

Self-Inquiry Tool for Identifying Your Cultural Frame of Reference

From *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond

Think about your surface culture:

- How did your family identify ethnically or racially?
- Where did you live—urban, suburban or rural community?
- What is the story of your family in America? Has your family been here for generations, a few decades or just a few years?
- How would you describe your family’s economic status—middle class, upper class, working class or low income? What did that mean in terms of quality of life?
- Were you the first in your family to attend college? If not, who did—your parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents?
- What family folklore or stories did you regularly hear growing up?
- What are some of your family traditions—holidays, foods, or rituals?
- Who were the heroes celebrated in your family and/or community? Why? Who were the antiheroes? Who were the “bad guys”?

Spend some time sifting through your shallow cultural beliefs and experiences with these questions:

- What metaphors, analogies, parables, or “witty” sayings do you remember hearing from parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles?
- What family stories are regularly told or referenced? What message do they communicate about core values?
- Review primary messages from your upbringing: What did your parents, neighbors, and other authority figures tell you respect looked like? Disrespect?
- How were you trained to respond to different emotional displays—crying, anger, and happiness?
- What physical, social, or cultural attributes were praised in your community? Which ones were you taught to avoid?
- How were you expected to interact with authority figures? Was authority of teachers and other elders assumed or did it have to be earned?
- As a child, did you call adults by their first name?
- What got you shunned or shamed in your family?
- What earned you praise as a child?
- Were you allowed to question, or talk back, to adults? Was it okay to call adults by their first name?
- What’s your family/community’s relationship with time?