

# Ditch the Myths: Rethinking the Neuroinclusive Classroom

FutureFest 2026

Stephanie Salazar & Olivia Green



minds in bloom  
learning

**“I don’t know how to make this work for 30+ students.”**



Today is not about guilt. It’s about intentionality to reach all learners.



# The Lowdown.

**15-20% students are neurodivergent.**

**In a class of 30, around 4–6 students have neurodevelopmental differences incl ADHD, autism, or dyslexia.**

**4.7% of Australian teachers are formally trained to support neurodivergent learners.**

# What makes you feel safe?

DRAW A SPACE WHERE YOU FEEL SAFE.

NOT ARTISTIC. SYMBOLIC.

JUST SHAPES, COLOURS, OR SIMPLE IMAGES THAT REPRESENT SAFETY TO YOU.





If we want neurodivergent students to learn, we need to know what safety looks like for *them*.



Be a learner of your students' stories.

## My Learning Story

A one-page snapshot of who I am, how I learn, and what helps to support me at school.

**About me:**

- My favourite things and deep interests
- What I enjoy communicating/sharing about
- Things I feel proud of
- If I like working with others or on my own

**My name:**

**How I learn best:**

- How I communicate (words, visuals, gestures, AAC/device)
- How I understand instructions (1-2 step, modelling, visuals)
- How I like to show my learning
- What helps me stay focused or engaged

**What gets in the way:**

- Sensory triggers (noise, touch, smell, movement, light)
- Signs I'm feeling overwhelmed
- Eg. unexpected changes, too many verbal instructions, etc.

**What supports me best:**

- Strategies that help me feel calm or regulated
- Movement or sensory tools that support me
- What helps me to understand a task or routine
- What helps me transition between activities
- What adults can do to help me engage

**My grown-ups want you know...**

- One short sentence about something important for my teacher to understand

**One thing I want my teachers to know...**

- One short sentence about what helps you feel calm, connected, or ready to learn
- What I need when I feel overwhelmed
- What helps me understand instructions

minds in bloom learning



# 5 myths....

# reframed

(It's ok if you've thought these things!)

Let's upgrade our thinking together.

# “It’s bad parenting.”



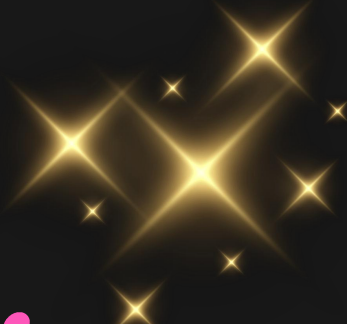
WE’VE ALL THOUGHT THIS.

It’s a natural thought when behaviour feels unpredictable or difficult. But what if this child is doing the best they can with the capacity and energy they have today?

**DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS REQUIRE DIFFERENT SKILLS.**

At home, they can perhaps play freely.  
At school, there are expectations, structured activities, non-preferred tasks, social pressures to perform, unspoken rules, and constant demands.

“ND children have fluctuating capacities and energy.”

How can I work in genuine partnership with parents to better understand & support this child?”

# “These children shouldn’t even be at this school.”

THE WORKLOAD & PRESSURE FEELS HEAVY.

Specialist support programmes are closing, so the reality is more neurodivergent students will be in mainstream classrooms. The pressure is real.

BELONGING IS FOUNDATIONAL.

Belonging is not a bonus—it's foundational for learning. Students benefit from peer modelling, social exposure, and daily micro-wins that build confidence and connection.

“What makes belonging possible for this child?”



“I can’t teach them. I have 29 other students who need my attention too.”

#### THIS IS THE PRESSURE POINT.

That feeling is real, and we honour it. But adjustments aren't about doing more—they're about designing and responding in the moment with intentionality so neurodivergent students can actually engage in the learning.

#### WHAT ADJUSTING MEANS FOR THE WHOLE CLASS.

When we adjust for one child, we're modelling to the whole class that everyone deserves to feel safe, learning looks different for everyone, support is normal, and growth is personal.

# “I can’t teach them. I have 29 other students who need my attention too.”



## BREAKING INSTRUCTIONS & TASKS INTO SMALLER STEPS

One or two steps at a time. Matches working memory capacity.  
Helps students see the path forward without overwhelm. Reduces executive function load.



