



Undergraduate Honors Theses

2024-06-04

Nothing About Us Without Us: A Folkloristic Approach to Creating Neurodivergent-Friendly Pedagogies for Secondary Classrooms

Brittney Hatchett

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studentpub_uht

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Hatchett, Brittney, "Nothing About Us Without Us: A Folkloristic Approach to Creating Neurodivergent-Friendly Pedagogies for Secondary Classrooms" (2024). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. 390.
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studentpub_uht/390

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Honors Thesis

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US: A FOLKLORISTIC APPROACH TO
CREATING NEURODIVERGENT-FRIENDLY PEDAGOGIES FOR
SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

by
Brittney A. Hatchett

Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of graduation
requirements for University Honors

English Department
Brigham Young University
June 2024

Advisor: Michael J. Richardson

Honors Coordinator: Bryant Jensen

ABSTRACT

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US: A FOLKLORISTIC APPROACH TO CREATING NEURODIVERGENT-FRIENDLY PEDAGOGIES FOR SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

Brittney A. Hatchett

English Department

Bachelor of Arts

This paper examines how utilizing an applied folkloristic approach of studying the communities of ADHD and autistic people allows us to conduct research that actively involves the voices of ADHD and autistic adults. I have collected personal experience narratives from ADHD and autistic college-aged students about their experiences with different teaching strategies in junior high and high school. Through analysis of these narratives, I examine how the narratives of ADHD and autistic individuals can help guide educational pedagogies towards models that more equitably consider cultures of disabled individuals and better meet the educational needs of future neurodivergent students while simultaneously showing the unique voices of an understudied “folk” in the fields of folkloristics and education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
I. Introduction.....	1
II. Literature Review.....	4
III. Methodology.....	10
IV. Results.....	16
1. Listening/Care.....	16
2. Narratives of Difference vs. Narratives of Deficit.....	18
3. Feeling like a Burden.....	23
V. Discussion - Application to Classrooms.....	27
1. Building strong relationships of trust with neurodivergent students.....	27
2. Cultivate positive narratives about neurodiversity in the classroom.....	33
3. Prioritize “neurodivergent-friendly” over “neurodivergent-accessible”	38
VI. Conclusion.....	44
References.....	45
Appendix A: Interview Questions.....	53
Appendix B: Contributor Pseudonyms and Demographics.....	54
Appendix C: Books with Quality Neurodivergent Representation.....	56
Appendix D: Well-Known Successful Neurodivergent People.....	59

I. Introduction

Discovering you are a part of a community and culture you didn't even know you had is both liberating and daunting. On the one hand, you are no longer alone, there are others who understand you, and suddenly you have support where prior you did not. On the other hand, the weight of history you are learning for the first time, the vastness of stories that you are suddenly able to hear, and the enormity of the pain that you and others have been carrying silently for generations can seem like a mountain you may never be able to climb. At least, this was how I felt as I was diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in the spring of 2021.

Growing up, I was called several things by peers, teachers, and other adults in my life. When I cried over the slightest provocation in elementary school, I was called "sensitive." When I devoured hundreds of pages of books in middle school in one sitting without stopping to eat or even pee, I was called "gifted." When I knew too much about incredibly specific topics that nobody else cared about because I got lost for hours reading Wikipedia articles or library books, I was called "quirky" on a good day and "annoying know-it-all" on a bad one. I was "smart" because I did well in school and "creative" because I picked up countless hobbies. But at the same time, I was "careless" because I lost things

all the time and “lazy” because I struggled to begin tasks, even when I knew how important they were. Over and over, I was told how much potential I had and what I could do if I just applied myself, despite the fact that I was running myself into the ground with the amount of effort I was applying. So getting diagnosed with ADHD in college was a major source of relief for me, as I finally understood that I wasn’t lazy, weird, or careless; I just had different wiring in my brain.

At the same time, however, this relief also came with outrage that no one had noticed what was going on earlier. In retrospect, it seems like it should have been so obvious, but because I did well in school and my grades were good enough to not warrant concern from my parents and teachers, I slipped by unnoticed. It didn’t matter that I was struggling the whole time so long as my performance was within the realm of acceptability. This outrage at going through my life so invisible led me to search for answers and understanding, and I found both in the same place—the neurodivergent community. Neurodiversity as a term was coined in 1998 by Judy Singer, a sociologist and member of the autistic community herself (Walker & Raymaker, 2021). It refers to the idea that there exists in the human brain variation and diversity much in the same way that diversity exists in skin color, gender, sexuality, and body type. And in that same way, neurological diversities such as ADHD, autism, and dyslexia are simply

that: diversity. Not a disease that needs to be cured. And just like any community surrounding any aspect of human diversity, the neurodivergent community is full of rich history and culture, stories and artifacts, and people who reach out to each other and offer advice and tools to each other to make their lives better. A whole community that I had no idea existed until I became a part of it. And after comparing the many stories shared in online community spaces to my own experiences in the public education system, I became concerned that too many teachers and psychologists are unaware of the broader neurodivergent community and its culture as well. As a neurodivergent educator, this bothered me deeply.

II. Literature Review

In response to this pain and dissatisfaction with the education system that I and others in my community were experiencing, I began to comb through past and current literature in the fields of education and psychology, looking to see what the academic community's response was to this issue. As researchers such as Elizabeth Pellicano and Jacqueline den Houting (2021), Francesca Happé and Uta Frith (2020), Noam Ringer (2020), and Iban Onandia-Hinchado, Natividad Pardo-Palenzuela, and Unai Diaz-Orueta (2021) have noted, the perceptions we have towards neurodiversity have shifted greatly over the last 50 years from a medical model focusing on perceived deficits to a more social model that frames neurodiversity as simply that—diversity in the makeup of people's neurochemistry, no more or less “normal” than diversity in gender, race, or sexual orientation.

However, even in modern scholarship, the model of deficit is still widely present among those who study ADHD, autism, and other forms of neurodiversity. As Pellicano and Houting note in their 2022 research review, autism is still characterized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as “a series of ‘persistent deficits’ demonstrated by autistic children, young people and

adults, involving deficits in social communication and interaction, and restricted, repetitive and inflexible patterns of behaviour, interests or activities” (382).

Likewise, the DSM-5 has the following to say about ADHD:

“ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder defined by impairing levels of inattention, disorganization, and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity. Inattention and disorganization entail inability to stay on task, seeming not to listen, and losing materials necessary for tasks, at levels that are inconsistent with age or developmental level. Hyperactivity-impulsivity entails overactivity, fidgeting, inability to stay seated, intruding into other people’s activities, and inability to wait—symptoms that are excessive for age or developmental level” (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

This language of deficit uses words with distinctly negative connotations:

“inability,” “restricted,” and “impairing,” among others. This contributes to the cultural stigma surrounding neurodiversity. Impoliteness, immaturity, weakness of character, emotional dysfunctionality, and unreliability are all demonstrated by Masuch et al. (2019) to be associated with symptoms of ADHD. Furthermore, despite there being clear consensus on person-first language (i.e. “person with autism”) being least preferred and even offensive among autistic people, (see: Bury et al. 2020; Kapp et al. 2013; Kenny et al. 2016) it is still widely used and

encouraged in modern academic literature discussing autism. This is largely because autism is still seen among many scholars as an undesirable medical condition that a person is afflicted with and should therefore be considered separate from the individual in the same way cancer, multiple sclerosis, or a fever would be.

