

Neurodiversity training: a collaborative approach

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Emma

Kirstie

Callum

ADVANCE HE Equality and Diversity Conference

What we would like to achieve today:

Explore how multiple perspectives can contribute to better understanding of differences and promote equality and diversity.

To reflect on how research participants may benefit from an interactive approach and how it may differ from a traditional approach to training.

To decide what elements of participatory and didactic types of training may be useful to blend to achieve a better understanding of individual differences.

Introductions

Who are we

And...

Why is our delivery
model more effective
than traditional
approaches?

What does the training look like?

- We use a combination of thought-provoking statements/questions designed to get our attendees to think/reflect on their own perceptions (for example, 'Autism is more prevalent in males than it is in females.')
- We use videos that are powerful and exemplify the autistic experience, selected by my colleagues, who feel those represent the authentic lived experience of autism (for example, focusing on sensory differences).
- In the second half of our session, we place attendees in groups, asking them to come up with questions representative of their student support role (for example, during last week's staff training we had colleagues from the academic integrity team, library services, learning and teaching focused colleagues, academics, mental health services team). This part is designed to give a more personalised flavour to the training and help the attendants understand how perspectives can differ and how they can support students in their role.
- We offer attendees the opportunity to ask further questions and give us anonymous feedback after the session through a Padlet.

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A little bit of history of how the training evolved to amplify the voice of those with lived experience:

Staff training on Autism and students in HE co-presented with a colleague in 2018. We introduced the lived experience aspect by asking Emma to join the training team.

Colleague retired-involved Kirstie in the training too, to make the lived experience element more dominant. During one of the sessions, Callum, a student services colleague, came as a participant and volunteered to co-present with us.

Since then, we have been presenting in multiple events such as the Neurodiversity Leadership training and the lived experience aspect became central, while slides are used to ask questions, give research evidence and structure conversations.

Our priority is to provide a safe space for participants to ask questions without being judged and encouraging them to reflect on difficulties and potential solutions to provide better support.

This has been part of a wider attempt to improve equality and diversity. For example, conducting research with Emma and involving her as a guest lecturer in sessions is part of promoting the overall lived experience and equality and diversity aspect in the university. The Inclusion, Diversity and Special Educational needs Special Interest Group I lead, introduced the seminar/research element in our overall efforts.





Emma

- I am Emma. I was diagnosed with autism when I was 16 after significant difficulties with my mental health. I have been able to achieve a master degree in Autism, which is how I met Tereza. I have worked with Tereza on different research topics and chose the topic of females and empathy for my masters research thesis.
- It seems to have a bigger impact and create a deeper understanding. It is not being read from a book or a presentation it's coming straight from the persons mouth. It gives a more personal touch.
- It creates a safe supportive environment, in the sense that we are prepared for there being no silly questions or "ignorance", these sessions are about learning and understanding on a much deeper level meaning they are in a better position to then support other people to the best of their ability.
- When you have met someone with autism you have really, only met one person with autism. Everyone is different, just the same as neurotypical people. This mode of delivery really proves this. This highlights the need for personalisation of support and understanding.
- There is a lot of evidence which also suggest females present their autism differently from males and are often diagnosed later. This provides the opportunity to hear the experiences of both genders.
- There is only so much you can learn about a condition, when you live with it yourself you understand it on a whole different level.



Kirstie

- From listening to us, you will realise that every Autistic person is different.
- For the most part, we don't tend to hear the voices of Autistic people first-hand.
- I think you can potentially get as much from how we choose to present or say things, as from what we actually say.
- We are not tick boxes to be solved. We are real people with real experiences.
- This is not something that should be done to us, but instead, done with us.

Callum

- I'm Callum. I'm 27 and work at the University of Northampton as a Student Support Officer. I was diagnosed at 21 with Autism and with ADHD at 26. It was actually going to University that prompted me to seek diagnosis after struggling so much with the transition and expectations that living away from home entailed.
- Coming from a staff angle, my advice to you going in is – be present, actively listen and continue to do so once you leave today.
- We become scared to fail as adults. But this is the only way we can learn. You are only human and will not get it right every time.
- It's only by having those with neurodiversities embedded in every level of training surrounding the subject, can we create those environments where failure feels like a safe and natural part of the learning process.
- It is a back and forth relationship that then translates to how those being trained will interact with their students, peers and family going forward. Then the cycle of modelling good practice surrounding neurodiversity awareness and adjustments can ripple outwards.



