

Developing a Culturally Responsive Classroom Library: A Practical Infographic Guide
for Elementary Educators

by
Carly Coleman

A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from
the University Honors College

Spring 2026

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Janna McClain, Thesis Director

Dr. Dianna Rust, Thesis Committee Chair

Developing a Culturally Responsive Classroom Library: A Practical Infographic Guide
for Elementary Educators

by Carly Coleman

APPROVED:

Dr. Janna McClain, Thesis Director

Department of Elementary and Special Education

Dr. Dianna Rust, Thesis Committee Chair

University Honors College

Acknowledgements

I would first like to present my gratitude to Dr. Janna McClain for guiding me in this process. I have never worked on such an in-depth project, and I do not know how I would have gotten through it without your expertise, patience, and encouragement. From our first meeting to the final revisions, your passion and love for pre-service teachers and their future students have been evident in your teaching and research. You have left a lasting impression on me, and I hope to one day emulate your commitment to students and their education in my own professional work.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the elementary education and special education department of MTSU. Changing my major to elementary education at the end of my freshman year was a difficult decision, but the College of Education staff and every professor I have had deepened my love for students and my desire to inspire future generations to be lifelong learners. My courses and field experiences have not only provided me with academic knowledge but also grown my confidence in my pursuit of teaching.

I would additionally like to thank my family, whose love and understanding have been the cornerstone of my academic life. You never fail to provide your full support for all my projects and adventures, no matter how wild or unconventional they may seem. Your love has sustained me through moments of doubt and late-night work sessions. I would like to give a special thanks to my parents. You have never failed to provide unconditional love and support. Because of this, you fostered in me the ambition to shoot for the moon, and the contentment to land among the stars should I miss. I am forever

grateful to you for the example you set of living a life guided by the Lord and driven by genuine love, a strong work ethic, and unfailing generosity.

Abstract

As American schools become increasingly diverse, teachers often lack the resources to evaluate, select, and provide their students with diverse literary media. Research has shown that diverse literature not only increases students' positive views of their own culture but also promotes cultural learning and academic success. The study aims to support elementary teachers striving to develop their own culturally responsive classroom libraries by curating a research-based infographic guide.

This project is inspired by existing research on culturally responsive pedagogy. Methods include a review of the existing literature and semi-structured interviews with nine elementary teachers from three different Tennessee counties about the challenges, requirements, evaluation, and selection processes they face when creating their classroom libraries.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vi
List of Terms	vii
Introduction	1
Literature Review	1
Thesis Statement	4
Research Questions	5
Methods	5
Findings	9
Conclusion	21
References	23
Appendix A	27
Appendix B	29
Appendix C	35
Appendix D	40
IRB Approval Letter	47

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant Characteristics	10
--	----

List of Terms

Culturally Responsive Teaching: The use of the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance style of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: An educational framework that utilizes the implementation of cultural identities of students, their experiences, and lifestyles into the classroom learning environment.

Introduction

The goal of this action research thesis is to develop an infographic style infographic guide for elementary educators on building a culturally responsive classroom library (See Appendix A). Culturally responsive teaching is defined as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance style of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010). I have synthesized literature to provide criteria for teachers evaluating books for their libraries, collected data through interviews with current elementary educators, and focused on creating an award book recommendation list that represents multiple races, ethnicities, cultures, abilities/disabilities, and socioeconomic statuses. This infographic infographic guide will be useful for K-5 teachers in any classroom at various types of schools. Due to the current heightened political climate, the books included may be considered controversial in certain areas across the United States, but their status is noted in the recommendation list if relevant.

Literature Review

Although the political climate in the United States has created controversy around diversity, equity, and inclusion, educational researchers have a broad consensus regarding the importance of valuing diversity in schools (AERA, 2025). It is vital that students learn that differences are not always a bad thing and that they see themselves reflected in the media presented to them (Bishop, 1990). Introducing literature in this manner is an example of engaging in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), students must learn about topics that matter to them to achieve academic success, value aspects of their own culture to develop cultural competence and feel empowered to

respond to the injustices in their immediate communities and beyond. By being introduced to age-appropriate literature that represents social minorities in their community and the world, students can be pushed towards academic success that affirms their own culture while also expanding their cultural knowledge and awareness of the world. Research on the impact of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy on student reading outcomes has found that students' insights into themselves and others increased both within and outside their own culture (Duke et al., 2021).

Sims Bishop's (1990) concept of children's literature as "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors" offers a strong conceptual argument for the importance of diverse media in classroom libraries. Children can get a glimpse of the differences of other cultures that make them so important. When children read books that depict characters like them, whether by race, language, or lifestyle, they can begin to see themselves interacting with society in ways they may have never deemed attainable. Research by Fleming et al. (2025) suggests that when children interact with urban children's literature that mirrors their personal experiences, it can increase literacy engagement by leveraging students' funds of knowledge and allowing them to share their lives. Children's literature has the ability to be a gateway to an increase in desire to and enjoyment of reading if effectively used in this way.

Children's literature can also be used to fight lingering stereotypes. Derman-Sparks (2016) provides well-crafted guidelines for balancing aspects of representation in a classroom setting. Guidelines include avoiding tokenism, stereotypical illustrations, and loaded words. They also include representing own-voice authors, children, and adults

who strive to make positive changes, and empowering all students, not just a select few. Culturally responsive children's literature may also increase feelings of belonging in students. Digital Promise, a nonprofit organization focused on equal learner opportunity, suggests that students with a strong ethnic or racial identity may have a "buffer" against the negative impact of discrimination on their social and emotional well-being (n.d.). Since children's literature serves as a mirror for students to develop strong, positive views of their own culture and identity, it may also help increase feelings of belonging or inclusion in classroom environments.

While diversity in children's literature is increasing slowly, there is still a lack of representation that needs to be addressed. According to statistics from the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) in an article by staff from the School Library Journal (2024), out of 3,491 books received, 40% had a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) primary subject or main character. This percentage may sound appropriate; however, books with a White (28%) or animal (20%) primary subject or main character account for a larger share than books that include diverse representation. Another startling realization is that books with a Black or African main character or primary subject are not even half of the percentage of books with White characters fulfilling the same role.

Although diversity in children's literature publications is slowly increasing, these books do not seem to be making their way into classrooms. Of the twenty most common books found in Tennessee classroom libraries, all authors were white, half were male, and half were female; in terms of racial and gender identity, 55% of main characters were

white, 35% anthropomorphic (animals with human characteristics), 10% black, 35% male, and 30% female (DaSilva et al., 2025). The same research found that more “challenging” themes, such as racial inequalities, socioeconomic disparities, and gender/sexual identities, are largely absent in Tennessee classroom libraries. The Tennessee Age-Appropriate Materials Act of 2022 requires the publication of lists of classroom library content and has the power to deem books unacceptable for classroom use (Tennessee General Assembly, 2022). This, along with accessibility issues, will be examined as proposed barriers to teachers, including culturally responsive literature in their classroom libraries.