Because, as Pellicano and Houting (2021) assert, the majority of scholars discuss and understand neurodiversity as a “disorder of brain development” and “an undesirable deviation from the norm,” the general populace follows suit (381). I see this even among the casual conversations of my 7th grade students, who continue to use “retarded” and “autistic” as pejorative insults towards their peers despite repeated explanations as to why they should not. This language persists because the cultural image of neurodiversity being an undesirable thing is so strong, and common vernacular reflects these attitudes. Because of this bias, anything neurodivergent people do is seen within the context of something being wrong with them, even when they perform well. Dawson and Mottron (2011) address this in the context of autistic performance, but this is also true for other neurodivergent individuals as well:

“Autistics, like non-autistics, have genuine difficulties in many areas, and like non-autistics, require assistance in areas where their performance is

weak . . . But autistics uniquely are seen as pathological when displaying significant or dramatic strengths, creating for autistics a nearly insurmountable disadvantage or disability not faced by non-autistics” (34).

This perspective is reinforced by the fact that much of the existing academic literature has been written by the outsider perspective of neurotypical researchers, and while neurodivergent researchers and academics certainly publish peer-reviewed work on neurodiversity¹, the insider perspective of neurodivergent individuals is too often contained to memoirs and other non-scholarly publications (see, e.g. Prahlad, 2017; McCreary 2019). In mainstream scholarship, the deficits attributed to autism and ADHD often imply that such an insider perspective may be invalid, since it has been suggested that autistic individuals lack a “theory of mind” (Baron-Cohen, Leslie, & Frith, 1985) and therefore may be unable to reflect on their own experiences (Lombardo, Chakrabarti, Bullmore, & Baron-Cohen, 2011).

This is especially the case in research designed to improve educators’ ability to teach neurodivergent students. Indeed, researchers tend to prioritize the voices of parents, teachers, administrators, or laboratory reports over the

¹ For a non-exhaustive list of autistic researchers researching autism, see: <https://www.autisticprofessor.com/autisticresearchers>

personal experiences of neurodivergent students themselves (Jaswal & Akhtar, 2018; Mazefsky, Kao, & Oswald, 2011; McGeer, 2004; Milton, 2012). Furthermore, the focus of much of this research is based on helping neurodivergent students to perform and behave more like their neurotypical peers, since success is based on performance relative to the norm of the majority. There is a wealth of literature concerning the academic performance of neurodivergent students (Booster, et al. 2016; Johnson, 2011; Merriman & Coddington, 2008; Peña et al., 2020; Root, Henning, & Boccumini, 2018), evidenced-based practices for early intervention to help them learn subject content or develop academic coping mechanisms (Jackson & Hanline, 2020; Hume et al., 2021; Ledford et al., 2021), and behavioral management strategies to help them better adhere to neurotypical expectations (Gaastra et al., 2020; Gray & Garand, 2016; Kasari et al., 2014; Kirby, Bagatell, & Baranek, 2020; van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012), but there is still not enough research that actively includes the personal experiences of the neurodivergent community as a primary source from which to draw conclusions about how educational pedagogy should develop.

It is therefore clear that while ADHD and autistic voices have driven a shift from a paradigm of deficit to one that asserts that neurodivergence is not inherently a disability, but rather a cognitive difference that presents as a

disability “in the context of the demands of the neurotypical world,” there is still a significant lack of inclusion of the experiences and expertise of neurodivergent individuals in research done regarding them (Happé and Frith, 228). Pellicano and Houting (2022) admit that the existing medical paradigm of neurodiversity is an “excessively narrow, deficits-based view” that “exclude[s] the very people it is meant to serve from agenda-setting in research,” and its effects are still visible in current research despite the efforts of neurodivergent advocates and scholars (389). They suggest that “we need to develop far more robust mechanisms of participatory codesign and coproduction in autism research, to ensure that autism science is designed in partnership with autistic people themselves,” and I argue that the key to doing so lies in methodology that uses reciprocal ethnography as is commonly conducted in the field of folklore and anthropology (389).

III. Methodology

A reciprocal ethnographic approach of analyzing the personal narratives of neurodivergent people as members of a community or folk group who contribute to the knowledge generating process rather than as individuals with a diagnosis to be studied has the potential to give us valuable insight into their unique needs because it acknowledges that both researcher and participant are “necessarily and unavoidably active. Each is involved in meaning-making work. Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled” (Davies, 2002; 98). These insights can then be applied to education similarly to how multicultural education studies have allowed us to examine and improve how we educate students of color. The present thesis therefore focuses on applying reciprocal ethnography as used in the field of folklore to the field of education in order to create more equitable classroom environments that better meet the learning needs of the communities of people that we call neurominorities—a term coined by autistic psychologist Nick Walker referring to those of us who are minoritized because of differences in the ways our brains work (Walker & Raymaker, 2021). This research is also quite personal to me as a

member of the ADHD community, as it gives me the unique opportunity to study my own folk group from an emic, or insider, perspective.

Inspired by Elaine Lawless' studies of women in religious ministry through reciprocal ethnography in her book, *Reciprocal Ethnography and the Power of Women's Narratives*, I designed an education-oriented ethnographic research project to gather the personal experience narratives of neurodivergent people and consider them as members of a folk group rather than as individuals with a diagnosis. Through this methodology, I hoped to gain insight into the unique needs of neurodivergent students, as ethnographic analysis can reveal not only what does or does not work in a classroom but also the hopes, dreams, frustrations, fears, and lived experiences of neurodivergent people. All of which are critical information for making informed decisions about creating an inclusive learning environment for the neurodivergent students—both diagnosed and undiagnosed—that exist in every classroom.

To collect the necessary personal experience narratives, I conducted ethnographic interviews with neurodivergent college-aged adults (either self-diagnosed or professionally diagnosed) designed to collect stories about their experiences with education in junior high and high school and how the teaching methods and pedagogies of their teachers helped or hindered their

learning. Because this project is based on the methodologies of applied folkloristics, I conducted the interviews based on the industry guidelines of fieldwork in folklore. This approach focuses on fostering the “emergent conversational form of communication” inherent to the interactions of people in their communities and treating the interview as a space for “creating the kind of environment where folklore would naturally flourish and go from there” (McNeill 2013, 25). As such, while I had ten open-ended interview questions prepared to guide the conversation toward the type of ethnographic data I was looking for (provided in Appendix A), each interview ended up going in slightly different directions depending on how the conversation flowed. This allowed me to adjust the interviews in the moment as necessary to maintain the conversational environment.

Of the contributors I have conducted interviews with, 12 are ADHD, 6 are autistic, and 7 are AuDHD—the emic term in the neurodivergent community for those who are autistic and ADHD. 10 of the contributors were diagnosed as children, and 15 were diagnosed as adults. Contributors came from a variety of different socio-economic backgrounds and folk groups as noted in Appendix B, though the effects of these other demographic details on their experiences as neurodivergent students are beyond the scope of this thesis. The length of the

interviews varied from around 20 minutes to two hours, depending on how much each contributor felt like sharing, and each was video and audio recorded so as to preserve the impact of vocal tone, pauses, facial expression, and body language on the meaning and context of the narratives. Because of my membership in the neurodivergent folk group, it was important to me to ensure that the interviews felt more like a natural conversation between friends than a structured researcher-participant interaction. In order to facilitate this trust and camaraderie, in the majority of the interviews, I purposefully situated myself next to the people I was talking with to emphasize our relationship as co-members of a folk group, and I would often offer my own experiences and stories as both prompts and expressions of relation and understanding.

