

# **Using Bibliotherapy to Promote Cultural Competence in Family and Consumer Sciences Education**

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*Diversity, equity, and inclusion are crucial concepts for educators to demonstrate cultural proficiency in the family and consumer sciences (FCS) classroom. The purpose of this manuscript is to show how one FCS educator preparation program seeks to develop culturally proficient FCS educators. By implementing course activities that help students examine their own cultural biases and by exploring bibliotherapy using the Bluford novel series, students learn how to reflect upon cultural differences and gain insight for their future classroom. The details of the diversity, equity, and inclusion plan for the Texas Tech University Family and Consumer Sciences program are provided.*

## **Introduction**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are critical concepts for family and consumer sciences educators to understand and demonstrate with cultural proficiency, which requires a shift in thinking for many preprofessional and professional educators today. Diversity is defined as all our varied identities and differences including race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, socio-economic status, thinking, and communication styles as a whole and as individuals (Ford Foundation, 2023). Equity seeks to ensure fair treatment in opportunities and access. Equity is built on respect for all. Inclusion builds a culture of welcoming and belonging by inviting all individuals to contribute and participate (Ford Foundation, 2023). Cultural proficiency is defined as “the policies and practices of an organization or the values and behavior of an individual that enable that agency or person to interact effectively in a diverse environment” (Nuri-Robbins et al., 2012, p. xxiii). In the Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) classroom, cultural proficiency should be operationalized as, “educating all students to high levels through knowing, valuing, and using as assets their cultural

backgrounds, languages, and learning styles within the context of our teaching” (The Center for Culturally Proficient Educational Practice, 2022). The purpose of this manuscript is to highlight how one FCS educator preparation program (EPP) has embraced diversity, equity, and inclusion and seeks to develop culturally proficient FCS educators. Examples of EPP course activities are described and details of the DEI Plan for the program are provided.

One framework for cultural competency has four tools: the barriers, the guiding principles, the continuum, and the essential elements (Helms, 1990). The barriers include the problems that occur when people resist change. The guiding principles equip individuals with moral tools. The continuum includes five standards of behavior for measuring cultural growth. The standards are assessing culture, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of differences, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge. These are also known as the essential elements for cultural competency in the classroom. The benefits of cultural proficiency are to provide more effective relationships, promote positivity, and prepare instructors for a diverse classroom (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). The underlying core values of this framework are the guiding principles that equip the FCS EPP with the tools needed for developing culturally proficient educators.

By becoming culturally proficient, educators can consequently implement a culturally responsive methodology (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020). According to Pérez (2021), cultural responsiveness is the practice of putting your cultural competence into action. Both are essential in the field of education—especially when recognizing the diverse population of today’s classroom. Although culturally responsive teaching has emerged as an essential aspect of pre-service teacher training, many enrolled in the EPP often complete their program of study without being introduced to issues in society produced by race, class, and culture (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020).

The faculty in the FCS EPP has extensive training in cultural proficiency in the classroom and has successfully implemented diversity training through culturally responsive pedagogy within undergraduate and graduate courses. Driving our programmatic changes was recognizing that most students enrolling in the FCSE undergraduate program are predominately white (Texas Tech University, 2021). Further, in Texas K-12 public schools, Hispanic students accounted for the largest percentage of enrollment with 58% and African American students had a total enrollment of 12.6% in 2020 (Du et al., 2020). To better prepare our EPP students for the classroom, it is essential that we prepare future teachers to understand that racial and cultural identities are factors that should be considered, taught, and demonstrated in their educational environments (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020). Therefore, the FCS EPP planned opportunities and adopted strategies for our students to examine their biases and learn more about minority students. By doing so, faculty are providing future educators with strategies to build inclusion and focus on student academic achievement using culture as a cognitive scaffold. The following learning experiences are the result of assessment processes including our program-level assessment and our DEI plan for EPP accreditation.

### **Implementation**

Students in our courses must learn, understand, and recognize their hidden biases before they can successfully teach in a classroom of their own (Marco Learning, 2018). Bias is perpetuated by conformity with in-group attitudes and socialization by the dominant culture. White culture is dominant in America, possibly explaining why people of color do not often show bias or favoritism towards their own ethnic group (Blevins, 2015). This happens because

the mass media has control over images we routinely see, and many times takes advantage of stereotypical characters such as young, beautiful, white people shown as able-bodied and popular. Omitting cultures from TV shows presents an all-white world, which could explain why children adopt hidden biases opposite from their families (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1991-2023). Scientists believe children can acquire prejudices as toddlers. Children as early as three can pick up on racial stereotypes without even understanding their significance. Children then go on to form attachments to their group and create negative attitudes about the out-group or other racial groups. Early in life, these biases may appear in verbal slurs, ethnic jokes, stereotypic categorizations, and discriminatory acts (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1991-2023).

