



Accepting Different Neurotypes in the Classroom

By Eric Garcia



The role of educators

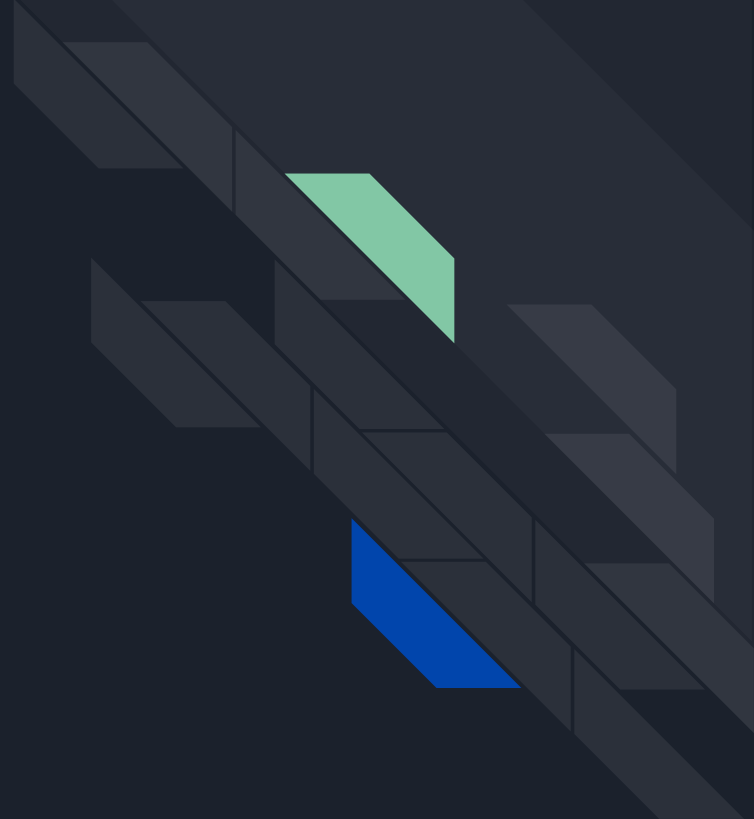
- Educators can often be the first group of people to detect when a student acts and learns differently from their peers.
- Oftentimes, particularly when homes don't have an understanding about disability, they can be a guidepost
- In the 1990s, after autism was included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, educators were often responsible for reporting statistics about autism to the federal government to give us a fuller picture of autism



The role of school: Side 2

- At the same time, educators can also pose risks to their students
- Educators can sometimes see autistic kids as problem children or not see their needs as legitimate
- They can often mislabel autistic kids, particularly children of color, as having behavior disorders
- But other educators have the capacity to end these practices as they are on the frontline

So how do we best assist autistic people?





Who I am and what I've learned

- First of all, I'm autistic and I grew up autistic at a unique time during our public understanding of the condition
- But my experience as an autistic person wasn't enough. I spent the last eight years as a journalist covering politics in Washington.
- I traveled across the country to try and understand how our misunderstandings about autism have led to bad policy outcomes for autistic people.



What I've learned

- What I've found is that oftentimes, the biggest challenges for autistic people in education come not from being autistic
- This is not to diminish the disability and yes—autism is a disability
- Rather, oftentimes, the biggest challenges come when neurotypical society attempts to change autistic people



Accommodations

- Accommodations are often the biggest challenge in this
- Oftentimes, whether in K-12 or college, autistic kids and their parents feel isolated
- As my friend David Perry said “we dehumanized our in the paperwork but got support”
- Similarly, the problem with getting supports is they often put the onus on the people with disability



Neurodiversity

- Neurodiversity, which goes back to old online forums, and some argue back to activist Jim Sinclair. But put simply, it argues that autism and other disabilities, like dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, and so on, are normal variations in the human population and do not require a cure but rather accommodation and acceptance.



What about a better world?

- What if instead of seeing disability as a problem to be solve, we examine how the ways education excludes autistic people?
- What if instead of working from a deficit model, we have a skills-based model?
- How do we include people with disabilities in this?
- What if our understanding of autism as something to be avoided shifted to saying that autism is a natural variation of humanity and that we should adjust accordingly?