After collection, I conducted qualitative analysis of the video and audio data through multiple rounds of coding, using a grounded theory framework (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Saldana, 2009). After recording the interviews, I rewatched each one, taking notes on repeated themes in stories and elements that stood out to me. I rewatched all of the interviews twice, noting the time stamps of each section that stood out to me and color-coding the text of each notation according to the recurring patterns I was noticing. I then transcribed the sections I noted time stamps for, taking care to include all verbal and nonverbal elements

of the story being told, including vocal tics, laughter, pauses, and relevant body language. During the transcription process, I compared the interviews, tallying the frequency of certain recommended practices, emotional responses, lived experiences, and other similarities and differences across the interviews. I then synthesized the accounts of specific teaching pedagogies that contributors experienced with current scholarship in education more generally. More specifically, this entailed comparing the lived experiences with given teaching strategies mentioned by contributors to studies on those strategies in journals such as the *Journal of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, and *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*.

I recognize that the scope of this thesis cannot reasonably account for every aspect of neurodivergent learning, especially considering that neurodiversity includes many more neural differences and disabilities than ADHD and autism. However, three main patterns emerged from my analysis of these interviews that I find significant in their implications for both educational theory and practice and our understanding of the neurodivergent community as a folk group:

- 1.) a desire for listening/care,

2.) the impact of narratives told about neurodivergent people, and

3.) a high frequency of feeling like a burden on their educators.

IV. Results

1. Listening/Care

The first of the three major patterns I found throughout each interview was a desire to be listened to and cared about. Many contributors in all three groups—who I will hereafter refer to with pseudonyms—expressed that the teachers they had the best relationships with and who they felt helped them to succeed were those who spent time getting to know and care about them.

“Honestly, my favorite teachers, it wasn’t that they all did the same things, it was just that they asked me. Like, ‘I noticed that you’re having some trouble. What do you want me to do?’” – Ann (AuDHD)

“It felt like he somehow saw a potential in me...He would work to establish a relationship with everyone in the class.” – Cody (ADHD)

“I guess I can think about this as just, whenever teachers were willing to sort of hear me out and sort of connect with me on a personal level, maybe. Like I felt like they were my friend and that they trusted me as much as they could with how old I was, y’know. They give me the benefit of the doubt. It was best when I felt safe to really, y’know, disclose what I was, y’know, what I would be experiencing, challenges, sorts.” – Wayne (Autistic)

In contrast, when I asked about teachers who hindered their success, I frequently was told a story about a teacher who dismissed, ignored, distrusted, or otherwise belittled them for things that weren't necessarily in their control as neurodivergent students—especially for those who didn't get diagnosed until college.

“I didn't know how to approach my teachers and ask for help, so a lot of times I wouldn't. And so the experiences that I had with teachers where when I did ask questions I felt like a burden, that made me even more hesitant to go to any teacher, regardless of how I felt with them, because I was scared of damaging that relationship.” – Erica (ADHD)

“Kids can tell when a teacher doesn't care. Even autistic kids can tell. They might not show it in the same way, but they can tell.” – Mason (Autistic)

“They didn't realize or even look at my IEP...It was like they didn't even care.” – Eugene (Autistic)

“Sometimes they'd call me out in front of the class and it'd be kind of embarrassing, and, like, I had to keep playing it off as a joke, but on the inside it was, like, hurting.” – Cody (ADHD)

As we can see from these brief quotes I've showcased here, these students are expressing both a desire to be listened to and cared about and a fear of losing that love and care. While this is by no means unique to neurodivergent students, it does showcase that this group feels a particular anxiety about this aspect of their teacher-student relationships. Certainly every student wants to be cared about, but it is more of a concern for neurodivergent students because their education needs are often different than many of their neurotypical classmates. This particular element has been repeated across the various stories I've collected, and seems to indicate that not only are neurodivergent students aware of the way they are perceived by their teachers but they are deeply concerned about that perception being negative due to inaccuracy or caring more about a student's behavior or academic performance than them as a person.

2. Narratives of Difference vs. Narratives of Deficit

The second pattern is how the stories told about neurodivergent people shape how neurodivergent people perceive themselves and neurodiversity in general. In the field of folklore, it is widely acknowledged that the stories that people in a community share with each other are fundamental to the shaping of how people perceive each other. This is a particularly salient issue for people in the neurodivergent community, and several of the neurodivergent people I

talked to who had been professionally diagnosed as children told me variants of the same experience. Each described how a lack of positive neurodivergent representation in the media and narratives they were exposed to in their classes in combination with a lack of exposure to other autistic people as a community brought a lot of shame and embarrassment surrounding their autistic identity.

Faust, an autistic graduate student I interviewed, went into great detail about his journey of going from being embarrassed and ashamed of being autistic to becoming an outspoken autistic researcher and advocate. His experience mirrors those of other autistic community members I interviewed who were diagnosed as children or young teenagers:

“Okay, so say as a, like, child, I always took great pride in my intelligence. So I remember, like, reading a book for, like, this gifted literature class, um, that they put me in. Um, that, so we're reading a book for it, and this was shortly after I got diagnosed. Where, um, so there's a character in the book, um, who doesn't talk much. He's like, he's, I think he's like a janitor or something? And like, so there's this girl who's the narrator, the protag. I'm like, let's try. I think it was a first person book, so you could see all her thoughts about everything. And then like, um, she sees this guy and I think, like, her comment is, uh, quote unquote. Um. Like his brain, um, is

between mini and micro. And like. And she wonders if, uh, if he has Asperger's.

"So that's the first time I note, [laughs] uh, maybe this is not such a good thing. [laughs] And I did not want to be associated with those people.

Again, because, like, I was like, I'm smart. Those people are not. And it's like, so, so that's also wrong, and it's like, 'Well, since all these things do not describe me, I'm not autistic. And the, I guess, the psychologists are just idiots.'"

Because one of Faust's first instances of exposure to a narrative with an autistic character was a negative one portraying autistic people as unintelligent, he learned to associate autism with that, causing him to reject his diagnosis and an identity as an autistic person. He knew that he was intelligent, and if autistic people were, as this narrative told him, unintelligent, then he therefore could not be autistic. This was clearly a memory he associated with some degree of emotional pain, since during this portion of the interview he was stimming with an acupuncture ring rather intensely and his laughter seemed to be a reflexive response to diffuse awkward or uncomfortable emotions. The perceptions of the people and media he came into contact with taught him that autism was something bad, unfortunate, or shameful, and so he wanted to divorce himself

from that, but as an adult looking back, he clearly considers it to be a hurtful experience.

However, his demeanor lightened as he continued his story to explain how his perception of autism changed when, as a teenager, he was exposed to media that portrayed autistic individuals in a more positive light:

“So then my, like, my uncles are visiting, and they, and they, um, they, um, they, um, show the show. The-the-they-they, this was the, it was like 2011. And there's a new meme. A new meme was on the rise. It was *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. And that was like, they-they came and showed it, and I had *zero* interest in that. [laughs] But then later on, after they left, the seed had been planted in my brain. What is this thing? Why do people like this thing? [laughs]

“So I looked it up, and then I ended up on TV Tropes, and they started discussing, like, these characters. And then I saw something interesting. They're, like, saying, um, wild mass guessing, um, Twilight Sparkle, Fluttershy is autistic. And then I was like, ‘Huh.’ And then I started watching the show, and then I was like, ‘Wow, I relate to this so much.’ Um, and it's like, like for the first time, like, I felt like a connection to, like, a character that was autistic. Like, had a connection, and—one—and two: I

actually liked her. And that was the thing. Maybe I can like myself too.

