
REVIEWING RESOURCES

Many people do not write down their personal assumptions about power, privilege and racism when they create resources or tools for others to use. We have included several resources and tools in this website that we and others have found useful, even though some of them are not clear about the assumptions underneath their work. Sometimes the author(s) seems to be assuming that readers share a common set of understandings about race and racism; sometimes the author(s) seems to be avoiding certain ideas or words (rather than alienate some readers); and sometimes the author(s) seems not to be taking issues of privilege or racism into account.

Why should you care whether or not a racial analysis is explicit? For one thing, you may want to know the kinds of experience and knowledge base in which the material is grounded, to see if it makes sense for your community and your issues. For another, it helps you know if the author is likely to have thought about inclusion, unequal distributions of power and the existence of different perspectives and life experiences. You also have more insight into the way an author's understandings might affect what the author chooses to research, how data are interpreted and so on.

When the analyses are not there, or not clear, you might want to ask the following reflection questions. They are designed to help you critique or add to what the material is offering in ways that can support racial equity work.

Suggested reflection questions:

What seem to be the assumptions about how change happens?

- For example, are both bottoms-up and top-down strategies recommended?
- Are allowances made for people to commit to change without following through, or does the material assume that people always do what they say they will do?
- Does it assume that leadership is broadly spread through a community, or highly concentrated in people with particular positions or titles?
- Does it offer multiple ways of holding people, groups and systems accountable for creating change – public strategies, insider strategies, strategies of influence, etc.
- How well do these assumptions fit your groups' understanding of how change happens in your place and on issues like the one you care about?
- What cautions or modifications do answers to these kinds of question suggest for your use of the material?

What words are used to describe issues of privilege, racism, oppression and power?

- Are the definitions clear?
- Do the definitions, or the way the words are used, acknowledge the existence of persistent differences in power, life experience and perspective among various racial/ethnic groups or do they assume there is a single world view or all people have roughly the same opportunities and challenges?
- Are the terms diversity, race or racism used interchangeably or are they used more precisely?

If the material indicates that something “works”, what does that actually mean, and on what evidence is that assertion or judgment based?

- If someone is recommending a reading strategy for third graders, based on evidence that it improves reading scores for all third graders in a study – do you know if results were tabulated separately for each group you care about? For example, did children of color do as well as white children? Did children from less affluent homes do as well as children from wealthier families? Without specific group level analysis, it is not possible to know if everyone who participated in the reading program did well, some individuals did very well and some did poorly, or some groups did very well and some did poorly.
- The same is true when are looking at how effective a community change strategy might be. Is there evidence that a particular change strategy reaches a broad cross-section of that community, or that it reaches each important segment within it– including those most isolated and difficult to reach. Based on the answers, are there additional strategies to include in your plan to make sure that, if your plan is implemented completely and at high quality, each group you care about will benefit at a level that makes a difference?

What does the material imply about why things are as they are, particularly in terms of different outcomes for different groups?

- Does the resource/tool ask you to consider the ways in which racial disparities are maintained in your community? Does the resource/tool help you choose strategies that consider system, institutional, intergroup and individual levels of privilege and racism, and how they act to interrupt or reinforce each other?

Finally, does the resource/tool help you consider the likely impact of various strategies on particular groups, in addition to the intent of those strategies? For example, does it help you consider which housing policies have contributed to racial integration and which to racial segregation, regardless of whether or not they were designed to do so?