

# Autism: A Non-speaker's Perspective

Tim Chan

Pronouns: he/him

Dx with Autism at 3 years of age

Non-speaking after 14 months of age

Communicates via partner-assisted typing

Presented a TEDTalk at 18

Published autobiography "Back from the Brink"  
(2019)

Director of *Reframing Autism*

Ambassador of *I CAN Network*,  
*Communication Rights Australia*.

B.A. Honours (2022)

PhD (2023 -)

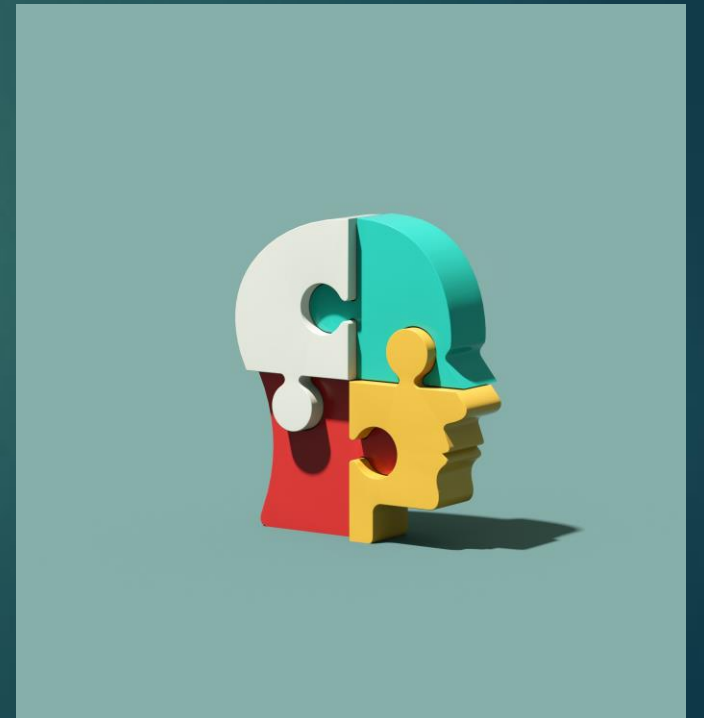
# Representation of Autism: The Puzzle

Early understanding:

Representation as problems in meaning-making of the world and other people

With increased understanding:

Revision in autism being the puzzle as seen by most people



# My Journey

From puzzle pieces to understanding myself  
and autism

Nonspeaking since 14 months

Dx with Autism at age 3

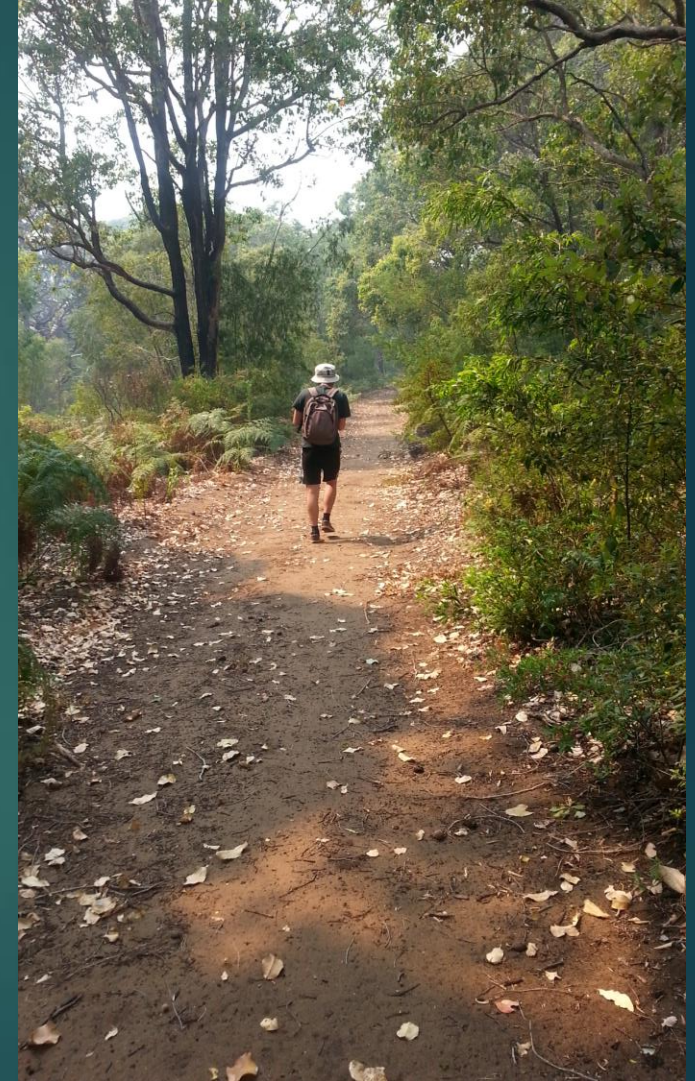
with developmental delays and high support needs

Mastering language

Acquiring AAC to communicate

Attending School and University

Working as a nonspeaking advocate



# Growing Up Autistic: My Challenges

## Visual thinker

Thinking in pictures with speech as fleeting sounds without meaning.

