

AN EXAMINATION OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF
DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL AWARENESS AFTER PARTICIPATING IN A
FAMILY HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the influence of a genealogical project on the understanding and acceptance of diversity by 72 university undergraduates in a foundations of education in a multicultural society course. Student-generated papers at the beginning and end of the course supply all of the data. The topics for investigation – specifically ancestry, culture, and diversity – arise from the research questions, and content analysis enables the collection of data on these topics. A summary of each of the three topics from both papers establishes the participants’ understanding of these subjects before and after completing the genealogical assignment, and therefore makes comparisons possible.

In the first paper, which is an autobiography, the students who mention their ancestors, view them as relatives who lived many years ago in foreign countries and about whom they know very little. The ancestors in their final paper, which focuses on the genealogy project, are exciting people who had important connections, interesting jobs, and accomplishments that made the students proud.

When students address culture in their autobiography papers, they focus more on the culture of other people than on a culture of their own. In their final papers, their thoughts on culture expand to include their own culture which they relate to their

ancestry and the many different cultures they find in researching their family background.

In their autobiographies, participants' view of diversity is a simplistic connection to race or anything different from themselves, but in the final paper they have a more complicated definition that includes themselves. They explain acquiring this expanded view of diversity from researching their family tree and collecting family stories that reveal their own background to be different from what they had known. They evolved from knowing very little about their heritage to seeing themselves as belonging to a diverse family and having a diverse background. As they recognized their own diversity, they begin to acknowledge how this will help them as teachers of diverse students.

DEDICATION

To my mother and father

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	ix
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the Study	3
Research Questions	3
Definition of Terms	4
Limitations of the Study	4
Delimits of the Study.....	5
Methodology	5
Outline of the Study	6
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
Cultural Awareness	7
Culturally Responsive Teaching/Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	8
Family Heritage.....	9
Summary of the Literature	11
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY.....	13
Description of the Course.....	13
Criteria for Selecting the Course.....	13
Description of Assignments	14
Description of Participants	15
Data Collection.....	18
Data Collected.....	18

	Page
Organization of Data for Analysis.....	18
Analysis of Data	22
 CHAPTER IV FINDINGS	 24
Ancestry in the Autobiography	24
Culture in the Autobiography.....	25
Students’ Culture.....	25
Cultural Traditions	26
Texas Culture	29
Texas A&M University Culture.....	29
School Culture.....	30
Unfamiliar Cultures	31
State Culture.....	33
Learned from Cultural Experiences	34
Influence of Cultural Experiences on Students’ Future	36
Diversity in the Autobiography.....	38
Summary of the Autobiography.....	41
Introduction to the Final Paper.....	42
Ancestry in the Final Paper	43
Slavery.....	44
Native Americans.....	44
Military Connections.....	45
Famous Ancestors	49
Discovered Famous Ancestors through Research.....	49
Family Stories of Famous Relatives.....	53
Occupations of Ancestors.....	54
How Life was for the Students’ Ancestors.....	61
Historical Events or Connections	66
Culture in the Final Paper.....	67
Diversity in the Final Paper.....	70
Summary of the Final Paper.....	74
 CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	 78
Brief Description of Project and Procedures.....	78
Research Question Two – Ancestry	79
Research Question Three – Culture.....	80
Research Question One – Diversity	81
Conclusions	83

	Page
Significance of Study and Findings	84
Recommendations for Further Study	87
REFERENCES	89
APPENDIX A: WEIGHTED VALUES OF ASSIGNMENTS	93
APPENDIX B: AUTOBIOGRAPHY PAPER ASSIGNMENT DETAILS	94
APPENDIX C: FINAL PROJECT DETAILS	95
APPENDIX D: STUDENTS' PRE-PROJECT THOUGHTS	97
APPENDIX E: EXTENT OF RESEARCH	99
APPENDIX F: DIFFICULTIES THE STUDENTS ENCOUNTERED.....	101

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
TABLE 1: Age of Students	16
TABLE 2: Example of Spreadsheet	19
TABLE 3: Example of Spreadsheet Columns.....	21
TABLE 4: Countries of Origin.....	73

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Starting with the Civil Rights Movement, Americans have been slowly pushed toward cultural awareness and a recognition of the country's diverse population. African Americans wanted recognition of their accomplishments and a record of their history through textbooks, and other minority groups soon followed with similar demands for their stories. The result was ethnic studies programs, the first of which were Black Studies. Early acknowledgement of ethnic groups often came in the form of a look at heroes and holidays and little more. Eventually, however, the studies of diverse populations advanced and educators realized the shortcomings of the heroes and holidays approach. More culturally responsive teaching began to emerge as a more relevant approach to diversity (Banks & Banks, 2010; Banks, 2013).

In the United States, where the teaching force is overwhelmingly white, the public school populations are increasingly diverse (Boser, 2014; Holland, 2014; Sleeter, 1993). Public school teachers in Texas likewise do not reflect the demographics of the students they teach. Nearly two-thirds of the teachers are white and just over three-fourths are female (TEA, 2013). Approximately 70% of the student population is made up of students of color. The numbers of male and female students are roughly the same: 51.3% male and 48.7% female (TEA, 2014).

“Preparing teachers for an increasingly diverse student population in the public schools has become a national concern” (Hollins, 1990, p. 201). When teachers are

culturally aware and use culturally sensitive pedagogy, educational success becomes more attainable for students of all ethnicities. “Increasingly, colleges and universities are focusing on providing diversity education” (Kernahan & Davis, 2007, p. 49). “There is a need to develop new approaches to and perceptions of multicultural education in teacher preparation programs” (Hollins, 1990, p. 202).

This study reports on a project in which preservice teachers examined their family heritage. The focus of the study was to determine if their cultural awareness and understanding of cultural diversity changed after they completed the project. When students learn about their own heritage, there is a hope that they will be more open to accepting other cultures.

A majority of the study’s participants were white. They were being prepared to enter a largely diverse education system. Several areas that were useful to explore when trying to understand the needs of white teachers as they teach children of color were cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching/culturally relevant pedagogy, and family heritage.

I chose to examine cultural awareness because culturally aware teachers look at diversity in a positive light that can help their students be academically successful (Larke, 1992). I also looked at culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy since they incorporate the perspectives of culturally diverse students in more effective teaching (Gay, 2002, p. 106). In addition, because of the genealogy component of my paper, I studied the influence knowledge of family heritage could have on cultural

awareness and cultural understanding and I examined the connection between understanding one's own culture and understanding other cultures. "Many teacher educators attempt to prompt teacher candidates, who are usually majority white, to examine themselves as culturally and historically located beings in order to prepare for multicultural and antiracist teaching" (Sleeter, 2011, p. 421).

Statement of the Problem

The existing literature does not address the understanding of diversity and the cultural awareness of undergraduate students after they have examined their family history.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine possible changes in the cultural awareness and the understanding of diversity of undergraduate students who participated in a family history project.

Research Questions

The following questions provided guidance for this study. The main questions are followed by sub-questions that supplied intermediate data for analysis.

1. What did students write about diversity in their autobiographical papers, specifically diversity in schools and their educational experiences?

What did students write about diversity in their final papers after completing the genealogy project?

To facilitate answering the primary research questions, the following secondary

questions were also asked:

2. What did students write about their ancestry in their autobiographical papers?

What did students write in their final papers about their ancestry after completing the genealogy project?

3. What did students write about culture in their autobiographical papers?

What did students write in their final papers about culture after completing the genealogy project?

Definitions of Terms

Family - Family as used in this study is not limited to the small group of the participant's closest relatives, but includes a much broader collection of all relatives.

Culture - Culture is the beliefs and customs of a group that define its identity. It may include elements common to multiple groups.

Ancestor - Ancestor is defined as one of the people, usually more remote than a grandparent, from whom a person is descended. Participants in this study, however, considered grandparents among their ancestors but not parents.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study involve the data which was extant data collected as classroom assignments prior to the creation of the research questions. This limited the study because the two assignments had different directions, thus making a direct comparison difficult; interpretation was needed in converting students' writings into usable data; isolating the knowledge that students acquired while completing the project

from knowledge gained in the course was problematic; and the possibility exists that students could have self-censored their writing to appear more culturally aware or to write what might be socially acceptable.

Another limitation of this study and the data collected from the students is student intention when enrolling in the course. Thirty-five percent of the participants were taking the course to meet a university core curriculum requirement and not as a certification requirement course. Thus, their motivation to understand the connection between their culture and that of other students may not have been as high as those who were planning to teach.

Delimits of the Study

This study was limited to those students enrolled in a 2:20 p.m. and a 3:55 p.m. course on Foundations of Education in a Multicultural Society in the spring 2013 semester. Only student-written responses were used to determine if the genealogy activity of the course had an effect on their cultural awareness.

Methodology

The methodology I used to examine this qualitative study was grounded theory, which allowed themes to emerge instead of testing existing theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998). I identified themes significant to the study through content analysis that verified the presence of specific words and concepts in the text. These words and concepts were then analyzed and inferences made (Busch, DeMaret, Flynn, Kellum, Le, Meyers, Saunders, White, & Palmquist, 2015). I examined the themes that

emerged from the students' writings in their final papers and compared them to themes that emerged in their autobiographical papers.

Outline of the Study

My dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I includes the introduction to the research study, the research questions, the limitations and definitions. Chapter II is the literature review addressing cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy, and family heritage. Chapter III explains the method of data collection and analysis used in the study. Chapter IV reports the findings. Chapter V provides an analysis of the findings as well as conclusions and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is concerned with the cultural awareness and the understanding of diversity on the part of preservice teachers. To provide a background for this study, I examined literature related to cultural diversity, including cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally relevant pedagogy. I also reviewed the literature concerning the use of family heritage as a teaching tool.

Cultural Awareness

Haberman (1991) defines cultural awareness as “one’s sensitivity to issues of cultural diversity, sexism, racism, handicappism, classism, religious differences, multilingualism, and the commitment to educate in ways which will enhance human diversity and provide equal opportunity” (p. 25). According to Larke (1992), culturally aware teachers readily recognize and accept diversity as a positive that can lead to academic success for their students. They know their students’ cultural backgrounds, understand their problems, and demonstrate sensitivity to their needs, and they are knowledgeable about multiculturalism and make effective multicultural teachers.

Kambutu and Nganga (2008) describe cultural awareness as a desirable characteristic of teachers in diverse settings and one schools of education embrace. Cultural understanding is similarly desirable as it contributes to the eradication of ethnocentrism. They stress the importance of finding teaching methods and learning activities that promote cultural awareness and they consider carefully planned

international travel to fit those needs, explaining that more experiences with unfamiliar cultures will eventually promote familiarity with those cultures. They emphasize the significance of people's "ability to learn from local communities and to tolerate ambiguity in order to develop cultural awareness and understanding" (p. 940).

Haberman (1991) who supports educational programs addressing values with preservice teachers, says, "While it is possible to reshape values, it is more common for most of us to live our entire lives with the values we first learned as children" (p. 26). However, he adds drastic measures in education might have some success promoting value that lead to cultural understanding. Among the changes Haberman suggests are needed in teacher education programs are new directions in philosophy, revised selection criteria for students, increased areas of expertise for instructors, and the coaching of teachers by experienced master teachers. "Having teachers with greater cultural awareness and sensitivity" (p. 31), is a goal significant enough for use in all areas.

Culturally Responsive Teaching/Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Terms such as culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy, along with culturally responsive teaching, are often used interchangeably. Authors who write about teaching children of color use phrases such as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002; Starker & Fitchett, 2013), culturally responsive pedagogy (Sleeter, 2012), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Young, 2010). These same authors also use some of these terms interchangeably. For example, Sleeter (2012) explains that culturally responsive pedagogy is also described "as multicultural teaching, equity

pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, sociocultural teaching, and social justice teaching” (p. 573).

Ladson-Billings (1997) defines culturally relevant teaching as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 17-18). Gay (2002) describes culturally responsive teaching similarly as using “the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). Addressing issues of power and privilege and emphasizing cultural competence for children of color, Gay and Kirkland (2003) write this about culturally responsive teaching:

Our beliefs about the necessity of CRT [culturally responsive teaching] are based on the premises that (a) multicultural education and educational equity and excellence are deeply interconnected; (b) teacher accountability involves being more self-conscious, critical, and analytical of one’s own teaching beliefs and behaviors; and (c) teachers need to develop deeper knowledge and consciousness about what is to be taught, how, and to whom. (p. 181)

Among the important characteristics of culturally responsive teaching, as noted by Gay (2002), are curriculum that includes content appropriate for ethnic and cultural diversity, classroom environment in which learning can take place for ethnically diverse students, and teachers who can relate to ethnic diversity by their instructional methods and communication skills and who have extensive knowledge of cultural diversity.

Family Heritage

“Although America is known as a nation of immigrants, 27 percent don't know

where their family lived before they came to America” (Ward, 2007). Research in family history is increasingly popular as methods of genealogical research improve and multiply and the databases of genealogical information grow in number and expand in size (Greener, 2014; Rodriguez, 2014; Shellenbarger, 2013). In the United States, “54 million belong to a family where someone in the family has used the Internet to research their family history or genealogy” (PEW, 2000, p. 8). Barnwell (2013) observed, “The popular practice of family history research illustrates the overwhelming influence a desire for belonging and political relevance has over the way we choose to author our life histories” (p. 14). People embark on this type of research in the United States for different reasons. The purpose of some genealogical research is to identify pedigrees and thus establish social position while other researchers hunt for their family’s histories that are forgotten or were never recorded. Sometimes family histories connect private stories with public issues to create discussions about racism (Gardner, 2003).

