

Breanne Litts Receives Spencer Foundation Grant | ITLS

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Dr. Breanne Litts of the Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences department and Dr. Melissa Tehee of the department of Psychology received a grant from the Spencer Foundation funding their project investigating how to develop cultural competence in learners.

The Spencer Foundation is a private funding foundation that supports a broad spectrum of innovative research on education. Nancy Sassano, proposal development specialist in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, stated, "Getting funded by a private foundation is difficult because of the low proposal acceptance rates due to their limited resources. It is also difficult with foundations like Spencer because they accept a wide variety of applicants and projects. It's hard to customize a proposal when you don't know what kind of projects your competition is submitting."

Litts and Tehee's project addresses the need to diversify existing knowledge systems taught in K-12, specifically through integrating Indigenous ways of knowing sciences and stories. To do so, Litts, Tehee, and their interdisciplinary team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, designers, and educators are collaborating to design curricula that build sixth graders' cultural competence by developing their cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills.

"We will not only equip youth in their ability to embrace new worldviews and perspectives, but we will also offer a more inclusive and equitable way to teach disciplinary ways of knowing and being," Litts said. "Our findings will offer new insights for how to develop cultural competence at the learner-level and provide a new model of engaging youth in critical conversations about how diverse cultures understand the world around us."

"Our ultimate goal is to help students [and teachers] gain new perspectives through a cultural lens," Tehee said.

Litts and Tehee first tested their curriculum by partnering with Stuart Baggaley and a few other teachers from the Edith Bowen Laboratory School at Utah State University. At the end of the trial period, Baggaley said that working with Litts and Tehee had been super beneficial to him. "It widened my horizon and opened my eyes to see how I can better incorporate other cultures teaching methods into my own. This way of teaching has helped both me and my students learn more effectively."

Litts and Tehee are collaborative designing the curriculum with Stuart Baggaley and Jennifer Jenkins, along with a few other educators from the Edith Bowen Laboratory School at Utah State University. After the first year of design and implementation work, Baggaley said that working with team had been super beneficial to him. "It widened my horizon and opened my eyes to see how I can better incorporate other cultures teaching methods into my own. This way of teaching has helped both me and my students learn more effectively."