

Synthesis Paper: EDU 367

Halli J. Ackerman

University of Mary

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When I think of cultural diversity, my mind immediately goes to race and religion. Because I come from Bismarck, North Dakota, all I grew up with were people just like me, white. Religion has always played a huge role in my life, also, which is why I believe those are the two-main aspect that come to mind when I think about this topic. Upon further inspection, cultural diversity is concerned with the multitude of cultures, races, ethnicities, religions, genders, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic statuses present in a community, and I have always felt that my childhood lacked in experiences that allowed to experience this diversity. In writing this autobiography, however, I realized there were many experiences that exposed me to cultural diversity that helped shape my knowledge of diversity and human relations, even if I did not have as many opportunities as others. In this paper, I intend to reexamine this autobiography I wrote at the beginning of the semester that is based on the experiences I had in elementary school, middle school, high school, and university that have contributed to my understanding of cultural diversity and the overall way I view and interact with others, as well as give myself some advice based on my understanding of Sonia Nieto's (2013) writing.

Elementary School

Rewind to 15 years ago when I first began school at Grimsrud Elementary School in Bismarck, North Dakota. From kindergarten through 6th grade, the only ethnicities present in the school were other white people like me and a few Native American students, yet at that age, I could not tell the difference between the two cultures. In my mind, everybody was like me, everybody understood me, and everybody came from the same type of situation or household as me. This was very egocentric, I know, but that is just how kids think. The more I reflect on this viewpoint as a child, the more I realize that it is a teacher's job to start introducing children to the

differences the exist among people. Parents and teachers can start educating their kids on this subject by being transparent about reality, though it may be harsh. As Treuer says, “Communication requires a safe space for discourse, an opportunity for genuine connection, and authentic, reliable information,” and I truly believe this is the only way to turn students into informed citizens, even starting in elementary school (2012, p. 5). I wish I would have been more knowledgeable about the diversity around me, and I truly hope to be both a parent and teacher that starts this important conversation.

It was not until I started getting invited to birthday parties and sleepovers in the second grade that I realized not everyone came from the same situation or household. The first incident that sparked this realization was when I went to my best friend’s house for a playdate and was very confused upon arrival. Her house was at least four times the size of mine, it was on the river, it had more than one bathroom, she had her own bedroom, and there was a playroom just for her. I was shocked! How could she and I look so similar but be so different? This is an important idea for me to remember as I develop my own classroom and relationships with students, we may have the same color of skin but immense differences do exist. Nieto recognizes this concept heavily in her book, especially in a quote that says, “The children in our classrooms and schools, regardless of how similar they may look on the outside, are diverse in ways that may not be apparent—social class, ability, family structure, sexual orientation, the language spoken at home, among others,” some of these elements go unnoticed as being major components of diversity in the classroom (2013, p. 139). I remember asking my mom about this and she explained to me that different people make different amounts of money based on what job they have, but a bigger house and more money does not equate to more happiness. I was always raised to be grateful for what I have regardless of how much or little it is, for I am rich in

faith and family. The magnitude of this statement did not strike me until my best friend came to me crying on the playground one day because she just found out her parents were getting a divorce. My parents have been happily married for 24 years now, and I feel immensely blessed. Again, this is another way that diversity exists in society, those whose parents are divorced. In a nut shell, this was my first experience with socioeconomic diversity.

Along with the experiences that led me to understand socioeconomic diversity on a basic level, I also experienced what I consider to be my first encounter with racial diversity as a 4th grader. A new family had just moved into the house next to us, and I was so excited because I heard there would be more kids in the neighborhood. The family was from Haiti. My siblings and I instantly became best friends with the kids, and we would stay out late into the night riding our bikes and laughing. We spent so much time together, in fact, that I began to notice differences in the lives they led that was very intriguing to me. They were always genuinely friendly and kind, they commuted by bike to almost everywhere they went, and they were the hardest workers I had ever seen. The mom and dad both held two or three jobs at any given moment. I remember the poor relationship that many people had with the mom and dad because they spoke poor English. The school nearly wrote off communication with the parents all together because it was too challenging.

