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Maria Gutierrez Chavez  
*California State University, Monterey Bay*

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Ethnic Identity Development in K-12 Classrooms

Maria Gutierrez Chavez

California State University Monterey Bay

### Abstract

Ethnic identity, or the set of self-ideas one has about one's own ethnic group membership, is not seen as an area of development in K-12 classrooms, therefore, the researcher set to uncover benefits of aiding this development. Participants for the Capstone Project included 25 fifth-grade students in a public elementary classroom located on California's Central Coast. The researcher found evidence suggesting students' self-esteem is related to one's ethnic backgrounds, as well as finding that students really enjoy learning about their own cultures and identities. The researcher believes this research is imperative in relation to her own personal career goals as a future educator in the United States public education system. As a future educator, the researcher understands the need for a higher understanding of ethnic identity, most importantly because diversity is a growing facet in this country that can be embraced rather than rejected.

*Keywords:* Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem, Multicultural Literature

### Literature Review

Teachers are a big part of their students' lives. If a parent chooses to enroll their student into the K-12 public education system in the United States, their child will more than likely spend over six hours a day, five days a week, in a single classroom with a single teacher. Teachers can choose to be mentors and guides to help their students grow. A way they can work to help their students grow is through helping them develop a strong ethnic identity. Ethnic identity refers to a "construct or set of self-ideas about one's own ethnic group membership" (Bernal, Cota, Garza, Knight, & Ocampo, 1993, p. 33). It encompasses both a group, and self-identity (Ong & Phinney, 2007). Researchers have found that it is more difficult for minority groups to develop a strong ethnic identity because they are subject to more acculturative stress than their Anglo-American counterparts (Cote & Levine, 2002). Developing a strong ethnic identity, particularly for students of minority groups such as Latinos or African Americans, can be beneficial for all parties involved (Bernal, Knight, & Phinney, 1993; Feliciano, 2009). When thinking about ethnic identity development, it is important to note the role schools play in either the development or subtraction of the ethnic identity of a child going through the public-school system (Feliciano, 2009). A focus in the development of a strong ethnic identity in K-8 classrooms can help boost the self-esteem of the students in the classroom (Gonzales-Becken, Guimond, & Umaña-Taylor 2009), broadening perspectives of others. This also helps educators connect with their students at a deeper level and has the potential to lessen dropout rates.

### **Ethnic Identity**

Ethnicity or culture is a common method of self-identification, which can either connect or disconnect groups of individuals and affects how one perceives not only one another, but more importantly how they perceive themselves (Phinney, 1996). Phinney (1996) defines ethnicity as

“refer[ing] to broad groupings of Americans on the basis of both race and culture of origin” (p. 919). The labels used to categorize individuals in terms of national or ethnic origin, such as Asian or Hispanic, are not enough to describe the characteristics innate to the ethnic group (Bernal & Knight, 1993; Phinney, 1996). What is, however, important is understanding how the knowledge of ethnicity and culture affect the “social, emotional, cognitive, and mental health outcomes” (Phinney, 1996, p. 918) of participants who are a member of the ethnic group. Ethnic identity and its development and formation, therefore, can be a window for teachers to learn more about the multitude of perspectives they come in contact with on a day to day basis.

The population of ethnic and minority groups is steadily growing in the United States of America. According to researchers, “the Spanish-origin population is growing about three times as quickly as the total population, and it will continue to maintain this rate of increase through the year 2080” (Bernal, Cota, Garza, Knight, & Ocampo, 1993, p. 33). That being said, little research has been conducted as to how identity formation develops for ethnic minority groups in contrast to the Anglo-American identity. Because American culture is everywhere and everywhere, ethnic identity development for minority groups entails a different understanding of culture and practices, which are simply not as evident in day to day life for members of ethnic groups in the United States of America (Cote & Levine, 2002). For example, curriculum in US public education classrooms are not conducive with Chicana/o experiences (Duncan-Andrade, 2005). Duncan-Andrade (2005) states: “...Chicano students are also faced with a curriculum that too often reduces their role in the historical development of the modern world to that of a conquered people whose contributions are hardly worth mentioning” (p.593).

There is no single theory that encompasses ethnic identity. As a matter of fact, many researchers (Bernal & Knight, 1993; Douglas, Shelton & Yip, 2014; Phinney, 1993; Romero,

2014; Ong, 2007) have based ethnic identity development on social identity theory or group identity theory. Ethnic identity formation differs among ethnic groups, as well as within each individual ethnic group itself (Bernal & Knight, 1993). Socially-constructed categories such as race and ethnic identity can change depending on the context or experiences an individual is faced with (Feliciano, 2009). Within an ethnic group, individuals may either agree or disagree with the practices and behaviors being emanated by the majority ethnic group, causing friction. The level of participation within a culture or ethnic group can also factor into the development of a strong ethnic identity (Bernal & Knight, 1993).

### **How Does Ethnic Identity Develop?**

Studies (Keis, 2006; Park, 2011; Daly, Shin, & Vera, 2007) have found that children, as young as 3.5 years old, are in fact aware of race, and the implications race and ethnicity have on an individual. This racialized thinking in children helps them be able to form their own identities through their own social context (Park 2011). In late childhood, researchers found a preference for the majority group among minority group children (Phinney, 1993). Several models of ethnic identity development exist. The researcher, however, has chosen to focus on Phinney's (1993) three-stage model of ethnic identity formation because it is not only based on Erikson's (1964, 1968) ego identity, but also "(2) Marcia's (1980) ego-identity statuses and with the models of ethnic identity in the literature, and (3) applicable across ethnic groups" (p.63).

Stage one is where an individual has not really begun to explore their ethnicity but are increasingly surrounded by a Euro-American society, which prefers White values and attitudes. This may cause a sense of not belonging or a conscious feeling of wanting to be White, a part of the majority. They may also have negative biases towards their own ethnic group, making the dominant group more appealing. Phinney (1993) also mentions a feeling of wanting to leave the

past behind and conforming to the American way of life in this first stage of ethnic identity development.