Maybe that's possible. I didn't know that was possible."

Growing up around narratives that told him autistic people were unlikable taught Faust that he himself was unlikeable. In contrast, encountering just one example of a narrative that portrayed autism positively allowed him to see himself in a positive light as well. The effect of such narratives—both textual and cultural—were also illustrated in the experiences of other contributors I interviewed. Many described feeling embarrassed, ashamed, or awkward in school because they needed accommodations, which suggests an underlying narrative in education that paints neurodiversity in a negative light:

"Some of my special education classes I really didn't need because I just—I felt ashamed." – Rosie (AuDHD)

"I know there's some professors that don't think, like, [wobbles hands] don't think ADHD is real, and they like, have opinions about it, and like, I don't wanna, like, call anyone out, but like, I know some people that are like, 'Oh, you should just study harder. Use a planner. [laughs] Just sit down and do your homework.' And it's like, I-I wish—it's-it's hard cos I'm trying to find this balance myself of, like, trying to have patience with

myself but also pushing myself to, um, to, like, do the best that I can do, and it's hard to ask someone else to do that." – Cody (ADHD)

"For the most part, like, I think I just wanted to look at myself as, like, normal like everyone else." – Logan (ADHD)

These patterns of thought suggest that the stories and narratives surrounding the identity formation of a newly introduced community member have a huge impact on whether that person will see their identity in a positive or negative light. And it is particularly telling that the most positive experiences come through more informal narratives in their communities and popular media and not through the clinical explanations of their diagnoses by professional psychiatrists.

3. Feeling like a Burden

The third and final pattern I noticed is a pervasive resignation regarding the power dynamics between neurodivergent and neurotypical people. One of the questions I asked each contributor was "What do you wish your teachers had done for you?" and I would frequently get placating responses either absolving teachers of responsibility for their struggles in school or asserting that it's unreasonable to ask teachers to do any more than they already are.

“I’ve long become resigned to the fact that NTs will never understand how difficult communication is for us on the spectrum.” – Mason (Autism)

“It’s really everyone versus the teachers, and so like, it’s hard for me to say, ‘You should have done this better,’ when they’re already fighting twenty other battles.” – Jeffrey (ADHD)

“I’m not saying the world shouldn’t be accommodating to neurodiversity, but at the same time, we’re in the minority...The unfortunate thing about reality is that for anyone with a neurological disorder, life is gonna be harder for you no matter what.” – Eugene (Autism)

However, if I followed up this question with a rephrased version asking what a perfect classroom environment in an ideal world would look like for them, they were often full of suggestions and desires for an educational space that accommodated their needs. Most of these suggestions were very reasonable things too, such as greater autonomy in the classroom, access to fidget tools, and involvement in their individualized education plan meetings.

“Research autism ... Try to be accommodating ... Any student should be involved in a discussion about them.” – Mason (Autism)

“The only thing I would ask is if teachers were a little bit more clear in the initials of any unit, or every day taking one minute and just say, ‘Quick reminder: what can you do with this information and what would you want to gain from this information?’ ... Or better yet, if there was one day at the beginning, I would much rather do this than like a procedure...

Other than a syllabus day, like, every teacher, y’know they, like, have to review the syllabus and they understand they gotta explain their policies, right? If they could somehow cut that down to ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes, right? Do everything they need to in that fifteen, twenty minutes and then do the rest of the day of just saying, ‘Okay, I want you to tell me your goals and your dreams and what you want to accomplish and how you’d like to see yourself. Great!’ And then doing the rest of the class explaining, ‘Great! Let me tell you how learning this material will help you to accomplish that.’” – Jeffrey (ADHD)

“One-on-one time ... You need to be willing to adapt your lesson plans. Get to know your students. It’s okay to stick to your lesson plan, but be willing to adapt when an obvious need arises.” – Eugene (Autism)

The way that these contributors perceive their desires to be an unattainable ideal suggests that neurodivergent people often feel obligated to

adjust and accommodate for the convenience and comfort of the neurotypical majority in their classrooms. So much so, they have come to believe that the current level of inclusion they do have is the most they can ask of their teachers and peers. To ask any more is to become a burden on others, which is a major anxiety for neurodivergent folk groups. This fear of becoming a burden is pervasive but often unspoken to outsiders. It is likely that this dissatisfaction and resignation was only expressed to me at all because I was positioned as an insider in the community who has experienced similar feelings myself.

V. Discussion - Application to Classrooms

More nuance will certainly continue to surface as further research in this field is conducted, and I fully recognize the limitations in general applicability of this relatively small sample size of neurodivergent undergraduate students. However, I argue that these patterns hold several important applications for general education classrooms and future ethnographic research on the folk groups of neurominorities.

1. Building strong relationships of trust with neurodivergent students

From the interviews I conducted, it is clear that neurodivergent students perform better in school when their teachers build relationships with them, trust them, and understand their needs. This is true for students both neurodivergent and neurotypical, but neurodivergent students are hurt more by the absence of these relationships because they often need more support in the classroom to succeed than their neurotypical peers. As Erica mentioned in her interview, “the experiences that I had with teachers where when I did ask questions I felt like a burden, that made me even more hesitant to go to any teacher regardless of how I felt with them, because I was scared of damaging that relationship.” In light of this, I suggest the following methods for building trust with neurodivergent students based on suggestions from the students I interviewed.

a. Regular student-teacher conferences

Building relationships with students requires that we talk to them on a one-to-one basis. As Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle explain in *180 Days: Two Teachers and the Quest to Engage and Empower Adolescents*, “When we talk to them, our students gain confidence because they know we value their experiences. When we talk to them, we raise expectations, as students work harder to clarify their thinking. ... But the talk we do in conferences does so much more than simply raise expectations; conferences are where we connect with our kids. They are where our students *learn a lot about us*” (17). The language that we use in these conferences also matters, because it helps students to feel seen and understood, and it shows them that we care about them. Zach and other contributors often recalled that the teachers that they felt most comfortable with “would work to establish a relationship with everyone in the class.” When we inquire after students’ thinking, they learn that we value their ideas. When we prompt them to challenge themselves, they learn that we believe in their capabilities. When we share recommendations and curriculum designed for them, they learn that we think about them even when they’re not around. This builds trust and helps students cultivate the academic self-efficacy that they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

While this is true for students of all neurotypes, for our neurodivergent students this also means talking to them frankly about their needs or their IEPs if applicable. Rosie mentioned that much of her discomfort and difficulty with self-advocacy stemmed from feeling isolated because teachers often “didn’t realize or even look at my IEP...It was like they didn’t even care.” Talking openly about neurodiversity as a normal part of human existence helps to mitigate the feelings of shame and ostracization that many neurodivergent students may feel in a world where people still use “autistic” and “special needs” as pejorative terms with which to insult others. Having teachers who can discuss neurodiversity with clarity and without judgment models to these students what treatment they should be able to expect from respectful interpersonal relationships and how to communicate their needs and experiences when they are seeking support.

b. Encourage greater participation from students in IEP meetings

In many of the IEP meetings I have attended as a general education representative, I have noticed that the student the meeting is meant to revolve around is often talked *about* but rarely talked *to*. Instead, conversation is directed at the parent, who is undeniably a very important source of information about their child’s needs, and the child is left to sit silently at the table—or sometimes

even in a chair in the back—while the adults discuss the future of their education. Mason expressed great frustration with this, mentioning that being left out of his own IEP meetings made him feel like he had no control over his education and that his opinion was unnecessary and unwanted. He and other contributors suggest that a “student should be involved in a discussion about them” whenever a formal meeting occurs because even though parents certainly have invaluable insight into their child’s life, the foremost expert on a child’s disability is the child themselves.