Preservice teachers are encouraged to examine their own culture and family history in preparation for teaching culturally diverse students because there is a connection between understanding one’s own cultural identity and being able to understand or be aware of other people’s culture (Beyer, 2010; Norquay, 1998; Sleeter, 2008; Sleeter, 2011). Hollins (1990) advocates that before preservice teachers enter the classroom they should “develop a cultural identity of their own that can be shared with their peers and the students they teach and thus form the basis for better cross-cultural

understanding” (p. 202). Therefore, students who address their cultural identity are more culturally aware (Brown, 2010; Kernahan & Davis, 2007).

Sleeter (2008), Norquay (1998), and Hollins (1990) addressed how the knowledge of one’s family heritage could be useful in cultivating cultural awareness in preservice teachers when they assigned their students family history projects. Their projects, however, were different from the family heritage assignment I created for my course. Sleeter (2008) and Norquay (1998) directed their students to explore their immigration history, while Hollins (1990) requested her students research the origins of their last names.

Summary of the Literature

I examined the literature addressing cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching and culturally sensitive pedagogy, and family heritage. While an increasingly diverse population of school children is being instructed primarily by white women, the literature portrayed those teachers as lacking experience with diversity and often ineffective in today's classrooms. Instead, the positive qualities of cultural awareness and the impact of teachers with better cultural awareness and cultural understanding were emphasized. The literature supported increasing culturally directed pedagogy and teaching. Teacher educators promoted projects and programs to help in this effort, such as asking preservice teachers to reach into their past by researching their family heritage. What the preservice teachers discovered frequently was an unexpected mixture of

cultures. This newly found diverse background has given those who researched their family history reason to look differently at people of other cultures.

My study featured a family heritage project that differed from others in the literature because it was a broad-based search of family history rather than one with a more restricted focus. The study was aimed at determining if any change existed in preservice teachers' cultural awareness and understanding of diversity after they examined their family history.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III includes explanations or descriptions of the following: course in which the data was collected, criteria for selecting the courses, assignments, the population and its characteristics, data collection and data collected, and method of data analysis.

Description of the Course

The following brief description of the course is published in the Texas A&M University 2011-2012 Undergraduate Catalog: “Foundations of Education in a Multicultural Society. Historical, philosophical and cultural foundations of education emphasizing education for a multicultural society” (p. 762). The Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture offers this course to meet a state certification requirement. While this course is required for undergraduate Elementary and Middle Grades teacher certification, for non-certification students it meets one of the university’s core curriculum requirements. The two sections of this course selected for the study each met two days a week.

Criteria for Selecting the Course

I taught two sections of Foundations of Education in a Multicultural Society in the fall semester of 2011, spring semester of 2012, fall semester of 2012, and the spring semester of 2013. Each time I taught this course, I made changes to the assignments, such as clarifying and expanding the directions. I decided to focus this study on the

students in the courses I taught during the 2013 spring semester because the genealogy project was the most developed at that point. In addition, recent significant changes and improvements to the technology made executing the family history project easier for the participants. For example, requiring students to create an Ancestry.com account made it possible for them to organize the data that they collected. Also, the 2012 release of the 1940 census provided students more information about their relatives. Prior to that release, the 1930-census was the most recent U. S. Census available.

Description of Assignments

The assignments and activities that were part of the course were designed to raise the cultural awareness of the students. In this course, students were expected to read a textbook, write two papers, give a presentation about a chapter in the text, participate in a group project, and conduct research on their family tree. There were also two examinations - a midterm and a final - with questions that encouraged students to reflect on what was being covered in the course. While all the assignments in the course promoted cultural understanding, only the autobiography and the final paper were examined to provide the data for the study. See Appendix A for a list of assignments with their weighted values.

The autobiographical paper required students to share their social and cultural experiences, especially those that had made an impact on their life. In addition, they were to address topics that included family, school, and travel experiences. During the semester the students completed a genealogy project wherein they, using Ancestry.com

and other resources, constructed a family tree as they conducted a study of their ancestry. They investigated their family history to determine their ancestors' national origins, where they had lived, their occupations, and any periods of emigration or immigration. The assignment related to this genealogy component of the course was introduced at the beginning of the semester, and students were instructed to start on it as soon as possible. I held required one-on-one meetings with students to check their progress and was available daily, either in person or by email, to answer any questions they might have. After they completed this genealogy project, they wrote a final paper detailing what they learned about their family history by conducting this research. See Appendix B for the first writing assignment directions and Appendix C for the second writing assignment. The autobiography and final paper were “bookends” to the required family genealogy project and they formed the basis for this dissertation research.

Description of Participants

Participants in the study were 72 undergraduate students attending a large public tier-1 research university in the southwestern United States. They were enrolled in Foundations of Education in a Multicultural Society and completed all parts of the course. The participants consisted of 62 female and 10 male students. These students were classified by the university as freshmen (5), sophomores (32), juniors (29), and seniors (6). The students took a teacher-prepared interest inventory on the first day of class to provide the instructor with information useful in creating a culturally relevant

course. They reported such data as their major in college, their age, and their ethnic identity.

Forty-seven students were majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies and were being prepared to be certified in one of the following areas: Early Childhood-6, Middle Grades 4-8, Special Education, or Bilingual Education. The 25 remaining students were enrolled in other colleges in the university (e.g., College of Science, College of Liberal Arts, College of Engineering, or College of Agriculture and Life Sciences). The participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 years of age (Table 1), with the majority being 19 or 20 years old.

Table 1
Age of Students

Age in years	Number of Students
18	6
19	26
20	30
21	8
22	1
23	1

The students were asked to select one of seven ethnic identities, used by the university to classify students, which they felt best described their ancestry. Of the 72 students, 60 identified themselves as European/White, five as Hispanic/Latino, four as Asian/Pacific Islander, and three as Multiple Ethnicities.

In writing their autobiographical papers, the students included information about their families that did not directly address the research questions. This information is included here to provide the reader with a more detailed look at participants in the study.

A majority of students, 56 of the 72, said they were born in Texas. Fourteen indicated they were born in a state other than Texas: California (2), Hawaii (2), Maryland (2), Washington (2), Arizona (1), Florida (1), Louisiana (1), Massachusetts (1), Nevada (1), and Oklahoma (1). Only two students were born outside of the United States, one in India and one in Pakistan. However, with the exception of one student who came from Massachusetts to attend college in Texas, all the other students had lived in Texas for most of their lives.

Students wrote about the size of their families and who the members were. Almost half of the students (35) were in families of four where they had two parents and one sibling. Two-dozen students had two siblings and two parents in their families of five. Five students belonged to six-person families and one to a family of eight. Two students wrote that they were only children, four mentioned their parents but did not write about siblings, and one provided no information about his family. While students were listing their family's size, many noted their place in the family as well: 27 students

were the youngest child, nine were the middle child, and 19 were the first born. Twelve students added the information that their parents were divorced.

For nine students, descriptions of their families also included pets. They listed dogs, cats, and horses and considered them members of the family. One student even called her sister's Golden Retriever her niece and another explained how her parents referred to the family cat as the student's little sister. According to another student, Autumn and Mr. Whiskers held very important places in the family. In all their writings, students named their pets as part of the family and sometimes wrote about them before writing about their parents or siblings.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected as part of regular classroom activities. As indicated above, both data sets were regular assignments, collected in the second week of school and the 14th week of school in the spring 2013 semester, respectively. Students submitted their assignments electronically on the learning management system used by the university.

Data Collected

All the course assignments promoted cultural understanding, but only the autobiography and the final paper provided the data for the study. A list of the assignments can be found in Appendix A.

Organization of Data for Analysis

For the purpose of this study, the names and university identification numbers of

all students were removed from the data set before the analysis began. The following procedure was used on both sets of papers. I did not attempt to standardize the categories in the second paper based on the first paper’s categories, but determined categories based on the students’ writing.

In order to convert these papers to data that could be analyzed, I separated each paper’s ideas and thoughts and entered them into a spreadsheet, which was divided into eight columns. See Table 2. The first two columns served to identify and manipulate the data as needed. The remaining columns dealt directly with students’ written material and its eventual transformation into data that was analyzed.

In the first column, Column A, which was titled “NUMBER,” I used a registry number so the information could be moved around and returned to the original order. This was used to sort data for analysis.

Table 2
Example of Spreadsheet

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
NUMBER	STUDENT ID	TEXT	FIRST CYCLE	SECOND CYCLE	THIRD CYCLE	FOURTH CYCLE	FIFTH CYCLE
1	KW-F11-001	Howdy!	GREETING				
2	KW-F11-002	I was born in Fort Worth, Texas	BIRTH LOCATION	TEXAS	FORT WORTH		

Column B was titled “STUDENT ID” where I assigned each student a code number. These codes included the participants’ initials and gender, along with numbers

to represent in which class the paper was written and whether it was the first paper or second paper. A final three-digit number identified, in chronological order, the text in Column C. For example, an item from my paper, Kristina Waller, that had the code KW-F11-001 would break down to this: KW-the student, F-female, 1-first class, 1-first paper, 001-the number for the first block of the student's text in Column C. The entire text of each subject's paper was entered into Column C, which was titled "TEXT." Each different thought or idea was entered into a different cell.

Column D, titled "FIRST CYCLE," was where I began sorting the student writing into categories. In Column D, I coded each idea or piece of information from the "TEXT" column as it appeared on its own line of the spreadsheet. For example, many students started their papers with "Howdy," which would be in Column C on the spreadsheet. I identified this in Column D as "GREETING." If the students included a title for their paper, I applied the label "TITLE" to that line.

Since Column D was for the first cycle of sorting, most labels there covered very broad categories, such as, BIRTH LOCATION, INTERESTS, REFLECTION, and COLLEGE. Succeeding columns were designed to refine this data from Column D.

While coding the information in the students' papers, I found it necessary to make many changes and adjustments, as well as to define the parameters for a number of designated codes. For example, the code "BIRTH LOCATION" was one of the more straightforward categories and had these parameters: If a student wrote he or she was born in a certain place, that location was designated as "BIRTH LOCATION." If the

student mentioned the same birthplace for a second or third time, it was then coded as “BIRTH LOCATION 2.” This resulted in the duplicate references being sorted to the end of the BIRTH LOCATION list, where it easily avoided a miscount for the analysis.

To find, clarify, and organize some of the ideas expressed through the codes in Column D, I sorted the spreadsheet by the codes in this column. I found similar words were used for a number of codes. To correct this, I combined the similarly coded data and used only one code. Therefore, I combined “RELIGION” and “RELIGIOUS” to use only “RELIGION,” while “SCHOOL ACTIVITY” and “SCHOOL ACTIVITIES” were both designated “SCHOOL ACTIVITY.” At this point, I also corrected spelling errors that were identified in the codes.

Table 3
Example of Spreadsheet Columns

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
NUMBER	STUDENT ID	TEXT	FIRST CYCLE	SECOND CYCLE	THIRD CYCLE	FOURTH CYCLE	FIFTH CYCLE
135	KW-F12-054	My ancestors fought in the Civil War for the Confederacy.	FAMILY STORY	MILITARY	CIVIL WAR	SOUTH	
139	KW-F12-058	I also had a great grandfather who fought in World War II and was killed in Italy.	FAMILY STORY	MILITARY	WWII	KILLED	

In Column E, titled “SECOND CYCLE,” I added more specific details to the themes from Column D. Refer to Table 3 to follow the use of a spreadsheet for data organization. For “FAMILY STORY” from Column D, I attempted to determine what was the major theme of the family story being written about and entered that in Column E. The family stories that involved any type of military service were coded “MILITARY” in Column E. A third sort column, Column F, contained the specific military service or battles the student wrote about. I used Column G to provide other useful details.

After continuing to refine the data by using additional columns of the spreadsheet, I found little need for the columns past the “THIRD CYCLE” or Column F. A few entries were made in Column G, and those in Column H were extremely rare.

Analysis of Data

I used content analysis for my examination of the students’ papers in order to detect themes present in their writing. Once data from the spreadsheets were sorted by topic, I began reviewing those grouped entries pertaining especially to the research questions and used those topics to answer the research questions. When the information was not detailed enough to interpret the full meaning of the students’ writing, I searched their autobiographical papers and final papers for specific words in order to examine their writing about a topic in its original context. I found it helpful to also search for variations of my original search words. For example, to find comprehensive information that the students wrote on the topic of culture, I searched the papers using the letters

“cultur” which also found variations such as cultural, cultures, and multicultural. The context in which students had placed the words revealed the varied ways they viewed and understood the topics. I was able to group their ideas into like themes that became the main text of the findings from their two papers. Culture addressed by participants was sorted into topic areas such as students’ culture, unfamiliar culture, and Texas culture. By using a combination of the spreadsheet and searching the text, I was able to examine the students’ writing in a thorough and exact manner.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In the first half of this chapter, data from the analysis of the autobiographies are presented. Data from the final papers are recorded in the remainder of the chapter. Subtitles in the form of side headings separate the data topics for ease of reading. Ancestry, culture, and diversity are the data topics for each paper. The amount of data pertaining to each topic varies by paper due to the directions for the assignments. For example, when students were asked to write in their autobiographies a response to questions about their cultural experiences, they produced a large amount of data on culture. Not being asked specifically about their ancestry, they wrote very little about it in the autobiographies. The assignments for the papers are in Appendix B and Appendix C.

