

# Developing Underrepresented Preservice Teachers' Cultural Competence with Children's Literature

End of Year Report: WCU Innovations in Diversity & Inclusion Grant, 2024-2025

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## Program Description

While Early Grades Preparation students receive a theoretical framework for diverse representation in their teaching, there is often little time in their tightly packed schedules for in-depth analysis of text selection for authentic representation. This Innovations in Diversity & Inclusion Grant provided the funds to continue the Children's Literature for Inclusive Pedagogy (CLIP) Research Fellowship, a semester-long, paid research fellowship for five preservice teachers begun in Fall 2023. This fellowship aims to provide underrepresented preservice teachers with a focused learning experience on cultural competence in children's literature. Though not all students employed through this grant may find their identities underrepresented in literature or their chosen field, all were committed to providing their underrepresented students with culturally relevant learning experiences and loving representation.

The fellowship consists of weekly meetings where the fellows work with the faculty members to analyze literature for representation and classroom use. It begins with an introduction to the state of representation in children's literature and the rising threat of book bans and federal pushback against diversity and inclusion. Next, the fellows work closely with each professor in their area of expertise to learn about positive and negative representations of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability in picture books. Finally, the fellows embark on a capstone project for their last month of the semester, creating a deliverable of their choosing to showcase what they learned and to use in their future teaching.

## Budget

The entirety of the \$5,000 awarded was allocated for student wages to participate in the fellowship. At \$15 per hour for four hours of work per week, each student was paid \$1000 over the course of the semester. Since some fellows also received Federal Work Study, we had \$1,310 left over at the end of the semester that has been approved to carry over into Fall 2025 for another round of fellows.

## Results

On April 23, 2025, we met with the five fellows to discuss their respective capstone projects. During the meeting, fellows collaboratively reviewed their in-progress capstone projects and worked together to brainstorm new ideas for further expanding their knowledge (see these [slides](#)). For example, one fellow stated, “there are so many ideas, it’s hard to choose one,” and another fellow responded with “well you can continue doing the work when you get your own classroom.” Although we facilitated the meeting as project directors, we entrusted the fellows with taking charge of their own projects and co-leading the meeting. This semester was an extremely successful iteration of the CLIP Fellowship. Our five fellows each produced a diverse set of capstones: three websites, a children’s book, and a video from one preservice teacher to her future teacher self:

- [Website 1](#): Reading Critically: Opening Your Mind to Explore Literature
- [Website 2](#): What If We Said Gay?
- [Website 3](#): A More Diverse Booklist
- [Children’s Book](#): *Nani’s Family Cookout*
- [Video](#): From preservice teacher to future teacher-self

## Next Steps

We will use the remaining funds from this grant to hire one student fellow for a Fall 2025 fellowship as well as four students who qualify for Federal Work Study. The next iteration of this fellowship will be open to any undergraduate preservice teacher at WCU and we are excited to see how this work translates outside of Early Grades. We plan to apply for a second Innovation in Diversity & Inclusion grant to fund non-work study students for the 2026-2027 academic year. We also are working to preserve fellowship capstones by creating a [dedicated section](#) on Digital Commons, our campus’ institutional repository. We will be adding past capstones to this repository over the next academic year.