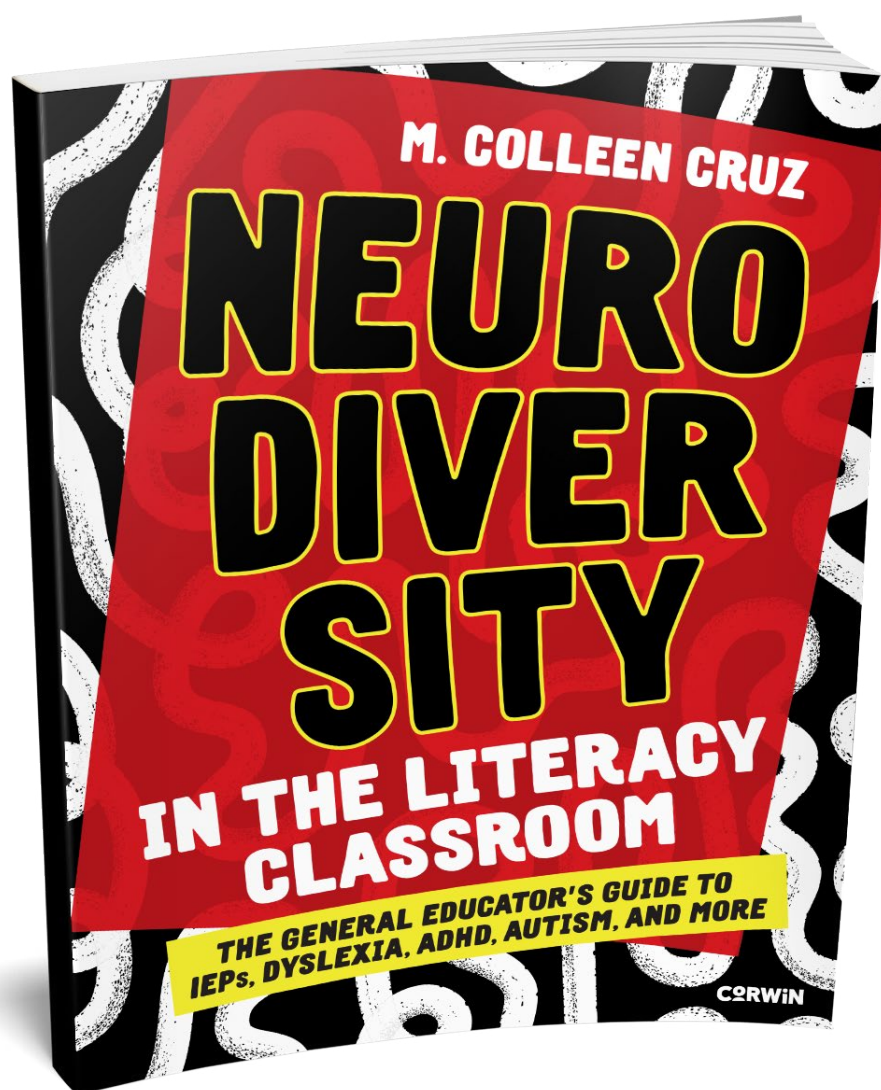


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Introduction

Read This First!



One day, early in my career, I was having lunch with other teachers in someone’s classroom when a colleague put down her sandwich, looked around to make sure no kids or administrators were around, and said, “I am going to ask a question that may make me look bad, but it’s really bothering me. If a kid doesn’t know how to read in your class, what do you do? Like I am embarrassed to admit, I just tell them to pick easier books and read a lot and then wait for Sandy (our reading specialist) to pick them up. I don’t really know what to do if they don’t know how to read, do you?”

This launched into a rather awkward conversation where a group of teachers, ranging in experience from new to veteran, all admitted that most of what we knew had to do with students who already read and could do it pretty well. None of us had a deep understanding of phonics or fluency instruction, let alone variations on how to teach comprehension, or what to do when the things we knew how to do didn’t work. There was an after-school scripted program that some of us did with select students, but everyone admitted that if a kid needed something outside of the program—if, say, the way the program taught how to break up long words didn’t work for a kid—we were stumped. We all realized that we were, in effect, useless as instructors to kids who were not typical learners.

