Let's Value Neurodiversity in Education:

How to Support Students, Staff, and Faculty

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Neurodiversity Definitions

- **Neurodivergent:** having a brain that works differently from how society defines "normal" brains
  - Examples: Autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, learning disability, and mental health conditions
- **Neurotypical:** having a brain that works the way society defines as "normal"
- **Neurominorities:** neurodivergent people
- **Neurodiversity:** an advocacy-focused term that refers to "The range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population" (Oxford Dictionary).

Hughes, J. M. (2016). Increasing neurodiversity in disability and social justice advocacy groups. *Washington, DC: Autistic Self Advocacy Network*.

Outline

- Why? Neurodivergent Adults
- Examples of Support
  - By Faculty
  - By Staff
  - At a Programmatic Level
- Recommendations

Neurodivergent Adults

- Those with a diagnosis in childhood
- Those not diagnosed until adulthood
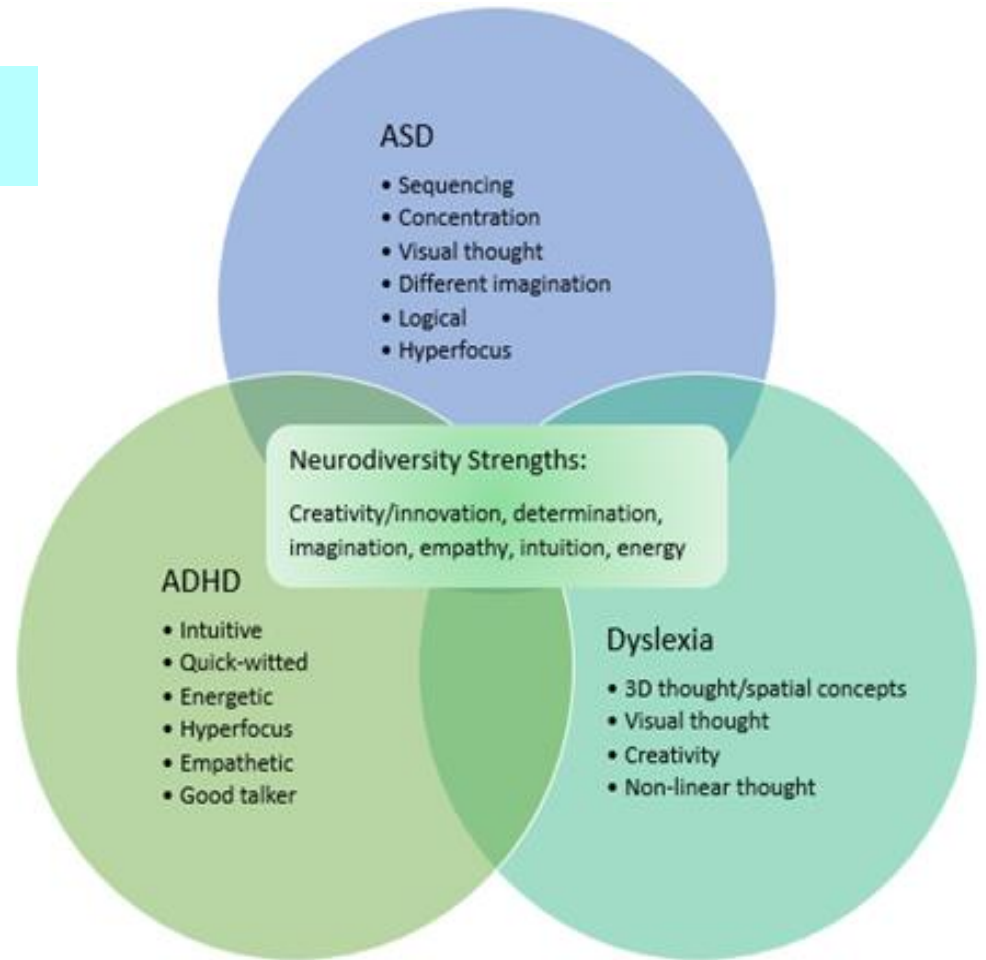- Those who do not know they are Neurodivergent

Example: 50-60% of Autistic adults are undiagnosed (Lewis, 2017)

Me looking back at all the obvious signs I'm autistic that I didn't realize until I found out I'm autistic

