



# The Facilitated Dialogue Workbook

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# Executive Summary

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) started implementing systems thinking with the help of the Waters Foundation in 2014. Since then, various school teachers and other staff members have been trained in using systems thinking in their buildings. Through the use of systems thinking, MPS hopes to see academic improvement of students, increased teacher retention, decreased student suspensions, improved school climate, increased school innovation, etc.

Systems thinking utilizes habits, tools and concepts to develop an understanding of the interdependent structures of dynamic systems. When individuals have a better understanding of systems, they are better able to identify the leverage points that lead to desired outcomes.

Systems thinking is a district initiative to deliver academic and lifetime benefits to students through effective application of system thinking strategies in classroom instruction for continuous school improvement. By learning to view tasks and problems from multiple angles and over the course of time, students can see beyond one-time events and recognize patterns and trends. This helps avoid reactive, quick-fix responses and instead teaches them to divide a challenge into smaller components.

Milwaukee Public Schools. (n.d.). *Systems Thinking: Empowering & Engaging Students*. Office of Innovation & Information. Department of Innovation Development.

MPS has undertaken to evaluate systems thinking in the district during the 2017-2018 school year. The main goal of this evaluation is helping encourage ongoing improvement within the district. It will also help with the dissemination of lessons learned to others interested in systems thinking and its implementation.

# Methodology

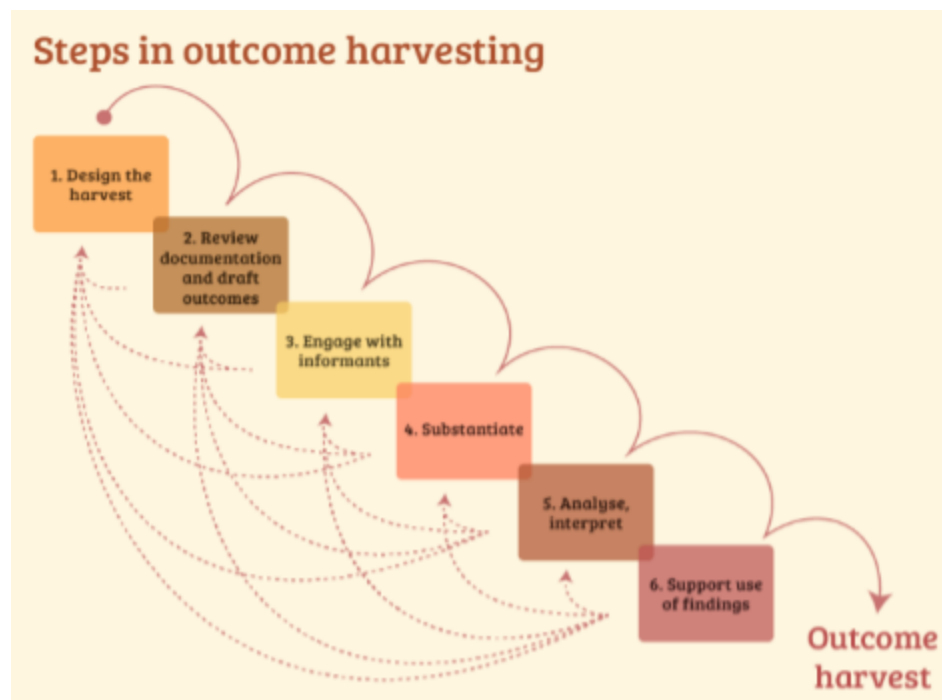
## Outcome Harvesting

In this document, we propose a facilitation process that can be used to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of systems thinking in schools and organizations. We have looked at the Outcome Harvesting evaluation method to inform and help design the facilitated dialogue workbook.

**Outcome Harvesting consists of asking individuals within the system to identify or “harvest” changes (outcomes) and work backwards to connect the outcomes to an intervention that has been implemented and see how said intervention has contributed to these changes.**

*In this instance, it would be identifying outcomes such as reduced rates of suspension or increased teacher retention and demonstrating how these outcomes may be linked to the implementation of systems thinking in the schools.*

This methodology aligns with this project as Outcome Harvesting has been proven beneficial in evaluating complex situations where multiple factors could be influencing the various outcomes being measured. Outcome Harvesting is only one approach to facilitation and other methods should be considered if it is believed they would be more appropriate for the facilitation being conducted.