Romero, Edwards, Fryberg and Orduña (2014) describe Phinney's (1993) moratorium stage as a time where "individuals spend time learning more about the culture, history, traditions, and language of their ethnic group... it is seen as a required stage before reaching achieved identity" (p.2). Phinney (1993) describes it as a critical turning point. This is where individuals begin to realize that their ethnicity may or may not be all encompassing in terms of what is right in their eyes. For example, in Mexican culture there is an emphasis on *machismo*, which may be personally conflicting for girls within this ethnic group.

The final stage of ethnic identity development is when it has been achieved. This is categorized by a strong, confident and clear sense of ethnic identity (Romero, Edwards, Fryberg & Orduña, 2014; Phinney, 1993). Individuals have a positive outlook and are accepting of their culture and can explain its importance in terms of self-identity. According to Romero, Edwards, Fryberg and Orduña (2014) this final stage of ethnic identity development can shield individuals from discrimination and acculturative stress, protecting their mental health.

Romero, Edwards, Fryberg and Orduña (2014) add another distinction to the process of ethnic identity development, "ethnic affirmation" (p. 2). This is not a stage in of itself, but something they have found that affects negative pride and happiness when it is positive. When it is negative, it can make individuals feel shameful of their ethnic group. For this reason, the researcher discusses the way ethnic identity affects the self-esteem and mental health of individuals, as well as its importance in the school context because of this connection. Romero, Edwards, Fryberg and Orduña (2014) argue that ethnic affirmation and ethnic identity can work together to mitigate negativity.

### **The Connection Between Mental Health & Ethnic Identity**

Researchers have found a positive link between having a strong ethnic identity and a mental well-being. Kim, Hogge, and Salvisberg (2014) conducted a study, finding that acculturative stress negatively affects self-esteem, which caused more negative mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. The environment an individual is placed in is very important to the decrease of acculturative stress, “in a society that allows for multicultural ideologies and promotes cultural diversity, immigrants feel less pressure to make drastic cultural changes” (p. 145). The pressure of assimilation some ethnic groups face in areas where they are discriminated against places heavy strain on their mental health, therefore developing a strong ethnic identity at an early age can help boost reaffirmation and self-identity (Rumbaut, 1994).

Self-esteem, or how an individual evaluates themselves overall, affects the mental health of minority groups (Hogge, Kim, & Salvisberg, 2014). Ethnic identity has been found to be a strong indicator of a good quality of life, high self-esteem, and autonomy (2014). It has also been found to lessen the effects of how one perceives discrimination and whether or not one engages in risky behaviors such as substance abuse (Barnes-Najor, Fisher, Sheehan & Zapolski, 2017; (Hogge, Kim, & Salvisberg, 2014). Researchers have also found a discrepancy between the self-esteem of boys and girls due to their different experiences within their ethnic groups (Gonzales-Backen, Guimond & Umaña-Taylor, 2009). In regard to why, researchers have stated:

“It is possible that increased exploration provides individuals with tools and knowledge with which they can better understand their ethnicity. This increased knowledge may make individuals feel more self-assured or self-confident with regard to their ethnicity” (2009, p. 402).



### **Ethnic Identity within the School Context**

Many topics have been discussed in relation to how ethnic identity can have a positive impact of one's mental health, and self as a whole. The importance of promoting ethnic identity development in K-12 classrooms, however, has not been discussed. As mentioned above, children are able to differentiate and are able to attribute characteristics of race and ethnicity at a very young age. Because children are in school most of the time during the first 18 years of their lives, public schools have a great impact in the way their identity develops (Feliciano, 2009). As schools begin to see more and more diversity, it becomes a greater responsibility for the school to help its students gain a better understanding of what it means to have a strong ethnic identity (Douglass, Shelton, & Yip, 2014).

Feliciano (2009) states how the context and life experiences help form racial and ethnic identities, "Whether children of immigrants adopt panethnic terms versus plain American identities or identities rooted in their home countries is an important indicator of how they are assimilating or incorporating into U.S. society" (p.138). Ethnic identity formation is not something that is cut and dry, it is always developing or changing depending on the context and individual is placed in (Feliciano, 2009). The researcher found Feliciano's (2009) results to be quite telling. Feliciano (2009) found that those who chose to identify with both their own ethnic origin, as well as the United States, were among the more educated in the study. Duality, and acceptance is key. Douglas, Shelton, and Yip's (2014) research has explored how members of ethnic groups have feelings of anxiety, which are connected to the demographic composition of the school. This is across all primary school settings.

Dropout rates for ethnic minority groups, especially Latinos/as, are statistically significantly higher than dropout rates for Whites (Daly, et. al., 2007; Pérez, Malgón, Ramirez,

Gonzalez, Jimenez, & Vélez, 2015). How an individual is viewed in terms of race and ethnicity, for purposes of discrimination, has an impact on how they view themselves. This can lead them down a rabbit hole of no return, and forever mark them as at-risk youth (Daly, et. al, 2007).

Promoting a development of strong ethnic identities in K-8 classrooms, can help make a positive impact those individuals who have negative biases or xenophobia against others (Daly, et. al, 2007). Another factor is disengagement from school content. K-8 public schools in the U.S. are primarily framed through Euro-centric curriculum, which leaves the “other” to fend for themselves (Duncan-Andrade, 2005). Promoting ethnic identity development through curriculum in K-8 classrooms can engage those who once felt they were not represented, and also help everyone, including the teacher, learn about their peers. There are many ways ethnic identity development can be integrated in the school context.

### **Evaluation of Options**

The researcher provides three options to explore the issue of ethnic identity development in K-12 classrooms. The researcher uses the following criteria to evaluate the options provided: time, cost, and impact on stakeholders. That is, the length of time required to implement each option, the amount of money necessary to implement each option, and lastly how each option affects the stakeholders.

