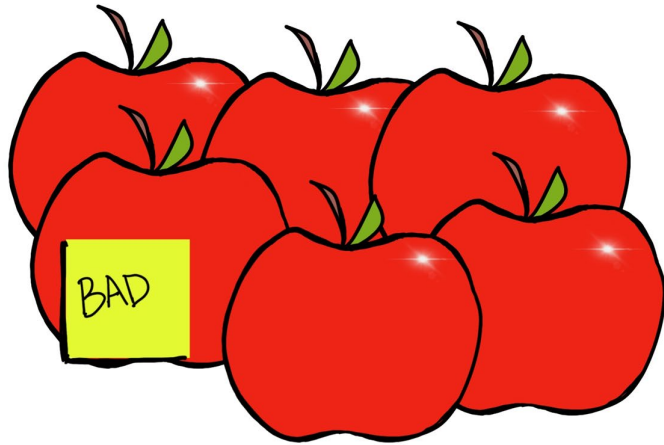
Early Social Identity Research - 2



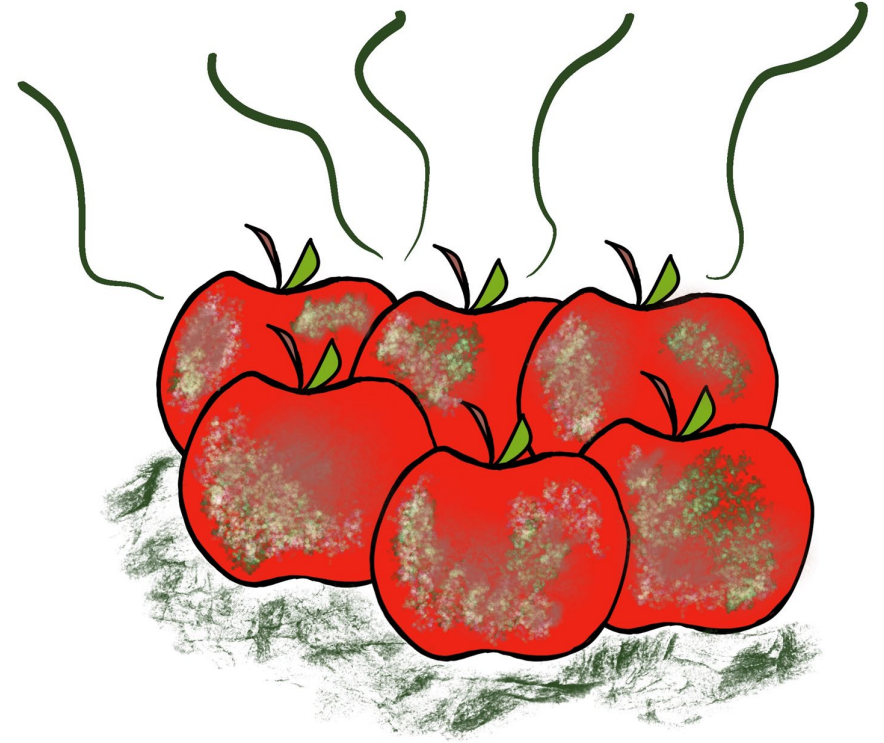
Tajfel's research also demonstrated that humans, as part of their typical cognitive process, categorize things and in doing so tend to over-exaggerate the differences between groups and similarities within groups. These groups are then referred to as the “in group” and the “out group”.

This idea of the human cognitive tendency to categorize things coupled with social identity theory's assertion that humans are prone to over exaggerate differences and similarities helps explain how identity is socially constructed and how implicit bias occurs.

Social Identity Theory In-Action



VS.



Common Examples of Embodied Social Identities

Macro Level

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender Identity
- Sexual Orientation
- Dis/Ability
- Class/Socioeconomic Status
- Education
- Religion/Faith

Meso/Micro Level

Identity by Profession

- VR Counselor, Lawyer, Student, Teacher, Plumber, Pastor/Priest etc.

Identity via Community

- City Council Member, School Board Member, Pole Worker, etc.

Identity via Family

- Grandparent, Parent, Sibling, Kid, etc.

