

From the Studio of Jack Pelham

Special Needs Policy

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I am a sole proprietor, teaching from my own private (and small) studio space, and without any assistants. Unfortunately, this means I'm simply not in a good position from which to accommodate special needs students. As it is, I have a high success rate in maintaining an orderly and efficient atmosphere in the classroom, and I consider that one a great feature of my classes. This particular strength comes at a cost, however. It means that not just any student out there is a good candidate for my courses, inasmuch as not every student is completely willing and able to comply satisfactorily with my Code of Conduct. In some cases, there may be some special needs or developmental issues in play, and in other cases, a particular student may be able, but unwilling. In my experience, it's not the cause that's important; it's the disruption that results from disorderly moments in the classroom.

Now, having said all that, let me address the topic of special needs. I realize that developmental psychology is hardly an exact science—and I've had more than one student "on the spectrum" do well in my classes. It is a question, then, of "how much?" That is, of how much and how often any particular student will present a disruption to the class experience. Many high-functioning students with various conditions turn out **not** to have any "special needs" at all in our classes, providing no disruptions at all. So, it comes down to a judgment call, based in part on best guesses from past behavior.

Generally, in cases in which it seems like a particular student in question might be expected to remain orderly based on his or her track record, I am amenable to giving it a try—with the firm agreement that if disruptive patterns emerge, the student's enrollment will be withdrawn, just as would the enrollment of **any** student failing to remain orderly in class.

I sympathize with and respect the situation of special needs families, and regret that I am not in a position to help in whatever special ways that your students might need. I also ask that you sympathize with and respect **my** situation, too, and that you resist the temptation to try to sneak in a student with known issues without having a frank and straightforward discussion with me about it in advance. While it's tempting to keep the facts to oneself in hope that it might work out well, my experience has been that it generally causes more difficulty for everybody as the situation is eventually discovered for what it is.

I am also faced with an additional difficulty that I'd like you to consider. If I take on a policy of enrolling students with borderline behaviors, while it might seem "not that bad" in any particular case, I am left to deal with the **cumulative** effects of multiple low-level disruptions, potentially even manifesting all at once—and even with possible undesirable interactions **between** various special-needs students. This is what forces me into a "nip it in the bud" position. Indeed, this is why I set the barre so high with my **non**-special-needs student population, putting them in time-out (on the rare occasions that such is necessary), or even removing them from enrollment when habitual patterns of disruption become apparent.

In short, it is the disruption and disorderliness that is at issue here, and not the special needs that may prompt it. I hope that this adequately explains my policy, and I welcome any questions or comments you may have. You may contact Jack Pelham here.