Even when a child is young and has not yet acquired the academic language that adults use to discuss educational accommodations, it is still vital to make it clear to the student that they are the most important person in the room during an IEP meeting and that their feelings, experiences, and needs are what matter most. This can most easily be done by simply addressing the student when we are talking about them in a meeting. Instead of phrases like “Jimothy struggles with vocabulary acquisition in my class, so I recommend pulling him out for reading tech two times a week,” we might say something like “Jimothy, I noticed that you’ve been struggling with learning new vocabulary in my class. Tell me about that,” after which the student can provide their experience with that challenge, and a more informed learning goal and accommodation can be

made based on that. The result of pulling our hypothetical student Jimothy out for reading tech two times a week may still be the result, but with this approach, the solution would be based on Jimothy's voiced experiences and concerns, which teaches him the important lesson that the adults who have come together on his behalf for this meeting pay attention to him and care about what he thinks and feels.

c. Create space for more informal teacher-student interactions

We only have so much time in the classroom to teach our curriculum, and it is often overwhelming to try to find the time to teach all the standards, let alone all of the extra things students need to feel comfortable, safe, and loved in the classroom. Yet, in order to teach those standards, especially to neurodivergent students who may need extra support in our classrooms, we need to have plenty of flexible time where we can work with students and interact with them informally. As previously mentioned, student-teacher conferences are invaluable, but so are the small, daily interactions that show students we care about them beyond the three to five minutes we allot them in those conferences. Eugene and Ann both mentioned that some of their favorite teachers were those who often "checked in" with them casually and asked about

their lives and feelings. We can create more of this time by moving instruction toward the model of mini-lessons and workshops.

This structure will look different from subject to subject, but by providing students with structured independent workshop time on a regular basis, teachers are enabled to tend to the academic needs of individual students and talk to them casually about their lives and interests as well. Doing this helps students to see us as people who care about them and who are happy to listen to chapters of their life stories. For many neurodivergent students, being able to freely share their interests without fear or judgment is a precious commodity that is far more rare than it ought to be. Because of this, creating space for these students to be able to share the 1001 bat facts they just learned the other day without being shut down aids in their emotional development into secure adults and shows them that we are people they can trust. By setting a specific time for these informal interactions to occur, we are also able to help our neurodivergent students who may be prone to outbursts understand that we do care about what they have to say and that there will be a time for them to share, even if that moment isn't right at that second. When we then make good on that promise, students learn that they can trust us to keep our word, and classroom management issues related to students' desire for affectionate attention may be mitigated because our students

know that a “not right now” is not just a shutdown but a promise to listen when the time is right.

2. Cultivate positive narratives about neurodiversity in the classroom

The dominant cultural narrative about neurodiversity in our schools needs to be one that is positive and inclusive. If our students believe that being neurodivergent is something negative, then that is the narrative that will persist in the culture of our schools, and students will be harmed by it. Thus, it is our responsibility as teachers to help cultivate better narratives that teach all students that neurodiversity is no more strange or unfortunate than any other type of human diversity.

a. Provide good books with positive neurodivergent representation

As is evidenced by the experiences of Faust and others related previously, the narratives that students encounter in the fiction and other media we consume in the classroom has a significant effect on the way that neurodivergence is perceived. If positive representation is lacking or if poor representation is all that is present, then students internalize it. Because of this, it is necessary to expose students to positive narratives that portray neurodivergence accurately and positively. In the English classroom, this is easier to accomplish, given the subject matter, but other subjects can include such narratives as well with

supplementary informational materials that discuss, even briefly, the realities of neurodiversity in the world.

We can also work with our school librarians to showcase neurodiverse texts and recommend books to students. Included in Appendix C are examples of both middle grade and young adult literature with quality neurodivergent representation. Many #OwnVoices authors have written novels and memoirs that portray neurodivergence from an insider perspective, one that is valuable for neurodivergent students as reflective representation but also for neurotypical students as a window of understanding into the lives of people who experience the world differently. This broadening of horizons through written narrative is a slow process, but it is a necessary one if we wish to shift the culture of the student bodies of our schools to one that is not only aware of neurodiversity but acceptant of it.

b. Promptly address ableist language and disability-related insults

Despite our society having made important steps toward inclusivity and equity, it is still not uncommon to hear students use ableist slurs and insult their peers with language associated with disabilities—especially neurodivergence. Among my own students, I still catch them calling each other “retarded” or using the words “autistic” and “special needs” as pejorative insults. This is, of

course, wrong of them to say in the same way that we recognize racial and sexual slurs and insults are wrong. When our neurodivergent students hear this language, the notion that it is bad or shameful to be who they are becomes internalized, and they are more hesitant to advocate for their academic needs out of fear of being a burden or becoming ostracized by their peers.

A major part of cultivating a safe classroom environment for all students is ensuring that we promptly address any instance of ableist language used by students and make it clear why that language will not be tolerated. The fact that students use “autistic” as an insult speaks to the societal perception that being autistic is something undesirable—that being autistic means you are “dumb” or less valuable as a person. To combat this perception, it is our role as teachers to correct misconceptions and teach students about neurodiversity when these moments occur.

c. Show students examples of successful neurodivergent people

Important to any student’s success is the belief that it is possible for them to succeed. When students believe that success is impossible, they stop trying, and because of this, it is important to show students examples of people like them who have been successful. When teaching about important figures in your subject, take care to include people who are neurodivergent and mention that

fact. With older historical figures like Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein, or Mozart—who are often popularly suspected to have been neurodivergent—it can be controversial to retroactively assign a modern armchair diagnosis. I would therefore recommend avoiding using such individuals as examples, given that evidence and fact is important in education, regardless of the potential relatability or inspiration it might provide for students.

Furthermore, modern examples of successful neurodivergent people may be even more relatable to students. In Appendix D, I have included a list of known neurodivergent individuals that students may have heard of or be able to relate to. Mentioning them offhand or incorporated into a more formal lesson can help show neurodivergent students that neurodivergence is simply another form of human diversity and does not necessitate grand scale failure or inability despite the struggles that come with being neurodivergent in a society designed for a neurotypical brain. For neurotypical students, seeing that the world is full of people who are neurodivergent but don't display that neurodivergence in the stereotypical way they might expect can help them to develop greater empathy for others and a more nuanced understanding of what disability is.

Even more ideally, inviting members of the community who are neurodivergent to come and talk to students about their experiences can give

students a concrete image of neurodiversity and help to expand neurodivergent students' sense of community beyond their handful of peers that they may interact with in special education courses. Being a part of a community or, in etic terms, a folk group, gives people a sense of identity and belonging and provides them with the opportunity to become involved in its culture. When neurodivergent students feel they are a part of a community, their self-efficacy grows because "Staying connected to our community traditions can give us confidence to move into the unknown, and courage to create an equitable future for ourselves and our communities" (Morales 2020).

