



BRAINY CO.
CELEBRATING NEURODIVERSITY

Different by Design: Building Inclusive Classrooms Through Student Voice

Walk into any classroom and you'll witness something remarkable. Every student is responding to the same environment, yet no two learners are experiencing it in exactly the same way. Some are energised by collaboration, others need quiet reflection. Some thrive on structure, others flourish through creativity and exploration.

For educators, this diversity can feel both inspiring and overwhelming.

As schools work to create genuinely inclusive environments, many teachers find themselves asking: *How do I meet such diverse needs while supporting learning, wellbeing and participation for every student?*

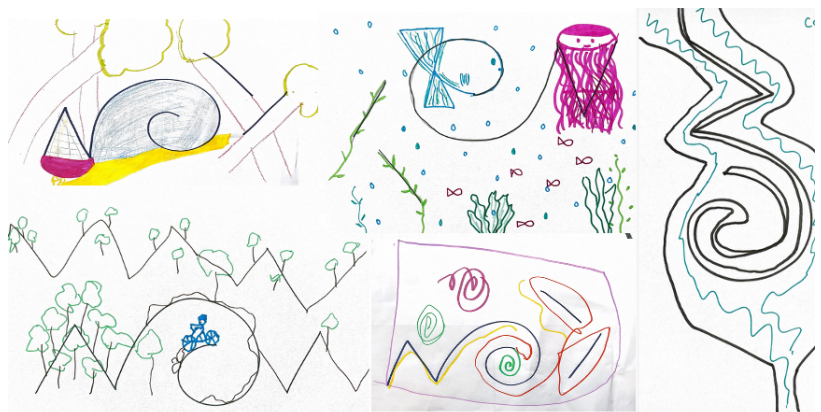
Perhaps the answer lies in a simple shift of perspective.

What if inclusion isn't about creating more plans, more adjustments or more interventions? What if it begins by helping students understand themselves?

At BrainyCo, we believe we are **Different by Design**. When young people can visualise and understand their own strengths, challenges, emotions and learning preferences, and develop an appreciation for the experiences of those around them, inclusion becomes something far more powerful than a support framework. It becomes a culture of belonging.

One of the simplest ways to demonstrate this starts with a squiggle.

Present the same squiggle to a room full of students and educators and the results are extraordinary. One person sees a treasure map. Another creates an underwater scene. Someone else imagines a mountain bike trail or a snail balancing an ice cream on its head. The starting point is identical, yet every interpretation is unique.



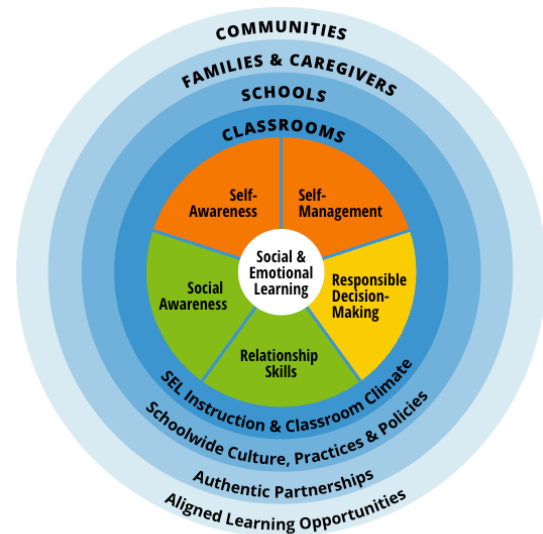
THE SQUIGGLE

The same thing happens in our classrooms every day.

Students experience the same lesson, the same teacher and the same learning challenge, yet their brains interpret those experiences differently. Different brains bring different perspectives, different ways of thinking and different solutions. Rather than viewing these differences as barriers, we can recognise them as the very foundation of creativity, innovation and learning.

This understanding sits at the heart of neurodiversity, the recognition that variation in how people think, learn and experience the world is a natural and valuable part of human diversity. When schools embrace neurodiversity, we move beyond asking students to fit a single model of learning and instead create environments where differences are understood, valued and leveraged as strengths.