I couldn't sleep that night, and I realized how deeply problematic it was that I really didn't know how to teach foundational reading skills to students who needed them. I taught at a highly regarded public school with lots of professional development opportunities, resources, and programs available, but none of them helped me to teach literacy to students with individualized education plans (IEPs), 504 plans, or anyone else who needed intervention.

That lunchtime conversation launched a quest. I decided I had a lot to learn. I requested a switch in position and became a teacher in a co-taught, inclusive classroom. I threw myself into reading everything I could get my hands on, signing up for professional development on my own, talking to the reading specialists at my school, the service providers, the special educators. By the time I left my classroom to become a teacher educator, teaching reading and writing to students who were identified as having disabilities or difficulties with literacy became an area of passion and expertise.

While it has been about two decades since that lunchtime discussion, that quest to learn as much as I possibly can about students who are too often underserved by general education in the United States, and fine-tune understandings of how best to serve them, continues. Much of what I have learned and continue to learn is in this book.

We Can Only Do What We Know

When I went to graduate school, I was only required to take two special education classes as part of that degree. A quick scan of more recent programs for teacher certification with a master's degree continues to show an average of one to two special education classes required for a graduate degree in education. While we are seeing more and more programs that offer concentrations or special certification coursework that require more instruction in special education, in general, most new teachers, if they go the traditional route, have only taken one to two classes of dedicated coursework in neurodiversity, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, or special education. It is not unusual for teachers who went an alternative route to step into the classroom without having taken a single class on learning disabilities or neurodiversity.

When I started teaching, I believed that while I might have a few students who had IEPs or 504s, the responsibility of effectively teaching those kids what they were mandated to know would belong to the special educators. This notion seemed to be supported by my school administration. We pored over data, recommended students for interventions or evaluations, and sat in on IEP meetings, but as for the actual teaching of those students? I felt woefully unprepared and no one seemed concerned about that. I was lucky enough to teach in a building with skilled interventionists and special educators. While it was never explicitly said that those students' growth in literacy was their responsibility, many felt it was implied.

For a long while I assumed my experience was the anomaly. While I was interested in learning more, I just assumed that everyone already knew what I was looking to learn. But over time, and in my later role as an educator who specialized in giving professional development to other educators, I soon discovered that I was far from alone. Almost every general education teacher I spoke with felt that not only were they lacking what they needed to know to teach students with a range of learning needs but also that on-the-job professional development tended to focus on learning new curricula (which was rarely inclusive of any neurodivergence or disability needs), data, assessment, and any new district/state/federal initiatives. One teacher shared, "We spend a lot of time looking at data and listening to what the students need to be taught. But no one tells us how to teach it."

When I sought out teachers to pilot aspects of this book, I asked several questions so I could match teachers to the chapters that would be most useful to them. While the questions were not designed as a poll, the data they revealed lined up with my personal experience and what others around me have shared. The majority had no or very little training in special education, neurodivergence, or disability before they became teachers. Now, as teachers, they get a little bit more, but not a single respondent felt they got a good amount or that they

were well prepared. (See Figures I.1 and I.2.) In Figure I.1, teachers were asked, “Which word or phrase best describes the training or knowledge you received about special education, neurodivergence, and disability and how to best support students in a general education setting *before* you become a teacher?” In Figure I.2, they were asked, “Which word or phrase best describes the professional development you have received about special education, neurodivergence, and disability and how to best support students in general education *while being a teacher?*”

Figure I.1 • Teacher Survey Question

Which word or phrase best describes the training and knowledge you received about special education, neurodivergence, and disability and how to best support students in a general education setting *before* you became a teacher?