Source: [https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/outcome\\_harvesting#OH\\_origin](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/outcome_harvesting#OH_origin)

# Who Should Use This Workbook

**Anyone that wishes to facilitate discussions surrounding Systems Thinking implementation.**

This facilitation workbook has been designed with the view that facilitated discussions would be held with teachers and staff from various MPS schools that are currently using systems thinking. These could be individuals that have been using systems thinking for several years or individuals who have been recently introduced to systems thinking. However, the design and questions laid out in the following sections can be adapted so that facilitated discussions could be held with other participants such as students, parents, community members, or staff within other organizations that are also implementing systems thinking.

\*Participants should at a bare minimum have a basic understanding of systems thinking as well as the tools and Habits of a Systems Thinker.

Some Examples Are:

- 1.) Evaluators wanting to gather formative or summative evaluation data
- 2.) Staff leading meetings on professional development
- 3.) In class, teachers acting as facilitators and students as participants in the dialogues
- 4.) During Parent Teacher Association Meetings to assess systems thinking understanding
- 5.) Assessing community members understanding of systems thinking

# How to Use This Workbook

After reading through the Executive Summary, Methodology, and Who Should Use This Workbook, now it is time to better understand how the process will unfold. Below are eight steps to follow. Further explanation of a particular step is followed by a link.

Step 1: Choose a Framework ([Choose a Framework](#))

Step 2: Organize the Dialogue

Step 3: Facilitate the Dialogue and Collect Feedback from Participants

Step 4: Process (Read through) the Feedback

Step 5: Choose Which Tool to Use for Analysis ([Next Steps: Applying the Outcomes](#))

Step 6: Apply the Chosen Tool to the Feedback (Example: [Iceberg Example](#))

Step 7: Reflect on Process and Findings from Step 6

Step 8: Report and Share the Findings

# Getting Started: Choosing a Framework

Each framework below has a variety of different questions and processes but they all are “harvesting” or generating outcomes from participants. Pick the framework that you feel best aligns with your purpose and your anticipated participants and setting. Feel free to adapt and make these dialogues your own. In other words, tailor the set-up and edit the questions to fit your contextual needs.

## Outcome Harvesting

These questions are based on Outcome Harvesting by Ricardo Wilson-Grau and Heather Britt. Information about Outcome Harvesting can be found here:

<https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resource/overview/OutcomeHarvesting>  
<http://outcomeharvesting.net/>

**Purpose:** As previously described, Outcome Harvesting is an effective evaluation method to use in complex situations and when the focus is on outcomes that have been reached instead of on the activities included in the intervention. Outcome Harvesting assists evaluators in connecting identified outcomes or changes back to an intervention that has already been implemented.

**Preparation:** To begin, an individual (“the harvester”) needs to be identified to lead the facilitation process. This individual can be someone from either within the system or an outsider, but it is important that this individual understands the Outcome Harvesting methodology. In addition, “harvest users” must be identified. Harvest users are those that will be using the information gathered to make decisions or take action such as the school board or school administration. Furthermore, it is vital that the harvester engages individuals in the facilitation process who know what outcomes the intervention has attained or have observed changes taking place. In this case, it is important to include those teachers and staff that have been trained in ST and are using ST habits and tools on a daily basis and can speak to the changes they have observed.

**Directions:** Outcome harvesting consists of the six steps listed below. While it is necessary to include all six steps in order to successfully complete the Outcome Harvesting process, the harvester can adapt or rearrange the steps to best fit the needs of the facilitation.

- 1. Design the Outcome Harvest.** This step includes developing the questions to be used in the facilitation. Sample questions are provided below. The facilitator may want to include harvest users in this part of the process to ensure that the questions focus on gathering the information needed to make future decisions.
- 2. Review documentation and draft outcome descriptions.** To prepare for the facilitation, it is beneficial to review previous documentation or data to identify potential outcomes. This may include data collected by the schools such as test scores, attendance records, teacher retention records, etc. The facilitator may also want to look

at the documentation from previous facilitated discussions or the Systems Thinking Initiative Map discussed later in this workbook.

