

NSEAD Conference Art & SEND

Thursday 19th June 2025

Art and Special Needs. How Art teaching can support children with SEND

Frances Akinde

ABOUT ME

Neurodiversity Champion

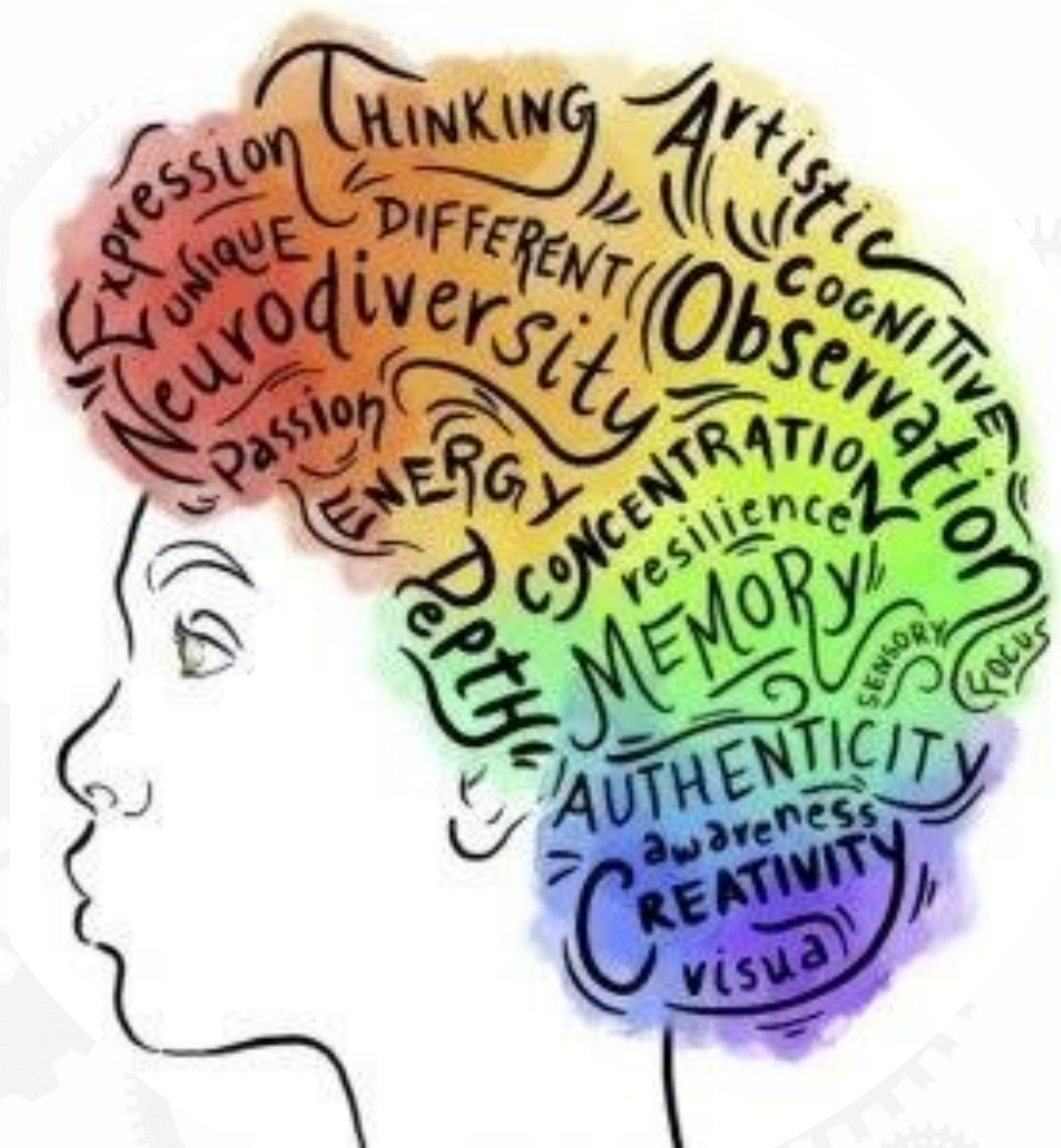


- Local Authority SEND, Leadership & Curriculum Inspector
- Education & SEND Adviser
- Assistive Technology Trainer
- Anti-Racist Schools Coach
- Former advisory teacher (SEND/SLCN)
- Former Secondary Special Headteacher (Autism)
- NPQH
- MA Education
- NASENco.
- Artist & Art Advocate - Art is for life!
- Advanced Diploma Art therapy
- MA Psychology & PHD pending!
- Author of Be an Ally, Not a Bystander



