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Children's Colorado Dietetic Internship + JFK LEND Fellowship

Background

- Up to 70-90% of children with autism and other developmental disabilities experience feeding challenges.
- These challenges include restricted diets, sensory-based aversions, and anxiety around try new foods
- Parents and clinicians report mealtime stress due to lack of resources and limited child-friendly tools to support positive food exposure

Problem Statement

- Children with neuro-disabilities experience high rates of sensory-based feeding challenges, yet there are limited child-friendly tools to support safe, positive food exploration

Project Goal

- To create a sensory-friendly storybook that encourages children with developmental disabilities to explore new foods through curiosity, play, and on small brave bite

Target Audience & Users

Target Audience

- Children ages 3-7 with sensory-based feeding challenges

Target User

- Parents, RDs, OTS, SLPs, PCPs

Settings



Clinic Feeding Therapy



Home Mealtime Routines



Early Childhood Classrooms

Solution: Brave Bites

Brave Bites is a sensory-friendly storybook following fruit and vegetable characters who model curiosity, bravery, and "one small try"



Each character has a unique texture and a "superpower."
They try something new; not perfectly, but bravely!

Methods

Literature Review

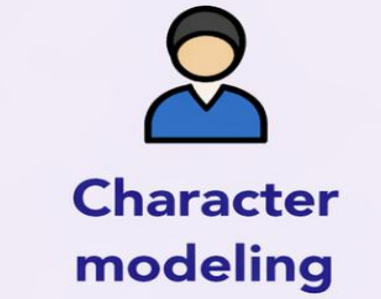
- **Databases:** Google Scholar, PubMed
- **Search Terms:** Feeding challenges, sensory food aversion, neurodevelopmental disorders and eating, pediatric feeding therapy, food neophobia, sensory play

Thematic Synthesis

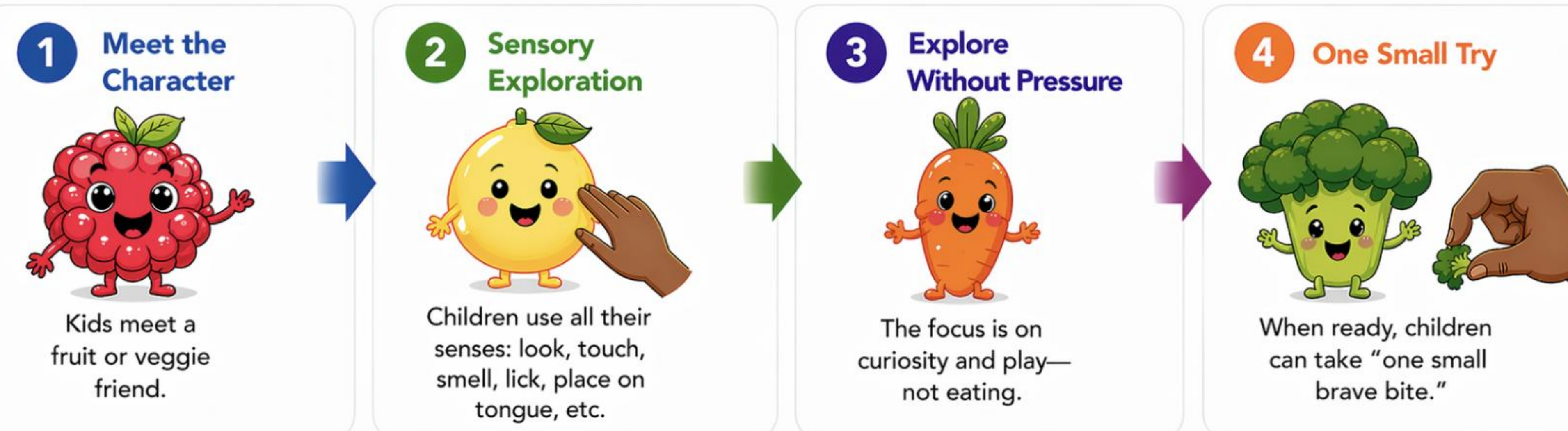
- Key themes found across the literature:**
- Repeated exposure increases food acceptance
 - Sensory play reduces anxiety and food refusal
 - Pressure-free environments improve willingness to try foods
 - Modeling and positive reinforcement support behavior change

Application to Book Design

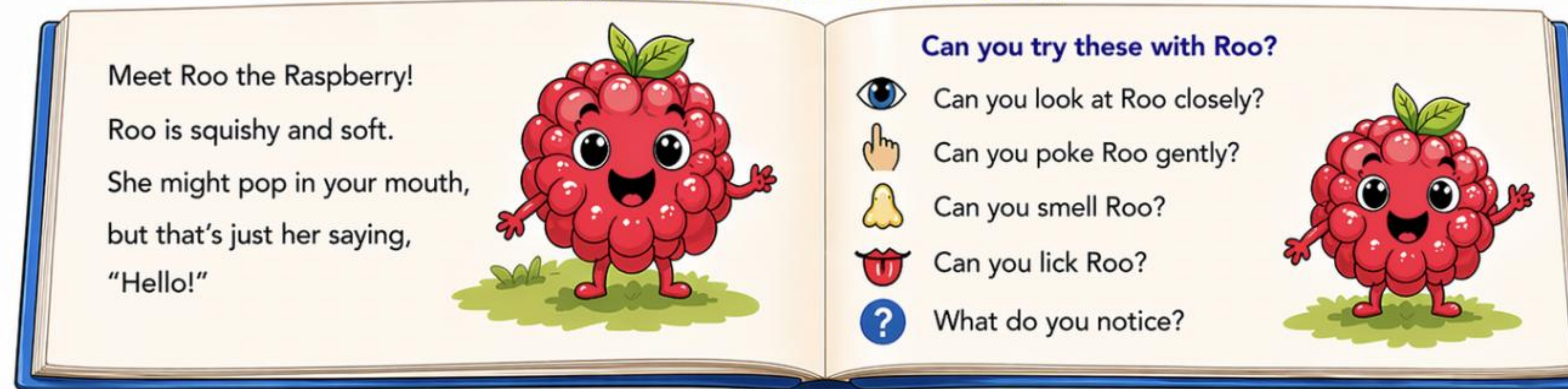
These themes informed the book's:



How It Works



EXAMPLE PAGE: ROO THE RASPBERRY



Evidence & Literature Support

- Up to **80%** of children with developmental disabilities experience feeding difficulties. (Silverman et al., 2025)
- **Sensory-based feeding interventions** improve food acceptance and mealtime participation in children with feeding difficulties. (Marshall et al., 2021)
- Children need **8–15 repeated exposures** to a new food before acceptance increases. (Lanigan, 2019; Spill et al., 2019)
- Children with sensory food aversions are at **increased risk** for restricted dietary variety and **nutritional deficiencies**. (Taylor et al., 2021)

Implications

- Provides a developmentally low-pressure tool for food exploration
- Supports children in building confidence and reducing mealtime anxiety.
- Aids parents and clinicians in creating positive feeding experiences

References

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Future Direction

- Finalize and publish full book
- Make it adaptive to any fear food
- Develop a parent/clinician guide with exposure steps and supportive mealtime language
- Gather feedback and evaluate impact with families and clinicians.