

The 2025 SOPHE Presidential Address

"She told me I poisoned my kids with this diversity stuff:" Learning identity and difference through autoethnography.

**Donna M. Sayman
Wichita State University**

Introduction

Thank you. It is an honor to be addressing you all today. I would also like to thank David Snelgrove for his leadership and consistency. Since I first started attending SOPHE in 2006, he has been a steady, reliable presence. I also want to thank Carolyn Fridley, our President for 2024. She gave such a wonderful address last year that I was quite reluctant to follow in her footsteps!

A while back, I ordered a set of 60-minute blank cassette tapes for my 90-year-old cousin. He lives in the hills of West Virginia, and he couldn't find them. So, I just ordered them off Amazon and had them shipped to him. Now this man has been more of a father to me than a cousin. Our shared love of the banjo and all things hillbilly formed a tight bond between us. After he received the tapes, he called and asked how much he owed me, and I told him nothing as the tapes only cost 13 dollars. He adamantly said, "No! I must pay you back!" I said, but it's such a small amount of money, why do you need to pay me back? He replied, "What if I died and you came all the way to my funeral. You'd look in my casket and think, 'He owed me \$13 dollars.'" Believe me, if he died, my memory would not be on that, but I can remember things that I should probably forget.

For example, several years ago, when my stepdaughter attended an upstate New York university for her master's in business administration, she complained that someone filed a complaint with the dean for her "offensive language". In recent years, she has been greatly influenced by online conspiracy theories and other extreme ideologies. Evidently, during a Zoom discussion, she voiced her opinion and spouted some remarks which offended a few people. When she called me, she was angry and about to talk to the dean, and she vehemently claimed she was being targeted for violating Critical Race Theory (CRT). Let me repeat that...she was targeted for violating Critical Race Theory. As I have written several articles framed in CRT, I was gobsmacked. *What could she possibly mean by this accusation?* As she attempted to declare her innocence to me, she also elaborately insulted me by asserting that I '*poisoned my students with this diversity stuff*' and continued to pontificate how the teaching of diversity is detrimental to our society.

Purpose Statement

In this message, I would like to reflect on autoethnography as a means to teach about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). I will refer to a small, pilot study I conducted with my special education graduate students that explored if actively participating in autoethnographic activities can assist students to understand identity, diversity, and differences within themselves and with others. The purpose of this project was to determine if autoethnography can be effective in teaching about diversity and differences to pre-service teachers.

What is Autoethnography?

We begin with a definition of Autoethnography. Goodall (2000) described it as “creative narratives shaped out of a writer’s personal experiences within a culture...” (p.9) working as a bridge between cultural curiosities and lived experiences. Through autoethnography, the reader is invited into your thoughts, history, and identity. Autoethnography can be a tool that “connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2004, p.XIX). Madison (2012) stated that critical autoethnography “begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain” (p. 5).

Using autoethnography is also a way to empower voices who have been historically marginalized (McQueeney & Lavelle, 2017). Patton (2015) highlighted critical autoethnography as having the potential to break through constructs of White, colonialist privilege, questioning power imbalances between the researcher and the researched. Autoethnography takes away the concept of *other* as the focus of study and turns the gaze inward. Ellis and Bochner (2000) elaborated that the core of this methodological process is self-awareness connecting the personal and the cultural. But they also cautioned that autoethnographic writing can require difficult, intense introspection and self-reflection, “The self-questioning autoethnography demands is extremely difficult, so is confronting things about yourself that are less flattering” (p. 738).

Drechsler Sharp et al. (2011) posited that when university professors ask students to discuss life experiences, it is often accomplished could the use of it writing assist

Through means that silence the voice of the student. The student is given a prompt, they write their journal entry, and it’s turned into the professor, graded and handed back. No other person reads the reflection, and the exercise becomes nothing more than busy work. Another downside to classroom journal writing is that writing prompts are often assigned as a warm-up for more serious academic writing. Several research studies demonstrated autoethnography as a unique means to help people understand themselves and others at a deeper level (Allbon, 2012; Battle, 2016; Drechsler Sharp et al.2012; Glowacki-Dudka et al. (2005).