Cultural biases that students do not think exist within themselves exist as mental residue in almost everyone. Studies have shown individuals can consciously work and behave without prejudice, but still possess negative hidden biases (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1991-2023). To bring these biases to light within our students, they are instructed to take an Implicit Association Test (IAT). This type of test by Project Implicit® can tap into those hidden biases, stereotypes, and prejudices that can affect a culturally competent teacher and classroom (Harvard.edu, n.d.). Students are allowed classroom time to take the test but are instructed during the test they may begin to *feel* their hidden biases and prejudices as they are contemplating the test questions (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1991-2023). Just by requiring our future educators to take this test, it is forcing hidden biases into the conscious part of the brain.

### **Bibliotherapy**

After students complete the testing, a discussion then takes place on how to be committed to change. If individuals are aware of their hidden biases, then those biases can be monitored and altered before the behavior presents itself. To further impress upon students how their understanding of hidden biases can help them be more culturally proficient educators, a bibliotherapy exercise is completed in class.

Bibliotherapy is a therapy modality that involves storytelling or the reading of specific texts with the purpose of healing. It uses an individual's relationship to the content of books, poetry, and other written words as therapy (Bencomo, 2021). An FCS educator can use the predominant themes identified in the written content for instructional units to help increase cultural proficiency. The goals of bibliotherapy are: (1) to provide information about a problem; (2) to communicate new values and attitudes; (3) to create an awareness that others have dealt with similar problems; and (4) to provide solutions to problems (Bencomo., 2021). Identifying and understanding one's bias can then be felt and seen through the lens of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy also helps students to apply the beginning standards of cultural growth which include assessing culture, valuing diversity, and managing the dynamics of differences.

Students are assigned to read *A Matter of Trust* (Schraff & Langan, 2002) from the Bluford Series. The Bluford Series is a collection of novels that focus on the lives of high school students who attend Bluford High, named after Guion Bluford, America's first black astronaut. The stories are set in contemporary urban America. The characters featured in the novels are diverse in many ways, and students can experience how the characters address topics such as family, friends, trust, violence, isolation, peer pressure, and many more that are important to adolescents (*The Bluford Series*, 2022). *A Matter of Trust* (Schraff & Langan, 2002) centers on high school student Darcy's growing conflict with her old friend, Brisana Meeks. Amid jealousy and competition, Darcy fights for her relationship with Hakeem Randall and struggles with her fears over her own family's future (Schraff & Langan, 2002).

As a class and after reading the book, students are assigned a character and must answer questions based on that character's point of view. For example, a student would be assigned the character Darcy. This student would practice empathy for Darcy while the other students analyzed the feelings of how *they* would feel if their father left at a young age as Darcy's father did. Pretending to be Darcy, they would then come up with one question to ask Darcy's father, and the person pretending to be Darcy's father would respond from the dad's perspective. Completing this exercise with various characters and storylines from the book enables individuals to feel the weight of the characters' issues which range from jealousy, racial injustice, stereotyping, fighting, relationship struggles, fear, and many more. Students are then asked to complete the following:

Write a one-and-a-half-page summary of the *A Matter of Trust* (Schraff & Langan, 2002) novel. Please include these items in your response:

- What is the overall summary of the story being told?
- Specifically, how can this story be an outlet for students to work through problems and help them recognize they are not alone in their struggles?
- Reflect upon cultural differences and insights.
- What is bibliotherapy?
- How could bibliotherapy be included as a teaching method in your future classroom?

According to Byrd et al. (2021), there are multiple approaches to using bibliotherapy. Simply reading the literature can be a source of becoming more culturally aware or allowing yourself to become empathetic as you gaze through the lens of each character. Another method, as referenced in the strategy above, includes interactive bibliotherapy. Within this method, the participant, the literature, and the facilitator create interactions that involve distinct responses and a better understanding of the story. The facilitator can drive the conversations that help the participant integrate feelings and cognitive responses to the story. Additional bibliotherapy activities could include:

- *Reading and responding to the text:* Teachers can use the series to promote critical reading and response skills, encouraging students to reflect on the characters, themes, and issues presented in the text. Students can also discuss and analyze their own experiences and perspectives concerning the text.
- *Creating visual representations:* Students can create visual representations of the characters or themes in the series, using a range of media such as drawing, painting, or digital tools. This activity can promote critical thinking and reflection, as well as creativity and self-expression.
- *Engaging in discussions:* Teachers can facilitate discussions on themes and issues presented in the series, creating a safe and respectful space for students to share their own experiences and perspectives. These discussions can promote critical thinking, empathy, and understanding.
- *Conducting research:* Teachers can assign research projects that explore topics related to the themes and issues presented in the series, such as poverty, racism, or social justice. This activity can promote critical thinking, research skills, and awareness of different perspectives and experiences.
- *Writing and reflection:* Teachers can assign writing and reflection activities that encourage students to reflect on their own experiences and perspectives, and to connect

these to the themes and issues presented in the series. This activity can promote critical thinking, self-awareness, and empathy.

