

“I’M UNLEARNING!”

APPLYING REFLEXIVITY TO
HIGHER EDUCATION DISABILITY
RESOURCES AS A TOOL FOR
SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH
INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

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LEARNING GOALS

Understand the concepts of positionality, reflexivity, and intersectionality as they relate to your role

Consider the implications of personal engagement with positionality as a disability resource professional

AGENDA

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1. Speaker introductions
 2. Define concepts (intersectionality, positionality & reflexivity)
 3. Explore findings from recent research on positionality and disability resources
 4. Engage with our own positionalities
 5. Discuss the relevance of positionality to our work
 6. Connect positionality to reflexivity as a tool for working with students with intersectional identities



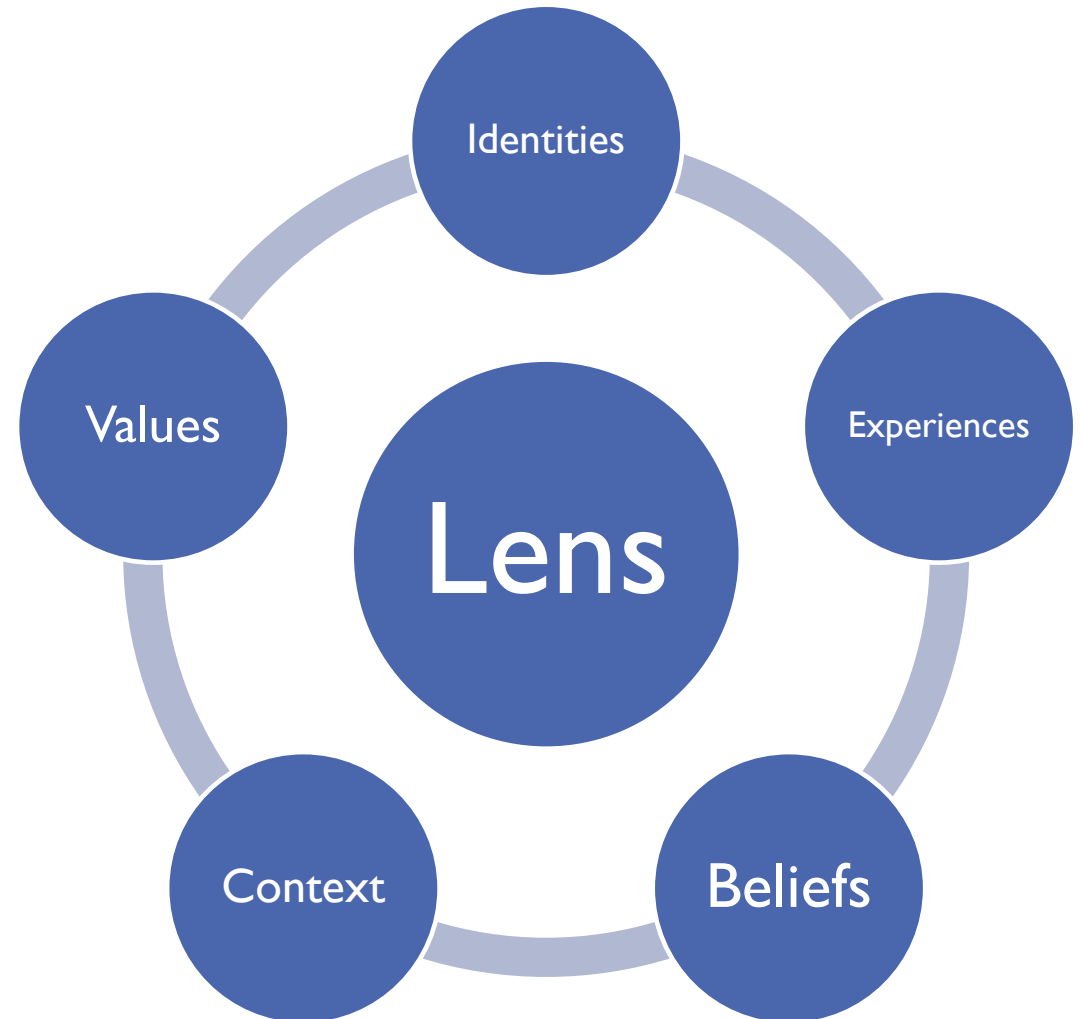
SPEAKER INTRODUCTIONS



FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

POSITIONALITY

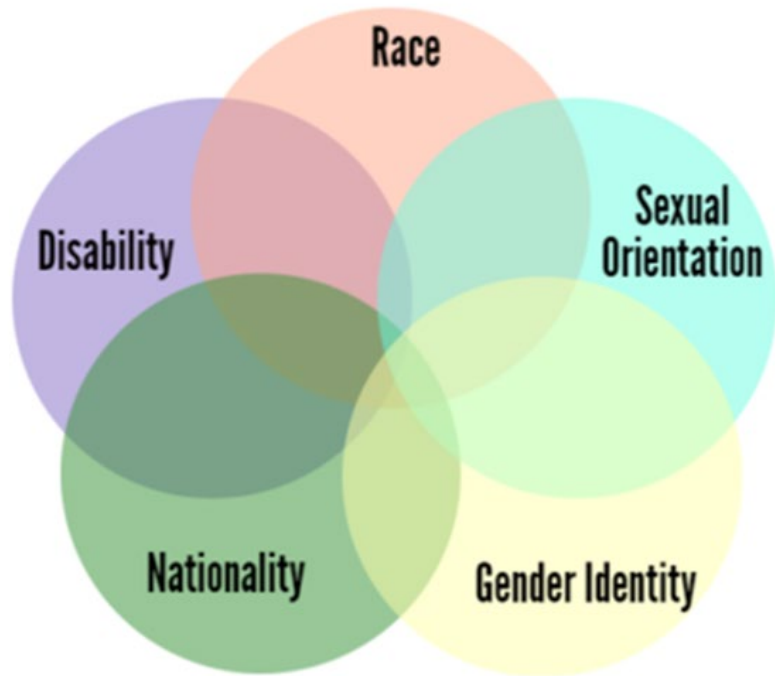
- Your 'lens' for everything (i.e., a personal framework)
- Composed of the multiple, interrelated components of ourselves (e.g., identities, experiences, beliefs)
- Impacts choices, interactions, biases, perceptions, judgments, truths, etc.



MORE ON POSITIONALITY

- Positionality is fluid
- The prominent, most influential components of positionality at any give time can also be context-dependent
- Thinking about positionality is complex and may be daunting – that's okay!