Autoethnography may create a safe space for pre-service teachers to dialogue about race and culture in a non-threatening manner. Therefore, I wanted to know if autoethnographic writing could facilitate discussions of identity and diversity and could the use of its writing assist in a rich, robust conversation about social issues? To me, it seems as if constructive debate is dying in our culture especially in academia. It’s my contention that we can learn about each other’s differences as we better delve into an understanding o ourselves and our lived experiences.

Theoretical Frame

This discussion is framed through Social Identity Theory as defined by Abrams and Hogg (1990). This is a lens for understanding how a person defines themselves and their concept of family. Identity involves internal and external meanings of self. Identity also consists of levels of

definition: individual, relational, and collective. Individual identity refers to the aspects of self-identification which include beliefs, values, and behavior. Relational identity refers to one's role in connection with others. It also encompasses how an individual interprets that role and assumptions. Collective identity refers to people's association with groups and social categories. It also defines how that person gives meaning to these groups. Côté (1996) constructed a framework that explained the connection to identity and culture. The supposition is that individuals in most societies can actively strategize their identity through their means and access to capital. This can represent various forms, e.g., wealth, education, etc. and is closely tied to Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) social-class reproduction theory with the goal of social-class mobility. Autoethnography can serve as a powerful means of identity formation because it situates the self within cultural and structural contexts. By narrating lived experiences and connecting them to broader social patterns, individuals begin to see their identities as historically and politically shaped rather than solely personal. As Ellis et al. (2011) note, autoethnography "acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research" (p. 273), making it possible for writers to understand their identities as co-constructed through relationships and cultural forces. For marginalized individuals, this process can be especially affirming; Boylorn and Orbe (2014) argue that critical autoethnography enables those at the margins to "speak for themselves" and theorize their lived experiences as valuable knowledge (p. xx). In this way, autoethnography is not merely reflective, but constitutive — it allows people to claim, reshape, and affirm their identities through the act of storytelling.

Teacher identity influences the ways in which teachers "construct their own ideas of 'how to be,' 'how to act,' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society" (Sachs, 2004, p. 15). It provides the basis for teachers' instructional "meaning making and decision making" (Bullough, 1997, p. 21). That is, when teaching, learning to teach, and interacting with their students, students' parents, and colleagues, teachers negotiate (a) what they value and prioritize in their professional practice and what kind of teacher they are or aspire to become (Yazan, 2017a) and (b) "the conceptions and expectations of other people, including broadly accepted images in society about what a teacher should know and do" (Beijaard et al. 2004, p. 108). Autoethnography may be able to help encourage the examination of lived experiences from a critical standpoint.

Background

For a little background on how I became interested in autoethnography. I was born, as polite people would say, out-of-wedlock, in 1959, Catholic, upstate New York, to a single mother. My mother rarely told me anything about my father. Sometimes, if I pressed for information, she would say something to placate my curiosity, but in my heart, I knew the stories she told were not true. When I was in elementary school, I asked the ever-present, but rarely spoken question of my paternal parentage, *Who is my father?* At one time, she said he died in Vietnam; however, we never visited a flag decorated gravesite. There was no evidence of medals, honors, or more importantly, no pictures. At sporadic moments throughout my childhood, I would try again. The reaction from my usually good-natured, quiet mother would turn to agitation and tears. She would become brusque and scold me to stop asking. As it upset her greatly, I didn't often ask. At times, she would give me a fictitious name and said he was someone with whom she worked. Even as she lay on her deathbed in late 2009, I asked for the final time. Again, she repeated the fictitious name I had heard a few scant times before, a name I now understand was not that of my father.

For much of my life, when anyone asked me about my father, I was often evasive or just straight out lied. I told myself that knowing his identity didn't mean that much to me. But as I grew older, I now realize how much it really bothered me not knowing who my father was and by association, who I was, how my identity, my values, my morals and my life choices were determined growing up without that knowledge. It's like half of me was unfinished. What I learned long after this search was over is that I never felt legitimate.

