Transcript for Bridging the Gap: Supporting Neurodivergent Learners from Campus to Career
BCcampus FLO Friday session on February 19, 2026
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JENNIFER FANE:
Wonderful. All right. Thank you so much, Britt, for the introduction and Britt and Helena and Kelsey for the opportunity to come and speak with you all and present research, as well as a little bit of lived experience and really sort of current trends, challenges, and strategies that are really working well for neurodivergent learners in post-secondary and with the workforce transition. I'm also B.C. based. I am so thankful to be on the unceded territory of the Qayqayt Nation, which is colonially known as New Westminster. And so pleased to speak with you all. I'm often talking to Ontario folk or people back on the other side of the country, so it's really nice to connect with peers here in B.C. J just got to get my controls going here.

I am monitoring the chat as I go. So I really would encourage people to pop in comments or questions or just please feel free to use the chat as you like. And I will keep an eye. And if there's questions and things, I'll try to engage with the content as I go. If I miss anything, I will definitely come back during the Q&A at the end as well too to make sure that everyone's comments and ideas and questions are answered. So I know that, if you're confused why this says Signal49 instead of the Conference Board of Canada. The Conference Board of Canada rebranded last month, so I might even mess up the research as well, too, and who knows there might even be a mistake in slide deck, but hopefully not. So Signal49 is a not-for-profit research-focused Canadian organization. We've been around for 70 years. This name is just new to us for about a month old.

About me, I am a late identified autistic researcher, educator, and former teacher and professor. Before moving into this research role that I'm in now, I worked in the post-secondary system both in Canada and Australia for about 12 years. I worked as a certified teacher as well in the New Westminster and Tri City school districts before then. So what I'm about to what I'm sharing today is findings from three national research studies that look at neurodiversity and neuroinclusion across Canada in post-secondary and workforce contexts. But I'm also bringing in a lot of my experience of working with neurodivergent learners in the classroom, neurodivergent workers in the workforce, parents of neurodivergent children that are trying to navigate systems for sometimes themselves and their children at the same time as well. And my goal always in the work that I do is really about that translation piece of research to practice and the needs of practitioners back to researchers as well. That's really where I find joy in my work is that intersection between how do we really bring insights and evidence from research into day to day practice to actually ameliorate the outcomes of neurodivergent, folk in Canada.

So as I mentioned, I am speaking about empirical research here. I'm going to try and make empirical research fun. If anyone can do it, hopefully it is me. I'm a big nerd and do absolutely love talking about research. So what this presentation today is to synthesize findings across

1

three large scale, research studies. The first one looked at the neuroinclusivity of Canadian workplaces. That was in 2021, 2022, with my colleague Jane led that research. In 2024, I led a national research study that looked at the neuroinclusivity of post-secondary education across Canada. That captured the lived experience of about 450 neurodivergent post-secondary students, as well as staff, faculty, administrators, leadership, and coordinators in post-secondary. So a lot of the content is going to come from that study there, but I just do want to highlight the lived experience piece that is coming through the research that I'm presenting. And then last year, I looked at entrepreneurial activity and alternative inclusive pathways for neurodivergent workers who have been excluded from the workforce or haven't really had opportunities to be included in the workforce too. So I will speak to some of that as well too, because if you look at where neurodivergent people are art when it comes to labour force participation, it actually really does tell us compelling story about gaps, gaps in supports and strategies and evidence-based recommendations. And then I will just put in a little plug here because if you are interested or work in the area of work integrated learning, I'm gearing up for a national study that is going to investigate no inclusive approaches to work-integrated learning. So if that's an area you're in or working in or would like to know more or possibly would like to participate in that research study, please feel free to connect with me after I'd love to connect with individuals working in the will or experiential learning space.

Okay, just to make sure I don't forget to mention this, the research I'm talking about has been generously funded by the Future Skills Centre, which means all the reports and resources and materials are freely accessible via the Signal49 website. I just wanted to highlight some pieces here that might be of interest. On the left-hand side, there's two reports. That's the research that looks at the neuroinclusivity of Canadian post-secondary education. There's also a two-page student guide written at a high-school level as well for neurodivergent students. There's a three-part workforce inclusion resource that is aimed at career services, students and employers. There's also resources for neurodivergent students who might be interested in entrepreneurial activity or self-employment pathways, including an interactive resource map that will be going live on the website within the next week or so. I am building, I call this the neurodiversity research portfolio, and I'm busy really trying to figure out where the gaps are, bridges to support, and then creating resources based on what we're finding. So if hopefully something here is of interest or if there's things that you're really needing that you're not seeing, I'd love to know where are gaps and what would be helpful as well. Perfect. To actually get on with the content now.