INTERSECTIONALITY

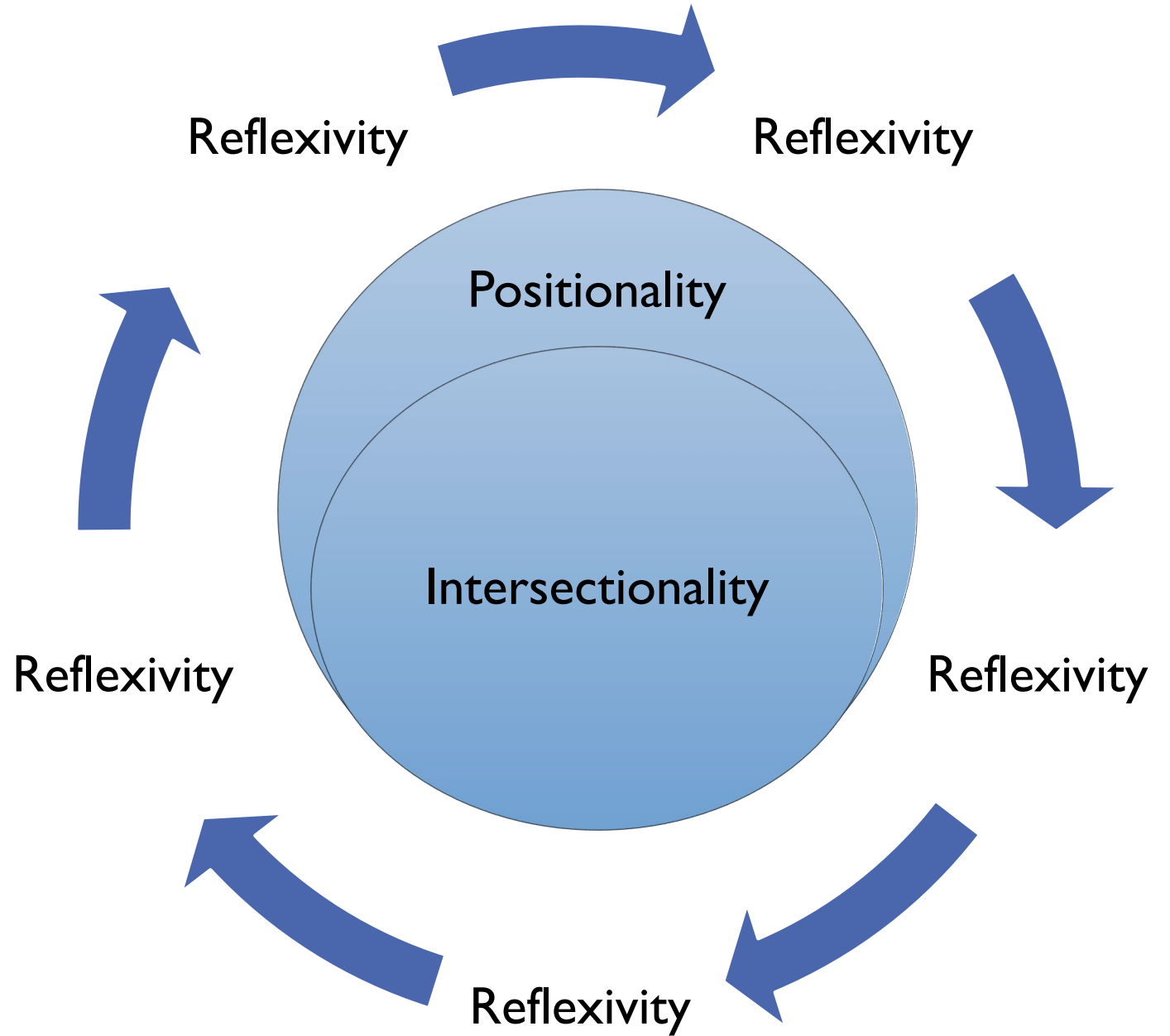


- Framework for understanding the way in which a person's identities intersect
- Used to describe someone's experience with multiple identities
- Can include: race, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, ethnicity, etc.
- Acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences related to discrimination and/or oppression

REFLEXIVITY

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- Reflexivity is the *act* of going inward and deeply thinking about your positionality
 - Holding up a mirror and examining the intricacies of how positionality acts as a lens
 - Making the implicit, explicit
 - Examining internal thoughts/reactions, and managing them while redirecting external actions
 - Learning about identities and experiences that we may not have known were influential/created a bias
 - Different from *reflecting*

BRINGING IT
ALL TOGETHER



HOW DO
THESE APPLY
TO DISABILITY
RESOURCES?

FINDINGS
FROM A
RECENT
RESEARCH
STUDY

POSITIONALITY IN DISABILITY RESOURCES

Positionality is influential to disability resource professionals (DRPs)

- Identities and experiences “guide how [DRPs] work with students”
- Positionality shapes “how [DRPs] make decisions or respond to certain situations”

The influence of positionality can be for better or worse

- Positionality is a “big reason” why DRPs “end up on that spectrum with accommodation decisions”
- Certain “assumptions” stemming from positionality can “create a bias towards individual students,” which may be “good or bad”
- Regardless, the influence of positionality can “have a veil of professionalism over it”

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF POSITIONALITY

Positionality “impacts how *any of us* make decisions,” but DRPs are “just not always cognizant of it in a particular moment.”