In the Summer of 2022, within 3 months I had been diagnosed with Menieres (which resulted in going deaf in one ear), ADHD & Dyslexia

[Being diagnosed with SEND: A journey of discovery
inclusion special educational needs mental health \(sec-
ed.co.uk\)](#)



Creativity & Neurodiversity

Expression
without Words

Focus and
Concentration

Visual
Learning



Building Confidence

Problem Solving
Skills

Emotional Outlet

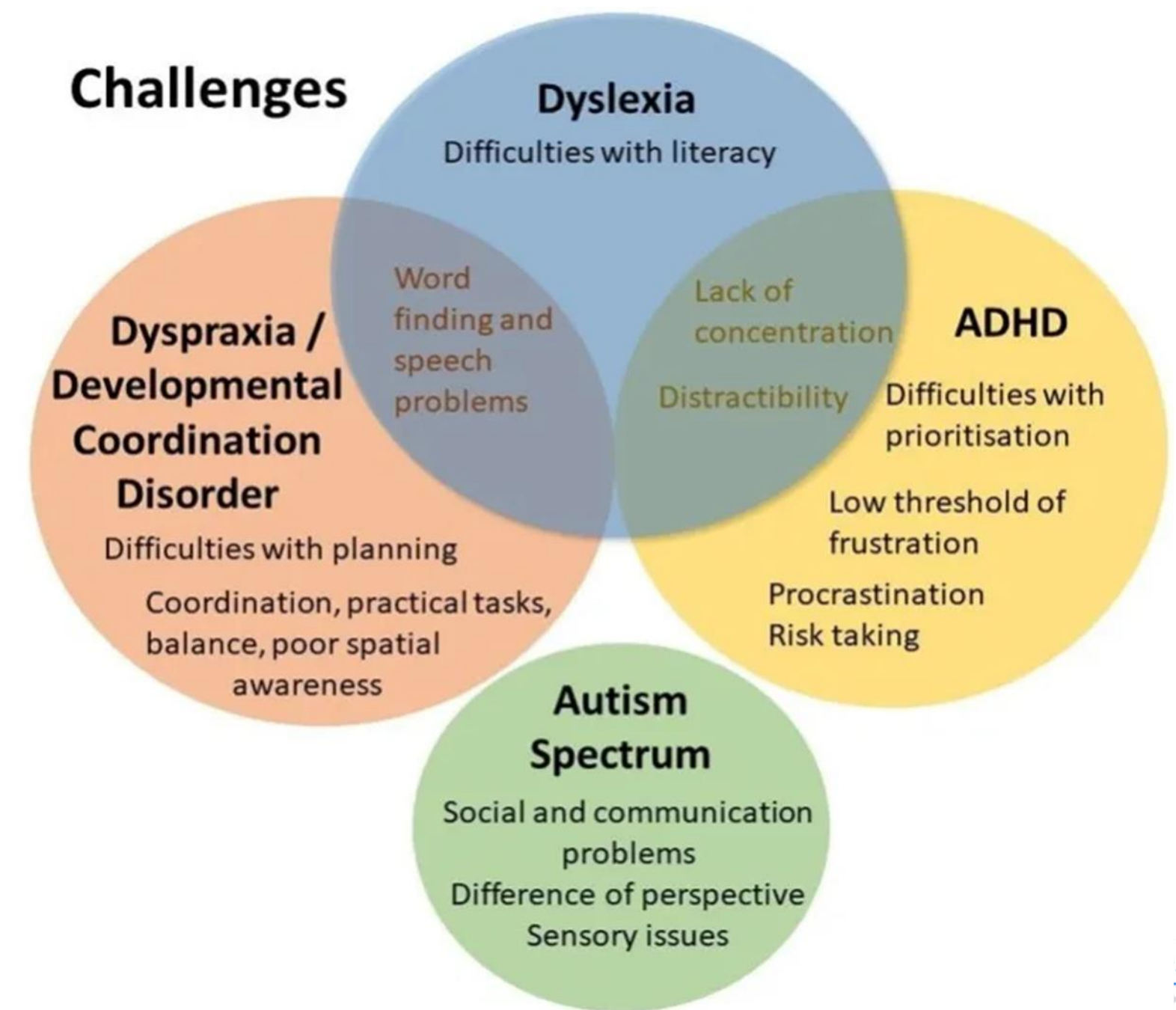
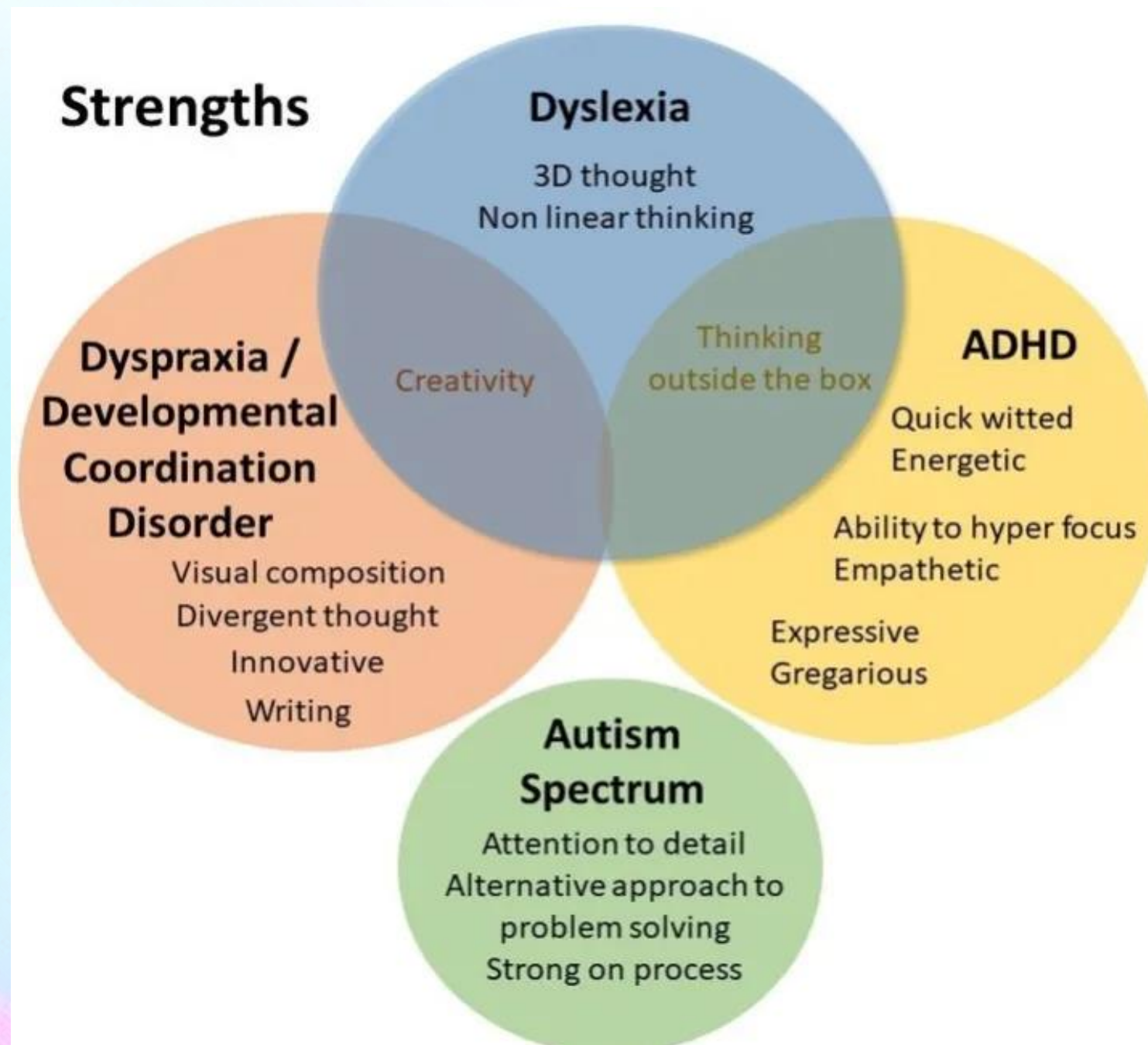