Identity by Interest

- Baker, Reader, Crossfit, Gardner, DND

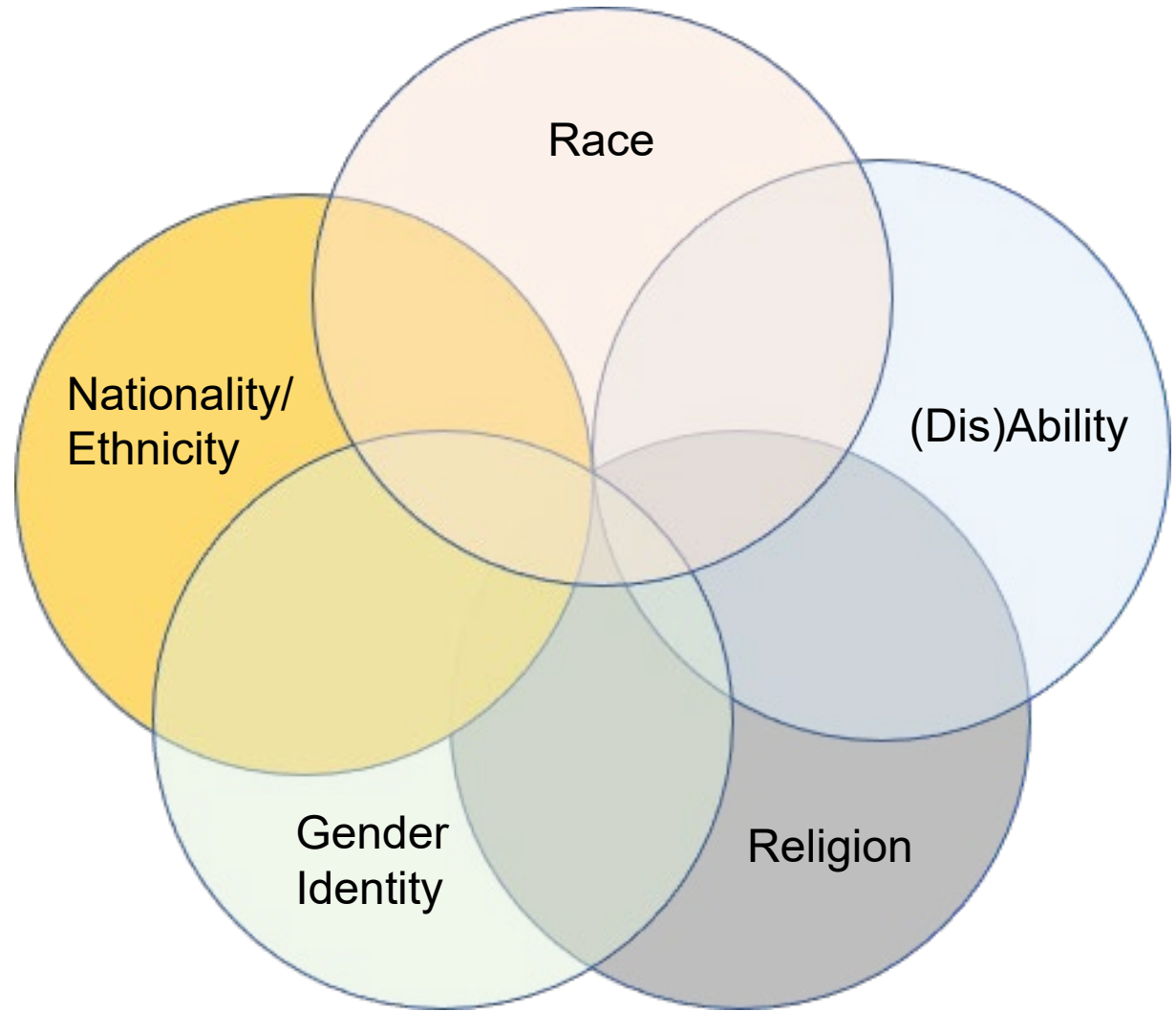
Identity by Cause

- Cancer Survivor, Climate Change, Social Justice Issues

Intersectionality

“the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage”

- Oxford Dictionary



Intersecting Identities Intersectionality

- Although often used interchangeably, both the term and concept of intersecting identities is **NOT THE SAME** as intersectionality.
- As research around social identity progressed, a shift in how we understand social identity occurred.
- It is now widely understood and accepted that a variety of factors comprise a person's social identity and that these factors are interconnected as each factor influences other aspects of our identities and these various identities shape how we experience and understand privilege and oppression (Ratts et al., 2015).
- The difference between intersectionality and intersecting identities is relative to the degree of power, privilege, oppression and individual experiences as result of their various identities. Intersectionality is about how multiple social identities come together (intersect) in ways that compound the level of oppression they face.
- Everyone has intersecting identities but NOT everyone would be considered as having intersectional identities.

