

Cultural Autobiography/Memoir EDCS 720



Purpose:

You will be expected to write about the cultural experiences and identities that have made you the person you are today. You will explore and identify how multiple cultural constructs have advantaged and disadvantaged you in your development. The purpose of this assignment is to initiate reflection about your cultural identities and experiences according to the themes we discuss in this course. The autobiography/memoir will provide you a means to examine critical incidents in your own life and to begin to consider how these experiences are shaping your own philosophy of education, your images of teaching, and your decision to be an education professional.

Tasks:

Step 1- Brainstorming: Begin by reflecting on incidents and experiences that have significantly affected your cultural identities. Keep in mind these experiences could be positive or negative. To help you get started, you could think about (a)“I am who I am because of...” and (b)“How have my social identities privileged or marginalized me in my schooling experiences?”:

1. My religion/spirituality- What values and perspectives did your religion/spirituality instill in you? What messages did you receive about your religion/spirituality in your family? In your religious/spiritual community? In your schooling experiences?
2. My gender- What messages did you receive about the roles of males and females? What messages did you receive about your gender in your family? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences?
3. My sexual orientation- What messages did you receive about your sexual orientation in your family? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences?
4. My language- What messages did you receive about your language in your family? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences?
5. My social class- What messages did you receive about your social class in your family? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences?
6. My race/ethnicity- What messages did you receive about your race/ethnicity in your family? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences?
7. My (dis)ability- What messages did you receive about your (dis)ability? Your religious/spiritual community? Your schooling experiences?

Step 2- Analysis: In addition to your race/ethnicity AND social class, choose **one** other aspect of your social identity and write about specific incidents and experiences that have significantly affected this facet of your cultural identity. The following questions about the influence of core social institutions (family, peers, community, religion, media, and school) on your identity should be addressed thoroughly in your autobiography as you reflect upon your incidents/experiences in particular contexts. In thinking about each of your social identities, also process the ways in which your childhood messages shaped those identities relative to others’ identities that were/are different from your own. For example, how was your religious/spiritual identity positioned in relation to others’ religious/spiritual identities?

- Parents/guardians/family- What values did they instill in you? How did they do that? To what extent do patterns you learned in the family suggest what you believe are the best kinds of decision-making patterns in the classroom?
- Peers- To what extent did school facilitate you becoming familiar and interacting with people who differ from you? Do you have quality friendships with people from different social

identities than your own? If yes, how did those relationships come about? If no, why do you think this is the case?

- Community & Religion- What kinds of behaviors were rewarded? How were they rewarded? What kinds were looked upon negatively? How?
- Media- Which forms of media (TV, books, internet, news shows, movies, magazines, etc.) were most privileged as sources of knowledge and new understanding in your home? School? Which forms of media do you most engage now as a college student? Do most of the media you engage show a representation of people from different social identities than your own?
- School- What was the racial/ethnic and social class composition of the student body? Was there shame or embarrassment assigned to students who received free or reduced lunch?

Step 3- Application: Now What?

You know what your experiences were, and you understand what they mean. Now what will you do with that understanding? What is your educational/professional philosophy? What will you do in your practice to perpetuate or reform the system through which you were schooled? Be sure to provide a justification for why these actions make sense to you and why they are important, using concepts and ideas gleaned from our readings. Be sure to think about:

- **How** do your experiences and memories help you think about who you are as a person?
- **How** do these experiences help you think about the roles of educators/teachers/professors/administrators generally and your role as an education professional? How do your multiple identities provide you with particular strengths and limitations as an education professional?
- **How** do your experiences and memories help you develop a sense of what teaching, learning, and schooling is all about? (*Did your ideas about teaching, learning, and schooling change over time? If so, how? If not, what accounts for the consistency in your ideas?*)
- **How** have your experiences and/or growth shaped the ways in which you think about your relative privilege within dominant social structures and schooling structures? (Think about the kinds of schools you attended; the match/mismatch between the school culture and your home culture; the assumptions your teachers made about you and the expectations they held for you, etc.)
- **How** do these incidents help you think about any or all of the following themes discussed in class: the explicit, implicit, and null curriculum of your schooling, methods of instruction used by your teachers, social reproduction, tracking, agency and structure, social mobility, meritocracy, deficit perspectives, culture, cultural mismatch, and social justice in education?

Some Particulars:

Making Connections: In your essay be sure to make connections to the course readings as well as other relevant readings. Include citations to at least 6 relevant readings. Be sure to include a bibliography with full references for the citations.

Length: Your autobiography essay should be 7-8 pages, 12 point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, standard margins (1" all around or 1" top & bottom with 1.25" left & right).

Due Date: The assignment should be uploaded to Blackboard by midnight on **November 14**.