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Practitioner Article

Using Neuro-Affirming Picturebooks in Early Childhood Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the importance of using neuro-affirming picturebooks in early childhood classrooms to promote awareness, empathy, advocacy, and inclusion related to neurodiversity. Drawing on scholarship on diverse children's literature and disability representation, the article discusses how these books can support children with neurodiverse learning needs while also helping neurotypical children develop more empathetic, strengths-based perspectives. To illustrate practical classroom application, the article presents a hypothetical four-day instructional unit focused on dyslexia for a second-grade classroom. The article concludes with considerations for selecting neuro-affirming picturebooks that reflect diverse identities and align with strengths-based and social models of disability.

KEYWORDS

neuro-affirming picturebooks; neurodiversity; early childhood education; inclusive literacy instruction; disability representation; diverse literature

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019), the student population in many early childhood classrooms has become dramatically diverse along the lines of race, culture, socioeconomic status, gender, and ability over the past two decades. Consequently, critical scholars (e.g., Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2021) argue for early childhood teachers to incorporate the experiences and perspectives of diverse people into the curriculum as a means of celebrating, affirming, and advocating for people from diverse backgrounds and creating humanizing and inclusive learning environments for all children. While many early childhood teachers have made much progress in diversifying the curriculum regarding race and culture, fewer early childhood teachers have incorporated the experiences of people with disabilities into the curriculum (Hansen et al., 2023).

Although approximately 20% of students in United States classrooms are neurodivergent, very few early childhood educators incorporate the perspectives and experiences of neurodivergent people in the curriculum (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The absence of experiences and perspectives related to neurodivergent people in the curriculum can often lead young children into developing biases, stereotypes, and ableist attitudes and actions toward neurodivergent people in the classroom and in the world around them (Hansen et al., 2023; Hiremath et al., 2025; Mullins, 2024).

In this article, I argue that early childhood educators should use neurodivergent-affirming (or neuro-affirming) picturebooks to promote neurodiversity awareness and advocacy among young children. I begin by defining key terms as they are being used in this article. Next, drawing on scholarship related to diverse children's literature and disability representation in picturebooks, I outline and discuss three reasons why using neuro-affirming picturebooks is necessary in early childhood classrooms. Then, I provide an example of how teachers might incorporate these picturebooks in a 4-day instructional unit on dyslexia. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of

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considerations teachers should embrace when selecting neuro-affirming picturebooks for use in early childhood classrooms.

It is important to note here that two conflicting models of disability (neurodiversity) exist within the broader scholarship on this topic: the medical model and the social model (Goodley, 2014). Goodley (2014) points out that the medical model of disability (neurodiversity) views disability exclusively through biological, genetic, hormonal, neurological, and physiological lenses. Consequently, people who are identified as being disabled or neurodivergent are often viewed as individuals who are impaired and in need of medical attention or treatment to fully participate in society.

In contrast, the social model of disability problematizes this notion and views disability (neurodiversity) through the lenses of the social, economic, cultural, and political factors, policies, practices, and systems that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in various aspects of society. While the medical model focuses on identifying and addressing the deficits a neurodivergent person may have, the social model focuses on identifying the strengths and assets neurodivergent people possess. Additionally, the social model focuses on transforming the social forces, factors, policies, practices, and systems that prohibit people who are neurodivergent from fully participating in various aspects of society (Berglund, 2023). Furthermore, I draw from the social model of neurodiversity in this article.

Defining Key Concepts

The concepts I espouse here include neurodivergent, neurodivergent awareness, neurodivergent advocacy, and neuro-affirming picturebooks. The term neurodivergent is commonly used by medical professionals, theorists, and educators to recognize the neurological differences that exist within an individual's brain (Singer, 1999; Slagus & Kitchin, 2024). According to Dunne (2024) common categories of neurodiversity include the following: Autism Spectrum Disorders; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; Learning disabilities; Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD; Dyspraxia); Dyslexia; Tourette Syndrome; Bipolar Disorder; Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD); Synesthesia; Acquired Brain Injury; Epilepsy; and Mental Health Conditions. Furthermore, when I refer to a neurodivergent person in this article, I am referring to a person who has one or more of these conditions.

