

THE RESIDENCY LAB

LEADERSHIP POSITIONALITY JOURNAL



OCTOBER 2026

BACKGROUND

Teacher residencies have become a transformative approach to preparing educators, designed to address persistent issues in teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention. Defined by the Pathways Alliance as programs anchored in partnerships between school districts and preparation programs, residencies combine rigorous coursework with a yearlong, mentored clinical practice (Pathways Alliance, 2021). This model provides aspiring teachers with affordable, high-quality preparation while simultaneously meeting the staffing needs of schools, ensuring residents gain deep, authentic experience across the full spectrum of teaching responsibilities.

Yet, while residencies are often positioned as equitable pathways, they are deeply shaped by the perspectives and assumptions of program leaders. Leaders' conscious and unconscious biases may affect all aspects of program design including recruitment strategies, definitions of effective teaching, and program priorities. This influence can inadvertently perpetuate inequities, particularly when diversity efforts focus narrowly on representation without addressing systemic barriers that keep certain groups from entering or remaining in the profession. Leaders' decisions also embed a "hidden curriculum," signaling whose identities, knowledge, and experiences are valued within the profession.

For residencies to truly advance equity, leaders must engage in continuous self-reflection, focusing on how their own positionalities shape program design and implementation. Drawing on research in teacher development and equity-minded leadership, this work engages leaders in education to move beyond surface-level diversity efforts toward deeper, systemic change. By cultivating cultural competence, embracing reflective practice, and acknowledging philosophical differences in values, knowledge, and reasoning across cultural groups, leaders can design residency programs that genuinely prepare and sustain diverse educators to meet the needs of all students.

This journal serves as a companion to our white paper, *Leading for Equity in Residencies: The Critical Role of Self-Knowledge and Cultural Competence*, offering leaders practical guidance and reflective tools to engage in the steps necessary for building equitable, culturally responsive residency programs.



THE RESIDENCY LAB

© CDE Foundation and The Residency Lab
October 2026

Licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. You are free to share
and adapt with attribution.

RESEARCHING THE SELF

The best place to begin is by looking within. On the path to cultural competence, leaders must have a deep understanding of their own racial and cultural heritage as well as an awareness of how one's racial and cultural heritage might influence their work as leaders.

The following prompts are intended to provide space for your reflection. There are no incorrect responses, but special attention should be given to how you know (epistemology). As you reflect, be on the lookout for deficit views that you might express, implicitly or otherwise.

What is my racial and cultural heritage? How do I know?

In what ways do my racial and cultural backgrounds influence how I experience the world, what I emphasize in my work with novice educators, and how I evaluate and interpret others and their experiences? How do I know?

How do I negotiate and balance my racial and cultural selves in society and in the context of my work with novice educators? How do I know?



THE RESIDENCY LAB

© CDE Foundation and The Residency Lab
October 2026

Licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. You are free to share
and adapt with attribution.

RESEARCHING THE SELF

What do I believe about race and culture in society and education, and how do I attend to my own convictions about race and culture in my work with novice educators? How do I know?

What are and have been the contextual nuances and realities that help shape my racial and cultural ways of knowing both past and present? How do I know?

What racialized and cultural experiences have shaped my decisions, practices, approaches, and agendas in my work with novice educators?

☐ **As you reflected, did any deficits emerge?
Note them here:**

☐

☐

☐

RESEARCHING THE SELF IN RELATION TO OTHERS

Mirroring the previous exercise on Researching the Self, another aspect of this process shifts the focus to what is known about those whom one serves: in this case, novice educators within the teacher residency program(s) you lead. The following prompts are intended to provide space for your reflection. Remember that there are no incorrect answers, and that special attention should be given to how you know (epistemology). As you reflect, be on the lookout for deficit views that you might express, implicitly or otherwise.

What are the cultural and racial heritage and the historical landscape of novice educators I work with? How do I know?

In what ways do my novice educators' racial and cultural backgrounds influence how they experience the world? How do I know?

What do my novice teachers believe about race and culture in society and education and how do they tend to the tensions inherent in my and their convictions and beliefs about race and culture in education? Why? How do I know?



THE RESIDENCY LAB

© CDE Foundation and The Residency Lab
October 2026

Licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. You are free to share
and adapt with attribution.

RESEARCHING THE SELF IN RELATION TO OTHERS

How do I negotiate and balance my own interests with those of my novice educators, which may be inconsistent or divergent from mine? How do I know?

What are and have been some social, political, historical, and contextual nuances and realities that have shaped my novice educators' racial and cultural ways or systems of knowing both past and present? How consistent and inconsistent are these realities with mine? How do I know?