As an elementary education major, I have experience with children’s literature and knowledge of its importance. Additionally, as a white female who grew up in schools that lacked racial diversity, coming to a more diverse area such as Rutherford County to learn to teach, I have recognized my own lack of knowledge when it comes to incorporating age-appropriate materials that celebrate people who are different from me. Since I plan to use the knowledge and wisdom I gain from compiling this infographic guide to help my future students better understand one another and to ignite awareness of the social changes that need to take place, this project has been well worth my time and effort as an honors student and future elementary educator.

Thesis Statement

This project argues that teachers can foster cultural affirmation and curiosity by creating a classroom library that highlights the cultures present in the classroom and the world. To support this claim, this action research thesis provides elementary educators

with an easy-to-understand, practical infographic guide to developing their own culturally responsive classroom libraries. The infographic guide provides insights from educators, evaluation criteria for diverse children's books, recommended book lists, and practical funding resources. While research on culturally relevant and responsive teaching methods is established, teachers across the country lack easy access to these methods in a synthesized resource that bridges research and classroom application. The final project is useful for K-5 teachers as it includes a wide variety of perspectives and methods for classroom library curation. It also benefits their students by giving them opportunities to expand their knowledge and curiosity about their own culture and cultural differences in society.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this project are as follows:

1. What supports and barriers do elementary classroom teachers currently experience when creating a classroom library?
2. What factors shape elementary teachers' decisions to include books in their classroom libraries?
3. How do teachers conceptualize culturally responsive literature?
4. What resources have teachers previously used to construct their classroom library?

Methods

The infographic guide includes personal reflections from current elementary educators from three Tennessee counties on their experiences with designing classroom

libraries. The data from these reflections were obtained from interviews: eight conducted online via Zoom and one by phone due to Zoom technology issues, with transcripts transcribed using Otter.ai. IRB approval for these interviews was obtained on October 27th, 2025. The original sampling method was snowball sampling, a nonprobability sampling method that begins with an initial hand-selected group of participants who then refer the researcher to additional potential data sources (Dudovskiy, 2019). The three initial participants were selected by my advisor and me from the three selected counties. After their interviews were conducted, these participants would have referred me to another teacher in their county. This was supposed to continue until a total of nine interviews were conducted. However, due to non-response issues, only one of the nine interviewees (11.11%) was contacted through snowball sampling. The other eight were contacted directly by me, or by faculty members in the College of Education at MTSU.

My interviewing method was interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA interview structure has the benefit of not explicitly telling one what to ask, but how to manage the questioning process (Bevan, 2014). IPA interviewing is conceptually linked to phenomenology, which argues that the identity of an experience appears in different modes and has multiple ways of experiencing (Sokolowski 2000, as cited in Bevan 2014). This is especially helpful for this project, as single questions are not adequate for the data that needs to be collected. The phenomenological method enabled me to explore multiple educators' points of view while structuring the interview to accommodate participants' natural attitudes, foster critical, reflexive self-dialogue, and promote active listening (Bevan, 2014).

I developed a semi-structured interview protocol following the processes and question types described by Bhattacharya (2017). One concern with conducting this type of interview is that interviewees may be asked questions that may feel uncomfortable, leading them to choose not to self-disclose (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The semi-structured nature is intended to promote natural conversations that lead to authentic answers to questions interviewees may otherwise feel uncomfortable answering. A sample size of nine is adequate, as IPA studies are designed to include small samples due to the lengthy process of detailed transcript analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

One of the most important parts of this data collection was having an interview script (see Appendix B) with potential follow-up questions. Analyzing the transcripts was essential to compiling the infographic guide, and a thematic analysis was deemed most appropriate for this project as it allows for easy pattern identification across interviewees.

Naeem et al. (2023) describe a 6-step method for conducting a thematic analysis of an interview script as follows. The first step was to transcribe and familiarize yourself with the data. This revealed trends and themes within the responses, making it easier to organize data. The next step was to take the identified themes and make them into keywords. This helped me summarize interviewees' perspectives and experiences in simple terms. The third step was creating codes, short words or phrases, with the help of the previously identified keywords. These codes express the main idea of the segment of data to which they were assigned. Then, themes were developed by grouping the codes into clusters that carry “patterned meanings that link the research questions and data” (Naeem et al., 2023). Through conceptualization, the study seeks to understand and interpret concepts derived from the data. These interpretations were to be of high quality

and carry significant meaning. Finally, a conceptual model was developed that culminates the findings of the research. This model infographic guided the development of the final infographic guide's sections.

Through thematic analysis, the data from these interviews directly shaped the final infographic guide. The practical infographic guide includes a section that addresses the questions: What supports and barriers do elementary classroom teachers currently experience when creating a classroom library? What factors shape elementary teachers' decisions to include books in their classroom libraries? How do teachers conceptualize culturally responsive literature? The answers to these questions are informed by data from the IPA interviews, providing other educators with applicable insight into how they can better support their students' cultural knowledge through revisions to their own classroom libraries.

The infographic guide also includes book recommendations gathered from a variety of sources, including teachingforchange.org, the American Library Association, and interviewees. Along with the recommendations, a checklist is provided to help teachers select books for their classroom libraries. This checklist was developed by me but takes inspiration from previously curated checklists (see Appendix C; Harper & Brand, 2010; National Education Association, 2024; Office of Head Start National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness, n.d.). These sources emphasize similar key criteria that a book must include or exclude to be considered culturally responsive. Some of these criteria include avoiding stereotyping, representing diverse people groups, and

the author's background. The infographic also includes practical, cost-effective resources for funding diverse books for classroom libraries.

The final infographic guide has been included in Appendix A. Digital copies have been produced to enable easy, accessible distribution ([access to digital copies here](#)). These have also been distributed to participants through email. The infographic guide will be available to be distributed through the College of Education's social media platforms

Findings

After conducting the semi-structured interviews, the qualitative data excerpts were analyzed through the use of thematic analysis. The following section details the key characteristics of the interviewees and the four major themes identified in the data excerpts. Each theme is then further discussed in relation to the study's guiding research questions.

The nine interviewees were given pseudonyms to prevent any privacy breaches. The participants had a wide range of years of experience in the education field, with the least experience being two first-year teachers and the most being a teacher with 30 years of experience. Teachers working in each elementary level were interviewed, with some overlap in third and fourth grade. Each participant currently teaches in one of three Tennessee counties. The counties have also received numbers for privacy purposes. As shown below, Table 1 provides an organized overview of each interviewee.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Teacher Pseudonym	# of Years Teaching	Current Grade	District
Ms. Moore	6	4th	1
Ms. Johnson	17	3rd	1
Ms. White	30	2nd	3
Ms. Ahmed	1	4th	2
Ms. Garcia	12	4th	2
Ms. Hamilton	21	K	3
Ms. Wilson	17	3rd	3
Ms. Armond	3	1st	2
Ms. Richards	1	5th	1

The transcripts of the nine interviews were analyzed using 24 thematic codes (see Appendix D). In total, 278 excerpts were identified, along with 365 code applications. Some excerpts received multiple codes. After reviewing the excerpts and code frequencies, the codes were condensed into four key themes. These themes are valuing classroom libraries, previously used resources, out-of-pocket expenses, and obstacles to students engaging with texts.

