

What I want you to know

"It can be easy for some neurodiverse students with comorbid "giftedness" to fall through the cracks of educational support systems, because they're "in their element" in a classroom. If you notice high-achieving students struggling in an area outside the curriculum, they may benefit a great deal from clear, compassionate feedback. My undergraduate advisor went out of her way to give me advice on how to make my classmates feel more heard and appreciated during class discussions, which was a problem I hadn't even realized I had. Her guidance has stuck with me ever since. "

Positives about difference

"I've always found "easy" things difficult, and "difficult" things relatively easy—especially once explained. I think that my experience has encouraged me to have greater patience with my neurodiverse students. Sometimes I can also give informed support for the "easy" or "obvious" things that most people don't think much about, but that I still sometimes struggle with. "

Identifies as AU, ADHD, ANX, DEP, Mental Hlth

What I want you to know

"I think in words, categories, and debates rather than images. Visual tasks, like recalling a scene or working with spatial reasoning, are difficult because I cannot form mental images. Imagining a beach to relax doesn't work for me because instead of visualizing, I list sounds and words associated with beaches. With ADHD, my thoughts feel like countless tabs open, all text-based. Without visual memory, I focus on finding patterns and connections through words and ideas. I rely on photos to remember things, and having images available to refer to is essential to my learning."

Positives about difference

"With aphantasia and ADHD, my mind is always active. I focus best on debates, patterns, and categories rather than visuals. Of course, I am significantly challenged in some areas. For example, trying to remember kanji in words instead of visually has been a decades-long exercise in frustration. Nevertheless, I've come to appreciate that not being distracted by mental images can allow me to think more deeply about the logic behind words and ideas. Sometimes, this helps me "see" more clearly than neurotypical people.."

Identifies as ADHD, APH, DYSG, Hear (CAPD)

What I want you to know

"My low vision prevents me from seeing your slides. Please give me a copy before classes / presentations, so I can participate in real time."

Positives about difference

"I have excellent memory and use my hearing to "read" interactions. When people put alt text onto images, I can read them quickly and use my strategi strengths."

Identifies as VIS-D, INT

What I want you to know

"I've never been diagnosed, but I suspect that I have a milder version of my son's condition. I see many traits that I share with him, some of which have actually been plusses for me professionally—being able to get intensely focused on tasks that I find interesting, for example. I also have similar difficulties relating to people, becoming anxious in crowds, and having compulsive tendencies that can be occasionally be debilitating, but usually are simply distracting. For example, this prompt asks for "up to 100 words;" I'll be unable to submit it if I don't write exactly that many!"

Positives about difference

"My son has difficulty making friends and relating to others, but it is encouraging to see him make steady progress as he matures. Under our supervision, he has started to develop friendships online through playing videogames. We are also fortunate that our municipality has progressive work-placement programs to help adults with disabilities do meaningful work. Now that he has graduated high school, we are working with his / these community services to place him as an assistant at a "day service" (a kind of daycare) for children with disabilities. It makes him so proud that he is helping other kids now!"

Identifies as AU, ADHD

What I want you to know

"People with ADHD are not always physically "hyper", the quiet students who are slow on the uptake or appear to be zoning out are probably frantically trying to make sense of the situation and don't know how to respond. They probably feel embarrassed and isolated because they feel "everyone else gets it, why don't I? What is wrong with me?" Give them time to process, you may be surprised at how much material they have retained and synthesized. I wish my teachers understood that about me. I have a feeling they don't remember anything about me because I was silent in the classroom and tried to blend in with the woodwork. I'm only now speaking up and sharing parts of myself that I've always, always hidden. It's liberating."

Positives about difference

"Being ND is a blessing (and a curse). But it's what makes me and my ND family members unique! We're not a boring bunch, that's for sure. "

Identifies as ADHD, ANX, DEP, IMP-S, INT

These are the voices of teachers you know. But like students, they do not feel able to tell the world they are neurodiverse, because of taboo, or fear of impact on career and social interaction. Their ability to take off the mask, depends on you. Only **1.79%** of all students in tertiary education in Japan declare any kind of disability (JASSO Press Release 2024) This page is irregular. Because life is like that for many of us.

What I want you to know

"Absences or Incomplete assignments are not signs of disrespect."

Positives about difference

"My neurodiversity has also help me achieve great things when I can tap into its strengths."

Identifies as ADHD, IMP-S

Alexandra Burke

Adjunct: Shiga University
JALT2024 International Conference
November 16, Shizuoka, Japan

What I want you to know

"Although we may look lazy or just not making enough effort, we often spend twice as much time to accomplish the same as a neurotypical person. Don't judge. Be patient. Don't pity us. There are things we excel at too. Just have the patience to find our strengths."