☐ **As you reflected, did any deficits emerge?
Note them here:**

- ☐

- ☐

- ☐

- ☐

ENGAGED REFLECTION AND REPRESENTATION

It is important to note that aspects of this framework are not necessarily completed in a linear and sequential fashion. That is, as you reflect, you may learn more, and this new learning may impact previously expressed reflections. In other words, reflecting about the prompts provided in the first two aspects, Researching the Self and Researching the Self in Relation to Others, might be approached as an iterative process, in which cycles of reflection move the individual back and forth between these two sets of reflective prompts self and others.

While this exercise is not necessarily linear and sequential, it is recommended that the individual takes sufficient time to express at least some preliminary reflections in light of the prompts from Researching the Self and Researching the Self in Relation to Others prior to engaging collaboratively in collective reflection. As a group, perhaps beginning with a group of peer-leaders from other residency programs, consider the following prompts to ignite and guide reflective dialogue:

What have you learned through Researching the Self?

What frustrations or tensions emerged through Researching the Self?

ENGAGED REFLECTION AND REPRESENTATION

What have you learned through Researching the Self in Relation to Others?

What frustrations or tensions emerged through Researching the Self in Relation to Others? What more would you like to know about the novice educators you serve? How might you come to know more?

What biases did you identify through Researching the Self and Researching the Self in Relation to Others? How might these biases, implicitly or otherwise, undergird the decisions, practices, approaches, and agendas in my work with novice educators? How might these biases be supplanted or reconciled in your decisions, practices, approaches, and agendas?

☐ **As you reflected, did any deficits emerge?**
Note them here:

- ☐

- ☐

- ☐

SHIFTING FOCUS FROM SELF TO SYSTEM

The difficult work of critical self-reflection undertaken in the preceding exercises must not be completed solely for the self, although we hope that the reflection thus far has moved your learning further in coming to know thyself and those whom you serve more deeply. Reflection for the sake of personal growth is a noble enterprise indeed. However, as Freire (1970, 1974) asserted time and time again, the deeper understandings we gain through critical self-reflection and growth must translate into action in the service of others—what he called praxis.

In this culminating exercise, consider the following prompts to adjust the lens of your reflection toward the organizational and institutional perspectives of the system(s) in which you operate and the community/communities you serve. In doing so, we hope opportunities for organizational change and development emerge to foster a more culturally competent experience for novice educators learning in residence.

What is the contextual nature of race, racism, and culture in my organization? In other words, what do race, racism, and culture mean in my organization and the broader community served? How do I know?



CDE FOUNDATION



THE RESIDENCY LAB

© CDE Foundation and The Residency Lab
October 2026

Licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. You are free to share
and adapt with attribution.

SHIFTING FOCUS FROM SELF TO SYSTEM

What is known, socially, institutionally, and historically about the organization and community served? In other words, what do others within the organization and community, including those from indigenous and marginalized backgrounds, write or state about the community or the organization? Why? How do I know?

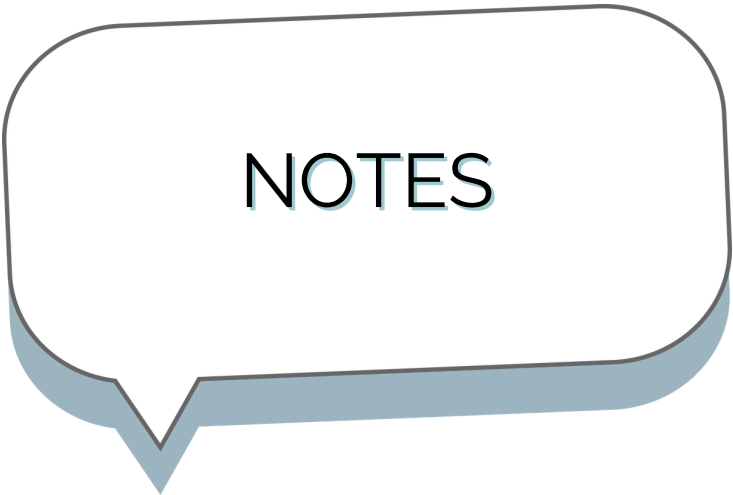
What systemic and organizational barriers and structures shape the organization and community, locally and more broadly? How do I know?

☐ **As you reflected, did any deficits emerge?
Note them here:**

☐

☐

☐



Use this page to capture any notes that you'd like to document, or any continuation of thoughts you didn't have room for on previous pages.

A series of horizontal dashed lines for writing notes.