AMERICASBESTPICS.COM

Lewis, L. F. (2017). A mixed methods study of barriers to formal diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder in adults. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47, 2410–2424. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3168-3

Neurodivergent Strengths

ASD
- Sequencing
- Concentration
- Visual thought
- Different imagination
- Logical
- Hyperfocus

Neurodiversity Strengths:

Creativity/innovation, determination, imagination, empathy, intuition, energy

ADHD
- Intuitive
- Quick-witted
- Energetic
- Hyperfocus
- Empathetic
- Good talker

Dyslexia
- 3D thought/spatial concepts
- Visual thought
- Creativity
- Non-linear thought

Common Barriers for Neurodivergent Adults

1. **Transition** (navigating a new culture/environment)
2. **Accessing & Receiving Accommodations** (ableist attitudes)
3. **Stigma & lack of understanding** (microaggressions; sensory issues; no sense of community)
4. **Hidden costs of disability** (emotional labor)

ASAN, Benchmarks to Inclusion: Creating Core Principles to Facilitate Autistic Student Success in Higher Education
https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/briefs/benchmarks-to-inclusion/

Neurodivergent Students in Higher Education

- 78% of 4-year public institutions and 70% of 2-year public institutions serve autistic students (Widman & Reyna, 2020).
- Only 38.8% of autistic students complete a postsecondary program as compared to 60% of neurotypical students (Kuder & Accardo, 2018).
- 72% of autistic students graduate with a high school diploma but only 47% of autistic students enroll in higher education within 6 years of graduating high school.

Institutional challenges of supporting neurodiverse students:

- Accommodations do not meet the nonacademic needs of neurodiverse students
- Lack of funding/resources for additional supports
- Faculty and staff are often times underprepared to meet their needs
- Many students do not self-disclose or seek accommodations

Kuder, S. J., & Accardo, A. (2018). What works for college students with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *48*, 722-731.

Widman, C. J., & Lopez-Reyna, N. A. (2020). Supports for postsecondary students with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, *50*(9), 3166-3178.
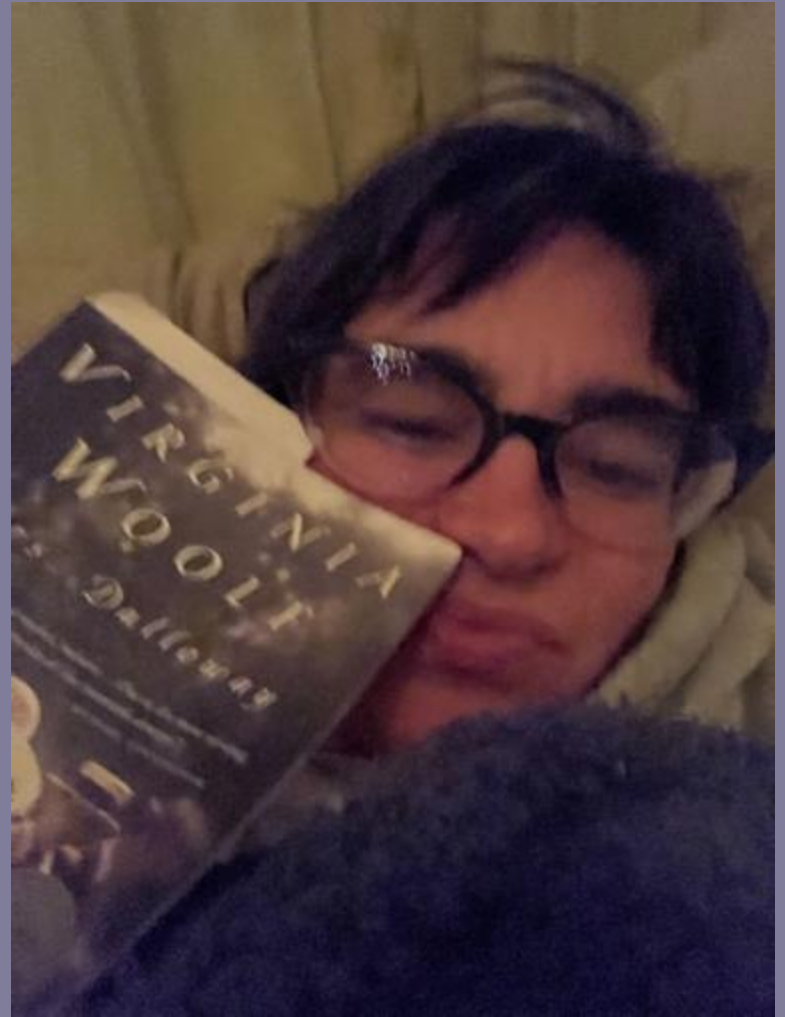
Support by Faculty

