

An Introduction to Neurodiversity in Higher Ed:

Applying Your Knowledge of Neurodiversity in Teaching,
Learning, and Advising

Presented by: Sarah Silverman to BCcampus

Part 2 of a 2-Part Workshop Series

Welcome and important notes

I am excited to learn with you today!

- This session will last around 1.5 hour and will have some opportunities to participate and ask questions
- Use your time, space, and tech however you want
 - Cameras on/off, moving around your space etc.
- You are invited to use the slides and handout however you would like
- The links to the outline and slides are found at:

Slides:
Handout:

About me

- My name is Sarah and I use she/her pronouns
- My description: White woman with short brown hair and metal glasses frames (today I am wearing...)
- I teach instructional design and disability studies
- I have done faculty development and instructional design support for about 8 years
- I am Autistic - so I have a personal connection to neurodiversity
- My research interests include accessible and feminist pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning, and the history of the neurodiversity movement

How to participate today and after

- There are several ways to participate today, with no hierarchy or “better” and “worse” ways
- Some options include
 - Contributing using the chat
 - Writing, with pen and paper or an electronic device
 - Thinking without recording anything
- I have planned for accessibility, but live presentation may not be everyone’s favorite format
 - I invite feedback, use of these materials after today’s session, and am happy to talk one-on-one about this content as well

About you

I'd love to learn a little more about you.

Share your choice of

- Name
- Institution
- Role
- What interested you about this session?

Please use the chat to share

Goals

- Review key points about neurodiversity history and theory
- Consider the interactions of disability, diagnosis, disclosure, and neurodiversity
- Connect the policies for accommodations with the neurodiversity and pathology paradigms
- Navigate complex case studies related to neurodiversity in classroom and collaboration settings
- Reflect on your own relationship to neurodiversity
- Brainstorm goals for further neurodiversity-informed practice

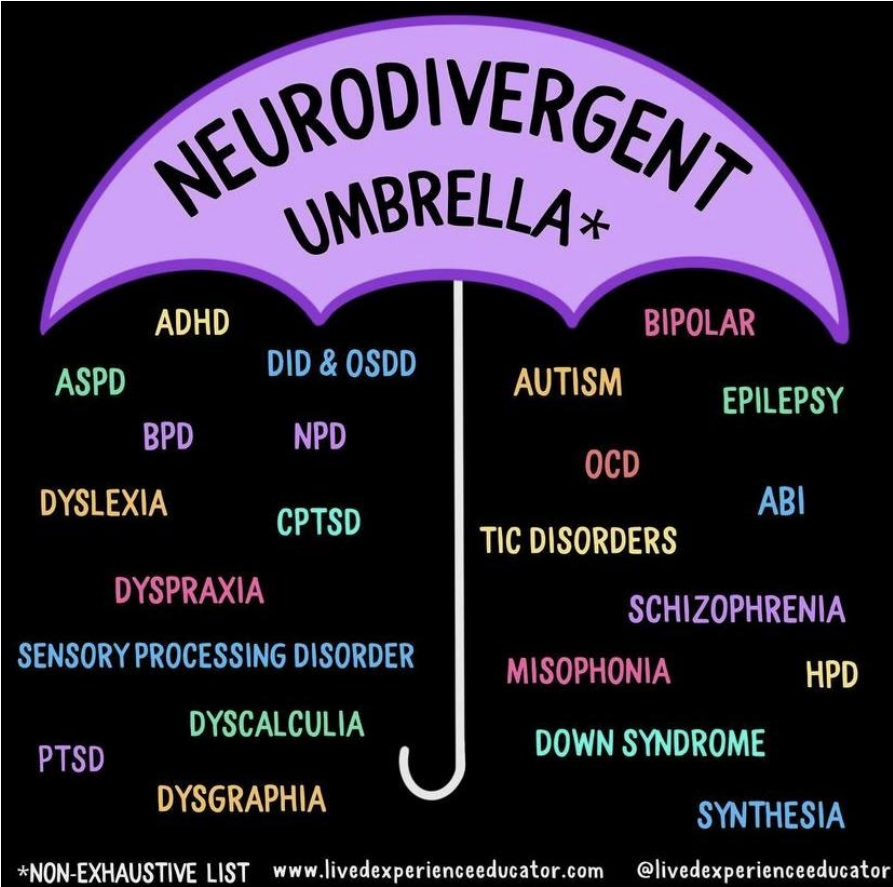
Introductory Reflection Pause

According to your incoming knowledge, how does the category of “disability” relate to “neurodiversity”?

Please use the chat to share

Many forms of neurodivergence are disabilities

Credit: Sonny Jane Wise



Not every forms of neurodivergence is a disability

“There are innate forms of neurodivergence that don’t involve any sort of disablement. Many forms of synesthesia, for example. While it’s possible to have levels of synesthesia so intense as to result in atypical access needs which require accommodation, the majority of people who experience synesthesia aren’t impaired by it in any significant way, and thus require no special accommodation for it, and thus aren’t disabled by the absence of such accommodation.”

-Nick Walker, *Neuroqueer Heresies*

Rights of students with disabilities

Rights (depending on locale) typically include

- Protection from discrimination
- Accommodations that ensure equal access
- Some type of support services

What is your own understanding of the rights of students with disabilities in your own context?