Neurodivergent awareness refers to the process of acknowledging, accepting, and valuing neurological differences in individuals (Dwyer, 2022). Essentially, neurodivergent awareness promotes the general idea that these diverse and creative brain differences often require responsive, adaptive, and inclusive teaching and learning strategies and environments (Singer, 1999). Neurodivergent awareness asserts that these cognitive differences have a direct impact on how people learn and behave. For this reason, neurodivergent people should be honored and celebrated for their unique perspectives and experiences, without experiencing deficit and/or judgmental views from others (Singer, 1999).

Much like disability advocacy, neurodivergent advocacy involves justice-oriented actions, initiatives, and systemic changes aimed at promoting equality, equity, and human rights for people with diverse brain wirings (Saunders, 2018). In addition, neurodivergent advocacy urges individuals to move from a medical and deficit-oriented model of working with individuals who are neurodivergent and toward a strengths-based, neuro-affirming, and humanizing approach (Mullins, 2024). Four key values that are frequently involved in neurodivergent advocacy include: 1) applying a neuro-affirmative approach; 2) appropriate and respectful language choices and usages; 3) anti-ableism; and 4) a social model of disability (Mullins, 2024). Furthermore,

neurodivergent advocacy focuses on making individual and systemic accommodations and changes to respond appropriately to the needs, interests, and strengths of people who are neurodivergent in society in general and in classrooms in particular (Mullins, 2024; Saunders, 2018).

Drawing from scholarship (e.g., Hiremath et al., 2025; Kleekamp & Zapata, 2019; Leveto, 2018; Mullins, 2024; Thompson, 2018) related to neurodivergent advocacy, I define neuro-affirming picturebooks as (picturebooks) that acknowledge, center, and affirm the experiences and perspectives of neurodivergent people. These books contain main or secondary characters, or both, who are neurodivergent. It is important to note that, while most of the main characters in neuro-affirmative picturebooks are human beings, some neuro-affirmative picturebooks feature animals, creatures, or objects as main characters as well. Moreover, neuro-affirming picturebooks can be fiction or nonfiction.

Benefits of Using Neuro-Affirming Picturebooks

A substantial body of scholarship (e.g., Hammond, 2015; Hayden & Prince, 2023; Kingsbury, 2022) identifies a wide range of academic and social benefits associated with using diverse picturebooks with children from diverse and non-diverse backgrounds. A full discussion of these benefits is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, drawing from this body of scholarship, I highlight three potential benefits of using neuro-affirming picturebooks with young children in the following section.

First, using neuro-affirming picturebooks can create spaces in the classroom where neurodivergent children see themselves reflected, celebrated, and included (Hayden & Prince, 2020). Through ongoing and sustained interactions with neuro-affirming picturebooks, neurodivergent children are likely to develop higher levels of self-acceptance and feel fully included in the classroom (Mullins, 2024). For example, a second-grade teacher who has several children in her classroom who have ADHD might intentionally read *Rainbow Brain* (Menon, 2023) to create a dialogical space to help her students develop a better understanding of this neurological condition. In short, this book shares the experiences of a person who is both autistic and has ADHD (AuADHD). This book also helps readers understand that people with differently wired brains are not deficient. Using a strengths-based lens, this author highlights the fact that people who are autistic and have ADHD are often very creative, curious, sensitive, and deep-thinking people. Additionally, this book uses colorful illustrations and a positive and celebratory tone to describe the unique experience of having these two neurotypes together. In this sense, neuro-affirming picturebooks serve as "mirrors" (Bishop, 1990) for neurodivergent children. When books serve as mirrors for individual experiences, "literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience" (Bishop, 1990, p. 9).