- *Collaborative projects*: Teachers can assign collaborative projects that require students to work together to address issues of equity and inclusion, such as creating a community action plan or developing a public service announcement. This activity can promote critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, and advocacy skills.

The FCS EPP has created and implemented a DEI Plan for our undergraduate and graduate courses. While our plan is a compliance expectation with the Texas Educator Preparation Program Requirements, we have gone beyond the minimum expectations to include a comprehensive plan which was used as a model plan in our recent EEP accreditation review documentation. Please see the Appendix to view the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in FCSE Undergraduate Educator Preparation Courses DEI plan.

### **Conclusion**

By identifying hidden biases, future educators can journey toward their cultural proficiency, therefore, enabling them to create a culturally competent classroom in their future teaching endeavors (The Center for Culturally Proficient Educational Practice, 2022). Bibliotherapy is a starting point to help FCSE students learn how to implement DEI in their classroom. A growth mindset and continuous improvement are necessary within our FCS EPP. Using student evaluations and reflections to guide our growth, continuous improvement can be made. Our DEI goals can be achieved whenever there is a focus and recognition on goal achievement, and faculty, staff, and students will thrive when we begin to cultivate awareness of our biases, work to increase empathy and empathic communication, practice mindfulness and loving-kindness, and develop cross-group friendships in our own lives. By implementing DEI activities in our EPP, over time, our students will be able to connect and communicate with other teachers and students, as well as thrive in the classroom and as future FCS educators. The faculty at Texas Tech University wants our students to recognize they are proficient in DEI with their students and become advocates for ALL of their students, and champions for the Family.

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## **Appendix**

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in FCSE Undergraduate Educator Preparation Courses**

There is support for our DEI plan at the institutional level. Specifically, the College of Human Sciences provides a college-wide DEI response statement and facilitates discussions and activities through its DEI Committee, which is currently chaired by an FCS EPP faculty member.

#### ***COHS Administration Response to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion***

The College of Human Sciences believes and recognizes that diversity makes us stronger. Developing a deeper understanding of each diverse background represented in our community will only strengthen our ability to build a richer and more resilient community that positively impacts those around us and beyond. We are committed to taking action to create a learning environment where all feel valued, respected, supported, and empowered.

#### ***Family and Consumer Sciences Overall Program Level Implementation Actions***

- A new mentorship program is implemented by the Field Experience Coordinator. This program pairs experienced family and consumer sciences teachers with those who have been teaching for three years or less to encourage and help them navigate successfully in the FCS profession.
- Recruit from diverse schools and use culturally diverse schools more frequently for field experiences.
- Invite diverse representatives to the FCSE Program Advisory Board.
- Hold focus groups with diverse learners in our programs.
- Based upon feedback, adjust pedagogical practices in the EPP.
- Survey cooperating teachers for their DEI local expectations and classroom practices.
- Continue having FCS EPP faculty members serve on the college-level DEI Committee.
- Encourage all faculty to apply for the *Institute for Inclusive Excellence*, a university-level extensive professional development for faculty. Each cohort requires an application and a nine-month commitment from faculty participants. Two current FCS EPP faculty have participated.
- Utilize and implement the Equity Framework for Career and Technical Education Research found at CTE Research Network online.

#### ***Family and Consumer Sciences Education Program Course Implementation Actions***

##### **Course: Introduction to Family and Consumer Sciences Education.**

Activities and Resources:

- Discuss DEI during the teaching philosophy assignment and “Traits of a Good vs. Bad Teacher” lecture.
- Begin the process of understanding your own biases by discussing and examining the information on these websites:
  - The Center for Culturally Proficient Educational Practice (2022)
  - MasterClass (*Understanding cultural bias: 3 examples of cultural bias*, 2021)
  - Psychologenie (Blevins, 2015)
- Include the *Culturally Competence Now* (Mayfield, 2020) textbook by making it a required text that will be used throughout the FCSE program.

Long-term Goals or Ideas:



- After this course, students will understand how important DEI is in education, as well as realize that their behaviors and biases affect this.

### **Course: Foundations of Family and Consumer Sciences Education**

#### ***Activities and Resources:***

- Inclusion of all students in (Career and Technical Student Organizations) CTSO-based activities through the integration of CTSO components in the classroom using the FCCLA® Stand Up national program in the classroom.
- Have students participate in FCCLA®-based activities like the Stand Up national program or Power of One with information relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Examine the state and national standards to determine how they can be used to create consistency and equity within lessons.

