

Neurodiversity in the Classroom: Working with Students on the Autism Spectrum

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Today's Discussion

- What is Autism?
- Beware the Single Story
- K-12 vs. Higher Education
- Faculty Perspectives
- Function of Behavior
- Student Support

Acronyms/Abbreviations to Know

Acronym/Abbreviation	Full Name
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
ADA/ADAAA	Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act
DRC	Disability Resource Center
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
FAPE	Free, appropriate public education
QIWD	Qualified individual with a disability
OCR	US Dept. of Education Office of Civil Rights

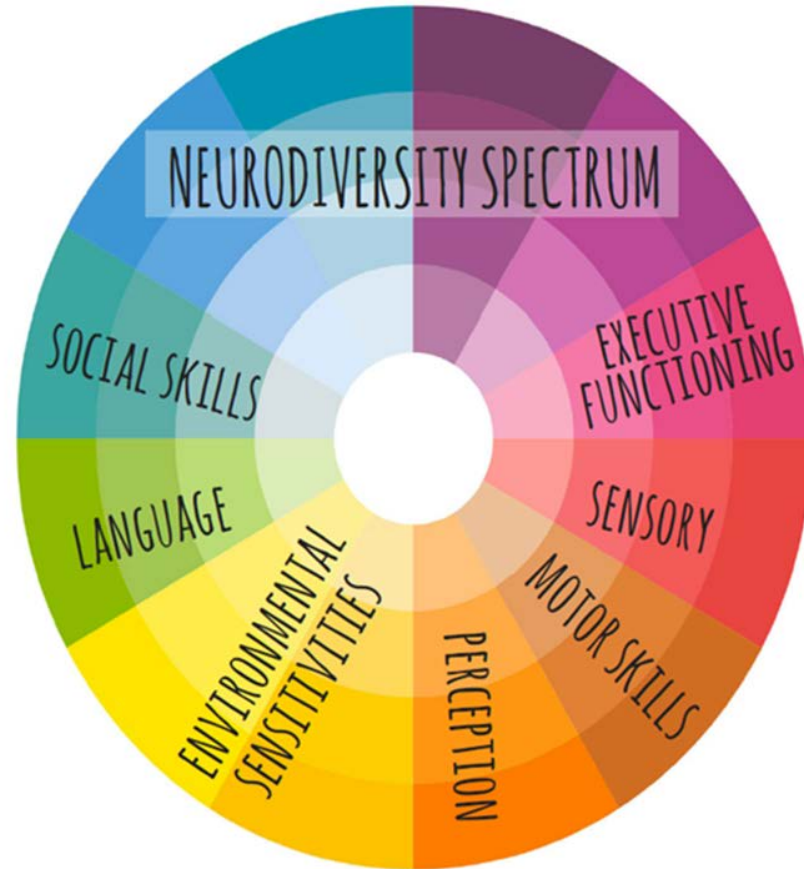
Myths about Autism

- It is not a mental health disorder
- It is not caused by vaccines
- It is not the new, hip diagnosis
- It is not caused by refrigerator mothers or poor parenting
- Not all people with Autism are savants
- Autism cannot be cured
- People with Autism are not violent
- People with Autism are not cold or unloving

What is Autism?

- Core Impacts
 - Social Communication
 - Cognitive Skills
 - Behavioral/Self-Regulation
- Other Impacts
 - Executive Functioning
 - Motor & Sensory
 - Gastrointestinal

Neurodiversity Spectrum



Thierfeld-Brown, Rigler, & Rutherford-Moody, AHEAD 2017

“Autism is a disability of trust.”

(Prizant, 2016)

The Danger of a Single Story

- Not all students with ASD are interested or have the capability to go into a STEM field.
- TED Talk by Chimamanda Adichie (October 7, 2009). Full video clip available at: <https://youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg>
- <https://youtu.be/dnXVFiE5bEI>

ASD in K~12

- According to the CDC (2018), 1 in 59 children are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - 1 in 42 males have been diagnosed as compared to 1 in 151 females
- Students can be identified by Child Find as early as age 3 and receive services, if eligible
- Student is served under IDEA
- IEP is developed to provide supports, accommodations, and modifications to ensure success
- Student is not normally involved in the development and implementation of IEP goals, supports, and outcomes

IDEA vs ADA

	IDEA (K-12)	ADA (University)
Type of Law	Education & Entitlement	Civil Rights statute & Eligibility
Coverage	FAPE	QIWD
Identification & Evaluation	School district is responsible; 1 of 13 categories	Student must self-identify; Impairment in major life activity
Ensures	Success	Equal Access
Determining Services	Evaluation, remediation, & special accommodations	Reasonable accommodations
Personal Devices & Services	Provided by school district	Student responsibility
Role of Parents	Parents must be included in all decisions	University staff cannot speak to parents w/o student authorization
Appeals Process	Right to due process	Institutional grievance procedure/OCR Complaint

ASD on Campus

- Starting in SY 2018-2019, an estimated 50,000 students on the Autism Spectrum a year will be entering colleges and universities across the nation for the next decade (CDC, 2018).
- Most students are otherwise qualified, but face social-emotional difficulties in and out of the classroom.

ASD Retention & Graduation

- 47% of students on the Spectrum, who graduate from HS, are enrolled in post-secondary institutions
- Graduation Rates within 6 years
 - ASD: 35%
 - Other Disabilities: 38%
 - Neurotypical: 51%

(Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2014)

Why the achievement gap?

- Students with ASD tend not to perform as well as their neurotypical classmates.
- Theory of Mind or Mindblindness (Baron-Cohen, Leslie, & Frith, 1985)
- Weak Central Coherence (Frith, 2003)
- Executive Functioning Theory (Geurts, de Vries, & van den Bergh, 2014)

Faculty Perspective

- Social Understanding/Behavior
 - Missed social and non-verbal cues
 - Personal boundaries
 - Group collaboration
- Critical Thinking
 - Knowing your audience
 - Abstract Thinking
 - Thinking Tasks
- Anxiety
 - Managing Anxiety
 - Manifestation
- Academic Strengths
 - Passionate interests
 - Desire to be correct
 - Rule adherence

Behavior: Perception vs. Function

Behavior	Perception	Function
Head on desk	Rude, sleeping	Sensory Overload
Repeats words to instructor	Not taking lecture seriously	Processing time
Dominates class discussion/does not change topic on cue	Has a strong grasp of the material/showoff	Does not understand the give & take of conversation
Does not recognize you	Aloof, rude	Limited facial recognition
Rocking, clicking, tapping	Disruptive, non-participatory	Self-stimulatory behavior (Stimming) to cope with over-stimulation.

How to Support Students

- Allow time for processing during class discussions
- Be clear with instructions/expectations and write down if possible
- If there is a change to the syllabus or course schedule, please inform the class early
- Provide concrete examples of abstract concepts (if possible)
- Be open to more structured group development and assignments
- Alternative criteria for assessment
- Encourage use of campus resources (DRC, CAPS, tutoring, Writing Center)

“We are freshwater fish in salt water. Put us in fresh water and we function just fine. Put us in salt water and we struggle to survive.”

-Quote by unidentified individual with ASD

New Article by Simon Baron-Cohen (April 30, 2019)

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/the-concept-of-neurodiversity-is-dividing-the-autism-community/>

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Questions? Comments?

Thank you for attending! If you have any questions, concerns, or would like department-specific training, please email me.

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