

Assignment 1: Self Reflection Paper

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Abstract

This paper is a self reflection of my identity and culture. I will discuss the factors which influenced my identity and how I came to understand my identity. In addition, I will discuss my experiences from a STEM discipline in high school and/or college. Finally, the ways in which my identity eludes into my classroom will be discussed.

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Part 1: Identity Reflection

As I am writing this paper, I am struggling with trying to understand just what is my identity. I also am struggling with trying to identify my culture. Who am I? This is the biggest question asked by anyone. In researching the definition of identity I have come to the conclusion, my identity is what I do in a way. I am a Mom, wife, teacher, and coach. I do not take no for an answer. When someone says I can not do something, I try to prove them wrong. I cherish being a Mom and spending time with my family, especially when we get to go camping.

What is my culture? This question is hard for me to determine. I am of mixed European background mostly. My great grandparents on my father's mom's side were full blooded Italian and my grandpa (who I never knew), my father's father was full blooded Swedish. On my mother's side, both sets of great grandparents and grandparents were of Dutch, German, Irish, and Native American descent. Growing up I guess I associated more with my Italian roots. When I was young, I would tell anyone who asked, I am Italian. As a child with my father's family, my grandmother always made lots of homemade pasta and cannolis. I can remember going to my Italian great grandparents house for holidays. In the basement, my great grandfather had built a huge 30 person table so we could all sit around the table and eat together. He always made his own wine from his own grapes. My great grandmother would always have her homemade pasta and sauce with cannolis for dessert. The time spent around the table with family talking, eating, talking, and well more eating is what I remember most. We all could sit there at that table for hours being with family.

Growing up my mother and father always pushed me to be better than I was and never settle for anything less. They encouraged and challenged me to get good grades and do well in every sport I played so I could earn scholarship money for college. They taught me to have a strong work ethic and to persevere in anything I started. My parents taught me hard work will pay off in the end. In addition, my parents instilled the idea of being kind to others and the willingness to help other people.

My Italian culture and my parents' teachings show up in how I teach and coach. I challenge my students and players to continually strive for nothing less than his/her best. Always give 100% effort. My motto when coaching is we are one team, one family. If one person struggles, we all struggle. If one person triumphs, we all triumph. I encourage my students and players to help each other daily. While helping, students and players grow and learn themselves. I always tell students that if they can explain a concept to another student, they themselves will understand that concept even better than before. For my players, it is the old motto, "you are only as strong as your weakest link." By helping those less skilled, they are only improving the team as a whole.

Part 2: STEM Learning History

My favorite experiences as a STEM learner come from my AP Calculus teacher and my AP Chemistry teacher in high school. Both classes were challenging, but the experience was positive. Each teacher had a way of making each day special. My AP Calculus teacher, in my senior year of high school, was very short and always wrote in blue marker on the white board. By the end of the day, her fingers were all blue from using her hands to erase the board instead of the actual eraser. She always called herself a blue smurf. I can not pinpoint learning something

specific in her class, but rather the experience as a whole. She was so energetic and enthusiastic about teaching math. As a student, I knew she cared because she was always willing to help and answer questions. In a way, she is why I am a math teacher today.

While in AP Chemistry, my teacher always had a way of incorporating real life examples and labs into the classroom. And as my AP Calculus teacher, he was just as enthusiastic about what he taught. He did not just lecture but showed how things happen. For example, he almost always had some type of visual experiment he demonstrated during class. In addition, he genuinely cared for his students. He made a point to ask how my volleyball, basketball, softball games, or Judo meets went. I looked forward to learning in both AP Chemistry and AP Calculus every day.

Due to my experiences in the above mentioned classes, I continually took math and science in college. I developed a liking for math and science because of those teachers. In my own classroom, I try to be just as energetic and enthusiastic as the “blue smurf.” I want my students to have the same experience I did in my AP Calculus and AP Chemistry class. Even if my students do not love math, I am hoping they walk away with an appreciation for the subject and willingness to learn new concepts.

Part 3: Role of Culture in Teaching

There are only 3 rules in my classroom; be respectful, be responsible, and be receptive. I believe being respectful and receptive help in building culturally responsive classroom. The definition of receptive is to be open-minded; the willingness to listen to other thoughts and opinions with no put-downs or judgement. Being receptive is associated with being respectful in that each person in the classroom respects others’ thoughts and opinions with no put-downs or

judgment either. With the three rules, the goal is to build a classroom where all students feel comfortable, welcomed, and ready to learn.

I do believe culture plays a role in teaching and learning of STEM. However, I feel this is my weakest attribute in teaching mathematics. For example, when I am teaching my Algebra 2 students how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide complex numbers, where there are no story problems...how do I incorporate a student's culture? Through this course I am hoping to learn how to do this.