

# **Webinar Transcript: Leading the Implementation of Neurodiverse Practice in the Classroom and School**

**Presented by: Yvonne Bristow, CYCP, M.P.Ed. & Chris Sands, OCT**

**[SLIDE – WEBINAR: Leading the Implementation of Neurodiverse Practice in the Classroom and School]**

*[Text on slide: NOV. 15<sup>th</sup> 3:45 – 4:45PM ET*

Presented by:

Yvonne Bristow, CYCP, M.P. Ed.

Child and Youth Worker, Sir John A. MacDonald CI, Toronto District School Board

Chris Sands, OCT

Assistant Curriculum Leader, Special Education, Sir John A. MacDonald CI, Toronto District School Board

Image of twitter and Facebook logos

@LDatSchool

Image of LD@school logo]

[Cindy Perras]: The LD@school team is very pleased to welcome our guest speakers Yvonne Bristow and Chris Sands, whose presentation this afternoon is entitled, "Leading the Implementation of Neurodiverse Practice in the Classroom and School."

**[SLIDE – Funding for the production of this webinar was provided by the Ministry of Education]**

[Image of LD@school logo

*Text on slide:* Please note that the views expressed in this webinar are the views of the presenters and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry of Education or the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.]

[Cindy Perras]: The Ministry of Education provided funding for the production of this webinar. Please note that the views expressed in this webinar are the views of the presenters, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry of Education, nor the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.

**[SLIDE - Don't forget to use our social media hashtag!]**

[Image of twitter bird holding megaphone and twitter bubbles coming out of megaphone

*Text on slide:* @LDatSchool]

[Cindy Perras]: We will also be tweeting throughout the webinar, so if you would like to participate, you can send us a tweet by using our handle @LDatSchool, or the hashtag #LDwebinar.

**[SLIDE – WELCOME]**

[Image of Yvonne Bristow and Chris Sands

*Text on slide:*

Yvonne Bristow, CYCP, M.P. Ed.

Child and Youth Worker, Sir John A. MacDonald CI, TDSB

Chris Sands, OCT

Assistant Curriculum Leader, Special Education, Sir John A. MacDonald CI, TDSB]

[Cindy Perras]: That takes care of housekeeping for this afternoon, so let's get started. It is now my pleasure to introduce our speakers, Yvonne Bristow and Chris Sands. Yvonne has worked as a child and youth care practitioner for seven years in Toronto, and currently works in an autism program within the Toronto District School Board. She completed her CYW diploma, BA, CYC, and Masters in Physical Education in Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice Studies. She has had six articles published for CYC Online, on topics including autism, human diversity, and relational practice. She presented on neurodiversity and relational child and youth care practice at the 2017 Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care Provincial Conference.

Chris is a teacher and the assistant curriculum leader of special education at a secondary school in the Toronto District School Board. He is the current vice-president of the Ontario Subdivision of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders. Chris has taught in Nunavut and in priority neighborhoods and intensive support programs across Toronto, including students who live with dual developmental and psychiatric diagnoses, learning disabilities, mild intellectual disability, autism, and students in custody and detention. Chris's passion for supporting marginalized young people has led him to volunteer and work for organizations like Pathways to Education, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, and as a respite worker for two children with complex disabilities. Welcome, Yvonne and Chris. The cyber floor is now yours.

**[SLIDE – Leading the Implementation of Neurodiverse Practice in the Classroom and School]**

*[Text on slide:*

Yvonne Bristow @YCtheCYC & Chris Sands @CCSands14]

[Yvonne Bristow]: Thank you for the introduction, Cindy. Once again, my name is Yvonne Bristow, and I'm a child relief worker at a high school at the Toronto District School Board.

[Chris Sands]: Hello, everyone. My name is Chris Sands. I'm the assistant curriculum leader of special education at the same high school as Yvonne in the Toronto District School Board. We want to give you some background on us so you know where we're coming from during our webinar. Yvonne and I work in a mainstream secondary school where each student is taking credit-bearing courses and working towards the achievement of their Ontario secondary school diploma. Students in our school may have a learning disability or mild intellectual disability, or are autistic, or may have no identified exceptionality. We also have an autism program, which Yvonne is part of.

As we talk during our webinar about education, and what is called special education in particular, please know that we both believe in the power of these programs to do amazing things for young people. If we challenge your thinking or make you uncomfortable, please know that it is coming from a place of caring for our students. We wanted to do this webinar because we understand that brains are different, and we have been working to make our practice and our department a place where those brain differences are a strength, where brain differences help students, not hold them back.



### [SLIDE – Goals]

[Text on slide:

- Start thinking differently about disability
- Use universal design for learning and differentiated instruction to support neurodiversity]

[Yvonne Bristow]: So, thank you very much for joining us today for a webinar on, "Leading the Implementation of Neurodiverse Practice in the Classroom and School." Our goals today are to start thinking differently about disability, and to use universal design for learning and differentiated instruction to support neurodiversity.

### [SLIDE – Topics]

[Text on slide:

- What is Neurodiversity?
- Learning Disabilities & Neurodiversity Practice
- How to Implement a Neurodiverse Practice
- Recommendations for Further Learning]

[Chris Sands]: The topics we'll run through today are to give you a brief overview of what neurodiversity means. It may be a new, strange word for many of you, as it was for me just last year. We'll talk about how a neurodiverse practice makes sense for students with learning disabilities. We'll share some strategies to help you implement a neurodiverse practice starting tomorrow and into next year. And make some recommendations for how you can learn more about neurodiversity.

### [SLIDE – Language]

[Text on slide: "Neuro"]

[Yvonne Bristow]: So, the term "neuro" refers to the central nervous system, as today we are going to be talking about the brain, and the different types of brains we have. The key point of our presentation, the foundation of all that we're going to be talking about, is that brains are different, and that respecting those differences can change our practice.

### [SLIDE – Language]

[Text on slide:

**Neurodiversity**- The diversity and variations of cognitive functioning in all human brains and minds.

**Neurodivergent** - someone who identifies with a neurological difference (Including Learning Disabilities, ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia & Mental Health Concerns)

**Neurotypical** - someone who does not identify with a neurological difference.]

[Yvonne Bristow]: Chris and I want to start off by explaining how we don't identify as neurodivergent ourselves and aren't speaking for these groups. Rather, we are speaking as allies and educators who believe that neurodivergent individuals are a valuable part of society. The terms you're going to hear us using today include neurodiversity, which is the diversity and variation of neurocognitive functioning in all human brains and minds. Neurodivergent, who is someone who identifies with a neurological difference. That can include learning disabilities, ADHD, autism, dyslexia, and mental health concerns. And neurotypical, who is someone who does not identify with a neurological difference.

**[SLIDE – POLL]**

*[Text on slide:*

Poll: Do students learn or talk about their disability or neurodivergence in your class?]

