

# Research Guide

## College and Career Competency: *Self-Awareness*

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### Definition:

Self-awareness is the capacity to become the object of one's own attention (Duval & Wicklund, 1972, as cited in Morin, 2011). Self-awareness can involve self-reflection (positive curiosity about self) or self-rumination (anxious attention paid to self); the former is associated with positive consequences, the latter with negative consequences (Morin, 2002). Self-awareness is also defined as a "self-perceptive state emerging from self-observation" (Cassidy, 2011, p. 992). It includes understanding one's own strengths, limitations, preferences, and interests.

### Essential Components for Students:

1. Engage in self-assessment, self-observation, and reflection (on your experiences) and be open to input of others.
2. Apply your understanding of your strengths, interests, and challenges.

### Research:

- During adolescence there are considerable changes to self-concept, driven by rapid changes to the adolescent's interpersonal environment and new social roles that are taken on (Sebastian, Burnett, & Blakemore, 2008).
  - The adolescent's self-concept is formed by thinking directly about reactions to past events and experience (direct appraisal) and by thinking about how he/she is perceived by others (reflected appraisal) (Sebastian et al., 2008).
  - Positive social feedback that supports a positive self-concept becomes increasingly important in adolescence; conversely, negative social experiences contribute to a negative self-concept that can lead to affective disorders like depression (Sebastian et al., 2008).
- Having a sense of self is important for development in three ways: 1) it helps the child develop a personal narrative that gives meaning to activities and experiences; 2) it allows the child to set goals consistent with self-image and guides behavioral choices; and 3) it can be a powerful motivator for future behavior (Jacobs, Bleeker, & Constantino, 2003).
- Adolescents may feel distress and confusion as a result of growing self-awareness of different (and seemingly opposite) characteristics (Jacobs et al., 2003).
  - Teachers and others who work with adolescents need to recognize that the moodiness that accompanies the search for "the real me" is typical, but should also be watchful that it not become prolonged and intense and lead to depression (Jacobs et al., 2003).
- Research conducted with Swedish adolescents (Ybrandt, 2008) concluded that it was important to promote positive self-concept because it was the most important factor for adjustment and mental health, especially for girls. The study also found that negative self-concept was associated with a higher risk of problem behaviors.
- Self-awareness leads to self-evaluation (i.e., monitoring progress on one's plan and reflecting on the overall result of plan), which is important to **self-regulation** (Morin, 2011).

- Research shows three main sources of self-awareness: (a) the social world, (b) the physical world, and (c) the self (including the brain) (Morin, 2011).
- Researchers distinguish between private and public self-awareness (Govern & Marsch, 2001). Private self-awareness involves thinking about the self. Public self-awareness involves thinking about oneself as seen by others.
- Self-awareness by students can apply in the context of career interest and job seeking; as they gain a better understanding of their interests and skills, adolescents are better able to understand the opportunities that are available (Grote, Trusty, Chae, & Bakley, 2014).
  - Students with disabilities that exited school with high career awareness skills were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment or education (Benz, Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997).
- Self-awareness is part of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), which provides an important foundation for better adjustment and academic performance for students (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).
- Self-determination is defined as “a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior” (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998). One characteristic of self-determined individuals is self-awareness, which is: (a) awareness of personal preferences, strengths, and weaknesses, and (b) the ability to differentiate between wants and needs (Field et al., 1998). Students with disabilities who leave school more self-determined than peers are twice as likely to be employed a year after graduation (Field et al., 1998; Wehmeyer, 2002).

## Assessments:

Most self-report measures are designed to support the development of self-awareness. While specific tools measure whether a person is generally self-aware, a large range of tools inform a person’s self-awareness related to specific constructs (e.g., career interest inventories, learning styles inventories, self-determination scales, academic interest scales, recreation inventories).

- The *Self-Consciousness Scale* (SCS) (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975, as cited in Morin, 2011) is a 23-item questionnaire that asks respondents how much various statements apply to them, such as “I’m always trying to figure myself out.” The scale is available at <http://www.midss.org/content/self-consciousness-scale-scs-r> (Scheier & Carver, 2013).
- The *Self-Reflection/Self-Rumination Questionnaire* (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999a, as cited in Morin, 2011) is a 24-item questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale for questions like “Sometimes it is hard for me to shut off thoughts about myself.” The questionnaire (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999b) is available at <http://www.paultrapnell.com/measure/RRQ.doc>.
- The book *Informal Assessments for Transition Planning-2* (Gaumer Erickson, Clark, & Patton, 2013) provides an array of assessments that support students to develop self-awareness in working, learning, and living domains. Ordering information is provided at <http://www.proedinc.com/customer/productView.aspx?ID=5169>.
- Kuder assessments include the *Kuder Career Interests Assessment* (Kuder, 2015a), which supports youth in exploring career interests; the *Kuder Skills Confidence Assessment* (Kuder, 2015b), which asks youth to rate tasks and activities according to their level of confidence in performing the tasks; and the *Kuder Work Values Assessment* (Kuder, 2015c), which considers the characteristics of a workplace or type of work. The results from each assessment are matched with professions. Many states have adopted and renamed the Kuder assessment



- *I'm Determined* (Virginia Department of Education, 2012) provides many lesson plans to support students' development of self-awareness as well as other areas of self-determination (<http://www.imdetermined.org/>). The lesson plans are typically four pages long and include standards of learning, objectives, prerequisites, materials needed, the timeframe, the lesson procedure, evaluation, extending understanding, and student handouts. See an example of a lesson plan for middle school students on self-awareness and self-knowledge: [http://www.imdetermined.org/files\\_resources/212/ms-self-awarenessthisisme\\_copy.pdf](http://www.imdetermined.org/files_resources/212/ms-self-awarenessthisisme_copy.pdf).
- Much literature has focused on evidence-based approaches to teaching self-determination skills to students with and without disabilities. To increase effectiveness of instruction, self-determination components can be taught using student-directed (as opposed to teacher-directed) practices. Some practices are:
  - Help children recognize and apply preferences by providing options for choices. For example, encourage students to make decisions about academic goals, schedules, and other areas that can affect day-to-day activities (Field et al., 1998; Wehmeyer, 2002). Teachers can use role-playing or brainstorming to help students identify choices, and also help students understand the link between the choices made and goals that are set (Wehmeyer, 2002).
  - Provide opportunities to choose among different strategies for a task (Field et al., 1998; Wehmeyer, 2002).
  - Help students realistically assess weaknesses in key skills and determine ways to address those weaknesses (Field et al., 1998; Wehmeyer, 2002). This should be done in a supportive environment where the emphasis is on the students' strengths, but where students are given the opportunity to explore their limitations (Field et al., 1998).

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