Shyam

Dr. Shamala "Shyam" Gallagher
(they/them)
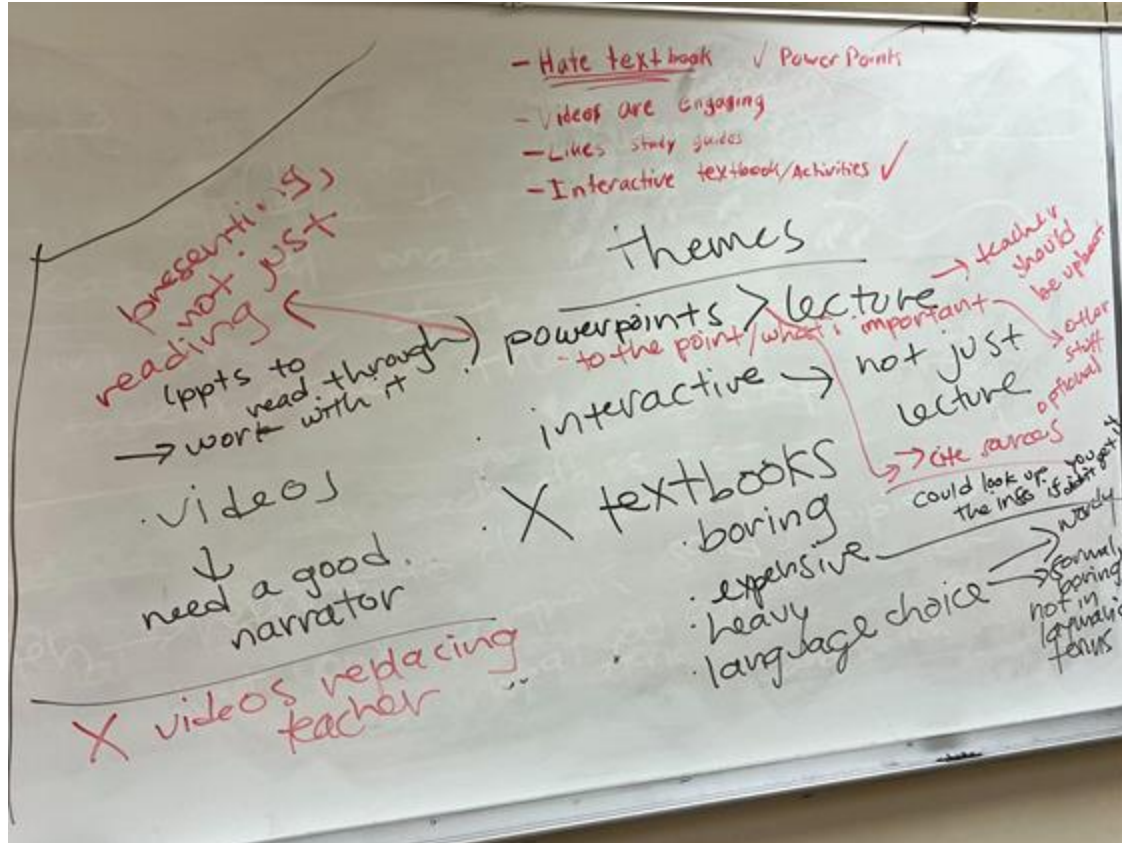
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ADHD, Bipolar

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Teaching with My ADHD = Asking How My Students like to Learn

What works and doesn't work for YOU as a learner?

Turn to the people at your table and discuss!
- If you want to discuss. Otherwise, freewrite or meditate upon the question.

- Who wants to share?