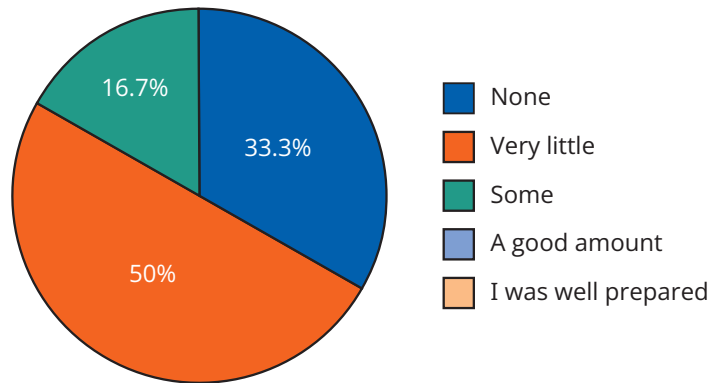
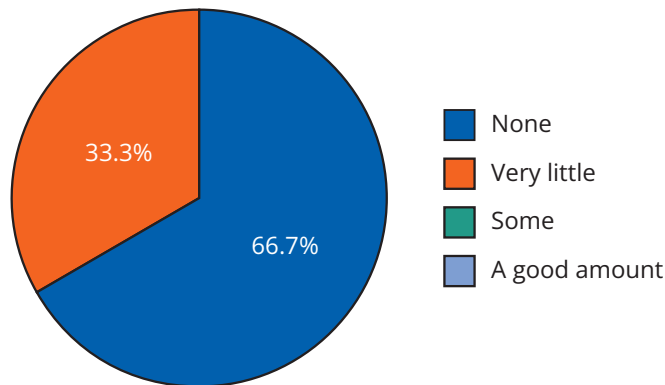


Figure I.2 • Additional Teacher Survey Question

Which word or phrase best describes the professional development you have received about special education, neurodivergence, and disability and how to best support students in a general education setting *while being a teacher?*



To be clear, these are excellent teachers and literacy coaches; they are people who run PLCs, follow educators on their social media, read professional books, and seek out professional learning opportunities. And they say that they have not gotten, and are not getting, much in the way of professional support, even though we are seeing more students who are identified as benefiting from specific supports and services with IEPs or 504s than ever before (Arundel, 2025).

Add to it that many of the teachers I spoke to with special education certifications report that most of their degree training was on law, a fast survey of a huge range of disabilities, the diagnosis process, and IDEA compliance. Very little, if any, of their training was focused on what to do in classrooms or as part of pull-out sessions with students.

I belong to a handful of groups focused on literacy, neurodivergence, and disability. Some of these groups are for educators; others are for researchers or caregivers. Some are in-person, some social media. There is a sharp contrast between the content shared in the caregiver groups versus the teacher groups. The teacher groups frequently seek advice for a range of scenarios or have direct questions about how to teach a particular topic or skill to a particular kid. Sometimes there are questions about good intervention or curricula programs or teacher training programs on a range of topics. But what strikes me is how often the caregiver groups ask for help with speaking to teachers or advocating for their children with IEPs or 504s. They assume that the teachers know how to help if the caregiver can just unlock the right phrasing or question.

Some schools, districts, and advocacy groups try to address the need for more teacher knowledge by pouring time and money into packaged programs, believing that if teachers use this high-quality program they will learn about the content and strategies over time and be able to transfer it eventually to “make it their own.” And there are strong programs available. As a parent who had a first grader who was struggling to learn to read when COVID lockdowns hit, I clung to my *Recipe for Reading* manual like a life raft. Unfortunately, many of the professional development supports associated with these programs are meant to just help implement the program. Less common is professional development that teaches how to teach literacy *and* not just how to use a program. So, if a student requires anything that is not outlined in the program, a teacher might find themselves struggling to meet that kid’s needs while staying on the pacing guide to teach with fidelity. These programs, even the most brilliant ones, tend to be either/or: either they are centered on the students who need additional support in literacy and are interventions only for them, or they are centered on the typical grade-level learner with a few sidebars and extension materials to support students who need something different.