In addition to creating spaces in the classroom where neurodivergent children see themselves reflected, celebrated and included, using neuro-affirming picturebooks can also help teachers dismantle implicit biases and deficit-oriented perspectives that young children often hold toward and about neurodivergent people in the classroom and in the world around them. Research (e.g., Aboud, 2003; Derman-Sparks et al., 2020; Dunham et al., 2011; Hamilton & Pottinger, 2024; Hayden & Prince, 2023) points out that it is not uncommon for many young children to hold biased, negative, and deficit-oriented attitudes toward people who do not share the same identity and/or group status as them. Conversely, children who regularly read about the experiences of neurodivergent people are more likely to develop anti-biased and strengths-based perspectives

toward neurodivergent people than children who do not read about them regularly (Mullins, 2024). For instance, a first-grade teacher who is noticing that some of the neurotypical children in the classroom are holding and expressing negative attitudes about an autistic child in the classroom might decide to read *A Friend for Henry* (Bailey, 2019) to help disrupt some of the stereotypes associated with people who are autistic. In short, this book tells the story of a young autistic boy, Henry, who hopes to make a friend in his classroom. Henry pays close attention to the details around him (e.g., how others move, speak, and play). Henry feels most comfortable when things are calm and predictable. Since his classmates don't always behave in ways he expects, building friendships can feel confusing and sometimes frustrating. In time, Henry learns that friendship does not need to match his exact expectations.

Using neuro-affirming picturebooks can also help neurotypical children develop a sense of empathy toward neurodivergent people in the classroom and the world around them (Katch, 2018; Mullins, 2024; Wee et al., 2022). Essentially, reading stories featuring neurodivergent characters on a consistent basis can help neurotypical children consider multiple perspectives about neurodivergent people and develop a sense of empathy and compassion toward the challenges that neurodivergent people experience in society (Katch, 2018; Mullins, 2024). For example, by reading books about dyslexia, such as *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998) and *Tom's Special Talent* (Gaynor, 2009) consistently in the classroom, children who are not dyslexic can develop a sense of empathy for people who are dyslexic.

Thank You, Mr. Falker tells the true story of author Patricia Polacco's struggle with learning to read and the teacher who changed her life. The story begins when the main character, named Trisha, is very young. When Trisha starts school, she discovers that reading does not come easily to her. Letters often look jumbled and tangled on the page, and no matter how hard she tries, she has difficulty making sense of them. Trisha feels ashamed and begins to believe that she is not smart, even though she is creative, artistic, and thoughtful. Everything begins to change when she moves to a new school and meets Mr. Falker, a warm and perceptive teacher. With the help of Mr. Falker and a reading specialist, Trisha slowly begins to decode words and finally experiences the joy of reading on her own.

Reading neuro-affirming picturebooks in the classroom can also contribute greatly to the social and emotional learning development in neurodivergent children (Dermata, 2019; Mullins, 2024; Schoppmann et al., 2023). Through reading about the perspectives and experiences of neurodivergent people on a consistent basis, children can develop the language and skills needed to handle (neurodivergent associated) challenges (e.g., meltdowns, sensory overloads, overstimulation, etc.) in positive, nonthreatening, and constructive ways (Dermata, 2019; Mullins, 2024). For example, a kindergarten teacher who has a child in her classroom who is experiencing self-regulation challenges due to sensory processing issues might select the book, *Wiggles, Stomps, and Squeezes Calm My Jitters Down* (Parker, 2021), in an effort to normalize instances when people experience sensory processing difficulties and to identify developmentally appropriate strategies for self-regulation. In short, this book explores what daily life feels like for a young child with sensory differences. The story is told from the child's perspective, allowing readers to experience the sensations, movements, and coping strategies that help the child manage overwhelming feelings.

Using Neuro-Affirming Picturebooks to Teach About Dyslexia

To illustrate the power and potential of using neuro-affirming picturebooks in early childhood classrooms, in the sections that follow, I describe how a hypothetical second-grade teacher named

Ms. Williams uses neuro-affirming picturebooks to teach a 4-day instructional unit on the topic of dyslexia. Table 1 provides a list of examples of neuro-affirming picturebooks that might be used in early childhood classrooms. While the broader focus of this article is on using neuro-affirming picturebooks across all categories of neurodiversity, it is important to note here that Table 1 only includes examples of picturebooks that center on the theme of dyslexia. This decision was made to remain consistent with the overarching theme of the 4-day unit shared later in this article. Thus, picturebooks representing all categories of neurodiversity were not included in this table. Considering the focus of this article is early childhood classrooms (K–2 in particular), I include only books deemed appropriate for most early childhood classrooms; therefore, young adult literature was excluded from this list. Furthermore, I include only books on this list that align with the social model of disability/neurodiversity.