Through the process of reviewing excerpts, it was clear that teachers in Tennessee value diversity being present in their classroom libraries. All interviewees found value and importance in having a classroom library that represents their students and other cultures. Ms. Ahmed stated:

Obviously, I think it's wildly important. I think it's greatly important, because not only do students need to be able to see their own cultures reflected in the books that they read, but it's also important for students to see other cultures. Because children learn not only through, like, words on a page, right? They learn through experiences. They learn through the things that they go through in life and the media that they consume. So, ensuring that all students are exposed to all cultures is important for their overall development.

This quote reveals a common belief held by teachers. Teachers recognized that for students to be well-rounded individuals, they need to engage with media that makes them feel seen and introduces them to people who are different from them. This, in turn, suggests that the importance of high-quality, diverse literature may compel teachers to provide these texts for their students to benefit from. In their experience, teachers also found that diverse classroom libraries aid in fostering a culture of respect in classrooms. 44.44% of teachers specifically mentioned respect in their interviews. Ms. Johnson noted:

And I think that that is super important and necessary, because if we can teach children at this grade level to respect differences, we won't have the mess going on right now that's going on. You change it from the classroom, not from outside.

This teacher strongly believes that many of the world's problems stem from a lack of respect, also suggesting that teachers play a vital role in students learning the concept of respect, and this starts in their classrooms. As students engage with texts that represent themselves and their peers, they can begin to appreciate the differences between themselves and others. When people can understand each other, their beliefs, and their abilities, conflicts may become easier to resolve.

A second theme identified was the use of previously identified resources. Both first-year and veteran teachers were able to give examples of resources that they had used to build up their classroom libraries. 100% of participants provided at least one resource they used to add books to their classroom library. It is important that teachers are aware of the resources that they can access, so this finding was considered key. Teachers used donations from families and colleagues, professional development opportunities, organizations such as Read to Succeed and Cassidy Cares, and online sources such as Epic. Additionally, many school districts provide teachers with a classroom budget to purchase classroom resources. Ms. Johnson spoke on the use of classroom budgets enthusiastically:

Yes, my district provides teachers with money, and the PCO gives us money in a special account that we can spend. And so, we are allowed to go into the Scholastic Book Fair and spend moneys. And that's where I get a lot of my diverse books from.

These allocated funds allow teachers to make their own decisions about which books to include in their classroom libraries. If teachers relied solely on donations and

other resources, they would have much less say over which books they want in their classrooms. By using classroom budgets to purchase books for their classroom libraries, teachers can also ensure that their students' interests are represented in the available literature.

A third key theme derived from the analysis was out-of-pocket expenses. The participants made it clear that outside resources and classroom budgets can only be stretched so far. 66.66% of teachers identified that buying books for their classroom library with their personal funds is a barrier to building a classroom library. Ms. Ahmed, a first-year teacher, explained, "... it was really stressful at the beginning of the year because I didn't have literally any money to buy books for my library." Luckily for Ms. Ahmed, she was able to obtain around 100 books from the school librarian while she was throwing some books out. However, many teachers do not stumble across this luck. Because of this, it is vital that all teachers are made aware of the resources that were mentioned previously. One of the three teachers who did not mention issues with relying on their own funds, Ms. Wilson, encouraged teachers who are early in their careers:

Take those donations when they're available ... don't spend, you know, a ton of your own money doing it, because it's easy to do, especially your first few years. It's so easy to just say, well, that's how I have to buy it, but you know, depend on others. Ask when you know teachers retiring, or you know that if you know a former teacher, ask if they have any literature. I would say, just go look for it and don't be in a hurry.

Veteran teachers may better understand the benefits of using other resources before resorting to their own money to add books to their classroom libraries. Many new educators leave higher education, excited to be in the classroom with their first group of students. Because of this, they may feel they have to have perfect classroom on the first day, making it tempting to buy a plethora of brand-new, diverse books.

The final key finding from the analysis of the interview transcripts is the obstacles students face in engaging with text. Many external factors can interfere with students' ability or desire to engage with diverse texts. One of these is teacher biases. 55.55% of the participants indicated that they would not include certain books due to their own preferences. Four of the five participants who discussed this specifically mentioned their preference to exclude books with LGBTQIA+ themes. Three of those four currently teach in the same school district. This may reveal a potential community bias against conversations or matters that involve LGBTQIA+ topics. Ms. Armond gave this as her reasoning:

... so anything that's like related to sexuality, I try not to include just because I think that's the parents, you know, parents or family members. I try and leave that to them, because I don't think that's my job as a teacher.

This personal preference directly affects the media students engage with in their classrooms, as it excludes certain content from the classroom library. This, along with other teachers' personal preferences, can be considered an external barrier to students' access to diverse books. Students' own biases can also hinder their desire to engage with

different texts. 44.44% of the interviewees reported having experience dealing with student biases. The most specific example came from Ms. Ahmed:

I think the only negative reaction that I've had come from a student that was reading a book about women coding or something. And he was just like, said something about women and how they- women can't do this. Men should do this or something. And so it was a whole conversation about that.

These biases may potentially prevent students from engaging in classroom discussion about diversity. Students may also be more likely to dismiss a book containing diversity when they hold these biases. When situations like these arise, many teachers take personal responsibility to have mature conversations with students to explain how harmful biases can be to a classroom environment. These conversations can be emotionally taxing on teachers due to the complexity of administration and parental opinions. To avoid these difficult conversations, some teachers choose not to include books they find inappropriate for the classroom. Ms. Wilson stated, "I would only have things that I know are good for kids." This effectively shows that teacher and student bias can overlap and co-occur. Additionally, some teachers may feel the need to avoid certain books to avoid conflict with parents. 33.33% of participants reported personally experiencing parental disapproval. Ms. Garcia spoke about a curriculum book that received parental criticism:

... when we first implemented this new ELA curriculum that we use now, there was a parent that was upset over one of the books that we read ... it's called

Nazarene Secret School. It's about a little girl in Afghanistan and how, like, little girls are no longer able to go to school or to learn and things like that.

When authority figures push back against diverse literature, students can face challenges accessing these books. Additionally, it can reasonably be inferred that parental figures' attitudes and biases influence students' biases. This could lead to more biases entering the classroom, disrupting the previously established atmosphere of respect. When parents take these strides, books can become excluded at the district or state level. Ms. Hamilton shared four titles of books that had been censored from her school library. These titles are *The Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds, *Princess Boy* by Cheryl Kilodavis, *Mommy, Mama, and Me* by Lesléa Newman, and the comic book series *Lumberjanes* by Shannon Watters. *The Long Way Down* covers topics such as gun violence and poverty, while the other three titles include LGBTQIA+ content. While these books may not have been excluded by a classroom teacher, censorship at any level can lead students to miss out on opportunities to learn about others or life experiences that differ from their own.