Exercise: Stanford University SPARQtools - Map Your Identity

- Which identity is most important to you personally? Least Important?
- Which identity do you think people notice first about you?
- People with privileged identities enjoy greater acceptance, status, and power in society than do people with other identities. Which of your identities might be considered privileged?
- People with marginalized identities face greater discrimination, prejudice, and other hardships in society. Which of your identities might be considered marginalized?
- Overall, which of your identities are you most hesitant to discuss? Why?

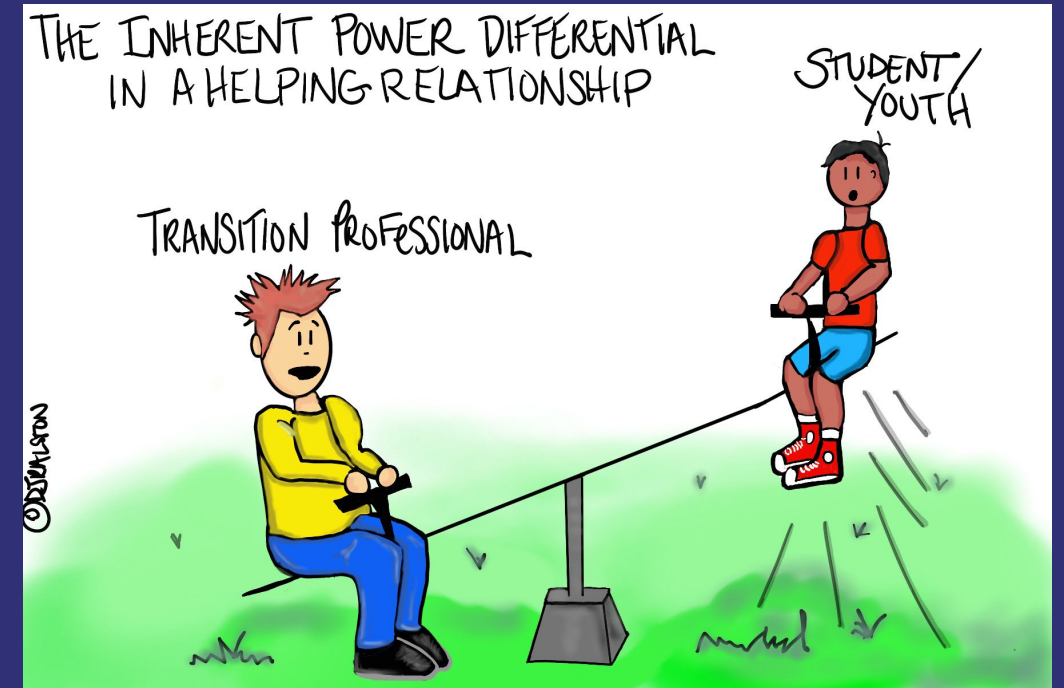


How to be an Active Adult Ally



Action: Recognize Power Dynamics

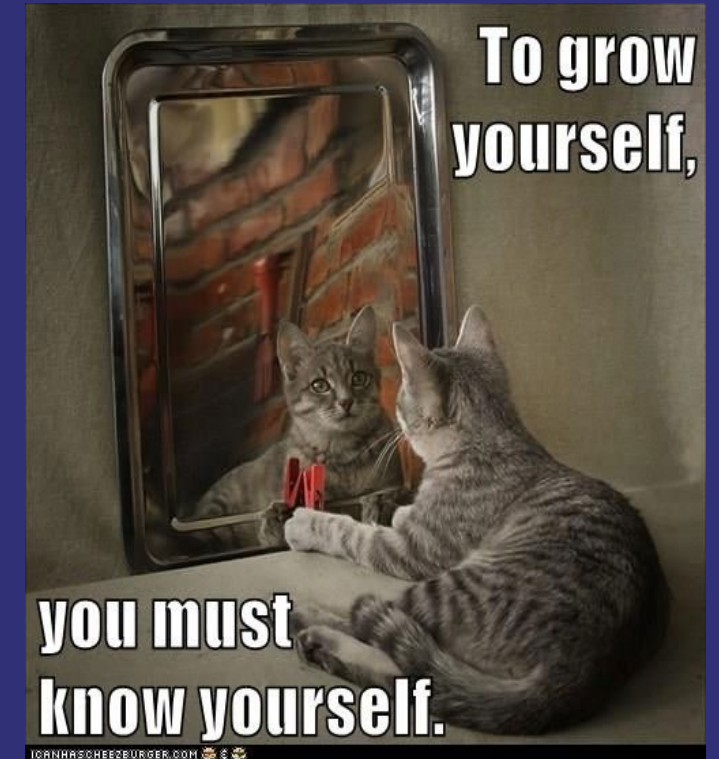
- Within the helping-relationship (such as that of a Transition Professional and a Student or Youth) there is always an inherent power differential because one party needs assistance which leaves them with less power than the person helping.
- In Transition helping-relationships that inherent power differential is typically compounded by cultural and societal norms associated with age difference.
- What other aspects of a transition professional's identity can compound the power differential?