Table 1: Examples of Neuro-Affirming Picturebooks

Title of Book	Author	Year	Description
The Alphabet War: A Story about Dyslexia	Diane Robb	2017	This book tells the story of a boy who struggles with reading and spelling. This has a dramatic impact on his self-esteem. He receives specialized help and eventually gains his self-confidence.
The Boy Who Learned Upside Down	Christy Scattarella	2013	This story centers on Alex, a boy who faces difficulties with reading and focusing in school. A supportive teacher helps him set a goal to earn a stuffed toy by doing well on a spelling test.
Brilliant Bea: A Story for Kids with Dyslexia and Learning Differences	Shaina Rudolph and Mary Vukadinovich	2021	This book tells the story of a young girl named Bea who struggles with reading, yet she is an excellent storyteller. Her teacher helps her audio-record her stories as a way of responding appropriately to her reading struggles.
Did You Say Pasghetti? Dusty and Danny Tackle Dyslexia	Tammy Fortune	2020	This book tells the story of a boy named Danny who is diagnosed with dyslexia, and he feels frustrated and insecure. He begins working with a reading specialist and a tutor who teaches him “special tricks” to train his brain and help him read more effectively.
Milo and the Wiggly Words: A Heartwarming Rhyming Story About Dyslexia, Confidence, and Learning in Your Own Way	G Money Cricket	2025	This book tells the story of a young fox named Milo who loves stories but finds reading very difficult. A kind teacher, Miss Maple, introduces him to specific tools and strategies that help him manage his reading challenges.
Molly’s Great Discovery	Krista Weltner	2024	This book tells a story of a girl named Molly who struggles to read, write, and spell. Eventually, she asks her teacher for assistance and learns how to advocate for herself.
Robby the Dyslexic Taxi and the Airport Adventure	Lynn Greenberg and Jonathan Greenberg	2025	This book tells the story of Robby, who is a taxi for the Creative Cab Company in the city of Greensborough. His dyslexia makes it challenging for him to read street signs. He

			learns to be successful by using his memory for routes he has already learned.
Sparkle: An Inclusive Kids Book Celebrating a Child with Dyslexia and Dysgraphia	Alexandra Hoffman	2025	This book tells the story of Jasmine, a girl with dyslexia, who struggles when it is time to read and write. She learns how to use wordless books to share her stories.
Tom's Special Talent	Kate Gaynor	2013	This book tells the story of a boy named Tom who struggles with reading and writing due to dyslexia and discovers he also has a unique talent for art and painting.
A Walk in the Words	Hudson Talbott	2012	This book tells the story of a boy who is a talented artist but struggles with reading. He learns to find success by moving along at his own pace and not comparing himself to others' progress.

Although the focus of this instructional unit is dyslexia, it can serve as a model for early childhood teachers designing and implementing instructional units of study on other topics related to neurodivergence. Table 2 provides an overview and a summary of the instructional activities included in this unit.

Table 2: Instructional Unit on Dyslexia

Step	Neuro-Affirming Picture Books Involved	Pre-Reading Activities	During Reading Activities	Post Reading Activities
1	***Thank You, Mr. Falker*** (Polacco, 1998)	Predictions	Critical Questioning and Dialogue	Create a Comic Strip to Summarize Key Events in Text
2	***A Walk in the Rain with a Brain*** (Hallowell, 2004) ***The Alphabet War*** (Robb, 2017) ***Ben and Emma's Big Hit*** (Newsom & Shamir, 2021) ***A Kids Book About Dyslexia*** (Travers, 2025) ***A Walk in the Words*** (Talbott, 2021)	Vocab-O-Gram Graphic Organizer	Making Connections	Quick Write
3	***If You're so Smart, How Come You Can't Spell*** **Mississippi?** (Esham, 2008)	3-2-1 Writing Activity	Character Analysis Graphic Organizer	Alternative Digital Story

4	***Molly's Great Discovery: A Book about Dyslexia and Self-Advocacy*** (Weltner, 2024)	Evaluating Controversial Statements	Critical Discussion	Advocacy Commercial