I want to be clear here: I am not pointing the finger at educators or caregivers for the disconnection between what teachers need to know and what teachers do know in terms of meeting the needs of all students, especially and including students who are neurodivergent or have learning disabilities. I have been and am one.

However, after years of complaining and moaning about that disconnection, I came to the realization that while there are many books on teaching literacy to general education students, and some books on teaching literacy to students who have learning disabilities, I could not find one that addressed the very specific needs of a general education teacher or a special educator teaching literacy in an inclusive setting, which includes neurodivergent students, students with learning disabilities, and students with or without identified learning variabilities in the same classroom. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2024), most students with disabilities spend 80% or more of their time in the inclusive general education classroom; of course, this is where almost 100% of students not identified with disabilities spend their time. I realized that wishing and waiting for a book I could recommend to the teachers I work with was not going to materialize. I needed to write it myself.

What This Book Is (*Betty Crocker’s Cookbook*) and What It Isn’t (*Mastering the Art of French Cooking*)

When I first graduated from college and moved into my first apartment, my mom gave me the “good old” *Betty Crocker’s Cookbook*. She said, and I paraphrase here, “It’s not fancy, but it will give you all the foundations.” These were the pre-internet, pre-smartphone days, so having a book like that was a necessity for figuring out how to make a basic broth from scratch or a simple vanilla buttercream. It also had all the substitutions, measurement equivalents, and even how to set a table for different occasions. If you had *Betty Crocker’s Cookbook* you could get dinner on the table with only what you had in your pantry and maybe even make a birthday cake for dessert.

But you weren't going to find out how to make the perfect *pâte à choux*, create a balanced *sauce à la moutarde*, or learn how to pair food with wine. If a deep dive into French cooking was what you wanted, then *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* by Julia Child is what you needed. However, my wise mother knew I needed to start somewhere that would cover a lot of ground and hold my hand on my post-college adult cooking journey, so Betty Crocker it was. Truth be told, while my cookbook collection has grown quite a bit, I still refer to "good old" Betty from time to time.

This book is meant to be your Betty Crocker version of a professional development book about teaching literacy to neurodivergent students and students with learning disabilities in general education settings. What that means is that this is a book that

- offers foundational understandings of must-know key ideas of working with students who are neurodiverse or have learning disabilities;
- assumes that readers might need some filling in or a refresher on vocabulary, practices, and background on these topics;
- realistically addresses the challenges of balancing a sometimes very wide range of needs in one classroom;
- *will not* give specific lessons to teach in literacy; and
- *will not* deeply explore most aspects that are touched upon, but rather will give working information to get you started.

In other words, I tried to include everything I wished I had at my fingertips when I was in the classroom and to answer the most common questions I get asked when I'm working in schools, communities, and districts. What I kept picturing was a teacher, or a team, who has a student or group of students that they want to think and plan for so they reach for this book. While it might not give everything that a teacher needs, it will hopefully give a starting point.

Who Is This Book For? The Air Fryer Versus the Egg Scrambler

The book you are holding is a labor of love and my best attempt to bridge some of the differences between what educators are expected to know and be able to do and what they can do right now. I have been working on this book informally for about a decade and formally for another four years. The deeper I delved into it, the more desperate I was to make sure that everyone who needs the information I will share in these pages can get their hands on it. I won't go so far as to say "steal this book," but I might be OK if you did. Why? Because as someone who has dedicated a majority of my career to high-quality, inclusive literacy practices and as the parent of two children with IEPs as I began writing, I am invested in everyone who needs it to get the information in this book. And, in the process of deepening my learning while writing this book, I learned so many more things that are shocking, exciting, and critically important for all teachers to know if they don't already.

My dream, as I have told those poor unfortunates to whom I have been talking incessantly about this book, is that this book becomes the air fryer equivalent of a professional book for teachers.