Limitations of accommodations

- Requirement of disclosure
 - Privacy/stigma
- Requirement of documentation
 - Cost
 - Medical model
- Need to have knowledge/awareness of the disability
- Disability as an individual problem
- Locating disability inclusion in the category of compliance rather than relationship

Review of neurodiversity and pathology paradigm

Recall Dr. Nick Walker's definition of the neurodiversity paradigm from our introductory talk:

1. Neurodiversity – the diversity among minds – is a natural, healthy, and valuable form of human diversity.
2. There is no “normal” or “right” style of human mind, any more than there is one “normal” or “right” ethnicity, gender, or culture.
3. The social dynamics of neurodiversity include the dynamics of social power relations – the dynamics of social inequality, privilege, and oppression – as well as the dynamics by which diversity, when embraced, acts as a source of creative potential within a group or society.

US Example

“Our college strives to provide an inclusive environment across campus that is accessible to all individuals with a diverse range of abilities. As your instructor, it is my objective to facilitate opportunities within all class activities and programs because your success is important to me. If you are encountering difficulties that are interrupting your learning experience please feel free to make those known to me as soon as possible, as early planning is essential. If you feel that you need accommodations in this course, you must present a memo to me from the Disability Resource Center, indicating the existence of a disability and the approved accommodations. Accommodations are not retroactive. If you have not already done so, please contact the Disability Support Resources office. Please note that I cannot provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received a copy of the DRC issued memo.”

British Columbia example

Medical documentation must meet all of the following requirements:

- It should be up to date and recent, preferably created within the last 3 years.
- It is legible and preferably typed and submitted on letterhead
- Includes the practitioner's name, license number, title, phone or fax, mailing and email addresses, and signature
- Indicates the length of time you have been under the practitioner's care
- Describes the nature of medical condition or disability, along with detailed explanation of the functional impact of the disability. A diagnosis alone is not sufficient to support a request for an accommodation.
- Provides sufficient detail so the Centre can determine appropriate accommodations
- Describes the symptoms that formed the basis for the practitioner's diagnosis
- Includes relevant test results and supporting documentation if the practitioner is verifying an existing diagnosis
- Describes the timelines for rehabilitation and recovery if the diagnosis is of a temporary nature
- Identifies side effects of medications that may adversely affect academics

[UBC Documentation requirements for accommodations](#)

Scenarios, not strategies

- Advice for neurodiversity-affirming teaching practices often appears as a checklist or strategy list
- Some of this advice is useful, if a bit general e.g.
 - Provide flexibility in assignments and assessments, including due dates
 - Present the same information in multiple ways
 - Clarify expectations
 - Acknowledge and embrace different forms of “participation”
 - Provide structure, supportive environment, and options for participation for highly social or collaborative
- Neurodiversity is not one condition, identity, or set of needs: it is a collection of these, which can be different or even create friction

Neurodiversity paradigm, not “managing neurodiversity”

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Access friction: Something we have all experienced, but maybe not had a word for

A phenomenon in which people have different, and potentially conflicting access needs

More generally, an acknowledgement that working towards access often involves *at least some* friction

*I originally learned the term access friction from BC educator [Arley McNeney](#)

Case study options

1. A group project in a mid-sized economics class
2. Student-instructor conflicts over universal design elements in a small seminar
3. Team members negotiate needs to review materials in advance of a meeting
4. Are stim/fidget toys “unprofessional”?

Cases and instructions on handout

Wrap-up of case study activity

Neurodiversity is part of every classroom, even if you don't have someone who has disclosed an identity or diagnosis

- Teaching in the “neurodiversity paradigm” will require the balancing of various student needs and preferences
- Teaching that is inclusive of neurodivergent students doesn't need to compel neurotypical students to use methods that don't work for them

An inclusive classroom community will need to acknowledge difference, facilitate interpersonal understanding, and embrace options

Recall our conversation about educational norms

What makes you a unique learner?

How have you experienced the norming influences of our educational system?

Your answer could reference your experiences as a student, teacher, staff/administrator, or any other role.

Questions and staying in touch

If you are interested in hearing more about these topics, you can subscribe to my newsletter: <https://beyondthescope.substack.com/>

Email: sarahsilverman24@gmail.com

Linkedin ([link to my profile](#))

Website: www.sarahemilysilverman.com



Classroom participation guidelines

Classroom participation guidelines

| Concept | Ideas |
|---|--|
| No one “right way” (neurodiversity paradigm) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple ways to participate, without a preference for specific ones (may depend on learning goals)• Consider before, during, and after class opportunities• Consider how to avoid pathologizing differences |
| Need for mutual understanding | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Curiosity rather than criticism when a student’s participation is different than expected/norm• Avoid locating difficulties in classroom dynamics in one student’s style e.g. “they don’t know when to stop talking”<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Consider structures that align with learning goals to guide participation, such as discussion protocols |
| Access friction | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome discussion of access friction related to participation and learning presence• Support accessibility of student contributions e.g. if a student offers a video, support them in adding captioning |

Framing and or scaffolding for group assignments

Framing and or scaffolding for group assignments

| Concept | Ideas |
|--|--|
| No one “right way” (neurodiversity paradigm) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Recognize different ways of participating in a group assignment, and explicitly address lack of hierarchy in roles● Consider whether any given assignment must be conducted in a group to meet learning goals<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Explain your reasoning to students and consider offering an option of group or individual work |
| Need for mutual understanding | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Remind students that learning about colleagues’ communication and thinking styles is part of the learning process● Support students in reframing interpersonal conflicts or differing working styles as opportunities |
| Access friction | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Remind students that they may need to share and receive information about their and their colleagues’ access needs● Incentivize the surfacing and negotiation of access friction - it is an expected feature of group work |