Ancestry in the Autobiography

As mentioned previously, the students were not asked directly about their ancestry for their autobiographical papers. However, they were prompted in the assignment to describe their family. The descriptions of their families were reported in Chapter III in the section titled, "Description of Participants." Seven of the 72 participants included specific comments about their ancestry in those descriptions. One student noted a connection to Native American ancestors and another said that she did not know where her ancestors came from. The other five students discussed their ancestors in terms of European countries or descent. Of those five, one said her ancestors

were from all over Europe, another wrote that her ancestors had immigrated to the United States from Scotland and Europe, and a third said her ancestry was hard to trace but was from Eastern Europe. Of the last two students, one wrote her ancestors were from Czechoslovakia and the other described her family background as including ancestors from Germany and Ireland. The remaining students in this study reported details about their families but did not use the word ancestry.

Culture in the Autobiography

Sixty-six of the 72 students participating in the study used a form of the word culture in their papers a total of 456 times. Six did not mention culture in any form. The 66 students wrote about different aspects of culture. The assignment asked students to describe cultural experiences that had made an impact on their lives. It also asked what they had learned from their cultural experiences and how those cultural experiences would influence their future school/work environment.

Students' Culture

Participants who wrote about their own culture used comparisons rather than actually defining their culture. They indicated their circumstances were different from their peers with respect to the varied cultures of their family, and they described their culture as different from other cultures they encountered. The students explained their parents' culture was not the same as the culture of the students' environment, or their mother and father were from different cultures. One student called her family a mixture of cultures with her mother being Cajun and her father Mexican. Another student, whose

father's side of the family was Swedish and mother's side had Eastern European roots, identified closely with Jewish culture. She said she considered herself to be half Christian and half Jewish. When she was growing up, her family celebrated Hanukkah and Christmas, as well as Passover and Easter, and she never regarded that as unusual. Another student with parents of different cultures was proud to be both Cajun and Dutch and said she admired and enjoyed both cultures. As she grew up, she began to identify a culture of her own but still related to the cultures of her parents.

When students discovered differences between their own culture and other cultures, they were quick to make comparisons. For example, a student who visited a culture where the people were very poor noticed how happy those people were even though they seemed to have almost nothing. Realizing material possessions were not important to the people made the student question her own culture. Trying to be open in expressing a view of culture, another student wrote she did not see her own culture as superior or inferior to other cultures, while yet another student said she knew her culture was not the only culture. Additionally, two students expressed pride in their culture; another declared philosophically that people's cultures were shaped by the schools they attended at an early age. Another student stated her culture emphasized family, and still another said attending church with her family influenced her culture and values.

Cultural Traditions

Students also wrote about culture in terms of family traditions, including special meals and food dishes. For example, one student wrote about culture only in relation to

food, particularly her German grandfather's kraut noodle and her aunt's tamales and chorizo. She was amazed to discover different cultures observed holidays with different foods and was excited her family could relate to its own cultures through food. A student who was born in India said his friends frequently asked him about Indian food and told him how much they liked it. Another student, who recalled being surrounded by other cultures in the schools she attended while growing up, said she appreciated what she learned in that environment and reported fondly about a special school day on which the children shared food of their individual cultures. She wrote such activities have made her realize how many different cultures are around her.

Food was also addressed when participants referred to Mexican culture. One student called Mexican food a pervasive characteristic of Mexican culture. She added that with Mexico's proximity, a person could find a Tex-Mex restaurant on almost any street corner in Texas. Another student, who reported eating mostly Mexican food but was not Mexican, said her family has been greatly influenced by the nearby Hispanic culture. Although other students also mentioned the Hispanic influence in Texas, very few wrote about those cultural traditions. While 15 of them did mention cultural traditions in their autobiography papers, five described their cultural traditions as typical of any American family. This involved celebrating such holidays as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, although one student included watching Monday night football on her list.

One student claimed no cultural traditions and two others said they could make

little or no link between their cultural traditions and their heritage. Another wrote her ancestors came to the United States so long ago that their cultural traditions have been forgotten, but added now she follows the southern cultural traditions of cooking style and how to dance. A student whose family is Muslim and moved from India to Pakistan explained her cultural traditions are a mixture from both countries and her religion. She reported only one cultural tradition, arranged marriages, which she said is now outdated. The student added, however, her parents were married while that tradition was still being practiced.

Two cultural traditions described by students were religious in nature. One concerned prayer which the student explained was to never ask God directly for anything, but rather to request God's help with the matter. The other was being raised in the Christian faith. That student said this was just one of many cultural traditions practiced by her family, but she did not name any more. A student who could identify only one cultural tradition said it was the emphasis placed on family which resulted in a gathering every Sunday of relatives and close friends for dinner. Another student described as cultural traditions two activities that included her grandmother and other female relatives. First, the grandmother traditionally pierced the ears of her granddaughters before they were one-year-old. Second, the student, her mother, aunts, and female cousins all celebrated the grandmother's birthday every year with a weekend trip or an activity such as visiting wineries or going shopping. The student hoped these traditions would continue so one day her own daughters could take part.

Texas Culture

Seven students turned to the state of Texas for their thoughts on culture. This included being happy to have grown up in the culture of Texas, knowing that they share Texas culture with their classmates and believing Texans have a culture all their own. Two listed what they associated with Texas culture: big trucks, hunting and fishing, Christianity, rodeos, country music, boots, and the word “y’all.” One student followed her list with the idea of immersing herself in a different culture to broaden her outlook on the world before beginning to teach. The Hispanic influence on Texas culture was not overlooked as students pointed out the immense popularity of Mexican food in their state.

Texas A&M University Culture

Twenty students wrote about the culture at Texas A&M University. They described the culture as friendly and welcoming, where students and faculty greeted each other with “Howdy.” They also felt the environment’s diversity or lack of diversity was noticeable enough to mention and several even admitted to feeling culture shock when they arrived at the university. Among the students who portrayed the university as not very diverse was one who was shocked at how white it was and another who described it as single cultured although she did not elaborate on what she meant by that. Other students expressed the opposite opinion, saying they had encountered numerous students of different cultures. One wrote she was overwhelmed by the many ethnicities at Texas A&M University, while another student reported she did not experience much cultural

difference entering college. Most of the students did not explain what they meant by cultural diversity, but those who did equated diversity with anything that was different to them. They implied international students naturally signaled diversity since they brought many differences to the environment. A final characteristic students mentioned in relation to culture at Texas A&M was the university's immense size. The students were amazed at how large the 50,000-plus student body is.

School Culture

Long before they arrived at the university, students had already begun to recognize differences in people that they attributed to differences in culture. The thirteen participants who discussed the culture of their high schools or earlier schools all framed their remarks in terms of diversity. One even included statistics saying she was among the 95% of Caucasian children in her elementary school. Middle school was more diverse and high school was eye opening with only 27% Caucasian students. She wrote being in the minority was not an issue for her and she learned about the various cultures and ethnicities in the school before joining an 80% majority Caucasian student body in college.

Of the five students who wrote they attended private school, one indicated her education might have lacked cultural diversity. She felt the school environment had supplied her with just an imitation of culture because only on a special culture day did the people at the school seem proud of their culture. At a private Christian school, another student said the culture he was exposed to for 12 years was very different from

the culture of those not at his school. While he said he liked the religious atmosphere and did not complain of any lack of diversity in the school, he did add traveling with his family and going on a mission trip gave him a chance to observe different cultures. The other students from private schools spoke highly of their schools and described them as culturally diverse.

Students who had attended public high schools, especially the larger ones, also called their schools diverse and a place where they could learn about different cultures. One student described cultural groups at her school as the partiers, jocks, rednecks, band members, and then everyone else. Another, who claimed she grew up in an increasingly multicultural society and saw the same people each day at school, added that eventually she stopped noticing people's differences. She concluded this is why many people do not recognize how different the people around them are.

Unfamiliar Cultures

When it came to writing about their cultural experiences, nine of the participants said they had had few, if any, such experiences. They explained that they had not encountered much cultural diversity or exposure to other cultures. One student wrote that because of her limited experience with people of other cultures, she was unsure of how to interact with them and therefore stayed away.

The students who did address their cultural experiences related those experiences directly to their own exposure to travel, internationally first and then within the United States. They described mission trips, school sponsored trips, and family trips and

vacations. The mission trips made a significant impression on the 11 students who wrote about them. They were shocked by the poverty, but even more amazed at the people's attitudes. They wrote the people had very little but were still happy. A student, who had been on mission trips to Venezuela, Mexico, El Salvador, Ecuador, and Honduras, said the love and care for others she saw the people exhibit in spite of their poverty was an eye-opening experience for her. Another student went with her church youth group to Haiti two years after the devastating earthquake of 2010 there. She spent a week among the Haitians and described them as laid back, welcoming, and happy, but she was surprised they could be so positive considering their circumstances. She added it caused her to think about what determines her own happiness.

Students' descriptions of the cultures they encountered on school trips and trips with their families did not include words such as "shocking" or "amazing," which they had sprinkled liberally through their reports of cultures they experienced on mission trips. Nevertheless, the students still recognized how different cultures could be from their own culture and how different they could be from each other. Two students reported on cruises they took with their families. One was fascinated at seeing the everyday lives of the people where the ship stopped, and the other remarked on encountering so many different cultures and speaking to so many different people. The second student added that as she and her siblings grew older they became more captivated by the cruise destinations than the ship's water slides. Especially interesting

to her was a stop at Belize where she experienced the country's culture before it became a popular tourist spot.

State Culture

Students who traveled in the United States were often surprised to find how much cultures could differ from state to state. After spending a short time in two states working on projects to help local communities, a student observed the people she met in the Appalachian location were not very outgoing or friendly, while the residents of a New Orleans neighborhood were extremely warm and welcoming. She was not put off by the first group, however, and just attributed the matter to different cultural backgrounds.

A travel team baseball player in high school and now a participant in this study encountered a variety of cultures when he met other players from all over the country at the baseball tournaments he attended. Another student pointed out the culturally diverse and fast-paced life of people she met in New York City was vastly different from life in Texas, while a third student reported the culture of Colorado as different because of the physical opportunities available with the state's notable geography.

Students who claimed southern culture did so with warmth and pride, but the culture of the North received a much cooler review. Addressing this comparison, one student explained that different actions are culturally acceptable to those different cultures. A student who experienced both cultures in moving from Massachusetts to Texas found the cultural differences much greater than she had anticipated and felt their

effect on her were unusual. For example, in the North, her political opinions had been considered very conservative, but in Texas she was pegged as outrageously liberal for her same ideas.

Learned from Cultural Experiences

Students found cultural experiences in foreign countries and in the United States; in the poverty of developing countries and the rich heritage of wealthy nations; in their high schools and at college; and with their friends and family members. Describing what they thought they learned from their cultural experiences, 28 students said they learned about another culture and observed how other people lived. They made comparisons between other cultures and their own culture, and they professed to being more understanding and accepting of other cultures due to their cultural experiences.

A student, who has traveled in Kenya, nearly all of Western Europe, and much of the United States, said his interactions with other cultures helped him assess American culture and become more tolerant of the variety of cultures in the United States. A not so well-traveled student said she had never encountered a different culture until going on a mission trip where she saw the poverty in a Mexican town just across the border from Texas. She said it was an eye-opening experience for her, and she admitted never having thought about the conditions others were living in. A student, who went to a wedding in Mexico with her grandparents, quickly learned that being in a different culture and not knowing what was going on could be uncomfortable.

Another student claimed both German and Arabic cultural experiences in her

household, with German food from her father's side of the family and Arabic decorations, books, and stories from the time her parents lived in Saudi Arabia. She felt those influences were responsible for her fascination with different cultures and languages. A Catholic Hispanic student whose best friend growing up was Jewish said attending many Jewish events with her friend and learning about that culture helped her become a more well-rounded person. Another student, who felt she had experienced very little cultural diversity until going to college, said she made friends at Texas A&M University with students of other ethnicities and found out about their cultures. She learned she and her new friends had many ideas in common such as the value of education, family, and determination, as well as respect for cultural differences.

Students also wrote they learned about themselves from their cultural experiences though they were not inclined to elaborate. One said she now has a sense of who she is due to how she was raised and the cultural experiences offered by her parents. Another called cultural experiences a large part of who she is as a polite and respectful person.

Cultural experiences, according to one student, taught him not to automatically think people living in poverty were not as happy as he is. Along the same line, a student who had been on several mission trips said she learned money and material possessions are not everything. She said her experiences also caused her to question her own society and culture.

Four additional comments from students on what they learned from their cultural

experiences showed considerable thought. People's ideas are important, according to the first student, who added that understanding other's views is a useful skill. Similarly, the second student said she learned everyone has something valuable to contribute. The third student explained her cultural experiences showed her people have different ways of doing things and no one way is right or wrong. The last student said he now tries not to see his culture as better or worse than other cultures.