These four key findings directly address the research questions. Examining the excerpts allowed for connections to be made between the data and the desired answers. Some of these key themes address more than one research question, and they all help highlight real teacher life experiences.

Research question one focused on the supports and barriers teachers face in developing their classroom libraries. This data identified common resources teachers use to create a classroom library, such as classroom budgets, non-profit organizations, and

colleagues. Teachers also frequently discussed barriers in creating their classroom libraries, including funding, bias, and parental disapproval, which also addresses question one.

Research question two examined the factors that shape teachers' decisions to include or exclude books from their classroom libraries. These interviews revealed that personal biases can strongly influence what they include or exclude in their classroom libraries.

Question three asked how teachers view and understand culturally responsive literature. An analysis of the responses revealed that all participants found culturally responsive literature valuable for representing their students, introducing them to other cultures, and helping them become well-rounded people. Some teachers also viewed culturally responsive literature to foster respect among students.

Question four explored the resources that teachers have used in the past to build up their classroom libraries. Similar to question two, the interviews revealed a variety of strategies to build their libraries, including professional development courses, colleagues, donations, and others.

When considered together, these four key findings highlight how the current themes in the participant interviews address the guiding research questions of this study. This effectively highlights teacher experience in developing classroom libraries.

Limitations & Implications

Though this study successfully examines and analyzes teachers' relationships and opinions toward diverse classroom libraries, several limitations must be considered. By defining the present limitations, the scope of the study can be better determined. The largest limitation of this study was my inability to implement snowball sampling and instead rely on convenience sampling. The original design for this study was to have the selected teachers (one from each county) provide references to contact for interviews. The first issue was a lack of response from teachers who were reached out to by email. This could possibly be due to message quarantining through their district emails. Another issue may have been the timing of the teachers' contact. Teachers were first contacted in November. At this time of year, elementary schools become busy with Thanksgiving break and preparing for the end of the semester. Additional teachers were emailed in January, but at this time of the year, teachers are busy reteaching classroom behaviors and reacclimating students to the school environment. When teachers completed their interviews, they were asked to provide any colleague contacts who may be interested in participating in the study. Of the contacts received, only two responded, and only one interview was conducted. If this study were replicated, it would be advisable to use a different sampling method to reduce the need for manual participant selection. Convenience sampling could introduce unintentional bias into the collected data, as the selected participants were all previously known to faculty members or me at the College of Education at MTSU.

Additionally, this study interviewed teachers through Zoom, keeping the interviewer from seeing the classroom libraries to their full extent. Using Zoom made it easy to implement Otter.ai's Notetaker, an AI software that transcribes audio and separates the dialogue by speaker. When recording more than one voice in person or without Zoom, which doesn't recognize which participant is speaking, the transcript can become easily distorted, with dialogue misplaced. However, without visiting the teachers' classroom libraries, the interviewer must rely solely on the descriptions they provide in their interviews. Some teachers provide more detailed information, while others only offer generalized responses. Of the nine participants, only two moved their cameras to show the details of their classroom libraries. If the researcher were to be in person, they could collect photos, multiple book titles, and note any features overlooked by the participants. If replicated, it is highly recommended that the researcher visit the classroom library in person, even if the interview is conducted via Zoom. This would provide them with more detailed data to work with.

A final limitation of this study was that participants were interviewed only once. A single interview can provide the researcher with high-quality information, but a series of interviews that build on one another can help the researcher identify more precise themes. If replicated, it is suggested that each participant be interviewed four times. Each interview would be centered around one of the research questions. When completed, the researcher may find it easy to cross-reference interviews, as they will be organized by topic. Additionally, this may be easier for participants, as they only have to focus on one main topic during each interview rather than multiple complex topics in the same sitting.

These limitations notwithstanding, the findings provide critical insight into how teachers value culturally diverse classroom libraries, the resources they use, and the support and barriers they face. With these findings in mind, teachers should consider their classroom environments and the support their students need to counter their personal biases. One suggestion is to find literature that combines both diversity and students' interests. This may lead students to be more willing to select a book that includes themes they are biased against. Teachers can also do a "book highlight of the week," in which they select a diverse book and give a quick, but detailed, review. They should make these books seem interesting and worthwhile. These ideas may help establish the classroom norm of respect, which, in turn, supports behavior maintenance and a welcoming, safe classroom.

From this study, school districts may consider how they can help teachers become more aware of the resources available to them. Like the infographic produced by this research, the district administration could compile a monthly newsletter detailing any new grants or funding opportunities that teachers may not be aware of. In this newsletter, a new organization or non-profit organization that has free or inexpensive books could be spotlighted each month. Additionally, teachers who are clearing out their classroom libraries or retiring could submit their contact information for any other teachers to use in the future. By doing this, administrators can support their teachers by showing that they care about the texts their students have available to them, as well as helping them identify any resources they may be unfamiliar with.

This research and its findings suggest that classroom libraries with diverse representation are essential to student development. Teachers have identified that diverse literature helps students to become familiar with cultures unlike their own and puts them on a path to becoming respectful adults. Though not promised, this can put them on track for success in life, which many teachers hope for their students.

This study opens many avenues for further research. One suggested study would be a longitudinal study on the academic outcomes of students who had access to quality, diverse books versus those who did not. This study could track the academic data of students from a school district well known for its diversity and inclusion, as well as from one that is not. A second study could be a student-focused phenomenological research study. This could resemble the semi-structured interview method used in this study, but with research questions better suited to young students. A final study that could be conducted could be similar to this one, but with a much larger sample pool that compares regions of the United States rather than just Tennessee.

Conclusion

As diversity in education remains an ever-present, controversial conversation in the United States, teachers are continually challenged to adequately represent their students and the broader world in their classroom libraries. Using phenomenological research through semi-structured interviews and thematic coding, this study explored how teachers think about cultural responsiveness, the resources they know are available to them, and the internal and external barriers and supports they face in creating a diverse classroom library.

This study identified four key themes through the analysis of participant interview transcripts. One of these findings was that elementary teachers value classroom libraries that represent their students. This leads to a second key finding: there are common resources that Tennessee teachers use to diversify their classroom libraries and access high-quality texts. Though these resources may be available, a third finding found that teachers frequently spend their own money to ensure their students have access to books they believe are important for them to read. The idea of choosing books they personally believe are good for students segues into the final finding: student biases, teacher bias, parental disapproval, and the exclusion of books can pose barriers to students' full access to diverse texts.

This research was worthwhile, as it provides a general overview of common patterns in the conceptualization of cultural responsiveness and reflectivity among elementary educators in Tennessee. The implications of this study show that steps can be taken in the lives of teachers and administrators to better ensure that students have access to texts proven to improve their academic success rates.