I don't know how old you are, but I was an adult when air fryers first hit the scene. I thought they were a useless extra appliance that I didn't need. Kind of like the egg scrambler my sister got my mom for Mother's Day when we were kids. An egg scrambler, if you don't know what it is, is a niche appliance. You insert one egg on a pin. The pin vibrates violently. Then when you crack your egg, it is all ready to cook. As you can

imagine, it was used once and then shoved in a drawer by my mother because it only had that one use. Many books for educators are egg scramblers, and I did not want this book to be like that: only good for one narrow situation that could probably be better served by tools that have broader purposes. Instead, I want this book to be an air fryer. Something that so many of us did not have, did not see a use for, but now around two-thirds of American households have at least one of (Doering, 2024). For someone who lived most of my adult life without one, hardly a week goes by when I don't use it at least once, or usually more.

What Content Is Covered in This Book?

This book is organized into two parts with a total of seven chapters.

Part I is dedicated to the essentials that every educator should know regardless of who is in your class when it comes to neurodiversity and learning disabilities.

- **Chapter 1** looks at foundational knowledge on neurodiversity and learning disabilities that plays out in today's schools. There is information on language, must-know legislation, and explanations of our current system of education.
- **Chapter 2** is an overview of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a powerful and practical framework that allows teachers to meet the needs of a range of learners. Whether UDL is new or already familiar to you, this chapter is designed to be a good intro or refresher. It also discusses how UDL can apply to literacy instruction.
- **Chapter 3** is focused on individualized education plans (IEPs). It goes over their background, including essential information about what they include and how students get them. It also explores the role of strengths-based IEPs and what they can look like in literacy.

Part II shifts into more specific information about literacy practice and three common types of neurodivergence we might see in general education classrooms.

- **Chapter 4** explores key features of quality literacy practices for all students, including the role of diagnoses in our plans.
- **Chapter 5** discusses print-based learning variabilities, specifically dyslexia. The chapter will cover foundational definitions, common strengths of students with dyslexia, diagnostic criteria, as well as important instructional content and strategies.
- **Chapter 6** explores attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Although ADHD is not considered a learning disability, it is considered a type of neurodivergence that can thrive with literacy when the instruction leans into strengths and removes or reduces obstacles.
- **Chapter 7** is the last chapter and discusses autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In addition to exploring essential understandings of autism, this chapter addresses the unique strengths and needs autistic students have around literacy.

How to Navigate This Book

I thought a lot about how this book could be read or referred to. And ultimately in the structure those two seemingly opposite uses were the driving force of how it is organized. This book absolutely can be read cover to cover. It also can be a book that you only dip into on an as-needed basis. You have an IEP meeting coming up? Spend some time reading through the IEP chapter. A student's family informs you that she has ADHD? Take a look at that chapter.

My fondest hope for this book is that it is read in the company of others, whether in an informal book club, a professional learning community, or as part of a schoolwide professional reading cycle. I tried to include intriguing information, reflection activities, and collaboration opportunities throughout the book to make that sort of engagement a natural option.

The book includes several key features that I hope will help you plan your reading more easily, or at least make it possible for you to get what you came for.

- Each chapter has a similar layout and some shared features:
 - Overview of the chapter with estimated time it will take to read so you can plan what to read based on your time, interest, or both
 - Short summary of must-knows and truths for each topic
 - Context that will provide you with foundational and background knowledge of the chapter topic
 - The Beyond the Basics section, which takes some of the information explored in the context section and builds upon it as well as adding deeper information that is helpful to know
 - The Take It to the Classroom section, designed to leave you with practices you can apply
 - The Next Steps section, recommended resources for learning more about each of the chapter topics
 - Final Thoughts, which pulls everything together
- The chapters are written from most important to most interesting. So, if you have a set amount of time to read, starting at the beginning you will get bite-sized summaries, with more details coming as the chapter unfolds.
- In each chapter you will notice a Research Read section with a research article from a journal published by Sage (the parent company of Corwin Press, the publisher of this book) and guiding questions for you to explore on your own or with colleagues. One of my biggest frustrations as an educator has been, and continues to be, how many people tell teachers to “just read the research” when it can be difficult to determine worthy research material and it can be expensive to get your hands on. One of my favorite features of this book is that I was able to include links to relevant research articles written by experts in the field that you can read in their entirety. Whenever possible, I tried to include articles that were meta-analyses, which encompass analysis and summarize many different studies, so that your reading time is maximized.
- You will also notice three articles or excerpts written by guest contributors. I included these to bring in other voices and encourage you to think of this book not as a solo work but as a conversation within the field. The more voices we can hear from, the better our professional lives will be. Each contributor I invited is one that I have learned a tremendous amount from and thought you might enjoy learning from, too.