3. **Engage with informants in formulating outcome descriptions.** This step would be the facilitated dialogue. In the dialogue, the facilitator would use questions such as those listed below and the information gathered in the previous step to identify as many outcomes as possible and begin connecting the outcomes back to the intervention, the implementation of systems thinking.
4. **Substantiate.** The facilitator and harvest users review and finalize the outcomes and verify that they can be linked back to the intervention. Again, the systems thinking Initiative Map may be beneficial during this step. It may also be helpful to bring in a third party who is unbiased to validate the outcomes identified.
5. **Analyze and interpret.** The facilitator, in collaboration with stakeholders, interprets the results of the facilitation and looks for proof that the intervention influenced the outcomes. It is important to document the results so that the results can be reviewed during future evaluations.
6. **Support use of findings.** Share and review the results with the harvest users. This may initiate another facilitated discussion in order to determine how the findings may be used, such as what changes could be made to the intervention.

Questions:

- Briefly describe specific changes you have observed in students, teachers and/or staff/administration since the systems thinking training and the implementation of systems thinking.
- Who specifically changed?
- Can you point to when the change occurred?
- What changes have you noticed in the behavior of and relationships between students, teachers and/or staff/administration, activities, policies or practices? Have teachers formed stronger positive bonds with students? Are students engaging in academically and socially productive ways?
- Are there specific schools or areas of a particular school where this change has been noticed?
- Has the school district contributed to this change? Has it supported and encouraged this change? What has its influence been?
- To what extent can these changes be attributed to systems thinking training?
- What unintended outcomes (positive or negative) are produced?
- What are the particular features of systems thinking that are making a difference?

## A Modified World Café

Information about the World Cafe method can be found here:

<http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>

<http://therightquestions.org/the-world-cafe-workshop-facilitation-method/>

[http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/world\\_cafe.htm](http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/world_cafe.htm)

Purpose: To capture relevant information in a non-threatening, relaxed setting that stimulates conversation and sharing.

Preparation: At round tables, have the categories below on a large sheet of paper.

- Things that are going well (Accomplishments)
- Areas for growth (Challenges)
- Resources to share
- Questions you have

Directions:

- 1.) Participants will be seated at tables of four to six people.
- 2.) Give groups about 15 minutes to talk and write about the category on the sheet of paper on their tables.
- 3.) One of the facilitators should keep time and have the groups move tables when 15 minutes have elapsed.
- 4.) One facilitator should be stationed at each table to summarize previous conversations and keep the process on track.
- 5.) After each group has visited and recorded their thoughts at all four tables, the whole group should reconvene to debrief. The facilitators should lead this time of sharing and the thoughts expressed need to be recorded as well since some of them might be new thoughts previously unuttered. A graphic recorder may also be used. This is the time to clarify and elaborate.
- 6.) After the facilitation, the information recorded on the various sheets of paper should be transcribed and arranged in a format helpful to the process. For example, charts can be used or a narrative.

The questions below can be used by facilitators to jog participants' thoughts and keep the process moving or as the questions being considered at the tables instead of the categories above. In that case, instead of four categories or tables, there would be three. These questions can also be used in a circle dialogue. In such an event, it is crucial that there is a notetaker to record participants' comments and questions.



#### Before systems thinking (Not Initiating-Initiating)

- What did you think about systems thinking when you first heard about it?
- How did you think systems thinking would affect your day-to-day teaching/work?
- What did you think the results of using systems thinking would be?
- What did you think the major challenges of using systems thinking would be?
- What was the process to choose the schools that would implement systems thinking?

#### Now while using ST (Implementing)

- Have your initial thoughts about systems thinking changed? How?
- How has systems thinking affected/changed your day-to-day teaching/work?
- What systems thinking tools do you use the most?
- Are you seeing the results of using systems thinking you thought you'd see? Please explain.
- What are the major challenges of using systems thinking?
- What are the major benefits of using systems thinking?

