

Self-Reflection

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Endeavor STEM Teaching Certificate Project

**Part 1: Identity Reflection****What are some aspects of your identity and/or culture?**

There are many components that make up my identity and culture. When I think of myself the words that come to mind are mom, teacher, daughter, Italian, Catholic, and white. There are definitely other things also that make me who I am. I consider myself to be introverted. I love spending time with my family, traveling, reading, and watching my children play sports.

**Using your own experiences, thoughts, reflections, and memories, how have you come to understand your own identity/culture?**

A lot of my earliest memories revolve around my culture and identity. I grew up in a middle-class, white, Catholic, Italian family. I attended a small school and most of my friends and their families were like me. My dad was born in Italy and my mom is Italian, so the Italian culture was very present. My dad spoke Italian, we listened to Italian music, and ate Italian food. We celebrated traditions like the Feast of the Seven Fishes on Christmas Eve. Family was very important growing up and we ate dinner together each night. We went on family camping trips and vacations and spent holidays with our extended family. My parents taught me about my Catholic faith early on by saying prayers, taking me to church each Sunday, and sending me to Catholic school.

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**What are some factors, people, or experiences that have helped to share your identity/culture?**

My parents played a key role in my identity and culture. My dad grew up in Italy without a lot of money. When he was 20 years old, he left his family to come to America. He wanted to come to America for job opportunities and a better way of life. I know it was very hard for him when he first came to America because he did not know English and did not have any family or friends here. His perseverance is something I admire. He worked hard to provide a good life for my mom, my sister, and me. My mom is truly my role model. She is a strong woman and always puts others before herself. She has truly been a wonderful mom to me. My parents did not have the opportunity to go to college but worked hard so my sister and I received a good education. My mom put a strong emphasis on learning from the time I was a child and had high expectations for me. I think she is the reason I became a teacher and she helps me to be the mom I am to my three children.

**How has your understanding of your identity/culture changed over time?**

I think I am still true to my own identity as an Italian, Catholic female, but I am more understanding of other cultures and people now. I guess I lived a somewhat “sheltered childhood” which was good and bad. Most of my friends and family friends were very similar to me and I did not experience much diversity. It wasn’t until college and my teaching career, that I began to learn more about other cultures and different ways of life. I consider myself to be very understanding of all cultures and supportive of all my diverse students. I love learning about my students’ families, backgrounds, and customs.

**SELF-REFLECTION****How might my experiences impact me as an educator?**

My dad was born in Italy and had a very thick Italian accent. Many of my friends did not understand him. My dad was not a “typical” American dad who watched football and coached sports. I also spent a lot of time with my family on weekends. My parents were strict so I did not often get to do the things some of my friends did. I think this has helped me to get a better understanding of my students. They might have parents who speak other languages or have different personal experiences from other students in the class. I try to focus on having students share their unique experiences, but I also try to have students from different backgrounds do activities to help them find things they have in common. My parents taught me to always work hard, to set goals for myself, and to be kind and respectful to others. These are the same things I teach not only my own children, but also the students in my class.

**Part 2: STEM Learning History**

**Select one of the STEM disciplines and describe your earliest memory you have learning something in that discipline.**

My mom loved math. She was always really good at math and it seemed to come naturally for her. From the time I was little, my mom would do math-related activities with me. My earliest memories involve my mom counting with me and practicing math facts with me.

**What was the experience like? What made it memorable?**

I remember being a young child and as we would drive places in the car, my mom would ask me math problems. I used to think it was so fun. We would be spending time together and I

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was doing something that I loved...math. I remember how proud of me she would be when I would quickly get the answers correct.

**Reflect on your experiences as a STEM learner (k-12 and college). What was challenging?****What were positive learning experiences and why were they positive?**

My mom definitely instilled in me a love of math. I was in elementary and high school math clubs, took advanced and AP math classes, and went to college and received a math degree. I was blessed to have amazing math teachers, some of which I am still in contact with many years later. I had many positive learning experiences because my teachers really believed in me and encouraged me to work hard. I also had a strong parent support system. I think the most challenging thing was taking classes with many boys. I often felt I had to prove myself because of my gender.

**How did your experience and teachers shape your perceptions of this discipline?**

My experiences and teachers helped to shape my perception of math. I honestly love math. I find it challenging and fun. I have taught secondary math as well as elementary math and received a doctoral degree in education in which my dissertation was all about math. My teachers provided me with many positive math experiences.

**How are these experiences reflected in the way I teach?**

I have to be honest and say that the way I learned math is very different from the way I teach math. There are different algorithms, strategies, and many more hands-on experiences and technology which I think is wonderful. What I consider to be similar between my learning

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experiences and my teaching experiences is the attitude about math. I want my students to love math. Many do not begin the school year feeling this way. I make my math activities challenging and fun to encourage students to have a positive attitude towards math. I want all students (of different genders, backgrounds, learning styles) to be successful in math. Just like I learned about the importance of math, I emphasize this to my students. I work hard to get students excited about math and wanting to learn more.

**Part 3: Role of Culture in Teaching****Describe the ways you include your culture and students' culture in your classroom.**

I spend a lot of time in the beginning of the year learning about my students and having them share with each other. We do many activities such as bringing in "Me bags" to share things important to them, doing activities in which they tell their favorite things and find similarities and differences among classmates, and create bulletin boards about the students. I also send home parent surveys to learn more about my students from a parent perspective. I have a strong teacher/parent connection in my classroom. I often have parents come in to share about their culture, make traditional foods, and read stories or do crafts that represent their religion and traditions. I obviously am not an expert on every culture so I think it is important for families to have the opportunity to share their stories. I do share about my Italian culture and tell my students about my traditions also. I love how many of my English learners get excited to hear that I grew up in a house with two languages.

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**To what extent to you believe culture to play a role in teaching and learning STEM?**

I think culture is very important in teaching and learning STEM. My family and experiences helped me to love math (and other STEM areas). I wanted to take this class because I teach many diverse students from various socio-economic backgrounds, cultures, religions, and nationalities. I want to ensure that STEM experiences are equitable. I was fortunate to have wonderful experiences in the STEM areas, so I want to ensure that my students have wonderful experiences also.