Option 1- Multicultural Literature

Option 2- Adaptation of drama and theater of Jonathan Ball Tiny Step for Peace Pilot Project

Option 3- Peer Relationships

**Option 1**

Option 1 for promoting the development of a strong ethnic identity is the effective use of multicultural literature in K-12 classrooms. One of the main reasons dropout rates are so high for students is a lack of connection to classroom content. Thoughtful choices of multicultural literature can help bridge this gap. According to Keis, (2006) children's literature can help begin a dialogue between groups of people, which may have never started due to ethnic or racial barriers. For Latino students in particular, having a book that relates to their own personal experiences with immigration or even better, is in their heritage language, can make the transition to an Anglo-American society easier. Multicultural literature does this by offering children a voice (Keis, 2006). This voice can help students become better writers, and better advocates in a democratic society. The notion of being silenced is very true. When a child does not see their own identity on the shelves of the library in the school, they spend most of their days in, they begin to wonder if their story is important (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Children should never have to wonder if what they have to say is valid.

This option is a good option in terms of time, and the impact it can have on the stakeholders. In terms of time, adding multicultural literature to the school library will not take a very long time. Though teachers may have to spend a little bit more time finding good multicultural literature, in terms of the stakeholders, it can help promote acceptance among their students and maybe even within themselves. Cost, however, could pose an issue because it would be somewhat expensive to revamp the library, and classrooms in an entire school. Even though this is true, books are long lasting items, which can be passed down, therefore, the good outweighs the bad.

**Option 2**

Option 2 is an adaption of the Jonathan Ball Tiny Step for Peace Pilot Project in Warrington, England (Connolly & Hosken, 2006). To commemorate two boys who passed away following IRA bombings in 1993, the Tim Parry Jonathan Ball Trust, “engaged in a variety of educational activities and programmes aimed at promoting peace and resolving divisions and conflict that impact upon the lives of children and young people” (2006, p. 109), one of which was the Jonathan Ball Tiny Step for Peace Pilot Project. They had two very distinct objectives when they embarked on this program that the researcher thinks would be a valid option for K-12 programs in the U.S.: to develop diversity celebrating learning resources through the use of drama and theater, and promoting the development of children’s personal, social, and emotional development “regardless of ethnicity, culture, or ability” (p.109). The researcher feels the use of drama or theater to help promote awareness, and acceptance of ethnic differences would be both educational and fun.

Teachers could help put on plays for children based on real life experiences, or maybe even a familial story from parents, which involve inclusion and diversity. They could supplement the learning as they did in the pilot programme, through teacher-led activities in the classroom asking difficult, but necessary questions about the perceptions of self, and others. The pilot programme in England had many positive results, including a heightened awareness of diversity, and the children were able to notice when they were beginning to exclude others (2006). The pilot programme organized eight classes into four pairs depending on where they were located, and were further broken down by ethnicity and socioeconomic status. They created control groups within these pairings and measured the students’ awareness and attitudes before they

implemented the pilot programme (2006). Their main goals were to “(1) increase children’s ability to recognize, without prompting, instances of social exclusion; (2) Reduce children’s tendency to stereotype others by increasing their awareness of the many different things that children share in common; (3) Increase children’s willingness to be more inclusive of others who are different from themselves” (p.111)

Though this option shows great trajectory for helping to develop a strong ethnic identity, it will most likely take a lot of time to implement. Teachers must go through necessary workshops and trainings to be able to thoughtfully apply ethnic identity awareness. Also, the revamping of a theater set may cost a lot to complete. This option does, however, have a strong impact on the stakeholders. Children are sponges for information, especially when the information is presented in a fun and enjoyable way. Teachers can also benefit from the connections they could build during this process of exploration.

### **Option 3**

The third and final option the researcher explores in relation to ethnic identity development in the use of peer relationships. Children can learn a lot about one another through dialogue. Teachers can randomly pair students every two weeks, so everyone gets to everyone, and have them learn about one another’s cultures and ethnicity. If they are from the same ethnic group, they have the opportunity to learn how traditions and practices differ from group to group. Teachers can create integrate this into the curriculum through writing exercises, which can also help them develop their voice. With parental support, they can spend a day at one another’s houses and see what a day in their lives looks like.

In terms of time, this option works well. It will take a bit of time for teachers to find thoughtful questions to ask about their experiences, but other than that, this option works well. In

terms of cost, this option also passes. In most K-12 public schools, children have access to paper and pencils, as well as computers for research purposes if necessary, therefore, cost can be mitigated. The researcher does, however, see how an issue can arise through the stakeholders. The impact of this option highly depends on the participation of the students, which could be difficult at first because children can be shy. Parents can also factor into this option depending on their openness for this type of research. This can be mitigated through a positive outlook, and encouragement from the part of the teacher and school.

### **Recommendation**

After evaluating the options, the researcher recommends Option 1, Multicultural Literature, for the promotion of ethnic identity development because it has the least constraints in terms of time, cost, and impact on stakeholders. Though Option 3, is also a valid option to use, the researcher felt an issue could easily arise from the stakeholder's nonparticipation. Though books can end up costing a lot, the researcher believes the benefits of reuse can outweigh the bad.

### **Conclusion**

The researcher has outlined the reasons for an emphasis or focus in the development of ethnic identity in K-12 classroom. This paper elaborates how ethnic identity develops, and how it can either negatively affect the mental health of minority ethnic groups in the United States of America. Ethnic identity development through the stages proposed by Phinney (1993), can be the basis for beginning to help students begin to explore their ethnic identities, and what it means to be a part of a culture, regardless of whether they are White, or non-White. By providing students with the materials needed to develop a strong ethnic identity, educators can potentially reduce dropout rates by engaging and connecting with their students. Though research on how ethnic

identity develops in early childhood is scarce, the research on ethnic identity development in adolescents indicates a need for an earlier development because of the implications on dropout rates in later years.

