

Culture & Teaching Autobiography

We do not see the world as it is...

We see the world as we are.

- Anais Nin

Cultural identity and epistemologies manifest in our teaching practice as well as in the ways students learn. How we interpret and evaluate students, how we design and facilitate our courses, how we interact with students, and even how we choose what to incorporate in our syllabi and other course materials are all influenced on deep levels by our own cultural identity(ies).

From an anthropological perspective, our cultural identities are made up of the **values, assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors** we were raised with by family, communities, nationally, culturally, and through spiritual traditions, religious teachings, and educational environments. By journeying deep within our own cultural identities, we can get a better sense of how our cultures impact our college teaching and enhance our ability to see how the cultural identities of those we teach are likely to impact their learning. In addition, this type of self analysis and awareness can offer us insights and empathy into serving students from similar and different cultures and backgrounds.

Your culture and teaching autobiography should be a narrative & interpretation about your life and **teaching practice** from within this cultural identity. Autobiographical writing is a kind of storytelling or making sense of things through narrative. This essay is a chance for you to describe and illustrate (give examples/tell stories) of this aspect of yourself and what being a part of this culture means in your life and teaching practice. ***Be sure to go deep!*** You are encouraged to utilize metaphor, artifacts such as photos, themes or other creative means to explore this identity yet be sure to stay focused on deeply and specifically describing and interpreting elements of **your cultural** identity.

Some professionals reflect in their own lives while others find it necessary to also do some informal research into their family histories, reading about specific cultures/ethnic group values/traits, having conversations with relatives etc.

The following are steps of analysis you may find helpful to your process as well as a visual model to assist you to consider how specific assumptions and values/traits and manifest in your teaching practice and how you work with those who hold different values/traits than yours.

Steps of Analysis - optional - use if you find this kind of process helpful)

- **Introduction**
 - o Describe your cultural identity in general and what you know about your cultural origins, history, family names etc. Tell a story to capture an overall sense or spirit of the cultures you were raised in even if these cultures were not overtly discussed as culture within your family or community.

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NOTE: for the following components of this self analysis, feel free to integrate components/steps within each value OR to use the step-by-step section approach shown here.


- **Choose 3-5 major values or traits** that originate in this identity
 - you can use the *Cultural Assumptions, Values and Behaviors in College Teaching Model* near the end of this document, if you wish, to assist you in analyzing each value/trait)
 - If you are having difficulty in identifying cultural values/traits in relation to your teaching, the *Cultural Constructs of Teaching and Learning Model (Chávez, Ke & Herrera, 2009)* at the end of this document may be helpful. This model was developed empirically from research on culture and college teaching.

For EACH value or trait you've identified as originating in your culture(s):

- Describe each identity value or trait -- explain and interpret each value/trait and tell stories or give examples to illustrate how this value or theme plays out in your life
- Second, discuss assumptions and beliefs underlying this value or theme and their meaning to you. What assumptions and/or beliefs about others or about the world serve as a foundation for this value or theme?
 - For example, if you come from a culture that interprets most things from a collective (rather than individual) perspective, then collectivity is likely an underlying assumption beneath some of your values, behaviors, and beliefs. If you come from a culture or cultures that highly value individual
- Third, discuss how this value/trait manifests itself in your life and your behaviors. ...as well as what attitudes and motivations originate in this aspect of your upbringing. Be sure to provide examples/stories to illustrate each value/trait.
- Fourth, describe how this value manifests in your collegiate teaching and the way you interpret, judge, design for, and interact with students and with your subject area. Some examples include how does this value/trait play out in your:
 - syllabus design and content
 - interactions with students
 - activities you facilitate during class sessions
 - how much of your professional and/or personal self you share with students
 - how you disseminate knowledge within a course
 - what you believe is the purpose of education/learning
 - what your role is in relation to student learning
 - how you evaluate and judge student behavior
 - what kinds of skills you expect students to already have and what you expect to teach them

- Fifth, how is this value/trait **helpful** to your effectiveness as a teacher? How is it **limiting** to your effectiveness as a teacher? Be sure to provide illustrations/examples to show what you mean. If you are more of an emerging teacher discuss how you believe it will be both helpful and limiting.
- Next analyze this identity in relation to **how you teach/facilitate student learning with students who have DIFFERENT cultural values/traits.**
 - Analyze the effect of this identity on your view of and work with students --- interpretations, assumptions, generalizations, judgments made about students you teach and advise.
 - Focus especially on how you work with students who have **different** values than those that originate in your culture(s).
 - How do each of the values/traits you described earlier affect the way you see, interpret, and judge students in your classes?
 - For example, do you interpret silence as a sign of thoughtfulness, apathy, or something else?
 - Analyze the effect of these values/themes on your behavior toward students and toward yourself in your work as a teacher.
 - How do you or could you teach in ways that are supportive of others with different ways of learning than your own or those valued in your culture(s)?
 - How might you harness student's cultural strengths and abilities toward their own and others' learning?
 - How might you learn from both students who are culturally similar to you AND students who are culturally different from you?
- Discuss the implications of these values on your facilitate learning effectively with diversity of students.
 - How might you maximize your own cultural strengths as well as minimize cultural limitations in your teaching?
 - How might you draw from the cultural strengths of students as well as teach in ways that assist in developing from their limitations?
- Summarize what you learned through this culture and teaching self reflection and how you wish to continue growing as a faculty member who teaches across cultures..

Cultural Constructs of Teaching and Learning

Individuated		Integrated
In a culturally <u>individuated</u> worldview, a private compartmentalized, linear, contextually independent conception of the world is common, assumed, and valued.		In a culturally <u>integrated</u> worldview, an interconnected, mutual, reflective cyclical, contextually dependent conception of the world is common, assumed, and valued
Knowledge, individual competence, to move forward toward goals and the betterment of humanity	Purpose of Learning	Wisdom, betterment of the lives of those with whom we are connected
Mind as primary, best, or only funnel of knowledge	Ways of Taking in & Processing Knowledge	Mind, Body, Spirit/Intuition, Reflection, Emotions, Relationships
Compartmentalized and separate; belief that understanding how the parts work separately, abstractly, and in isolation will lead to the greatest understanding	Interconnectedness of What is Being Learned	Contextualized and connected, belief that understanding how things affect each other within the whole, pragmatically, and within community will lead to understanding
Learning is a private, individual activity; responsible for one's own learning so that others are not burdened	Responsibility for Learning	Learning is a collective, shared activity, Responsible for one's own and others' learning
Linear, task oriented, can be measured and used, to be on time shows respect	Time	Circular/seasonal, process oriented, dependent on relationships, to allow for enough time shows respect
Provider and Evaluator of Knowledge -- best perspectives and ways of learning, predetermined/bounded learning; communication primarily between teacher and students	Role of the Teacher / Control	Facilitator of Learning Experiences -- multiple perspectives and ways of learning, emergent / constructivist; wide variety of interactions between students, and between teacher and students
Others' perspectives are optional for learning. Primarily rely on verbal messages; individuals are paramount, predominantly verbal in both written and oral communications	Student Interactions	Others' perspectives and interpretations are important to learning. High use of nonverbals, collective as paramount, and multiple streams of communication
Learning by mastering abstract theory first, followed by testing. Unlikely to include application /experience/doing in real life	Sequencing	Learning by doing, listening to others' experiences, imagining, or experiencing first, then drawing out abstract theory

Chávez, Ke & Herrera (2009). The earliest version of this model was presented in a paper at the 2009 ASHE Conference. This model is developed from a later version of the model in Ke & Chávez (2013).

Cultural Assumptions, Values & Behaviors in College Teaching

