



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

----- Case Study 3



Case Study 3: Opening Disability

Conversations | Dr Cressida Ryan

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GENERAL - If it was obvious, and / or my antennae were wiggling:

1. I'd ask a student to have a word with me. I might ask whether anyone at school had ever suggested an SpLD, or whether any of their siblings had SpLDs. I always start by finding something to praise in the work. I rarely acted on my first instinct, but left it a few classes / homework until I could say –

“I've seen you're strong on x but I'm beginning to notice a pattern of y, which reminds me of other students who have e.g. dyslexia and I wondered whether this had ever been suggested to you?”

“Moving to university involves working in new ways, and I was wondering how you were finding that affected your work, as I've noticed xyz, which might not have been picked up on before”. “I'm new to teaching you, so am looking at your work with fresh eyes, and was wondering whether you'd ever been screened for...”

“I've noticed a couple of patterns / features in your work and was wondering if you knew why these things happened in your work.”

2. This is good if you don't want to suggest SpLD because you don't think the student will handle it well, but opens up a conversation about what might make work better. It's a difficult balance though. I might give feedback saying “please could you look at how you manage spelling / grammar / structure etc.” and then support the student in receiving that feedback (“do come and talk to me about specifics” etc.) to try to get them to admit they found that hard.

3. Running generic skills sessions “how to read / write / notetake for academic purposes” so baseline support was built into universal design, and there’s space to experiment and explore everyone’s strengths and weaknesses, which leads to a generic discussion of when an SpLD assessment might be helpful, and therefore might bring students forward.

4. It can help to have an external example, e.g. “here’s an example of the kind of issue dyslexic students have had with this assignment. I noticed a similar issue with your work, and wondered what you thought of the situation?”

Responses were usually:

1. Oh yes, I just haven’t told anyone. How do I handle that now?
2. Oh yes, here’s my previous support plan.
3. Oh really? Nobody ever said that but I always found x hard at school and my sister has dyslexia so I suppose that makes sense. What do I do now?
4. Oh really? That isn’t something I’ve ever thought about but thank you for pointing out how I could improve, and if you think it is worth talking to someone, how do I go about it?

So, I think teacher education, clear routes to disability advisor support, a range of questioning approaches which take into consideration how the student is presenting, and some transitional pedagogy and universal design helps.



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