Understanding SEND in the Classroom

- **Common Types of SEND**
- **Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC):** Individuals with ASD may have difficulties with social interaction, communication, and may display repetitive behaviours.
- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** Learners with ADHD may struggle with attention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity.
- **Dyslexia:** Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that affects reading, writing, and spelling skills.
- **Dyspraxia:** Individuals with dyspraxia may have difficulties with coordination, motor skills, and planning.
- **Visual Impairment:** Learners with visual impairments may have difficulties with vision, such as partial or total blindness.
- **Hearing Impairment:** Hearing impairments can range from mild to profound and may impact a learner's ability to hear and communicate effectively.

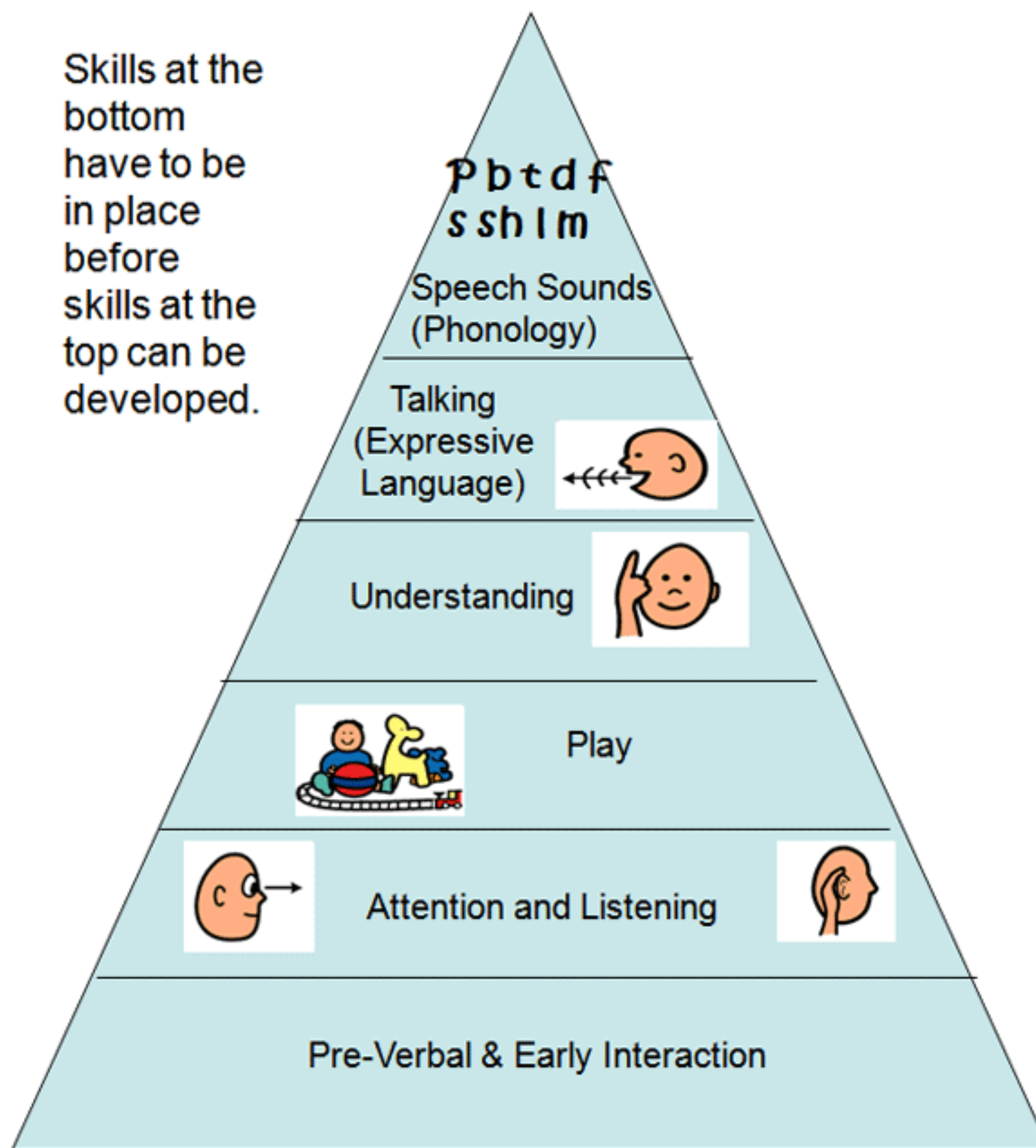


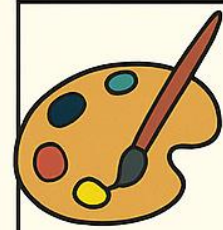
Strengths & Challenges



Language Development Pyramid

Skills at the bottom have to be in place before skills at the top can be developed.





Blank Level Questioning for Art Teachers

Level 1 Naming & Matching (Basic Comprehension)	Naming & Matching (Concrete Thinking) Focus: Simple observation and labelling. <ul style="list-style-type: none">What colour is this?Point to the red paintbrush.What is this tool called?Show me the circle. Ideal for young pupils, early language learners, or those with speech and language difficulties.
Level 2 Describing & Classifying (Basic order Thinking)	Describing & Classifying (Basic Comprehension) Focus: Describing features, functions, and beginning to infer. <ul style="list-style-type: none">What will happen if you mix these colours?What do you think the artist did first? Encourages descriptive vocabulary and introduces reasoning.
Level 3 Reordering & Predicting (Higher-order Thinking)	Reordering & Predicting (Higher-order Thinking) Focus: Sequencing events, predicting outcomes, beginning to infer. <ul style="list-style-type: none">What will happen if you mix these colours?How is this person thinking in this picture? Supports storytelling, interpretation, and decision-making.
