

Socio-Cultural Autobiography

Due: December 2, 2009

When I first reviewed the syllabus and read about the assignment of writing an autobiography of my culture I have to admit that I was intimidated. My initial thought was that I was a typical American and could not imagine writing five pages about my culture. I have come a long way throughout this course and have realized that I do have culture. I have learned that culture is so much more than family traditions. It took some in depth searching but I feel that I have learned a lot more about myself. In addition, I feel that I have a clearer understanding of how my upbringing and other environmental influences have helped to shape the person and teacher that I am today. I also feel that many situations in my adult life continue to shape my role as a citizen and an educator.

The "Guidelines for Understanding Culture and Diversity" by Brenda Rodriguez was an extremely helpful handout that furthered my understanding of culture. I found the section about developing self-awareness particularly interesting. It seems obvious now that understanding your own culture can improve your understanding of other cultures but I had not really put much thought into that before. The personal inventory helped me to look at how my

culture and personal experiences have influenced my development as well as my perceptions. Furthermore, when answering the survey questions I was able to see more clearly how my experiences helped to support and encourage cultural diversity in my own classroom. For example, the question about social class made me think about the differences between my social class and that of my students. It also got me thinking about the expectations upon me as a member of the middle class compared to societies expectations of my students. If society did not expect me to be successful would I have worked as hard as I have to be the person I am today? Maybe, but I'm not so sure. Knowing the importance of this, I set high expectations for all of my students. I make sure the expectations are realistic because I do not want them to be frustrated. However, they understand that I know what they can do and that I will always be there to push them yet be supportive.

I can say for sure that the schools I attended set high expectations for myself and fellow classmates. Until the age of seven I lived in Johnston, Rhode Island, a suburban, predominantly white neighborhood. Then my parents decided to move to an even more suburban area, Smithfield, Rhode Island. They wanted my sister and I to be in an area that had a better school system. Even though the makeup of the neighborhood looked similar I noticed a difference in the school climate almost immediately. There was a tremendous amount of emphasis put onto material items and status. My parents made sacrifices for us to move there and we

did not have the money that the families of most of my classmates had. Regardless of this contrast I made friends and acclimated fairly quickly. I enjoyed my time in Smithfield and felt that I had a pretty normal school experience.

Comment [CM1]: Schools, parents and people you interacted with

It was not until high school when I started dating a boy from another town that I began to notice the lack of diversity in my school. I met friends of his that were of different races and I enjoyed their company. Most of the diversity in my school was from the foreign exchange students that would join us for a few semesters at a time.

Comment [CM2]: This was different type of diversity. ☹

Just as I was beginning to realize the lack of diversity in my school I had an experience with an English teacher that caused me to question the bias and possible prejudice of some of my teachers. The assignment was to complete a review of one of our favorite television shows. I chose to write about “The Cosby Show” and I felt that I did a great job explaining all of the reasons why I enjoyed the show. Not only did I get a poor grade but the comment back to me was that my favorite show was completely unrealistic. Is it that unrealistic that an African American husband and wife can be married with children and have successful careers? I was shocked by the comment and if I was the mature woman that I am today I would question that teacher and ask her to elaborate further about her comments. I find this relevant because this is an example of an educator who has grown up with their own set of values and beliefs that have shaped the person they

Comment [CM3]: Narrow minded, unfortunately! They are so many middle and up-middle class black families out there!

are and their perceptions about the world. Thankfully, I feel that I am a lot more sensitive to culture and bias than my former teacher was.

Comment [CM4]: Very reflective comment!

There are many other factors and experiences that have influenced my development. My parents have been a huge influence in my life. They raised me to work hard to achieve my dreams. They both valued education and understood its importance. However, I feel that this has caused me to make judgments about some of the parents of my students. I have to be honest that there have been times when I made assumptions that lack of parent involvement meant that the parents did not value education. My parents attended all conferences and school events along with talking with me about school each day and discussing and assisting me with my homework. I attributed these things as characteristics of parents who value education. Through my experiences including the reading and discussions throughout this course, I know now that it is not that simple. There are many different reasons that parents may or may not be involved in their child's education and it's complicated. I was quick to judge because of my past experiences.

Comment [CM5]: Reflecting on how we all tend to use our cultural "norm" to evaluate others.

I could discuss other areas of my upbringing that helped me to be the person I am today but nothing has shaped the teacher I am today more than the experiences I have been through since student teaching and being hired in an urban district. The reward is something that is indescribable.

When I first got the assignment that I would be student teaching in Central

Falls I did not know what to expect. I heard many terrible things about the city and rumors about crime and danger. I never anticipated how much I would appreciate working with these children. I feel fortunate to have been hired in this district. I have learned so much from my children about their individual cultures and it has helped me to learn more about myself. Now that I have experienced the joy of working with the children of Central Falls I cannot imagine working anywhere else. Each year I feel that I continue to learn strategies to meet the individual needs of my students which assist me to become a better teacher.

Comment [CM6]: Good!

As adults we are continuous learners and this course has helped me a lot while taking me on a cultural journey of self-evaluation and analysis. I have realized that there are more things that I can do to incorporate culture into my daily instruction. Laura Lorida's Checklist for Cultural Awareness together with Pat Landurand's Suggestions for Increasing Cultural Competence have been and will continue to be helpful tools to assist in my growth. I cannot yet answer yes to all of the questions on the checklist so the suggestions for increasing cultural competence will continue to assist me. I look forward to continuing to grow as a person and a professional.

Special Education 551: Socio-Cultural Autobiography Rubric

Areas of Analysis	Approaches Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
Demonstrate a comprehensive and reflective description showing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Culture ▪ Socio-economic ▪ Religion or spirituality ▪ Place of origin and/or present location ▪ Family structure, composition, roles ▪ Family characteristics and interactions 	Demonstrates some reflection and addresses adequately the cultural, socio-economic, and family characteristics and their contributions to the development of self. 2 4	Demonstrates a comprehensive and reflective description showing how cultural, socio-economic, and family characteristics have contributed to development of self. 6 8	Autobiography is very comprehensive and reflective and addresses cultural, socio-economic and family characteristics as well as other specific contributions. 10
Describes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family child-rearing practices ▪ Traditions, customs, and activities of importance Explains how they have contributed to development of self	Begins to describe how family child-rearing practices, traditions, customs, and activities of importance have contributed to the development of self. 2 4	Describes child-rearing practices, traditions, customs, and activities of importance and how they have contributed to self. 6 8	Provides a comprehensive description and reflection on child-rearing practices, traditions, customs, and activities of importance and how they have influenced perceptions and values of the individual. 10
Describes key factors and/or experiences that have greatly influenced development of self (i.e. schooling, neighborhood, church, significant life events etceteras).	Begins to describe key factors and/ or experiences that have greatly influenced development of self. 2 4	Describes key factors and/or experiences that have greatly influenced development of self. 6 8	Provides a comprehensive description and reflection on key factors and/or experiences that have greatly influenced development of self. 10
Integrates course content in reflections on autobiography.	Begins to integrate course content in reflections on autobiography. 2 4	Integrates course content in reflections on autobiography. 6 8	Demonstrates a comprehensive integration of content in reflections of autobiography 10
Autobiography is well organized and clearly articulated. The autobiography is professionally written.	Autobiography shows some organization and clarity; demonstrates some degree of professionalism in the presentation of information 2 4	Autobiography is well organized and clear; demonstrates a satisfactory degree of professionalism 6 8	Autobiography is very well organized and is very clearly articulated; demonstrates a high level of professionalism in the presentation of information 10

Name _____

Point 40 _____/50