Because of this friendship, I see the importance of teacher-parent relationships, and when I am a teacher, I hope to do everything in my power to work with all parents, not just the ones that speak English, to promote the success of the student. Nieto interviews a teacher who does a great job of working with families of diverse backgrounds, and she says, “Recognizing the importance of reaching out to families, Roger builds relationships with them by meeting them where they feel comfortable” (2013, p. 45). I love the idea of meeting families where they feel

comfortable, whether that means speaking the same language or not, for it is a necessity. It upsets me to think that my friends' education suffered because of the limited communication between the classroom and home. If I were a classroom teacher in this situation, I would be inspired by Nieto's quote that says, "...thriving teachers recognize that all students, including students of diverse backgrounds, have assets that they bring with them to school, and they build on those assets," and I would do my best to identify the strengths and talents in these students, especially those that reflect their culture (2013, p. xv).

When this friendship formed, I began to recognize people from different races around town, and I believe that my friendship with them made me more comfortable around people of different races. I still keep in contact with this family today, and I am grateful to have had them as neighbors. This relationship significantly and positively impacted my views on diversity. Overall, my culturally diverse experiences were limited in elementary school, but those experiences I had were valuable nonetheless.

Middle School

As I transitioned from elementary to Horizon Middle School, I somehow knew that I would be facing more diversity. The summer prior to my first year of middle school was a huge culturally-diverse experience. My family went on our first vacation to Las Vegas, Nevada. I had never experienced such a wide variety of people in my life. There is one moment that sticks out to me the most, for I have never felt this before. I was in a knick-knack store on Fremont Street when I looked around me and realized that I was the only white person in the store. Everybody in the store was Asian, and I felt so out of place. I did not know the language they were speaking, I could not communicate with them in any way, and I felt alone. Though I initially panicked

because I was clearly separated from my parents, I reflected on that experience afterwards. That must be a snapshot of what it can feel like at times to be a minority.

Now, I think of the knowledge I have gained in teaching students of diverse backgrounds, and I realize the loneliness and exclusion that students' whose first language is not English must feel when their teacher does not make an effort to communicate with them or get to know them fully because of the language barrier. This is an injustice to the student. This quote says it all, saying, "So, if you don't know who your students are, you really cannot be an effective teacher of those students because there are no generic students. They are students with particular histories, particular biographies, particular experiences that we need to understand, in order to be effective with them," and I absolutely refuse to be an ineffective teacher just because a student does not speak English (K-State College of Education, 2015). If I need to learn a little of the language my students speak, I will do that if it means I can connect to them and help them succeed. That vacation was the first time I was immersed in a town that was oozing with amazing diversity, and I believe that the diversity is partially why I look back on the vacation in such fond light. I met many amazing people on that trip, and, again, it added to my thoughts on cultural diversity and human relations.

Once middle school actually began, I was hit with a terrible illness that was completely unexpected. I suffered with Celiac Disease which left me extremely ill for about four years, my entire middle-school experience plus one year of high school. I was missing approximately three days of school a week, if not more, and at time I felt like I was dying. When I did make it to school, I was the one who felt out of place. My teachers judged me for being absent, the school threatened that I might not go on to high school, some teachers and students bullied me or poked fun at my sickness, and I was not forming friendships due to the absences and the crippling

anxiety that accompanied it. During this time, I lost my first job just three months after I got it because I was too sick to work. As one might expect, I do not look back fondly on my middle-school years, for I try not to look back on them at all. Because I practically had to homeschool myself during my illness, I paid no attention to those around me at school. Everything I did during those years was just to make it to the next day. Make it to the next assignment. Make it through the next flare-up. This tainted any exposure to the cultural diversity that I would have experienced during those years because I was never there, and quite frankly, I was too depressed to acknowledge anything existed except me and my poor health.