What I discovered about myself during this long, emotional journey shocked me. My dad's entire family were from Appalachia and at first, I was quite taken aback. I must admit that I harbored a previously unknown prejudice. I was biased against what I perceived as illiterate backward hillbillies. Even when I visited family on Bradshaw Mountain in the southwestern region of W.V., I still looked at the homes and people as different from me. I must confess that I saw them as *other*. I learned that I am related to both the Hatfields and the McCoys! My paternal grandmother was a moonshiner, and she ran an underground speakeasy during the depression to support her 10 children from three different baby daddies. I met that information with snark and judgment! I hated that feeling. I hated recognizing the prejudice that was unknowingly buried in my heart. During this personal journey in the search for my father, I realized autoethnography was critical in helping me to unpack the intense emotions and feelings surrounding the process. As the deep reflection and journaling of my experience allowed me to gain new insight into my hidden biases, fears, and stereotypes, I realized that using autoethnography could be a way to teach about identity and diversity in higher education. In writing about family, I realized there is a constant shifting of identity as we grow and learn.

The Chilling Effect

Returning to the project! I live in a state identified as having strict Educational Gag Orders for all levels of education (Kelleher, 2022). During a recent town hall, the FORMER State Superintendent of Education in Oklahoma was asked a question as to how educators can teach about the Tulsa Race Massacre despite the educational gag orders. His response: "That is critical race theory. You're saying race defines a person – I reject that. You can be judgmental of the action, of the content of the character of the individual – absolutely, but let's not tie it to the skin color and say that the skin color determines it." (Morris, 2023, para 1). He further elaborated that teaching about this event considering race is prohibited by law. For years, I watched in dismay as our conservative lawmakers intensified the push to vilify CRT along with DEI. They banned books. They instituted educational gag orders for teachers in Prek-12 and faculty in higher education. They were successful in eliminating Offices of Diversity on university campuses. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate introduced CRT into the field of education in 1995, recognized that the merging of CRT with any talk of race or equity opens a strategic effort to make the term dangerous and meaningless. This leads to any uncomfortable or contested discussion being branded as "CRT," even when it isn't. In many states, anti-DEI legislation often carries harsh punitive action for violations. Several public-school teachers have publicly lost their jobs, and a few school districts have had their accreditation downgraded because of this legislation.

Several states also have a hotline to call if they think a professor may be pushing anything they deem subversive and on February 27, 2025, a national hotline was established (U.S. Department of Education, 2025). The new EndDEI.ed.gov portal urges parents to report "details of alleged discriminatory practices based on race or sex that are occurring at their student's local school" (para.2). Turning Point, USA has long maintained a hotline for the

reporting of radical professors in higher education (Turning Point, 2025). The Libs of TikTok are another conservative organization monitoring educators. With over 3 million followers this organization encourages people to report any instance of divisive concepts in university classrooms. Chaya Raichik, the founder of that social media account, was named an advisor to the Oklahoma Media Library Advisory Board (Derksen & Carter, 2024).

DEI and subsequent bans

All of the attacks on DEI came to fruition as on January 20, 2025, when the President issued Executive Order 14151 for all federal agencies including universities and public Pre-K-12 schools to... “terminate, to the maximum extent allowed by law, all DEI, DEIA, and “environmental justice” ((Executive Order No. 14151, 2025). In addition, Pentagon officials ordered the purge of anything related to DEI across all military branches leading officials to delete images of the plane that dropped the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima, the Enola Gay, because it has the word *gay* in it (McCann-Ramirez, 2025). A list of words banned by the White House removed from all federal agencies the accomplishments of many women and banned words included *women, female and disability* were on the list, but the word *men* or *man* is not (Levy, 2025).

Importance of Diversity and Identity in Education

For pre-service teachers, an understanding of DEI is critical. Especially for those students with differences. According to the most current numbers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024), there are approximately 7.5 million students served in special education classrooms throughout the United States. This represents an all-time high as 15% of children in this country receive special education services. However, teachers are often ill equipped to differentiate either the curriculum or the classroom environment for diverse learners. Inequities occur within the disproportionate number of minority children in special education. These inequities exist at all levels from referrals, testing, IEP development, and implementation. Teachers often incorrectly recommend *difficult* children for special education testing rather than providing needed interventions alongside their peers. This often occurs due to a misunderstanding of the child’s behaviors that may be racial, or gender based (Harry & Klingner, 2022; Pfende, 2024). For example, Butterworth et al., (2024) discovered “that Black students were 40% more likely to be identified as having a disability...” (p. 217). Reasons for the disproportionality are based on several factors such as race, gender, or geographic location. Most critically, researchers have found that teachers are not sufficiently taught how to recognize disabilities in students nor were these teachers trained how to accommodate a diverse student population (Strassfeld & Cooc, 2024). Teachers are the gatekeepers of testing and placement for students into special education. They are also a part of how students of color or students with differences are disciplined in schools. Years of research have clearly demonstrated that children of color are disproportionately disciplined at a higher rate than their White peers (Samimi et al 2025). It is therefore imperative that pre-service teachers learn about DEI and identity so they can be more cognizant in providing all students with needed accommodations and modifications.