As the topic of diversity and its role in education continues to provoke diverse stances, it is important that researchers continue to examine how teachers, students, and parents conceptualize diverse media in the classroom. Continued growth in understanding of this subject will ensure that students receive a quality education that not only develops them academically but also molds them into socially aware and respectful adults.

References

- American Educational Research Association. (2025, February). *AERA responds to the new administration efforts to dismantle scientific research and data: NCES and IES take big hit*. <https://www.aera.net/Newsroom/AERA-Highlights-E-newsletter/AERA-Highlights-February-2025/AERA-Responds-to-the-New-Administration-Efforts-to-Dismantle-Scientific-Research-and-DataNCES-and-IES-Take-Big-Hit>
- Bevan, M. T. (2014). A method of phenomenological interviewing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 24(1), 136–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732313519710>
- Bhattacharya, K. (2017). Unit 6: Data collection methods. In *Fundamentals of qualitative research: A practical guide* (pp. 126–148). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315231747-6>
- DaSilva, A., Clay, M., McClain, J., Barksdale, B., & Schrodt, K. (2024). “*Divisive topics,*” “*age-appropriateness*” and elementary classroom libraries in Tennessee: An explanatory sequential mixed method work-in-progress. Presented at the Literacy Research Association annual meeting on December 4, 2024 in Atlanta, GA.
- Derman-Sparks, L. (2016, January 27). *Guide for selecting anti-bias children’s books*. Social Justice Books. <https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books/>
- Digital Promise. (n.d.). *Sense of belonging: Literacy 4-6*. Learner Variability Navigator. Retrieved [November 13, 2025], from

<https://lvp.digitalpromiseglobal.org/content-area/literacy-4-6/factors/sense-of-belonging-literacy-4-6/summary>

Dudovskiy, J. (2019). *Snowball sampling*. *Business Research Methodology*.

<https://research-methodology.net/sampling-in-primary-data-collection/snowball-sampling/>

Dukes, Charles & Ming, Kevin & Finnegan, Lisa & Miller, Katie. (2021). *Culturally responsive literacy instruction: How is it reflected in the literature?*. Multicultural Learning and Teaching. -1. 10.1515/mlt-2020-0002.

Fleming, J., Catapano, S., Thompson, C. M., & Ruvalcaba Carrillo, S. (2015). The power of the mirror: Identity, academic self-concept, and motivation to learn. In *More mirrors in the classroom: Using urban children's literature to increase literacy* (Chapter 2, p. 21). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=Q8svDAAAQBAJ>

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, practice, and research* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Harper, L., & Brand, S. (2010). *Checklist for selecting and evaluating multicultural literature* [Checklist]. Primary English Teaching Association Australia.

https://www.petaa.edu.au/Mp/Curric-Res/Book-Chapters/PET128-Adams-Diversity/Harper_brand_checklist.aspx

Kilodavis, C. (2011). *My princess boy*. Aladdin.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>

- Lesléa Newman, & Thompson, C. (2009). *Mommy, mama, and me*. Tricycle Press.
- Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22(1), 1–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>
- National Education Association. (2024). *Checklist for identifying high-quality children's literature that includes disability experiences* [Checklist].
<https://www.nea.org/resource-library/checklist-identifying-high-quality-childrens-literature-includes-disability-experiences>
- Office of Head Start National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. (n.d.). *Selecting and using culturally responsive children's books* [PDF]. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/selecting-culturally-appropriate-books.pdf>
- Reynolds, J. (2017). *Long way down*. Atheneum.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 53–80). SAGE.
- Stevenson, N. D., Ellis, G., Allen, B., & Watters, S. (2014–2020). *Lumberjanes*. BOOM! Studios.

Tennessee General Assembly. (2022). *Age-Appropriate Materials Act of 2022*, Pub. Ch. 744, Tenn. Code Ann. Title 49, § 49-6-3801 et seq.

<https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/default.aspx?BillNumber=SB2407&GA>

=112

Appendix A

Infographic guide

DEVELOPING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM LIBRARY

A GUIDEBOOK FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATORS

1 The Importance of Diverse Texts

Diverse texts can improve student success, boost engagement with texts, and help create a respectful learning environment.

2 Resources for Diverse Text Access/Funding

- [Read to Succeed](#)
- Professional Development Workshops
- Cassidy Cares
- [Epic](#)
- Teacher/Parent Donations

3 Resources for Finding Diverse Book Titles

- [Teaching For Change](#)
- [American Library Association](#)
- [Cooperative Children's Book Center](#)
- [We Need Diverse Books](#)

4 Resources for Finding Diverse Book Titles

- [Teaching For Change](#)
- [American Library Association](#)
- [Cooperative Children's Book Center](#)
- [We Need Diverse Books](#)

5 High Quality Diverse Book Awards

- [Coretta Scott King Award](#)
- [Schneider Family Book Award](#)
- [Pura Belpré Award](#)
- [Arab American Book Award](#)

4 Diverse Book Evaluation Criteria

- Is the story engaging?
- Are the portrayals of cultures accurate?
- Are the text and/or illustrations free of stereotypes or tokenism?
- Does the author have a credible background?
- Does this book represent students' interests?
- Is the story developmentally appropriate?
- Do the characters reflect your classroom population or local community?
- Is culture explored rather than simply included?
- Are diverse characters fully developed and given purpose in the story?

TENNESSEE TEACHERS' RECOMMENDATIONS: A DIVERSE LIBRARY

A GUIDEBOOK FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATORS

1 Consider Student Interests

".... when making decisions on what books to choose, I considered the students' interests. But because of the relationships that I've built with my students, I know them each on an individual level."

2 Fight Your Own Biases

"You can't have a culturally responsive and reflective classroom and library without first evaluating your own biases... teachers are not immune to being racist. They're not immune to being bigots."

3 Take Your Time

"Take your time... It's going to take some years to really build it up. Take those donations ...don't spend, you know, a ton of your own money doing it, because it's easy to do, especially your first few years."

4 Utilize Your Colleagues

"definitely, colleagues on a very regular basis, and our librarian is absolutely fantastic. She will help us in any way if we just ask."

5 Diverse Texts Matter for Students

- "I think it's very important, especially in kindergarten... when they see a character that looks like them or lives like them, or celebrates birthdays like them... it gets their attention, and I think it helps them to realize, like I matter and I'm not alone..."
- "It is necessary because it builds a well rounded human being who has respect for other cultures."
- "I think, I think when I see the joy that they have on their faces when they find a book that looks like them, or if they find a book that looks like somebody they love, I think that it, to me, is what reading is about."

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Script

INTERVIEW SCRIPT — DEVELOPING A CULTURALLY REFLECTIVE

CLASSROOM LIBRARY

Participant ID: ____

Date: _____

Recording Consent Given: Yes / No

Mode: In-person / Zoom / Phone

INTERVIEWER:

Hi! Thank you for being here. I'll be asking you a few questions about your classroom library, focusing on how you think about culture, representation, and student engagement. Feel free to take your time. Let's begin.