As I have witnessed firsthand, it can be easy for teachers to disassociate themselves from the struggles of their students, maybe because it is easier than taking the baggage home with them or maybe its laziness to sympathize or show compassion. Either way, teachers should remember this powerful quote that says, “I could be reminded by all of you in your own personal and brave struggles, that we must root our classroom theory in reality, that we will forward and forever commit to recognizing the potential and human spirit in every student and that we will always appreciate the dreamers, the light seekers, and the activists, because in them, we see ourselves,” and maybe that will make all the difference with our students (HarvardEducation, 2017). There were teachers who really did their best to work with me, but it took time. It took time they did not have but time they prioritized. What did I do to deserve this attention? I think these teachers recognized my potential, and they did their best to help me recognize it too. After all, “To educate, requires Galileo like patience. Today, when I look my students in the eyes, all I see is constellations. If you take the time to connect the dots, you can plot the true shape of their genius, shining in their darkest hour,” and this is a lesson I will make sure to not forget. (HarvardEducation, 2016). Many people do not recognize the diversity that exists in the health of

others that cannot be seen, and I intend to be the teacher who acknowledges this and works, patiently, with students to overcome it.

High School

As middle school came to a close, I viewed Century High School as a fresh start. Slowly but surely my body was healing, and I wanted to experience all high school had to offer. I jumped right into clubs such as National Honor Society, Sources of Strength, and was already involved in school choir and community choir. The volunteer hours required for National Honor Society exposed me to lots of diversity present in the Bismarck-Mandan area. I volunteered at Ministry on the Margins a few different times which was a wonderful experience. Here, there were people of all different races, religions, and socioeconomic statuses, and each person had an interesting story to share. Sources of Strength is a club meant to foster community and inclusion in schools. Many students of different sexual orientations were involved in this club because it was a great outlet for them to be accepted and understood. This was an area of diversity that I did not have any experience with until high school, but I am very fortunate to know more about these people as the diversity continues to grow in those with different sexual orientations.

In addition to this exposure, high school was my first experience interacting with many Native American students. I wish I had gotten to know them better, but I think the stereotypes I carried during these years, ashamedly, hindered my motivation to do so. I believe that Treuer got it right when he said, “But Indians could be terrifying to members of the white community, and when presented with angry looks and few opportunities to safely learn about their neighbors and the first people of the land, they usually just stuck to their imaginings,” for this is exactly the experience I had growing up (2012, p. 1). I cannot blame my community entirely for the stereotypes I carried for so long, but I wish there were more opportunities then and now that

allow for a better understanding of Native Americans rather than just the Powwow each year. We would come to the Powwow each year in elementary school, yet still, “Indians were imagined, not understood,” and most of us thought that all Native Americans did was dance and make shouting noises (Treuer, 2012, p. 3). I am really excited to carry the knowledge I do now about Native Americans, for I know this will help me be a better teacher. Choir turned out to be an excellent way for me to meet a variety of people, for I was fortunate enough to be accepted into many honor choirs across the country. Many of the people I met at these choral events were very diverse, and I treasure those friendships that I still have today. Overall, my involvement in clubs greatly impacted my views on cultural diversity and helped me to obtain genuine human relations.

By senior year, I knew almost everyone in my high school class on a personal level. I was fortunate to make friends with many of the students in the special education classrooms as well, and this has strongly influenced my decision to double major in elementary and special education. I would consider high school to be the height of my culturally-diverse experiences, as one of my very best friends was from Mexico, I was constantly connecting with those who were very different from me, and I was getting out into the community as much as possible. I loved senior year the most because I had teachers who encouraged me greatly to participate in the community, and someday, change the world for the better.

As a future teacher, I am excited by the quote that says, “For others, thriving is helping students become critical learners who can make a difference in the world,” for I cannot wait to thrive by exposing my students to something that is greater than themselves, servant leadership and the community (Nieto, 2013, p. 151). Collectively, I believe all these experiences led me to

be selected as the class of 2016's homecoming princess, as well as vice president of my school choir. Celiac disease is something that I struggle with daily, but I was blessed to be mostly healthy throughout my high school years. This allowed me to build amazing friendships, take great classes, apply for colleges, be a valedictorian, and many more amazing things. High school greatly shaped me into the person I am today, regarding cultural diversity and all other aspects, and I like that person a lot.

