

Overview:

Professor and Ability Center Endowed Chair, Dr. Jim Ferris speaks at the University of Toledo on “Autism and Education” explaining that disabilities are socially constructed. He describes the complexity of experience individuals have within the autism spectrum and contrasts notions of ability and disability.

Summary:

In this segment, “Autism as Difference,” Dr. Jim Ferris explains how autistic individuals may experience distractions they must filter, challenges they must overcome and skills they would like to share. He emphasizes his points with excerpts from a documentary about Jordan, an autistic man. Dr. Ferris also asserts that autism should be recognized as a difference, not as a disability. This manner of framing difference does not diminish the difficulty of living with autism, nor does it diminish the challenges of raising a child who is on the spectrum, but it does allow society to better understand autism rather than regarding it as a tragedy.

ODE 9-12 STANDARD 1: *Health*; Topic 1, *Healthy Lifestyle Choices*; Topic 2, *Empathetic and Productive Relationships*

Discussion Questions:

1. How might you express emotion to someone with autism?
2. Are there any noises or distractions that bother you? How do you respond to these distractions? In what specific ways do you react or attempt to filter through the distraction?
3. In what ways can individuals with autism be better included in classroom activities? Why is this important? What is ‘neuro-diversity’? Why does it matter in learning environments?

Activity:

Ask the class to form a circle, and begin with one student saying “I went to the store to buy a _____” with the first student completing that sentence. The next person in the circle then repeats the sentence, including what the person before them said, and then adds another item. During this activity, turn on a radio or television, vacuum, drumroll on your desk, or make other noises to create distractions. The distractions should steadily increase in volume and intensity. At the end of the game, ask students to discuss the distractions and how they felt. After the students have an opportunity to share, explain to the class that what they’ve experienced is similar to how a person with autism might feel when attempting to focus and tune out distractions. Discuss ‘neuro-diversity’ and the spectrum of abilities exhibited through this activity.

Resources:

Autism in Young Children: Move to Include: <https://wgte.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/mti17.autism.young.children/autism-in-young-children-move-to-include/#.WwMLly-ZPq0>

Magic as a technique for teaching children with autism: <https://wgte.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/arct14.sci.nvmagicaut/magic-and-autism/#.WwMMuS-ZPq0>