[Chris Sands]: Could we please launch the first poll question? We have a question for you to get our minds on the topic of disability. We are wondering, in your class or school, do students learn and talk about their disability or neurodivergence? So please take a minute and answer this question.

Okay, I guess we'll close the poll now. Hopefully that was enough time for everyone. Thank you. Great. Thanks for your responses, and thanks for your honesty, too. Whatever your answer, we want you to keep this question and your answer in your mind during our presentation. How do we talk about disability in class and in school? Is there pride and advocacy around disability, or is it something we try to hide? And how do those feelings affect how we influence our students and the stories we tell about disability? Can we go to the next slide, please?

**[SLIDE – Language]**

*[Text on slide: Language shows respect and has an impact on our practice.]*

[Yvonne Bristow]: The reason we started with language, and the reason we're going to continue to come back to language, is because it definitely has an impact on our practice. By challenging language, we challenge beliefs. And by challenging beliefs, we challenge behavior and practice. We should also ask individual students on their preferred language when talking with them, as language can differ from one person to the next. But by choosing language that is appropriate for the person, we can help remove stigma towards differences.

**[SLIDE – Neurodiversity]**

*[Text on slide:*

- Biological
- Political
- Social]

[Yvonne Bristow]: So when we talk about neurodiversity, it can be broken down into three core categories, by biological, political, and social aspects of neurodiversity.

**[SLIDE – Biological]**

*[Text on slide: The variation in DNA that affects the physical development of the brain]*

[Yvonne Bristow]: When we examine the biological aspects of neurodiversity, we are talking about the makeup of DNA, or the physical development of a person's brain that makes them who they are. Through science and research, we have come to understand that there's a lot of diversity within our brains, and that having different brains means people have different ways of learning, communicating, and being.

**[SLIDE – Political]**

*[Text on slide:*

- Empowering individuality
- Emphasizing differences from dominant society]

[Yvonne Bristow]: The political aspect of neurodiversity is valuable to discuss, as it relates to the neurodiversity movement. The term neurodiversity was coined by autistic self-advocate Judy Singer in 1996, and has since become a political movement by many neurodivergent self-advocates who are speaking up about the ways they feel oppressed as a minority group, while emphasizing the differences from dominant society and how society can better support the needs of neurodiverse individuals. The term neurodiversity means that differences in neurology should be recognized and respected as a social category, similar to how we look at ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or race.

**[SLIDE – Social]**

[Text on slide:

A philosophy of teaching and relating.

Valuing and using preferred method of:

- Communication
- Learning
- Relating

Strength-based action]

[Yvonne Bristow]: Social aspects of neurodiversity include how we respect differences in the way we teach, in the daily life events of others, and within our relationships. It's all about valuing and using the preferred method of communication, learning, and relating for each of our students. It's when we operate from a strength-based perspective, where we're creating equitable opportunities for neurodivergent people to feel successful and valued.

**[SLIDE – Social]**

[Text on slide: Every human being has skills and talents as well as needs.

- Identify the strengths of our students who are neurodivergent and not just their needs]

[Yvonne Bristow]: Every human being has skills and talents as well as needs. It is critically important for us to not just identify the needs of students, but also to identify the strengths of our students who are neurodivergent, and not just focus on their needs, or what we perceive their needs to be.

**[SLIDE – Language]**

[Text on slide: The problem is not that people have different ways of thinking

- Dominant society erects barriers
- Dominant society decides what is “good”]

[Yvonne Bristow]: The problem is not that people have different ways of thinking, but rather that society constructs differences negatively. Dominant society erects barriers towards those who learn, communicate, or express themselves different. Society also decides what is good or desirable. But strengths and skills can be so diverse and expressed in so many different ways. So as educators, we need to unpack the ideas and assumptions we have on these differences.

### **[SLIDE – Learning Disabilities & Neurodiversity]**

[Image of the Ontario Ministry of Education's Policy/Program Memorandum No. 8.

*Text on slide:*

- Average or above average thinking and reasoning skills
- Difficulty with processes of learning

One type of brain is not privileged over another.]

[Chris Sands]: We know through learning disability science that because brains are different, we learn and communicate in different ways. The Ministry of Education's policy and program memorandum number 8, pictured in the top right corner here, tells us that students with learning disabilities must have average or above-average thinking and reasoning skills, with difficulty in one or more of the processes of learning, like memory, or language, or executive function. This sets the stage for us understanding that brains are different and don't need fixing. And that is the foundation of our presentation today, that by valuing the brains of our students, how they communicate, how they learn, how they build relationships, we can better help those students learn and show what they know. We can better help them reach their potential and their goals.

### **[SLIDE – Why UDL and DI and Neurodiversity?]**

*[Text on slide:*

Universal Design for Learning:

- “Learning opportunities that extend learning of all students” (Learning for All, p. 14)
- Space, activities, resources build on strengths, meet needs of ALL students

Differentiated Instruction

- Different types of activities to teach and assess curriculum

Neurodiversity

- Instead of “remediating weaknesses” → “build on strengths to overcome challenges” (Armstrong, 2017)]

[Chris Sands]: Universal design for learning, UDL, differentiated instruction, DI, and neurodiversity are natural partners. They all expect that we start with students' strengths when we plan learning and assessment activities. If we plan by thinking about what students are good at, we can design activities that enable them to show what they know. UDL, DI, and Neurodiversity insist that we hold high expectations for students. They all insist that students can be successful, that we need to challenge our ways of teaching and assessing in order to access those strengths. My colleague, [inaudible] says that when we think about accommodations, we need to move “beyond extra time.” Giving students double time on a test can be helpful for many, but it also has the effect of saying, this test is the best and only way to assess your knowledge. Changing it at all would damage the integrity of the curriculum, and therefore, the most we can do is to give you some more time to write this perfect test. Neurodiversity gives us a new way of looking at disabilities and accommodations. As the scholar Thomas Armstrong says, instead of considering ways to “fix weakness,” we should focus on the strength of the student to help them overcome challenges.

**[SLIDE – Universal Design & Differentiated Instruction]**

[Text on slide: Courageous Conversations → Neurodiversity & UDL

- My usual lesson ≠ curriculum
- How do WE need to change?
- “If only they didn’t have a disability, they would do well on this assignment”
- How does this activity show a student’s strengths? How is it responsive to their needs?]

[Chris Sands]: Whenever we work for change, it is necessary to push ourselves and others outside of our comfort zones, and that will require having some courageous conversations. The best way of getting at differentiated instruction, I think, is to realize that your preferred teaching activity is not the curriculum. It is the way that you have chosen to have students learn and show what they know. Curricular expectations are much more broad. If we understand that the curriculum lays out expectations for broad understandings, then we must accept that there are different ways for students to learn and show what they know. And that acceptance will manifest itself as differentiated instruction. Instead of designing a lesson and then trying to figure out what you will remove for the students with an LD, how can we create activities where all students will participate in the same or similar ways?