A Word About the Scholarship Included and Referenced in This Book and Why It Matters

“Nothing about us without us” has long been a slogan in disability rights activism (Koontz et al., 2022) because so often decisions are made, topics are researched, and policies are written with little to no input from the very people most impacted by these actions. Throughout the book you will notice contributions from, articles written by, and works cited from a range of different scholars. I strove to make sure the scholarship I included and referenced in this book was as representative of our current student population in the United States as possible and the identities and lived experiences of the students we are focused on

across these pages. That means I tried to include a range of identities, including neurodivergence, disability, race, ethnicity, country of origin, socioeconomic class, geography, and religion, to name just a few. Because of the current makeup of scholars on these topics, while I was able to include a diversity of voices, I was not able to get the type of representation that fully reflects our rich and diverse student body in this country. When I reached out to my dear friend and constant thought-partner, Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul, about this struggle, she said, “Representation in academia is a known and documented concern, and specifically in academic publishing. There are barriers that still exist. Be transparent with your readers that this is a problem that you hope in future editions you will be able to remedy.”

If you know Dr. Cherry-Paul, you know to take her advice, so that is what I am doing here.

Writing This Book Now

Writing this book now was extraordinarily fraught for many reasons, both personally and because of larger national and world events dealing directly with education, equity, inclusion, neurodiversity, and disability. I did my absolute best to reflect the complications of this rapidly changing educational landscape and tried to make clear the places where I thought things might change once the book has been published. As of the writing of this introduction, everything I have included reflects the most up-to-date information and theory from reputable sources that I could find. Anything that is inaccurate or out of date by the time you read it is a reflection of the dynamic situation we are in and my limitations as an author, and not the skills of the editors and contributors to this work. I also want to make clear that, unless I refer to someone by their full name, all the people discussed in this book are referred to by a first name pseudonym to protect their privacy.

With that explained, I want to use the last bit of this introduction to explore some foundational content that I hope will set us up for what’s to come.

Belonging Is the Bedrock for Inclusion

In 2023, *Science* published a big study on an intervention at the college level that had an impressive impact on students finishing their first year of college successfully (Walton et al., 2023). The impact was especially large for students with identities that historically had a slower or stopped progression through college. What was the intervention about?

Belonging.

One of the most powerful interventions to give to college students to keep them in college is that of belonging.

If you believe the adage “bigger kids, bigger problems,” it should come as no surprise that while the stakes might be a bit lower in school-age children, research has shown, again and again, that belonging matters deeply for students in elementary and middle schools. One compelling meta-analysis that looked at 10 studies found that students’ sense of belonging was a key factor in students’ positive outcomes in school (Allen et al., 2018).

From the time public schools in the United States were developed by Horace Mann in the 1830s as a way to create a “common” space for education so that children of different backgrounds would have access to similar knowledge bases, skills, and civic morality, they have been grounded in a belief that school should be a place where everyone would belong so that later, after school and into adulthood, that sense of community and communal values would remain. While we know those original public schools did not fulfill that core value of true inclusion, integration, and access, it is helpful to remember that a central stated value to their creation was belonging.

