

Neurodiversity in the Classics Classroom

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Four Neurodiversity Initiatives: what did we learn?

Asterion



The Relaxed Tutorial Project

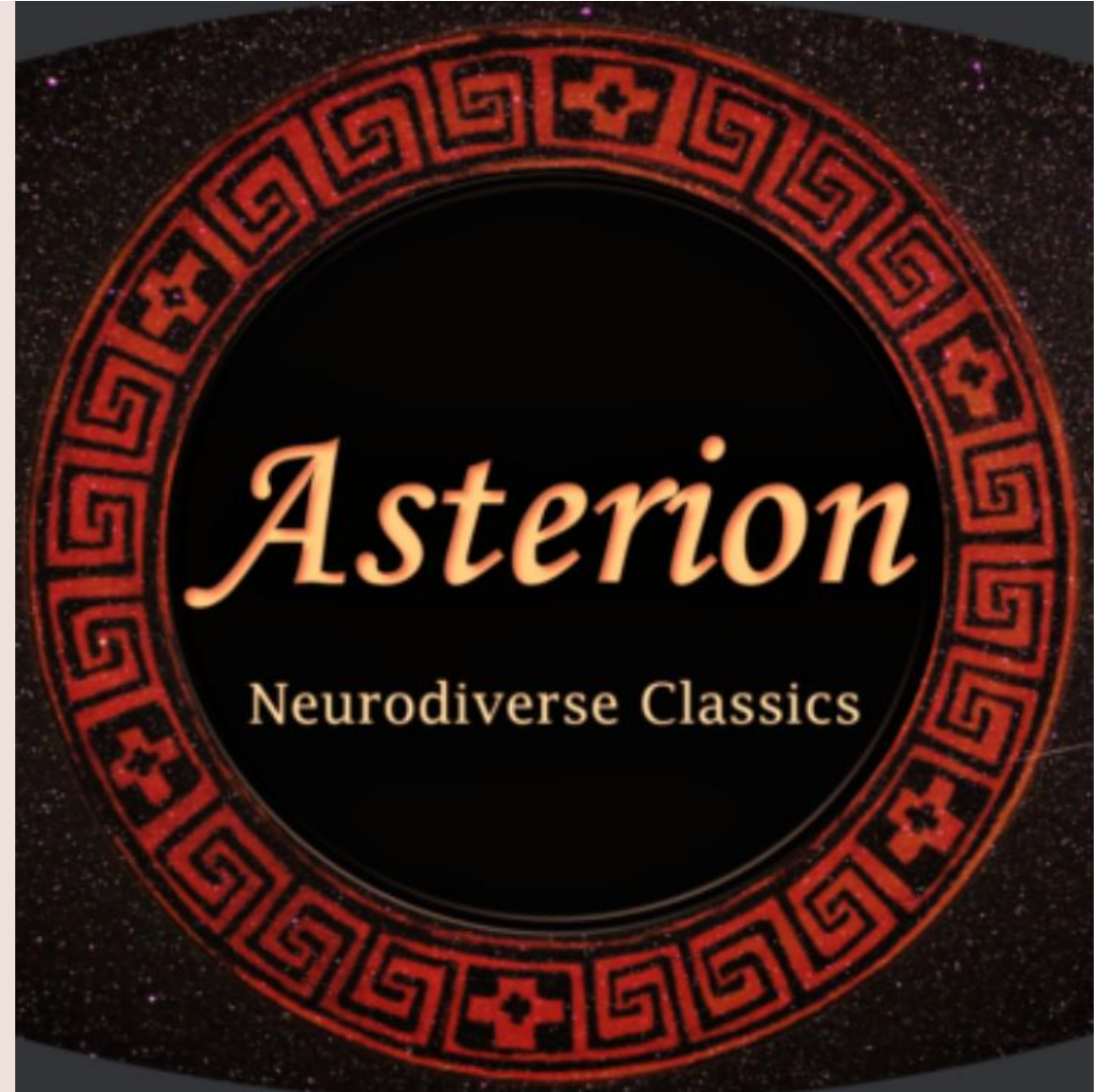


NESTL Toolkit (Oxford)



ACCLAIM

Asterion



Asterion

What we did...