The director of the Toronto District School Board says that when it comes to matters of equity, and disabilities is an equity issue, our work needs to be focused on staff. Educators spend a lot of time talking about what we will do to and for students. But we need to start looking at the work that needs to be done to and for staff. So, instead of lamenting that students with IEPs don't have the skills to be successful in your class, let's think about what strengths that they do have that can't typically come out in some courses. And how can we change our own practice so that those do come out? And no, we're not saying that students don't have to improve themselves or take responsibility. But we, as educators, have work to do so that students can show their strengths.

**[SLIDE – For Example...]**

[Table on slide:

<b>Typical Practice</b>	<b>Neurodiverse Practice</b>	<b>Universal Design/Differentiated Instruction</b>
“I know they have a disability so I won’t make them...”	How an individual communicates or relates ≠ Skills or potential	Sentence starters, outlines, breaking assignment in to pieces, exemplars, role-modeling, visuals, explain expectations, supportive peers, graphic organizers, success criteria, larger font...

[Chris Sands]: We're going to talk about how we can shift our own and others' thinking from the typical practice that we see in schools to a more neurodiverse practice or belief, and how that plays out in universal design for learning or differentiated instruction. So we, and you probably too, see many educators who have their heart in the right place, but do things that end up limiting the progress of the student. We assume that because a person is neurodivergent, then necessarily they

are unable to perform at the level of their peers. So we might hear things like, "Well, I know they have a learning disability, so I won't make them write the essay." Or, "I know they have problems, so I just gave them [inaudible]." But with differentiated instruction, many students can be successful in the mainstream class with mainstream assignments.

Differentiated instruction and neurodiversity is not looking for pity, it's looking for effective strategies. We are not erasing the students' disability, or saying that students don't have needs, but recognizing that different teaching strategies can help students. For example, it's true that people with learning disabilities may have trouble writing, because there's so many processes and skills involved in writing that a student could potentially have difficulty with. But with sentence starters and an outline, more of our students will be successful.

**[SLIDE – For Example...]**

[Table on slide:

Typical Practice	Neurodiverse Practice	Universal Design/Differentiated Instruction
"They have an IEP so we put them in the special education / applied class"	These students communicate and behave differently. How can we find out what they know?	Learning centres, inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning...  Will a special education program build skills that the mainstream class can not? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life skills?</li> <li>• Literacy/numeracy skills?</li> </ul>

[Chris Sands]: When we look at what classes we place students into, what are we finding out about a student before we decide their placement? What assumptions do we make before pushing students into significant decisions that will have a lasting impact on the future? A neurodiverse practice would recognize that students do, of course, have needs, but they also have strengths. So we might say to ourselves or a colleague, these strategies have helped the students show what they know. Or we might realize that even after using several different strategies, the student still needs more support. But we are making a decision based on evidence, not on assumptions stemming from how they are different from us.

Assumption is a word that will keep coming up. A neurodiverse practice means that decisions are based on lots of evidence, including feedback and relationships with the student. Decisions are not made based on assumptions that spring from the name of a diagnosis like learning disability or autism.

**[SLIDE – Ableism]**

[Image of a book *Strength Lies in Differences, Not in Similarities* by Stephen R. Covey.

Text on slide:

- Making negative judgements about people based on their *perceived* ability.]

[Yvonne Bristow]: Any discussion of equity has to include bias. So, just as we discussed racism, homophobia, and sexism, we need to address ableism. Ableism is making negative judgments about a person based on their perceived ability. So we should ask ourselves, what do you assume about LDs, disabilities, autism? Is this based on what we've heard, experienced, or read? How can we choose to view our students based on who they actually are, and our actual experiences with them?

**[SLIDE – Ableism]**

[Image from the Dear Everybody campaign with the words *Dear Everybody, Talking to someone with a disability like they're a baby is rude unless they're a baby.*

*Text on slide:*

- Treating students as if they are younger than their chronological age]

[Yvonne Bristow]: An example of ableism we mainly see in education is treating students as if they're younger than their chronological age. So that could include looking at a 16-year-old who uses a tone and cadence that, to us, sounds more similar to a younger child, and then treating them as if they are, in fact, a younger child. This could include talking to them as if they can't make decisions for themselves, or that you can make better decisions for them than they can ever do for themselves. This could also include educators who don't try to encourage self-advocacy skills in neurodivergent youth, because they think these students can never efficiently advocate for themselves. In this example of ableism, educators would have lower expectations for neurodivergent youth compared to neurotypical youth based on what we think they can comprehend or understand, rather than working together with them to understand what their goals and skills are.

**[SLIDE – Ableism]**

*[Text on slide:*

- Restricting non-conventional behaviours]

[Yvonne Bristow]: We can also see ableism when we restrict non-conventional behaviors that are non-threatening. This can include restricting students who may self-stimulate by flapping their hands, rocking their bodies, or those who are in need of movement breaks. Those behaviors aren't harmful to the person or others, and shouldn't be punished. One of the core findings regarding self-stimulating, or stimming, behaviors is that these traits could actually help young people self-regulate and feel calm. So why do we think to restrict this type of behavior if it serves a positive function? Often, these movements or behaviors may make others feel uncomfortable because they look different. But it's important for us to encourage genuine expressions, especially if they can help our students to focus and feel calm.

**[SLIDE – Ableism]**

[Image of a radial cluster with the word *Charity Model* in the centre with six spokes with text connected to the centre: Feeling sorry/sad; "Always need help"; "Must be inspirational"; "Disability is a problem"; "Disabilities are tragic"; Seeing 'impairments'.]

[Yvonne Bristow]: It's also important to discuss the sympathy or charity model as it relates to ableism, as this is a model where people are viewed as tragic victims of their impairments, and where others are distracted by their negative assumptions of disability. Someone may intentionally

or unintentionally express how they feel sorry for someone with a disability, because they think that person will never have a life that is fulfilling, and that they will always need help. This may happen when someone can't relate to another's disability, or they don't try to understand that person's lived experience. It may mean talking to that person as if their disability should be blamed for their hardships and challenges in life, which can make that person feel disconnected from their disability. It can also take the direction where people constantly look for inspirations or heroes in the disability community, discussing it as if everything they do is so special and fantastic, even when they do everyday actions. This model can also often be condescending, as it signifies a disability as a problem, or something that stands out in a negative way from that person, instead of seeing that person for their authentic self and asking them how they feel about their disability or neurodivergence.