Action: Engage in Critical Reflection – 1

What does this mean?

- Critical self-reflection is the process of analyzing and evaluating one's experiences, beliefs, and actions to develop a deeper understanding of oneself and the world.
- Everyone has implicit biases, engaging in critical self-reflection helps mitigate bias, promote, learning, growth and professional development.



Action: Engage in Critical Reflection – 2

Critical Reflection Key Characteristics

Self-awareness: Critical reflection involves a high level of self-awareness, as individuals examine their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

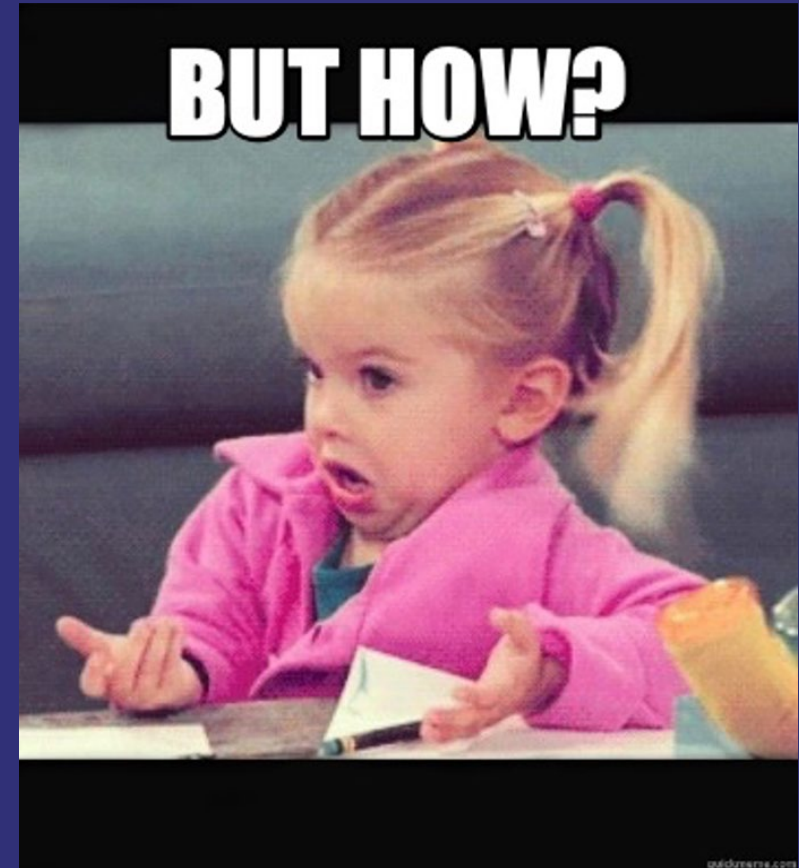
Openness to feedback: Critical reflection requires individuals to be open to feedback from others and willing to consider alternative viewpoints.

Analytical thinking: Critical reflection involves a process of analyzing and evaluating one's own experiences, beliefs, and actions.