University

At the end of high school, I felt so fulfilled that I knew I was ready to embark on the college adventure. I chose the University of Mary partially because my dad works here, and also, I chose it because I knew it would allow me to grow in my spiritual identity. My first inclination was to become an occupational therapist, but after I got a job teaching preschool two years ago, I knew my calling was to teach. Luckily, the University of Mary has one of the best private education programs in the country, and I have loved it all the while. At the university itself, I feel like it is both more and less culturally diverse than other stages of my life.

The university has been more culturally diverse in the way that people come here from all over the place. It is less culturally diverse in the way that the majority of people at the school are white, Catholic, and female. Interestingly, though, the first week of classes I was paired up to interview a student from Sweden who is an atheist. This was totally unexpected because I just could not believe that an atheist would consider coming to a Catholic school. After talking to him, though, it was clear that there are more students that I thought at the University of Mary who are not Catholic. Overall, that interview is the most impactful experience I have had when it comes to religious diversity. It sparked an interest in me to learn more about other religions, and I hope to continue that through my time at the university.

Aside from religious diversity, however, I have experienced a lot of types of diversity by working in the AVID program through Bismarck Public Schools. AVID is a class for students in middle and high school who have some special circumstance that might make them more likely not to pursue higher education. The teachers that are selected to run the AVID program are hand-picked by the district because of the attributes they show in the classroom, and this is important because of the diverse population they are required to work with. As I reflect on this autobiography, I recognize the open-mindedness that is necessary for these teachers to have as they go into the classroom, for there I would consider the interactions they have with their students to be a love that many teachers do not possess. Nieto explains this importance when she says, “Just as important, loving one’s students is not letting preconceived notions about students get in the way of teaching. These preconceptions—whether based on students’ race, language, accent, social status, ability, or other differences; the advice or warnings of other teachers; or a student’s cumulative record can become self-fulfilling prophecies,” and this is crucial for me to remember regardless of the population I am working with (2013, p. 127). I cannot hold preconceived notions that may harm my students’ success.

Making the AVID program so unique, is the fact that many of the students in the AVID program come from single-parent homes, have an incarcerated parent, receive free or reduced lunch, are first-generation college goers, or are a minority. This program truly embodies the quote that says, “Courage can be demonstrated in everyday interactions as well as in one’s very philosophy of teaching, a philosophy that might contradict conventional wisdom, “the way things are done,” and I believe this is the case because of the unique attention and dedication that is given to this diverse and greatly disadvantaged population (Nieto, 2013, p. 133). I have been involved in this program for two years and I love it. This has increased my empathy and

understanding towards students of diverse backgrounds, and I find myself becoming friends with many of them.

Aside from this major culturally diverse event, I entered into a relationship with an amazing boy from Mexico freshman year. We have been together for close to a year, and it has been life changing for many reasons. For one thing, I always envisioned the way my life would be when I got to the point where I would be in a committed relationship. However, that mental image was always with another person just like me, someone who is white, Catholic, and probably from North Dakota. This gives some insight into the lack of cultural diversity that I grew up with. Now, I am in a committed relationship with someone who is Mexican and Evangelical. I feel blessed to get to spend time with his family on holidays and occasions that have shown me the beauty that is Mexican culture. It is also fun to show him the beauty that is in my German, Scandinavian, French, Irish, and Norwegian culture. I have never had the opportunity to show anyone else my culture, for everyone around me has always had the same culture as me.

Looking back on this paper, I recognize how important it is for both me and my boyfriend not to be labeled as simply “white” or “Hispanic”, but rather, if we are going to be acknowledged by race or heritage, we would like to be addressed by the exact places we come from because they are uniquely beautiful. I can connect this to Treuer’s quote that says, “As much as possible, we should all use the tribal terms of self-reference in writing about each tribe: they are authentic and loaded with empowered meaning,” and I wish to remember this when working with Native American and all diverse students (2012, p. 8). This relationship has really changed the way I view people from diverse backgrounds. With the recent news about building a wall at the Mexican border, sending DREAMERS back to Mexico, and the overall disrespectful talk about

Mexicans and many other races, I have a much more personal connection to the people who will be affected by those decisions, and this encourages me to become more politically educated as well. People fail to recognize the positive influence Mexican immigrants have had on this country, as well as immigrants from elsewhere, and this is demonstrated in the quote that says, “Immigrants and others whose native language is one other than English have influenced every area of life in our nation from our dietary preferences to the kinds of small businesses found in our cities and towns to voting patterns in local and national elections” (Nieto, 2013, p. 77). This is so important for all people to remember before passing harsh judgements.