### [SLIDE – Ableism]

[Text on slide: Labels that influence practice:

- “Academic” or “Weak”
- “High” or “low-functioning”
- “Good kid”
- “Behaviour kid”]

[Yvonne Bristow]: And similarly to the charity model, labels frequently used in the medical model of disability can create harmful misunderstandings about a young person's abilities and skills. Sometimes educators may refer to a student or a group of students as weak, in contrast to students who are considered high-achieving or academic. This also applies to the terms high or low functioning, as all these labels create divisions between students and misrepresent who they actually are.

[Chris Sands]: If I could just jump in here, I think an effective comparison may be made to, like, a car, or some kind of object. For example, if Yvonne told me that she was going on a cross-country road trip, and I offered her a low-performing car for the journey, she would probably picture something like the car pictured here. And no offense if that's anyone car. I ride a bike, so I shouldn't talk. And she would of course decline my offer. Who would accept a "low performing" car? And if she did take the car, maybe she would drive it to the top of her street and back. But she definitely wouldn't have high expectations for it. She wouldn't push it to work at the same level as any other car.

In the same way, if I told Yvonne that she has a new student in her class who is weak, or low-functioning, or low, then why would Yvonne have high expectations for that student? Why would she create programming that challenges the student, that teaches them new skills for success in school and life? Why would she build that student's independence, and offer them challenges within and outside of school? She would not. And this is how language affects our practice. Language reflects, reveals, and reproduces our biases and low expectations.

[Yvonne Bristow]: And the same goes for the labels "good kid" or "behavior kid." What do those labels do for a student's school experience? What does it tell us about what a student can do, and their interests or challenges? Behavior kid almost paints them as a person who's not deserving of support or guidance because they are "too difficult."

**[SLIDE – Dear Everybody]**

[3 Images from the Dear Everybody campaign. The first image has the words *Dear Everybody, Got a question for someone with a disability? Ask them. Not the person with them.* The second image has the words *Dear Everybody, Not everyone with a disability looks like they have a disability.* The third image has the words *Dear Everybody, Sometimes concentrating looks like fidgeting.*

Text on slide: <http://deareverybody.hollandbloorview.ca/>]

[Yvonne Bristow]: Chris and I really want to include posters from the Holland Bloorview "Dear Everybody" campaign, as it speaks powerfully to the message of ending the stigma towards disability. We really encourage all of you to visit their website and to view the letter, as it's been written and created by people who identify with the disability. And it's just an overall fantastic message.

**[SLIDE – For Example...]**

[Table on slide:

Typical Practice	Neurodiverse Practice	Universal Design/Differentiated Instruction
“The student moves around a lot during class. Do they have an IEP?”  “I know the student has a problem because they talk to themselves while they’re working.”	Who is uncomfortable?  Is behaviour helping or hurting achievement & well-being?	Activities where students can move around the room

[Chris Sands]: An important part of having a neurodiverse practice is recognizing and challenging your own discomfort and bias, and the discomfort and bias of others. We might hear, "The student moves around a lot during class. Do they have an IEP?" Or, "I know the student has a problem because they talk to themselves while they're working." But what those messages actually say is that I have a way of communicating and building relationships, so you should have a similar way. So we then assume that this behavior, the behavior of the student, is inappropriate, and as caring adults, we seek to change the behavior. But why? What exactly is the problem if a student with a learning disability takes pictures of the notes, or listens to music during an exam, or paces the class while the teacher talks? A neurodiverse practice challenges their discomfort and assumptions, and then thinks about what activities will best reveal student strengths.

**[SLIDE]**

[Image of a tree diagram with the word ‘beliefs’ that branch out to two strands each in blue and red. The blue strand contains four blue boxes with the words ‘a different community’, ‘high expectations’, ‘opportunities driven by students’, and ‘Universal Design for Learning; Differentiated Instruction’. The red strand contains four red boxes with the words ‘incapable’, ‘minimal expectations’, ‘opportunities driven by assumptions and biases’, and ‘stuck in inferiority inertia’.]

[Chris Sands]: As I become more aware of the science of neurodiversity, I've become more aware about how beliefs about neurodiversity get played out in classrooms, and in schools, and in relationships. I've become more aware that it's not just "political correctness." There are real consequences in the programming and relationships we have with students, based simply from our assumptions about how they communicate or relate to us. If we follow my very creative and artistic diagram, we can see that our beliefs drive our practice.

Looking at the lower path, if you believe that a neurodivergent person is less capable because of how they communicate, or build relationships, or learn, then you will have low expectations. If you believe a person is incapable of thinking and knowing about themselves, then it would be unprofessional to have them identify their own goals, advocate for themselves, and build skills relevant to those goals. So, if we believe someone is low-functioning, we will close opportunities for them. And almost certainly, the opportunities that remain open will be inferior to their age-level peers.

On the other hand, following the upper path, if we believe that a neurodivergent person is simply from a different community, like someone who speaks a different language, then we would maintain the same high expectations we have for any of their peers. And believing that students-- sorry, lost my [inaudible]. We would maintain the same high expectations we have for any of their peers. And believing that students have strengths that will help them learn leads us to try to find those different ways, which leads us to differentiated instruction.

**[SLIDE – For Example...]**

[Table on slide:

Typical Practice	Neurodiverse Practice	Universal Design/Differentiated Instruction
"That's how I know I'm doing my job well. You wouldn't even know they have a disability."	Why should we not know?	Students show their knowledge how they prefer  Students create IEP brochures to advocate for strengths and needs
"Because they have a disability, maybe they can be the timekeeper...maybe for co-op they can fold boxes."	What do you want to do and learn?  How do we get to that goal?	High expectations timetable  Learning activities build skills

[Chris Sands]: Because we don't always believe that disability can make our lives and schooling richer, we try to erase it. That's why we might hear, "I know I'm doing my job well, because you wouldn't even know my students have an LD." Or, "I don't see a person in a wheelchair, I just see a person." But why not see the wheelchair? Why not acknowledge the learning disability? Many people claim their disability as an important part of their identity. But whatever the relationship our students have with their disability, at the start of each year, our students create an IEP brochure in which they identify their strengths, their needs, and things that help them to learn. They present this



brochure to each teacher, not as an excuse, but as the start of a conversation about what helps them to be successful. You can find more information about the IEP brochure on the LD at School website.

Another thing we might see before we value neurodiversity is a belief that we're including disability, but in fact we are not. So the student can be on the sidelines, but not making valuable contributions. Instead, we should be thinking about how disability can be valued. Neurodivergent experiences, ways of knowing, and ways of expression are important, and can make our lives and learning better, just like the experiences of any student from any community. How can these strengths help the students be successful?