Eleven students used words such as aware, accept, open-minded, or respectful in relation to how they viewed other cultures. After considering their cultural experiences, three students said they have learned to be more accepting of other cultures and two declared they are now more culturally aware. Another student said because of her cultural experiences, she has become more open-minded and can better appreciate other cultures, while still another concluded her open perspective toward cultural differences was a result of her cultural experiences.

Influence of Cultural Experiences on Students' Future

When asked how they thought their cultural experiences would influence their future, the participants wrote about what they would take to their work environment, about students they might one day teach, and what they would want those students to learn. They referred to their cultural experiences for explanations of how they had been influenced and to justify the plans and ideas they have for their future.

Knowing they are preparing to teach in schools with increasingly diverse student populations, the participants expect to see different cultures represented in their

classrooms. Optimistic and enthusiastic, they were confident the cultural experiences which exposed them to new cultures and expanded their knowledge of other cultures will continue to assist them in addressing cultural issues. One participant said her cultural experiences will help her relate to students with different cultural backgrounds, and another anticipated understanding her students' cultures better because she has already encountered a variety of cultures. Two participants cited the importance of knowing about students' cultures when trying to make a connection with them, and a third named her own mixed ethnicity as helping her to communicate. Visiting a culture about which she knew almost nothing, a participant admitted to feeling very uncomfortable. Much later she decided this experience will enable her to help students who are overwhelmed in a culture new to them.

Participants said their cultural experiences were important in influencing their actions and ideas, especially as related to various aspects of culture. For example, as a result of cultural encounters, the participants said they would be inclined to be accepting of other cultures and interested in learning about different cultures, especially those of their students and the students' families. They also felt teachers should be a positive cultural influence on students.

Students wrote about their plans for their future classrooms and their thoughts on teaching. One created a list of ideas for student learning influenced by her cultural experiences. She wants her future students to feel comfortable and safe in the classroom, acknowledge their potential, avoid stereotypes, know their dreams are attainable with

hard work, and understand their individual cultures are important. Others also had ideas similar to the contents of the list, including wanting students to be tolerant and respectful of cultures different from their own, informed of classmates' and friends' cultures, and proud of their own culture. Another participant wants to help her students detect similarities and accept differences among their classmates, particularly as related to culture. A participant with plans for setting aside class time to teach her students about different cultures, decided using books with strong cultural themes could be an effective teaching method. Another, who will encourage her future students to share information about their cultures, said her goal is to help the students become as culturally aware as she can while still teaching them the course subject matter.

Students did not define or explain their own culture in any detail but they showed they were aware of the concept of culture as they discussed their family heritage and traditions. They recognized differences in cultures, especially through their travels, but also in their education as they encountered students who were different from themselves. They said their cultural experiences had helped them to better understand and accept others who are not like themselves and at the same time to learn more about themselves. They also felt they would call on their cultural experiences as they began teaching the diverse students they expected to have.

Diversity in the Autobiography

In the autobiographies, the noun "diversity" and the adjective "diverse" were written a total of 73 times by 39 students, while 33 students did not use either word.

Their words on diversity were most often related to race or to the schools they attended before college. Race was in the comments of 17 students, and schools were mentioned by 17 as well. Thirteen students discussed both race and school as they wrote about diversity while eight referred to only one.

The participants described schools and communities as diverse when their populations included several races, usually more than two. Those who claimed a lack of exposure to diversity said it was because they grew up in predominately white neighborhoods or towns or attended mainly white schools. Not extremely diverse was how one student labeled her elementary school with 70% white children. A student who wrote that her elementary school was 95% Caucasian, described it as not diverse. She said her middle school was slightly more diverse, but she designated her high school as eye-opening and very diverse with 46% of the students being African American, 26% Caucasian, and 21% Hispanic. Another student who said her school was diverse but her friends were mainly Caucasian did not explain what made the school diverse. Two other students called their schools diverse with equal numbers of several races. One explained the students were African American, Hispanic, and non-white Hispanic, plus a small number who were Asian American, but the other did not name the races.

Ten students mentioned Texas A&M University in their discussions of diversity, though their opinions of how diverse the university was ranged from not at all diverse to extremely diverse. Three said they knew the university was not known to be very diverse. However, one of the three admitted it was the most diverse school she had ever

attended while a second said her fellow students did not realize how little diversity there was on campus. Others described Texas A&M as diverse (1), very diverse (1), not diverse (1), and the least diverse school ever (1). Three more explained they had been exposed to very little diversity before going to Texas A&M. The students who found more diversity at the university than in their previous schools and communities expressed how they felt about this. Three said how interesting it was to get to know international students and another said she enjoyed interacting with students of varied ethnicities and cultures. A student from a small high school, who said College Station was a big city to her, explained that she loved the diversity at Texas A&M with so many new people to meet and so much to learn from them.

Eight students commented on diversity as it related to teaching or to their future classrooms. Two felt prepared for teaching because of the diversity they had encountered and the diversity they learned about in college. Another credited her well-rounded childhood with equipping her to handle the diversity she expected in her classroom. Three participants revealed their plans and the expectations they had for their future students: to learn in a diverse setting and to learn, understand, and accept the diversity of their peers, how they are different as well as similar. One participant stressed the importance of teachers knowing about diversity and being familiar with the diversity of other cultures. Another felt children who experienced diversity at an early age would grow up to be more accepting of other people.

In seven instances, students used the words “diverse” or “diversity” to mean

different, such as diverse hobbies, diverse restaurants, and diverse qualities. Students also chose diverse to describe towns and cities (5), their family (2), and ESL and ELL populations (2).

Summary of the Autobiography

In the autobiographies of the 72 participants, I examined what they wrote about ancestry, culture, and diversity. I focused on their descriptions, ideas, and thoughts to determine their understanding and interpretation of the topics.

The small number of students who commented on their ancestors related ancestry to location. To them, their ancestry was defined by where their ancestors had once lived and from what countries they had emigrated and eventually come to the United States. They felt their ancestry represented their family origins.

Students wrote about culture more as it related to other people than how they might define or describe a culture of their own. They alluded to their culture by comparing their own situation to the cultures of others, pointing out how they were different. At times students revealed aspects of their culture by describing cultural traditions they had known growing up, including how they celebrated holidays and special food dishes that were prepared at home. When they wrote about culture in Texas, they noted the Hispanic influence, said they were happy to be Texans, and expressed pride in their state. They portrayed the culture at Texas A&M University as friendly and welcoming. Their comments on the diversity of the university's culture were tied to the diversity of schools they had attended previously. Those who described their elementary

schools and high schools as diverse claimed they learned about different cultures at those schools. Students who wrote about their pre-college schooling as not diverse made no such claims.

As they wrote about their cultural experiences, they focused on their interactions with people of other cultures, races, and nationalities - people who were different from themselves. They believed they had learned from those encounters and they said that this knowledge had made them think about their own culture and relationships between cultures. Students felt their cultural experiences would help them relate better to their future students whom they expected to represent many cultures. They also credited their cultural experiences with causing them to be more accepting of other cultures and more interested in learning about their students' cultures.

The participants related diversity mainly to race and described diverse communities and schools as including several different races. Their opinion of the scope of diversity was related to their previous exposure to diversity. The students who expressed their thoughts about their future careers in education wrote that they expected their students would be diverse and that they felt it would be important for them as teachers to encourage an understanding of diversity in their classrooms.

Introduction to the Final Paper

After completing their family tree, students were asked to write a final paper reflecting on the experience. This paper was to include an overview of their tree, a brief summary of any family stories, a description of difficulties they may have encountered

in their research, the most surprising information they uncovered, and what influence this project has had on how they will make an inclusive multicultural classroom. (The complete assignment is in Appendix C). I examined these final papers to discover what and how students wrote about ancestry, culture, and diversity.

Ancestry in the Final Paper

Students wrote a great deal about their ancestry in the final paper because they were asked to write family stories, which were all about their ancestors. This section is divided into topics that the students wrote about their ancestors: slavery, Native Americans, military connections, famous ancestors – researched and from family stories, occupations of ancestors, how life was for the students’ ancestors, and historical events or connections. There is some overlap in the categories. For example, some of the stories in the military connections could also go in the section about occupations. I tried to divide the categories in the most logical manner.

Due to the nature of the assignment, five double-spaced pages, students often wrote brief or abbreviated reflections on assignment topics. This constraint likely limited the richness of their stories, which is unfortunate in that there probably was more to each story than is reported here. In three of the categories, occupations, how life was for the students’ ancestors, and historical events or connections, I did not combine similar information but allowed a paragraph for each story. In those stories the students’ names were changed.

Slavery

When writing about their ancestors in their final papers, seven students specifically addressed the discovery that their ancestors owned slaves. The students described this revelation as unexpected, interesting, and eye-opening. One explained how stunned she was to learn slaves were treated as property in family wills. Another had never considered the possibility her family might have owned slaves, while a third explained it was the most interesting thing she had found but it made her feel a little uncomfortable. A student determined that one side of her family owned slaves and were slaves on the other side of her family. She explained how this discovery had caused her to reframe her perceptions of the Civil War as a horrible war with no right or wrong side but that, in the end, good came out of it. Another student reported that she was intrigued to find out that one side of her family owned slaves but the other side, while not owning slaves, was racist too as her great grandfather was a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

Students were surprised at finding a direct family connection to slavery. Slavery no longer seemed to be an abstract historical event but a real part of America's past that involved their ancestors.

Native Americans

When the students began researching their family trees, many were interested in confirming long held family beliefs of Native American relatives and encounters their ancestors had with various Native American people and tribes. As the students investigated their ancestry, of the 17 students who discussed Native Americans in their

final papers, more than half were unable to find documentation that proved they had Native Americans among their ancestors. One student said she did find a single Native American relative on each side but could not verify the long-held notions of her parents that both sides had an extensive Native American heritage. Only three students wrote that they were able to document their Native American heritage. A student's grandmother took great pride in her Cherokee culture and decorated her home with Native American artifacts. She also made dream catchers for her granddaughter and told her Native American stories. The student, however, was unable to find any records of her grandmother's connection to Native Americans. The students also wrote that Native Americans had killed a fourth great grandfather, captured a sixth great grandfather, and kidnapped a third great grandfather.

Students spent a great deal of time and effort searching to confirm beliefs of Native American ancestry and were frequently disappointed in the results. The students who could find no documentation simply concluded they were unable to locate the information because of reasons such as, Indian ancestry was hard to trace or at some point their families were embarrassed and hid this information. Two students indicated they were definitely not giving up the search. However, even with no documentation to prove the connection, none of the other students were willing to stop claiming Indian heritage or abandon the idea of having Native American roots.

Military Connections

A theme that emerged when students were writing about their ancestors in the

final paper was military service. Forty-six students wrote about having a family member or ancestor with military service. These military connections varied from battles fought in Europe to more recent conflicts in the twentieth-century. The students were surprised at how much previous generations had been involved in the military.

There were several stories of military service that resulted in the students' ancestors moving to different countries. One student had two ancestors who fought in the Jacobite Rebellion in Scotland, were captured and sent to the United States as indentured servants. Another student had a family member who served in the British Navy around the American colonies in the early 1700's. He became unhappy with his life as a midshipman and jumped overboard at the Delaware River. He swam ashore and eventually settled in Maryland. On his father's side of the family, the same student discovered a soldier in the German military who deserted and eventually fled to Illinois. The student was surprised to learn his ancestors had not immigrated by what he described as a typical means. He noted that not only did they abandon their military obligation, he was fairly sure that their immigration was illegal.

There were ten students who discovered ancestors who fought in the Revolutionary War; two who had an ancestor on each side of that conflict. One student learned that her sixth great grandparents were both identified with the Revolutionary War movement. She wrote that while her sixth great grandfather was a soldier, his wife made bullets and distributed them to the front lines as part of the war effort. Because of this service, her sixth great grandmother received a pension after the war.

Nineteen students found that they had at least one ancestor who took part in the United States Civil War. Sixteen of those students specified which side their ancestors fought for: 10 for the Confederacy, and three for the Union. Another three were surprised that they had ancestors on both sides of the conflict. One student with ancestors fighting on both sides reflected that many more of her ancestors who fought in the Confederate Army were killed than her ancestors who fought in the Union Army. In addition, three students discovered that their Confederate relatives were captured and held prisoner by the Union Army.

Several students who stated they had an ancestor who served in the military more recently were able to include stories and memories that their ancestors had shared with them. One student found her great grandfather's World War II service records on the Ancestry.com website and called him to find out more details. He told her that when he arrived in Africa, the CIA [sic] recruited him to be a spy. He told her that as a spy he was never sent to the front lines and his accommodations were better than those for soldiers. It was still very dangerous because spies caught by the Germans were much more severely punished than soldiers. The student wrote that hearing from her great grandfather was the best part of this research project, and she realized that she might never have spoken to him about his service if she hadn't come across his draft card online.

One student was able to provide her grandmother with details about the death of her father, the student's great grandfather. Her grandmother was only five years old when

her father was killed in World War II. She had been told that he died in Germany during a raid, but the student discovered that he actually died in the Netherlands after German fighters attacked his aircraft. When the student shared these documents with her grandmother, her grandmother was shocked that she never really knew how her father died until she was in her seventies.