Why the collaborative training model?

- The 'nothing about us without us' (Charlton, 1998) movement has gained momentum in the last few years. However, that momentum does not appear to have stretched far enough.
- Multiple experts and researchers (such as Melanie Nind and Iva Strnadová) in the field of inclusion and disability have stressed the importance of engaging individuals with lived experience as co-researchers. Little, however, is known about co-teaching and assigning leading roles in training to individuals with lived experience.
- Change can only materialise when those of us that are 'experts' in name, support those with lived experience (who are the true experts) become the protagonists as we take a secondary (but still central) role.
- Our training model is one of empowerment and one in which control is gradually relinquished to those that ought to be in control. Tokenistic attempts to 'include' voices should no longer be acceptable in our view.

How will today's session be structured?

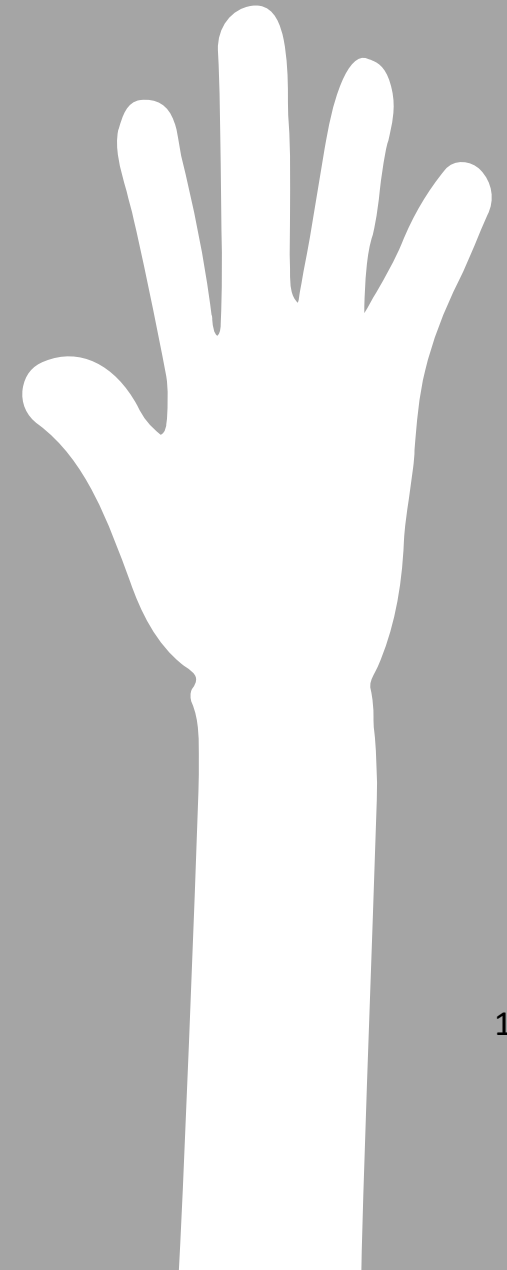
Firstly, we have explained how our staff training sessions tend to be structured and gave you an idea of the materials used during the training.

Now, you will be placed in groups. Based on the information we gave you about ourselves, think about what type of questions you would like to ask. In your groups, you will select around 3 questions to ask each one of us (i.e. three for Emma, three for Callum, three for Kirstie and three for Tereza). This should take you ten minutes. These questions will need to be related to informing your approach to supporting neurodiversity in your context. It can be three different questions for each or the same three questions asked to all of us to gain the different perspectives/experiences. You will then have five minutes to discuss your questions with each one of us.

Finally, we will all get together and discuss the pros and cons of this approach and reflect on potential uses in your settings.

Thank you.

Any questions?



For any follow-up questions, please email Tereza:
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