**[SLIDE – Neurodiversity in Practice]**

[Table on slide:

Typical Practice	Neurodiverse Practice	Neurodiversity/Differentiated Instruction
<p>“My students must be able to hand write / do mental math...”</p> <p>“Make eye contact when you speak.”</p>	<p>What are we teaching &amp; assessing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which <b>curricular</b> expectation?</li> <li>- Why that <b>learning</b> skill?</li> </ul>	<p>Google Voice Typing</p>

[Chris Sands]: Planning in a neurodiverse practice means thinking critically about our curriculum and pedagogy. We should ask ourselves, what are we teaching, and why are we teaching that? How are we teaching, and why are we teaching in that way? Thinking like this leads us to implement different teaching and assessment strategies. One especially useful tool is technology, which is more accessible than we might think. For example, in this picture, you see a student using Google Voice Typing on his phone to create his IEP brochure. And he said to me proudly when he was finished, "I wrote all of this in like 20 seconds." How can we use technology in the classroom that students walk around with in their pockets every day?

**[SLIDE – Neurodiversity in Practice]**

[Table on slide:

Typical Practice	Neurodiverse Practice	Universal Design/Differentiated Instruction
<p>Essay and presentation show us what students know</p>	<p>How do you learn?</p> <p>What do you like?</p> <p>What are you good at?</p> <p>What’s hard for you?</p> <p>How do you feel about your disability?</p>	<p>→ Assignments &amp; activities around the <b>curriculum</b></p> <p>→ How can students “Justify...explore...summarize...identify...”</p>

[Chris Sands]: Typically, we have assessed student understanding by having them write an essay or do a presentation. That works for some students. To get a better understanding of how we might

access student strengths, let's ask questions that will amplify the student voice. For example, what helps you to learn? What's hard for you? How do you feel about your disability? These questions help us move away from this idea that the teacher's assignment is the curriculum. It is not. The teacher's assignment is how that particular teacher has chosen to get at the expectations of the curriculum. A neurodiverse practice recognizes that there are many ways for a student to demonstrate, understand, explain, justify, and those other action words from the curriculum.

**[SLIDE – Neurodiversity in Practice]**

[Table on slide:

Typical Practice	Neurodiverse Practice	Universal Design/Differentiated Instruction
<p>“They were so cute when they presented their project.”</p> <p>“For someone with a disability, I’m surprised they can...”</p>	<p>“Your way of expressing information is valuable”</p> <p>An individual’s personality/behaviour does not necessarily reveal their potential</p>	<p>High expectations: → IEP brochure starts self-advocacy → Timetable challenges them to reach potential → Timetable reaches for <i>their</i> goals too - Co-op, life skills, dual credits, special education programming</p>

[Chris Sands]: Another ableist practice that Yvonne mentioned is being inspired by age-appropriate performance. This is another way of saying low expectations. We need to understand that a person's personality or behavior does not determine their potential in school or in life. So let's create structures and practices that set students up for success. I mentioned our IEP brochure project, which gets students advocating, and gets teachers listening to student voice. What can we do with our timetable, so students are learning skills that they need in order to reach their goals? For example, some of our students are timetabled into the learning strategies class, where they are actively engaged in learning about time management, organization, [inaudible], goal-setting, and of course self-advocacy. How can you create space for students to learn those life skills like hygiene, cooking, public transportation, and interview skills? How do we recruit neurodivergent students into co-op and dual credits, as their neurodivergent peers are?

**[SLIDE – What Can I Do?]**

[Image of a radial cluster with the word *Tomorrow* in the centre with six spokes with text connected to the centre: Trying a different teaching strategy; Teach and create space for self-advocacy; Challenge low expectations; Share strategies with staff.]

[Yvonne Bristow]: So, as we mentioned in the beginning, Chris and I really want to give you practical tools that you can start applying in your classroom or school environment. So, things you can start trying to do tomorrow include trying a different teaching strategy. So, think of what are the ways you can adapt your style to incorporate something new, something that involves a different way of thinking, or an activity or a lesson that rewards inquiry over a deadline or firm assessment

expectation. Ask the students what their preferred way of communicating their thoughts and ideas is. If they aren't sure yet, give them the opportunities to try different things, and build relationships with students so they feel comfortable talking to you about their preferences, their wants, and their needs.

Ensure your classroom space opens up the door to self-advocacy. That could mean connecting students to resources on neurodiversity or disability, or connecting your students to mentors from the neurodivergent or disability communities. Be the type of educator who encourages confidence in identity and expression. Challenge low expectations. So, when a colleague or parent makes a statement that seems to be deficit-based, try your best to re-frame the conversation to be more accurate. Don't just discuss the challenges of students. Talk about the whole child. Also, challenge your current expectations of the students that you are serving. Can they be motivated or encouraged in different ways? Finally, share strategies with staff, whether that's in a staff meeting, in a newsletter, an email, or any platform really that you're comfortable with. Discuss your thoughts on brain differences, or share what you've learned so far, and continue your learning, perhaps together with your school team.

**[SLIDE – What Can I Do?]**

[Image of a radial cluster with the word *Next Month* in the centre with six spokes with text connected to the centre: CONSIDER: Why am I teaching these skills? Am I limiting skills or expression?; Help team describe strengths & needs, rather than “weak” and “high-functioning”; Read and learn about Neurodivergent perspectives.]

[Yvonne Bristow]: And to continue with the thought, what's something, or what are things you can start implementing next month? So, question if we're consciously or unconsciously limiting the skills and expressions of students based on the skills we deem as important. Are we teaching students the skills that they want to learn? Are we teaching skills that help students achieve their potential? Do our skills limit achievement and expression? So, skills like enforcing mental math, writing down homework instead of taking a picture of it. Maybe some of you have taken a picture of one of our slides throughout this presentation, so it's easy to understand how some students may prefer a benefit from taking pictures of your notes.

Think about giving opportunities for tech, like laptops and calculators, memory aids, sentence starters, or modifying [inaudible] sizes. Think about how we sometimes teach skills like "must make eye contact," or, "you shouldn't move your body that way," and recognize how those aren't always helping our students, and aren't teaching them things that will improve their confidence and outcomes. We also want to emphasize that neurodiversity is not about tolerating everything a student does. It's understanding and valuing how brains are different, and as a result, people act and think in different ways, and that's okay.

An example Chris and I thought of when we were thinking about giving feedback to students was how last year, a student showed up for an interview for a leadership position dressed inappropriately. That was him in the moment, thinking he was being a cool teenager. In this situation, that was neither a learning need nor a sensory issue, so we gave real feedback and critique to the student, because we know how much he values leadership roles and opportunities. As caring

adults serving students, our role includes supporting the skill development that ultimately helps students reach their identified goals, and that includes giving advice and feedback.

You can also help describe the strengths and needs. So, think of how we can work from a strength-based perspective when working with all young people. Check in to see if you're using labels that may inaccurately represent students, and think of how you can describe students when you're discussing them with colleagues or parents. Learning to change our language takes time, but working towards more accurate, inclusive language can ultimately create environments where everyone is feeling respected.