Positives about difference

"The hyper focus has enabled me to excel at language learning as a child. I also am quick to take action (though I am not as cautious). My friends say they appreciate my creativity and energy level. "

Identifies as ADHD

What I want you to know

"As a highly sensitive person, there are certain sounds and scents that may be nothing to many people but mental torture for us. They greatly affect our performance at work. As for being aphantasic, I can't picture the scenery and people's faces, not even my own. I thought it was normal, but I've learned that I can only recognize people by their 'vibe,' not their faces. When I try to imagine someone's face, all I see is a fuzzy outline of it. That being said, it is very helpful when people can provide instructions using precise words."

Positives about difference

"As a highly sensitive person, I can identify people by their scents and voices. I can also sense people's moods easily because I literally feel them. I am very good at remembering people's names (but not their faces). My students are usually impressed by this ability"

Identifies as APH, HSP

What I want you to know

"Give us a decompression corner and permission to stim. We are trying our best, we're not lazy, just overwhelmed. Sometimes not looking at you or drawing is our way of focusing."

Positives about difference

"I love having niche interests and connecting with other ND folks over them. I love skipping over small talk and getting to real talk. I love being able to offer a different take from what people expect, and I enjoy being able to hyperfocus - but only wish I could activate that ability on purpose!"

Identifies as ADHD, DYSP, HEAR, RSD

What I want you to know

"Brains are remarkable in how they are able to work around challenges and get stuff done. Don't judge people on how they get stuff done but on the end results. There are always many roads to a destination. "

Positives about difference

"It has provided me with insight and the ability to think outside the box with learners and question my assumptions. This let's me adapt as a teacher to the learners and not always force my way on them."

Identifies as ADHD, DYSL

What I want you to know

"I have diagnosed ADHD, so I often struggle with processing speed and working memory. It is frustrating, yet it seems to bring elements of what I love about myself. Being diagnosed has definitely allowed me to be kinder and more understanding of myself. In spontaneous situations, I (sometimes/often) struggle to grab the right words, and my thoughts take longer to articulate. This (occasionally / sometimes) leads to misinterpretations and my feeling like I am being underestimated, especially in academic settings where quick responses are valued.

I wish my teachers and colleagues understood that me pausing to find the word I want is not indicative of my ability, and if they stick with me, there will usually be a useful takeaway. "

Positives about difference

That said, I value my ability to be flexible. My authentic curiosity not only makes the learning experience more meaningful for me but also encourages me to explore deeper discussions with students. It feels like a stimulating adventure where we learn from one another.

Collaboration (indirect and direct) is vital for me. It is fun to "hack" myself. For example, I meet online with a colleague for one hour a week. We catch up for 15 minutes, then use "Body Doubling", both online, but quietly working on our own projects - apart but together.

I also hack my hyper-focus for project management. My colleague and I schedule our meetings when I have a block of free time immediately after. It is very productive, because it uses my hyper-focus to drive through the meeting. Then, I get a lot done very quickly in that free time block. Together, we're crafting something special, demonstrating that embracing neurodiversity can lead to creativity and innovation."

Identifies as ADHD



What I want you to know

"I was diagnosed with ADHD last year at age 70. We have several neurodivergent people in our families. I am very much pro disability rights.."

Positives about difference

"My wife has a couple of students who struggle to keep up and other teachers are insensitive, encouraging her to discipline them. My wife cannot and will not do that."

Identifies as ADHD

What I want you to know

"Lots of institutions provide educators with professional development workshops on 'learning disabilities'. Sadly, the majority of these sessions are nothing more than the passive transfer of basic information on neurodivergent conditions. Teachers MUST establish a neurodiversity-affirming learning environment for ALL students ... they need access to practical resources (e.g., Basic Inclusive Principles and Practices for Inclusive English Language Teaching chart) and hands-on training (e.g., how can I incorporate features from the UDL framework into my lessons?). Schools must adopt a more INCLUSIVE APPROACH and NOT isolate neurodivergent learners into separate classrooms with teachers who have almost no 'special needs' training. "

Positives about difference

"My son's condition (i.e., ASD) lets him view the world around him from a unique vantage point ... He is creative and enjoys drawing ... He has an encyclopedic knowledge about certain anime series ... When he was a small boy, I was a little concerned because he did not seem 'normal' ... something appeared to be 'off' ... the only thing that was 'off' was my misconstrued perception of neurotypical vs. neurodiverse continuum. I feel blessed whenever we spend time in nature because my son will point out things that I would never see (e.g., unusual rock formations, insects, etc.)."

Family members identify as Au, ADHD, DYSL, DYSP, HSP, INT

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