Teaching About Dyslexia

I chose to use a "hypothetical" teaching scenario because hypothetical scenarios can serve as efficient, non-threatening, meaningful, and effective methods for teachers (preservice and in-service) to study and develop solutions to similar problems, issues, situations, and challenges in the classroom (Alsaeed & Mohammad, 2023; Bernhardt, 2018; Yenen & Kızkapan, 2025). In this sense, hypothetical teaching scenarios are not intended to serve as a substitute for empirical data or research studies. Rather, hypothetical teaching scenarios are presented as opportunities for teachers to reflect on, learn about, and even reimagine their teaching practices (Alsaeed & Mohammad, 2023). Accordingly, the hypothetical teaching unit on dyslexia presented in the following section is intended to serve as a teaching and learning tool for early childhood teachers to reflect on, learn about, and expand their current teaching practices. To this end, the hypothetical unit on dyslexia discussed in this article involves a second-grade teacher named Ms. Williams. Ms. Williams has a class comprised primarily of non-dyslexic students. Nonetheless, three of the students in her class have been identified as being dyslexic.

Cultivating a Humanizing Environment of Mutual Respect and Honor

It is not unlikely that early childhood teachers may have classrooms with one or more dyslexic children in them (Robinson & Thompson, 2020). For this reason, it is critically important for teachers to teach in ways that are particularly sensitive, inclusive, and responsive to the social and emotional needs of children with dyslexia. To avoid inflicting social, emotional, or psychological harm on both dyslexic and non-dyslexic students, it is important that early childhood teachers embrace three commitments when implementing this unit. First, teachers should commit to using identity-first language. That is, language that affirms neurodivergence as an integral part of identity rather than treating it as a condition separate from the person (Dunn & Andrews, 2015; Grant et al., 2025; Pearson et al., 2026). Therefore, teachers should commit to using "dyslexic children" rather than "children with dyslexia" when implementing this unit, reflecting the preference expressed by many self-advocates within the neurodivergent community. In doing so, children begin to see dyslexia as a meaningful part of who someone is rather than something to be distanced from.

In addition, when teaching children about dyslexia or any other form of neurodiversity, it is important for teachers to avoid asking students to self-identify or discuss their experiences against their will. Asking students to self-identify may cause social, emotional, and psychological shame, hurt, and stigma for the child with dyslexia (Mankiw, 2021). Alternatively, teachers should consider meeting with the parents and guardians of children with dyslexia in the classroom prior to implementing the unit to determine whether they are comfortable sharing their experiences during the unit. Furthermore, if necessary or requested, children with dyslexia in the classroom should be given the option of being exempted from the unit.

Whenever possible, teachers should also look for opportunities to highlight commonalities between people with dyslexia and people without dyslexia. Through this process of highlighting the similarities between people with dyslexia and people without dyslexia, children without

dyslexia are less likely to develop stereotypes and biased attitudes toward people with dyslexia (Mullins, 2024). Furthermore, by embracing the previously mentioned commitments, teachers will alleviate potential educational harm and cultivate supportive, humanizing learning environments for all students in the classroom (Artman-Meeker et al., 2016). The following four-day instructional sequence provides one example of how these commitments can be translated into meaningful classroom instruction that promotes understanding, inclusion, and neuro-affirming perspectives related to dyslexia.

Four-Day Instructional Unit Sequence

Day 1: Building Background Knowledge on Dyslexia. To build background knowledge about dyslexia, Ms. Williams takes a few moments to introduce, explore, and define key vocabulary related to the topic. Ms. Williams introduces the book, *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998), to her students and asks them to make predictions about the story as she and her students take a "Picture Walk" (Ness, 2017) through the pages in the book. Ms. Williams records the students' predictions on chart paper to revisit at the completion of the reading.

As Ms. Williams reads the text aloud to the whole class, she pauses periodically and intentionally poses thought-provoking questions about the text. The goal here is to engage her students in a critical dialogue related to the topic (see Table 3). Whenever feasible, Ms. Williams strives to problematize (Freire, 1970) any stereotypical and deficit-oriented notions of dyslexia that may arise during this critical dialogue. After Ms. Williams finishes reading the book, she revisits the students' predictions and discusses how accurate they were. Ms. Williams then poses a few additional discussion questions to encourage her students to think critically about the major events in the text, as shown in Table 3. Lastly, students are directed to work in pairs and create a comic strip that summarizes key events in the text.