The Project

After witnessing numerous publicized hate campaigns and bullying against individual teachers and school districts I wanted to find a way to teach about diversity that wouldn’t offend

anyone and not put my tenure in danger. I realized that faculty discuss laws and ramifications for not following the gag orders but there is scant conversation on *how* we teach critical issues of DEI to future educators

In this study, participants were graduate students enrolled in a special education degree program. All students were adults over the age of 18 years and not part of a vulnerable population. This project was embedded in a Family and Professional Collaboration course that is required for all of our graduates. The project consisted of biweekly small-group writing activities conducted in cohorts of four students. At the beginning of the semester, participants were asked to complete a pre-test questionnaire through Qualtrics. During the semester, the students partook in small cohort writing groups (4 students each) and were given prompts for writing essays. They shared their essays with their group discussing and reflecting on the writings. In addition to the writing, there were video clips and other activities for the groups. At the end of the semester, the participants took the post-course questionnaire.

What I found

In total, there were 34 participants. Of those, 25 identified as female and 8 identified as male and one who identified their gender as fluid. All defined their race as White/Caucasian, with one person indicating Hispanic and one person indicating Black. Most defined their religious belief as belonging to a Christian denomination, but some identified as non-believer, eclectic, Agnostic, and Unsure.

The pre-test survey asked questions such as: How well would you describe your understanding of your race? How well would you describe your understanding of different races? Have you heard the term white privilege? What does it mean to you? Most of the participants answered that they understood their race from moderately well to very well. In response to the question: Do you think you are aware of your own personal biases and prejudices about people who are different from you? Every participant said they were absolutely aware of their own biases; however, some had a caveat.

“Yes, I feel I am. However, I am always open to learning more about how I can be even more aware and conscious of my biases and prejudices.” And “I try to be. Though I am sometimes surprised at thoughts that come into my brain or subtle actions that I take when around people of certain ethnicities or races that are different from my own.”

In the first assignment, I was pleased with the responses from the students as they were engaged and forthcoming. The readings focused on poverty, so the participants discussed their experiences through that lens and the impact of poverty either directly or indirectly on their experiences. Many of the participants shared happy memories from their childhood. Some revealed truly traumatic events that happened in their past. Please indulge me with this very lengthy participant response, but it was so powerful and honest I didn't want to cut anything out. They wrote,

“Most of my memories from my childhood are not good memories as my dad was an abusive alcoholic and my mom was co-dependent. However, I must add that my dad never physically abused me; it was always abuse to my brother and mom. With this said, one of the most memorable (not a good memory) was of a night when he came home from one of his drunken excursions and was upset that he didn't have a meal waiting for him after 2 a.m. The importance of this memory was that I was going to do better as a person; as a parent; and most definitely as a citizen. The night was terrorizing. It was of the color black; it reeked of the smell of bitter beer breath; it sounded like glass breaking and was

loud; it felt like I was going to drown; I couldn't taste anything but the lump in my throat and the salt of my tears. Despite this night as well as many others, I am an overcomer, and I have a decent relationship with my dad. I have been able to be forgivable, forgettable and use the experience to not only better my life but better the life of others. I am able to truthfully say to students going through similar situations that "I understand" and to be able to just listen and advocate on their behalf. It is with the love of other family members as well as teachers and school staff that I was able to overcome these childhood obstacles." Their peers were non-judgmental and supportive with one responding, "Thank you for sharing your memory. I can imagine it was a tough memory to share but I am glad you were able to forgive and continue on. I love how you were able to take a negative time in your life and use it to better yourself for those around you. That is a great quality to find in teachers and a great quality, I think, to find in a special education teacher. You are able to understand circumstances at a level that could be close to something they may be experiencing at home."

Another woman talked about growing up in Southern Louisiana and her experiences with bullying.

