

Systems Snapshot Q&A



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Q: How were you first introduced to systems thinking?

A: This is a two-part answer for me. As a middle school student in the mid-90's, I had the privilege of attending Orange Grove Middle School, which is part of the Catalina Foothills School District where Tracy Benson, Joan Yates and others from the Waters Center brought systems thinking into schools for the first time. They were (and are) visionaries when it comes to young people learning and applying systems thinking.

As an educator, my career has been as a teacher in that very same district. To this day, systems thinking is embedded into the curriculum. I use the Habits and tools of systems thinking in all subjects, specifically English Language Arts and Social Studies.

Q: Which Habit of a Systems Thinker do you wish everyone practiced?

A: *Changes perspectives to increase understanding.* I spend quite a bit of time on this Habit with students. As you can imagine, it's challenging for a 10-year old to look beyond their own lived experience, but this Habit really helps to encourage flexible thinking and a willingness to consider other people's points of view – which is especially important in today's world.

Q: Which leader (past or present) do you admire most and why?

A: Eleanor Roosevelt because she was a real trailblazer for women and always stood up for what she believed in. She fought for women's rights, children's rights, and brought a lot of awareness to impoverished people. My mom was also an inspirational leader in my life. She was a teacher in the Catalina Foothills School District for her whole teaching career and did a lot with systems thinking, including the Ladder of Inference. She won the *Teacher of the Year Award* and I won the same award exactly 10-years later. It was a real "full circle" moment.

Q: What is one book you think everyone should read?

A: This is a tough one because I love, love, love to read. One book I always recommend to my students and that impacted me as a young reader is *The Phantom Tollbooth*, by Norton Juster. It's whimsical and fantastical, but the whole point is that learning is a beautiful journey. One of my favorite quotes comes from this book: *"You must never feel badly about making mistakes, as long as you take the trouble to learn from them."*

Q: What advice do you have for someone getting started as a systems thinker?

A: Don't look at it as something you have to learn to do. It's not a skill. It's a way of life and a way of looking at the world. I would also say the Habits of a Systems Thinker are a great place to start – get familiar with them and try to embed them in everything you do.

Q: Why do you think the world needs systems thinkers?

A: Our world today is unlike any other we have ever seen. It's so globalized and there are so many unique challenges. Now more than ever, we need to be self-reflective of the systems we face. We need people who can step back and see the big picture, make connections, recognize patterns and trends, and who are capable of identifying an effective leverage point. From an educator perspective, systems thinking is something that transfers into the real world – and will serve students well in every aspect of their lives and journeys.