Table 3: Questions Posed During the Unit

Day	Central Texts Involved	Before Reading the Text	During Reading the Text	After Reading the Text
1	***Thank You, Mr. Falker*** (Polacco, 1998)	How do you think it feels when something is hard to learn, but other kids seem to "get it" quickly? Have you ever felt that way about something in school or at home? How do you feel when someone helps you with something that's tricky? Can you think of a time when a teacher, family member, or friend helped you learn something difficult? What does it mean to be "smart"?	Mr. Falker has the power to stop the bullying and help Trisha learn to read. How does he use his power as a teacher differently from the other adults in the story? Why is it important for teachers, or other grown-ups, to use their power to help students who are struggling? All the students in Trisha's class get the same lessons, but Trisha still can't read the way others can. Is treating everyone the same always fair?	How did Trisha change from the beginning of the book to the end? How did the kids' teasing affect Trisha? What could the other students have done instead of making fun of Trisha? Why do you think the author titled the book Thank You, Mr. Falker? What would you say to Mr. Falker if you were Trisha? Trisha was very good at drawing but struggled with reading. What does this teach us about being "smart"? Can

		Is there only one way to be smart, or can people be smart in different ways (like drawing, sports, building, or helping others)?	How does Mr. Falker make things more fair (equitable) for Trisha?	people be smart in different ways?
2	***A Walk in the Rain with a Brain*** (Hallowell, 2004) ***The Alphabet War*** (Robb, 2017) ***Ben and Emma's Big Hit*** (Newsom & Shamir, 2021) ***A Kids Book About Dyslexia*** (Travers, 2025) ***A Walk in the Words*** (Talbott, 2021)	What does it mean to be "smart"? Is there only one way to be smart, or can people be smart in different ways (like drawing, running, helping friends, or remembering things)? Have you ever worried that you weren't good enough or smart enough at something in school? How did that make you feel? Everyone's brain works a little differently. What are some things you understand or do well? What is something that can feel tricky or difficult for you? If you found a talking brain on the sidewalk, what do you think it might say to you? What questions would you ask it? Why do you think some kids learn to read, do math, or draw faster than others? Does that mean someone is smarter than other people?	Why is Lucy worried about not being smart enough? How do you think she feels when she first meets Fred? Fred says, "no brain is the same" and "each brain finds its own special way." What do you think that means? Ben loves everything about baseball. What do you notice he loves about the game? Why do you think baseball feels easier or more fun for him than reading? When Ben tries to read, the letters and sounds get jumbled up. How do you think this makes Ben feel?	How does this story change the way we think about being "smart"? Is there only one kind of smart, or are there many different kinds? What is one strength or special way your own brain works? Who in your life (a teacher, parent, friend, or coach) has helped you the way Ms. Kim or Emma helped Ben? How did they encourage you? What is one important lesson from Ben and Emma's Big Hit that you want to remember when something feels hard in school or while doing sports? How can we make our classroom a place where it's okay to struggle and keep trying?
3	***If You're so Smart, How Come You Can't Spell* Mississippi?** (Esham, 2008)	What does it mean to be "smart"? Can someone be very smart but still find certain things hard? Have you ever been surprised that someone who seems good at one thing struggles with something else?	Have you ever felt frustrated like Ben when learning something new? Why is Katie surprised when her dad has trouble spelling "Mississippi"? What does this show about how we sometimes think about smart people?	How does this story show that people can be smart in many ways? Have you ever felt like something was hard for you, even when other people thought you were "smart"? How does this book make you feel about that?