"Since we were first on the bus we had to sit in the back, and the other passengers would fill in as they got on. The second stop was a girl that liked to pick on me, she liked calling me white trash. I had no idea at the time what that meant, I was only 11 years old. I remember that the way she said it told me it was something bad and it made us want to cry. On this particular day she was calling me this again and I finally asked her what she meant by it. She told me "I had no momma, and I had to live off charity of others". Prompting another participant to share, "I can totally relate to your memory. It was with the amazing support of teachers and school staff that I was able to prevail through my childhood with an alcoholic father. For this reason, along with raising a child with ADHD has given me a passion to teach. I hope that I will be in the right place at the right time to give another child the reason to become who they are meant to be. I hope to be provided the strength, wisdom, and endurance to make a difference even if it's only for one child. This is my goal for success."

Overall, this assignment seemed to resonate deeply with the participants. They were transparent and vulnerable in their responses, and their peers were kind and accepting and a few opened up about their experience with abuse. As the semester went on, it seemed as though a foundation of trust and honesty was growing with the groups.

In the responses to the question, "How do you identify your racial/cultural background? Are there aspects of your race with which you needed to "come to terms?" I began to see what Alexander, (2004) called "social sense making" in relation to their identities. For example, one participant wrote,

Although I was raised in an upper-middle class suburban community in a middle-class family, I often consider myself as having grown up in poverty. All my basic needs were met. If I wanted or needed something bad enough my parents were able to provide. It wasn't that my parents were poor, but we were considered "low class" by community standards.

As the semester went along, it seemed as though the participants were feeling more at ease discussing controversial issues. For example, one participant wrote:

I still live in my small railroad town, and I love it. I love it because even though our community is small, we are diverse. Every year when I was growing up, and still to this

day, on Thanksgiving day, my dad would remind us that he belongs to the Mayflower Society. The Mayflower Society is a group of people from all over, who are direct descendants of the Mayflower passengers. My dad questions why my siblings and I have not yet become members. Given the aftermath of the years following the Pilgrims and their initial settlement, we are not exactly jumping for excitement to become members. While I have always appreciated that we have this proven lineage with fascinating stories of survival, the future mistreatment of Indigenous peoples is not exactly something to embrace. In addition, Puritans had some scary parenting beliefs. I am still debating if I am able to appreciate the uniqueness of my ancestors and look into their stories when they were still in England.

One response from her peer was:

I think it's important to note that with Puritans as part of your history, you are not personally guilty of anything wrong that some of the Puritans did. It's good to be aware of horrible misdeeds done in the name of God and because of racism, pride, "manifest destiny", etc. Being aware of past and present errors of one's particular race and culture is humbling and will hopefully help us to avoid repeating them. It's also good to retain and appreciate what is good. Another peer responded: "I can relate to all of this small town girl; feelings of guilt for which I've overcome; a woman with a degree for which I've had family members ridicule me ("You just think you are better than use because you have a degree, blah, blah, blah"); and family members who shunned me when I married my first husband who was Hispanic/White. It's heartbreaking to have our family members as our worst critics.

I really wish I could have continued this project with these same cohort groups. Boylorn & Orbe (2014) talk about how critical autoethnographies can directly resist Eurocentric norms and makes power visible by showing how colonialism, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression shape both personal experience and academic knowledge production. Using personal narrative as a tool for social justice, healing, and transformation rather than just as self-expression.

At the end of the semester, these participants completed the post survey. To the question: *Has your understanding of identity changed as a result of taking this class? Why or why not?* One participant said, "Yes. This course has taught me that the concept of understanding identity is continually changing and sometimes change leads to improved understanding and clarity." Another stated, "My understanding of identity is still the same, but I feel I have a better understanding of it now." And another participant stated, "I think it has. I was aware of some of these exceptionalities and even the economic inequalities based on where I worked last year and the classroom I was in, but this course gave me a concrete knowledge of what I already knew. But not everyone felt so positive, and one participant said: "No not really, I didn't have one to begin with."

In answer to the question, What did you learn about yourself that you never knew before? Some of the participants showed a great deal of introspection in their identities. For example, these responses: "I think I realized how much more I did have growing up than a lot of students." "I learned that I love seeking knowledge and this course has shown me that wanting answers, wanting clarification, and wanting evidence for claims is a good thing, even if those around me find it inconvenient."