## Frustration in meaning making

Lack of language for comprehension

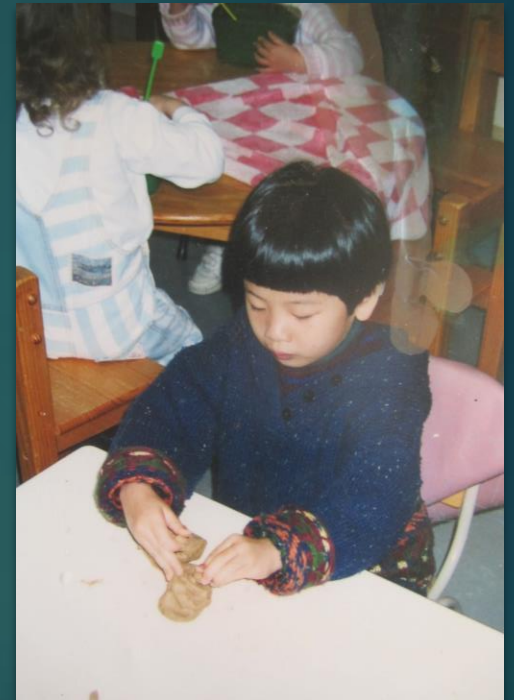
Used trial and error with associational thinking in sense-making

## Dyspraxia (movement challenges)

Reduced body awareness and proprioception

## Hypersensitivities

## High anxiety levels





## Mastering language

- individualised program
- receptive: pairing words to images
- expressive: translating images to words

## Language opens the door to

- understanding the world
- understanding my differences

## CCN differences in functioning

- sensory issues leading to self-regulation
- misinterpretation of self-regulatory behaviour
- often lead to presumptions of incompetence



# Communication Breakthrough age 9

Acquiring AAC to communicate  
Supported Typing/Facilitated Communication

Use of ST/FC provides opportunities to

- Connect with people
- Understand the world
- Understand myself and my niche



# Supported Typing or Facilitated Communication (FC)

Facilitator provides

1. Physical support for challenges in
  - fragmented body awareness
  - compromised proprioception
  - dyspraxia in difficulties in voluntary movements
2. Emotional and regulatory support re challenges in
  - sensory and anxiety issues
  - performance demands
3. Attentional support re challenges in
  - attending and focus

Support is faded with practice  
Aim in moving to independence

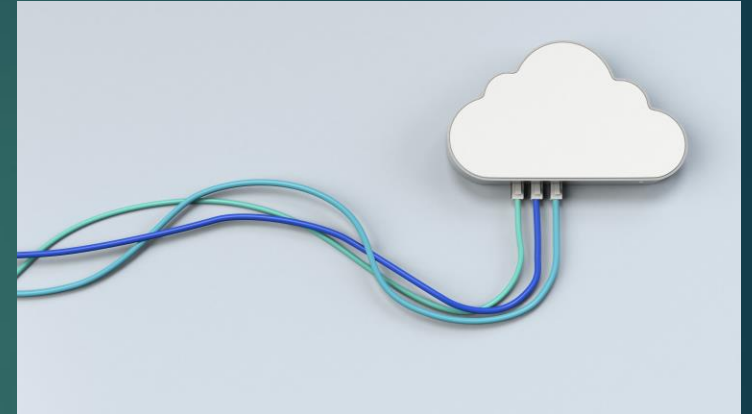


Typing with support from Ruben

# Neurodiversity in Reframing Autism and my own self-concept

## Neurodiversity approaches

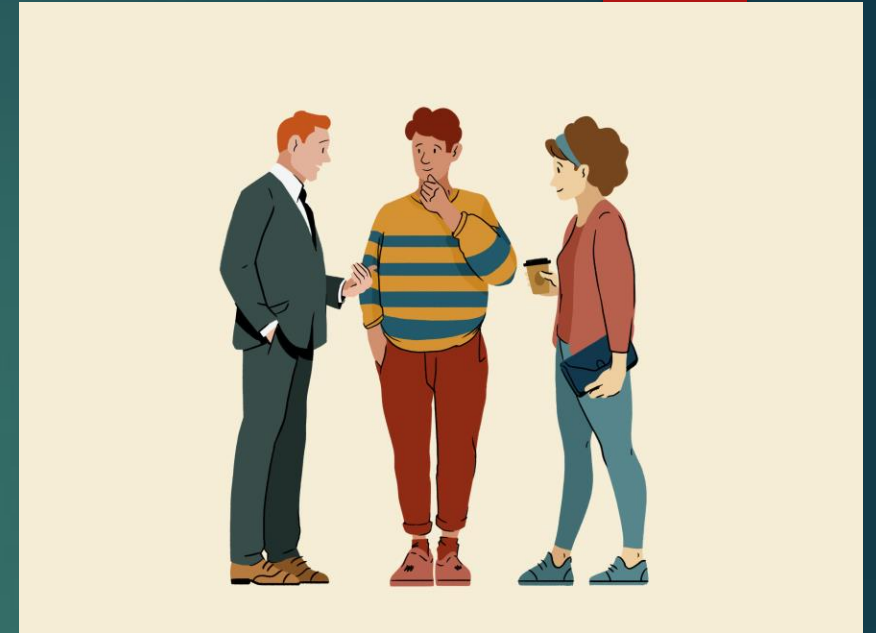
- Reframe autism and other conditions as differences in brain wiring
- Autistic differences seen as natural human expression, not deficits.
- Focus on autistic strengths





# Neurodiversity

- Double empathy model by Autistic researcher, Dr. Damian Milton.
- Neurodivergent functioning is different from, but not inferior to neurotypical functioning,
- Empathising and understanding a two-way street.



