Neurodivergent Education for Students, Teaching & Learning (NESTL) Toolkit

Key Resource 1 ------
Framework for Neurodivergent-Inclusive Teaching and Learning

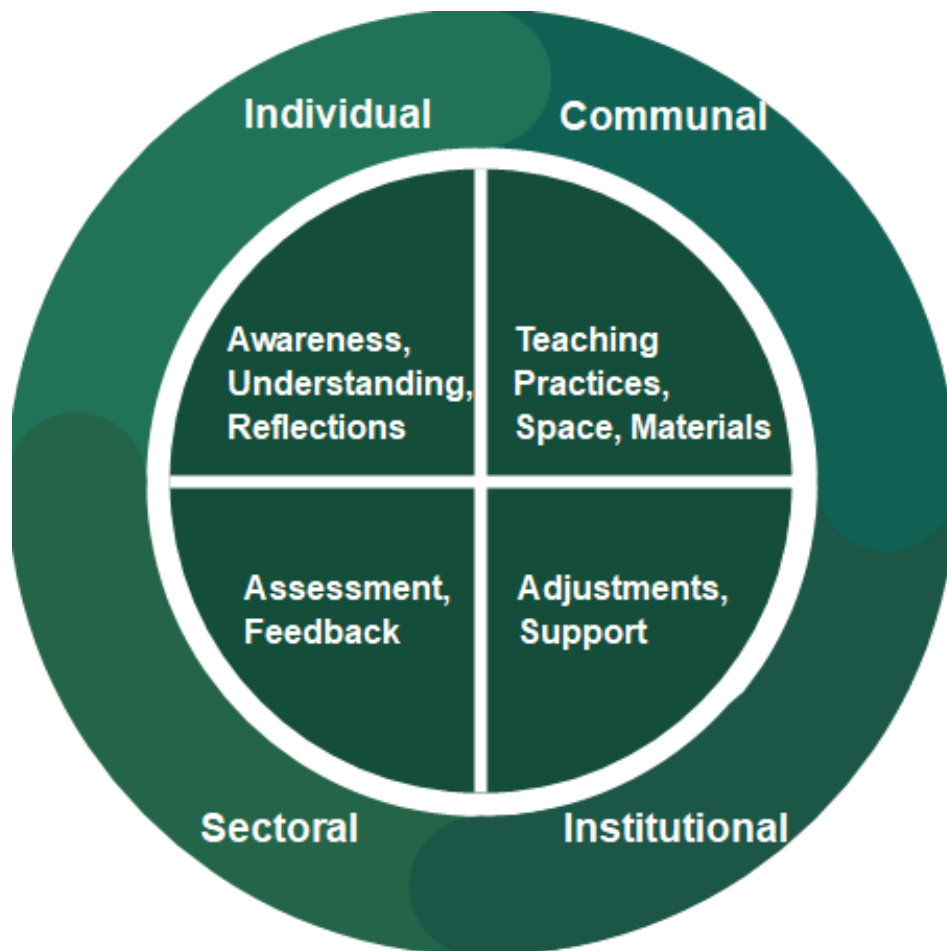# Framework for Neurodivergent-Inclusive Teaching and Learning

Figure 1 Framework for Neurodivergent-Inclusive Teaching and Learning

Creating a truly neurodivergent-inclusive learning environment involves a shift across multiple dimensions of teaching practices, space, culture, and system. The NESTL toolkit focuses on four key areas of actions:

- **Awareness and Understanding:** enhancing awareness of neurodivergent-inclusive teaching and learning, cultivating shared knowledge, developing a better understanding of neurodivergent students' needs, and demystifying neurodivergence and relevant stigma.
- **Teaching Practice, Space, and Materials:** designing teaching approaches, spaces (including physical, social, and psychological teaching spaces), and materials and resources that are inclusive by default.
- **Assessment and Feedback:** redefining how we measure learning and what we recognise as success in learning.
- **Adjustment and Support:** providing ongoing and responsive adjustment, and universally accessible and inclusive support that meets individual needs.

Within the four areas of change, initiatives can take different forms and need to occur at different levels. Some can be achieved by individual educators, while others require systematic and institutional changes.

We thus apply a nature-inspired metaphoric framework to describe **four forces of change** that intersect with each other, and with the four areas of actions. They include:

- **Individual Initiatives (Sparks 🔥):** individually-led, everyday teaching practices that can make a big difference;
- **Communal Efforts (Currents 🌊):** collaborative, college-, department-, college- or division-level efforts that create flow and consistency;
- **Institutional Changes (Winds 🌪️):** institutional policies and cultural shifts that (re)shape the teaching climate;
- **Sector-wide Transformations (Bedrocks 🌐):** fundamental, systemic and sector-wide transformations that reshape what education means and values.