#### Once systems thinking has been used for 2-4 years (Embedded)

- What do you expect to be the long-term results of using systems thinking?
- What will an systems thinking school look like?
- How can a school keep up the momentum of using systems thinking?
- What do you see for the future of systems thinking in your specific MPS school/building and in MPS overall?

## Appreciative Inquiry

Information about Appreciative Inquiry can be found here:

<http://www.davidcooperrider.com/ai-process/>

<https://cvdl.ben.edu/blog/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/>

[http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/appreciative\\_inquiry](http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/appreciative_inquiry)

Purpose: To uncover the positive things that are taking place in a system and starting from there to create a better future. AI looks at the questions we ask because the questions we ask determine what we focus on.

Directions:

- 1.) Form circle groups of 5-7 people.
- 2.) Read the questions and have every person answer. You may want to keep time.
- 3.) Make sure the answers are recorded.

Questions:

- Looking back on your time using systems thinking, what has been your greatest joy using systems thinking in your work? What made it a wonderful experience? Who else was involved? What was happening?
- If you were to close your eyes and then open them to find 5 years have passed, what would you hope to see in your workplace with regards to systems thinking? What would be happening?

# Alternative Options and Considerations

## Virtual Dialogues

Purpose: When budgets and busy schedules limit the opportunities to gather a group together in person, virtual meetings are a great alternative.

Preparation: Utilize a software program, like GoTo Meeting, where a large group can easily access the meeting through a variety of different devices. If using the World Cafe Framework, it would be recommended to have participants use a computer device in order for them add and see the notes for each category.

\*Note: When using a virtual meeting software, please be aware that sound issues may arise if other devices are open. Please request participants to turn off other devices while participating in the dialogue.

Special Directions:

As facilitator and organizer of the virtual meeting, you have the option to share your screen with participants who are on a device with a monitor.

Questions: Based on Framework selected ([Choosing a Framework](#))

# Next Steps: Applying the Outcomes

When applying the results and analyzing the outcomes you generated from the facilitated dialogues, there are a number of methods you can use. Below, we present two different ways that can be combined or used in isolation. The first is referencing the Systems Thinking Initiative Map created in Kumu<sup>1</sup> and the second is using the Waters Foundation Iceberg tool.

See [Links to Tools](#) for the following examples:

## Systems Thinking Tool: Systems “Concept” Map

“The Systems Concept Map” was initially created in order to flesh out the different perspectives within the educational system; however, it can also be used in aiding the analysis process.

By using the map to decode where certain outcomes are occurring, the systems map can help identify direct impacts that outcomes are having on specific areas of the map as well as illustrate indirect or “ripple effects” through connections between factors and sub-systems (loops).

## Systems Thinking Tool: Iceberg

The Iceberg is one tool that incorporates a multitude of additional tools within. The Iceberg is separated into four different sections, the top (Events), the second level (Patterns of Behavior), the third (Structure of a System) and the last level (Mental Models).

When using this tool, the outcomes that you generate are placed in the Event level. Then in each level below, fill out the remaining levels using the tools in each level, i.e. Behavior-Over-Time Graphs, Stock and Flow Graph, Causal Loops and the Ladder of Inference.

\*For a shortened analysis process you can instead choose one or two of the tools. This process can be done individually or in a group.\*