Level 4 Justifying & Problem-Solving (Abstract Thinking)	Justifying & Problem-Solving (Abstract Thinking) Focus: Inference, evaluation, and discussing ideas beyond what is seen. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Why do you think the artist chose this style?How would you change this piece to improve it. Encourages independent thought, critical reflection, and self-expression.

Blank Level Questioning for Art Teachers – Visual Overview (UK English)

Level 1 – Naming & Matching (Concrete Thinking) Focus: Simple observation and labelling.

Example Questions: “What colour is this?” “

Point to the red paintbrush.”

“What is this tool called?”

“Show me the circle.”

🧠 Ideal for young pupils, early language learners, or those with speech and language difficulties.

Level 2 – Describing & Classifying (Basic Comprehension)

Focus: Describing features, functions, and basic categorisation.

Example Questions: “What is this used for?”

“Which one is bigger?”

“How do you know that’s a sculpture?”

“What shapes can you see in this picture?”

🧠 Encourages descriptive vocabulary and introduces reasoning.

Level 3 – Reordering & Predicting (Higher-order Thinking)

Focus: Sequencing events, predicting outcomes, beginning to infer.

Example Questions: “What will happen if you mix these colours?”

“What do you think the artist did first?”

“How is this person feeling in the picture?”

“Why do you think they used that material?”

🧠 Supports storytelling, interpretation, and decision-making.

Level 4 – Justifying & Problem-Solving (Abstract Thinking)

Focus: Inference, evaluation, and discussing ideas beyond what is seen.

Example Questions: “Why do you think the artist chose this style?”

“How would you change this piece to improve it?”

“What message do you think this artwork is trying to share?”

“Can you compare this to another piece of art you’ve seen?”

🧠 Encourages independent thought, critical reflection, and self-expression.