Knowing my boyfriend and his family has helped me to grow as a person, and they inspire me to take the time to learn about the cultures of others. As I am writing this synthesis paper, I am in the process of learning Spanish. Spanish is so important to my boyfriend and his family, and I want to show the reverence I have towards their native language by trying to learn it as well. As Nieto says, “Our society has undergone extraordinary changes in the past several decades, none more dramatic than the enormous increase in the diversity of our population,” and I hope that learning Spanish will help me accommodate the future students I have who are Spanish-speakers (2013, p. xiii). Overall, I am excited to see our relationship grow as we continue to participate in each other’s cultures and traditions, and as we continue to learn about each other’s faith. God has truly blessed me.

My university years have brought even greater exposure to diversity as I have just completed the diversity practicum experience. I am thrilled to say that my practicum hours were fulfilled through the AVID program at Wachter Middle School and observations at Jeannette Myhre elementary school, and both places will have a place in my heart forever. Wachter Middle School is immensely diverse, and I would say that 50% or less of the AVID classes were white

students. The rest of the students were either Native American, Hispanic, or African American. I could tell the lack of paternal guidance in some of the male students in the AVID classes. One student has continued to bring me down with harsh words and mean comments since day one, yet I continue to show compassion towards him. I do not know what he is going through, what he has seen, or who his role models are, and I cannot judge him. I realize how exhausting, though, it can be to teach students of this demeanor, and I know I will encounter many like him in my profession. Nieto says it best when she says, "Teaching can take a toll on teachers. Not just a job, not even just a profession, teaching is a personal and emotional work, sometimes life-changing and life-saving and always consequential," and this is both terrifying and exciting (2013, p. 149). I empathize with many of the students in the AVID program who struggle with mental illness as I do. The stories they have told me about the trauma they have experienced or deal with on a daily basis makes me realize the impact I can have on students while they are at school. To be able to save lives is not something every professional can say.

At Jeannette Myhre, I was exposed to the most diverse population I have ever seen, and it was an absolutely wonderful experience. The lady I worked with has made it her mission to not only correct the behavioral problems of these students, but to show them the utmost respect in the process, and the students react wonderfully to her. She demonstrates exactly what this quote says, "She tries never to humiliate her students if they misbehave or threaten to call home or to call them out if they haven't done their homework, knowing that their 'walls will go up' immediately," and she has amazing results because of it (Nieto, 2013, p. 39). There was an incredible

What I respect the most about Jeannette Myhre teachers and staff, is that they really are trying their best to get to know the students on a deeper level. Because there is a high incidence

of behavioral problems at the school, the environment is more challenging and requires a greater focus on the “goodness” in each child. This requires a significant amount of knowledge about diversity on the teacher’s part, for some actions may be culturally motivated rather than malicious. I believe the school has embraced the multi-cultural perspective, as illustrated in this quote that says, “... teaching with a multi-cultural perspective is about opening minds rather than closing them. It’s about going beyond one way of looking at things, and looking at things with multiple perspectives,” and I feel this was an experience that many of my peers have not been able to have (K-State College of Education, 2015). Being immersed in an EL, special education, and wholly diverse school culture has motivated me to find a job in a diverse school myself. I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work in these diverse environments, and I cannot wait to continue to observe and volunteer at these locations.