Another student wrote that she felt honored that one of her great grandfathers was buried in Arlington National Cemetery after serving in World War II. Another student explained how her grandfather, a Texas A&M University [sic] graduate, fought in World War II and participated in the first overseas Aggie Muster on April 21, 1942.

The story behind how her grandfather became a medic when he was drafted to fight in the Korean War was discovered by a student. Originally he was given the job of sharp shooter where he would fight on the front lines. The front lines were dangerous and many on the front line did not return home. One night, on the way to Korea, the whole ship ate hash for dinner except the ship's doctor and her grandfather, who hated hash. When the whole ship came down with food poisoning, he and the doctor were the only passengers not ill. He spent the night tending the sick with the doctor and in the morning he was offered a position as a medic's aid. Because of his new position, he rarely saw combat and never had to fight. The student said that the new position was credited with saving her grandfather's life.

Another student was very excited when she learned that her first cousin twice removed was a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Air Force who painted the nose art on

planes used in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. She found pictures of him standing with the pilots in front of the planes he had painted. She even discovered that he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal.

Students reported on the military service of their ancestors with pride and sometimes surprise. Discovering these relatives and their stories gave them a clear and personal connection to the history they studied in school.

Famous Ancestors

Students also wrote that they were related to someone famous, important, or historical. These students can be divided into two groups: those who discovered famous relatives while researching their tree and those who had been told by their family that they were related to someone famous. Identifying famous relatives was important to both groups of these students and they spent time and effort exploring these connections.

Discovered Famous Ancestors through Research

The students who discovered famous relatives in the course of researching their family tree were excited and surprised to be connected to someone famous. Some of the stories that the students wrote are summarized below.

Several students were able to trace their ancestry back hundreds of years to the monarchs and nobility of Europe. One student found that many of her relatives were Scottish royalty including at least four Lords, three Earls of Lauderdale, a Thane, two Countesses, and more relatives referred to with titles Sir and Lady. Her 22nd great grandfather and 22nd great grandmother were the King and Queen of Scotland, and her

21st great grandparents also sat on the Scottish throne. She said she was not surprised that her grandfather's side of the family had royalty in it because she always knew he was special.

An ancestor's encounter with a king influenced a student's family name and crest. The student is a descendant of John Muirhead, who was the second son of the Lord of Lachop. Around 1500, while hunting in a Scottish forest, Muirhead saved the life of King James IV. The king was being threatened by a mad bull, and Muirhead rescued him by grabbing the bull by its horns and nearly breaking its neck. The king then named him Stark, which at that time meant strong. She explained that this incident is why that branch of her family has a bull's head on its crest.

Another student found that she was related to Sir Humphrey Cheatham, the sheriff of Manchester, Lancashire, England and his son, Thomas Cheatham I. The younger Cheatham emigrated to America in 1655, where he established an indigo and tobacco plantation called The Trellises in Chesterfield County, Virginia.

William Gifford was an ancestor to one of the participants and to 85% of the Giffords in the United States who claim to be descended from him, according to the student. Gifford was a tailor who settled in Sandwich, Massachusetts, and had six sons and two daughters. He was recognized for being a large landowner and a Quaker.

Giles Corey was another of the same student's relatives. He lived in Salem, Massachusetts, during the Salem Witch Trials and he was arrested for stealing food and tobacco prior to his arrest for witchcraft. He was then killed by being crushed. The

sheriff placed stones on Corey while Corey taunted him by yelling "more weight" until his body collapsed and he died.

The Meriwethers who lived on the Cloverfields Plantation in Virginia were among the ancestors claimed by one participant. She said these Meriwethers were connected to Meriwether Lewis, the famous explorer.

Another student discovered that her fourth great grandfather was a slave named Silas Cotton, who was the son of a slave and a white overseer. In 1840, he moved from South Carolina to Texas where he worked on the Logan Stroud Plantation. After being emancipated, Cotton worked as a farmer in Robertson County, Texas. He was elected as a representative in the Texas Legislature, where he served from 1870 to 1873.

Juan Bautista Chapa was born in 1627 in Italy and spent most of his life in Nuevo León, Mexico. A student who learned she is one of his descendants, said his written observations of the region are considered an important source for the history of the area.

A very proud Texan and participant in this study claimed several connections to her favorite state's history. The student's fifth great grandfather, José Francisco Ruiz, was the only native Texan who signed the Texas Declaration of Independence on March 2, 1836. His son-in-law, her fourth great grandfather, was Blas María Herrera. Frequently referred to as the Paul Revere of Texas, Herrera warned Sam Houston that Santa Anna was approaching the Alamo. This student expressed that she and her family feel a great sense of pride in being Texans and having such an important connection to

Texas history. The student, her grandmother, and sisters plan to apply to become members of The Daughters of the Republic of Texas.

A different student explained she was amazed to discover that her fourth great grandfather, Charles Clark, served as the Mississippi Governor from 1863 to 1865 and he was also a Civil War Confederate Major General. After the war he retired to his Doro Plantation in Bolivar County, Mississippi. The student was excited that she had found these stories because she had had no idea how much of her family had served the country.

The second great grandfather of one student was named after Andrew Jackson's wife's nephew, Andrew Jackson Donelson. Donelson was a prominent Tennessean who negotiated the Treaty of Annexation with the Republic of Texas, served as a Minister to Prussia, and ran as the Know-Nothing Party candidate for the Vice Presidency.

Another student found out that she was related to John Connally, the 39th Governor of Texas and the Secretary of the Navy. Connally was also in the car with President John F. Kennedy when Kennedy was assassinated. She was surprised to have such an important person in her family tree.

Harlan Carter, a president of the National Rifle Association (NRA), was also the brother of a student's grandfather. In 1975 he established the Institute for Legislative Action (ILA), the lobbying arm of the NRA. The student was very proud that his relative was involved in what he considered to be protecting the Second Amendment.

Family Stories of Famous Relatives

While growing up, students had been told by their families that they were related to famous people. One student's mother told her that her family was related to Andrew Jackson. When she started her family tree, this was the first piece of information she tried to find. The student was unable to support this claim and, disappointedly, she decided that this was false and Andrew Jackson was not a relative. However, several other students were not so easily discouraged by the lack of results in their research. One student had been informed by family members that her fifth great grandfather claimed Captain John Smith as an ancestor. She was unable to verify this but planned to continue investigating over the summer. Another student explained her family tradition maintained that her third great grandmother, a full-blooded Cherokee, was a relative of Robert E. Lee. However, she stated that she had not found any evidence of this yet. A third student wrote how her mother had always joked about being related to John Adams, the second President of United States. The student said that she became obsessed with finding the connection. Her fourth great grandfather was named Phillip Adams, but the birthdates did not match to tie him to John Adams. Not ready to give up, she approached her research from a different direction and examined John Adams' family tree. Eventually she came to the conclusion that she was not directly related to any of the famous Adamses. However, she followed that conclusion with a hope that one day in the future she would learn the truth about these men.

Every year at his mother's family reunion, a student has been reminded he is a

descendant of John C. Calhoun who was a politician and Vice President under John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. Eager to verify this information, he discovered that he did have a third great grandfather named John C. Calhoun, who was born in 1836, but could not have served as Vice President from 1825 to 1832. He did find, however, that the John C. Calhoun who was his ancestor had fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War and was a prisoner of war in 1865. The next time he hears at the family reunion that he is related to John C. Calhoun, he plans to break the news to his relatives there. They are related John C. Calhoun, but the one they are related to served the country as a soldier in the Confederate Army and not as the Vice President.

Students' reactions to the possibility of having famous people among their ancestors were similar to their responses when researching Native American ancestors. Even when confronted with overwhelming information that they were not descendants of famous people, or of Native Americans, they were still reluctant to abandon that narrative. Students are invested in their family histories and what they think they know about their ancestors. They are resistant to changing their beliefs.

Occupations of Ancestors

Students also wrote about the occupations that their ancestors held. These included occupations that they were proud of, ones they connected to history, and jobs they felt influenced their family.

- Anne discovered that her great grandfather's occupation, listed in the 1940 census, was a neon sign maker. She knew that her grandparents had owned a

neon sign company, but didn't know it went any further back in the family.

Anne's mother explained that Anne's great grandfather had started a neon sign company in Oklahoma and taught all of his children, including Anne's grandmother, the trade. In college, Anne's grandmother had a job as a neon bender. Eventually, she met a man and they married and started their own neon sign business in Austin, Texas. They ran the business for many years and in 2004 sold it to one of their children.

- In another discovery about her ancestors, Anne wrote about stories of a fire in a tobacco plant in Kentucky that were intriguing to her as she grew up, but the details were unclear. While researching her family tree, Anne began uncovering information about the fire, including a newspaper article that filled in all the details for her. What she discovered was that her second great grandfather had owned a tobacco plant in Kentucky which manufactured rolled cigarettes. The quickly mass produced cigarettes dropped the price the trust was willing to pay for farmers' tobacco, so the farmers formed a group called the Night Riders. In 1906, the Night Riders burned three major tobacco factories down, including her second great grandfather's plant. In addition, the Night Riders had called the insurance company the day before and canceled the insurance on the plant. She said the family's financial situation changed drastically overnight.
- Priscilla wrote that her grandfather told her how his great grandfather was a millionaire, who made his money from oil and farming. He once owned the land

that is used by NASA today at Cape Canaveral. When he owned it, it was swampland not worth developing so he returned it to the government. Knowing that her ancestor once owned this land was special for Priscilla. She said that these stories helped her see how important her family history is and see how these character traits helped to mold the foundation of her family.

- A professional welder who is the grandfather of one of the participants, Harriet, told his granddaughter about working on the construction of the Lake Buchanan Dam. He would camp near the river while he was working on the dam. It was a dangerous job and the other workmen would lower him down on a swinging board to weld pieces of metal that helped the cement [sic] dam hold its shape. If the welders fell off the swings into the wet cement, they would be buried alive and unable to be rescued. After the dam was finished, the river filled the lake much more quickly than anyone expected; large pieces of machinery, trapped at the bottom of the lake by the rapidly rising water, are still there today.
- Carly wrote about her great grandfather. She said he was born in South Dakota in 1911 and served in the Civilian Conservation Corps from 1933 until his honorable discharge in 1935. He lived in Camp Custer, South Dakota, while he was assigned to Company 1791 under the Forest Department. After his CCC service, he completed a diesel mechanic course and then worked for most of his life for the Northern Pacific Railroad as a pipefitter.
- April wrote that her second great grandfather moved from Germany to Michigan

to work in the coal mines. His son, her great grandfather, worked in an automobile shop selling tires while her great grandmother worked as a nurse.

April said she was very proud to learn that her great grandmother had completed high school and nursing school in that era, the 1940's. In addition, she said that knowing the exact identity of her first ancestor to come to America made the connection feel more real.

- The 1900 census revealed to Daisy that her second great grandfather was a bartender at that time. Her father explained that this relative was a saloon owner and he had a drinking problem.
- Tanya learned that her parents had summer jobs that surprised her. Her father spent the summer working in the V-8 juice factory where he helped unload the carrots that arrived at the factory on flatbed trucks. The carrots were dumped into drums where sprinklers rinsed off the dirt and the rats, and eventually the carrots were made into juice. Her father explained he was very thankful he wasn't involved in the cleaning process because it was so horrendous. Tanya's mother wanted to work as a bartender or waitress but her father refused to let her work late at night. Instead she got a job at the Dinner Bell with the other girls her age. Dinner Bell was a meat packing plant where bologna and hot dogs were made. She worked in the freezing building and had to spend the summer dressed for winter because it was so cold in the plant. Tanya wrote that she never imagined

having jobs like the ones her parents had, but claimed it must have been more the norm in Defiance, Ohio.

- Describing her grandparents as high school sweethearts, Linda wrote that after high school her grandfather played football at Tyler Junior College and the University of Texas at El Paso. Her grandmother went to one semester of college but dropped out to marry her grandfather. Linda proudly described how her grandmother started working at the hospital in Beaumont in the human resources department and by 2007 had worked her way up to being the vice president of human resources there. She noted that her grandparents had worked very hard to provide for their children, even helping them out after they were married.
- Doug whose great grandfather emigrated from Croatia to the United States wrote that his grandfather lived in Leadville, Colorado, where he worked in the mining industry and was instrumental in starting mining unions in the 1940's. Doug's grandfather also drove a semi-truck hauling mining products, had only a seventh-grade education, and fought in World War II where he earned a bronze medal for valor.
- Also surprised at her ancestor's occupation was Claire whose second great grandfather from Germany was a milk driver. She wrote that this was especially interesting because her father is a UPS man so they were both in the delivery business. In addition, Claire said there was a brick and tile business in the family

for a long time; and her grandfather, who died when her mother was 16 years old, had owned a car dealership that the rest of the family takes care of now.