- Invited contributions from neurodivergent teachers of Classics.
- Developed a series of Classroom Resources to highlight challenges and solutions for particular needs, from teachers with a combination of personal lived experience and professional experience.
- Focused on the teaching of Classics and Ancient History. What challenges are specific to our discipline?





ASTERION - Neurodiverse Classics

Neurodivergence quick symptoms and teaching tips

Please complete this sheet using simple, clear language and bullet points.

Neurodivergence: **Dyscalculia**

Definition: a specific and persistent difficulty with numbers. Dyscalculia falls at one end of the spectrum and will be distinguishable from other maths issues due to the severity of difficulties with number sense, including subitising, **symbolic** [e.g., fractions and decimals] and **non-symbolic** [e.g., dot patterns and pie charts] **magnitude comparison** [comparing size of the same kind], and **ordering** [placing numbers in order]. It can occur singly but **often co-occurs with other specific learning difficulties, mathematics anxiety** and medical conditions.

Characteristics/Known access needs:

- Inability to remember numbers easily (eg: page numbers in a book)
 - o *Sometimes exacerbated by black on white background, as per Dyslexia.*
- Switching round of numbers in a larger number (eg: 49 remembered as 94)
- Confusion of similar-looking numbers (eg: 3 remembered as 5)
- Difficulty with non-native numbers/symbols (eg: Greek alphabet, Roman numerals)
- Difficulty reading or remembering lists of numbers, and inability to easily discern between BCE and CE numbers or to remember what time period (actual years) is denoted by C.xxxx
- Remembering numbers/years differently each time – leading to Maths anxiety

Tips for Managing:

- Learn numbers (eg: phone numbers) in a song or to a beat
- Associate dates with an event / image of event
- Remember page numbers with corresponding chapter name or the sentence at the bottom of that page (ie: near the page number) for ease of confirmation
- Timelines! Although it may seem contradictory, timelines present dates in context, making them easier to remember.
- Colour-coding (unless the user is colourblind)
- Coloured gel overlays (as used for Dyslexia)

Ideas to consider when teaching or designing courses:

- Visual presentation of numbers rather than auditory
- Associate dates with an event / image of event
- Give historical events a story-like presentation, so that dates are secondary
- Present page numbers with corresponding chapter name or the sentence at the bottom of that page (ie: near the page number) for ease of confirmation
- Colour-coding (unless the user is also colourblind)
- Coloured gel overlays (as used for Dyslexia)
- Allow date questions to be answered using context instead, eg: Bronze Age, during the early reign of Augustus, etc. that still shows understanding.



ASTERION - Neurodiverse Classics

Neurodivergence quick symptoms and teaching tips

Please complete this sheet using simple, clear language and bullet points.

Neurodivergence: **Auditory Processing Disorder**

Definition: A difficulty with perceiving, differentiating or remembering sounds, words or phrases. Though functional hearing is normal, the brain and the ears do not work in tandem. As a result, Auditory Processing Disorder causes issues with understanding, especially with the quick and accurate digesting of spoken information. The condition shares features with ADHD, Asperger's and dyslexia and their co-occurrence can compound the problems.

Characteristics/Known access needs:

- Easily distracted or upset by a loud or sudden noise.
- Extra time needed to make sense of spoken information.
- Difficulty following a group discussion, especially if there is background noise. (Competing aural demands and the inability to filter out unessential information increase stress.)
- Problems with the visual and aural recognition of words. (This is more apparent in Greek. e.g. - may be confused with - .)
- Embarrassment at asking individuals to repeat what they have said.

Tips for Managing:

- Choose a quiet place to work (Use ear-defenders, noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs).
- If it is difficult to divide attention between listening and taking notes, ask to record the lecture.
- Say if the speaker is too fast, or ask for clarification. Alternatively, after class, ask for the information in writing or ask a student who was present.
- Use headphones during an online lecture to bring sound directly to the ears. Use the chatbox to question the group or an individual.

Ideas to consider when teaching or designing courses:

- Avoid putting the learner on the spot by asking a question (preferably, invite answers from the class).
- Limit the time devoted to listening tasks. (These quickly drain mental energy.) Also, remember that it may be harder to retain information at the end of the day.
- Give brief instructions and speak at a moderate pace. If clarification is needed, rephrase the information.
- Allow early access to handouts or PowerPoint presentations. (This reduces stress and enables a better grasp of the material.)
- Be alert to clues that an individual is struggling with listening fatigue. (appears inattentive, bored, or anxious.)
- Limit distractions, e.g., do not let individuals speak over one another.