So just a little bit of context here. But essentially, why I thought this session was really important and so pleased that BCcampus wanted to have me talk about it is that there are just a lot of barriers that neurodivergent individuals face when it comes to accessing post-secondary and the workplace. The more research I do in this area, the more I realize that actually the barriers are quite similar, even though they look a little different. But that transition to post-secondary and that transition to the workforce have a lot of similar barriers. And when I think about that, it makes me think about how similar strategies would actually be really helpful. So the goal of this presentation is really maybe to elucidate some of these key barriers or

challenges that have come through in the data and a little bit more about the profile of neurodivergent learners and workers, and then what actually would help make the difference both within post-secondary, but also helping level up or laddering up neurodivergent talent as they go to the workforce. And why that's so important is because neurodivergent learners have generally not had educational opportunities, teaching or learning opportunities that really met their needs. Generally, education settings are set up for the 80% of learners that are neurotypical, and while that works well for that 80%, generally, that really means that neurodivergent learners are underserved in the current systems, and then that under-service really results in them having less skills, less experience, and less transferable skills for the workplace, and then they meet those same barriers again in workplaces that again are set up for that 80%. So the goal is really to just really think about what would it look like if we change systems because that's important. But also what would it look like to equip individual students with strategies and skills and knowledge as well? Because that's really what would address a lot of the poor workforce outcomes for neurodivergent individuals. It's a levelling of systems, making sure systems are more inclusive, but also levelling up of skill development of neurodivergent individuals. And when we hit that nexus, that's really where change can happen. Sorry, keyboard controls are not working here. Okay.

What does a neurodivergent post-secondary student generally look like? What does their profile look like? Prior to the research I did, I guess, it's a year and a half ago now, we really had no idea. There was absolutely no data on the experiences of neurodivergent students specifically as a group in Canadian post-secondary and really actually even outside of Canada. This data really didn't exist. And while sometimes it is captured through other surveys and bits and pieces, it really didn't tell us the number of students, if we know the number of students and how they're being searched. This is an infographic that just reports some really key things I'd like you to keep in mind as I'm talking about neurodivergent students. The first one is that they are... Neurodivergent students generally have complex learning profiles, and as such, 38% actually have multiple neurodivergent identities or diagnoses. That might look like ADHD plus a learning disability. That might be combined ADHD ASD, that might be learning disability and a mental health issue. But again, almost 40% are managing or thriving within or finding challenges with multiple identities or diagnoses, which can actually create quite a bit of challenge for these students. Almost 60% of the sample identified ADHD as part or whole of their neurodivergent identity. ADHD and I'll show this a coming slides is by far the most common neurodivergent identity or diagnosis for this group. Why this is so important is because executive function skills are really the key to be able to complete post-secondary education is to have strong executive function skills and yet neurodivergent individuals have challenges in these areas. So lots of opportunities for targeted strategies, but a challenge for this group. Another challenge is that third, about 33%, about a third do not have a formal diagnosis, which means they generally are unable to access accommodations or supports within post-secondary because of that lack of a formal diagnosis. About a third of students actually aren't able to access supports, even if they wanted it or needed them. 40% report a mental health disorder that's actually on par for post-secondary students generally as well. Post-secondary is a difficult time. This population is finding those experiences as well, and 62% have

intersectional identities that might be international student. I am so sorry. Did I lose my screen? Sorry, everyone. There we go. I'm sorry. I'm clicking things here. The last thing I want to highlight here is that less than 50% actually report to their institution or share with their institution that they are neurodivergent. Less than half of neurodivergent students in the post-secondary system are identifying themselves as neurodivergent, which means that post-secondary institutions only know about half of the neurodivergent students that are currently attending. If you've talked to people in accessibility services, and I talk to people in accessibility services across Canada every day for the most part. Their caseloads are climbing so substantively, the amount of students seeking services continues to grow and this is a challenge, yet it's still less than half of the actual population. We can see here that this leg in ability to serve even the current caseload of students is actually very concerning because it doesn't even really scratch the surface on the entirety of the need.

Gloria says she's surprised dyslexia is not identified in these figures. I'm actually going to show the breakdown of a couple samples for learning disabilities, just hold on tight on those ones and link to the resources, yes, I can send Helena all those direct links, and Helena, I'm sure, or the team will be able to post them up on the website or send them out.