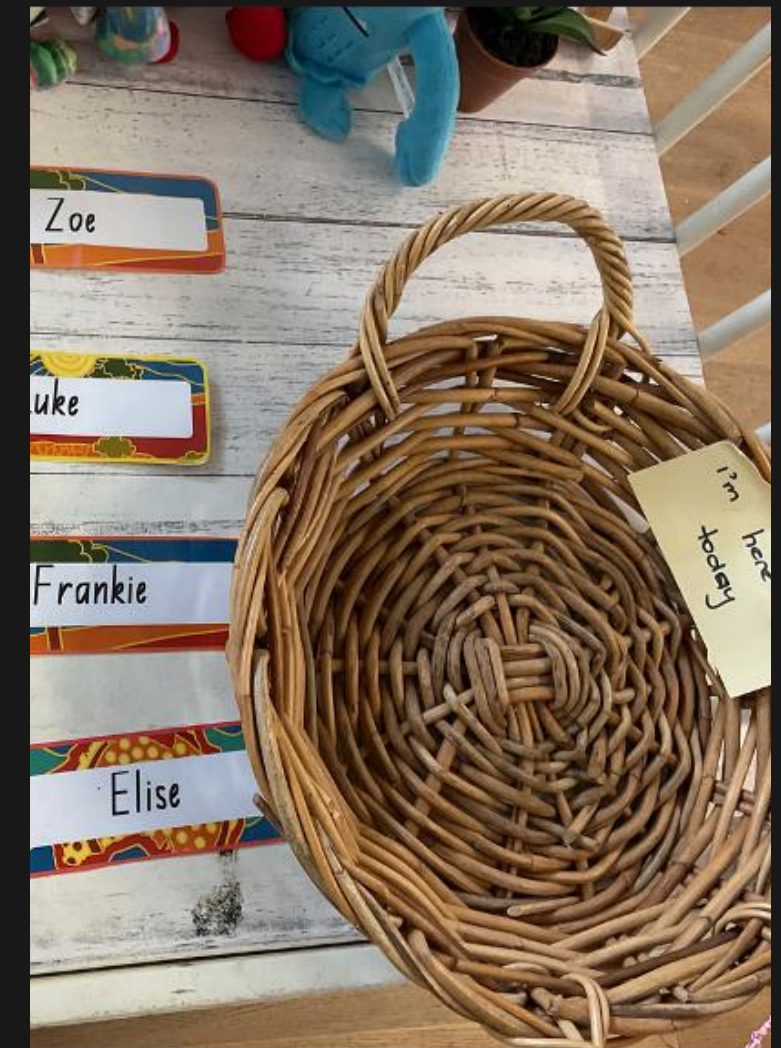
## CLEAR SUCCESS CRITERIA WITH EXAMPLES

Shows what "good" looks like. Removes guesswork and builds confidence.



## VISUAL SUPPORTS

Supports static processing—the ability to hold and manipulate information mentally.  
Reduces cognitive load.



## PREDICTABLE ROUTINES

Reduces anxiety and frees up mental energy for learning. Everyone benefits from knowing what comes next.

“I can’t teach them. I have 29 other students who need my attention too.”

“When we take care of our neurodivergent learners, the whole class benefits.”

“We’re expected to be  
therapists now.”

"THE JOB DESCRIPTION KEEPS GROWING, BUT THE TIME AND SUPPORT DON'T."

# “We are educators, helping to align therapy goals with the child’s learning goals at school.”



## YOU DON'T NEED CLINICAL LANGUAGE.

You don't need to overhaul everything you're doing.  
You need genuine collaboration.



## BRING TOGETHER EXPERTISE.

Teachers are experts of learning. Families are experts of their child. Therapists are experts of developmental support. Align goals together using tools like 'My Learning Story.'



## JOIN OUR MIBL COACHING CLUB

A community where we share practical strategies, including how to initiate these conversations with parents and therapists. Access meeting templates and examples from real schools.

“They aren’t meeting the standards.”

STANDARDS ARE REAL.

ACCOUNTABILITY IS REAL.

BUT STANDARDS DESCRIBE THE DESTINATION—THEY DON'T DESCRIBE WHO THE CHILD IS BECOMING ALONG THEIR JOURNEY.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS STILL MATTER.

## POSSIBILITIES...

### STRENGTH-BASED CONVERSATIONS

Start with what the child can do.  
Build from there.

### CLEAR, SMALLER GROWTH GOALS

If they can't write an entire story,  
maybe today their capacity is six  
sentences. Maybe their goal is  
just sitting with the group or  
following the rules of a game.

### CELEBRATE PROGRESS, NOT JUST ENDPOINTS

Some progress is hard-won and  
deeply significant.  
Notice it. Name it. Celebrate it.

# “They aren’t meeting the standards.”

Minds in Bloom Learning



“They aren’t meeting the standards.”

“What’s the next reachable step for this child?”



When we honour the journey, we create classrooms where all students—not just neurodivergent ones—feel seen, supported, and capable of growth.



# the neuro-inclusive classroom is where we...

ALL FEEL SAFE  
KNOW THEIR STORY  
REFRAME OUR THINKING  
RESPOND WITH INTENTION  
SUPPORT EVERY CHILD TO BLOOM

**Build a Neuro-Inclusive Future**  
**Workshops to empower your students and staff.**  
@mindsinbloomlearning  
[www.mindsinbloom.org](http://www.mindsinbloom.org) (sign up for updates & free resources)  
[hello@mindsinbloomlearning.com](mailto:hello@mindsinbloomlearning.com)

