BOSTON GROUP

CULTIVATE KNOWLEDGE. TRANSFORM LIVES.

EMBRACING NEURODIVERSITY:

Unlocking The Potential of Every Mind

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Why Embrace Neurodiversity?

The landscape of education is constantly changing, and with that, so is the makeup of our classrooms. Classrooms today celebrate a wide range of diversity, including race, ethnicity, language, religion, economics, sexual orientation, and gender identity. But one form of diversity that is often forgotten is neurological diversity. As teachers, we've all been there. We attend another Professional Development workshop, excited to learn new strategies and tools to help our diverse group of students. But when we return to the classroom, we find ourselves without any concrete action plan.
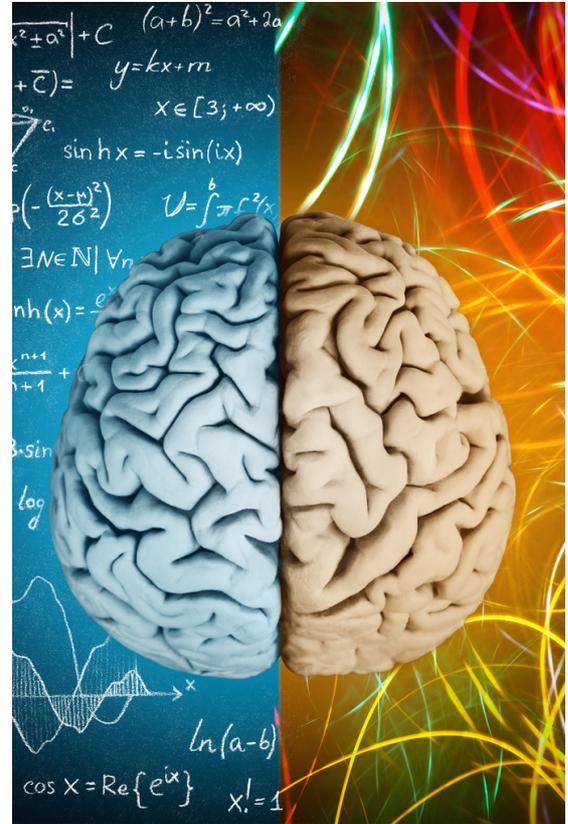
Learning differences and attention issues are rising, affecting one in five children in the United States. Of that group, only a small percentage receive specialized instruction or accommodations, leaving millions of children with unidentified learning and attention issues in our classrooms every day. Advances in neuroscience have shown us that no two brains are wired the same, so why should classroom curriculum and instruction be the same for all students?

We're not suggesting that the curriculum needs to be individually tailored for each student. Standard targets and outcomes should remain the same, but the path to achieving them may look different for each student. Whether a student has a diagnosed learning difference or not, we all learn differently. And using good teaching strategies for all learners is simply good teaching.

It's like being a master chef and giving every student the same ingredients but allowing them to create something unique with it. One student might make a pizza while another makes a soup, but in the end, they will both have created a delicious meal. It's the same with providing differentiated tools and strategies to all students - they will all achieve the same end result, but their journey will be unique to them.

As we become more aware of neurodiversity, it's our professional and personal obligation to meet the needs of all learners in our classrooms. Teaching is a calling, and we have all devoted our lives to supporting children in their individual journeys of learning and growth. But where do we start?

Ongoing professional development is crucial and must focus on the real-life challenges faced by educators in their classrooms. Teachers work tirelessly to do their best, but they often express a need for support in serving all students in their care.

In the following pages, we'll share some of the resources, tips, and tools that we've discovered over the years to help us create learning environments where all learners can thrive. We've got your back, teachers. Keep up the good work!

Resources, Tips, & Tools

With the resources available, it is not just possible but essential to hack your life and help your students hack theirs. These resources are not just for your neurodiverse student population, but are invaluable for all students, and for you too! Don't hesitate, to take the initiative and move one small step forward in creating a supportive learning environment where everyone has the opportunity to succeed!