Research shows the benefits multicultural literature can have on the identity formation (Keis, 2006; Page, 2002). Because of this, the researcher believes Option 1 of the three options listed above can be implemented easily and can show to be an effective learning tool for educators. In order for teachers to be able to get the most out of this option, they must really analyze the literature and its content in order to provide a well-rounded lesson for their student that encompasses topics of ethnicity, and diversity. According to Page (2002) teachers can teach multicultural literature through four major categories: “psychological, skills-oriented, curriculum-oriented, and sociocultural approaches” (p. 22). The researcher found that the sociocultural approach closely resonates with ethnic identity development in that “it seeks to unite theory and practice, deconstruct the social status quo, critique society, incite social action, and/or apply other cultural lenses to literature” (p. 22). This approach, however, is rarely used in common teacher practices. The use of multicultural literature through this lens and approach can help broaden perspective of race, ethnicity, and class.

### **Project**

The researcher emphasizes that ethnic identity can have a positive impact of one’s mental health, and self as a whole. Because of this, ethnic identity development can be a beneficial attribution in K-12 classrooms. As mentioned in the literature review, from a very young age, children are able to denote differences in ethnicity and race. Children are in school most of the time during the first 18 years of their lives; therefore, public schools have a great impact in the way their identity develops (Feliciano, 2009). As schools continue to see a rise in diversity, it

becomes a greater responsibility for the school and its teachers to help their students gain an understanding of what it means to have a strong ethnic identity (Douglass, Shelton, & Yip, 2014). Because minority ethnic groups can be so easily viewed as outsiders or foreigners, their self-esteem can be negatively impacted (Hogge, Kim, & Salvisberg, 2014). Developing a strong ethnic identity has been linked to a good quality of life, high self-esteem, and autonomy (2014). As mentioned before, teaching students how to develop their ethnic identity has also been found to lessen the effects of how one perceives discrimination. Also, it lessens the potential of whether not one engages in risky behaviors including substance abuse (Barnes-Najor, Fisher, Sheehan & Zapolski, 2017; (Hogge, Kim, & Salvisberg, 2014)

### **Design**

The researcher chose the community partner for this project because of its push for diversity and acceptance. The community partner has a very clear set mission and vision. The community partner has a mission to provide a high-quality education for all of the students in their community, while maintaining a positive, challenging, and secure environment in juxtaposition with a respectful atmosphere towards differences and community values. The community partner's vision is similar to its mission statement, however, has a strong focus on making sure the environment is challenging enough for the population they serve. This also means they hold their pupils to a very high standard, while still keeping in mind the different learning styles and individual differences that exist among their students.

The School Accountability Report Card or the SARC of the community partner states the population consists of 415 students. Black or African Americans comprise about 5.7%. Asian enrollment is also 5.7%. Filipino students comprise 5%, while the Latino population at the community partner site is 49.1% of the student body population. White student enrollment is



12.7%, while Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders comprise only 3.5%, which contrasts the population of the city of Marina. Of these 415 students, 72.2% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, 21.1% are English Learners, and 14.4% have a disability. The school offers K-5 grades. The researcher's project was implemented in one of the community partner's fifth grade classrooms.

The researcher found a way to integrate multicultural literature and creative writing for their research project. The researcher uses the 5-Step Lesson Plan design in order to conduct their project in one of the community partner's 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. The measurable goal of the research project was: Students will create a fingerprint poem about their own cultural/ethnic traditions. The researcher felt this would be a good way to introduce the topic of ethnic identity, and also felt the students would have a fun time doing this lesson because poetry can be a creative outlet for students.

### **Implementation**

The researcher refers Appendix A for the lesson plan, complete standards, and helpful information. The first day, the students were first given a survey to gauge their understanding of what, if they knew anything, ethnic identity meant to them.

The image shows a screenshot of a Google Forms survey titled "Ethnic Identity Pre-Survey". The survey is displayed on a purple-themed interface. At the top, there are tabs for "QUESTIONS" and "RESPONSES" with a count of "25". The survey content includes an introductory paragraph, an email address field, and several open-ended questions. A citation box in the bottom right corner identifies the source as Gutierrez Chavez, M.P. (2019) Pre-Survey Questions.

**QUESTIONS**    **RESPONSES** 25

### Ethnic Identity Pre-Survey

Hi everyone. My name is Maria Gutierrez. I am twenty-two years old, and will be graduating from California State University Monterey Bay. I identify as a Chicana. Even though I was born in Mexico, I grew up here in California. This is a survey for my final Capstone research project. Please be as honest as possible. Your answers will not be shared with anyone.

**Email address \***  
Valid email address  
This form is collecting email addresses. [Change settings](#)

**Tell me about yourself. What is your name? How old are you? Where are you from? What do you identify with in terms of ethnicity or race?**  
Long answer text

**What does ethnic identity mean to you? \***  
Short answer text

**Do you think it matters that we understand one another's cultures? \***  
Long answer text

**Do you feel you read enough about your own culture in your education? \***  
Short answer text

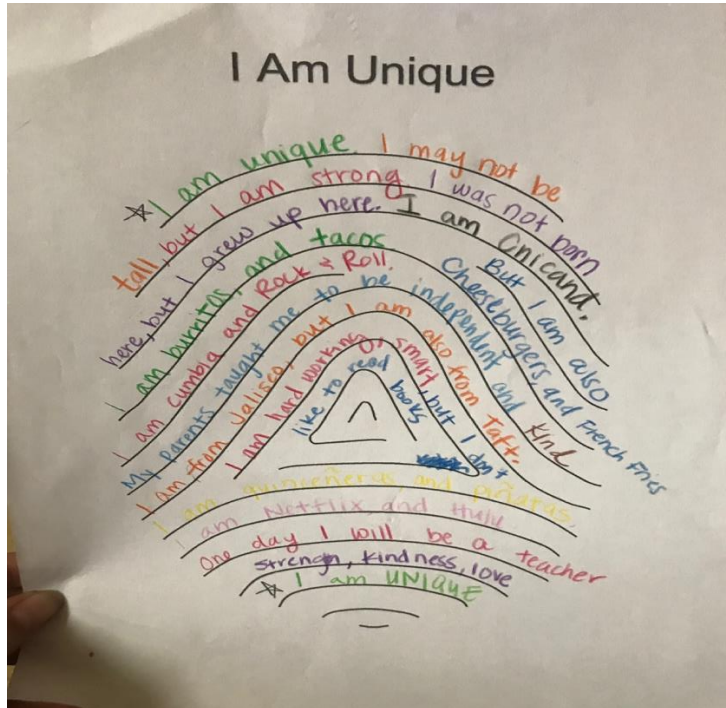
**Do you know about any culture other than your own? Please elaborate.. \***  
Long answer text