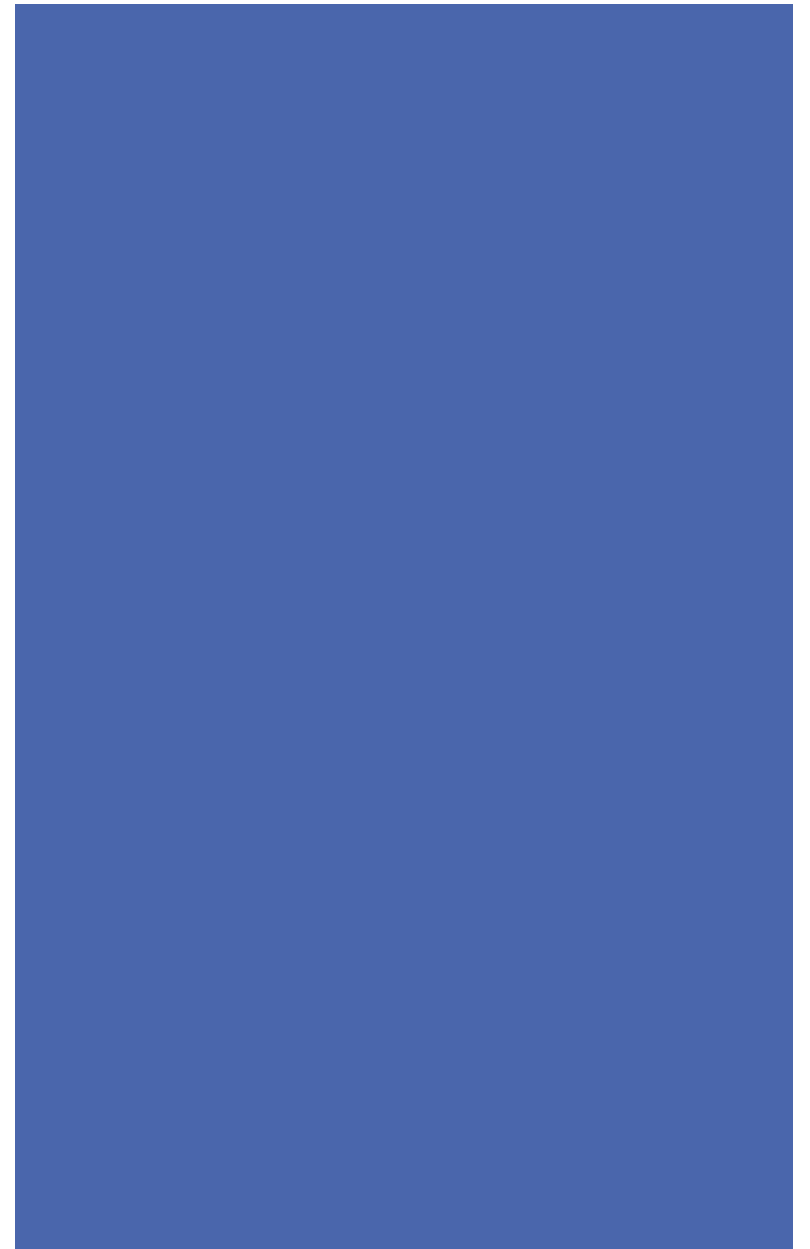
“...it’s okay that [positionality] influences [accommodation] decisions, it just *has* to be done in a way that’s effective.”

HOW CAN THIS BE
DONE EFFECTIVELY?

“...the more self-
awareness we have
about our own identities
and biases...the better
service we provide.”

