



Diverse Minds, Unified Success: Embracing Neurodiversity in the Classroom

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What comes to mind when you hear the term 'neurodiversity'?





Judy Singer

Neurodiversity_(n):

A biological truism that refers to the limitless variability of human nervous systems on the planet, in which no two can ever be exactly alike due to the influence of environmental factors

- *Usage*

- encompasses ALL Humanity
- is an **advocacy term** to name the Neurodiversity Movement, a civil rights movement for psycho-medically labelled minorities and their allies
- is a category of the intersectional factors that define advantage or disadvantage that

- *Misusage:*

- Does not mean "Neurological Disability" or "Otherness"
- Is not a diagnosis
- Is not a descriptor of genomes



Neurodiversity is an umbrella term referring to *natural* variation in the human brain in learning, mood, attention, sociability, and other cognitive functions.

The term encompasses a variety of neurological conditions and focuses on *differences* rather than *deficits*, suggesting there is no “*correct*” way for the brain to work.

Conditions that fall under the neurodiversity umbrella include:

1. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): This encompasses a range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech, and nonverbal communication, along with unique strengths and differences.

2. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): Characterized by patterns of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity that are more frequent and severe than typically observed in individuals at a comparable level of development.

3. Dyslexia: A learning disorder that involves difficulty reading due to problems identifying speech sounds and learning how they relate to letters and words.

4. Dyscalculia: A condition that affects the ability to acquire arithmetical skills. Individuals with dyscalculia typically have difficulties with numbers, time, measurement, and spatial reasoning.

5. Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder): A disorder that affects motor coordination and can impact daily activities and tasks. It can also affect speech.

6. Tourette Syndrome: A condition of the nervous system characterized by repeated, involuntary movements and vocalizations known as tics.

7. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD): Often included under neurodiversity, OCD is characterized by recurring irrational thoughts that lead one to perform specific, repeated behaviors.

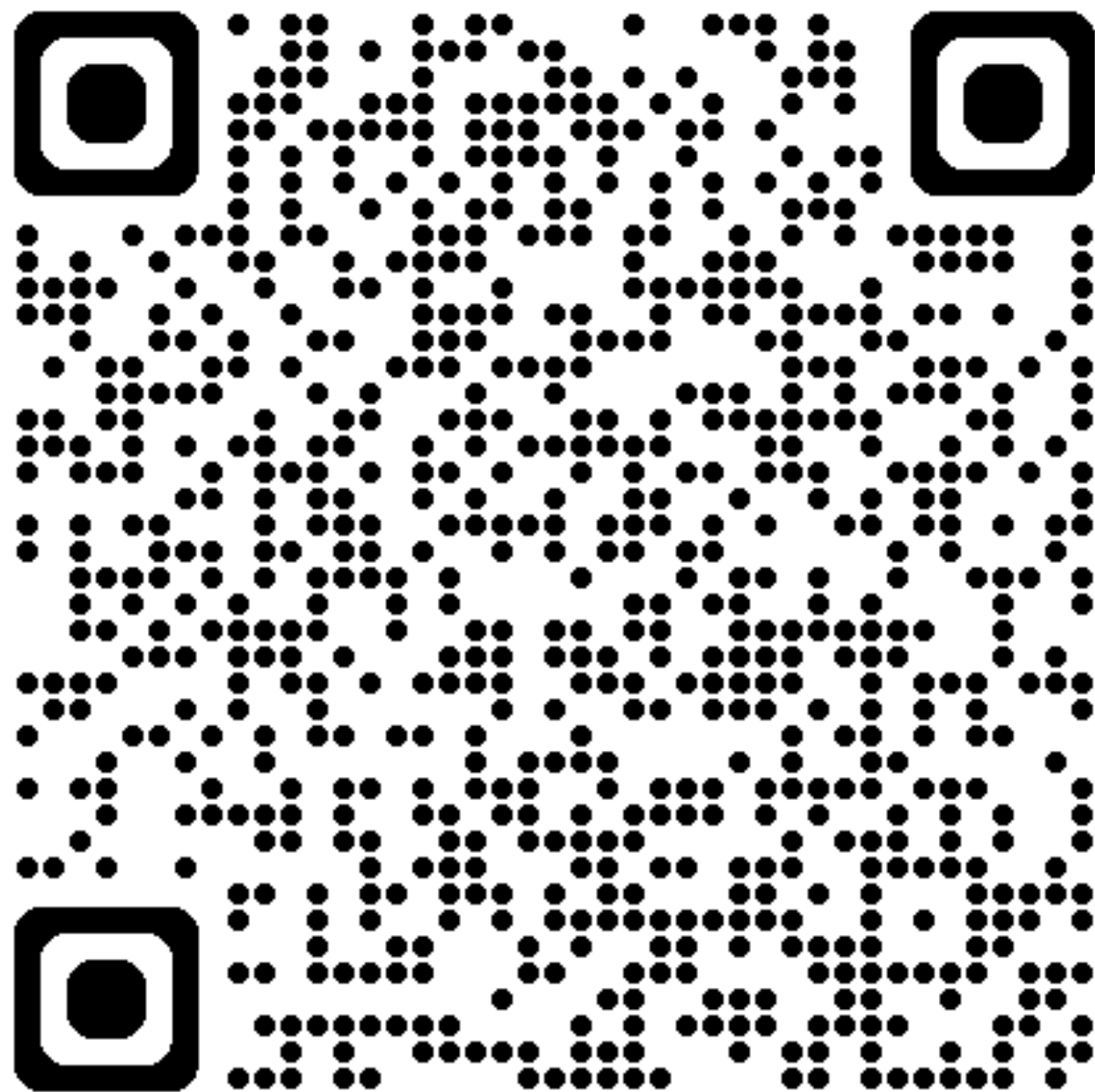
8. Executive Functioning Issues: Not a diagnosis in itself but often associated with other neurodivergent conditions; involves difficulties with planning, flexibility, organization, and self-monitoring.