**Do you think you would benefit from learning about different cultures even if it is not your own? Why or Why not? \***  
Long answer text

Gutierrez Chavez, M.P. (2019) Pre-Survey Questions

The first part of the lesson was a guided reading and analyzing of the children's storybook *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*. The researcher chose this book because they knew they would be able to connect their story, with that of Pancho's making it more sincere for the students in the classroom. The students and the researcher then huddled in a circle, and discussed Pancho Rabbit's life, the characters of her parents, and her uncle, and how her culture contributed to the storyline. The researcher then modeled the writing of their own fingerprint poem that discussed the tradition and culture they grew up around.

The students were then asked to take a set of interview questions home, (Appendix B, Evidence 3) to take to their parents to talk to them about their cultural traditions and practices. When they returned the next day, the researcher had the students brainstorm and write words on scratch paper that they felt were important to them before they actually wrote out their poems. The researcher posted their own poem, posted below, for the students to refer to.



Gutierrez Chavez, M.P.  
(2019) I Am Unique.

The researcher chose to use food as a distinguisher because they felt it was the easiest and most comprehensible way for students to understand their different cultures. For the same reason, they chose to distinguish between different music types: cumbia and rock and roll.

The students selected their own fingerprint style and began writing their poems in pencil first. The final step was rewriting their poem in colored pencils or marker (Appendix B, Evidence 1). The community partner has “morning meetings” in which the students share their most recent projects. The researcher felt this would be a great way to allow the students to share their poems, if they felt comfortable. They got to learn a little bit about one another, which was

an amazing experience for the researcher. Because the community partner was having a poetry month, this lesson was a good introduction to freestyle writing of poetry.

### **Evaluation**

There were some challenges in completing this project for the researcher. Unfortunately, the community partner had just come back from a two-week vacation, which meant the students were not completely focused on the task at hand. Also, the researcher felt some of the students were not really paying attention during the guided reading. This, most likely, was also due to just getting back from a vacation. Because the students were on vacation, the researcher was also not able to send out the pre-survey as early as they would have liked.

The researcher would have preferred they completed the surveys at home, and that they would have taken their time completing them. This, unfortunately, was not realized, therefore, the researcher does not definitively know if the goal was achieved. Another challenge the researcher found is that it seemed that some parents wrote the answers to the questions, making it difficult to know whether or not they really had a discussion with their children. That being said, the researcher noticed at least one of the students felt their ethnic identity made them less important than their peers, speaking to the importance of uplifting students with ethnic identity development.

Overall, the researcher believes this was a very good way to get the students to start thinking about how their cultures contribute to their identity. The pre-survey showed that students were not familiar with ethnic identity. Almost all agreed that understanding one another's cultures, as well as their own is very important. The students were also given a post survey to see if this activity had given them a better understanding of what ethnic identity means to them, and most said yes. Some of the students who had said that they did not learn about their

ethnic identity also answered no to whether or not they interviewed their parents to learn about their culture. Most importantly, all of the students agreed that the reading of *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* gave them a different perspective on how to look at different cultures. The students all really enjoyed getting to write their own poems.

### **Reflection**

#### **Discussion**

The researcher understands the limitations the Capstone project had, as described in the evaluation. As mentioned above, scheduling conflicts caused the researcher delay in conducting the pre-survey to evaluate the students' current understanding of ethnic identity development. Because they had just returned from break, and scheduling conflicts between the community partner site and the researcher, the homeroom teacher and the researcher felt it would be best to do the survey in class. The students only had a limited amount of time to complete the survey, and they were seated next to their friends, which may have caused some anomalies in the data. The students, in the classroom where the project was conducted, had just come back from a two-week vacation, Science Camp, and Spring Break. This caused a lack of attentiveness while the activities were going on. While the researcher gathered the students for the guided reading, the researcher noted many instances where a few of the students were not really paying attention.

The researcher felt that if they had more time to delve into the storybook and really discuss the book more in depth, the students may have had more of an understanding of how culture plays a part in the development of their identities. The researcher also feels they did not give sufficient instruction with the parent interview questions. There is no way to know whether some of the students actually spoke to their parents and interviewed them, or if the parents wrote up the questions without having an actual discussion. The researcher also notes that some of the

students' writings gave indication that they felt badly about their own personal cultures, as if their culture made them less of an individual. This struck a chord with the researcher, as they felt there needed to be more time to develop their understanding of how they can learn more about their culture to build their self-esteem.

### **Recommendation(s)**

The researcher notes there is a lot of room for improvement of this Capstone project. The spacing of time between activities could have been longer. The researcher recommends a deep discussion about ethnic identity in order for the students to really understand what the project was about. This can be done by bringing in multiple multicultural storybooks and discussing how each one can add to their understanding of different cultures. This can also add to the students' curiosity about their own culture and allow them to explore books that are related to their own ethnicity or culture. Visuals can also be beneficial. The researcher notes their use of vocal character mapping in the Capstone project, which could have been better served as a big poster in which the students could create themselves, in small groups, with the aid of an adult. The poster can help them visually see the differences among the characters, and how they connect. The researcher definitely feels an entire curriculum can be created for the year in order to best serve their students, therefore more time is a must.

Another recommendation the researcher provides is more parental involvement. The researcher feels getting insight from parents or grandparents can prove to be beneficial in the search of ethnic identity development. They are windows to a past life, which can lead to a higher understanding of where one comes from including cultural or ethnic practices. After talking to the students, the researcher feels strongly that they really enjoyed interviewing their parents for this lesson. Further recommendations for this would mean more in-depth questions

for their parents, which can allow them to really investigate where they come from or what it can bring to their ethnic identity quest.