The best answer to the question: In what ways could you integrate autoethnography into your classroom? One participant said, "I am currently integrating autoethnography in my

classroom for two classes. We are using the freedom writer's method and independent reading. In answer to the comment, *What other comments or concerns do you have in relation to the autoethnographic writing in this course?* "I don't have any. I really enjoyed this class. It allowed me to delve deeper into my way of thinking and become more open to other ways of thinking or perspectives. And "I really appreciated being encouraged to be honest and to say what I wanted to say rather than what I thought the teacher wanted me to say and that there was no judgment for sharing about my faith. I think that we must learn how to get along with people that we disagree with. I think it's valuable to have discussions and share our heart felt ideas without the fear of being judged--even when we may sincerely believe that another is totally wrong in one or more beliefs and actions."

Finally, to the question: Has your understanding of racism changed as a result of taking this class? One participant said:

I am more aware of how and what I am teaching. I try to expose my students to those authors who have a different voice than theirs. This echoes what researchers have discovered centering marginalized voices and epistemologies while valuing Indigenous (Smith, 2012), Black (Collins, 2000), feminist, queer, and other historically excluded perspectives (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014) as legitimate sources of theory. This could be a means to challenge academic gatekeeping. Using narrative, storytelling, poetry, and embodied writing that may not fit within rigid "scholarly" norms but reflect lived realities more truthfully. Decolonizing autoethnography requires centering these marginalized voices as legitimate and generative sources of theory. Autoethnography situates the personal within power structures. This can foster critical consciousness (à la Paulo Freire), where a person begins to see their identity as political, shaped by histories of inequality, resistance, and community survival and may be a means to instruct about DEI. Finally, another participant simply responded if their understanding of racism changed, they simply said: *Greatly.*

Conclusion

I really struggled with this message and talking about the autoethnography project. As I was looking at it, it seemed so...high schoolish. Certainly not anything original or creative; nothing that would amaze the world of academia. But then I realized that for my students, this was something brand new and unique. Even though they all have an undergraduate degree, they never participated in these types of activities with their peers. They were eager to tell me how much it meant to them as exemplified in the comments on the post-survey test at the end of the semester.

I believe autoethnographic research is a powerful way for a person to reconnect with their past, their present, and their future. I know this was an overwhelming journey for me that forced me to examine myself. The use of autoethnography can disrupt traditional ways of thinking about identity (Gender, race, SES, ability, family). I believe that anecdotal writing does have a place in higher education and in the classroom as it can generate new knowledge through an individual's unique perspective and view of the experience. This could be a way for students to understand and appreciate identifying formations in those with differences from them, or those who do not have the advantage of equitable social capital. Seems to be a help with understanding identity and diversity, but much more is needed. This cannot be a one time, one semester activity and writing prompts need to be coupled with reflexivity. It really takes much more than a semester assignment to begin to understand issues of identity and how that relates to diversity.

Margaret Atwood (2012) once said, "The desire to be loved is the last illusion. Give it up and you will be free" (p. 115). I certainly agree with that...in principle, but in reality, it is so much more difficult. I believe that what we all want, really, is to be loved and accepted for who

we are, but sometimes we do not even know ourselves enough to love the real us. My journey was couched in a personal narrative around an issue which shaped and redefined my identity. I found my sense of self shifting with each new piece of history of my father and his family, and through a somewhat painful emotional roller coaster of introspection. I discovered that identity is fluid and ever transforming. As Margaret Atwood (2006) said, “In the end, we all become stories” (p.248).