How ADHD (For Example) Can Interact with Ways of Learning

- Stereotypical faculty picture: "Bad student"
  - "Not paying attention," "not doing work," "lazy," "distracting," "disruptive" (Kern et al., 2015)
  - Can overlook the ADHD "good student" (often female/AFAB and/or ADHD-PI type)
- Actually, ADHD is…
  - Neurodevelopmental and REAL
  - Often connected to perfectionism (paralysis) and anxiety
  - Often connected to creativity, quick thinking, empathy, vulnerability, and social skills

THE EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION ICEBERG

There's more than meets the eye to executive function challenges

WHAT OTHERS SEE:

lazy
scattered
moody
sloppy
forgetful
rude
impulsive

Kern, J. K., Geier, D. A., King, P. G., Sykes, L. K., Mehta, J. A., & Geier, M. R. (2015). Shared brain connectivity issues, symptoms, and comorbidities in autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and Tourette syndrome. *Brain connectivity*, *5*(6), 321-335.

Creating Thriving Classrooms for Neurodivergent Students

- ADHD can cause struggle with "classical teaching or evaluation methods":
- **Lecture, paper, and exam** (Jansen et al., 2017)
- ADHD can thrive with "alternative evaluation" and "activating teaching models":
- **Oral exam, practical exam, portfolio | excursion, internship, self-peer/process evaluation** (Jansen et al., 2017)
- **Challenge:** Due to neurodiversity, some students benefit from **freedom** and some students benefit from **constraint** (Polish, 2017)

Jansen, D., Petry, K., Ceulemans, E., Van der Oord, S., Noens, I., & Baeyens, D. (2017). Functioning and participation problems of students with ADHD in higher education: which reasonable accommodations are effective?. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *32*(1), 35-53.

Inviting Neurodivergent Strengths - Open Pedagogy

Open Education Network

Certificate in Open Educational Practices 2022

- Teaching collaboratively, co-creating knowledge with students
  - Centering representational justice
  - Inviting diversified projects and activities (each student does a different thing!)
- Accompanied by process-based and contract grading models (Asao Inoue).
- Examples: co-creating syllabi, with the students, wiki edit-a-thons, student-led discussions, role-playing simulations, student-centered peer review, collectively creating textbooks and educational materials

Humanities Textbook Creation Project: Choosing Roles

Strategies to Expand Justice and Access

- Syllabus normalizing neurodivergence and offering resources
- Collaborative annotation on syllabi and assignments (Perusall)
- Choosing by consensus (both discussion and written options)
- Choice to work in groups or individually, receiving a group grade or an individual grade (their choice)
- Choosing roles based on strengths
- Co-creating and then solidifying rubrics for each stage
- Work session – students are invited to bring headphones, snacks, fidget toys, and whatever makes them comfortable in the classroom (Lori's knitting example)

Support
by Student
Support Staff

Sam (she/her)

Dr. Sam Crandall

Manager, Learning Commons
Phoenix College

Autistic

Autism Myths/Misconceptions
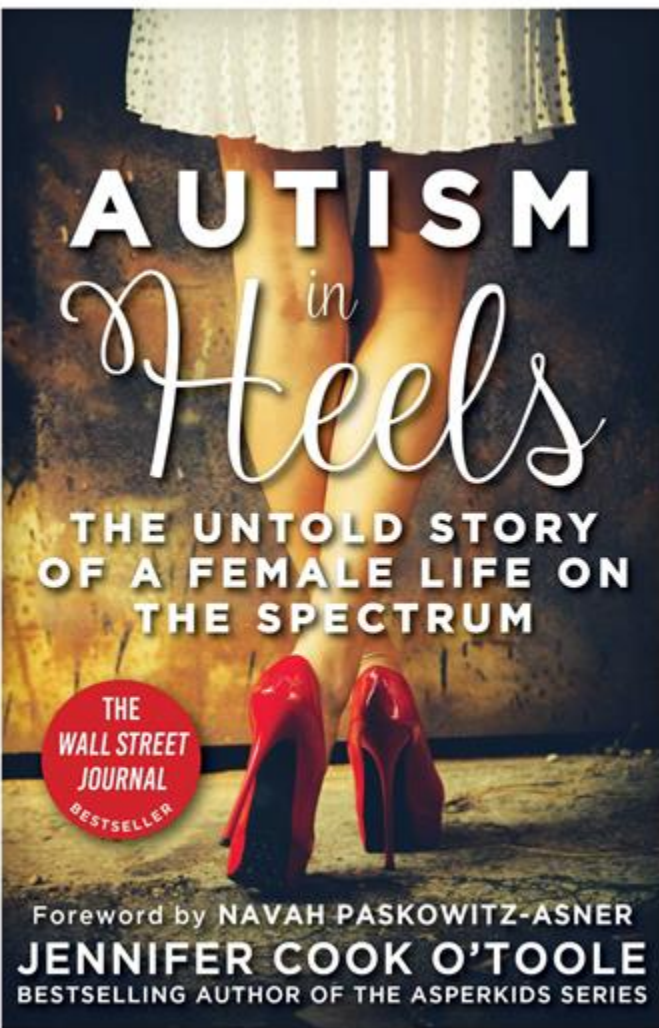
The "Chick-List Checklist" (abbreviated)