### **Future Plans to Build on the Capstone**

The researcher is currently planning to become an elementary school teacher. The researcher understands that in their teaching career they will come across many different students with many different backgrounds; therefore, an understanding of ethnic identity development will become essential. As mentioned in the literature review, research suggests diversity is only growing, and ones' identity has many different facets to it. Ones' ethnicity or culture has a lot to do with how one carries themselves. It is how one is raised. It can affect their morals and values, and traditions going forward into the world. The researcher hopes that as a teacher they will be able to help them gain a better understanding of their own ethnicity and culture to help, as research suggests, build their self-esteem.

The researcher will build on the capstone every day in their career as an elementary school teacher. There are many ways to include ethnic identity into the curriculum, and still be able to abide by state standards. Creative writing and multicultural literature are some of the easiest ways the researcher can build on the capstone project in the future. The researcher will always make sure to keep culturally sensitive and accurate literature on her bookshelves and encourage their students to look for themselves in the books they pick up to read. Free-writing with prompts that help guide them to search within their culture and traditions can also be helpful in trying to build their confidence and self-esteem.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, ethnicity or culture is a common method of self-identification than can help either help disconnect or connect groups of individuals. Through ethnic identity

development in K-12 classrooms, teachers can help be this connection among groups of individuals. Ethnic identity develops in stages according to researchers; therefore, it is not a short journey, rather a long and arduous one. It is not sufficient to have labels such as Asian or Hispanic, instead can also be beneficial to understand how the knowledge of ethnicity can affect mental health outcomes. With a growing population of ethnic and minority groups in the United States, the public education system must mold to help educate all students.

Because ethnic and minority groups undergo acculturative stress, it becomes a bigger responsibility for teachers to try and mitigate this in order for students to find success. Providing students with the materials needed to develop a strong ethnic identity can potentially reduce dropout rates by engaging and connecting with their students because of the connection between mental health and ethnic identity. The researcher chose to expand on their project with the use of multicultural literature and creative writing. The researcher has shown the importance of voice and seeing oneself through the lens of a book that shows them a little bit more about themselves.



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## Appendix A

Lesson Title: Fingerprint Poem

Lesson Duration: Day 1: 1 hour and 45 minutes, plus Day 2: 45 minutes

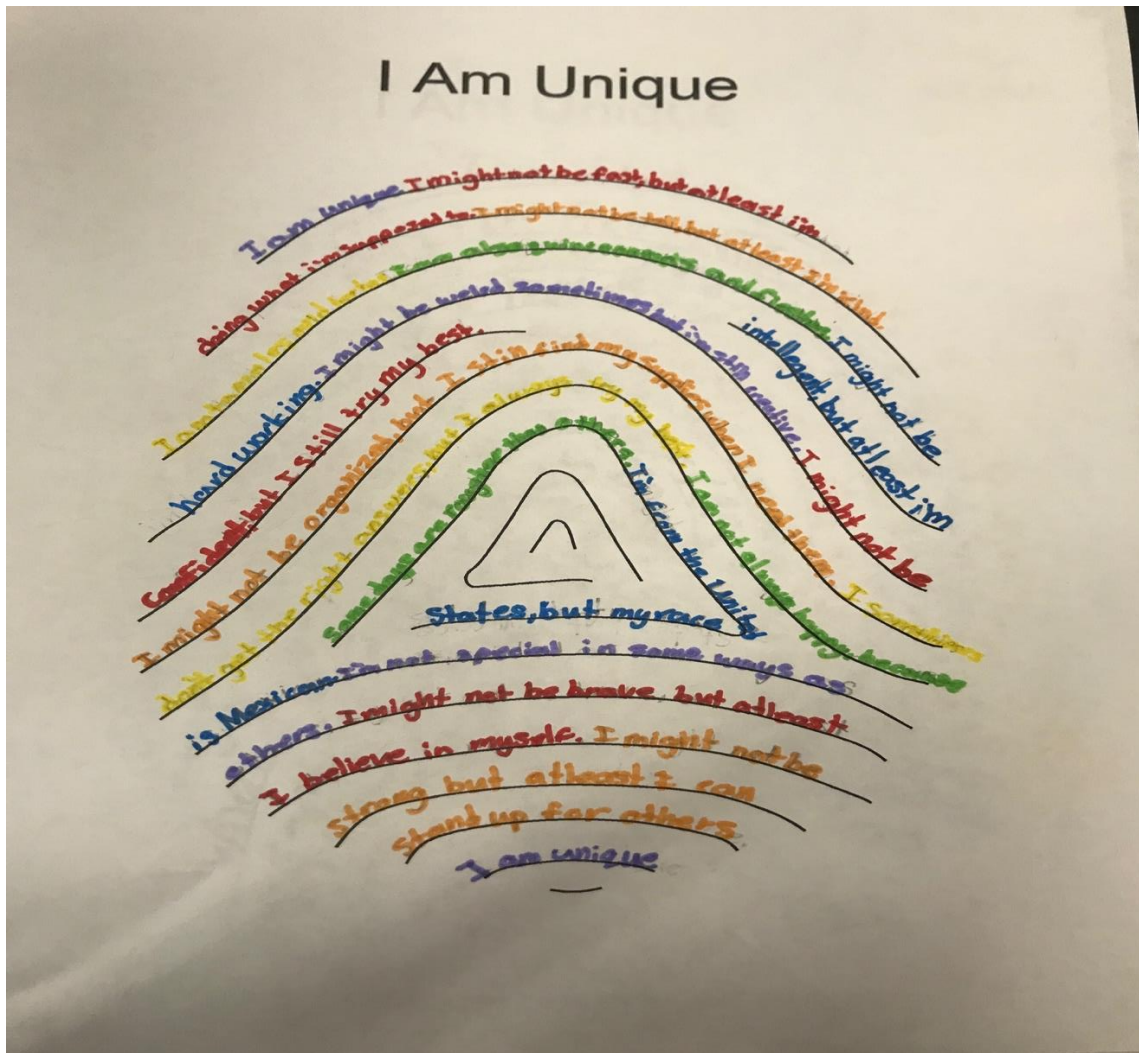
<p>Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Content</li>   <li>● English Language Arts/ Writing</li> </ul>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.</p> <p>CSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.7 Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic</p>
Central Focus/ Learning Target	The central focus for this lesson is for students to gain an understanding of their own ethnic identity.
Lesson Learning Objective/Target	Students will create a fingerprint poem about their own cultural/ethnic traditions.
<p>Academic Language Objective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demands</li> <li>- Funicions</li> <li>- Forms</li> </ul>	Students will identify information presented in the text, <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> , to determine main ideas and support them using key details while asking and answering questions with the teacher and peers.
Assessment Plan, Rubric, and Feedback Procedures After Student Work Analysis	Students will be assessed on completion of fingerprint poem. Feedback will be given in terms of whether or not they completed their poem using information they gathered from their parent interviews, and self-ideals.
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>- Parent interview questions</li> <li>- Fingerprint poem templates (3 different styles of fingerprints)</li> <li>- Colored Pencils or Markers</li> </ul>