Everyone needs a community to be a part of, but the need is even more dire for neurodivergent students whose differences often make them feel isolated, alone, and uncertain. Having access to a community of people who have gone through and are going through the same things they are teaches them that they are not alone. They learn the principle put very succinctly by Brandon Sanderson in his novel, *Rhythm of War*: "It will get better. Then it will get worse again. Then better. This is life, and I will not lie by saying every day will be sunshine. But there will be sunshine again, and that is a very different thing to say. That is truth. I promise you ... you will be warm again" (2020). The concept that life will not always be good but it will always get better is a critically

important one for neurodivergent students to learn at a young age, and the best place for them to learn that is from a community of people who have dealt with the same struggles and who can personally vouch for its reality.

3. Prioritize “neurodivergent-friendly” over “neurodivergent-accessible”

When we discuss accessibility in the classroom, a principle often overlooked is that accommodative measures should not only be accessible, they should also be friendly to those who need them. The difference between “neurodivergent-friendly” and “neurodivergent-accessible” is simple: “accessible” accommodations simply ensure that a student has access to what they need, while “friendly” accommodations allow a student to *easily* access what they need without having to jump through extra hoops and draw attention to themselves. If we do not prioritize the friendliness of our accommodations, then it is likely that students will not use them, which can cause issues for students academically and for schools financially when the continuation of unused accessibility measures comes up for review.

a. Neurodivergent-friendly design does not single out students

A key aspect of designing accommodations and accessible classrooms in a neurodivergent-friendly manner is ensuring that students are not singled out if they choose to use available accommodations. If using accommodations requires

a student to draw attention to themselves, it is no longer truly accessible because neurodivergent students are often highly sensitive to embarrassment, especially as young adolescents who are still learning to navigate interpersonal relationships with their peers. Zach mentioned wishing that “asking for accommodations didn’t have to be so awkward” because often, the threat of being seen as different from everyone else is enough to prevent a child from seeking the help that they need. Because of this, accommodations should be built into the regular proceedings of the classroom instead of as exceptions that a student is required to ask for.

For example, after listening to the suggestions of those I interviewed for this research, I decided that having a box of fidgets in my classroom would be helpful for my students. When designing the procedure for the use of these fidgets, my main priority was ensuring that the students who needed them would be able to easily access them. While I could have established a procedure where students who were allowed a fidget by their IEP could come and ask me for one, which could prevent overuse and breaking of my fidgets, I chose instead to place the box in a easily accessible location and allow any student to use a sign-out sheet to check out a fidget for the class period independently. With this design, students who needed them were able to use them without drawing

undue attention to themselves because there were no artificial barriers between the student and the accommodation. Furthermore, because any student regardless of IEP status could use them, using a fidget in my classroom does not force a student to out themselves as being different from their peers. As a result, the use of fidgets by anyone and everyone quickly became commonplace in my classroom.

Designing accessibility measures in this manner, be it late policies, retakes, or extra time not only makes classroom proceedings more generally accessible to all students, it also decreases the burden on teachers to remember exactly what accommodations each individual student is entitled to. By using IEP accommodations as a basis for classroom design, those accommodations are naturally accounted for, which makes the classroom a friendlier place for neurodivergent students to learn in. Furthermore, making accommodations a normal aspect of the educational process that any student can easily seek out also helps meet the needs of undiagnosed neurodivergent students and students with other situations in their lives that make school more difficult.

b. Design curriculum and classroom policies according to UDL guidelines

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has long since been established as an evidence-based means of creating differentiated instruction and accessible

classroom environments. By familiarizing ourselves with UDL guidelines and making them the basis of our everyday instruction, our classrooms become natural places of inclusion, the quality of our instruction improves, and student engagement increases. All students benefit from differentiated instruction, but our neurodivergent students need it in order to succeed, and the UDL guidelines provide a helpful starting point for designing inclusive instruction that meets those needs.

UDL focuses on designing instruction that includes multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression. It provides “concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities” (CAST 2018). Because the focus of the framework is on incorporating choice and various options for students, designing our classrooms according to UDL guidelines helps students to learn how to create accommodations for themselves, which is a skill that will help them in higher education, the professional sphere, and in their personal lives as well. By showing students that there are many means of learning and many ways to accomplish the same goal, they learn that finding a system of learning that works

for them is achievable and that needing to do things differently than others does not make them less.

c. Cultivate a classroom with a healthy understanding of failure

To create truly neurodivergent-friendly classrooms, we need to create an environment where failure is understood as a learning tool instead of a state of being. While everyone encounters failure in their lives, neurodivergent students often encounter it more frequently because they are working with a disability that makes certain aspects of their lives more difficult. Without a healthy relationship with failure, students are likely to internalize instances of failure and their senses of self-efficacy will weaken, which may result in students refusing to try at all for fear of failing. Because of this, it is imperative that we structure our systems of assessment in a manner that prioritizes self-reflection and mastery-oriented learning through failure.

When we expect students to be responsible for their learning experience, we teach them that education is an active process and a skill that they develop as opposed to something they are either “good” or “not good” at. By inviting students to assess their own learning and reflect on their understanding instead of relying entirely on their teachers for assessment, we teach students that learning is a process of making mistakes, failing, reflecting on why we failed, and

then trying again with better information. Too often students skip the reflection and simply try to brute force a better grade without going through the effort of troubleshooting what caused the error in the first place. If we do not provide our students with the time and space to reflect on failure, then we rob them of the ability to learn from their mistakes and reinforce the erroneous notion of failure as an identity instead of a consequence of a given action or lack thereof.

VI. Conclusion

There are numerous means of going about making our classrooms kinder, friendlier, and more accommodating for our neurodivergent students, but more than any one specific method or practice we can implement, this research has shown that the most important thing we as educators can do for our neurodivergent students is to listen to them. By truly listening to our neurodivergent students, we not only validate their experiences and perspectives but also gain invaluable insights into their needs and preferences, especially because each neurodivergent student experiences the world differently. This empowers us to tailor our teaching approaches, environments, and support systems in ways that truly resonate with them, fostering a culture of inclusion and acceptance within our classrooms. By recognizing that the neurodivergent community has its own unique culture and history that we can learn from, we can help our neurodivergent students develop meaningful connections, greater understanding, and ultimately, a positive educational experience that will encourage them to become lifelong learners.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). Neurodevelopmental disorders. In *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC.
- https://doi-org.byu.idm.oclc.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787.x01_Neurodevelopmental_Disorders.
- Baron-Cohen, S., Leslie, A.M., & Frith, U. (1985). Does the autistic child have a "theory of mind"? *Cognition*, 21, 37–46.
- Booster, G. D., Mautone, J. A., Nissley-Tsiopinis, J., Van Dyke, D., & Power, T. J. (2016). Reductions in negative parenting practices mediate the effect of a family-school intervention for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *School Psychology Review*, 45(2), 192–208.
- Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Lester, J. N., Sasson, N. J., and Hand, B. N. (Mar. 2021). Avoiding ableist language: Suggestions for autism researchers. *Autism in Adulthood*, 18-29. <http://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0014>.
- Bury, S. M., Jellett, R., Spoor, J. R., & Hedley, D. (2020). “It Defines Who I Am” or “It’s Something I Have”: What Language Do [autistic] Australian Adults [on the Autism Spectrum] Prefer? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04425-3>.

CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning guidelines. version 2.2.

<http://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13, 3-21.

Davies, C. A. (2002). *Reflexive ethnography : A guide to researching selves and others*. Taylor & Francis Routledge.