One thing we learned...

Embarrassment is a big factor – many neurodivergent students won't admit to struggling because they're stuck on something that looks “easy”.

Top Tip for Teachers

Many neurodivergent students process and remember information **in context**. Provide as much context as you can, in different modes, e.g. graphic/spoken/written.



Relaxed Tutorials



The Relaxed Tutorial Project

- What we did...
 - Looked at adjustments we could make to the online teaching context, WITHOUT changing the content of sessions.
 - Identified problem areas for autistic students, like breakout rooms and webcams.
 - Designed a new set-up badged as a 'relaxed tutorial'.
 - Noted that this was not a universal adjustment (settings that worked for autistic students did not work for dyslexic students).



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Neurodiversity and Ancient Studies: From Accommodation to Inclusive Design

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1. NOT EVERY DIFFERENCE IS A PROBLEM TO SOLVE

The cover of this issue, illustrated by Arturo Galindo, offers an appropriate point of departure. Rather than attempting to give neurodivergence a single visual form, it brings Antiquity into dialogue with multiplicity: different ways of seeing, connecting and organising information around the same object. That plurality is also where this issue begins. There is a recurring contradiction in the way universities talk about neurodiversity. We have become considerably better at recognising it, considerably more willing to discuss it, and increasingly capable of building institutional structures around it. Disability services identify reasonable adjustments, teaching centres produce recommendations for accessible learning, universities publish equality and inclusion strategies, and lecturers are more likely than they were twenty years ago to encounter students who openly describe themselves as autistic, dyslexic, dyspraxic, ADHD, or otherwise neurodivergent. All of this represents real progress. Yet beneath that progress lies an assumption that has proved remarkably difficult to dislodge: neurodiversity enters the classroom primarily when something goes wrong. A student cannot cope with a particular form of assessment, struggles with an oral presentation, becomes overwhelmed in a synchronous environment, needs instructions reorganised, requires more time, or asks for an alternative format. At that point, the system responds. Support is activated, the barrier is identified, and the student is helped to navigate an educational structure that was already there before their difference became visible. What remains less frequently asked is whether the structure itself deserves the same scrutiny as the student.

This distinction matters because the language of support can remain deficit-based even when the intentions behind it are entirely inclusive. We ask how an autistic student can be helped to participate in a seminar, how a dyslexic student can be helped to read a dense text, how an ADHD student can be helped to organise a long assignment, or how a dyspraxic student can be helped to function within an academic environment built around assumptions that were never designed with



One thing we learned...