<p>Instruction (Identify necessary supports/scaffolding/modifications)</p> <p>Time Allotted: 1 hour</p>	<p>Teacher does:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain what ethnic identity means, and ask students if they have any questions</li> <li>2. Gather students in a circle, ask them about their perceptions on different cultures such as whether or not they feel learning about them is important.</li> <li>3. Begin read aloud of <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i>, or other children's book that gives a different cultural perspective</li> </ol> <p>Student does:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Share their ideas</li> <li>2. Listen to each other's perspectives respectfully</li> </ol>
<p>Formative (informal) Assessment</p>	<p>Gauge student participation during idea sharing</p>
<p>Instruction and/or Practice Activity (Identify necessary supports/scaffolding/modifications)</p> <p>[Time Allotted: 45 minutes]</p>	<p>Teacher does:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher begins to explain their own culture, and practices</li> <li>2. Starts brainstorming out loud, with students, possible words they can use for poem</li> <li>3. Writes sample fingerprint poem for students to see process</li> <li>4. Lead class discussion for questions they can ask their parents to learn more about their cultural traditions</li> </ol> <p>Students do:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give ideas for words teacher can use in poem</li> <li>2. Try and see if any words used can be used in their own poems, write on post it</li> <li>3. Take questions for parents home and have a one on one interview with them.</li> </ol>
<p>Formative (informal) Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Check off post it or scratch paper to see if students are participating</li> <li>- Check off parent interview questions, and make sure students wrote them up themselves.</li> </ul>
<p>Closure with Outcomes Assessment</p> <p>[Time Allotted: 45 minutes ]</p>	<p>Teacher does:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Post personal poem on board for students to look at if needed</li> <li>2. Monitor students</li> <li>3. Gather students after poems are completed</li> </ol> <p>Student does:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Take out brainstorming scratch paper and begin to write fingerprint poem in pencil</li> <li>2. When completed, write over pencil with colored markers</li> <li>3. If they feel comfortable, may share their poem during morning meeting with their peers</li> <li>4. Peers listen respectfully, and applaud after</li> </ol>

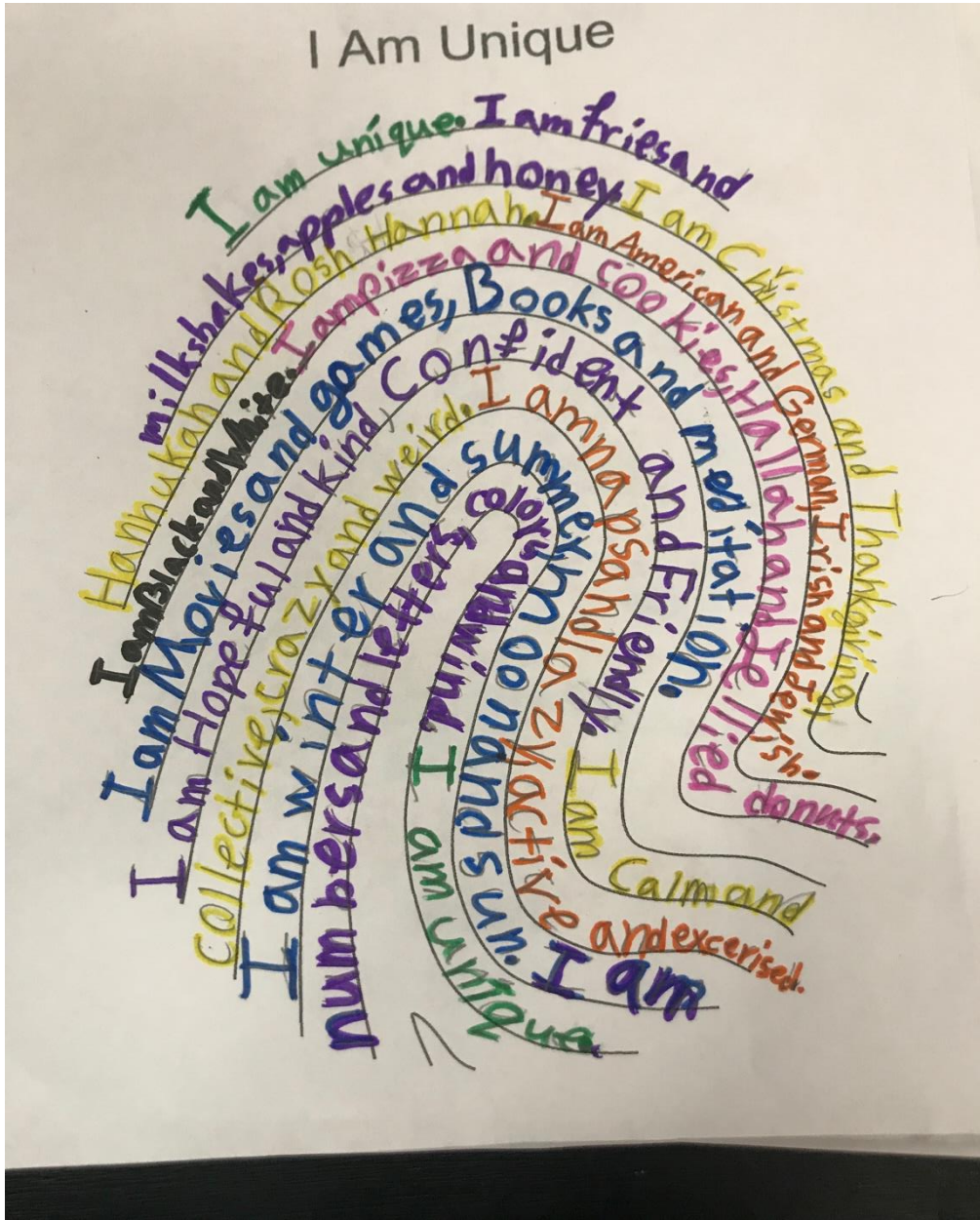
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Appendix B