Great. People want to know more about the student population, so I'm going to move quickly. So sorry. Is this jumping. Where are neurodivergent students everywhere? They're enrolled at universities, colleges, and polytechnics, around the same rate as neurotypical students, and they are enrolled across all areas of study. What I think is interesting here at the left-hand graph is that we often think that neurodivergent when people like, what are neurodivergent people good at? Often it gets pigeonholed as like, Oh, data analysis or computer science or information technology. And while those might be choice areas for some neurodivergent people, as you can see here, that's actually the smallest percentage of neurodivergent students are in computer science and information technology. Most of these students are in health, business, sciences, and social sciences, which are areas that there's not a lot of understanding or necessarily knowledge that neurodivergent students are highly represented in these areas. Health, for example, is also an area of which there is not enough workers in the health care industry. Yet, we know that neurodivergent individuals really generally struggle with employment. There's also going to be a mismatch between the talent that is emerging from the post-secondary system and the sector's ability to actually capture that talent. And as I promised, some here. Learning disabilities, dyslexia as an example of learning disability, actually, we're still smaller numbers compared to ADHD and autism. Sorry, I'm so sorry. I don't know why it's jumping.

Okay. So the chart on the left, you can see that the multiple identies or diagnosis is the largest chunk, so that's 41%. Often individuals with learning disabilities have an additional identity or diagnosis, whether that be ADHD or autism. So they're generally captured in this big group. There's also this category here that's 7% of single other identity or diagnosis. This is also where some people with learning disabilities were captured. But it really is ADHD only, ADHD only, multiple diagnoses, and then mental health only that really had high numbers. Now the sample

4

on the right here is actually from self-employed neurodivergent workers by identity and diagnosis. Here you can see, again, 41% is multiple identities or diagnosis. In both of these samples, almost half of participants had multiple neurodivergent identities. Commonly, learning disability is one of them. For example, I often say I'm autistic, but I'm also dyslexic. It's just not something I mentioned as often and my presentation of dyslexia is quite different, so it didn't get picked up for quite some time. Often learning disabilities get folded into a larger identity or diagnosis understanding. And for this sample, 29% are self-identifying. I like to show these two samples because they're completely different people. One is post-secondary students. The other is current workers in the Canadian workforce. But we can see the numbers are actually very similar, which tells me that, you know, these are good numbers to kind of understand the population that we're working with.

Now, neurodivergent individuals have what are called spiky skill profiles. This is a really key thing to understand about neurodivergent people for learning for the way that they learn and the way that they work. Neurotypical persons, that's at 80% generally the population. There's this gray line here. If they're good at one thing, they're generally pretty at the same level or good at all of the things. Again, everyone is different. All neurotypical people are different and all neurodivergent people are different. But these are just general what we know about cognitive profiles. If a neurotypical person is generally getting good at something in the workforce or in their job, they're probably be giving a most things and they're often seen as a good worker or a capable worker. When it comes to neurodivergent skill profiles, we see what is known as a spiky profile. We'll see exceptional talents or strengths, the much above a general neurotypical person, but we'll also see troughs and those can also be understood as areas of functional limitation or as a deficit, though I definitely don't like to use that language because I don't think it's particularly helpful. But what happens for neurodivergent individuals is often these areas of exceptional skills and talent are not seen or not captured because neurodivergent people aren't always given the opportunity to work in an area of skill or strength. Instead, really only the deficits or those functional limitations are seen. In the workplace, this is really often what happens is the focus becomes on what that person is not good at. They're not a team player, they're not a good communicator. They're late, they're disorganized. Again, those are all some of those executive function challenges that I talked about. This here is why we really need to understand the skill profile because we need to be able to, the goal when we're working with a neurodivergent student or client or yourself or your child, what are those strengths? What are the talents? What is really coming easily? What is something that can be leveraged, where are those functional limitations? Then what strategies would help address those functional limitations? So that is really that profile is really important to understand because if we don't see the strengths, all we're looking at is the limitations, and it's pretty hard to plan a career or a post-secondary degree off of limitations. And that's why often competence is not assumed and why especially for higher support needs, neurodivergent students. The lack of assumption of competency really means that they're not given opportunities to try opportunities to experience, opportunities to receive targeted or tailored supports. And I just included a quote down here, but I really like it because the spiky skill set, it can be really easily hidden. I was always a really mediocre student in high school.