- Early indicators
  - Less detectable ways to limit/avoid eye contact
  - Act *in* rather than act *out*
  - Lining up collections
- Special interests
  - Level of intensity of special interest (not interest itself)
  - Social buffer (i.e. fandom, historical fiction, literature, theater, etc.)
- Friendships
  - Hyperfocus on one "best friend"
  - Difficulty navigating female friendships
  - Friendships often end abruptly
- Additional
  - Three times more likely to be synesthetes
  - Gender identity variations
  - Eating disorders
  - Likely to be victims of abuse
    - Difficult to understand vindictive/cruel behavior
    - Feel overwhelming compassion/sympathy for abusers

Where does this commonly show up for students?

Task Initiation	Emotional Control	Flexible Thinking	Working Memory	Self-Monitoring
Have trouble starting and/or completing tasks	Have elevated emotions and fixate on things	Panic when rules or routines change	Forget what they just heard or read	Have trouble following directions or a sequence of steps

Planning & Prioritization	Time-Keeping	Impulse Control	Attention & Focus	Organization
Have difficulty prioritizing tasks	Have trouble managing their time	Have trouble keeping track of their belongings	Have trouble switching focus from one task to another	Have trouble organizing their thoughts

Brain Power Academy (n.d.). Executive Functioning: What it really means and how to apply it to your classroom tomorrow! https://academy.brain-power.com/course/executive-functioning

Professional Development for Staff

Autism Spectrum (Myths & Misconceptions)

Underdiagnosis (Females, POC)

Learning I'm Autistic

Common Barriers for Adult Autistics

Executive Dysfunction/Autistic Burnout

Autism Q&A

INTERVIEW WITH LAURA KAMIENNY
BY DR. SAM CRANDALL

Transitioning to New Environments

Microaggressions

Ableism

Common Communication Barriers

Inclusive Spaces

Best Practices for Community Colleges

- Educate the campus community

- Promote equity through individual interactions with students and advocate for a campus that values diversity

- Know that each student with ASD is unique

- Cultivate strong working relationships with faculty, other campus colleagues, and community partners

- Build relationships with students

- Provide students with concrete and explicit directions

- Provide students with sensory accommodations

Brown, K. R., & Coomes, M. D. (2016). A spectrum of support: Current and best practices for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) at community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *40*(6), 465-479.

Discussion

- Why are inclusive spaces important for our students and employees?
- What are some common barriers for Autistic adults transitioning to new environments?
- What are some examples of microaggressions and/or ableist language that can be problematic for Autistic adults?
- What are some common communication challenges for Autistic adults?
- Provide three examples on how to create inclusive spaces at the Learning Commons

Support at the Programmatic Level

Lori

Lori Wischnewsky

Doctoral Student
Texas State University

ADHD

Common Needs vs. Common Accommodations

Common areas of need for ND population
1. Time and task management
2. Sensory overload
3. Setting and implementing goals
4. Asking for help when needed
5. Staying focused
6. Managing comorbid Dx like anxiety
7. Communicating diagnosis and accommodations to faculty & staff
1. Interpreting verbal and nonverbal communication

ADA & 504 provided accommodations
A. Extra time on tests
B. Reduced distraction testing environment
C. Preferential seating
D. Recorded lectures
E. Early access to notes & PowerPoints
F. Reduced course load
G. Note-taker
H. Housing accommodations like single room
A. Early registration