- Reporting that her family members had worked at a variety of occupations, Kim said there were many farmers in her family. Her great grandfather, however, was a teacher, and from a census record, she found that her second great grandfather worked as a clerk in a tobacco warehouse. She added that her family members believe they also have some blacksmiths in their ancestry since their last name means knife smith in German.
- Ellen, a student with plans for teaching, reflected that being a teacher has spanned the generations in her family. She has two aunts who are teachers and now she learned that both her grandmother and her great grandmother were teachers. Ellen also wrote that her second great grandfather, born in 1865 in San Antonio, Texas, was a West Texas cowboy who drove cattle herds and worked on a ranch. In his lifetime, his occupations included cattleman, banker, county treasurer, and mayor of Alice, Texas.
- Martha found out that her second great grandfather came to America from England as a chauffeur for a wealthy family. She also discovered that her great grandfather saw the world as a dredge boat captain. His name was Jelly, and his boat was named *The Captain Jelly*. According to Martha's research, *The Captain Jelly* is still in use in Louisiana.
- Being a cook at the prominent Baker Hotel located in Mineral Wells, Texas was

a job that Cindy's grandfather held. He prepared food for many famous people including Marilyn Monroe. As he got older, he became ill but his doctor prescribed heart medication that made him go crazy. One night he sleepwalked onto the roof of the hospital. This caused quite a stir and took several nurses and family members to get him down. He died a few days later.

- Cindy also wrote that her eighth great grandfather traveled with Daniel Boone from Pennsylvania to Tennessee. Dunbar State Park in Tennessee is named after her ancestor.
- Writing about several of his relatives, Jim said his great grandfather graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, wrote an article for the *New York Times*, and drew his own comics. He also kept a detailed log of Jim's family history. Several other members of Jim's family were Irish and Scottish indentured servants. His third great grandfather, Admiral Abraham Byrd, spent two decades conducting research in the Arctic.
- Sophia discovered that her second grandmother lost eight children in childbirth before having Sophia's great grandmother. Sophia said her great grandmother received a degree in economics and taught at the local high school. This surprised her because she knew her great grandmother briefly, but didn't know she had been a teacher.
- Sophia was also shocked to discover that her uncle had two top singles on the Hot Country Songs Charts. She knew he was talented but never realized he had

been a country star. She noted that in 1995 his single was above Billy Ray Cyrus' "Achy Breaky Heart." Sophia wrote that she spent a lot of time searching the Internet for articles and videos of his success. She also spent time on YouTube laughing at videos of him.

The students learned that their ancestors worked in many different fields and had jobs that prior to the family tree project the students knew little about. Discovering the occupations of their ancestors was important because it gave the students an understanding of the type of work many of their relatives were involved in. In addition, knowing the kinds of jobs their ancestors had might help the participants relate to their future students' families, who may be involved in similar work.

How Life was for the Students' Ancestors

The students also heard stories from their grandparents and great grandparents about how life was for them growing up. The tales were of hardships such as health problems, accidents, and the death of family members, but they also included stories that were much lighter and a few even funny.

- Cindy's grandfather told her that he had polio as a child. He explained how it hurt to walk to school and the other children would make fun of him because he walked so slowly. Eventually, his parents took him to the doctor and learned he had polio. He told Cindy how he was in pain for a long time. She asked him when it finally stopped, and he said it didn't stop until he got the vaccine. Today he is very healthy, Cindy reported.

- Kim told the story of her grandparents meeting at a church bake sale in New Orleans. Her grandfather bought a cake that her grandmother had made but accidentally used salt instead of sugar. The cake was awful but they still ended up dating. Kim also passed on several details of her grandfather's childhood. He was born in 1920 and his home had no electricity or indoor plumbing. When the children took baths, six siblings would all use the same bathwater, which had been heated up and put in a giant bathtub. In addition, his mother became sick with tuberculosis and had to go stay in a sanatorium in San Angelo for a few months, leaving the children to be cared for by her sisters. One of the six children was a new baby that needed to be fed while the mother was gone. After trying expensive formulas, they finally gave the baby goat's milk, and since they did not have refrigeration, they gave the goat's milk straight to him.
- Kim also told of her grandfather who almost died of a ruptured appendix as a child. The doctors sent him home with his mother to die. He asked her to cook him a pot of collard greens, and after he ate the whole pot of collard greens, he got well. Later in his youth he got his arm stuck in a cotton gin and lost it.
- From a census record, Helen discovered that an 11-year-old boy lived in the house with her grandmother. Shortly after finding this mysterious boy, she attended a wedding where she was able to ask her grandmother's twin sister about the boy. Her great aunt explained to the student that the boy's parents had died and their family had taken him in and adopted him. The boy's six brothers

went to other homes. When the adopted brother turned 18 years old, he went away and rarely visited. Her grandmother was only about 10 years old when he moved away so she didn't know him that well. Helen thought that might have been why her grandmother never mentioned it.

- Jerry wrote that his grandmother told him what life was like for her as a young girl. Her first language was German and it took her a long time to learn English because her parents spoke German. She was raised on a large ranch in Harper, Texas that the family still owns. Jerry was shocked at the things they did as daily tasks on the farm. His grandmother told him they made their undergarments out of feed sacks, cleaned goats' head wounds by picking the maggots out of the wounds, and after they killed the hogs they did not waste any of them.
- A story about Pam's grandmother started with the death of the grandmother's father after he fractured his skull. He left his wife with eight children, but she could not afford to keep all eight children so she planned to give up the youngest two. The oldest child wouldn't hear of this, so he went to work at age 15 and they were able to keep all eight children. Pam had heard this story her whole life but did not realize that one of the children to be given up was her grandmother.
- The 1940 census listed a maid as living in the small Michigan house with April's great grandparents. April investigated this further by discussing it with her aunt whose mother had also lived in the house at the time. Her aunt explained that the

maid was probably an immigrant in need of cheap housing who lived there and took care of the children as payment.

- In a car accident with a drunk driver, Linda's grandmother survived along with the grandmother's father. The grandmother's mother, however, did not. After the accident, Linda's grandmother lived with her two sets of grandparents, one in Mississippi and one in Louisiana. She told Linda how she experienced farm life with her father and grandparents in Mississippi and city life in New Orleans with her mother's parents. She went to nursing school in New Orleans, where she met her future husband. He was also originally from Mississippi, but he quit school when he was in eighth grade and hopped on a train to New Orleans. There he lived with an aunt sometimes and other times he would stay in hotel lobbies. To make money, he did odd jobs and eventually worked his way through air conditioning and plumbing school. He married Linda's grandmother and they moved to Texas where he worked as a pipefitter.
- Sophia learned that after oil was found at Spindletop in 1901, her great grandfather sold all his land because he didn't understand that he could lease it. He then moved to Oklahoma and eventually acquired 960 acres of a wheat farm there. In 1933 a drought in the Dust Bowl ruined the crops and he died broke in 1939. His children sold off his land but Sophia's grandfather bought back 160 acres and then lost it to the bank in 1943.
- Tanya's mother told her how her grandmother would make all her clothes.

Eventually it became clear that her grandmother's sister was a better seamstress, so her grandmother would buy the fabric and cut out the patterns for her and her cousin's clothes and the sister would sew them together. Tanya's mother ended up having matching dresses with her much younger cousin and did not mind until she got older, and then she threw a fit. Tanya thought this was hilarious because she is the youngest of three sisters and in almost every picture until the oldest was in fifth grade the three girls are wearing the same dresses. She couldn't believe the one thing that annoyed her mother the most as a child, she turned around and did to her own children!

- Oscar wrote about his mother's struggles when she arrived in the United States. He learned from his grandmother that in Mexico his mother was at the top of her class in school. This was an honor that came with the responsibility of carrying the Mexican flag during monthly school parades. When the family moved to the United States, his mother moved from the top of the class to the bottom. She struggled in the American school because she did not speak English. She worked very hard and returned to the top of the class. Oscar found her determination inspiring.

Students learned how life was for their ancestors and considered the ways that their ancestors grew up. They noticed how different things were compared to their own experiences and were amazed at how difficult many aspects of their ancestors' lives

were and how much responsibility children were given at an early age. They could also see how the events of the past have influenced their own future.

Historical Events or Connections

As students researched their family history, they discovered ancestors who were involved in or connected to historical events. For example, they heard stories of their ancestors' involvement with alcohol during the years of Prohibition.

- Vivian wrote that her great grandfather on one side of the family made moonshine whiskey and sold it. Luckily, he never got caught. However, on the other side of her family, Vivian's great grandmother ran whiskey and she did get caught and arrested.
- Gracie said her relatives told her about the time Grandma Bernice got sent to jail for making wine during Prohibition.
- Mary explained that her grandfather was deep in the moonshine business.
- During the Great Depression, Jim's French great grandfather could not find work, so he and some other men planned a bank robbery. However, during the robbery, there was a shootout and his great grandfather was killed. His great grandmother, the would-be bank robber's wife, changed her name and moved back to her father's plantation in Saint Martinsville, Louisiana. Jim's grandfather told his father their true name when he was dying of Parkinson's disease.
- Another story about the Great Depression involved Edith's grandmother who was one of nine children. During that difficult time her grandmother's family

would travel to different farms and pick cotton. Her grandmother recalled how painful picking cotton was and explained that her fingers would bleed. Her grandmother's sister knitted a special pair of mittens to protect her hands from the sharp edges of the cotton boll. The family made it through the tough years in the 1930's by living off turnip greens.

- In 1968 in Washington, D. C., riots followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ava wrote that her Greek great grandparents owned a floral shop in the city at that time, but their store was not damaged in the rioting.
- Christine, whose seventh great grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War, also discovered that he donated 200 acres of land to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She found his name mentioned in the university's survey documents.

These connections to historical activities were important because they encouraged students to relate to events they had only learned about in history classes. The students were amazed and usually proud to find that that their ancestors were connected to these events. The magnitude of the historical happening and its positive or negative nature were not so significant for the students, nor was how much that ancestor had been involved in the event. They liked making the connection.

Culture in the Final Paper

Of the 72 students in this study, 58 wrote some form of the word culture in the final paper and 14 did not. They described their views of culture; they expressed their

thoughts about their own and other cultures; and they wrote about the importance of understanding and accepting other cultures. Fifty-three students discussed culture in their future classrooms and the cultural activities they intend to include.

The participants pointed out that there are many different cultures in the world and that all people have a variety of cultures in their background. They came to this realization after researching their own family history and finding ancestors from many countries and many cultures. A student who examined his family tree concluded that no individual could be identified by just a single culture.

When students wrote about their own culture and the cultures of other people, they used the adjective “different” in their descriptions. One student related different cultures to people different from herself. Others felt they had a varied cultural background if their ancestors were from different countries. Twenty-five percent of the students made a connection between culture and location, with the expectation that different cultures would be found in different locations. One student was surprised at hearing about the many different cultural backgrounds of the people she had encountered just in this course. Two students referred to America as a melting pot of many cultures, one adding that this variety enables people to more easily learn about cultures different from their own.

Students named other differences they related to culture, particularly about the people of different cultures, their appearance and their activities. They included race (1), religion (2), physical characteristics (2), skin color (2), traditions and holidays (2), food

(3), accent (1), ethnic clothes (1), importance of family (1), dances (1), language (1), and ways of learning (1).

Twenty-two percent of the students credited their cultural background with influencing who they have become and they acknowledged that coming from a variety of cultures contributed to that influence. Those who elaborated said their culture has helped to determine how they act (2), the decisions they make (2), their personality (2), and even their mannerisms (1) and lifestyle (1). One student wrote that being aware of ancestry and culture can have a great impact on how people live their lives.

The 53 students who wrote about the cultural aspects of their future classrooms described the environment they wanted to create for their students, what they hoped their students would learn, and their ideas for activities they would assign their classes. The details of their plans were all different but the basic ideas, goals, and motivations were similar. They wrote with certainty that they would be teaching students of different cultures, backgrounds, and races. They expressed their thoughts on creating an inclusive multicultural classroom, which they felt was what they should do and what they wanted to do. They hoped their classroom environment would be fair, open-minded, respectful, and engaging where students would feel safe and have a sense of belonging. They wanted their students to learn about cultures they may not have encountered, but they also expected students to share their own cultures with the class. They thought it was important for students to know about their own culture and where they came from, so they would be proud of their cultural background.

Eighteen participants described projects and activities related to culture that they would like to implement in their teaching. Six from that group had plans for assignments similar to the family tree project from this class. They felt this would help their students learn about their own culture and about the cultures of their classmates. Two students viewed this knowledge as a problem-solver. One, who planned a brief family history project as an icebreaker to start her new class, hoped that this activity would enable students to overcome cultural biases they might have. A second student felt this type of project could be helpful if problems arose concerning different cultures. She reasoned that students who know about their own culture and their peers' cultures can begin to understand why they have different ideas and opinions.

One participant thought her students would be more able to appreciate and accept other cultures if they realized that all people come from different cultures. This was something she expected them to learn through an ancestry research activity that she was planning. Two other assignments resembling parts of the family tree project included interviewing family members for students to learn more about the cultures and countries in their background and making group videos to help students who are uncomfortable with their classmates establish personal connections with them. The goal of these projects was to have students learn more about their own culture and the cultures of their classmates in an effort to increase their future students' cultural awareness.

Diversity in the Final Paper

In their final papers, 31 students used the words “diverse” and “diversity.”

