

April 24, 2014

Transcription Bill Patrick, NBCCD

Introduction: A video in which Bill Patrick, Counsellor at the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, talks about his experiences in accommodating students with compulsive behaviours.

How did you accommodate a student with a disability in your class?

The degree to which we would accommodate a student would depend on a couple of things. One is, how disruptive is this behaviour towards classmates, towards the learning environment? For instance, if someone is sighing or coughing or has some sort of behaviour that is very disruptive to the lecture or class discussion, then that would be an issue we would probably have to discuss and come up with plans, working with the instructor and whatever counselling support services may be on your campus to address the issue. Is this behaviour not just having an impact on a specific student but also on the environment in general—say sighing, or compulsive tapping, or hair pulling, or cutting, or things like that. If someone is cutting, is this person doing it in a visible way that is disruptive to the learning environment? Then it's an issue that really has to be addressed.

How was the experience from your perspective?

I think it's important to understand that compulsive behaviours are generally a way to reduce anxiety, so while they may look bizarre to outsiders, they are often serving a very functional purpose to the person who is doing them. So sometimes, resolving the issue is really a matter of redirecting the behaviour so that the person can get the same sort of soothing that they are seeking to get through this compulsive behaviour and perhaps doing it in a less dysfunctional or less disruptive way.

What would you say to a colleague who will have a student with a disability in his or her class?

I would say two things. One is seriously consider whether or not the behaviour needs to be addressed. We all get to be quirky, and who among us isn't quirky? So I would really look at whether we need to address that behaviour. If we do need to address the behaviour, I also wouldn't hesitate to do it privately, confidentially with the student, and discuss the impact that the student's behaviour is having on the rest of the class. Sometimes people are not aware of the impact their behaviour is having and sometimes that is because no one has addressed it with them. In my experience, most students and student support services personnel are quite eager to help resolve the situation and make it work for everybody. Sometimes the question comes up as to whether or not other students are allowed to know about one of their classmates experiencing a certain condition. We always have to be very careful to protect people's confidentiality. On the one hand they'll tell something is going on and sometimes that will frighten them unnecessarily. On the other hand, if this person has a disability, it is important not to single that person out. Sometimes, however, some students are willing to have that discussion and the first step to that would be to have that discussion with the student individually and talk about how to

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manage the situation because often, it causes me to have good, accurate information, become very empathetic, and their fear disappears.