

Reflection on PBS video, "How Difficult Can It Be?"
Kathy Weise / ECOMP 5007 / October 8, 2007

I watched the video "How Difficult Can It Be?" with two others, my son, Alex, who is a college student and has ADD, and a friend of his, Sam, who is also a college student studying to be a high school English teacher. After viewing the video, I felt that every new teacher should see it. Both these students attended K-12 schools that were highly mainstreamed so they experienced sharing classrooms with students with many different disabilities.

Alex reacted strongly to the scenes where the instructor created a pressured learning environment. He shared several stories of teachers that would constantly repeat questions to students and remembered having to intervene sometimes to explain something to a fellow student in a different manner. He commented that he didn't understand why the teacher thought repetition would assist understanding. He agreed with the boy in the video and said he always thinks long-term about how his difficulties are going to affect his ability to work in the real world and that worry overrides everything that he does in school.

Sam said she learned a lot about the variety of learning disabilities and better ways of dealing with them and particularly with the processing speed disabilities. She commented that she hopes she gets enough classroom time to work on developing some of the skills that were highlighted - creating an environment that encourages risk taking, trying to remember how to pace things better for certain students, and offering a variety of delivery and learning experiences for different learning styles.

This video provided everyone an opportunity to experience what it is like to have a learning disability. The facilitator provided excellent props and activities that were designed to show what it is like to have that specific difficulty and everybody involved in the video and those of us viewing it all felt the experience was illuminating. Some of the disabilities I was familiar with and some of them I wasn't but I learned a lot about them all. I learned what it would feel like to have the difficulty and I learned how to better teach someone with that difficulty.

He started the sessions with the emphasis that a student does not have a learning disability by choice. As he went through each of the disabilities of processing difficulties, reading comprehension, visual motor coordination, oral expression, reading and decoding, and auditory and visual impairments, he stressed the emotional components and processing difficulties of dealing with each of these disabilities and how they can directly impact the classroom environment. He demonstrated how learning behaviors changed when "I don't know" became an acceptable answer. He explained why students withdraw and look away when faced with the frustrations and anxiety their disabilities provide. He talked about common teacher strategies of offering rewards, taking things away or blaming them for not being motivated and then offered constructive strategies of providing more time and calling on students with processing disabilities first.

One of the most important things he talked about was a sense of fairness when dealing with students with disabilities. Other students, teachers, parents, and school staff will often offer the excuse that providing additional assistance or varieties of strategies is not fair. He emphasized that NOT providing them is not providing the student with disabilities an equal opportunity to education and that equal it not fair.

References

PBS Video, Rosen Productions, Peter. (1989). *Understanding Learning Disabilities: How Difficult Can It Be?* Country of Origin: United States.