Finally, read and learn about neurodivergent perspectives. There are many educators and advocates writing online, in texts, or making videos about their experiences and recommended approaches. I find that those with lived experience from any minority group have the most valuable things to communicate about their identity, so we should be listening. I like to think that every person is the expert of their own identity, and hearing and reading about neurodivergent perspectives has really bettered my practice, and it's helped me to understand what these groups want others to know about them.

#### **[SLIDE – What Can I Do?]**

[Image of a radial cluster with the word *Next Year* in the centre with six spokes with text connected to the centre: Why are these students in an applied or Special Education class?; In what ways does Special Education have high expectations for students & staff?; How can students communicate and build relationships in ways that work for them?]

[Chris Sands]: As we look to next year in making our practice more respectful of neurodiversity, let's ask, in what ways are student strengths being revealed and built upon in school? If we go through our diagram here, let's ask, are students in an applied or special education class just because they were last year? If students are in a special education class, in what ways is that program or course building their strengths more than a mainstream class? How are we valuing neurodivergent experiences and ways of communicating, like we would with any community? You make time to teach life skills, not for the purpose of "training our students to act more like us," but to build skills to help them achieve their goals.

#### **[SLIDE – Summary]**

[Text on slide:

- Brains are different
- Students can be different AND successful!
- Universal Design for Learning & Differentiated Instruction respect brain differences]

[Chris Sands]: Thomas Armstrong says that in education, we say we have high expectations, but our structures and processes don't always support these claims. So take up the challenge of thinking differently about our brains, and about how we can value everyone's way of communicating, learning, and relating.

I, personally, have only started to learn about neurodiversity in the last year or so, but already, I've been struck by the simplicity and profound implications of having a neurodiverse practice. At its

core, a neurodiverse practice just means that you understand that brains are different, and students can be different and successful if we value the strengths that they bring that they already have. Advocates for social justice and equity argue that nothing we do is neutral. We always have a stance, and that stance makes an impact. So realize that we never perceive our students without bias. What and how we teach, communicate, and build relationships with our youth reveals our beliefs about while it also works to determine their capability and potential. Finding and building on student strengths will lead us naturally to differentiate instruction, and to design our activities to be universally accessible.

### [SLIDE – Reaching List 1/3]

[Text on slide:

1. **Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity** -Steve Silberman
2. **The Brain That Changes Itself** - Norman Doidge
3. **When Kids Can't Read What Teachers Can Do: A Guide for Teachers, 6-12-** *Kylene Beers*]

[Yvonne Bristow]: Chris and I wanted to share some of the resources that have really helped us understand neurodiversity, and helped us understand how to implement it and become something that's really important to us. So, the very first text is called "Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity," written by Steve Silberman. This book has a really comprehensive history, talking about autism in neurodiversity, where, you know, autism is where this all began. Reading this book will really deepen your understanding of neurodiversity. And I have to say, this is probably my favorite book ever. I've lent my copy out to so many people, because the message is so important to me, and I find in general, people also feel a connection to this text.

[Chris Sands]: "The Brain That Changes Itself" by Dr. Norman Doidge lays a strong scientific foundation for understanding just how different our brains can be. It ought to give us strength to hold high expectations for all students, because we learn from this book that the brain can actually change its physical structure. "When Kids Can't Read What Teachers Can Do," by Kylene Beers, helps us understand the processes of learning to read, and has many effective strategies that you can use in your classroom tomorrow. I like how there's a big-picture narrative on the value of good teaching, combined with ready-to-go strategies for any class, [inaudible] if you're teaching reading at the elementary level. I'm teaching secondary school, like I mentioned, and I found strategies that I could use in my different classes.

### [SLIDE – Reaching List 2/3]

[Text on slide:

1. **Neurodiversity: Discovering the Extraordinary Gifts of Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Other Brain Differences** -*Thomas Armstrong*
2. "ASCD Neurodiversity" <https://goo.gl/3s2AvQ>
3. "Steve Silberman Maclean's magazine" <https://goo.gl/8Dgc49>]

[Yvonne Bristow]: Next is a book called "Neurodiversity: Discovering the Extraordinary Gifts of Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Other Brain Differences," by Thomas Armstrong. This resource is really approachable, because Thomas Armstrong is not only an advocate for neurodiversity, but he also works in education. So he has a lot of practical tools and suggestions that those of us who work in schools will really relate to and understand.

[Chris Sands]: The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, ASCD, is a great resource for education leaders, and had a cover page story on neurodiversity in April 2017 that helps you better understand how a neurodiverse practice can change education, and what it looks like in school and in your classroom. We have a link there, but if you Google search "ASCD Neurodiversity" it should be the first result that comes up.

[Yvonne Bristow]: And Steve Silberman, author of "Neurotribes," as I discussed earlier, also has an article in Maclean's Magazine, where's a Q&A where he talks a lot about autism, the autism culture, and his interest in autism and doing the research on that, which I think is just a great and easy accessible read for anyone interested.

### **[SLIDE – Reaching List 3/3]**

*[Text on slide:*

1. [Sonia.Boue.co.uk](http://Sonia.Boue.co.uk) Sonia Boué
2. <http://neurocosmopolitanism.com/> Nick Walker
3. [intheright.space/blog](http://intheright.space/blog) Johnny Drury
4. [Autisticmotherland.com](http://Autisticmotherland.com) Paula Sanchez
5. [Autnot.wordpress.com](http://Autnot.wordpress.com) Rhi]

[Yvonne Bristow]: Last but certainly not least, we really wanted to include self-advocate blogs, because these are the people who are writing about it and actually living it as well. They're the experts on neurodiversity. So the first person is Sonia Boue. She writes about autism culture and autism in her professional practice. Nick Walker blogs on neurodiversity, autistic identity, and cognitive liberty. Johnny Drury writes about creative education, arts, mindfulness, autism, and disability. Paula Sanchez is an autistic woman and the mother of an autistic teenager herself, so she writes about her experiences with those relationships. And Rhi writes about social expectations and experiences that are experienced throughout the autism and neurodivergent community.

### **[SLIDE – Thank you!]**

*[Text on slide:*

Y.Bristow@gmail.com  
@YBtheCYC

Chris.Sands14@gmail.com  
@CCSands14]

[Chris Sands]: Yvonne and I are passionate about this topic. We hope that came across. And we hope you do read, listen, and learn more about the perspectives of neurodivergent people, preferably from neurodivergent people and not just neurotypical professionals like us. And guess what? There's neurodivergent people all around you, in your schools. Access them, hear from them, and let's amplify their voices. We'd be very happy to communicate with each of you about neurodiversity, and can point you in the direction of resources to help you deepen your understanding and to support your practices. You can email us at the addresses listed here, or find us on the Twitter machine @YBtheCYC and @CCSands14. Let's start the discussion now. Please submit any questions you may have for our question and answer session. And we're excited to carry on the conversation. Thank you very much for attending.