SECTION 1: Background and Context

1. How long have you been teaching?

[Participant Response]

2. What grade do you currently teach?

[Participant Response]

3. Have you taught any other grades?

[Participant Response]

4. What school districts have you worked in?

[Participant Response]

5. Describe to me your current classroom library content. (DQ)

[Participant Response]

6. Approximately, how many books are in your classroom library?

[Participant Response]

7. Walk me through any organization systems you have in place for the books in your classroom library. (MTQ)

[Participant Response]

SECTION 2: Current Library Content

8. Can you paint me a picture of what your current classroom library looks like?

This could be décor, organization, or any other pieces you believe to be important. (MTQ)

[Participant Response]

9. Tell me about the types of books that are most common in your classroom library. (DQ)

[Participant Response]

10. What about the types of books that are the least common in your classroom library? (CQ)

[Participant Response]

11. What percentage of your classroom library uses visual illustrations in books?

[Participant Response]

12. Describe to me what cultures are present in your classroom libraries. (DQ)

[Participant Response]

- potential follow up: On the other hand, are there any cultures that you can think of off the top of your head that are not represented adequately in your classroom library? (CQ)

13. Can you provide some examples of these books that are in your classroom? (EQ)

[Participant Response]

14. Walk me through a typical experience when deciding if a book will be included in your classroom library or not. (MTQ)

[Participant Response]

SECTION 3: Representation and Cultural Relevance

15. Describe to me what the terms “culturally reflective” and “culturally responsive” mean to you with the consideration to your classroom library. (DQ)

[Participant Response]

Potential follow up: During higher education, how frequently were these terms, or similar terms, taught or mentioned?

16. Tell me, in what ways do you believe it is or is not important for students to see cultures, identities, and life experiences that identify with in the books that they read? (DQ)

[Participant Response]

17. In what ways have you seen students positively react or respond to literature that reflects their own culture or other cultures in society?

[Participant Response]

18. On the other side of this question, can you think of any instances where students have negatively reacted or responded to a lack of literature that reflects their own culture or other cultures in society? (CQ)

[Participant Response]

19. Describe the shift of opinions, either of students' families or administration, towards any pushes for diversity in the media students consume at school from the beginning of your career until now? (SGTQ)

[Participant Response]

SECTION 4: Challenges and Barriers

20. Tell me about a time you faced challenges such as access, funding, or administration support in creating a classroom library, or more specifically, if possible, a culturally diverse classroom library. (DQ)

[Participant Response]

21. What are the easiest cultures, identities, and/or life experiences to represent in your classroom library?

[Participant Response]

22. Are there any cultures, identities, and/or life experiences that are more difficult to represent in your classroom library?

[Participant Response]

Potential follow up: Are there any reasons you can identify that make these cultures harder to represent in your classroom?

22. Can you tell me about any resources that have helped you to build your classroom library and how you utilized them? This can include professional development opportunities, grants, book lists, etc. (MTQ)

[Participant Response]

Potential follow up: (if having taught in multiple districts) Have you found that these resources are more readily available in some districts compared to others?

SECTION 5: Support and Solutions

23. In your opinion, what are some ways that schools and/or school districts could better support teachers in developing their own culturally reflective classroom libraries?

[Participant Response]

24. Do you utilize collaboration with colleagues, school librarians, or families when making book selections?

[Participant Response]

SECTION 6: Reflection and Advice

25. If you could give one piece of advice to a teacher about creating a culturally responsive classroom library, what would it be?

[Participant Response]

26. Describe to me any memorable moments or reactions from students related to reading diverse literature that are important to you. (DC)

[Participant Response]

SECTION 7: Wrap-Up

27. Is there anything remaining that you would like to discuss that you believe is important or relevant to this topic?

[Participant Response]

28. Would you be open or willing to potentially review a draft of the infographic guide or give feedback on potential book selections in the future?

[Participant Response]

INTERVIEWER:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview with me. Your responses will be transcribed and used only for the purposes of my honors thesis research.

Appendix C

Sources to Inform Checklist

Harper and Brand's Checklist for Selecting and Evaluating Multicultural Literature

Checklist criteria (Harper and Brand 2010)	
Are the author/illustrator qualified to write or illustrate material relating to the culture(s) portrayed? How?	
Have the author/illustrator conducted related research? If not, have they lived among (either as a member of or as a visitor to) the groups of people represented in the book?	
Is the story interesting to children?	
Does the story contain authentic language?	
Are factual and historical details accurate?	
Overall, is this a high-quality story, independent of its multicultural aspects?	
Are characters believable?	
Are universal human emotions, attitudes, needs, and experiences reflected?	
Do characters represent people from a variety of cultural groups?	
Are lifestyles realistic?	
Are females as well as males depicted in leadership roles?	
Does the story reflect a variety of places and times?	
Are urban, suburban, and rural settings represented realistically?	
Are cultural settings and geographical features represented accurately?	
Are real situations depicted?	

Are rigid boundaries of class, culture, religion and ethnicity dismissed?	
Are various conflicts presented for children to explore and discuss?	
How are conflicts resolved?	
Does the story offer children a variety of situations, concepts, and new ideas on which to reflect, question, and consider?	
Are values explored, rather than preached?	
Are there lessons to be learned?	
Are children exposed to multiple perspectives and values?	
How does the story promote understanding of our diverse society?	
Are diverse populations represented?	
Is there diversity within cultural groups?	
Are characters realistically and genuinely represented?	
Do the illustrations avoid reinforcing societal stereotypes?	
Do the illustrations and text use authenticity to demonstrate respect for other cultures?	
Do the illustrations and text convey characteristics common to all people and cultures?	
Is the story age appropriate; can children understand what is presented?	
Is the story individually appropriate in terms of children's family backgrounds?	
Does the story reflect the social, linguistic, and cultural contexts in which children live or to which they can relate?	
Will the story encourage meaningful and relevant discussions?	

Steps to Evaluating Books Worksheet

Use this worksheet to evaluate all children's books, including those in lending libraries for families.

Consider the Context

Who wrote the book? Is the author and/or illustrator a member of the cultural group being portrayed? What is the author's background? When was the book written? What does it teach?

Examine the Illustrations

Are there offensive images? Are diverse characters accurately illustrated? Do the illustrations match the story?

Analyze the Message

Are the messages about sharing, friendship, overcoming obstacles? Diversity? Female characters? Characters with disabilities? People with non-traditional lifestyles?

Weigh the Words

Look for loaded words like "savage," "lazy," "silly," and "bashful." If the book contains any dialect, think about whether the use is appropriate and respectful, or could it be considered offensive or perpetuate stereotypes?



Email: NCCLR@bankstreet.edu • Toll Free: 888-246-1975 • NCCLRinfo@edc.org
Toll Free: 855-494-0331 • <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic>





Considerations for Selecting High-Quality Children's Books That Include Disability Experiences

Use the questions below to help you review and analyze titles before sharing them with your students or adding them to your bookshelves.