Nineteen students included the words in their discussions of their future classrooms and students, while 15 needed the words in reporting on the ancestors that research on their family tree uncovered. Many of the participants' ideas and feelings about their future as teachers were similar. They described their future students as diverse, and they wanted those students to understand and treasure diversity. They wrote that they wanted their students to know that all people are diverse and their differences should be celebrated. They thought it was important to embrace the diversity of their students; explore, accept, and encourage diversity in the classroom; and provide diverse multicultural experiences for their students. They felt that understanding their own diversity would help them as teachers because it would enable them to better understand their students. One participant said a family tree project would help teach students about the diversity they have in their own lives and could improve their acceptance of the diversity of their peers. Another wanted the students in her class to learn to be tolerant of people who are different from themselves.

When writing about their family tree experience, 15 students reported discovering their family to be more diverse than they had thought before they engaged in this research. Students had begun working on their family tree knowing the locations of one or two ancestors. As their research progressed, they found more relatives they had never known, or even heard of, and began to view themselves as part of a diverse family with ties to other countries. They related this diversity to the variety of countries where

their ancestors once lived and from which those ancestors immigrated to the United States.

Table 4, Countries of Origin, reveals the countries that students' research verified were the original locations or countries of origin for their ancestors. This information was collected from the final papers of all of the participants, whereas the 15 students counted above were only those who claimed their ancestry to be diverse after discovering they had multiple countries of origin in their background. Almost half of the total group of participants claimed German, English, and/or Irish ancestry. For students who listed links to ancestors in countries that are no longer recognized, I counted their relative as being from the country that now occupies that area. For example, I added the student who listed Arcadia to those who claimed Greece, and students who listed connections to Moravia I added to the Czech Republic. Also, I combined areas students mentioned that were part of a larger country such as Holland with the Netherlands. This table is important because the distribution of origins shown reflects the historical patterns of migration that many Europeans, especially the ancestors of a majority of the participants in this study, took to arrive in Texas. The top five countries from which the students' relatives emigrated were Germany (37), England (29), Ireland (23), Scotland (20), and France (11). Many of the Germans who migrated to Texas were brought to the state by the *Adelsverein*, an organization formed to protect German immigrants and to profit from their settlements. The Texas Hill Country towns of New Braunfels and Fredericksburg were settled by those Germans. The English immigrants settled in

Table 4
Countries of Origin

Country	First Class	Second Class	Total
Austria	6	3	9
Canada	2	3	5
China	1	0	1
Croatia	1	0	1
Czech Republic	2	4	6
Denmark	1	0	1
England	15	14	29
Finland	2	1	3
France	7	4	11
Germany	23	14	37
Greece	1	1	2
Guam	1	0	1
Hungary	1	2	3
India	1	1	2
Ireland	11	12	23
Italy	2	3	5
Mexico	2	5	7
Netherlands	4	1	5
Norway	2	2	4
Philippines	0	1	1
Poland	4	1	5
Prussia	3	0	3
Russia	2	2	4
Scotland	10	10	20
South Korea	1	0	1
Spain	2	1	3
Sweden	0	1	1
Switzerland	1	2	3
Syria	1	0	1
Venezuela	0	1	1
Wales	4	5	9

American colonies. The Scots and Irish made their way to Texas by way of Tennessee (Heberling, 2009), while the French settled in the Texas town of Castroville. Proximity to the Mexican border is not reflected in the student population at Texas A&M University, and for the 72 participants in this study only seven (less than 10%) claimed any Mexican ancestry.

In addition to describing the diversity they expected in their future classrooms along with the diversity they discovered in their ancestry, students also used the term in other ways, some of which overlapped. Diverse was how they described their family (9) and their classmates (5). They used diversity when discussing culture (8) and they connected it to race (6), religion (2), and socioeconomic status (1) as well. They explained that everyone is diverse (5) and that they are diverse (2). They did not write diverse simply as a synonym for different, such as diverse hobbies or diverse restaurants.

Summary of the Final Paper

Students' final papers were written to record and reflect on their work on the family history project. To discover their thoughts and understanding of ancestry, culture, and diversity, I studied what and how they wrote about the three concepts.

When students were asked to write about family stories, they produced a great deal of information about their ancestors on many topics and from numerous sources. Their feelings about those stories varied as well. They were surprised to find a family connection to slavery and admitted the discovery made them uncomfortable.

Nevertheless, this link brought to life a piece of American history that was no longer just

part of a textbook for them. Students, in their reflections, also found personal history lessons from family stories and from research of their family trees that described the military service of their ancestors. They were amazed at the extent of their relatives' participation in the military and at the same time proud of those ancestors. Students were also proud and excited to find ancestors with connections to historical events. The nature and magnitude of the events and the extent of the ancestors' involvement were not as important to the students as their link to those relatives.

Participants with family stories about Native American ancestors eagerly searched their family trees for documentation of that association. Unfortunately, more often than not they were unable to verify the connection. They did not give up on having Native American ancestry, but expressed certainty that more research would prove the link. Students had similar reactions to family stories of famous ancestors when they could not substantiate the information. They were resistant to abandoning beliefs that they felt had been an important part of their family lore. For students who found famous ancestors while researching their family tree, the discovery was exciting and surprising, but did not cause the angst of family stories that lacked proper documentation.

Students gained much personal information about their ancestors through family stories telling of their relatives' occupations and describing the lives they led growing up. They found their ancestors had worked at many different types of jobs, some of which the students felt had influenced their own immediate family. There was also the possibility that understanding the type of work their ancestors did would help the participants relate

to the families of their future students who might be involved in similar occupations. Family stories that came primarily from grandparents and great grandparents and required little research described the everyday lives and special activities of the students' closest ancestors. The students heard stories of hardship and happiness: health issues, accidents, and deaths, along with heartwarming family interactions and proud family moments. They acknowledged the difficulty of their ancestors' lives and recognized that events from the past might still influence their own lives.

Participants addressed culture in their final papers after research into their family background had shown them the different cultures in their ancestry. This discovery led them to conclude that there are many different cultures in the world and that all people come from a variety of cultures. A quarter of the students related culture to location with the belief that different locations would have different cultures. Though in small numbers, students also connected culture to other differences, such as traditions and holidays, food, religion, and race. Twenty-two percent said they felt their cultural background had influenced how they live their lives and how they became the people they are today.

Students wrote about culture in their future classrooms with enthusiasm and a positive approach. They expected they would be teaching students of different cultures and planned for their classroom environment to be respectful, open-minded, inclusive, and engaging. They wanted students to learn about different cultures and hoped they would share information about their own cultures with their classmates. Eighteen of the

participants described their ideas for culture-related projects for their classes. Their aim was to make students comfortable as well as understanding and accepting of their peers who may be from different cultures or backgrounds.

When students discussed diversity in their final papers, they focused on the diversity of their future classrooms and the diversity of their ancestry. They envisioned classrooms where diversity would be treasured and differences in people celebrated. They would embrace the diversity of their students and provide them with a variety of multicultural experiences. They felt that understanding their own diversity would make them better teachers because it would help them to gain a better understand their students. As they discovered more about their ancestry, students began to see themselves as members of a diverse family with connections to other countries. They related the extent of their diversity to the variety of those countries. Students also had other ways to use diverse such as describing culture, race, religion, and classmates.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Brief Description of Project and Procedures

The aim of this dissertation was to detect any change in the understanding of diversity by preservice teachers after they completed a family history assignment. This was accomplished by examining two papers written by students in a Foundations of Education in a Multicultural Society course, specifically in sections of the course taught in the spring of 2013. I first inspected the students' autobiography papers which were written at the beginning of the semester and then studied their final papers written after they completed a genealogy project. I specifically looked at the students' use and understanding of the words ancestry, culture, and diversity which were the focus of my research questions. Diversity was the subject of the primary research question, while ancestry and culture were topics for secondary research questions which were to assist in answering the primary research question. Therefore, I addressed the research questions in the following order: research question two (secondary research question concerning ancestry), research question three (secondary research question related to culture), and research question one (primary research question about diversity).

Through content analysis, I found what the participants had written on the research topics, collecting the information by using spreadsheets and by searching their papers for specific words. I was able to identify changes in their views of diversity, ancestry, and culture when I compared how they addressed those topics in their two

papers. The three sections that follow describe the findings related to the research questions.

Research Question Two – Ancestry

What did students write about their ancestry in their autobiographical papers?

What did students write in their final papers about their ancestry after completing the genealogy project?

The small number of students who wrote about their ancestors in the autobiography papers made a connection between ancestry and location. They identified their ancestry by where their relatives had once lived and by the countries from which they had emigrated on their journey to the United States. To the students, their ancestry was their family origin.

In the final paper all of the students wrote about ancestors. The views and thoughts they expressed about their own ancestry were numerous and wide-ranging. In researching their family history for the genealogy project, they discovered that their family background was more complicated than they had previously thought.

Prompted by the assignment for the final paper, students described stories about their ancestors that they had heard from grandparents and great grandparents or that they had found through research. They began to understand the influence of their ancestry on their own lives and on their close family members. They discovered connections to history that changed what they had viewed as abstract historical events into a real part of

America's past that involved their ancestors. Many of the family stories became personal history lessons for the students.

In their autobiographies, the students who mentioned their ancestors, viewed them as relatives who lived many years ago in foreign countries and about whom they knew very little. The ancestors in their final papers were exciting people who had important connections, interesting jobs, and accomplishments that made the students proud.

Research Question Three - Culture

What did students write about culture in their autobiographical papers?

What did students write in their final papers about culture after completing the genealogy project?

When students wrote in their autobiographies about culture, more often they wrote about other people's culture rather than a culture they claimed for themselves. They described differences in other cultures, and the comparisons they made to their own situations at times revealed how they might view a culture of their own. They hinted at that culture in their descriptions of family traditions, holiday celebrations, and special food dishes.

While they were hesitant to clearly define their own culture, students readily discussed cultural experiences which they related most frequently to travel. Mission trips, school trips, and family vacations, whether to foreign countries or within the United States, exposed students to different cultures and gave them an opportunity to

interact with people of different races and nationalities as well as different cultures. To some students, cultural experiences also included encounters at their schools with students different from themselves.

They said their cultural experiences had taught them about other cultures and they admitted those experiences had caused them think more about a culture of their own. They felt they would establish better relationships with their future students and be more understanding and accepting of other cultures because of their cultural experiences.

In their final papers, however, students discussed culture in the context of their ancestry and the variety of cultures they had discovered in their family history during the genealogy project. A connection between location and culture was made by a quarter of the students, some of whom also expressed the idea that different places would have different cultures. They described the world as having many different cultures and all people as coming from varied cultures. Twenty-two percent of the students credited their cultural background with influencing the way they live their lives and how they developed into the people they are now.

Research Question One - Diversity

What did students write about diversity in their autobiographical papers, specifically diversity in schools and their educational experiences?

What did students write about diversity in their final papers after completing the genealogy project?

Students who wrote about diversity in their autobiography papers were writing

primarily about race. They described their schools and communities as diverse if they included several different races but referred to them as not diverse or lacking in diversity if the population was predominately Caucasian. In their final papers, students still made links from diversity to race, but their discussions of diversity were more focused on a relationship between diversity and their ancestry and they easily connected diversity to culture as well. They were surprised as they researched their family background to discover their ancestors had come from many countries, and they began to consider themselves as belonging to a diverse family.

Whether their definition of diversity referred only to race or included culture and ancestry as well, students wrote in both papers that they expected their future classes to be filled with diverse students. Diversity was important to the eight students who discussed in their autobiographies their future as educators. Among their ideas were helping students to accept the diversity of their peers and recognizing the importance of teachers being knowledgeable about diversity.

In their final papers, 19 students related diversity to their future classrooms, but with more enthusiasm and passion than was evident in comments from the autobiographies. They described classrooms of students who understand and treasure the diversity of their classmates and who value and celebrate the differences they see in people as they realize that all people are diverse. They wrote about the importance of teachers accepting and embracing their students' diversity as well as exploring and

encouraging diversity in the classroom. They felt that knowing about their own diversity will help them understand and relate to the students they teach.

Conclusions

In their autobiographies, students viewed their ancestors as relatives who lived many years ago in foreign countries and about whom they knew very little. The ancestors they described in their final papers were exciting people who had interesting jobs, important connections, and accomplishments the students reported on with pride. They began to realize the influence that their ancestors, even from many generations back, could have over their lives today.

When students wrote about culture in their autobiography papers, they focused more on the culture of other people than on a culture of their own. They described their cultural experiences through interactions with people who were different from themselves. In their final papers, their thoughts on culture expanded to include their own culture which they related to their ancestry and the many different cultures they found in researching their family background.

Over the course of the semester, the students' ideas about diversity changed from a simplistic connection to race or anything different from themselves into a complicated definition that included themselves. In the final papers they explained acquiring this expanded view of diversity as they researched their family trees and collected family stories that revealed their own background to be different from what they had known. As they realized the diversity in their own family history, they began to describe themselves

as having diverse family backgrounds and felt this would help them as teachers of students from many different backgrounds.

Significance of Study and Findings

The results of this study show benefits great enough that, given the opportunity, I would assign this project to my classes in the future and would recommend that a similar project be infused into all teacher education programs. The participants in the study completed the course with a better understanding of diversity and cultural awareness. They began the semester writing very little about their own culture and expressing a narrow view of diversity.