Dawson, M., & Mottron, L. (2011). Do autistics have cognitive strengths? Should ASC be defined as disorders? In S. Bolte & J. Hallmayer (Eds.), *Autism spectrum conditions: FAQs on autism, Asperger syndrome, and atypical autism answered by international experts* (pp. 32–39). Boston: Hogrefe Publishing.

Gaastra, G. F., Groen, Y., Tucha, L., & Tucha, O. (2020). Unknown, Unloved? Teachers' Reported Use and Effectiveness of Classroom Management Strategies for Students with Symptoms of ADHD. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 49(1), 1–22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10566-019-09515-7>

Gray, C. A., & Garand, J. D. (1993). Social Stories: Improving Responses of Students with Autism with Accurate Social Information. *Focus on autistic Behavior*, 8(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/108835769300800101>

Happé, F., & Frith, U. (2020). Annual research review: Looking back to look forward – changes in the concept of autism and implications for future research. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 61(3), 218–232.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13176>

Hume, K., Steinbrenner, J. R., Odom, S. L., Morin, K. L., Nowell, S. W., Tomaszewski, B., Szendrey, S., McIntyre, N. S., Yücesoy-Özkan, S., & Savage, M. N. (2021). Evidence-based practices for children, youth, and young adults with autism: Third generation review. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 51(11), 4013–4032.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04844-2>.

Jackson, E. M., Hanline, M. F. (2020). Using a concept map with RECALL to increase the comprehension of science texts for children with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 35(2), 90-100.

Jaswal, V.K., & Akhtar, N. (2018). Being vs. Appearing socially uninterested: Challenging assumptions about social motivation in autism. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 42, 1–73.

Johnson, J. W. (2011). *The effect of strategy instruction on the reading comprehension of high school students with ADHD* (Order No. 3449902). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection.

- Kapp, S. K., Gillespie-Lynch, K., Sherman, L. E., & Hutman, T. (2013). Deficit, difference, or both? autism and neurodiversity. *Developmental Psychology*, 49(1), 59–71. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028353>.
- Kasari, C., Kaiser, A., Goods, K., Nietfeld, J., Mathy, P., Landa, R., et al. (2014). Communication interventions for minimally verbal children with autism: A sequential multiple assignment randomized trial. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 53(6), 635–646. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.01.019>.
- Kenny, L., Hattersley, C., Molins, B., Buckley, C., Povey, C., & Pellicano, E. (2016). Which terms should be used to describe autism? Perspectives from the UK autism community. *Autism*, 20(4), 442–462. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361315588200>.
- Kirby, A. V., Bagatell, N., Baranek G. T. (2020). The formation of postsecondary expectations among parents of youth with autism spectrum disorder. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 35(2), 118-128.
- Lawless, E. J. (2019). *Reciprocal Ethnography and the Power of Women's Narratives*. Indiana UP.

- Ledford, J. R., et al. (2021). The evidence base for interventions for individuals with ASD: A call to improve practice conceptualization and synthesis. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 36(3), 135-147.
- Lombardo, M.V., Chakrabarti, B., Bullmore, E.T., MRC AIMS Consortium, & Baron-Cohen, S. (2011). Specialization of right temporo-parietal junction for mentalizing and its relation to social impairments in autism. *NeuroImage*, 56, 1832–1838.
- Masuch T.V., Bea M., Alm B., Deibler P., Sobanski E. (2019). Internalized stigma, anticipated discrimination and perceived public stigma in adults with ADHD. *ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders*. 11(2), 211–220.
- Mazefsky, C.A., Kao, J., & Oswald, D.P. (2011). Preliminary evidence suggesting caution in the use of psychiatric self-report measures with adolescents with high-functioning autism spectrum disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 5, 164–174.
- McCreary M. (2019). *Funny, you don't look autistic: A comedian's guide to life on the spectrum*. Annick Press.
- McGeer, V. (2004). Autistic self-awareness. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 11, 235–251.

- McNeill, L. (2013). *Folklore rules: A fun, quick, and useful introduction to the field of academic folklore studies*. Utah State U. P.
- Merriman, D. E., & Coddington, R. S. (2008). The effects of coaching on mathematics homework completion and accuracy of high school students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 17(4), 339–355. <https://doi-org.byu.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10864-008-9072-3>.
- Milton, D. (2012). On the ontological status of autism: The ‘double empathy problem’. *Disability & Society*, 27, 883–887.
- Morales, S. (2020). Folk culture: A vessel for equity in education. *Journal of Folklore and Education*, 7:1-8.
- Oliver-Kerrigan, K. A., et al. (2021). Practices and experiences of general education teachers educating students with autism. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 56(2), 158-172.
- Onandia-Hinchado, I., Pardo-Palenzuela, N., & Diaz-Orueta, U. (2021). Cognitive characterization of adult attention deficit hyperactivity disorder by domains: A systematic review. *Journal of Neural Transmission*, 128(7), 893–937. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00702-021-02302-6>

- Pellicano, E., & Houting, J. (2021). Annual research review: Shifting from 'normal science' to neurodiversity in autism science. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13534>
- Peña, E. V., Gassner, D., & Brown, K. R. (2020). autistic-centered program development and assessment practices. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 33(3), 233–240.
- Prahlad, A. (2017). *The Secret Life of a Black Aspie: A Memoir*. U of Alaska P.
- Ringer, N. (2020). Living with ADHD: A meta-synthesis review of qualitative research on children's experiences and understanding of their ADHD. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 67(2), 208–224.
- Root, J. R., Henning, B., Boccumini, E. (2018). Teaching students with autism and intellectual disability to solve algebraic word problems. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 53(3), 325-241.
- Saldana, J. (2009). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Sanderson, B. (2020). *Rhythm of war*. Tor Books.
- van de Weijer-Bergsma, E., Formsma, A. R., de Bruin, E. I., & Bogels, S. M. (2012). The effectiveness of mindfulness training on behavioral problems and

attentional functioning in adolescents with ADHD. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 21(5), 775–787.

<https://doi-org.byu.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10826-011-9531-7>.

Walker, N. (2021). *Neuroqueer heresies: Notes on the neurodiversity paradigm, autistic empowerment, and postnormal possibilities*. Autonomous Press.

Walker, N., & Raymaker, D. M. (2021). Toward a neuroqueer future: An interview with Nick Walker. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1), 5-10. DOI: 10.1089/aut.2020.29014.njw

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What were some things that your teachers did in junior high or high school that hindered your success? Tell us some stories about your experience.
2. What were some things your teachers did that enabled your success? Tell us some stories about your experience.
3. What are some things you wish your teachers had done for you?
 - a. In a perfect world, what would an ideal classroom look like for you?
4. What are some things you wish your teachers understood about the way your mind works?
5. What advice would you give to a teacher who wanted to know how to better accommodate students like you in their classroom?
6. What are some things you did in junior high and high school to accommodate the way your mind works in an academic setting?
7. What are some things you do now? How do they differ and why?
8. What was your experience with assistance and resources that your school provided for you, such as IEPs, 504s, special education programs or other related services? Were they helpful? Why or why not?
9. What assistance and resources do you wish your school would have provided for you?
10. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for teachers to know about educating students like you?