See the next page for the Iceberg graph followed by a filled-in example

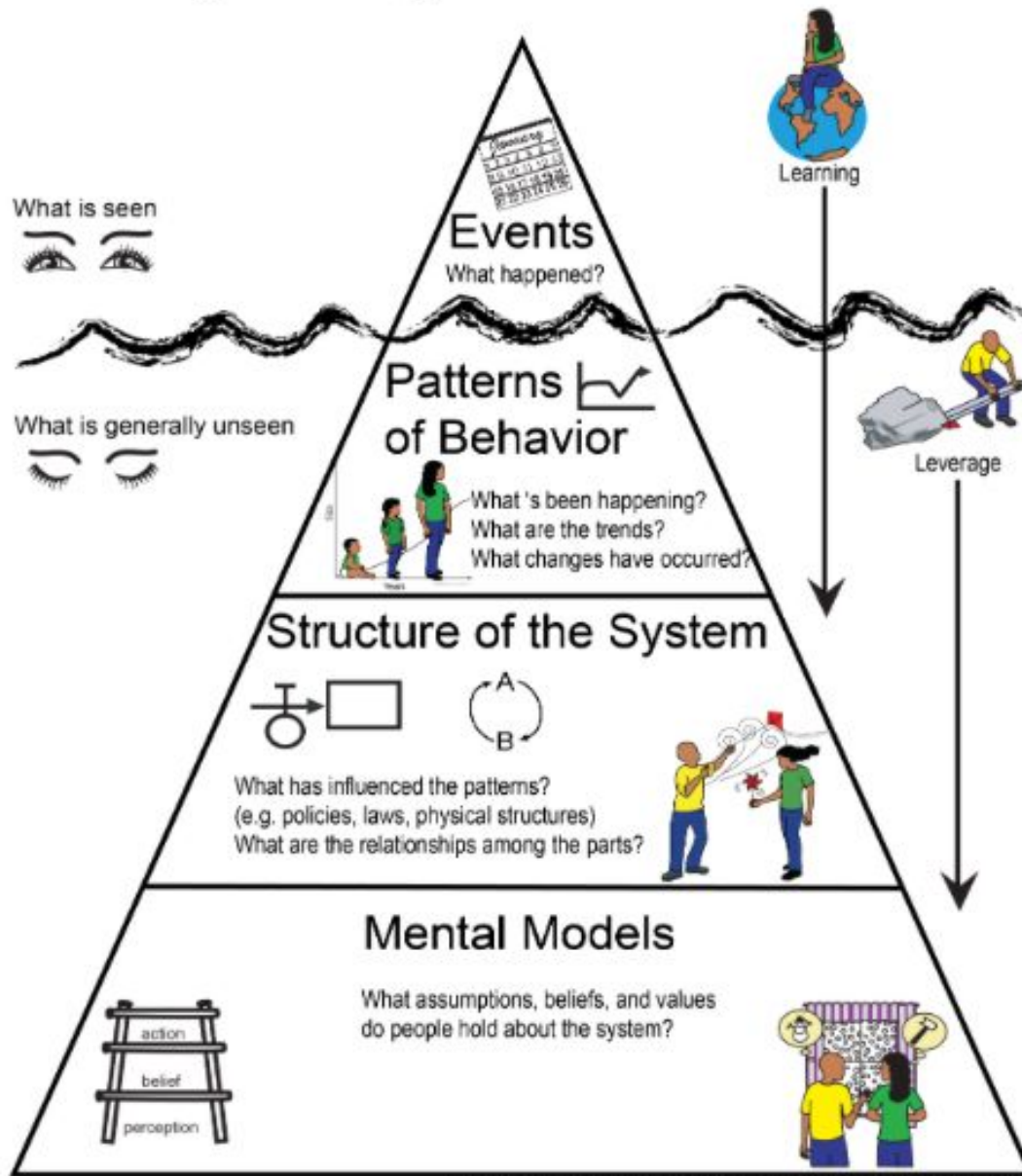


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<sup>1</sup> <https://kumu.io>