Keep Readers in Mind

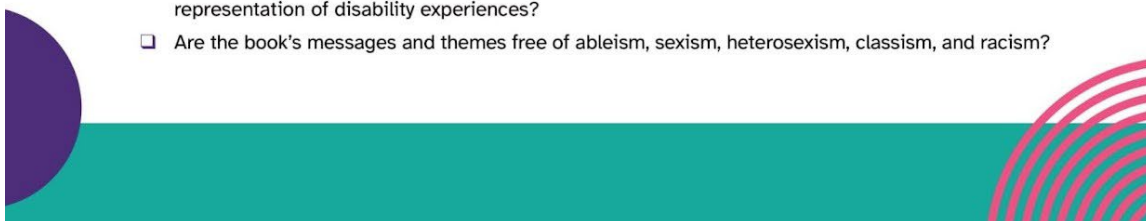
- ☐ Is the title developmentally appropriate?
- ☐ Is the story or subject matter of interest, appeal, and value to students?
- ☐ Will the topics and themes of the book grab and hold their attention?
- ☐ Does the book affirm the identities and experiences of students and/or provide a glimpse into the lives and experiences of people different from themselves?
- ☐ Can you see the title prompting students to think deeply or look at things in a new way?
- ☐ Will the format, text, artwork, design, and story elements of the book suit and/or be accessible to your students?
- ☐ Is the title available in accessible formats (digital talking books, braille, enlarged text, electronic publications, etc.) that will support your students?

Evaluate Literary Quality

- ☐ Does the text support complex interpretations?
- ☐ Are illustrations artful and do they support a complex relationship between text and illustration?
- ☐ Are thematically rich issues present?
- ☐ Are characters multidimensional and complex, developing throughout the story or shown to be dynamic, changing, and responsive?
- ☐ Does the text capture the authentic voice of characters or subjects and bring readers into the book?
- ☐ Is the text tightly constructed, featuring rich words, phrases, and structures that develop meaning and imagery for readers?
- ☐ Is the plot complex, motivating readers to find out what happens next?

Consider Messengers and Messages

- ☐ Does the author and/or illustrator have a background, qualifications, and/or lived experiences with subjects, themes, and topics presented that indicate accurate, inclusive, and affirming representation of disability experiences?
- ☐ Are the book's messages and themes free of ableism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and racism?





- ☐ Do informational books provide accurate, factual information?
- ☐ Is the book free of language that demeans, diminishes, or makes people invisible because of any of their identities?
- ☐ Are the text and/or illustrations featured free of stereotypes and tokenism?
- ☐ Are concepts, celebrations, traditions, cultures, or peoples portrayed in both the text and illustrations authentic representations?
- ☐ Do characters or subjects have agency and are they presented as able changemakers?
- ☐ Are people with disabilities integral to the main storyline and/or is it shared from the point of view of people with disabilities?
- ☐ Are lifestyles that differ from the dominant culture or class presented without value judgments?
- ☐ Does the book promote positive self-image and self-worth for people with disabilities?

Check the Copyright Date

- ☐ Was the book first published more than 10–15 years ago?
- ☐ Does the storyline avoid using a “cure” or “a miracle” for a person with a disability?
- ☐ Are the text, illustrations, and/or photographs, especially in informational books, current and timely?
- ☐ Is there quality non-biased representation of race, ethnicity, religion, women, older people, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, etc.?
- ☐ Does the book reflect the values of the time it was published or values with current relevance?

Avoid Biased Depictions

Please examine the following stereotypes and tropes identified [by authors/literary agents Lucy and James Catchpole](#). It is important to ensure books do not contain these types of depictions of the disability experience.

A parent shown grieving the birth of a child with a disability: Not all births are a time of uncomplicated joy (e.g., many pregnancies are unplanned). But we’ve never seen this shown in a picture book except when the child is disabled. For a child with a disability who’s never considered this possibility, it could be a traumatic revelation.

The message that characters with disabilities have a duty to answer questions and educate non-disabled people: We’ve written about this extensively, and it’s the theme of the picture book [What Happened to You?](#) Some people with disabilities may be fine discussing their disability, [many are not](#). But kids with disabilities especially should be allowed to be kids, not [living teachable moments](#).

A non-disabled central character who explains the character with a disability to the reader (e.g., books with titles like “My Sister Has Autism”): If you imagine we were talking about characters of different races, you can probably see why this isn’t ideal. Stories told from the perspectives of a character with a disability are preferable.

Appendix D

Code and Code Definition Chart

Code Title	Code Definition	Example Excerpt
Avoidance of Stereotypes	When teachers talk about avoiding stereotypes	"I think a lot of books that are inclusive of different cultures are extremely rigid and how they present those cultures, and it's very stereotyped."
Barriers to Obtaining Books	When teachers discuss things that hinder them from finding/obtaining culturally reflective/responsive books	"... the barrier, a lot of times, is funding. And so I think that is something that we could definitely improve upon. And I know that's always the easy answer, but I think if we were more intentional about what we spend our money on and decide to allot books for, you know, because I just think, I think that making books accessible to students is important, but I think that if the books aren't accessible to teachers, then it's harder for the students to be able to have access to them ..."
Bilingual Text	When educators have bilingual texts in their classroom libraries	"There's a book that has part in Spanish and part in English, and I can't remember which one, because I've got a few, but students were reading it, and they were like, one of my Hispanic students was reading it, and he was like, oh, that's in Spanish. I can understand it."

Code Title	Code Definition	Example Excerpt
Books Discluded	When teachers name topics or specific books they do not want/will not have in their classroom library	“But again, I have to reiterate, I have no LGBTQIA+ in my library at all, and I don't have any Christian or anything that teaches religion of any sort in my library at all. It's a respect thing for me that's personal.”
Difficult to Represent	When teachers discuss cultures/life experiences that are harder to represent adequately	“Some like black culture. So like, I have some Haitian students. It's extremely hard for me to find, um, Haitian texts or anything relative to their culture. I think that's the biggest one, just because I have a few students and they don't have any books that represent their culture.”
Diversity	When teachers have books that include cultures outside of those in the classroom/not specifically for a student	“Oh, I'd say it's pretty diverse. I mean, we've got, I try to keep it to where most kids can find something they enjoy.”
Empathy	When teachers discuss the promotion or importance of empathy	“And it's like we're setting them up to have more empathy by doing that, especially in today's climate, there's not a lot of empathy, and there's a lot of division. And by teaching them, hey, not everyone's like you, and that's okay. In fact, you might have something to learn from them. That's a lesson I'm always teaching them, and it's to make them better people. So it's the most important.”

