Sheffield Hallam University

Foreword

BEARDON, Luke <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7487-3723>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

https://shura.shu.ac.uk/36207/

This document is the Published Version [VoR]

Citation:

BEARDON, Luke (2025). Foreword. In: Applications and Practices for Empowering Neurodivergent Learners. IGI Global, xv-xvi. [Book Section]

Copyright and re-use policy

See http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html

Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive
http://shura.shu.ac.uk

Foreword

I've recently been contemplating a new concept – new to me at least – that of 'autistic epistemology'; in other words, where does perceived autism knowledge actually come from, how much of it actually stands up to scrutiny and, most importantly, what damage is done to the neurodivergent communities when such 'knowledge' is inaccurate or misleading? So many narratives around autism and other neurodivergences are problematic for one reason or another. Much of the literature is inherently ableist, neuronormative, exclusionary in nature. I often find myself having to seek out the small percentage of words that sit happily with me. Reading Applications and Practices for Empowering Neurodivergent Learners, however, had almost the opposite effect. It's not always possible to read a lengthy book and agree with every single sentiment, but while this is the case here, I can confidently note that the vast majority of the text is extraordinarily delicious to digest. Full of neuroaffirming flavors with genuine inclusion as icing, this is a cake that looks beautiful – and tastes just as good.

Going back to epistemology – this book breaks down many of the myths surrounding neurodivergence in a way that is impossible not to delight in. The incredibly strengths-based premise along with a robust acknowledgement of the difficulties faced by minority populations, there is a vast amount of knowledge that will be beneficial to the reader. From Critical Autism Studies through to ethnographic writing, some wonderful reflections on intersectionality along with some fascinating research, I cannot imagine how any reader could not come away with a better understanding of the neurodivergent world.

I am a huge fan of inclusive practice. I'm less sure what this actually looks like. Inclusion is such an individual concept – what might be exclusionary to one might feel inclusionary to another. I believe that there is such a thing as inclusive culture, though, which includes inclusive practices as best as possible. This book manages to feel as though it is steeped in inclusion. If it were a wet towel, on wringing it out, inclusion would drip from its threads.

Reading neuro-texts (i.e. narratives relating to neurodiversity and neurodivergence) can be a deeply uncomfortable experience. Neuro-safety – feeling safe when engaging in any specific activity – is a rare thing for many people. This book, though, feels safe. In fact, I would suggest that not only is it safe, but it also gives such a neuroaffirmative message that the neurodivergent reader may well feel validated, heard, and accepted. This cannot be underestimated seeing as many of the messages around being neurodivergent can have the opposite impact.

I came up with a neologism recently - 'scrupulautity' - based on scrupulosity whereby one might feel unfounded guilt, usually based on a religious upbringing. Scrupulautity is specific to growing up as an autistic person, when so many autistic children develop a sense that they are usually in the wrong. And it's easy to see why this could be the case. When concepts of neurodivergence are rooted in neuronormativity, when children are forced to mask, when neurodivergent children are made to feel lesser just for being their authentic selves and expected to change, conform, and behave in unnatural ways just because that is the way of the majority – no wonder they feel that they are the ones in the wrong. Books such as this one, however, flips the narrative. Neurodivergent authenticity is celebrated – encouraged, even; which makes for a delightful read.

Who should read this book? I'm sure it would be a lot quicker and easier simply to identify who shouldn't. And that would be a very short list, even if I could think of how to start it (which I can't). Researchers, clinicians, educators, humans in general – this is a book that will surely offer something to every single reader.

Luke Beardon
Sheffield Hallam University, UK