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

If you aren't on Twitter stop what you are doing right now! Make an account and follow these people. Then, follow who they follow! Twitter is hands down, the best free professional development out there.

- **@UnderstoodOrg**
- **@KatieNovakUDL**
- **@MadeByDyslexia**
- **@ADDitudeMag**
- **@anafabrega11**
- **@HowtoADHD**

Podcasts are another great way to fill your toolkit on the go. Here are some of our favorites to add to your list.

- **Huberman Lab**
- **Cult of Pedagogy**
- **The Balance, By Dr. Caitlin Tucker**
- **The Creative Classroom with John Spencer**
- **MindShift Podcast**
- **UDL In 15 Minutes**

The following book recommendations have the power to change your life! No, really... get ready to see education in a whole new way. All are available in an audio version as well!

- **Late Bloomers: The Power of Patience in a World Obsessed with Early Achievement**
- **The Power of Different: The Link Between Disorder and Genius**
- **ADHD 2.0: New Science and Essential Strategies for Thriving with Distraction--from Childhood through Adulthood**
- **Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones**
- **Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body**
- **The End of Average: How We Succeed in a World That Values Sameness**

READING SUPPORTS

Speechify is the #1 text-to-speech reader. It allows you to power through documents, articles, PDFs, email - anything you read - by listening.

Choose books that have audio versions available. This will allow students the opportunity to read with both their eyes and ears, which can improve comprehension, fluency, and confidence.

- **Libby** - Borrow ebooks, audiobooks, magazines, and more from your local library.
- **Sora** - Set up an account for your school and access hundreds of free audiobooks for your students.
- **Learning Ally Audiobook Solution** is designed for students who have a demonstrated learning disability, visual impairment, or physical disability that makes it difficult to read using traditional print. Learning Ally provides an online library of 80,000 accessible audio textbooks and literature titles.
- **Audible** is an online audiobook and podcast service that allows users to purchase and stream audiobooks and other forms of spoken word content.

Use Text Sets for developing higher-order comprehension and vocabulary gradually. A Text Set is a collection of sources that support a common theme, issue, or topic. Text Sets should include a variety of genres, text types, levels, and formats.

WRITING SUPPORTS

Allow students to use dictation and voice typing features on their devices, and create a learning environment that enables them to do so. The editing process will happen organically once their ideas are down on paper.

Consider adding a visual thesaurus to your available resources. These use images and diagrams to help more visual learners see the connections between words and can also improve word choice.

Hemingway Editor/Desktop App is a distraction-free writing and editing tool designed to help you polish your writing. It focuses on identifying common errors that bring down the quality of your prose: confusing sentence construction, overuse of weak adverbs, excessive passive voice, and the like.

QuillBot is an AI-powered paraphrasing tool that will enhance your writing. With just the click of a button, the paraphrasing tool will rephrase your sentence, paragraph, essay, or article to your liking, with many options available to customize and perfect the reworded text. This resource can be used as a tool to help your students stretch their skills in writing.

Grammarly is a cloud-based typing assistant that reviews spelling, grammar, punctuation, clarity, engagement, and delivery mistakes in English language text. It also detects plagiarism. It can be used as a powerful teaching tool as it shares weekly report cards and lessons for areas of your writing that can be improved. Pair this with a weekly reflection and students can set goals for their writing skill development for the upcoming week.

LISTENING AND COMMUNICATION SUPPORTS

Use Live Captioning so that students are able to read what you are speaking during your lecture in real time, providing an additional access point to the content rather than just listening to you.

- When using a Google Slides presentation, simply press Command-Shift-C to turn on live captioning. Enable the microphone in order for your spoken lecture to be captured on the slide.
- This live captioning feature is also available on Zoom or Microsoft Teams for online learning.
- Remember to always turn on closed captions when showing a video if the function is available.