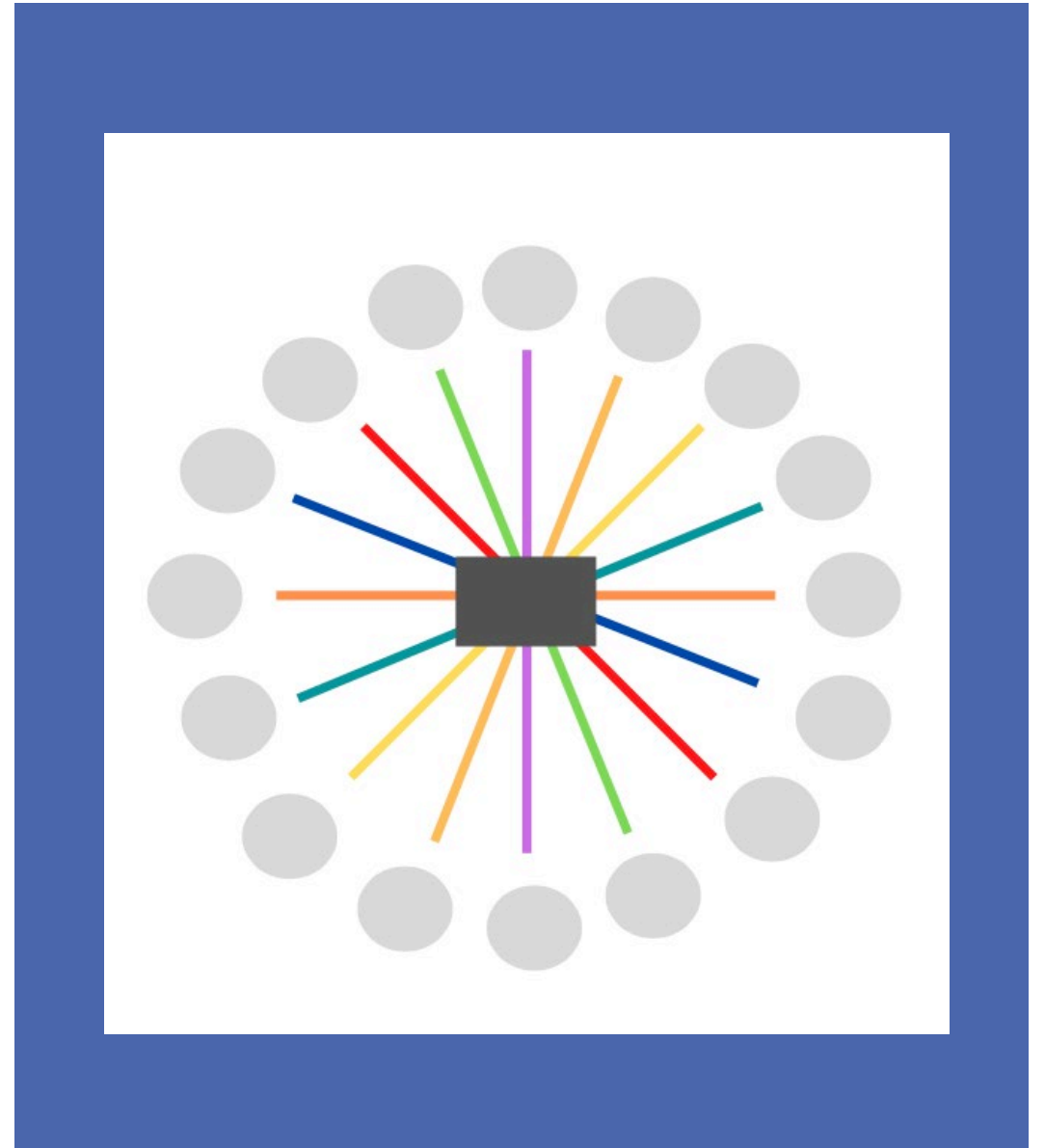
ENGAGING WITH OUR POSITIONALITIES

PRACTICING REFLEXIVITY



STEP ONE

LOOK INWARD TO IDENTIFY THE VARIOUS COMPONENTS OF OUR POSITIONALITY





EXAMPLE: MORGAN'S WHEEL

YOUR TURN!