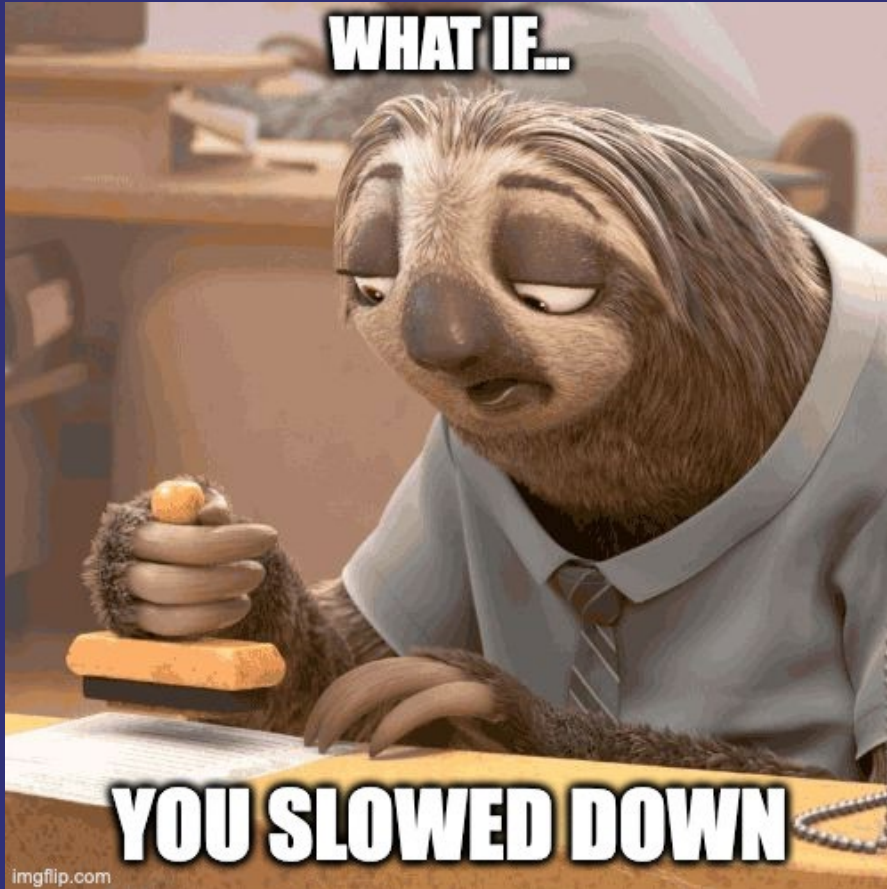
Action-oriented: Critical reflection is not just about thinking, but also about taking action to improve oneself and the world.

Action: Engage in Critical Reflection – 3

- Create a reflective space
- Set aside time
- Review your experiences
- Identify patterns
- Consider alternative perspectives
- Set goals for growth
- Seek support



Action: Engage in Critical Reflection – 4



Consciously engage in critical self-reflection when working with a student/youth – Ask Yourself:

- What and who are controlling the narrative in this situation?
- What do you know about the student/youth you are working with? How do you know that? Why is that knowledge valid? Are there other sources of knowledge that should be considered?
- How is success being defined? Who is defining it?
- Why is one course of action recommended and not another? Who benefits most from the course of action recommended?

Action: From Power Over to Power With - 1

According to our partners at the RAISE Center:

- One of the key elements of youth engagement and creating conditions to foster inclusion is creating a space where youth feel their actions and voice have value.
- Part of creating that environment is making sure the adults supporting those youth change their mindset from being the adult “in charge” to being an adult ally that works in partnership with the youth to achieve group goals or activities.

Action: From Power Over to Power With – 2

According to the RAISE Center:

- Authentic youth engagement is present when young adults are provided opportunities to consistently participate in decision making, take ownership of work, initiate conversations and plans, and able to give feedback that impacts programs, services, and/or systems that serve them.

Action: Suggestions from the RAISE Center: - 1

Develop a Youth Friendly Culture

- be flexible and creative in finding ways for youth to engage in services

Provide Information in Youth Friendly Ways

- have meetings in accessible locations, both virtually and in person
- ensure information is easy to read and understand
- use appropriate language, don't talk down to youth or use unfamiliar acronyms or complex jargon

Include Youth Voice at Every Level

- get youth involved in making decisions and supporting their thoughts/ideas

Partner with Youth-Serving Organizations

- Ask yourself questions such as: Where do youth in our community spend time, Who are the local experts we can learn from, What programs already exist that we can support, etc., and connect youth to these entities.

Build Relationships with Youth

Action: Suggestions from the RAISE Center: - 2

- Have meetings outside of school hours.
- Provide a webinar or call-in option with an adequate sound system.
- Send meeting reminders in a preferred, accessible form of communication.
- Have meetings in an accessible location: ADA compliant, with parking or near public transport.

Action: What you need to know about working with students and youth – according to YETI

- Build in time to recognize understand, and use, the student/youth perspective.
- Be open to student/youth's ideas and feedback even if it is difficult to hear
- Give students/youth tangible things to work on
- Take a young person at their word
- Respect boundaries set by young folks

Action: YETI Top Ten Tips for Student/Youth Engagement (Cont.)

- Take time to teach students/youth the system(s) including providing lists of typical acronyms.
- Youth are EXPERTS on their own experiences
- Take time to learn about what the young folks who are being invited in teams/spaces with adults are passionate about
- Listen to and honor accommodation requests
- Social interactions and discussions are important

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Find us:

#transitionTA | transitionTA.org | ntact-collab@uncc.edu



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