#### ***Long-term Goals or Ideas:***

- Have students create DEI-focused learning opportunities for all students they will work with in the future.
- Use the state and nation to drive lessons on DEI.

### **Course: Professional Applications in FCSE (Methods)**

#### ***Activities and Resources:***

- Diversity in learning styles.
- Introduce Cultural Competence in the lesson plans, activities, and visuals within the classroom.
- Address cultural needs/competency in the classroom planning process including micro and macro aggressions in terms of instruction.

#### ***Long-term Goals or Ideas:***

- Introduce district-level data for school districts.
- Assign diverse districts and schools for the unit plan. This is the information the students provide in the unit background statements and illustrates the necessary learning supports in the unit and lessons.

### **Course: Instructional Management in FCSE**

#### ***Activities and Resources:***

- Classroom management lectures and discussions include the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom.
- Classroom management lectures and discussions from the Resilient Educator website cover equity, differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, strategies for empathy, social-emotional learning (life literacy-emotional IQ), building character, creating a community for English language learning (ELL) students and Native American students, teaching tolerance in the classroom, inclusive teaching for project-based learning (PBL), tips for understanding emotional behavior disorder (EBD) students, equitable grading, and positive student and teacher relationships.
- Students must create a classroom diversity, equity, and inclusion statement along with their classroom management plan.
- Students are referred to the chapters in the FCS education e-textbook, *Teaching Family and Consumer Sciences in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Live Interactive textbook* (Alexander & Holland, 2018), focusing on classroom management and DEI.

- Students create an entire instructional unit plan dedicated to DEI.

***Long-term Goals or Ideas:***

- Students will leave this course understanding how to control their own biases in a classroom and obtain ideas, instructions, and a plan on how to implement DEI activities in their classrooms in the future.

**Course: Career Preparation in FCSE**

***Activities and Resources:***

- This course provides five hours of work-based learning field experience to observe diversity, culture, and safety in the workplace.
- Course content presents ways to remove legal barriers around work-based learning by understanding state and federal legal, health, and safety requirements and ways to mitigate work-based learning liability concerns for schools and employers to ensure equal access for all students.
- A member of the local Society of Human Resource Management is invited to discuss what they are doing to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion in today's workplace.

***Long-term Goals or Ideas:***

- Develop work-based learning case scenarios where students research, critically think, and develop a solution to diversity, equity, and/or inclusion problems in the workplace.

**]Course: Research and Evaluation in FCSE**

***Activities and Resources:***

- Developing a project that requires various scaffolding strategies to ensure all students are successful in learning while working on the project, as well as every team member is prepared to present that project to an authentic audience.
- Develop a project around a global issue related to a particular FCS course, such as food insecurity that includes meeting with individuals in a particular country to better understand why it is an issue.

***Long-term Goals or Ideas:***

- Students will understand how to create diverse teams within collaborative research and evaluation.
- Continue with mining state education agency data, including the total number of students and diverse populations, to research districts of interest for their student teaching placements.

**Course: U.S. Family Issues and Social Action**

***Activities and Resources:***

- Teaching Tolerance Website: It's an invaluable teacher tool to help reduce prejudice and encourage tolerance in schools, as well as within society as a whole
- Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has a site that fuses meaningful curricular connections between challenging current events and class content and is a helpful go-to for teaching tough issues

***Long-term Goals or Ideas:***

- Facing History and Ourselves: A wealth of resources to explore racism and prejudice. These materials empower students to understand and address difficult ethical choices --

past and present, as well as social justice and biases in policymakers. These resources will be added to this course in the future.

### **Course: Student Teaching in FCSE**

#### ***Activities and Resources:***

- Students attend required TEA training: Tutorial for Substance Use Disorder Treatment Professionals, Making Educators Partners in Youth Suicide Prevention: Act on FACTS, Texas Behavioral Support Initiative Course, and Dyslexia: Characteristics, Identification, and Effective Strategies.
- During student teaching, students are implementing their DEI plan. With the guidance of their cooperating teacher, they are adjusting their own biases and learning how to ensure each student is being served equitably. Students can also create their own DEI statement.
- Each lesson plan contains its plan for serving special populations.
- During student teaching seminars, student teachers refresh, reflect, and reinforce their classroom interactions by researching effective strategies for teaching in an all-inclusive environment. What are they seeing in their classrooms to share with their peers?

#### ***Long-term Goals or Ideas:***

- After this course, students will have fully implemented their DEI plan for a minimum of two weeks. This will help them gain experience in implementing their DEI plan for use in their future classroom.

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