**[SLIDE – Q&A]**

[Image of question marks]

[Cindy Perras]: Okay, thank you so much, Yvonne and Chris, for sharing your knowledge and expertise, thus providing our webinar participants with an opportunity to deepen their understanding on neurodiversity from an educational perspective. So let's move on to the Q&A part of today's webinar. If anyone has questions, please type your question into the chat box on your gotowebinar dashboard, and I will read your question to Yvonne and Chris. And actually, just as we're waiting for people to start typing, I wanted to say to Yvonne and Chris that I found your presentation today to be very interesting, and I imagine that our webinar participants are going to, as you've both indicated, walk away from the webinar today with some very practical ideas and suggestions that they can put in place right away in their classrooms.

And I have a question. I am familiar with ASCD, and Thomas Armstrong. One of his publications, "Neurodiversity in the Classroom: Strength Based Strategies to Help Students with Special Needs Succeed in School and Life." I'm wondering, that particular publication, if we have teachers who are specifically looking for strategies for supporting their students with learning disabilities, is this a publication that they could turn to?

[Yvonne Bristow]: I would recommend anything by Thomas Armstrong, honestly. His perspectives are so crucial, I think, for education. He writes about implementing neurodiversity with all young people in education, so his ideas on how to make it work in a classroom so that that's a neurotypical and neurodivergent blended classrooms, or classrooms that are mostly focused on neurodivergent youth, I'd say anything he's written about neurodiversity is pretty complex and respectful of the population.

[Chris Sands]: And I would add to that, I think reading stuff by Thomas Armstrong or other neurodivergent advocates, and anything from the reading list we provided is really helpful to kind of lay that foundation of what neurodiversity means, where the movement comes from, the implications for our young people and adults. But I think from there, that it's really important to, like we said, get to your students or the people you serve who are neurodivergent, and ask them, right? They're the experts on themselves. So you can read lots of books, and Yvonne and I are passionate about this topic and about education, so we do read lots about it. But I think it's important to then go to your students, and like we said, ask them, how do you learn best, how do you feel about this?

And we have these conversations often with staff in our schools about, students still need to demonstrate the expectations of the curriculum, right? We are an education facility. But there's many ways to get at those expectations, right? So we're not saying to throw expectations out the window, or not expect students to do work. Of course, they have to. But there's many ways to get at those expectations, and I think that's what neurodiversity really helps to strengthen our understanding of, that students have strengths that will allow them to better demonstrate the expectations of the curriculum.

[Cindy Perras]: Okay, thank you. Okay, so we do have questions coming in here. Let me just see. Okay. This one would be interesting. Do you ever have parental pushback. Sometimes parents don't want their child to know they have a learning disability. They don't want them to know they have an assessment. What would your entry point be for a discussion?

[Yvonne Bristow]: Want me to tackle this? So, I think we've all experienced this, and I know of many people who have also experienced these kind of challenges where they want to encourage the conversations on differences, but there might be parents who may not agree with that, or may feel apprehensive about that. And I would always say, listen to your students when it comes to that. I think if they're showing an interest and a connection to their disability, or their neurodivergence, we should never be withholding that experience from them. It wouldn't be fair to withdraw, or not to give them the opportunity to talk about a huge part of their life, especially if they're showing an interest.

So, I know it can be quite difficult having those conversations with parents, but I try to focus that on a strength-based perspective, that, you know, your son or daughter or child is interested in learning more about this. They want to have a better understanding of themselves. Perhaps that can help with how they learn in the classroom, their self-regulation and coping strategies. So, apply it as a way that it's a positive thing. There really is, I think, any young person wanting to know more about themselves and digging into that conversation, we certainly shouldn't be withholding that opportunity.

[Chris Sands]: Yeah, and I think there's, like, a deeper philosophical conversation to have with your staff, or with parents, or in your own head about what is it, exactly, about disability that is so difficult for us to have a conversation about? It makes a lot of people uncomfortable, and that's a shame. That's, like, more of a societal thing, I think. So I think, you know, you can start to address that with parents or with staff who don't want their child to know that they have a disability, or there was an assessment done. So I think we need to question, like, why exactly? Like, what's the problem with having a learning disability?

And also, make it really explicit and clear to the parents, 'cause I've had lots of these conversations, too, that the student does have strengths, identify very clearly what those strengths are, and then make it clear that that comes from who they are, right? That's their personality. Their disability's part of who they are, and they have those strengths, right? It's not like their disability would make them less than a person, and their strengths are just sneaking by in spite of the disability, right? The disability is part of who they are. They should be proud of it. And the student does have a lot of strengths. So I think a lot of times it comes down to very explicit and very clear conversations with parents about, you know, being proud of who the student is, and also making very clear what those strengths are.

Cindy, you're with Yvonne. I think a lot of the work needs to be done with the student, so that they feel proud of themselves and are aware of their own strengths, too.

[Cindy Perras]: Yes, I completely agree. It's really important for students to know themselves as learners, and that means knowing what their strengths are, and then also where the areas are where

they're going to need assistance, accommodations, or whatever it is to become highly successful as learners. Okay, another question here. While there are pockets of excellence in neurodiverse practice that exist in schools, it's not consistent or systemic in the public school system. What ideas would you have about helping all teachers to embrace pedagogy that embraces neurodiversity?

[Chris Sands]: Yes, I agree.

[Yvonne Bristow]: It's a very good question.

[Chris Sands]: [inaudible] No, I think that's something that I struggle with. I see it as one of my main missions in my role as the special ed department head at a high school, is to try to share those good teaching practices. I think depending on where your school and where your staff are when you're starting this mission. You want to start, just like with students, like, with digestible chunks. So, I would suggest, and what I've done-- I don't know if it's the best thing, but what I've done is start with very clear, very implementable strategies that staff can start doing tomorrow, right? Like, I don't know if I would hit them with our webinar on day one when they're still doing, like, lecture, lecture, test, lecture, lecture, test. But you want people to start thinking differently about how they're teaching it.

And I think the key point is, what I mentioned earlier, that your teaching strategy is not the curriculum. And we're not expecting you to throw the expectations of curriculum, or dumb things down, right? Students are still expected to demonstrate the curriculum, but there are different ways of getting at that curriculum, right? So sharing very concrete, very clear teaching strategies, like graphic organizers, larger font, sentence starters, lots of visuals and handouts or resources, or tests, activities where the students can move around the room to get information, right? These are things that a teacher could work on during their prep and have ready for the next class if they chose to, so I think starting with very clear, very specific things that teachers can do to access those students' strengths is a good way to start for teachers who haven't considered differentiated instruction or neurodiversity before.