Importantly, this approach is not separate from curriculum priorities. It aligns closely with both the Australian Curriculum's Personal and Social Capability and the internationally recognised CASEL framework for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). CASEL identifies five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Together, these capabilities help young people understand themselves, connect with others and navigate life's challenges successfully.



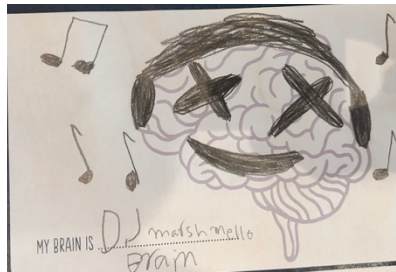
The challenge is that these skills are difficult to develop through instruction alone.

Young people need opportunities to explore, create, play, reflect and communicate. They need ways to make the invisible visible.

This is where BrainyCo's evidence-informed visual language system, co-designed with young people, educators, families and allied health professionals, is making a difference. Across early childhood settings, primary schools and secondary classrooms, students are building a shared language to describe their thoughts, feelings, behaviours and learning experiences.

Students create their own "brain characters" including Curious Brains, Learning Brains, Distracted Brains, Disaster Brains and hundreds of other imaginative representations of how they experience the world. What begins as creativity quickly becomes communication.

One young student, Ella, introduced her class to **DJ Marshmallow Brain**. When adults leaned into the conversation, Ella explained that sometimes she wanted to "turn up" her happy brain and "turn down" her sad brain or lonely brain. Sometimes she simply wanted to skip those tracks altogether. What appeared to be a playful artwork became a powerful discussion about emotions, regulation and wellbeing. More importantly, her peers immediately understood and connected with her experience.



DJ BRAIN

Another student, Lily, continued the conversation at home and returned with her **Alice in Wonderland Brain**. She described feeling lost and confused, but not necessarily alarmed. It was different from her "Masking Brain", which represented hiding her feelings from others. Through a visual metaphor, Lily communicated experiences that had previously been difficult to put into words.



These stories remind us that many young people already possess deep insights about themselves. The challenge is not that they have nothing to say. The challenge is that they often lack the tools and language to express it.

When students are given those tools, participation changes.

Instead of developing learner profiles, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or behaviour support plans *for* students, we can begin creating them *with* students. Young people become active contributors in identifying their strengths, recognising barriers, exploring strategies and reflecting on what works.

This process develops far more than self-awareness.

Students learn to problem-solve, make decisions, evaluate outcomes and advocate for their needs. They are building the executive functioning, self-regulation and social-emotional competencies that underpin lifelong learning. They are learning how to navigate complexity, not simply comply with instructions.

There is another important outcome that deserves attention.

Teachers benefit too.

Across Australia, educators are experiencing unprecedented levels of complexity and workload. Attempting to remember every adjustment, strategy and support need for every learner can contribute significantly to stress and burnout. When students develop the language and confidence to understand and communicate their own needs, responsibility becomes shared. Teachers no longer need to carry the entire burden of problem-solving alone. Instead, they become facilitators, coaches and partners in the learning process.

This is where inclusion becomes sustainable.

Not because teachers are doing more, but because students are increasingly equipped to contribute to solutions.

The result is a classroom culture where difference is normalised rather than hidden. Students recognise that everyone experiences challenges, strengths, emotions and fluctuating energy levels. They develop empathy, understanding and respect for one another. They learn that support is not something reserved for a few students but something that helps all learners participate successfully.

Perhaps the greatest lesson from the squiggle is that it was never meant to be straight.

The same is true of learning, development and inclusion.

When students understand themselves, appreciate the diversity around them and have opportunities to play, create, collaborate and problem-solve, they become active agents in their own learning. They develop the social and emotional capabilities needed to flourish not only at school, but throughout life.

And when schools embrace the reality that we are all different by design, inclusion stops being an initiative and becomes a way of being.

Because inclusion is not about giving everyone the same thing.

It is about ensuring that everyone has access to what helps them succeed.

All brains belong.

To learn more about BrainyCo's growing, community co-designed visual language system and join the movement to build more inclusive, neuro-affirming classrooms, visit www.brainyco.com.au