Inclusive Teaching Strategies

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**
 - UDL is a framework that provides multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement to meet the diverse learning needs of students.
- **Differentiated Instruction**
 - Differentiated instruction involves tailoring teaching methods, materials, and assessments to accommodate the individual learning needs and preferences of students.
- **Collaborative Learning**
 - Encouraging collaborative learning activities promotes peer support, social interaction, and shared learning experiences among students.
- **Visual Supports**
 - Using visual aids, such as diagrams, charts, and models, can enhance understanding and provide additional support for students with diverse learning needs.



Supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities

- It is important that the art curriculum is ambitious for all children and pupils.
- Pupils with the most complex needs may require curricular goals to be adapted for them. But the aims and specified end points set out in the national curriculum apply to all.
- It is particularly important for teachers to be mindful of theories of cognitive load when working with pupils who have additional needs or face barriers to learning.[footnote 127] Our previous research highlighted how children struggle to retain knowledge and develop schemas if their working memory is overloaded.[footnote 128] It may be useful for teachers to isolate the important aspects of a piece of work when teaching the works of artists, craft-makers and designers.[footnote 129]
- Sometimes, teachers unnecessarily lower their expectations for pupils with SEND. For example, they remove parts of the art curriculum instead of adapting them so that pupils with SEND can study the same areas as other pupils. Art educators have suggested that, when introducing pupils to the works of contemporary artists, it can be useful to start with works that have identifiable subject matter rather than less concrete imagery.[footnote 130] This supports pupils who struggle to make sense of abstract ideas, while enabling them to study the same works of contemporary artists as their peers.



Based on this, high-quality art and design education may have the following features:

- pedagogical choices are designed to develop the particular practical, theoretical and disciplinary knowledge intended in each lesson
- classroom activities are clear about what is to be learned (the curriculum object) and enable pupils to practise it
- teaching approaches take account of pupils' level of expertise
- when pupils learn techniques for the first time, teachers make sure they have enough opportunities to practise crucial components of these techniques
- as pupils become more proficient in areas of practical knowledge, classroom activities become increasingly varied and open ended
- teachers direct pupils' attention to the main concepts, themes and ideas that they are exploring
- when learning in other locations, such as galleries, pupils have enough prior knowledge to make these experiences meaningful
- teachers make subject-specific adaptations to activities for pupils with SEND, where appropriate, instead of excessive adaptations to the curriculum or lowering expectations



What is this like for your learners?

Visual Impairment

Provide tactile materials and tools for learners to explore.

Use high-contrast colours and large print materials.

Use verbal descriptions and audio cues to explain visual elements.



What does this look like for your learners?

Hearing Impairment

Use visual aids and gestures to support communication.

Provide written instructions and captions for videos.

Utilise assistive listening devices or technologies.



What does this look like for your learners?

Physical Disabilities

Provide adaptive tools and materials for learners to use.

Modify tasks to accommodate physical limitations.

Ensure accessibility of the learning environment.



What does this look like for your learners?

Learning Disabilities

Break down tasks into smaller steps.

Use visual aids and graphic organizers to support comprehension.

Provide additional time and support for completing tasks.



What does this look like for your learners?

Autism Spectrum Condition

Create a structured and predictable learning environment.

Use visual schedules and social stories to explain expectations.

Provide sensory breaks and accommodations for sensory sensitivities.



Key Takeaways

Differentiation is key

- Provide multiple ways for students to engage with the material
- Offer various options for demonstrating understanding

Use visual aids

- Incorporate visual supports such as diagrams, charts, and images
- Use colour coding and visual cues to help students organise information