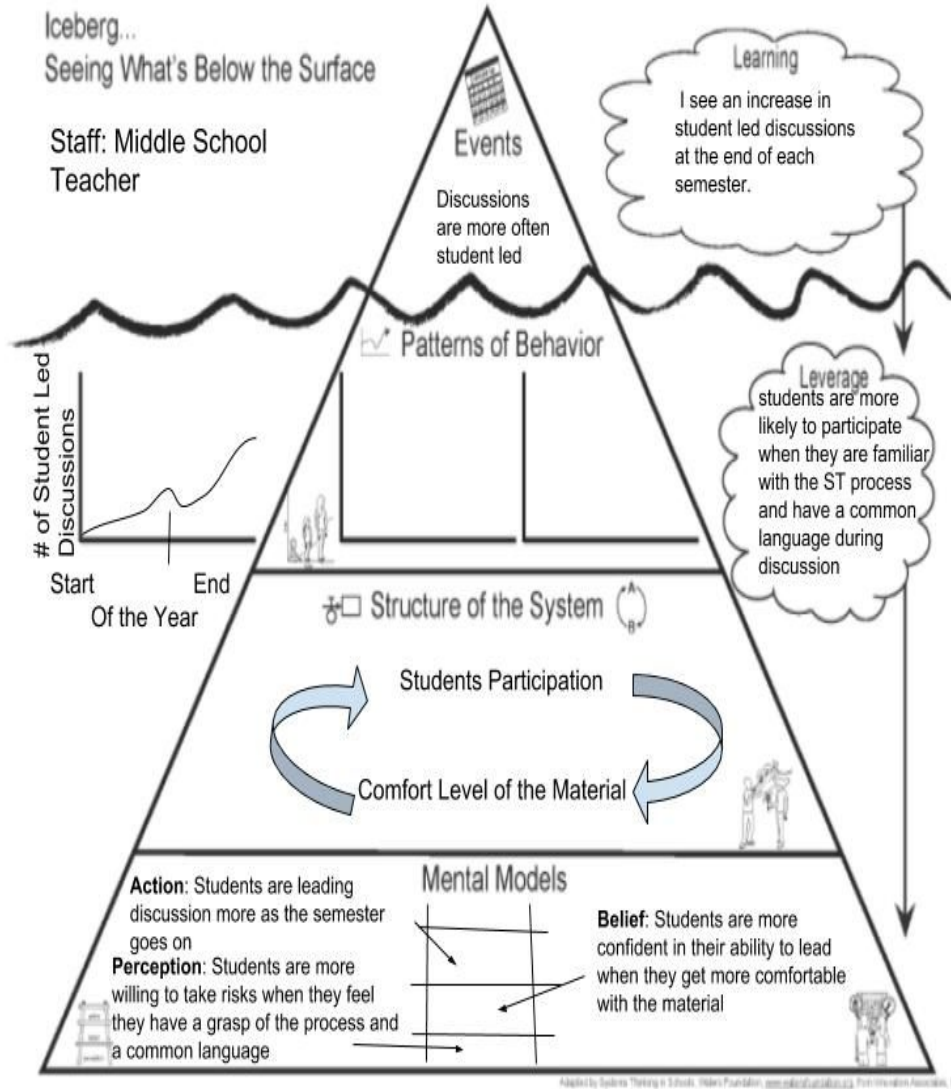
# Iceberg Graph

## Iceberg... Seeing What's Below the Surface



Adapted by Systems Thinking in Schools, Peter Senge, www.sensefoundation.org, from Innovation Associates, Inc.

# Iceberg Example



# Links to Tools

## Waters Foundation Tools:

Introduction to the different tools:

<https://www.watersfoundation.org/systems-thinking-tools-and-strategies/tools-2/>

## Systems Thinking Initiative Map:

Link to systems map:

[Systems "Concept" Map](#)

# Endnotes

- 1.) Information about Outcome Harvesting can be found here:
  - a.) Wilson-Grau, R. (2015) *Outcome Harvesting*. BetterEvaluation. Retrieved from [http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/outcome\\_harvesting](http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/outcome_harvesting)
  - b.) <http://outcomeharvesting.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Outcome-Harvesting-Brief-revised-Nov-2013.pdf?189db0>
  - c.) <http://outcomeharvesting.net/>
- 2.) Information about the World Cafe method can be found here:
  - a.) <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>
  - b.) <http://therightquestions.org/the-world-cafe-workshop-facilitation-method/>
  - c.) [http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/world\\_cafe.htm](http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/world_cafe.htm)
- 3.) Information about Appreciative Inquiry can be found here:
  - a.) <http://www.davidcooperrider.com/ai-process/>
  - b.) <https://cvdl.ben.edu/blog/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/>
  - c.) [http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/appreciative\\_inquiry](http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/appreciative_inquiry)
- 4.) Information about MPS was mainly taken from here:
  - a.) Milwaukee Public Schools. (n.d.). *Systems Thinking: Empowering & Engaging Students*. Office of Innovation & Information. Department of Innovation Development.



# Acknowledgements

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And to you, the user of this workbook, please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or feedback.

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