



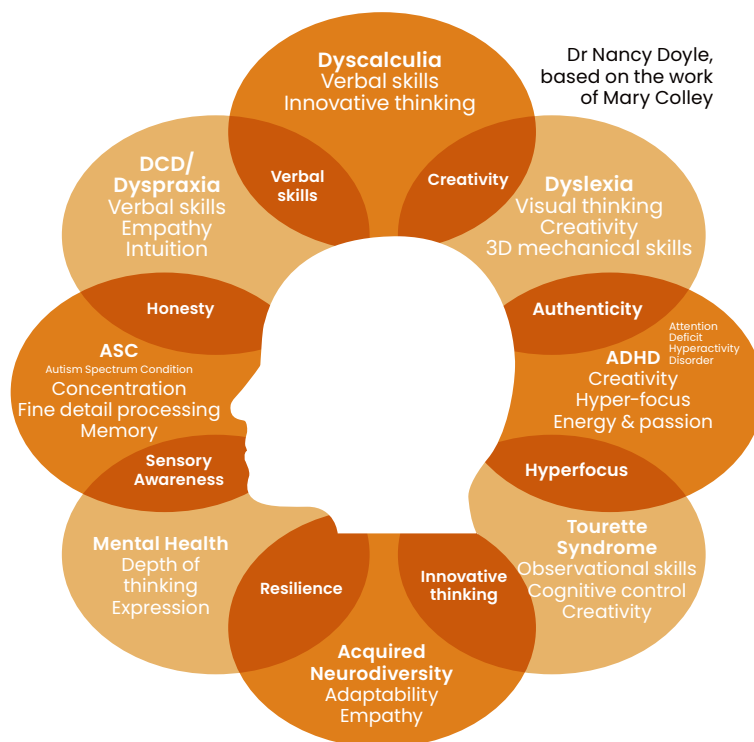
## It takes all sorts! (Aka the beauty of Neurodiversity)

As responsive, strengths-based practitioners, whether we are in an education or youth work setting, it's important for us to understand the diversity of young people we are working with, and that includes an appreciation of neurodiversity.

As you are aware, young people bring a range of preferences, strengths, barriers, and enablers into group and learning environments. In education, these are sometimes described as "Learning Styles" and relate to preferences in processing information either visually, aurally, kinaesthetically or via writing/reading.

Neurodiversity, however, refers to the idea that some brains work quite differently to others and encompasses a range of diagnoses (sometimes referred to as labels), as you can see in the diagram to the side. A key concept to emphasise is that neurodiversities are differences, not disabilities or deficits, and can also include impacts related to illness, disease or injuries that affect brain function.

Neurodiversity is not always obvious and, as awareness and scientific understanding increases, more people are getting diagnosed. A diagnosis can help people to find an answer to "why I am the way I am", but it often bears no relationship to their experience socially or



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based on the work  
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academically – that is, whether they struggle or thrive in certain situations.

Whether a young person has a diagnosis or not, understanding that they come to you with particular tendencies that can be seen as strengths can go a long way to reducing stigma, shame, or limiting beliefs they or those around them might have about what and how they can contribute.

It is estimated that between 15–20% of the population are neurodiverse in some way or other and it is up to us to ensure everyone feels included, understood, and celebrated in relation to their differences.

### TIPS TO AID INCLUSION

- Provide a way for rangatahi to self-identify in terms of their learning strengths and preferences
- Take time to get to know young people and listen to their stories of positive/negative learning or group experiences
- Always use a range of strategies to communicate information or instructions e.g. using visual, oral, and written means
- Offer choices – give taiohi the agency to opt in
- Include neurodiverse role models with non-traditional pathways and preferences – #GretAT!
- Create a culture that celebrates diversity and sees individual differences as superpowers
- Make diversity a priority in terms of what is visible, acknowledged, valued, and celebrated
- Ensure any correction, reminders or coaching about what is expected is done in a mana-enhancing way
- Seek advice from the people/professionals that know & understand the young person and/or their tendencies well
- Accentuate the positive – eliminate the negative!

[www.theeducationhub.org.nz/neurodiversity-an-overview](http://www.theeducationhub.org.nz/neurodiversity-an-overview)

[www.umbrella.org.nz/neurodiversity-in-workplace](http://www.umbrella.org.nz/neurodiversity-in-workplace)