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BOARDROOM REFLECTIONS

Designing for the Brain, Not Fixing It

Why Spark Launch's neurodiversity-first bet signals a shift in the future of learning.

By **Ravi R. Iyer, MD**



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By any conventional measure, education has spent decades trying to standardize learning. Spark Launch is making the opposite bet: that the next generation of learning platforms will be built not on standardization, but on cognitive alignment.

In a recent discussion, CEO Chaya Mallavaram outlined a vision rooted as much in lived experience as in technology. Her journey, from a "daydreaming" student struggling within rigid systems to discovering flow through coding, and later navigating her son's ADHD diagnosis, reveals the company's core thesis: the system, not the child, is often the point of failure.

That thesis underpins Sparkade, Spark Launch's flagship AI-assisted immersive learning platform for children with ADHD. But what's emerging is not simply another edtech product. It is an attempt to re-architect learning itself.

From Compliance to Intrinsic Motivation

Traditional education systems are optimized for compliance: grades, deadlines, and externally imposed benchmarks. Spark Launch is optimized for something else entirely: intrinsic motivation.

- Mallavaram draws a sharp distinction between how neurotypical
- and neurodivergent minds engage:
- "Neurodivergent minds are motivated intrinsically… schools
- today are still motivated by grades and external rewards."

This is more than pedagogical nuance. It suggests that large segments of learners are not underperforming due to a lack of ability, but due to misaligned incentive structures.

- Sparkade's design, immersive gameplay, autonomy, and
- adaptive progression is intended to meet learners where they
- are cognitively, not force them into predefined molds.

AI as Cognitive Infrastructure

- What makes this approach newly viable is AI, not as a feature
- layer, but as core infrastructure.
- Sparkade dynamically adjusts:
- Difficulty and pacing
- Engagement pathways
- Learning modalities
- All in real time, responding to how each child interacts with the
- system.
- "We couldn't have done this a few years ago before AI… it
- dynamically personalizes as the child moves."
- In effect, Spark Launch is building a system that continuously
- calibrates to a learner's cognitive state: a shift from static
- personalization to adaptive cognition.

Learning as a Whole-System Experience

Where Spark Launch diverges most from traditional edtech is in its integration of emotional and behavioral development into the learning process.

The platform is designed to incorporate:

- Executive function training
- Emotional regulation

- Self-awareness and identity formation
- This reflects a broader insight: learning outcomes for
- neurodivergent children are inseparable from family dynamics
- and mental health.

> *Mental health was the main thing... it transfers to the family.*

Rather than treating these as external factors, Spark Launch embeds them into the product experience, positioning itself less as a tool and more as an ecosystem for cognitive development.

Reframing Measurement: From Deficits to Strengths

- Perhaps the most strategically important element of Spark
- Launch's approach is its focus on identifying and amplifying
- strengths.

Instead of tracking only performance gaps, the platform aims to surface:

- Engagement patterns
- Natural interests
- Emerging capabilities
- Mallavaram's passion is obvious:
- "We will highlight what is unique about this child... so they know
- their strengths."
- This represents a quiet but profound shift: from diagnosing
- weaknesses to mapping potential.
- If successful, it could redefine how educational success is
- measured altogether.

Augmenting, Not Replacing, the System

- Importantly, Spark Launch is not positioning itself as a
- replacement for schools. Its model is additive, aligned with
- curriculum standards, and intended to improve classroom
- participation.

> *They can learn through the platform and then go to school and participate better.*

- This pragmatic stance may prove critical for adoption,
- particularly in a sector resistant to wholesale disruption.

A Larger Signal: Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage

Mallavaram's broader vision extends beyond education. She argues that neurodivergent thinkers, often intrinsically motivated and non-linear, will be increasingly valuable in an AI-driven world.

> *It's the neurodivergent folks... who will take humanity forward.*

- If that view holds, platforms like Sparkade are not just
- educational tools. They are early infrastructure for cultivating
- future-relevant cognitive profiles.

Investor Lens

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1. Market — ★★★★☆ (4/5) ADHD and neurodiversity markets are large, underserved, and growing.

- Increasing awareness among parents, schools, and
- policymakers
- Tailwinds from mental health prioritization and AI adoption
- Watch: Fragmentation and willingness-to-pay dynamics in
- consumer versus institutional segments.

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2. Moat — ★★★☆☆ (3/5) Potential moat in:

- Proprietary behavioral data
- Adaptive learning models
- Neurodiversity-specific design frameworks

However:

- AI tools are increasingly commoditized
- Gaming-based learning is a crowded space

Upside lever: Longitudinal data plus demonstrated outcomes.

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3. Team — ★★★★☆ (4/5) Strong founder-market fit through lived experience and technical background.

- Multidisciplinary team including clinicians, educators,
- technologists, and neurodivergent contributors
- An authentic narrative enhances trust in a sensitive category
- Watch: Execution depth at scale and operational discipline
- beyond vision.

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4. Risk — ★○○○★☆☆ (3/5) Key risks include:

Efficacy risk: Proving measurable learning and behavioral outcomes Execution complexity: Integrating AI, gaming, psychology, and curriculum Regulatory risk: Data privacy and child safety (COPPA, etc.) Scope risk: Broad vision may dilute focus in early stages

Bottom Line

- Spark Launch represents a shift from “fixing learners” to
- designing for them.

Its success will not depend on how compelling the vision is, but on whether it can translate that vision into:

- Measurable outcomes
- Trusted systems
- Scalable execution

If it can, Sparkade may help define a new category of learning, one where education is no longer something children struggle through but aligns with how they think from the start.

SPARKLAUNCH

- Startup Phase | AI-Assisted Neurodiversity-First Immersion
- Learning Platform
- Website: www.sparklaunch.ai

YouTube Podcast Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=_wA_waXYsao

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ravi R. Iyer, MD, is a physician-scientist, entrepreneur, author, and 5x TEDx speaker who has spent four decades exploring a deceptively simple question: What makes human beings, and the organizations they create, perform at their best? A Harvard-trained physician, corporate strategist, and the founder of multiple healthcare and performance ventures, he is the creator of Neuroalignment, a framework for building high-performance organizations around the realities of human cognitive diversity. His work sits at the intersection of biology, leadership, technology, and human behavior. Boardroom Reflections is where those worlds meet.

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