”

“The world needs all kinds of minds.”

-Temple Grandin



What are common misconceptions about neurodiversity and how can we address these in our teaching and campus culture?



Why consider neurodiversity when designing your course?

Enhance
Inclusivity

Improve
Learning
Outcomes

Foster
Innovation &
Creativity

Support Mental
Health &
Wellbeing

Not all students may seek out accommodations...

- Due to:
 - Stigma & Discrimination
 - Privacy Concerns
 - Self-Reliance and Independence
 - Past Negative Experiences
 - Perceived Unfair Advantages

What strategies can we implement to make our classrooms more inclusive for neurodivergent students?

Are there specific adjustments or technologies that you've found effective?



6 Common Neurodiverse Conditions:

Strengths

+

Challenges

ASD

Strong memory skills, excels in systematic and detailed thinking

Changes in routine, social interactions and sensory sensitivities

ADHD

Energetic, creative, excels in quick/dynamic thinking or problem solving

Sustained attention, impulse control, & time management

Dyslexia

Strong reasoning and problem solving, ability to think spatially/in pictures

Reading, writing, and spelling difficulties affect comprehension/expression

Dyspraxia

Empathetic, strong verbal and visual-spatial skills, excel in holistic thinking

Motor coordination, organization/planning, sensory sensitivity

Specific Learning Disorders

Strong problem solving (in areas outside of specific difficulty), creativity

Specific to condition (e.g., math with dyscalculia; handwriting/motor skills with dysgraphia)

Tourette Syndrome

Energetic, strong auditory processing skills, resilient, unique perspectives on tasks

Involuntary vocal/motor tics may at times be disruptive personally and to others

Equitable/Inclusive Teaching Practices:

- **Universal Design Principles:** design courses, assignments, assessments that are flexible, accessible and accommodating to different learning needs
- **Flexible Supports:** extended time on exams, alternative ‘choose your journey’ assessments, additional support resources

Equitable/Inclusive Teaching Practices:

- **Normalize Accommodations:** discuss them openly, inclusively, emphasize that they're intended to support students in educational opportunities rather than providing unfair advantage
- **Encourage Self-Advocacy:** encourage communication with you directly, creating supportive and nonjudgmental environment for discussing challenges and seeking assistance
- **Respect Privacy:** avoid pressuring for those who choose not to disclose (accommodations are voluntary and confidential basis)

Neurodiverse Inclusive Teaching Plan

Objective: *To create an inclusive learning environment that accommodates the diverse needs of neurodiverse students and promotes their academic success in your course.*

Course Name/Title: |

Instructor:

Semester/year:

Section A. Classroom Environment

A1) Physical Space

If applicable, describe how the physical classroom space will be optimized for learning by minimizing sensory distractions (e.g., excessive noise, bright lights) and providing seating options that accommodate different sensory needs (e.g., quiet corner, adjustable seating).

