



On November 20, 2025 from 12:30pm - 1:45 pm, I observed Dr. Marigrace Walker teaching a class session of EDU 109: Language and Literacy Development in the Young Child. Dr. Walker began by stating the purpose of that day's class session, which was to "learn how to identify high quality books for young children." She stated that books are an amazing way for children to feel seen, which is something everyone wants.

Dr. Walker proceeded by discussing what quality books can do for young children, like building their vocabulary and expanding their world knowledge. Next, she went over slides on the characteristics of high quality books in general and then, more specifically, about what to look for when choosing narrative books versus informational books. She then asked the students which type of books they gravitated towards when they were young.

Then, Dr. Walker delved into the metaphor about how books can serve as mirrors (where children see themselves), windows (where children learn about others), and sliding glass doors (where children can be transported into new experiences). She emphasized that "representation helps children feel belonging and supports identity development."

Dr. Walker went on to talk about the "funds of knowledge" that children have acquired and how quality books should connect to the children's experiences - emphasizing all children. This led to her talking about how to evaluate books by asking questions like: Who is represented? How are they represented? Who is missing? Are stereotypes present? Is the story respectful and accurate?

Then, Dr. Walker showed the students a list of children's book awards like the Newbery and Caldecott Medals, also highlighting lesser-known awards that honor quality books that are diverse, such as the Coretta Scott King Awards, Pura Belpre Awards, and Schneider Family Book Awards. Importantly, Dr. Walker stated that awards are a good guide for selecting children's books, but the teacher's professional judgement is what matters most.

Dr. Walker then went over a slide that listed a set of NY State Standards in Literacy and talked about how high quality books can help students meet those standards. She also discussed how high quality books support the foundations of the Science of Reading and how teachers use books to support learning.

Next, Dr. Walker read aloud the book *Not a Stick* by Antoinette Portis. Her reading was an excellent teaching model, as she read with great expression and stopped to ask questions that engaged the audience with the text. She talked about extension activities she had done with children and with college students. Dr. Walker then asked the students for other extension activity ideas for this book. Concluding this part of class, she suggested and discussed one final extension activity that would encourage family involvement.

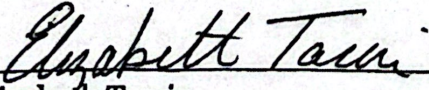
For the next 45 minutes, students were given a chance to choose books from the piles of children's books that Dr. Walker had put around the room. They were to read the book and then answer questions in the 4-page Evaluation Guide that she created. The questions in the packets corresponded with the information from the slides she had gone over in the first half of class. There was a little confusion as to whether the students were supposed to read together as a group or individually and about how many books they were supposed to read, but Dr. Walker clarified as she walked around from group to group.

The class ended with each group sharing their favorites of the books they had just read by giving a brief summary and discussing specifically what they appreciated about the book.

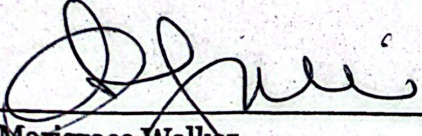
Dr. Walker led a 75 minute class that was full of excellent information for choosing good quality literature for children. She kept almost all of the students engaged the entire time thanks to her presentation style and her well-designed follow-up activity. Dr. Walker was clearly comfortable with and passionate about the subject matter, which made the class even more enjoyable. It was absolutely clear that the students are extremely fond of Dr. Walker and that they are very comfortable with her. As they read their books during the group activity, they were eager to tell her about the childhood memories the books brought up and some relevant experiences from their field placements. Dr. Walker's responses to the students were consistently warm and validating, clearly showing the positive relationships she has fostered with them. Her lesson was very well planned and executed. Dr. Walker took the time and effort to get the books for the activity from the public library instead of using classroom books, so that the books were fresh and new to the students.

One of my few suggestions for Dr. Walker is to cull what she thinks are the most important or useful concepts for the students and only put those on the slides - consider one concept per slide with a corresponding graphic to drive home the meaning. This would allow her to spend more time expounding on those concepts, rather than trying to quickly cover numerous concepts. I would also suggest stopping the whole class to clarify when it seems individual students need clarification on directions, because if more than one student seems confused, there are likely many more students that would find the clarification helpful as well.

My biggest "suggestion" is for Dr. Walker to keep doing what she is doing. She is deeply committed to and successful at forming strong, positive relationships with her students. During this lesson and many other lessons I have witnessed more casually, she keeps students engaged with hands-on activities which she continually connects to theory. Dr. Walker's time at the college has been brief and yet she has become a well-loved and relied-upon resource for her students and colleagues alike.


Elizabeth Tarvin

3/16/26
Date


Marigrace Walker

3/17/26
Date