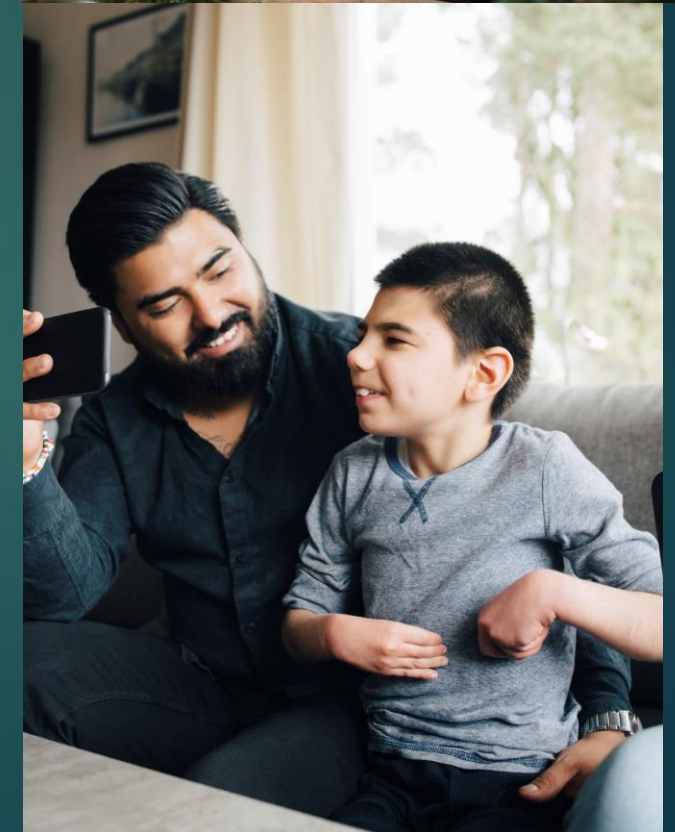
# Importance of social support in navigating autistic challenges

## Autistic challenges in

- meeting social expectations
- Responding appropriately
- self-deprecation from failure to adapt to social settings

## Social support essential in

- rewriting our narratives of inadequacy
- reaffirming our autistic identity
- reclaiming our self-esteem
- achieving our goals

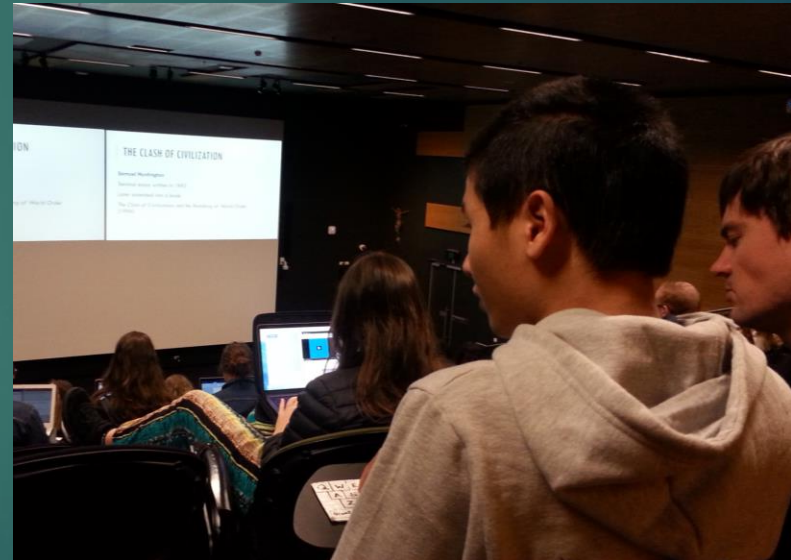


# Asso Prof. Mark Chou

Epitomises acceptance and inclusion  
Committed to supporting my learning  
Accepted and accommodated my differences



Attending lecture with Ruben





## Asso. Prof. Mark Chou

- Provided excellent guidance and supervision for my BA Hons. thesis
- Received the Autism Inclusion Award (ACU 2022)
- Gratified by Mark's comments:
  - as one of his "most capable students"





## Asso Prof. Mark Chou

- Encouraged and supported my PhD journey
- Continued to supervise my PhD after resignation and relocation to ANU
- Reassured me he is rewarded by personal satisfaction in my success

## Mentors' support and belief in me empowers me

- To grow in my self-esteem
- To align with my aspirations
- To live more fully



Meeting with Mark on starting my PhD Swipers Gully, Feb. 2023

# Inclusion:

Campfire analogy



Embracing diversity  
and unique perspectives

