

Autoethnography

In contrast to autobiographies, which focus on the unique qualities of individuals, autoethnographies compel authors to foreground their experiences in relation to a larger social group... Cultural narratives that lack critical reflection have potential to be more about amusement than analysis, telling without understanding, summarizing instead of meaning making... Autoethnography is a method of learning about and understanding lived experience in order to benefit self, society, community, and culture. To do otherwise risks being an exercise in self-centeredness. This move from self-centeredness to collective consideration is important to foster interpersonal communication and intercultural compassion.

--Patrick Camangian

“Starting with Self: Teaching Autoethnography to Foster Critically Caring Literacies” (2010)

Overview

Autoethnography is a form of personal narrative that enables us to make sense of our own lives by explicitly reflecting on how we are, in part, shaped by our lived experiences as members of diverse cultural groups, navigating systems that make up our larger society. In addition to promoting critical reflection on self and society, the process of creating and sharing autoethnographies supports the development of compassionate and humanizing learning communities.

As a culminating assessment, you will tell your story to demonstrate what life experiences have influenced your decision to be a teacher and who you hope to be in the world, through the self-examination that you have engaged in over the course of Foundations Year thus far. To develop your narrative, you will examine identity constructs and social group memberships (categories include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, language, class, sex, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion/spirituality, and their intersections), for the purpose of understanding your navigation of the world. Autoethnography involves more than just storytelling, and should include description, analysis, interpretation, and reflection.

Analyze the system and its conditions and forces (social, political, cultural, historical, educational, religious) that have shaped your lived experience. You should draw upon the various frameworks that we use in class to understand identity development, the influence of systems, and the manifestations of privilege, marginalization, and dehumanization at individual, and structural levels, historically and in the present. You should apply these frameworks to the essential question, “*Who am I?*” A combination of journal entries, readings, in-class discussions and out-of-class conversations should inform your narrative.

Your story is one of becoming: past, present, and future. Recognize that the construction of your identity will not follow a straight-line path; tell your story honestly, including twists and turns along the way; acknowledge the contradictions, explore them, and learn to sit in your discomfort.

Learning happens through crisis. Include influences and incidents that marked significant milestones and turning points. Contemplate the road that lies ahead. Most importantly, identify implications for your future work as a teacher.

Paper

- Develop a personal reading list of 8-10 sources that pertain to your specific identity constructs that will help facilitate your understanding of self. [Here is a link](#) to suggested readings.
- The final paper should be between 8-10 pages and have a central theme, storyline and point of view.
- Your paper and presentation should address the following questions:
 - Who are you? *What has shaped your worldview?*
 - Describe your social identities (including race, ethnicity, language, class, sex, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and religion), and the relative status and power conferred to you as a result of your group memberships. Which of these are most prominent for you, and why? How have these identity constructs impacted your understanding of being human?
 - What experiences (have compelled you) *brought you* to teaching? What compels you to develop the hearts and minds of children?
 - What are your values, beliefs, and philosophy about education, and how have they been shaped by your social identities and lived experiences?
 - What impact do you hope to have on the lives of children?
 - How will you keep yourself accountable to who you want to be and the teaching you want to do?
 - How has your relationship to the knowledge and understanding you have about human development, influenced your commitment?

Presentation

You will be given 10 minutes to present your autoethnography on the first day of class in Spring quarter through an intentional selection of multimedia - images, text, video, animation, recorded audio narration, music, poetry, interpretive dance, etc. Creativity and the application of your personal sense of the aesthetic in the preparation and presentation of this assignment are highly encouraged. Your final presentation is left to your creative discretion.

Questions to consider

The prompts listed below are offered as guidelines to support your thinking as you grapple with the larger questions for the paper.

Personal Identity

- Describe your social identities (including race, ethnicity, language, class, sex, gender, sexual

orientation, ability, and religion), and the relative status and power conferred to you as a result of your group memberships. Which of these are most prominent for you, and why? How have these identity constructs impacted your understanding of being human?

- What early messages constructed your understanding of the social order? From whom did these messages come? How did these experiences affect you?
- How has your ecological system impacted the navigation of your personal identity?
- What were the messages related to your identity(ies) in your home? What roles and behaviors were expected of you? Were there consequences for not following those expectations? How did your parents or other family members influence your beliefs about your social group and other social groups?
- How did schooling shape your perception of self and others? How did your peers influence your perceptions about your social group and other social groups?
- Describe times when your own understanding of your social identity(ies) was in conflict with someone else's expectations. How did it feel to be in those situations? How have you made meaning of these situations in retrospect?
- What images, smells, sounds, and feelings can you draw upon as you construct your experiences?
- Do a generational analysis (of family members, ancestors, etc.) of what brought you to the place/space you find yourself in at this time in your life.
- How have you been impacted by privilege and/or marginalization? In what ways have you internalized beliefs about the domination and subordination of social groups (your own and others)? In what ways have you acted on those beliefs?
- In what ways has your awareness/consciousness been expanded by your socialization within various social groups and communities? In what ways has your awareness/consciousness been limited by your socialization within various social groups and communities?
- As a member of (a) privileged group(s), what opportunities or experiences have supported you in healing and transforming into higher versions of the self?
- As a member of (a) marginalized group(s), what opportunities or experiences have supported you in healing and transforming into higher versions of the self?

Professional Identity

- Describe the teacher you want to be and what it will take to become that teacher.
- Why do you want to teach? What is your understanding of your role as a teacher in urban communities?
- What significance does your constructed identity hold for your future work as a classroom teacher and for the communities in which you will be entering?
- What are your values, beliefs, and philosophy about education, and how have they been shaped by your social identities and lived experiences?
- How will you keep yourself accountable to who you want to become and the teaching you want to do?
- As you look ahead to residency year, what questions will you pursue in order to further your learning and development?