Conclusion

As I look back on my experiences from elementary school, middle school, high school, and university, I can see the different ways in which my ideas on cultural diversity have been formed. In elementary school, my encounters with some wealthier friends was a big turning point for me in the way I viewed other kids. My wonderful neighbors also played a big role in showing me how even though people look different we are all the same inside. I greatly appreciate the culture they shared with me and the friendship we have today. In middle school, I am grateful that I had the opportunity to travel to an area that is filled with diversity and tremendous fun. I experienced personal diversity in my own illness that I still face today, but it has made me recognize that there are many types of diversity that are not necessarily visible to the naked eye. High school was an amazing experience, and the clubs I was involved in was a great way for me to be surrounded by more diversity. Those years allowed me to especially spend time with people

of different sexual orientations which I had not experienced elsewhere. This just added to the understanding that I was gaining about other forms of diversity.

At the University of Mary, I am meeting people of different religions, or of no religion, and this is my first real experience with religious diversity. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with an immensely diverse group of students in the AVID program, and I see myself growing as a person each time I connect with them. To top it all off, a major highlight of my college experience was entering into a relationship with a boy who is from Mexico and is Evangelical and observing at Jeannette Myhre elementary school, and the culture I have experienced because of this is unprecedented. This collection of experiences is invaluable when it comes to the type of teacher I will be and how I will address cultural diversity.

Learn About Yourself

It is clear that I need to know myself so I can understand how I am portrayed to my students. I cannot expect to get to know my students better and have strong relationships with them if I do not know myself well enough. It was interesting to see how often Nieto referring to knowing oneself throughout her book, as well as Parker Palmer. A quote that struck me is the one that says, ““The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul,” and I could not agree more with this statement (Palmer, 2007, p. 1). As a preschool teacher, I realize the way that I influence the actions of my students. If I show up to work in a less than happy mood, it is very likely that my room will not operate the way that I wish it would, and the kids will feed off the negative energy that I bring. I always try my best to show up with a positive attitude each day for this very reason, but I know it will be more challenging when I am working in my own classroom fulltime in the future.

During these next few years leading up to my teaching career, I plan to do my best to get to know myself better. Because I have always had anxiety, it is difficult for me to sometimes face the flaws that I have, for it is easier if I just avoid them. After doing the assigned reading for this class, I realized how pertinent it is not only to me but also to my students that I do not shy away from who I really am, and this is illustrated in the quote that says, “Sometimes the hardest work we can do as human beings is precisely this: to confront ourselves unflinchingly and honestly in order to improve” (Nieto, 2013, p. 150). I know that it will be challenging for me to emphasize with many of the students I have because we will be so different, especially those from diverse backgrounds. As a result of reexamining my autobiography, though, I know that I can still show these students compassion, and I believe this will be easier through self-reflection and constant transparency in the classroom. Because I am a white female, I resonate with this quote that says, “...but for teachers who are different from the majority of their students in race, ethnicity, language, social class, and/or other ways (and in any combination), it is vital that they spend time thinking about who they are and how their identities, experiences, values, and biases can help or hinder their work with students,” for I will try my best to, despite our differences, rejoice in my own identity while valuing theirs (Nieto, 2013, p. 150). As nervous as I am to continue learning about myself, I am excited because it means I will continue to grow as a teacher.

Learn About Your Students

Learning about myself will in turn help me to learn more about my students. Asking students about themselves, respecting them, and inquiring about their interests and talents are great ways for me to reach out and form those strong teacher-student bonds. If I have learned nothing else from this course, it is that I really can find common ground between myself and my students, no matter how diverse. Though we may not be going through the same things in life,

there are still components of my identity and theirs that are similar, and these are great building blocks for a stronger relationship. Possibly the most important quote I have read from this course, is the one that says, “Nevertheless, all teachers can find joy in teaching students of diverse backgrounds. It takes a humility, willingness to learn, an openness to acknowledging and valuing the tremendous assets of students of diverse backgrounds, and a commitment to public education,” and I would advise myself to participate to my full capacity in all of these areas as it is all part of getting to know my students (Nieto, 2013, p. xiv). I plan to convey to my students the genuine interest I take in the person they are, as well as their families. I want to know about their quirks, their cultures, the way they think and why they do the way they do, and I want to find the tremendous assets that accompany each child.