A2) Visual Supports

Specify how visual supports (e.g., visual schedules, visual aids) will be used to enhance understanding and support neurodiverse learners.

Section C. Instructional Materials

B1) Multiple Formats

Describe how instructional materials will be provided in multiple formats (e.g., printed handouts, digital texts, audio recordings) to accommodate diverse learning preferences and sensory sensitivities.

In what ways can we adapt our assessment methods to fairly evaluate diverse abilities of neurodivergent students?

What are challenges and benefits of these adaptations?



Recommendations for Assessment:

- **Multiple assessment options** (e.g., choice between written essays, oral presentations, multimedia projects)
- **Flexible timing/formats (digital vs. paper/pencil vs. oral)**
- **Focus on essential learning outcomes** (rather than specific methodologies or presentation formats)
- **Clear instructions and rubrics**
- **Encourage self-reflection and constructive feedback**

Additional Helpful Resources for Educators:

- **Inside Higher Ed** discusses the expansion of programs like LifePATH at Lone Star College, which are designed to support neurodivergent students by enhancing their career readiness and employment opportunities. [Creating Career Pathways for Neurodiverse Students](#)
- **Neurodiversity Hub** offers extensive resources including programs, academic accommodations, and employment opportunities tailored for neurodivergent students. It also provides training for employers and universities to better integrate neurodivergent talent. [Neurodiversity Hub Resources](#)
- **University College London** provides guidance on creating neurodiversity-friendly environments in educational settings, detailing practical adjustments for neurodivergent students and scholars to thrive academically and socially. [Supporting Neurodiversity in Education - UCL](#)
- **Northern Illinois University** explores neurodiversity in higher education, offering insights into inclusive teaching strategies and classroom behaviors that benefit neurodivergent students. [Neurodiversity & Higher Education - NIU](#)



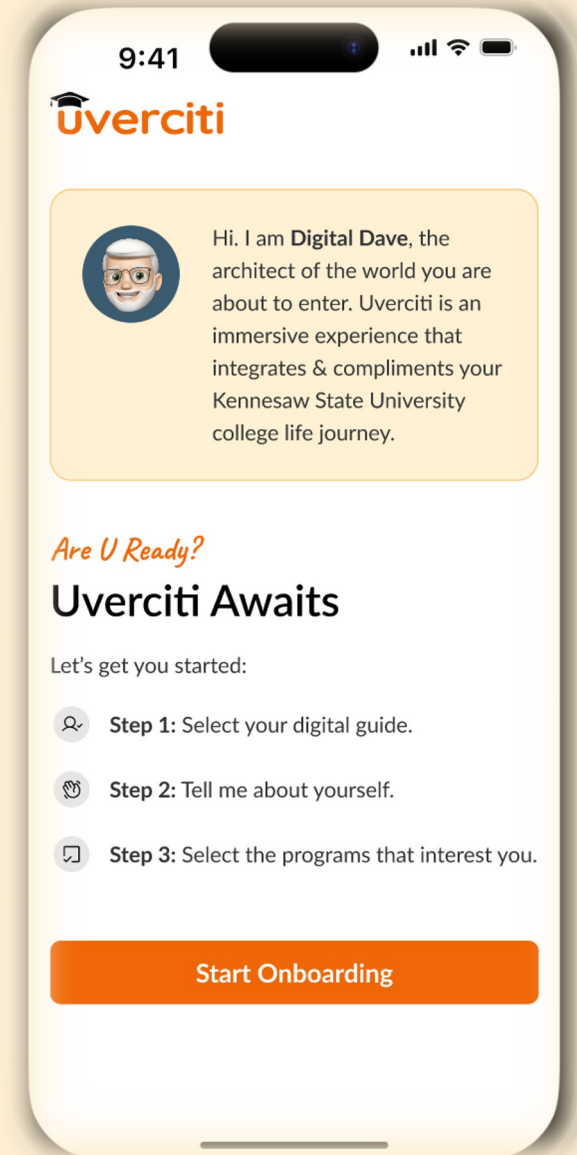
Questions about this handout:

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