The following illustrations and explanatory texts are created by Hanrui Li.

- **Individual Initiatives (Sparks 🔥)**: individually-led, everyday teaching practices that can make a big difference.

Figure 2 Sparks as a metaphor for Individual Initiatives; Illustration by Hanrui Li

Even the tiniest change made by one person can light up a corner of the world. As more and more people choose to act inclusively, these individual sparks accumulate and will gradually brighten the whole environment, just like stars lighting up the night.

- **Communal Efforts (Currents 🌊)**: collaborative, college-, department-, college- or division-level efforts that create flow and consistency.

Each group, department, college, faculty, unit, or school, can be seen as a branch current, and when these branch currents come together, they form a wider and more powerful stream that can drive meaningful change across the university.
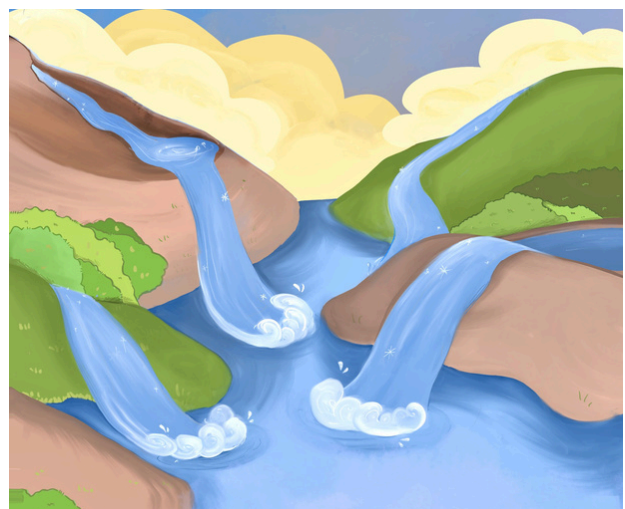

Figure 3 Currents as a metaphor for Communal Efforts; Illustration by Hanrui Li

- **Institutional Changes (Winds 🌪️)**: institutional policies and cultural shifts that (re)shape the teaching climate.

Figure 4 Winds as a metaphor for Institutional Changes; illustration by Hanrui Li

Wind has many forms: from powerful hurricanes to gentle breezes. A strong wind can bring visible, large-scale impact, while a soft breeze can gradually shift entrenched norms. As shown in the illustration, even a gentle wind can carry away rigid, outdated "leaves," clearing space for new, more inclusive growth.

- **Sector-wide Transformations (Bedrocks 🌐)**: fundamental, systemic and sector-wide transformations that reshape what education means and values.

Bedrock is typically solid and difficult to shift, but it lays the foundation of the world. Once it moves, it can trigger profound and lasting change across the entire ecosystem. This mirrors what happens when transformation begins at the sector level, reshaping the foundational values and structures of education.
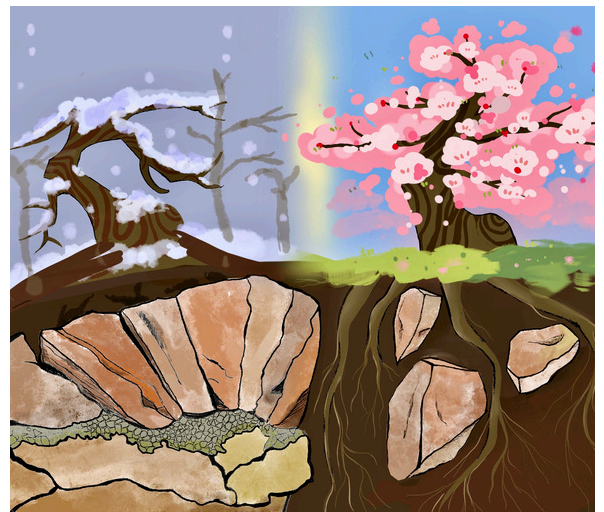

Figure 5 Bedrock as a metaphor for sector-wide transformations; illustration by Hanrui Li

In the illustration, the tree's roots on the right are able to stretch and grow freely only because the bedrock has shifted. This represents how meaningful change in education becomes possible only when deep-rooted systemic barriers begin to loosen. Just as roots need space to grow, transformation requires a shift in what lies beneath the surface. When change begins and the bedrock starts to shift, winter will eventually turn into spring.

For more detailed guidance, examples, activities, and case studies, see the full NESTL toolkit.

Scan Me!

NESTL Toolkit