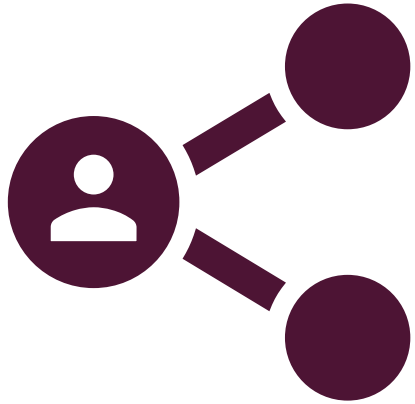
POSITIONALITY ACTIVITY



Spend 5 minutes
completing your own
positionality wheel



Think about identities,
experiences, beliefs,
dispositions, and contexts
that influence your day-to-
day life



SHARE OUT

REACTIONS, THOUGHTS, OR EXAMPLE
IDENTITIES/EXPERIENCES

STEP TWO

RECOGNIZING HOW
POSITIONALITY WORKS IN
DAY-TO-DAY INTERACTIONS
AS A DISABILITY RESOURCE
PROFESSIONAL

REMEMBER: THE INFLUENCE OF POSITIONALITY IS CONTEXT-DEPENDENT

Convergence in identities/experiences with students

- Helpful to “understand and relate” and “know what [students] are going through”
- Allow DRPs to “tap into” their own positionality to support accommodation decision-making
- Create a sense of “trust,” impacting reception of students’ self-report
- May lead DRPs to “over-encourage or over-accommodate,” or even “under-support” students

POSITIONALITY AS CONTEXT-DEPENDENT (CONT.)

Divergence in identities/experiences with students

- When identities/experiences differ, DRPs may “just assume” certain experiences and have “difficulty relating” to students
- DRPs are “limited” in their ability to understand students' identity-based experiences
- Divergences require DRPs to “constantly keep in check” their assumptions and biases about students' identities

SO WHAT?

STEP 3:
REFLEXIVITY

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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- When thinking about the items on your positionality wheel, which are most prominent to you right now? When you are relaxing at home? When you are in DRP mode?
 - When facilitating the accommodations process, which identities/experiences rise to the top for you? Why? How do they influence your choices, reactions, and decisions?
 - How does your positionality, overall, shape the way you understand disability? Other identities?

REFLEXIVE ACTIONS

- Pay attention to your ‘gut’ – what drives it when making accommodation decisions/working with students?
- When working with students, think about what you do/don’t know about *their* positionality, what you do/don’t have in common, and monitor how this impacts your reactions
- Unpack these ‘gut’ reactions and where they came from
- Think deeply about when you feel assumptions/judgements/biases as a DRP, if there is a pattern to it, and how you could minimize their impact in your actions
- Consistently spend time thinking about your positionality as it changes and evolves to stay in tune with its role in your work as a DRP (e.g., update your wheel or write it out)

REFLEXIVE STRATEGIES FROM PARTICIPANTS

“Ask more questions” and listen deeply to students’ experiences rather than relying on your own assumptions

“Accept that you are going to be imperfect” and take care in “recognizing your biases”

When an internal response occurs (e.g., judgement, bias), “take a step back,” “process” that response, question it, and “check” your external response

When in doubt, talk to someone else if you feel you are “too biased”

Recognize if you need to “unlearn” some of “the things [you] grew up with or were taught”

KEY TAKEAWAY

“It's incredibly important to understand and have engaged in this self-reflection so that you can understand where you're coming from, what are your values, what are your biases, and take note in the very least, of them, as you support students with disabilities.”

QUESTIONS?
THANK YOU!

FEEL FREE TO
CONTACT US

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