As a future teacher, it will be essential for me to experience the community in which my students are coming from. I may live in the exact same place as them without every seeing the community or neighborhood that my students see. For me, this will mean participating in a variety of events out in the community, especially those culturally diverse events that affect my students or reflect the students’ identity in some way or another. Even easier, I will make it a point to have at least one real conversation with each student a day. I found this quote quite sad, that reads, “I am still amazed when I discover that some teachers know very little about the communities in which they teach. They leave promptly at the end of the school day, never venturing beyond the school walls. They know almost nothing about their students’ families, and even less about the neighborhood in which the school is located...they thus ignore the opportunity to explore what is almost certainly a vibrant community with remarkable resources” (Nieto, 2013, p. 152). I know that this is a common action for many teachers, and I can understand why. Teaching is a very draining profession, and often, it feels like a burden to have

to venture out of one's home after the workday or work week. However, I hope to be the teacher that pushes myself to try harder, to work harder, and to connect harder for and with my students. They deserve better than a teacher who knows what they look like and roughly where they are at academically. They deserve to be understood like the precious individual's they are.

Cultivating Allies

Because it is impossible for one person to know everything there is to know about students from diverse backgrounds, it is important for me to form allies so I can gain insight from other teachers, professionals, and administrators who have been through similar situations. Getting tips, advice, and hearing stories from other teachers is something that I will always be open to, for I am passionate about continuing to learn and grow as a person. Reexamining this autobiography, I realize the true necessity of collaboration with others. When working on the Diversity Capstone Project for the heritage center, I needed to utilize all members of my team for a variety of different tasks, each catered to our own skill sets. Being able to work with pre-service teachers of different majors, I was able to recognize the immense talent that exists in others who are passionate about teaching. When I would be frustrated by something, someone else would talk me through it or decide to take over that section if they were more comfortable with it. In addition, it was such a blessing being able to brainstorm with them, as well as share struggles from the experience.

At the end of the day, I realize the strong friendships I have grown with all the teachers I have worked with in this class as well as out. I know me or my students could not be nearly as successful without them. In support of this idea, Nieto's quote that says, "Almost all the teachers spoke about the importance of developing relationships with other teachers. Doing so not only helped them expand their horizons by learning from their peers but also allowed them to share

their expertise with others” (Nieto, 2013, p. 152). It really is such a great feeling being able to help other teachers succeed because of your own expertise. Even something as simple as sharing lesson plans is so cool because it allows one to see the way other teachers think and how one could better their own classroom because of those ideas. I hope to have an open-door policy when it comes to collaboration with other teachers. Working hard to maintain those coworker relationships will be one of my main goals when first starting out as a teacher because I know I will need that support system to survive the first few years of teaching. Overall, I am very excited to continue to grow relationships with colleagues and peers, and I hope I can be as much service to them as they have been to me.

Have a Life

Part of growing as a person means that I need to have a life outside of the classroom. I need an escape from the rough days and a place where I can associate with people who are over the age of 11. Having interests and hobbies are part of growing as a person, and these things will help prevent burnout and allow me to interject stories from my outside life into the classroom. Teaching is definitely a part of my identity, but it is not solely my identity. There are many other things I do that make me feel glad to be alive and excited to wake up in the morning. Some things that I hope to do, even when I am a teacher, is continuing to participate in music, go to local arts events, spend time outdoors, travel, go to Tuesday night half-price movies, spend time with my friends and family, and spend time alone. As I get to know myself more and more, I realize the importance of dedicating time to myself and the good it does for my students. As Nieto explains, “The last thing teachers should do is focus solely on teaching: in the end, they will inevitably become disheartened, frustrated, or angry. They may burn out and leave the profession, as so many have in the past couple of decades,” and this is exactly what I do not want

to happen to me. I will continue to try my hardest to be the best teacher I can be while also cultivating the best Halli that I can be, an individual who likes adventure.

Overall, reexamining my autobiography has been a great service to me. I realize how much I have learned in such a short amount of time. The amazing reading materials that were required for this course truly enhanced my experience in this class, and it provided me with invaluable information that I will carry with me forever. This collection of experiences, pieces of advice to myself, and further information I have gained from this class will help me grow in my understanding of cultural diversity in my classroom and in my community. I want to stand apart from those in ignorance and be known as a teacher who welcomes all.

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