Culture belonged to other people, especially people different from themselves. As they researched their family tree and found different cultures in their ancestry, their view of culture expanded. When they realized the other participants in the study also came from many cultures, they began to see themselves as having a distinct culture of their own. Students acknowledging their own culture is an especially important outcome of the study because of the connection between people knowing their own cultural identity and their ability to understand other people's culture (Beyer, 2010; Norquay, 1998; Sleeter, 2008; Sleeter, 2011). In addition, those who address their own cultural identity are more culturally aware (Brown, 2010; Kernahan & Davis, 2007).

With respect to diversity, participants entered the course relating diversity primarily to race. To them, diverse schools, neighborhoods, and towns were populated

with people from different races. The diverse classes they would one day teach would be multiracial. As they researched their family history, they discovered their ancestors were from many locations and represented a variety of cultures. From this, their view of diversity expanded beyond race to include people of different cultures and from different locations, especially foreign countries. Diversity, then, became personal to the students and they felt they could claim a diverse family background. The students wrote in their final papers that learning of their own diversity would help them relate to students they would one day teach and whom they expect to have diverse backgrounds as well. Those who discussed their future classrooms, expressed their ideas and hopes with conviction and passion. They described interesting and creative plans for helping students to realize the positive aspects of diversity and to accept the diversity of their classmates. The enthusiastic and affirming manner with which those participants approached diversity attested to their move toward cultural awareness (Larke, 1992).

The discovery by students of the paths their ancestors took to the United States is another significant result of the study because it will help the participants to be understanding and accepting of future students who are immigrants. Important also are the stories about the occupations and life styles students collected about their ancestors as they worked on the genealogy project. This information will encourage them to be more open-minded to the family circumstances of their future students.

During the 14 weeks of the course, noteworthy changes were evident in the participants' attitudes toward and understanding of ancestry, culture, and diversity as

they first related those concepts to people different from themselves, then discovered their own connections, and finally began to realize their importance in a multicultural society. This transformation is directly related to the genealogy project which required the students to examine their ancestry and the culture and diversity of their own lives. “Self-examination is particularly important as a part of learning to teach students who are culturally different from oneself” (Sleeter, 2008, p. 114).

This study revealed other important results not directly considered by the research questions. They were found in the students’ stories of their ancestors. The details are reported below.

Students’ interest in their ancestry changed dramatically over the semester from showing very little curiosity about their ancestors to being knowledgeable and excited about those relatives. Fewer than 10% of the students had even mentioned ancestry at the beginning of the course. After they finished their genealogical project, they were much more aware of their family’s background. This is important because by knowing more about their own background, the students were able to see their family connections to historical events and famous people, to slavery and Native Americans. They found out about their ancestors’ occupations and military service, and they read stories of how their relatives lived. Many of the ancestors emerging from research provided students with links to past events they had previously known only in textbooks. History then became personal and interesting to them.

Students were especially proud of their ancestors who served in the military and

fought in many of the historic battles of the United States. They wrote that such historic events had more meaning to them because of the links they could make through their ancestors. The students who found connections to slaves also realized their ancestors had participated in a part of American history. Finally, almost all of the famous figures that students tried to prove they were related to were people the students had read about in their school history classes. These links are important because they gave the students a sense of personal connection to the history of the United States.

Recommendations for Further Study

As a result of this study I have several recommendations for further study, both in extension and expansion. First, connecting this study with different populations of students, both at the same university but in other colleges and other universities might verify the goodness of this instructional approach. Additionally, if the participants are preservice teachers from areas outside of Texas, then the genealogy project could successfully be applied to a larger geographical area. Likewise, finding the same outcomes for participants who are practicing teachers points to the beneficial use of the genealogy project in professional development for teachers. Second, a longitudinal study of the participants would be valuable in determining the genealogy project's lasting effect either in student teaching or in the first years of teaching.

The addition of an attitudinal measure might yield corroborating information about the value of the project. Although no attitudinal measure was part of this study, students indicated in their final papers that the creation of their family tree was a

valuable life lesson for them because of the discoveries they made about their family history.

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APPENDIX A

WEIGHTED VALUES OF ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment	Value
Autobiography	10%
Chapter Presentation	10%
Semester Project	30%
Midterm Exam	10%
Final Exam	10%
Participation, Attendance	30%
TOTAL	100%

The semester project was worth 30% of the students' grades. It was broken down as follows:

Final Paper - 15%

Family Tree - 5% (.GED file - 1% and sharing their Ancestry.com© tree with me 4%)

Interview Video - 5%

Learning Community Video - 5%

APPENDIX B

AUTOBIOGRAPHY PAPER ASSIGNMENT DETAILS

Due Thursday, February 7, 2013; 3-page limit

Objective: Students will share their cultural/social experiences through an autobiography. Everyone has something to share about cultural experiences. You are to write a three-page autobiography paper of your social and cultural experiences. In addition to your three pages, you must include a recent picture of yourself on the cover page.

Paper should include these five sections:

Introduction: Who are you?

Family information – family members, birth place, ethnic identification, cultural traditions, and travel experiences.

School experiences - elementary, secondary and college academic surroundings.

Social/cultural experiences which have impacted your life.

How your social and cultural experiences will influence your work/school environment.

Paper must be double-spaced and typed in 12 point font. Include your name on each numbered page. Please submit as an attachment on eLearning by Thursday, February 7, 2013. Do not exceed the 3-page limit.

APPENDIX C

FINAL PROJECT DETAILS

Spring 2013

Finding Your Roots

Part I: Faces of America

Please watch all four parts of the Henry Louis Gates, Jr., films titled “Faces of America,” which can be found on Media Matrix (<https://mediamatrix.tamu.edu/>). In these films, Dr. Gates traces the ancestry of well-known personalities and makes discoveries and connections that surprise even these people.

Once you have watched the films, answer questions about them that I will post on eLearning. Complete this assignment by March 17.

Part II: Your Ancestry

Introduction: The more you know about your family history, the better understanding you will have about multicultural education. When you study your own culture and how it may have developed or changed through the generations, you should also gain an appreciation of other cultures as they relate to your own past.

This assignment will help you become familiar with the experiences of various ethnic groups, explore the variety of views on cultural diversity in the United States, and develop culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies.

Description of assignment: For this assignment, you have already purchased a membership to Ancestry.com for a minimum of three months. This Web site has the world’s largest collection of information used by people researching their ancestors, and it provides ways to store and display the data in family trees.

Your first and probably best sources of information for your own family tree are the closest members of your family - parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles. Ask them about themselves and about other relatives to discover such information as the location and year of births and deaths, marriages, employment, education, and military affiliation. Also find out if they know of any family stories they can tell you. Such stories might describe relatives who had unusual jobs or mysterious deaths or accidents, heroes, villains, famous people, or just ordinary people with interesting tales to tell.

For the next several weeks, I am meeting with all students to discuss their family trees and check for overall accuracy of direction. I will answer your questions, help you solve problems, and, hopefully, give you some pointers as well.

When you have completed your research, you will produce a paper and a video of your ancestry, and you will have all of your relatives arranged in a family tree, and you will submit a second video of an interview with a member of your family.

Your family tree is generated by Ancestry's genealogy software as you proceed with your research and add more ancestors. This is also where all of your research data is stored and linked to your various relatives. Such data might include census reports, birth and death certificates, military records, and much more. You will turn in your tree through Ancestry by sharing it with me, as well as, submitting a .GEDCOM file. (A .GEDCOM file will save all your research so you can have a copy of your tree in the future.)

Your paper will include an overview of your tree, a brief summary of any family stories, a description of difficulties you may have encountered in your research, the most surprising information you uncovered, and what influence this project has had on how you will make an inclusive multicultural classroom. It will be limited to five pages.

The learning community video will be produced by students working collaboratively in the same learning communities that were formed for the chapter presentations. Four-person groups will be allotted eight minutes for their video, while groups with five members will have 10 minutes. Members will meet to discuss their research and findings in depth before deciding what information to include in the video in order to make it interesting and informative. This video should be one continuous, coherent film, not a film with a section for each member. You can use any technology you would like, but this should be a group decision. Working well as a group is very important in this part of the assignment. Originality is appreciated as well.

The interview videos will be produced individually by each student in the learning community. This is the final part of your semester project to discover your ancestry. It will be a 5-minute video of an interview with any one of your relatives. The objective here is to draw out of this relative a more personal description of your family. I have a very long list of interview questions from which you may choose the ones you like for this project. Be prepared to show this interview to the class in the same session that your learning community presents its semester project. Learning community 8 will need to present its videos before the scheduled syllabus date.

APPENDIX D

STUDENTS' PRE-PROJECT THOUGHTS

In the first lines of their final papers, about a quarter of the students volunteered what they had thought of the assignment to research their family tree when it was first given. Six students specifically noted that they had been excited about the project. One looked at it as an expedition to uncover her family's past, while another similarly said it was his chance to delve into his family history. An 18-year-old sophomore in the late afternoon class showed his excitement over the assignment by heading straight home after class, going online with Ancestry.com[©], and starting to examine his roots. He was especially hoping to find royalty among his ancestors. Of the two students who admitted to being less than enthusiastic after hearing of the assignment, one said she simply did not think she would like the project, and the other was unconcerned about finding out about her relatives because she thought she already had all the information about them.

Although not unenthusiastic about the project, six other students also indicated they were already well informed about their family background. One said her family is from Germany, but she had no details. Another was sure her research would show most of her family being from Texas. Others claimed to know family history with family origins. A student whose family considered family history to be important had been well exposed to her ancestry and lineage.

Ten students wrote in their papers that they knew very little if anything about the

history of their family. Two from that group admitted to never thinking much about the topic. Family history was not something one had ever paid much attention to, and the other could not recall her parents or grandparents discussing ancestors with her. Most of the remaining eight students who wrote that they were lacking in knowledge of their history still felt they had some idea about their heritage. However, there was one student who stated that there are many people around who don't know anything about their own family's background or where they themselves came from. She then added that she is in that group.

Other students who commented on the project assignment said they had always been curious about their ancestors but never had time for the research, or they were interested in the accuracy and extent of information available from the online source Ancestry.com. Some knew rumors or family stories and wanted to verify the information. Several were not sure what to expect of this project or what they would find. And one student decided the assignment was a wake-up call for her to record her family's history because she had only one grandparent still alive.

APPENDIX E

EXTENT OF RESEARCH

Students described the extent of their research on their family trees in terms of how far back they were able to find records of their ancestors. Thirty-two students wrote the number of great grandparents they were able to follow, and 41 counted generations back that they were able to trace their family lineage. Twenty-eight students reported the earliest year or the century in which they were able to find their ancestors.

One student traced her ancestry to 1000 and another to 1200. Three students traced their ancestry back to the 14th century while another found her earliest relative in the 15th century. Thereafter, in the more recent centuries, more students came to the end of their research. Four students named the 16th century for their earliest ancestor, while eight said the 17th century was as far back as they could trace relatives. Four students ended their research with findings in the 18th century and six could not get further than the 19th century.

Reporting on their earliest ancestors in terms of generations, a student in the first class claimed ancestors 22 generations back, while two classmates each listed an ancestor 20 generations back. Other students traced their earliest ancestors to the 3rd through 17th generation, with the most in the 5th generation (10) and 9th generation (6).

The 22nd great grandparent of a student in the first class was the earliest found

using that method of reporting, while the next closest discovered was a 19th great grandparent by a student in the second class.

APPENDIX F

DIFFICULTIES THE STUDENTS ENCOUNTERED

The students were asked to address in their final paper what difficulties they encountered while working on their family tree. Many of the problems were beyond the control of the course. In both classes several students said that their relative was dead and that would have been the best source of information. A total of 21 students reflected that the dead relative was a cause of trouble. Another 10 described relatives that could not remember the information that the student needed. Nine students explained the best source of information was located in another country, either being records or family members. Another seven explained the relative they needed to talk to was not close to the family.

Another source of difficulty for the students was their ancestors' names. The most common complaint was the use of the same name within a family. This caused the students confusion and frustration. Similar to names reused within a family was the complaint of names that were so common it was difficult to determine if the person was their relative or another person not related to them with the same name. The students also had trouble with the spelling of the names of their ancestors, which had more variables in the spellings than what the students were accustomed to. Some students had difficulties locating their relative's maiden names, which made tracing past that relative difficult if not impossible.

The students noted additional areas that caused them trouble. For example, the

census lists the head of household, spouse, and children. However, there is frequently no indication if these are children from the current marriage or a previous one. Students also commented on how confusing the information became when siblings in one family married siblings in a different family. This made their relative related in two ways: a husband's wife's sister is the same person as his brother's wife.

There were also problems with sorting out information. They found the handwriting difficult to read or conflicts in birth dates. In addition, students explained that they had overzealous relatives that would access their trees, and in an attempt to help, erased or corrected information the students had documented. One student even explained that her grandfather was so proud of his pure German family that he had edited the family tree to ensure this. After painstaking research, she learned that many of her relatives were not German and noted her family had non-German cultural influences. Her grandfather's edits to the tree caused her some difficulty, but she eventually was able to determine her ancestors' correct nationalities. The students were very appreciative of their relatives' assistance with this project and only a very small number indicated that their relatives caused them trouble. Many of the students remarked that their relatives provided them with critical help when they were stuck, family trees that had already been put together, and books about their ancestors.