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NEURODIVERSITY: AN IMPORTANT TERM IN EDUCATION AND HEALTH

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Neurodiversity: an important term in education and health

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The world is evolving, and this demands understanding new values and concepts. One topic that needs to be widely discussed within the context of health and education is neurodiversity. Undoubtedly, reflecting on neurodiversity is a positive and necessary issue in today's society.

WHEN TALKING ABOUT NEURODIVERSITY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND CERTAIN TERMS AND CONCEPTS.



Neurotypical:

a person whose brain functioning does not differ from the average of the normal population;

Neurodivergent: a person whose brain functioning does not differ from the average of the normal population;

Neurodiverse: characterizes an entire population, not a specific individual, and refers to people with different types of brain functioning.

Neurodevelopmental Disorder:

Disorders of cognition that may interfere with the acquisition, retention, or application of specific skills or information sets. They may involve dysfunction of attention, memory, perception, language, problem solving, or social interaction.

BUT WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

Simply put, the term neurodiversity refers to natural variations in how the human brain works. This includes (but is not limited to) conditions such as autism, dyslexia, ADHD, and others.

The word neurodiversity is different from that applied to an individual who has a neurodevelopmental disorder (which is a pathological condition) and recognizes that there are differences between individuals in the way they process, perceive,

and interact with information. In this sense, people who are neurodivergent, or distinct in other neurocognitive dimensions, are recognized as being part of normal variation.

By using the term neurodivergent one is rejecting the notion of normal or healthy brains, or a single correct way of perceiving.



The term neurodiversity moves away from considering a person as having a pathological condition and approaches the model in which the standards of normality are determined by social and non-biological paradigms and in which there is no recognition of the diversity of individuals.

NEURODIVERSE WAS DESCRIBED IN 1998 BY THE JOURNALIST HARVEY BLUME WHO WAS IN TOUCH WITH THE RESEARCH OF SOCIOLOGIST, JUDY SINGER. IN TURN, SINGER THEN USED THE NEW TERMINOLOGY IN 1999 IN HER THESIS.



Initially, neurodiversity was coined for cases of those with autism spectrum disorders; nowadays, however, the term is more general, and encompasses dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity, mental health difficulties, and others.

Thus, there has been a new approach to neurodiversity, especially with regard to its use in special education.

A neurodiverse individual, for example, may have a difficulty in a certain life skill, but in other respects have no other problems. One can imagine an autistic individual who has difficulties in interpersonal communication and interacting with their co-workers, but when full attention to programming a computer is required, they perform well, perhaps even surpassing the performance of a neurotypical individual.

Research has shown that one of the most challenging environments for a neurodiverse individual is school. Classrooms

are not always well suited to supplying students with different ways of teaching and learning. Many educational systems still use a single curriculum which applies to all students and disregards the need for individual teaching.

This will create an unfavorable learning environment and

perhaps provoke a hostile reaction from a student. In such situations, neurodivergent individuals may miss out greatly, as will society as a whole. A recent piece in the New York Times describes how neurodivergent individuals can use different ways to elaborate and process thought, with benefits all round.

Using only verbal modalities – such as the speech of a teacher or reading a textbook chapter – may not be enough for learning to occur. Neurodivergent individuals may need extra visual information that facilitates the structuring of thought and learning.



In an alternative teaching model, learning needs to include topics such as how to plan and organise, being cognitively flexible, how to be free of anxiety and distraction in the classroom, and ways of self-monitoring.

There are still many aspects of neurodiversity that should be included in any full discussion of the topic. The goal should be to understand individual differences more broadly and how they can benefit today's society. Lack of understanding and ignorance of tools and strategies can prevent teachers and students from obtaining

support when they need it. Appreciating individual differences allows society to be more embracing and inclusive.

In future bulletins, we hope to bring you more information on this important subject.

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