This book, which is about teaching neurodivergent and neurotypical students in heterogeneous settings, stands on a clear belief and understanding that students must have a sense of belonging in order to succeed. No matter what ideas are shared, research is explored, or strategies are explained in this book, if students do not believe that they belong in our schools, it will be for naught.

Belonging is the deep human need to know you are a wanted, valued, and needed part of a community. Belonging is about more than fitting in. Belonging is about contributing and effecting change within one's community as well as being cared for by that same community.

Dr. Erik Carter, the executive director of Baylor University's Center on Developmental Disabilities, developed "Ten Dimensions of Belonging," which apply to many contexts but were designed especially for schools and faith communities to consider the members of their communities with disabilities (see Figure I.3). In Dr. Carter's work, he posits that for a person to feel included and valued, all 10 of these dimensions need to be in place. As you look through or review the 10 dimensions of belonging, I encourage you to think of a student in your class and how you or your students have been actively involved, or not, in each of these dimensions when it comes to that student.

Figure I.3 • Ten Dimensions of Belonging



Source: Ten Dimensions of Belonging by Erik Carter, Baylor Center for Disability and Flourishing, Baylor University.

- **Present.** This dimension refers to the very real possibility that some children are not even in the room with us. In order to belong, someone needs to be present. That also means present for the good stuff like the class celebrations, field trips, and inside jokes. The more a child is present, the more likely they are to belong.

- **Invited.** This dimension refers to personal and individualized invitations, the type that make you feel like you matter, that someone is asking you because they want you in particular to be there. It is not a mass email sent to all the families suggesting that they come to the class writing celebration but rather a phone call, text, or face-to-face invitation.
- **Welcomed.** Being welcomed is an active move. It's not the same as opening a door. It's letting people know through our words and actions that they belong in this space and that we are delighted they came. My friend Shana Frazin, who is a middle school librarian, greets every child who comes to her library with, "Welcome! So glad you came to the library today." The first time I saw her do it, I'll admit I thought it was a bit corny. But when I looked at the warmth on the face of the adolescent she was speaking to and heard the sincerity in Shania's voice, I realized it was a powerful practice. It sends a message to anyone who enters our space that you are wanted here.
- **Known.** It's of course not enough to just exist in a space and take up air. We want people to want to get to know us—our likes, dislikes, talents, struggles, what we're famous for. If you think of that old hit television show *Cheers*, based on a group of bar regulars, what made it so popular was how well the regulars really knew each other. We can have students come in and out of our classes daily but not know which author is their favorite, or which genre they love to write, or anything about their life. Getting to know a bit about each child we teach and encouraging our children to get to know a bit about each other can be transformative.
- **Accepted.** Of course, people can know you well and not accept what they know, so this next dimension of belonging is critical. Perhaps a student has a strong aversion to something that everyone else likes. Are people in the class able to accept that? Are we able to accept that a student is a social processor and might need to talk things through to understand them? Accepting a person as they are and letting them know they are accepted is critical.
- **Supported.** Being in a space is not belonging if you cannot do what is expected in that space. In order to belong, we need to know that our needs will be met. If a student needs to sit closer to the front of the room or to wear headphones when the class gets loud, those are supports we can provide.
- **Heard.** It is not uncommon, in spaces that seek out diversity but have no interest in true inclusion, to invite people to a space and then not ask for their contributions, thoughts, and feelings. Students need to know that we are eager to hear what they think and that what they express and how they best express it is wanted.
- **Befriended.** Being in a space, even a warm space, where we do not feel connected to anyone and have no one to give a knowing nod to or ask how their weekend was can feel isolating, even if everything else is in place. In order to feel like they belong, students need to have a friend or two in the classroom. These do not need to be best friends, just someone who is happy to see them and they are happy to see in return. A someone (or a few someones) who is a little bit closer than the rest of the group. While educators are able to have some sort of friendly relationship with their students, because of power dynamics it is not a true friendship, so we need to be aware of how we are creating conditions that allow for peer friendships to build. Opportunities to informally chat, shared experiences like field trips or special events that can build shared memories, a joyful learning environment, a balance of work that allows for collaboration and independence—all of these can provide opportunities for students to befriend one another. We also want to keep an eye on budding friendships, whether they're in requests of who to sit near or work with or just noticing who enters the room together, and try to nurture positive friendships when possible.