Support Programs in Tennessee

University of Tennessee Knoxville	Postsecondary Autism Support Services (PASS)	2-hour weekly course for credit - academic and life skills; 1 hour weekly 1:1 support, peer mentoring, collaborate with faculty/staff/parents as needed; also offer online modules for student who do not join PASS ($3200/semester)
University of Tennessee - Chattanooga	Mosaic	4 year-long courses - yr. 1 -focus on transition to college, independence, social and study strategies yr. 2- developing identity, strengths and self-perceptions, yr. 3 - career skills and work opportunities yr. 4 - developing workplace skills, yr. 5 - work-life balance. weekly coaching, peer/professional mentoring, & supervised study hours ($3500/semester)
Austin Peay State University	Full Spectrum Learning (FSL)	1 weekly FSL course, 1 weekly accountability meeting, 3-5 tutoring session week, 3 weekly monitored study hours, 1 weekly peer mentor meeting, 2 monthly faculty mentor meetings ($3500/semester)
Christian Brothers University	Students Tackling Autism-Related Syndromes (STARS)	teaching employment and academic mastery (TEAM)- mentoring, tutoring, coaching, education planning, internship and career development, 1:1 meetings, weekly basis, ef skills, self-advocacy; Social interaction with peers with and without disabilities, lifestyle maintenance, physical and mental well-being; connects: hiring programs

Outcomes

While there are over 100 programs, there is little information on participant outcomes. The following schools do share outcomes.

- **Westminster College – Fulton**: College Transition Program had 26 graduates between 2011-2021, all graduates obtained full-time employment or advanced degrees, 73% retention & graduation rate

- **St. Joseph's University**: ASPIRE Program had 86% of participants employed or enrolled in a graduate program within 6 months of graduating

- **Adelphi University**: Bridges to Adelphi had a 96% retention rate for the 2019-2020 academic year, all participants had a GPA of 3.25 or higher

- **University of Idaho**: Ravens Scholars Program report retention and graduation rates of 81.25%

Increased Recognition of Needed Support

- IHE are recognizing the need for support programs to assist neurodiverse students in overcoming the systemic barriers to success.

- These programs are currently hosted at over 100 2-year and 4-year institutions, and the number of programs is increasing every year, but it's still less than 5% of schools in the US.

- Each program is unique as to what services they offer and who they include as participants.

- Most programs have elements of self-advocacy training, social support, academic coaching, executive function skill building, and career coaching.

- The cost of the programs vary widely from free to over $9K a semester.

At Your Campus

How Can You Help?

Allyship

- Educate yourself
- Listen to neurodivergent voices
- No assumptions
- Provide compassionate curiosity

Advocacy

- Educate the campus
- Promote/uplift neurodivergent voices
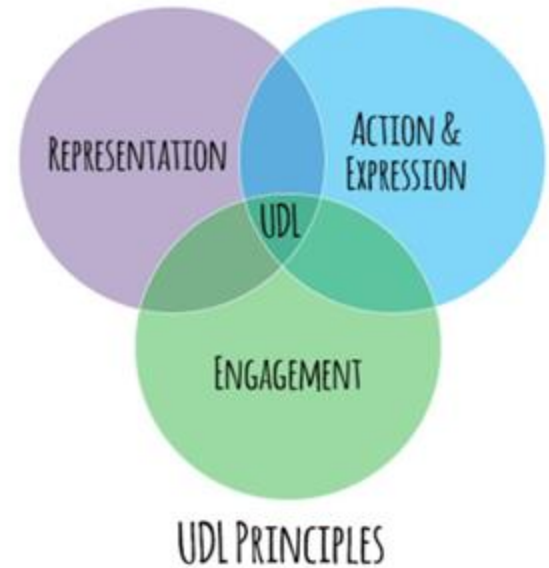- Provide best practices
- Create inclusive spaces

Alternatives to "Training"

- Facilitated Conversation
- Moderated Conversation
- Dialogue
- Discussion
- Information Session
- Listening Session
- Workshop

Recommended Resources

- College Autism Network
  https://collegeautismnetwork.org
- Universal Design for Learning
  https://udlguidelines.cast.org
- Open Education Network
  https://open.umn.edu/oen
- Autism Self-Advocacy Network
  https://autisticadvocacy.org

UDL PRINCIPLES

Questions?...

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