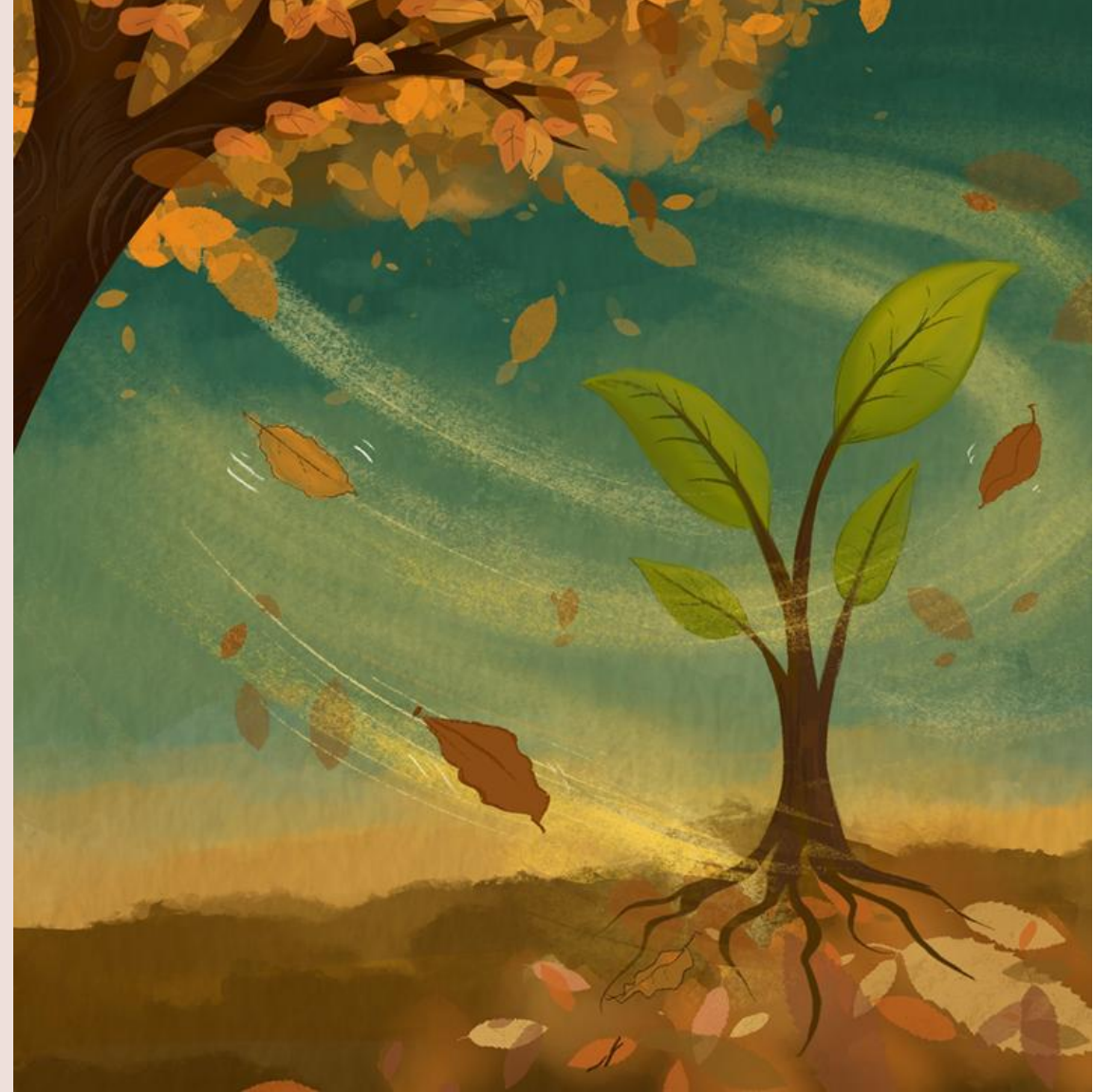
Adjusting the sensory and social environment can go a long way towards reducing neurodivergent anxiety.

Top Tip for Teachers

Anxiety is the main force that shapes neurodivergent experiences of education. Address the anxiety by being **reliable** and **consistent**.



NESTL



NESTL: Neurodivergent Education for Students, Teaching & Learning

- What we did...
 - Gathered a team of staff and students and an advisory board with lived experience.
 - Developed resources to support staff working with neurodivergent students.
 - Focused on mythbusting, student voices and practical suggestions.



Neurodivergent Education for Students, Teaching & Learning (NESTL) Toolkit

Co-Created with Neurodivergent Students and Staff, the NESTL Toolkit offers -

- Framework for Neurodivergent-inclusive Teaching and Learning
- Practical suggestions, with examples, quotes, case studies, checklists, and interactive activities
- Myth-busting around neurodivergence in higher education
- Curated lists of resources for further exploration

*Scan the QR code to
access the NESTL Toolkit*



**Framework for Neurodivergent-Inclusive
Teaching and Learning**



One thing we learned...

One understanding teacher isn't enough.
Good teaching practices need
institutional backing – so neurodiversity
awareness has to be systems-wide.

Top Tip for Teachers

Good practice needs to be shared.
Check out the **Journal of Classics Teaching**, which is now online and open access: maybe consider writing a report on any initiative or approach that might be helpful to other teachers.



ACCLAIM



ACClAIM: Autism Connecting with CLAssically-Inspired Myth Network

- What we did...
 - Prof Susan Deacy produced the first book on Autism and Classical Myth, called 'What Would Hercules Do? Lessons for Autistic Children Using Classical Myth', along with classroom resources.
 - Members of the group investigated the potential classroom use of other myths, to explore benefits for autistic and otherwise neurodivergent students.





One thing we learned...

Classical myth has huge and almost untapped potential for exploring and explaining neurodiversity.

Top Tip for Teachers

Myth has always been used to reflect on strengths, challenges and differences at a safe distance. Consider how you could use familiar myths to explore different ways of seeing the world.



Do get in touch!

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