			How does Dad feel when he can't spell the word easily? How do you think Katie feels when she sees this?	What can we do to be kind and helpful to someone who has dyslexia or another learning difference?
4	***Molly's Great Discovery: A Book about Dyslexia and Self-Advocacy*** (Weltner, 2024)	What does it mean to be a good problem-solver or to have a big imagination? What are some things you love to figure out or create? Have you ever found something in school (like reading, spelling, or writing) tricky, even when you were trying your best? How did that feel? Is it always easy to ask for help when something is hard? Why or why not? When is asking for help a smart thing to do?	Why is reading hard for Molly even though she's smart and creative? How do you think she feels when she struggles? What happens when Molly gets diagnosed with dyslexia? How does learning the name for her struggle help her? Molly meets Leeann, who also has dyslexia. How does having a friend who understands help Molly?	What was Molly's "great discovery"? How did it change the way she felt about herself and her dyslexia? How did Molly's big imagination and problem-solving skills help her in the story? Why is it important to ask for help when you need it? How did self-advocacy make things better for Molly?

Day 2: Considering Multiple Perspectives on Dyslexia. During the second day in the instructional unit, Ms. Williams divides her students into five groups. Each group is presented with a different text set (Serravallo, 2023) to read related to the topic of dyslexia. In short, a text set is a group of different books that center around a similar theme, topic, or character (see Table 2). As a pre-reading activity, Ms. Williams instructs each group to take a picture walk through the books they were assigned to read and to identify three vocabulary words to explore in greater depth. Students are then asked to work collaboratively to complete a "Vocab-O-Gram" graphic organizer (Serravallo, 2023) as they read and discuss their text set in small groups. As a concluding activity for this day, students are asked to complete a "Quick Write" (Serravallo, 2023) based on what they learned from reading the text set assigned to them. Finally, Ms. Williams selects one representative from each group to share their learning and thinking with the other students in the classroom.

Day 3: Combating Myths, Stereotypes, and Deficit Thinking. Ms. Williams begins this day's lesson with the goal of dispelling myths, stereotypes, and deficit-oriented thought patterns that people in society often hold about people with dyslexia. As a pre-reading activity, she instructs her students to select a partner to work with for the subsequent activity. Then she hands each group of partners a single index card and instructs them to complete a "3-2-1" activity (Serravallo, 2023). Essentially, students are required to discuss and write three facts they learned about people with dyslexia, two things they found interesting or surprising, and one remaining question they still have about dyslexia. Next, Ms. Williams instructs each group of partners to share and discuss their index cards with another group. After a designated period of time, Ms. Williams brings the students back together as a whole group to discuss their index cards, and she documents the students' thinking on chart paper. Ms. Williams discusses the concept of "stereotypes" and "bias" and how some individuals in society tend to hold stereotypical and biased attitudes toward people who are

dyslexic. To this end, Ms. Williams shares background information for the book *If You're so Smart, How Come You Can't Spell Mississippi?* (Esham, 2008). In short, this book tells the story of a third-grader named Katie who admires her father and considers him to be one of the smartest people she knows. Katie is surprised when she asks him for help spelling the word Mississippi, and he says he can't spell it. Katie's dad explains to her that he has dyslexia, which makes reading and spelling difficult for him from time to time. This conversation motivates Katie to learn about dyslexia in greater depth. She researches what it means and learns that many talented and successful people often struggle with dyslexia.

Next, students are given a "Character Analysis Graphic Organizer" (Serravallo, 2023) and are asked to complete it as Ms. Williams reads the text. She lets her students know that they have the option to make either the "father" or the "daughter" the focus of the graphic organizer. Ms. Williams pauses periodically and strategically at specific points during the read-aloud to pose questions, promote discussion, and allow students time to complete components of their graphic organizers.

After reading the text, Ms. Williams further elaborates on the overarching theme that being dyslexic does not mean that a person is unintelligent. She then divides students into small groups and instructs them to create an alternative digital version of the text. She encourages her students to use the same overarching theme (as the book they just finished reading aloud) in their stories, while simultaneously creating different characters, settings, and other supporting details. Ultimately, the goal here is for her students to think critically about how stereotypical and biased information about people with dyslexia can lead to potential misunderstandings, prejudices, and even discriminatory actions.

Day 4: Promoting Justice and Advocacy. To promote justice and advocacy, Ms. Williams reads aloud *Molly's Great Discovery: A Book About Dyslexia and Self-Advocacy* (Weltner, 2024) on the final day of the instructional unit. In short, this book is about a young girl named Molly, who loves to explore, imagine, and figure out how things work. Although she enjoys learning, Molly notices that reading, writing, and spelling are much harder for her than they are for her classmates. After completing several assessments, Molly is diagnosed with dyslexia. As she begins to process this news, Molly meets Lexi, an imaginary companion who represents her dyslexia. Lexi reminds Molly that having dyslexia is simply one part of who she is and not something that defines her intelligence or potential.