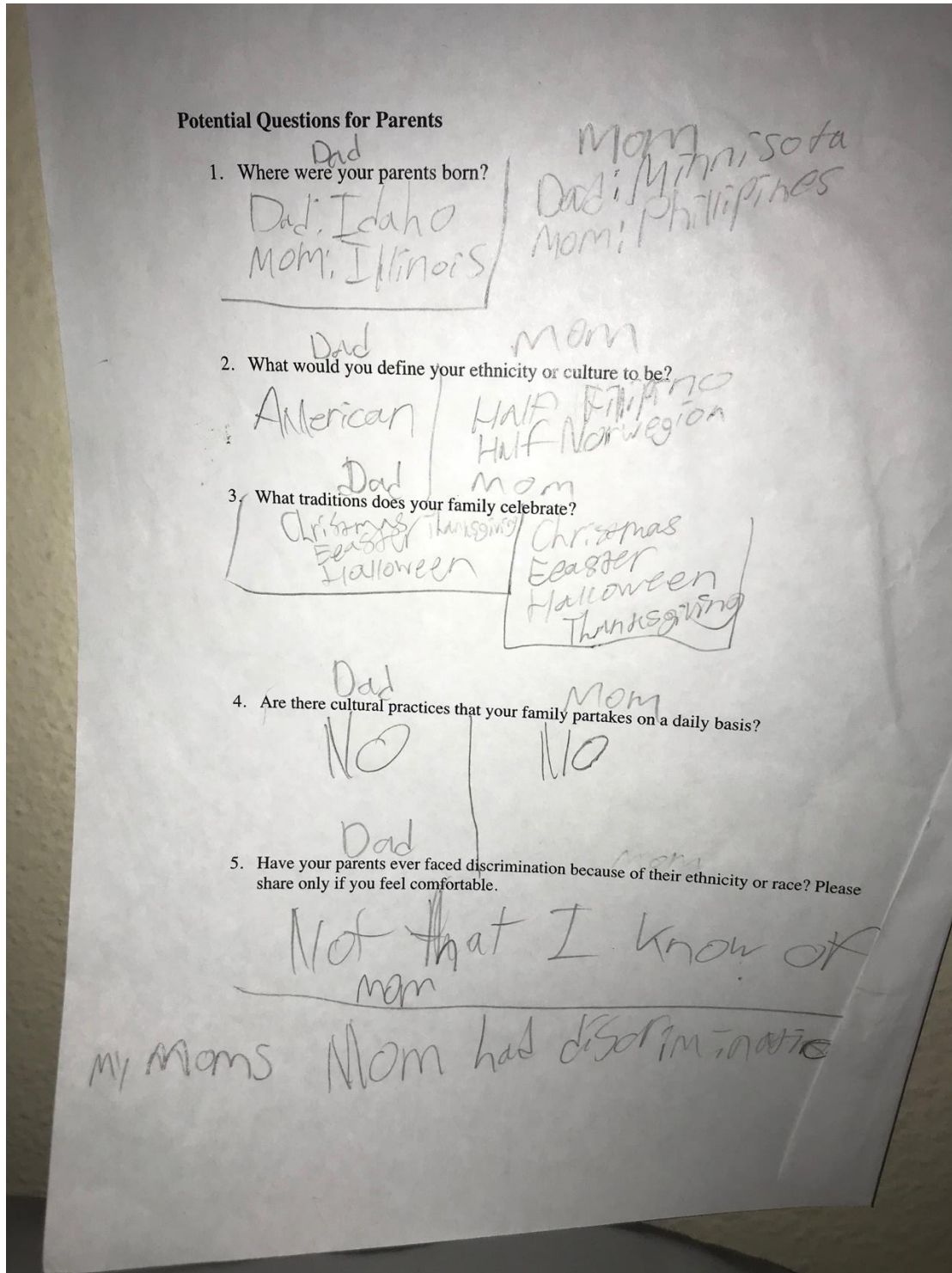
Evidence 1- Student Fingerprint Poem



Evidence 2- Student Fingerprint Poem



Evidence 3- Parent Interview Questions done by student





## Evidence 4- Parent Interview Questions done by Parent

Parents Interview

**Potential Questions for Parents**

1. Where were your parents born?  
Mexico D.F, Mexico — Mom  
dad - Jalisco, Mexico
2. What would you define your ethnicity or culture to be?  
Mexican - Both
3. What traditions does your family celebrate?
  - Day of the Dead
  - La Rosca de Reyes
4. Are there cultural practices that your family partakes on a daily basis?  
Go to church once a week
5. Have your parents ever faced discrimination because of their ethnicity or race? Please share only if you feel comfortable.
  - Yes because my mom spoke Spanish and was Mexican.