5

Teachers did not like me. I was really mediocre. Then as soon as I got to post-secondary and it was a little more self-directed, all of a sudden I was shining and I wasn't any different. It was just really the difference in the way that those systems worked and the level of self-directedness. I like this quote here because you can definitely hide. So if you have that spiky skill profile, you can look average, even if you're extremely talented and really need supports. So that's why neurodivergent people might be hiding and looking like they're doing okay, but they actually really need a little bit more help to really optimize what they're able to do and their capacity and their talent.

HELENA:
Sorry, Jennifer, there's two questions related to the graphs. So maybe you just want to go back to that graph?

JENNIFER:
I appreciate that. I've lost for some. I think it's my mouse, Helen. It's just skipping everywhere, and now I'm struggling to find the chat. There we go. Thank you.

The graph is not my data. No, sorry. That graph it comes from Nancy Doyle's work on neurodiversity. She's out of the UK. She does incredible work, but it's cut off. The Y Access as often IQ on these, which is how the skill profiles are generally measured. While IQ can be a useful measure for some things, it is not necessarily very useful, especially with that spiky skill profile. Those are great questions. Thank you. I can send share a link to Nancy Doyle's work too if there's interest to digging a little bit more as to where that idea comes from. Okay. Here we go.

As I mentioned, I think we really need to think of a systems approach when it comes to thinking about transitions. I just thought it'd be useful to highlight how similar some of the challenges are between that transition to post-secondary and how those gaps actually are amplified when the transition to workplace happens after. So imagine a neurodivergent high school student, perhaps they have ADHD or autism, their entire high school career, their parent has been in with them with the IEP meetings. There's been a lot of supports around thinking about what they need. Perhaps they've been given a learning block instead of an elective, so they've had a little extra time and perhaps the assignments and learning has been highly modified for the student and has allowed them to thrive. And that's actually what happens for a lot of high school students. K to 12 education has done a really great job in enhancing the inclusivity and allowing more and more students to travel through instead of being streamed out, which is what would have happened to say a student with dyslexia previously where, oh, you don't read, so therefore, we'll stream you to trades, for example, which is happening less and less. Children are getting less and less streamed and they're moving ahead. But what is happening though is they're hitting post-secondary and the levels of supports and accommodations are just simply not there and the gulf is massive. I can speak more about that if there's interest in the Q&A about where the gap is in accommodations between K to 12 and post-secondary. But essentially, they go from really having a lot of extra support in a very structured system to

having to navigate this all on their own. And that's actually exactly what happens again, often in this workforce transition. Again, that gap and that gulf is much bigger for neurodivergent students than it is for neurotypical students that make these much more difficult. This also comes at a time where they might be aging out of pediatric care or navigating changes in health care providers. They're navigating having to fill out forms independently, apply to things independently, they face higher documentation requirements, they face higher executive function demands. Again, these later and scale as they move from post-secondary into the workplace. What doesn't change, particularly is the stigma and misunderstandings as well and the lack of understanding of neurodivergent talent and how to optimize in the workplace. A lot of students are just keep their head above water as they get into post-secondary. They might have just got their accommodations in place halfway through the first semester because they were a little behind the ape ball. They might really be struggling, they might just be getting through. Then even if they managed to get through, they're going to face all of these similar challenges again as they transition to the workforce without necessarily having built any of the strategies needed to do this.

So what are these big challenges? When asked, this is a survey question to 400 neurodivergent students. What is your biggest challenge as a neurodivergent student? Executive function was, by far, twice over any other area of functional challenge. Students, of course, didn't say executive function. This is an open-ended question. They said things like sending assignments on time, keeping up with reading, staying, keeping motivated, keeping attention. But again, those are all executive functions, I've coded it as this. The next biggest challenges around pace of learning and social communication and group work. These are all very similar challenges to the workplace, that executive function need, that pace of learning or pace of work, and that social and communication piece. These are the pieces I'm going to focus on for this presentation because it's the area of really identified need with this population.

Also right before I start to, I want to point out that this population needs a lot of help, but they actually aren't seeking it out or accessing or it's not available. Less than a third of the students, this is about 400 students are actually accessing supports and services that are tailored for neurodivergent students. So there's a gap, and then even when these services are offered, sometimes there's a gap in uptake as well due to a lot of stigma or internalized shame about needing help or needing accommodation or needing something different.