[Cindy Perras]: Great. Thank you. Next question. And this is a very practical one. How do you balance the needs of students who need to move or make noise with students who require calm and quiet?

[Yvonne Bristow]: So I think in most classrooms, or most school spaces, having the opportunity for spaces where students can safely self-stim, if that's a possibility. So I know some rooms are able to have sensory spaces. It may also mean, like, something a lot of our students do is, when they may need to go and have some private space, or they want to stim privately, they may go for a walk in the hallway or find somewhere where they feel comfortable. I think also, in a classroom environment, talking to the whole population of students about stimming, and whether students want to self-identify and want to talk about the behaviors, or tics, or mannerisms that they might have with the classroom population, I think, would also be a great opportunity for them just to talk about neurodiversity and talk about their neurodivergence.

I think it's definitely possible, and something that sometimes takes a little bit of creativity of how to balance it for students who may stim loudly, and another student may have a sensory need where

loud sounds make it hard for them to learn. So trying to find the balance may be difficult in one space to the next. But I think looking for opportunities to use your whole school space or if there's another room in the hallway, anywhere you can go just to give everyone the opportunity to express themselves as they choose to express themselves, and how they feel comfortable expressing themselves.

[Chris Sands]: And I would add, so this gets to the differentiated instruction question. So, different teaching strategies should be used, and those strategies can involve movement, right? So, having students-- I think we showed a couple pictures where students can, you know, move around the room, and get different pieces of paper and try to match them up. I do that sometimes with definitions, with words and definitions. So some students get the word, some students get the definition and have to move around and try to partner up with each other, find the matching-- find the matching, like, the word or the definition that matches. So that's naturally moving. It's a strategy that's, as they say, necessary for some but good for all. So, our goal is not, like, perfect strategies all of the time for all students, 'cause that's not possible. But, you know, all students will benefit, or at least, you know, will be fine. And some students are really-- that's going to be a necessary thing for them. So I think that's why differentiated instruction is so important, because it appeals to all those students eventually.

So, having strategies built in where students can move around the room, to learn and to do the learning, right? It's not, like, let's take five minutes and run around the classroom. They're moving to do the learning, right? I think that's really important. And also, flexible seating. So, there was another picture in there of students who were working on some Chromebooks while they were sitting on stationary bike desks. So, students-- that's in our resource room, and students will jump on those things while the teacher's talking, or while they're doing independent work, and they're just kind of pedaling away at the back of the class. It's not disturbing anybody. And so they're able to move, and it's not bothering students who need more calm and quiet.

[Cindy Perras]: Great. Thank you. So, from a neurodiverse perspective, what should assessment and evaluation look like? Descriptive feedback can be provided, but report cards require marks and percentages.

[Chris Sands]: Yeah. I think again, this is such an essential point, is that you start with the curriculum, right? And I think some people are sometimes taken aback when people from special education advocate for sticking more closely to the curriculum, because I think there's a misconception that we want to, like, minimize the curriculum, or again, sorry to use this term, but like, dumb things down. But I know that's how people perceive special education sometimes. But I think to advocate to stick closer to the curriculum is better for our students.

Because like we said before, those broad expectations like, you know, have an understanding, exploring, justifying, there are many ways to do that, right? So students are still expected to demonstrate an understanding of the factors that affect immigration to Canada, okay? They need to demonstrate that expectation. But there's many ways for them to do that, right? They could create a comic strip. They could write a song. They could write an essay. They could do a presentation. So I think that's how-- we're not saying to, you know, give everybody 90%, and don't worry about

assessments, and just do it, everyone. Students need to demonstrate the expectations of the curriculum, but if we stick more closely to the curriculum and let that guide our practice, I think that's better for our students, because then we understand, you know, those big idea things like justify, explain, compare. There's many, many ways to do that, right? And that's how we mark our students, in the way that works best for them.

[Cindy Perras]: Okay. And this will be our last question. Neurodiverse practice focuses on a strengths-based approach, and it seems to me that there would be a logical connection to growth mindset. What do you as presenters see as the connection between neurodiversity and growth mindset?

[Chris Sands]: Well, I agree that there's a total connection, and that's-- I don't know if I mention explicitly, but that's a really great-- the book, "The Brain That Changes Itself," I think, is a great way to start that conversation, either with staff, or just for yourself, or even with students too. I think there's research that showed, and there might be an article, just like even in the New York Times that explains it, that students, they did, like, an experiment. Students were-- you know, they did some growth mindset lessons, and as part of that they were taught that the brain, like, its structure physically changes. And they improved their results because of that.

So I think helping students understand that our brains are different, that's a real thing. Brains can change, and so can we. And there is kind of-- there is hope for you, right? That you have strengths that will allow you to be successful in life. You do have strengths that will allow you to be successful in school. And growth mindset is not happy, wishful thinking. Growth mindset is the deliberate use of strategies that help you be successful, right? So I think that's how neurodiversity and growth mindset come together, is neurodiversity helps us understand what our strengths are, and then growth mindset tells us to use those strengths to help us be successful, and actually learn-- it's something that some of our GLE classes, or learning strategies classes last year-- they talked about cognitive behavioral therapy, and kind of having the students change their thinking to take more ownership over some of their negative thoughts.

[Yvonne Bristow]: Yeah, and I think, like, seeking the evidence in your thinking and thoughts. I think when it comes to neurodiversity, we can see an overlap with growth [inaudible] and with brain plasticity as well. We know that through all of these tools, and as well as the CBT tools that Chris mentioned that I used last year, people are able to change their thinking. Our brains are able to grow, and adapt, and evolve, and it's kind of fantastic. And this is not something that anyone is making up. It's based off of science. So I think we should all feel accountable knowing that these strategies are all appropriate, and evidence-based, and practical-based, to use these strategies and to think of where they enter everyday interactions with students. We should feel responsible to do so, because they all really focus on the strength of our students, and we know that they will actually help our students.

[Cindy Perras]: Wonderful. Great questions, great responses.

**[SLIDE – Other Questions?]**

[Text on slide: info@LDatSchool.ca

Image of three multi-coloured question marks in bubbles]

[Cindy Perras]: That's all the time we have for today, so we're going to end our question and answer session at this time. Should you have any further questions, please email us at info@LDatSchool.ca, or use our hashtag on Twitter and we will ensure your questions get answered.

**[SLIDE – THANK YOU]**

[Cindy Perras]: On behalf of the LD@School team, I would once again like to thank Yvonne and Chris for their presentation, and thank you to all of our participants for joining us. Please remember that we will be sending out presentation slides and a short survey following today's webinar. The feedback we receive through the survey provides us with important information for producing future webinars. As a reminder, we will be sending out a link to this recorded webinar in approximately three weeks. Watch for information on three more webinars coming in 2018. Topics include anxiety, technology, and literacy.

Thank you again for participating, and please enjoy the rest of your day.