- **Needed.** This dimension refers to the very human desire to be needed. We all want to be where we are needed. When we are not needed, it can feel a bit like people are just being nice to us or doing a bit of charity work by sharing space with us. But where we feel needed for our opinions, our humor, our knowledge, our abilities, our usefulness, we want to be, and we feel called to be. That means as educators we want to look at our class rosters and make sure that every student is needed in some way, whether this is a formal class job or role like line leader or timekeeper or something that is more subtle but a necessary part of the community, like our peace maker, devil's advocate, or fun fact sharer. Spending some time naming how each class member is needed is a huge step in the direction of ensuring everyone belongs.
- **Loved.** This dimension sometimes takes people by surprise. I interpret Dr. Carter's idea of love to refer to an action, not a feeling. When we love someone, we take specific actions. I love my friend's child, so I ask her questions about her life whenever I see her, remember her on special occasions, and listen to her when she needs a sounding board. We know what it feels like to be loved by someone and how it changes how we feel in any space when that person is present.

Inspired by Dr. Carter's "Ten Dimensions of Belonging," a large part of this book is grounded in the central idea that every child deserves to belong in our classrooms. Just allowing them in the room without truly knowing them, needing them, or caring about them is not enough. Yes, we need to teach them, but they will find it very difficult to learn, if not impossible, if we do not make our classrooms places of belonging.

Belonging Starts With Us

In order for our students to belong, we have some things we have to ensure are in place, starting with the 10 dimensions of belonging.

Dr. Carter's work started with faith communities. I tend to believe that faith communities and schools have more in common than they appear at first glance. One of those common things is that schools and faith communities strive to create belonging, to wear it on our sleeves, but the work that is often centered in both places (scripture study, charity, phonics, essay writing) often gets in the way of making belonging a priority.

Second, I want us to remember that the people most at risk of not belonging are neurodivergent people. More than half of adolescents with autism (50.6%) and about a quarter with an intellectual disability (24.8%) have never been invited to a social activity, and 83.5% of adolescents with autism and 41.5% of those with an intellectual disability have never been contacted by peers on the phone (M. Wagner et al., 2003). And while we might feel tempted to say that result is only because the study is so old, kids have so many more ways to connect, we would be wrong. More recent studies unfortunately draw similar conclusions, indicating some of the expected connection improvements due to an increase in tech use among youth (social media, texting, video calls, collaborative video games) have not increased social connections for neurodivergent students (Cullinane, 2021; Raines et al., 2023). It doesn't have to be this way. We can prioritize belonging in our classrooms. We can ensure that our classrooms are warm, welcoming, and worthwhile and that all students know they are learning and growing. We can ensure we see them and are working to be good teachers to them and not leaving all of that to someone else.

As you make your way through the book, I will mention Carter's work from time to time. I hope that when I do, you pause and think about your own role in making classrooms spaces of belonging.

Welcome to This Book!

The biggest idea I want you to know about this book is that from its inception, incubation, research, structure, drafting, and design, it was all created with you, the real human educator, in mind. I hope you see it for what it is: not a definitive source but rather a useful one that gives you or reminds you of what you need to make sure your teaching is as inclusive, joyful, and effective as possible for you and all of your students. And I hope I've done this in a way that makes this a friendly companion that you can read and return to as needed, skim to grab a quick idea or bit of information, dig into when the spirit moves you, or read with others as part of your professional learning community.

I hope this is just a continuation of a longer conversation I get to have with you. I encourage you to reach out to me on the various platforms and I welcome comments and questions that might develop as you read or while you try things.

Finally, and most importantly, I invite you to take this book for how it was designed: a beginning to a new quest.