Use Cueing as a Technique

- Nonverbal cues, such as hand gestures and body language provide physical prompts to help students attend to and understand new concepts. The use of physical objects, such as models can also help students visualize concepts.
- Offset unnecessary pressure by letting individual students know you will only call on them when standing directly in front of them, or they can use a physical object such as a post-it note in the corner of their desk to let you know they want to answer or have a question.

[Kaizena](#) - With this tool, you will be able to review student work faster than typing with voice comments. You can also embed explanation videos and much more. This allows for more efficient use of your time, and for students to receive feedback in preferred modalities for their individual learning needs.

ATTENTION SUPPORTS

Research tells us that attention is not something we can turn on and off with the click of a button. We have to "warm up to focus".

- Use white, brown, or pink noise prior to a lesson, or play music from a Focus Playlist during independent work time. Apps such as Spotify have countless Focus and Attention Playlists.
- Use Overt Visual Focus Exercises and increase the time as students become more proficient. Here is how: Pick a point or object in the room and have students deliberately set their attention to it. Start at 30 seconds. If you lose focus, not a problem, come back to the point. This act of retraining focus can be done at the beginning of class each day and slowly add 5 seconds a day.

Teach Students How To Use a Distraction Catcher when Reading

- Put a large post-it note on the first page of your book.
- Set a timer for the duration of time you would like to read (ie 25 minutes).
- Should your mind wander, write down any distractions, ideas, or tasks that pop up on the post-it note.
- Get back to reading until your time is up.
- Now, you can review the list and act on it.

Otter.ai uses artificial intelligence to empower users with real-time transcription of meeting notes that are shareable, searchable, accessible, and secure. Otter turns your voice conversations into smart notes that you can easily search for and share. You can use it to take notes, capture your thoughts and ideas while you're driving in the car, and transcribe your existing recordings and podcasts. It is also a wonderful tool for students to use when organizing group projects and keeping track of their progress.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SUPPORTS

Batch Tasks

- Help students determine the optimal times of day for the types of work they are trying to accomplish and the level of attention they can devote throughout the peaks and valleys of the day.
- Suggest getting that gnawing thing out of the way first, when they have high energy and high focus. We like to call it "Eating the Frog".

Schedule "Are You On Track Days"

- Take a day, or a portion of a day, to revisit goals that were set and determine what needs to be adjusted.

Brili is a visual timer for children with ADHD (really everyone!) and their parents. It is an app that helps families with children stay on task and on time every day. Easy setup, guidance, rewards, voice prompts, and real-time monitoring: it's got it all and it's fun to use!

WELLNESS SUPPORTS

Journaling

- Help students develop their reflective capacity. Journaling encourages students to set goals, reflect on their progress and adjust plans accordingly.
- It also supports the development of emotional regulation (ie write it down, think about it, act on it).

Meditation

- The **Healthy Minds App** trains your mind to be more focused, calm, and resilient with easy-to-complete lessons and guided meditations that only take minutes a day.

Window Swap is a temporary escape. Open a new (literal) window somewhere in the world. Look through windows of beautiful landscapes shared by real people, and share yours to become a part of this global community.

Uh Oh!

You just read through this entire list of resources, tools, and tips - and you're already feeling a bummer because you've reached the end! Don't worry friend, because this is just the beginning....

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR TRAINING
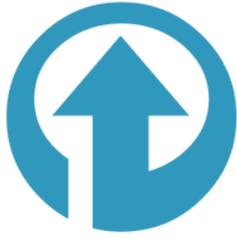
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TAKE THE NEXT STEP

If you want to take your understanding and support of neurodiverse students to the next level, then you need to check out our Embracing Neurodiversity Workshop! Discover how to better recognize the unique needs of your students and learn the many supportive tools we've adapted and developed. To catch the rest of our tricks and treasures, you'll have to come to us live - either at one of our conferences or by bringing us on-site to a school near you!

In addition to our workshops, The Boston Group provides services including customized professional development, program refinement, and support in finding your best fit educational environment.

Get in touch with us at **www.bgdifference.com** and we'll make sure you have the juice to take your teaching game to the next level! We would love to hear from you and support your goals in any way we can!

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