References

- Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (1990). An introduction to the social identity approach. *Social identity theory: Constructive and critical advances*, 1(9).
- Alexander, J. C. (2004). Alexander, J. C. (2004). Toward a theory of cultural trauma. In J. C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. J. Smelser, & P. Sztopka, *Cultural trauma and collective identity* (pp. 1-30). University of California Press.
- Allbon, C. (2012). “Down the rabbit hole—curiouser and curiouser” Using autoethnography as a mode of writing to re-call, re-tell and re-veal bodily embodiment as self-reflexive inquiry. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 1(1), 62-71.
- Atwood, M. (2006). *Moral disorder and other stories*. McClelland & Stewart.
- Atwood, M. (2012). A Sunday drive. In *Selected poems II: 1976-1986* (p. 115). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Battle, S. (2016). Black men, white teachers, white colleagues: An autoethnographic triangulate of racial profiling interaction and closure. *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, 22(2), 46-56.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers’ professional identity. *Teaching and teacher education*, 20(2), 107-128.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Boylorn, R. M., & Orbe, M. P. (Eds.). (2014). *Critical autoethnography: Intersecting cultural identities in everyday life*. Left Coast Press.
- Bullough, R. V., Jr. (1997). Becoming a teacher: Self and the social location of teacher education. In B. J. Biddle, T. L. Good, & I. F. Goodson (Eds.), *International handbook of teachers and teaching* (pp. 79–134). Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Butterworth, L. N., Denham, M. L., & Hestenes, L. L. (2024). *Exploring the structural inequalities of the individualized education program: A dis/ability critical race theory perspective*. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 37(2), 209-222.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Côté, J. E. (1996). Sociological perspectives on identity formation: The culture–identity link and identity capital. *Journal of adolescence*, 19(5), 417-428.
- Derksen, C., & Carter, M. S. (2024, January 23). Libs of TikTok creator Chaya Raichik appointed to Oklahoma's library review committee. The Oklahoman. <https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/education/2024/01/23/ryan-walters-names-libs-of-tiktok-creator-to-oklahoma-library-committee/72322896007/>
- Drechsler Sharp, M., Riera, J.L., & Jones, S. R. (2012). Telling our stories: Using autoethnography to construct identities at the intersections. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 49(3), 315–332. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jsarp-2012-6338>

- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. AltaMira Press.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4), 273–290. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.4.273-290>
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733–768). Sage Publications.
- Executive Order No. 14151, Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing, 90 Fed. Reg. 8339 (2025).
- Glowacki-Dudka, M., Treff, M., & Usman, I. (2005). Research for social change: Using autoethnography to foster transformative learning. *Adult Learning*, 16(3–4), 8–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104515950501600308>
- Goodall, H. L. (2000). *Writing the new ethnography* (Vol. 7). Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Harry, B., & Klingner, J. (2022). *Why are so many students of color in special education? Understanding race and disability in schools* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Kelleher, M. (2022, January 3). 10 states to watch for educational gag orders in 2022. *Ed Post*. <https://www.edpost.com/stories/10-states-to-watch-for-educational-gag-orders-in-2022>
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers college record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Levy, R. (2025, February 20). FDA staffers told that 'woman,' 'disabled' among banned words; White House says it's an error. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/fda-staffers-told-that-woman-disabled-among-banned-words-white-house-says-its-an-2025-02-20/>
- Madison, D. S. (2012). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- McCann Ramírez, N. (2025, March 7). Pentagon DEI purge reportedly targets Enola Gay bomber because of the word “gay”. *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/>
- McQueeney, K., & Lavelle, K. M. (2017). *Emotional labor in critical ethnographic work: In the field and behind the desk*. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 46(1), 81-107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241615602310> [scholarwor...rimack.edu], [scholar.google.com], [researchgate.net]
- Morris, N. (2023, July 7). Ryan Walters: Don't teach that race led to Tulsa Race Massacre. *The Black Wall Street Times*. <https://theblackwallsttimes.com/2023/07/07/ryan-walters-dont-teach-that-race-lead-to-tulsa-race-massacre/>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). Report on the condition of education 2024 (NCES 2024-144). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2024/2024144.pdf>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Pfende, P. (2024). *The case of Blackness and disability: Disproportionality in special education identification*. *The Vermont Connection*, 45(1). <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/tvc/vol45/iss1/7>
- Sachs, J. A., & Young, J.C. (2024, October 8). *America's Censored Classrooms 2024-Refining the Art of Censorship*. <https://pen.org/report/americas-censored-classrooms-2024/>.

- Samimi, C. (2025). There are still more black boys in the office: educators' perspectives on racial discipline disparities after restorative justice implementation. *Teachers and Teaching*, 31(7), 1134-1163.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Strassfeld, N., & Cooc, N. (2024). Disproportionality monitoring for special education and stakeholder practices in a post-affirmative action landscape. *Theory Into Practice*, 63(4), 366–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2024.2355817>
- Turning Point USA. (2025). Turning Point USA. <https://www.tpusa.com/>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2025, February 27). U.S. Department of Education launches “End DEI” portal. <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-launches-end-dei-portal>
- Yazan, B. (2017). “It just made me look at language in a different way:” ESOL teacher candidates’ identity negotiation through teacher education coursework. *Linguistics and Education*, 40, 38-49.