



## **Neurodiversity in the Classroom**

### **EDUO 9406 One Unit, 15 hours**

Instructor – Ryan Pickett

Welcome to **EDUO 9406 Neurodiversity in the Classroom**. This class was created as part of a six course series entitled **Strength-Based Teaching and Learning**. The other five courses in the series are:

- **EDUO 9407 The Talents of the Learning Disabled**
- **EDUO 9408 The Joys of ADHD**
- **EDUO 9409 The Gifts of Autism**
- **EDUO 9410 The Strengths of Intellectually Disabled Students**
- **EDUO 9411 The Bright sides of Emotional and Behavior Disorders**

Just as we celebrate diversity in nature and cultures, so too do we need to honor the diversity of students who learn, think, and behave differently. This series is designed to help teachers and schools embrace the strengths of such neurodiverse students in order to help them thrive in school and beyond. The content learned in the class, **Neurodiversity in the Classroom**, will afford you the knowledge necessary to create strength-based classrooms and schools where students with disabilities flourish alongside their typically developing peers. By meeting the requirements of this class, participating teachers will earn one semester unit of graduate level extension credit from Dominican University of California, a fully accredited university.

Although **Neurodiversity in the classroom** is **NOT** a prerequisite for the other five courses, it does provide a foundation for them. All six classes in the **Strength-Based Teaching and Learning** series require one book entitled **Neurodiversity in the Classroom: Strength-Based Strategies to Help Students with Special Needs Succeed in School and Life** by Thomas Armstrong. This book is available for purchase at [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com).

## Course Objectives

After completing the course Neurodiversity in the classroom, you will demonstrate or indicate:

1. Knowledge of the concepts neurodiversity and positive niche construction.
2. Awareness of your current approach to neurodiverse students in your classroom.
3. Awareness of your school's current approach to neurodiverse students in your school.
4. How to create Strength-Based classrooms and schools.

## Grading Rubric

Exemplary: A+ to A-	Acceptable: B+ to B-	Unacceptable:
Reflective, thoughtful ideas relevant to the assignment are clearly stated	Presents some relevant ideas and connections to the assignment	Ideas are not clear or relevant
Very well organized	Generally well organized	Shows little or no organization
Responses relate numerous facts and specific details of the program materials	Some facts and specific details of the program materials are included	Few or no facts or specific details of the program materials are included
Free of spelling and/or grammatical errors	Writing contains a few spelling and/or grammatical errors	Numerous spelling and/or grammatical errors make the writing difficult to read

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

After reading the Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 7 of the book, Neurodiversity in the Classroom: Strength-Based Strategies to Help Students with Special Needs Succeed in School and Life complete assignments 1-5. Place each assignment 1-5 on a separate page, clearly labeled with assignment number and name.

### 1. Interviews

Interview a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and an administrator at your school regarding your school's special education policies and procedures as well as how these students are supported. You may talk in generalities or about specific students you have in common. After each interview, try to count the number of positive and negative statements made by either you or your colleague regarding the subject.

- What does this experience tell you about you and your colleagues' implicit attitude about the special needs students at your school?
- In your conversations, did you focus on their deficits or their strengths?
- Why do you believe you and your colleagues had such a focus?

## 2. Political Action

Review the federal special education eligibility criteria. Most school districts generally list a parent friendly version of this on the district website. If you are unable to locate this, either ask a special education teacher at your school or review the following website from a district in California: <http://www.srvusd.net/eligibility>. You should now have interviewed colleagues about special education at your school, reviewed the special education eligibility criteria, and read about neurodiversity as well as strength-based schools in your textbook. Based on this information, write a letter to your local congressman asking for changes in special education laws that reflect concepts of neurodiversity and positive niche construction. In your letter, explain how and why current laws counter the ideas of strength-based teaching. Furthermore, utilize what you have learned about neurodiversity and strength-based schools to provide your own thoughts as to how these laws could change to support the concept of neurodiversity.

## 3. Positive Niche Construction Comparison

Chapter 1 of your textbook outlines seven elements of positive niche construction. In Chapter 7, you read how William H. Henderson Inclusion Elementary School became a strength-based school through positive niche construction. Compare your school with William H. Henderson Inclusion Elementary with respect to all seven components of positive niche construction (Strength Awareness, Positive Role Models, Assistive Technologies/UDL, Enhanced Human Resources, Strength-Based Learning Strategies, Affirmative Career Aspirations, and Environmental Modifications). In your comparison of each component, discuss what your school is doing right and what it needs to work on.

## 4. Common Core State Standards

While implementing the new standards, we cannot forget the challenge that our neurodiverse students may have achieving success. Chapter 1 of your text references Universal Design for Learning and The Center for Applied Special Technology as a resource for helping our neurodiverse students achieve success on the Common Core State Standards. Study each of the aforementioned organizations websites, <http://www.udlcenter.org> and <http://www.cast.org>. After studying these websites, explain how utilizing the strategies and information provided could help you create a strength-based classroom in which your neurodiverse students are successful in meeting the new standards. In your explanation, be sure to reference at least four of the components of positive niche construction.

## 5. Board Presentation

After taking this course and making the necessary changes to your classroom, your principal notices how successful your students have become. Your principal especially notices the improvements your neurodiverse students have made. He or She is so impressed that he asks you to do a twenty-minute presentation at the next school board meeting. Your presentation to the board must indicate how you achieved success by creating a strength-based classroom. Be sure to include details on how you embraced the concepts of neurodiversity and positive niche construction and how it is helping your neurodiverse students with the new standards.

## **Submit Coursework**

Course assignments must be placed in the appropriate **Assignments Drop Box** found in the course.