Code Title	Code Definition	Example Excerpt
Fears	When teachers talk about fears in dealing with diversifying their classroom libraries	"I think we're also in the middle of a time politically where teachers are being made to be afraid of what they put in their library. At the beginning of every year, we're told to catalog all of our books."
Funding Aids/Resources for Finding Books	When teachers discuss resources that assist in funding books or obtaining books for their classroom library	"Yes, we use, and I believe this is through our district we use a platform called Epic, and they, they provide quite a huge library of, of books, nonfiction and fiction books, lot of good picture books, and a lot of books that will read aloud to the kids, Which is huge for kindergarten, so the kids can actually, you know, browse books and choose one on their own and listen to it. So that's really nice."
Gaps	When teachers identify gaps in their classroom library content or common gaps in classroom libraries as a whole	"I don't have a single book in my library that talks about Hanukkah or like Jewish people, so that's a gap. So I'm like, I'm filling in the gap."
Importance	When teachers discuss/state that diverse classroom libraries are important/say something is very important	"It is top tier that they do. There is no other answer for it. It is necessary because it builds a well-rounded human being who has respect for other cultures."
Included Books	When teachers name books that they have in their classroom library, or discuss criteria to be met	"Seeds of Change ..."

Code Title	Code Definition	Example Excerpt
Next Steps	When teachers discuss how admin, parents, and communities can better support teachers in diversifying their classroom libraries, and in turn, benefit students	“It could be great if they allowed so much, you know, funding per year to, to expand that and maybe, you know, find out the populations of each classroom, or each teacher knows their own population. And you know, if I know I have a child that I don't have representation for, would be great to have a certain fund every year to go toward that. Just expand it. And even if you don't have a new culture, maybe just expose them to a new culture, right?”
Organization	When teachers describe the structure/organization of their classroom libraries (book organization, layout, decor, etc.)	“I do like a monthly book bin. And so right now it's March 3, but I have not moved my black history and my President's Day books.”
Own Voice Author	When teachers talk about including books written by authors of the culture/life experience	“And so I really want to make sure I am putting books in my library that are written by people from those communities and that have firsthand experience with those communities, like we have books that are written from different Native American tribal leaders, who I think just obviously provide a much more firsthand account of what their community goes through. So just kind of looking at who wrote it.”

Code Title	Code Definition	Example Excerpt
Parental Disapproval	When teachers talk about push-back from parents of students	“And I just think that the policing of books is crazy, and there's definitely been some of that, like we're reading a book right now in our book club that I do in our intervention time, and a mom called and said she wasn't happy that we were reading it because it said, like the word hell in it, or something. And it's just like the hyper sheltering people parents, they just don't want their kids to be exposed to anything, and then their kids are coddled, and it's just yeah.”
Representation	When teachers talk about the importance of having books in the classroom that match their students' cultures	“I think that, like I said earlier, I think it's important that when kids see themselves in books, or if they see a representation of someone they love in a book, that they're more apt to read it.”
Respect	When teachers discuss the importance of having respect or teaching respect	“But I think that it helps them build respect for other students in their classroom, and also helps them learn what is not respectful in the classroom.”
SEL Inclusion	When teachers discuss purposefully including books geared towards SEL	“And so I have a lot of books about feelings and just how to manage feelings and reminding them that their feelings are valid. And just, how can we work through these together?”

Code Title	Code Definition	Example Excerpt
Student Biases	When teachers discuss addressing student biases	“I think the only negative reaction that I've had came from a student that was reading a book about women coding or something. And he was just like, said something about ... Women can't do this. Men should do this or something. And so it was a whole conversation about that.”
Student Interests	When teachers talk about considering student interests	“I've got some fairy tales, just various things that students I know are interested in, and so, like, I try, and also, if I can thrift books that are students' interests. Like I have some students who love Sonic, some students who love Mario, some girls who love princesses, and things like that. And so I just want to make sure that there are books there that represent their interests, because I think that they'll be more apt to pick it up if they see something that they might enjoy.”
Student Reactions (Positive)	When teachers describe positive student reactions to diverse literature	“The day that I got that book about the South Korean folk tale, I put it on my bookshelf, and my student literally bee-lined it for it, and had the biggest smile on his face, and was like, [Educator 001] What is this? And then he recognized the Korean writing on the inside, and he just felt seen.”

Code Title	Code Definition	Example Excerpt
Teacher Biases	When teachers discuss their own or other teachers' biases	“Because of my belief and my faith, I filter a lot out because I don't. I don't want to. I don't want to open certain subjects and certain topics in my classroom for discussion. It's just not something I'm I want to do in my kindergarten class.”
Disconfirming Evidence	When the teacher shares a perspective on another code that differs from the patterns most prevalent in the data.	(Difficult to Represent) “Now, I have had the only real culture I can think of that I've had, other than that, would be Russian. I've gotten several Russian or Ukrainian kids over the years. I say several, you know, I've had, probably had three or four over my career, but that might be a good idea to get something from their culture.” (Organization) “And then I would say, don't get overwhelmed with it. Sometimes less is more. I, at one point in my career, probably had 500 books in my classroom library, and it was, it was too much. There wasn't. There was a lot of quantity, not a lot of quality there. So, I would say, Be picky. You know, don't get overwhelmed. Go slow about it. You know, be intentional with your choices.” (Barriers to Obtaining Books) “I've never faced any challenges, not one.”

IRB Approval Letter

From: "do-not-reply@cayuse.com" <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
Sent: 10/27/2025 7:13:59 PM
To: "Carly Coleman" <cmc2fd@mtmail.mtsu.edu>, "Janna McClain" <Janna.McClain@mtsu.edu>
Cc:
Subject: [EXTERNAL] IRB-FY2026-12 - Initial: Initial Expedited Protocol Approval Letter



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
FWA 00005331 | IRB #00003571
Office of Research Compliance
010A Sam Ingram Building
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd.
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

Date: October 27, 2025
PI: Charlene Coleman
Department: Middle Tennessee State University, Elementary and Special Education
Co-PI: Janna McClain
Department: Middle Tennessee State University, Elementary and Special Education
Re: Initial - IRB-FY2026-12
Developing a Culturally Responsive Classroom Library: A Practical Guide for Elementary Educators

The Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved by Expedited Review the above-referenced research study. The approval is effective starting October 27, 2025.

Decision: Approved

Research Category:

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

The following apply to your approved study:

1. In accordance with 45 CFR 46.110 and the regulations for Expedited Review (Common Rule), this project does not expire and continuing review is not required by the IRB.
2. Any unanticipated harm to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance.
3. All modifications to the approved study must be submitted for review through Cayuse IRB for approval before their implementation. Adding new researchers constitutes a modification to the protocol. Per MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who handles the data or interacts with participants. Everyone meeting this definition for this project must have completed the required CITI training and received IRB approval prior to becoming actively involved in the project.
4. Closure of the study must be submitted within Cayuse when the study ends or when personal identifiers are removed from the data and all codes and keys are destroyed.
5. Federal regulations require human subjects records be retained for at least 3 years after completion of the research. Once de-identified, the data can be kept longer for further analysis.
6. If your research is funded by a sponsor, they may have specific data retention policies that supersede the standard IRB guidelines.
7. If your study involves protected health information (PHI), you must adhere to HIPAA regulations when storing and destroying data.
8. Data should be destroyed using a secure method that permanently erases information. Keep a record of when and how research data were destroyed.

Sincerely,

Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board