Prior to reading the book, Ms. Williams divides her students into small groups. Each group is given an envelope with three controversial statements related to dyslexia. Students are then instructed to read the statements with their group members and discuss whether each is true or false and why. The primary goal of this activity is for students to use the information they learned in the previous three lessons to think critically about issues of equality, equity, and justice for people with dyslexia. Ms. Williams then discusses ways for people who are not dyslexic to advocate for people who are dyslexic and then records this information on chart paper. While reading the book, Ms. Williams pauses periodically and poses critical, reflective questions to facilitate dialogue on dyslexia, advocacy, and justice. Finally, as a culminating activity, students are asked to work in small groups to design, facilitate, and record a short 2-minute commercial that advocates for people with dyslexia in society.

Cautions and Considerations

As mentioned previously in this article, early childhood classrooms are becoming increasingly neurodiverse in composition. This suggests that early childhood teachers should incorporate neuro-affirming picturebooks as a means of affirming, centering, and humanizing neurodivergent people in the classroom and in broader society. As early childhood teachers search for texts to use in their respective classrooms, it is important to note that not all picturebooks with disabled (neurodivergent) characters are the same. While some picturebooks with disabled (neurodivergent) characters portray neurodivergent people in a positive light and from a strengths-based lens, others portray them through deficit-oriented, biased, and stereotypical lenses (Hayden & Prince, 2023; Kleekamp & Zapata, 2019). For this reason, it is vital that early childhood teachers keep three considerations in mind as they decide which neuro-affirming books to include and which books to exclude in the classroom.

First, whenever possible, early childhood teachers should prioritize using neuro-affirming picturebooks that provide a multifaceted and/or nuanced view of the neurodivergent characters in the text. It is not uncommon for picturebooks featuring disabled characters to portray them in narrow, single-dimensional roles that focus almost exclusively on their disability (Kingsbury, 2022). Neurodivergent people are people who share multiple and intersecting identities (Dwyer, 2022). While highlighting and centering a character's neurodivergent classification is important, it is equally important to highlight and center other aspects of their identity. Furthermore, in doing so, children are better able to relate to these characters (Mullins, 2024).

In addition to prioritizing neuro-affirming picturebooks that portray neurodivergent characters in multifaceted and nuanced ways, it is also important for early childhood teachers to use neuro-affirming picturebooks with racially diverse neurodivergent characters whenever possible and feasible. Paciga and Koss (2022) point out that many children's books about people who are disabled (neurodivergent) contain only characters who are White. Consequently, whenever feasible, early childhood teachers should seek to incorporate neuro-affirming picturebooks with racially and culturally diverse characters to create affirming, celebratory, and inclusive spaces for neurodivergent students from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. This is not to suggest, by any means, that early childhood teachers should completely avoid using neuro-affirming picturebooks with White protagonists. Rather, the goal here is for teachers to be intentional about also including neuro-affirming picturebooks with both White and non-White main characters. In doing so, children of all cultural and racial backgrounds develop broader and more nuanced understandings of people who are neurodivergent.

Unfortunately, there are still many picturebooks on the market with main characters who are neurodivergent that focus on what I referred to earlier in this article as the medical model of disability (Berglund, 2023; Kingsbury, 2022; Matthews, 2009). This view of neurodiversity often perpetuates and even exacerbates deficit views toward people who are neurodivergent (Matthews, 2009; Saunders, 2000). Rather than including picturebooks that center the medical model of neurodiversity, early childhood teachers should prioritize using books that focus on the social model of disability/neurodiversity. While the medical model of disability/neurodiversity focuses on medical interventions and treatments that people with disabilities need to fully participate in society, the social model of disability points out and highlights the "social barriers which prevent equal opportunity and identifies a form of social oppression which can be overcome by social change" (Saunders, 2000, p. 26). By using only neuro-affirming books that center the social model of disability, children can develop empathetic, humanizing views of people who are neurodivergent in their classroom and in the larger world around them.

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