Okay, that brings us right into the disclosure dilemma. Why I want to talk about disclosure is because it is equally as important when thinking about post-secondary as it is in the workplace, but it is still an extremely challenging process. We see here, I mentioned that 43% are, only 43% disclose in post-secondary, only 50% of neurodivergent workers disclose in the workforce. Again, we have really low rates and employers and post-secondary institutions know of less than half of the population that actually identifies as neurodivergent. So what this means is that about half of neurodivergent workers and students actually are not engaging with disclosure and accommodation, which means that they might not necessarily be able to get the services supports that they need. Now, of course, disclosure is extremely personal and it should not be a

7

blanket statement that all neurodivergent people should disclose and actively seek accommodations. However, if it's due to stigma or fear or lack of supports, that actually is a problem because the purpose of disclosure is actually to help, even though unfortunately, that is not always the case.

So why aren't students disclosing what is happening there? I was really curious about that, so I looked into it or sorry, this is a survey question. And why did they not disclose? Well, almost over 70% said, I don't require supports or accommodations. Perfect. If that was true. Well, if you don't need an accommodation, why would you ask for one? But this was a check-all-that-apply question. Actually about 73% of those that did not disclose also selected other reasons why they didn't. That's stigma, anxiety, or fear about the process, and then the most common one, the wait and see approach. I hope it's all okay. I think it's going to be okay. I'm going to give it my best go. I'm sure it'll be fine. And that's when students sometimes in the middle of the semester, midterms hit and they're drowning, and things are not going well, and then it's actually too late to get those accommodations in place for that semester. So it ends up being quite a challenge. Even if students or workers, because this is true in the workplace, too,

I'll show you in the next slide, want to go through the process of disclosure and accommodation, it's actually extremely difficult. The top quote is from a neurodivergent student that actually said the accessibility system is actually very non-inclusive. It took her up to six months to actually get the evaluation, go back to the doctor, get registered and then wait to find an appointment, and she actually failed most of her first semester due to that and had to start again in second semester once these accommodations were in place. And even managers of accessibility services that agree with this, this is a quote here saying that students with ADHD are actually asked to do the most work in terms of actually getting the support they need. If you have ADHD, you can imagine filling out five or six different forms, going to health care providers, submitting all the things, and then up one week before every single exam having to put in a request for an alternate exam setting these are actually high executive function load challenges that you're throwing at students who have the biggest challenge with executive function. The system really is not set up to support students. It's actually really putting an extra load on the students who are least essentially capable of carrying that load. This looks exactly the same in the workplace, unfortunately. The top quote here is around a neurodivergent, currently self-employed, consultant who, as part of her job working for an autism charity would give presentations to families. A posting camp up and her organization that was just around training. It's a position just to do all the training for the organization and all her colleagues are like, you should apply for this. You'd be so great for it because she was getting the very best feedback on these presentations. But she really struggles with anxiety and the interview. Instead of a panel interview, she asked if she could give the presentation to the panel instead of actually answer the interview questions and then accommodation was denied. Even though that actually would demonstrate whether she could do the job or not. Below, there's another example of accommodations being denied in the workplace. You can see here that the biggest issue for neurodivergent people around disclosure and accommodation is actually not really their thinking or their ability to do these things. It's actually whether the systems are going to

8

be responsive to their disclosure or accommodation needs. If students are not navigating disclosure and accommodation in post-secondary and given opportunities for self-advocacy and to learn how they want to present their identities or their diagnosis or their support needs, they're likely to go into the workforce without these skills and meet these exact same challenges.

HELENA:
Jennifer, there's two questions around disclosure in chat you want to look at that?

JENNIFER:
Oh, and thanks, Dave, for finding... the spiky profiles for, wow, it's a great group. When they disclose in the workplace, do... Perfect. Is disclosure higher in other parts of the world? There actually is not really great data on neurodivergent individuals globally, it's just starting now, but these larger datasets that actually explore the lived experience of neurodivergent students are quite new. If we look at autism research prior to 5, 7 years ago, we really only see clinical based research, same with ADHD. This whole idea that maybe we should figure maybe we should ask the people that we're wanting to learn about their own experiences. Maybe we should do that. It's actually relatively new. If we think about women's health, women weren't involved, included in clinical trials until the 90s, right? So it's taking a lot of time to catch up, so we're really still trying to catch up on this dataset. Stats Can does not actually collect data on neurodivergence either. There are a lot of data gaps. When did it disclose in the workplace? I'll just touch on it briefly, but that really depends. Actually, I might hold on that one until we get to the disclosure thing and get some examples there.