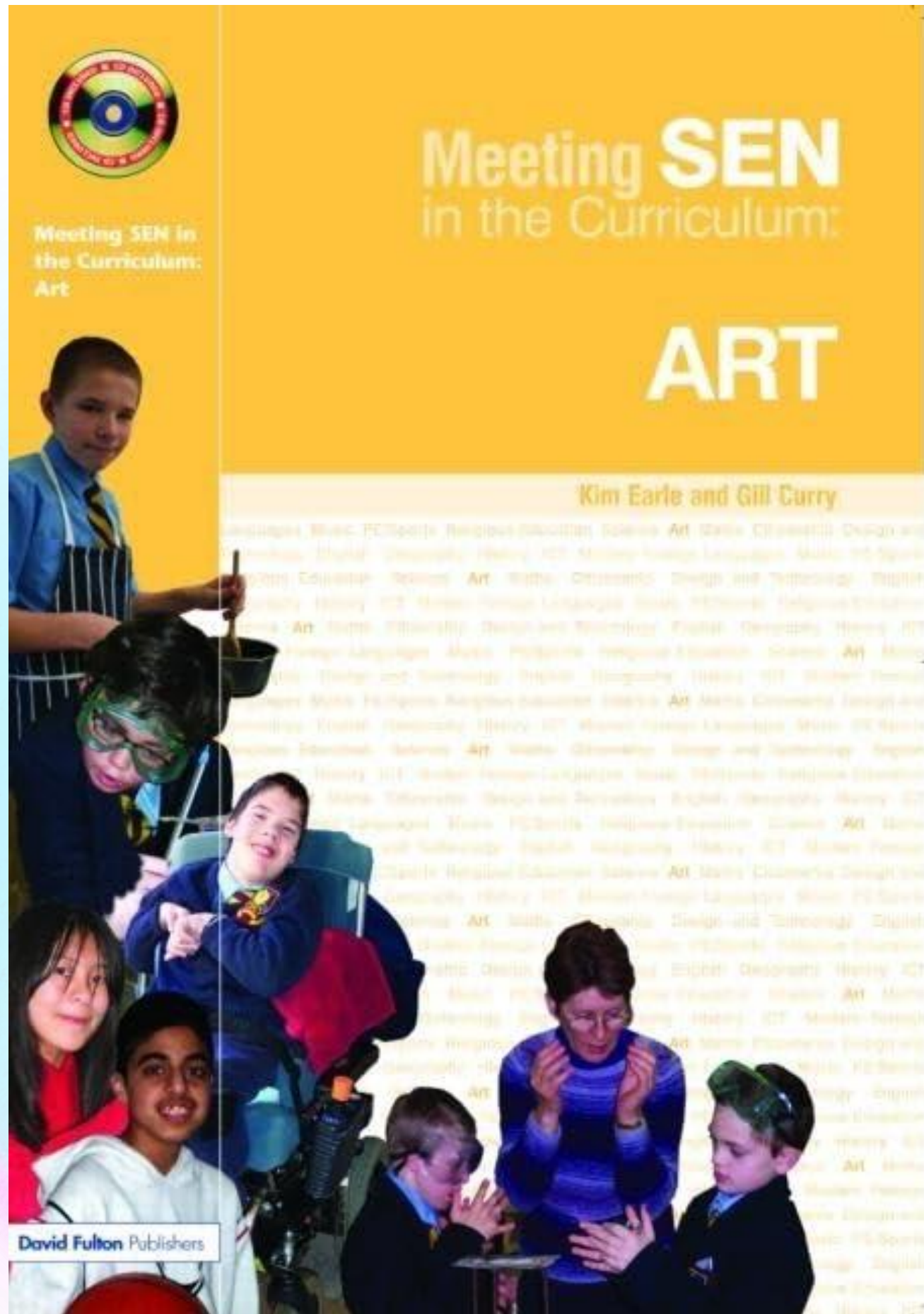
Create a supportive environment

- Foster a positive and inclusive classroom culture
- Provide clear expectations and guidelines

Collaborate with specialists

- Seek support from special education teachers and other specialists
- Collaborate with parents and caregivers to ensure consistency and continuity of support





Special educational
needs and/or disabilities
Training toolkit

For primary PGCE tutors and trainees
Including pupils with
SEN and/or disabilities in
primary art and design


developing people, improving young lives

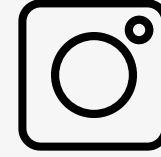
[Including pupils with SEN and/or disabilities in primary art and design \(ioe.ac.uk\)](http://ioe.ac.uk)



Contact Me



Frances Akinde



@inclusion_ht



@frankietweetart



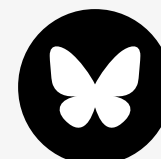
www.inclusionht.com



frances@inclusionht.com



@frances-akinde-baanab



@inclusionht.bsky.social