Appendix B: Contributor Pseudonyms and Demographics

ADHD			
Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age Diagnosed
Ivy	Female	White	Adult
Derek	Male	White	Adult
Logan	Male	Latino	Child
Erica	Female	White	Adult
Leo	Male	White	Child
Cody	Male	White	Adult
Jeffrey	Male	White	Child
Gideon	Male	White	Adult
Lucy	Female	White	Adult
Shane	Male	White	Adult
Susan	Female	White	Adult
Honey	Female	White	Adult

Autistic			
Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age Diagnosed
Faust	Male	White	Child
Wayne	Male	White	Child
Mason	Male	White	Child
Robin	Male	White	Adult
Eugene	Male	White	Child
Ewan	Male	White	Child

AuDHD			
Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age Diagnosed
Ann	Female	White	Adult
Mandy	Female	Asian American	Adult
Harrison	Male	White	Adult
William	Male	White	Child
Bren	Nonbinary	White	Adult
Jay	Female	White	Adult
Rosie	Female	White	Child

Appendix C: Books with Quality Neurodivergent Representation

Middle Grade

- *A Kind of Spark* by Elle McNicoll (Autism)
- *Anything But Typical* by Nora Raleigh Baskin (Autism)
- *Check Mates* by Stewart Foster (ADHD)
- *Fish in a Tree* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt (Dyslexia)
- *Focused* by Alyson Gerber (ADHD)
- *Forget Me Not* by Ellie Terry (Tourette's)
- *Get a Grip, Vivvy Cohen!* by Sarah Kapit (Autism)
- *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus* by Dusti Bowling (Tourette's)
- *Me and Sam-Sam Handle the Apocalypse* by Susan Vaught (Autism)
- *Mighty Jack* by Ben Hatke (Autism)
- *Mockingbird* by Kathryn Erskine (Autism)
- *Moojag and the Auticode Secret* by N.E. McMorran (Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia)
- *Not If I Can Help It* by Carolyn Mackler (SPD)
- *Planet Earth is Blue* by Nicole Panteleakos (Autism)
- *Real* by Carol Cujec and Peyton Goddard (Autism)
- *Rogue* by Lyn Miller-Lachmann (Autism)
- *Show Us Who You Are* by Elle McNicoll (Autism)
- *Stanley Will Probably Be Fine* by Sally J. Pla (SPD)
- *The Boy with the Butterfly Mind* by Victoria Williamson (ADHD)
- *The Humiliations of Pipi McGee* by Beth Vrabel (Dyslexia)
- *The London Eye Mystery* by Siobhan Dowd (Autism)
- *The Many Mysteries of the Finkel Family* by Sarah Kapit (Autism)
- *The Miscalculations of Lightning Girl* by Stacy McAnulty (OCD)

- *The Name of this Book is Secret* by Pseudonymous Bosch (Synesthesia)
- *The Someday Birds* by Sally J. Pla (Autism)
- *The Real Boy* by Anne Ursu (Autism)
- *The Wild Book* by Margarita Engle (Dyslexia)
- *Tune It Out* by Jamie Sumner (SPD)
- *Tornado Brain* by Cat Patrick (Autism)
- *Waiting for Normal* by Leslie Connor (Dyslexia)

Young Adult

- *A List of Cages* by Robin Roe (ADHD, Dyslexia)
- *A Mango-Shaped Space* by Wendy Mass (Synesthesia)
- *Afrotistic* by Kala Allen Omeiza (Autism)
- *Calvin* by Martine Leavitt (Schizophrenia)
- *Challenger Deep* by Neal Shusterman (Schizophrenia)
- *Chaos Theory* by Nic Stone (BPD)
- *Harmonic Feedback* by Tara Kelly (ADHD, Autism)
- *Hoshi and the Red City Circuit* by Dora M. Raymaker (Autism)
- *Kissing Doorknobs* by Terry Spencer Hesser (OCD)
- *Lakelore* by Anna-Marie McLemore (ADHD, Dyslexia)
- *Marcelo in the Real World* by Francisco X. Stork (Autism)
- *May the Best Man Win* by Z.R. Ellor (Autism)
- *On the Edge of Gone* by Corinne Duyvis (Autism)
- *Peta Lyre's Rating Normal* by Anna Whateley (Autism, ADHD, SPD)
- *Please Don't Hug Me* by Kay Kerr (Autism)
- *Reggie and Delilah's Year of Falling* by Elise Bryant (Dyslexia)
- *Something More* by Jackie Khalilieh (Autism)
- *The Boy Who Steals Houses* by C.G. Drew (Autism, Anxiety)

- *The Extraordinaries* by T.J. Klune (ADHD)
- *The Love Letters of Abelard and Lily* by Laura Creedle (Autism, ADHD)
- *The Luis Ortega Survival Club* by Sonora Reyes (Autism, Selective Mutism)
- *The Many Half-Lived Lives of Sam Sylvester* by Maya MacGregor (Autism)
- *The Place Between Breaths* by Na An (Schizophrenia)
- *The Spirit Bares Its Teeth* by Andrew Joseph White (Autism)
- *The State of Grace* by Rachael Lucas (Autism)
- *Turtles All the Way Down* by John Green (OCD)
- *Unbroken: 13 Stories Starring Disabled Teens*, edited by Marieke Nijkamp (various)
- *Underdogs* by Chris Bonnello (Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia)
- *Unseelie* by Ivelisse Housman (Autism)
- *When My Heart Joins the Thousand* by A.J. Steiger (Autism)

Appendix D: Well-Known Successful Neurodivergent People

Autism

- Armani Williams - American NASCAR driver
- Clay Marzo - American professional surfer
- Dan Ackroyd - American actor and screenwriter known for creating and starring as Ray Stantz in the *Ghostbusters* films
- Elon Musk - American founder of SpaceX and Tesla, current (as of 2024) owner of Twitter/X
- Greta Thunberg - Swedish environmental activist
- Stephen Wiltshire - British architectural artist
- Temple Grandin - American animal behaviorist and neurodiversity activist
- Tim Burton - American filmmaker of *Corpse Bride*, *Beetlejuice*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and more

ADHD

- Adam Levine - lead singer of Maroon 5
- Emma Watson - English actor known for starring as Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* films
- Greta Gerwig - American director, writer, and actress best known for *Little Women* and *Barbie*
- Henry Cavill - British actor known for his roles as Superman, Geralt of Rivia, and Sherlock Holmes
- Michael Phelps - American swimmer who is, incidentally, the most decorated Olympian of all time with 28 medals total (23 of which being gold, the current record for Olympic gold medals held)

- Simone Biles - most decorated American gymnast in history
- Steven Spielberg - American filmmaker known for highly acclaimed films *Jurassic Park*, *Jaws*, *Indiana Jones*, and more

Dyslexia

- Florence Welch - English-American singer-songwriter and lead vocalist of Florence and the Machine. She also has dyspraxia
- Jennifer Aniston - American actor best known for her role as Rachel Green on *Friends*
- John de Lanczy - American actor best known for his role as Q in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*
- Ingvar Kamprad - Swedish founder of Ikea
- Kiera Knightley - English actor known for her roles in *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Pride and Prejudice*
- Liv Tyler - American actor most well known for her role as Arwen in the *Lord of the Rings* film
- Muhammad Ali - American world champion boxer and social activist
- Steve Jobs - founder of Apple

OCD

- Daniel Radcliffe - English actor best known for his role as the eponymous Harry Potter
- David Beckham - English former professional soccer player
- Justin Timberlake - American singer, songwriter, and actor. He also has ADHD
- Howie Mandel - Canadian comedian and television personality known best for his role as a judge on *America's Got Talent*. He also has ADHD