Now, again, some students and workers might not want to disclose and that is, of course, their choice. But I asked on the survey of the students satisfaction rate with their post-secondary. As you can see here, those that did not disclose were less satisfied than those that did. We can see here that again, it varies a little bit by diagnosis, but again, those that did disclose had higher rates of satisfaction and that is likely because they were able to access supports and accommodations that made it more possible for them to continue on their studies or for the studies to be less onerous or more manageable. Accommodations are often seen as equity or as privileges, especially in the workplace. The Ontario Public Service has just demanded every public servant return to five days in office after hybrid or remote work opportunities for five years. It's really challenging to be neurodivergent and just work or go to school like everybody else. Generally, what works for neurotypical people does not work the same way for neurodivergent people. All neurodivergent people really would benefit from specialized strategies and supports. That doesn't necessarily mean it has to be given by the university. It might be strategies or supports that they can employ themselves, but they need the knowledge to be able to do that. Here when we look at satisfaction, we can see students that did disclose have high rates of satisfaction because they likely were given things, supports or accommodations. But that doesn't necessarily mean that those supports or accommodations fit the need entirely.

Did disclosure rates vary by identity or diagnosis? I don't know if anyone was interested in that question, but yes, absolutely, they did. The highest rates of disclosure are by students by multiple diagnoses. Again, that is likely because the complexity of their learner profile, these students are familiar with disclosure processes and know that they benefit from them. Whereas if we look at autism and we think about the stigma around autism, it's perhaps not surprising to see that there's the lowest level of disclosure for autism. And much lower than say ADHD or mental health, which again, I think the stigma has been slightly reduced for those groups a little bit more, not to say, of course, that people with ADHD or mental health challenges don't meet stigma in day to day life. Sorry, my mouse is being very silly.

When it comes to the disclosure and self-advocacy and whether this is in post-secondary or the workplace, I think the really important conversation to have is not around do I disclose or not? The most important conversation is what do I need to work at my best or what do I need that will really help me address functional limitations. Now sometimes those are things that a student can put in or a worker can put into place themselves. For example, if they struggle with staying on task, using a pomodoro technique or building out a schedule or using an app to on-task versus off-task times. Those are really useful and helpful strategies for workers and students alike, and that's something that a student or worker can do themselves. But when it comes to accommodation like alternate exam seatings or alternate work location, that's actually an accommodation that often needs to be a formal accommodation process. Really, the first thing to think about though is what does the student need and how much external support is needed for that. Once that is answered, it's a lot easier to really decide if disclosure is needed because if you don't need something from the employer or the school, disclosure might not be necessary. Whether if you do, then the conversation might be like, what would it look like to go through the disclosure process? Now while disclosing can certainly be very challenging, post-secondary actually is in some ways a safer place to disclose than a workplace might be because generally, post-secondaries are more familiar with accommodations and usually they can go through more easily or more structured or at least there are these processes. The vast majority of Canadian workplaces are small and medium enterprises that do not necessarily have strong policy around disclosure or accommodation or even necessarily have HR departments. When students are transitioning to that workplace, they might actually be transitioning to a small workplace that actually doesn't have a formal process or policy around accommodation and disclosure, which can be much more tricky. That's why thinking about how student might work on self-advocacy skills and thinking about asking for what they need in post-secondary actually allows them to build skills for the workplace should they need to disclose or want to disclose there. It also allows them to understand their rights and where to seek supports and who people are that can support them with this. Again, for anyone, but for neurodivergent students when things start going wrong, they can snowball. It gets very difficult and students might hide, they might stop responding to emails, they might stop responding to calls, they might stop going to things. The idea is to help them know where to find supports are before that shutdown happens because it can be difficult to re-engage. Or sometimes this then ends up in student conduct issues because there's been challenges that just have not been addressed. When it comes to the workplace, when should a student

disclose? That is also a really great question that would really need to be carefully thought through with the student. Disclosure in the workplace, there generally are three or four entry points. It might be at the time of application. It might be at the time of interview, it might be at the time of onboarding or it might be at some point during the employment. When thinking with neurodivergent workers about if to disclose or when to disclose, it would likely depend on the level of functional support that they would need. If they need an accommodation for an interview, then disclosing during the application process is going to be necessary because they will need that accommodation. If they're unlikely to need an accommodation for the interview or training or onboarding processes, then it is a conversation to be like what I want to disclose once I had the job or disclosed previously. Really helping that student think about what would be the role of disclosure? What would they want their employer to know or to ask for, and then whether it would need to be formal or more informal. For a lot of neurodivergent workers, informal accommodations actually solve a lot of challenges and formal accommodations could be if employers don't require formal accommodation processes, flexibility in location, flexibility on hours, flexibility about lighting, flexibility about sound, flexibility around communication, flexibility around participation in meetings or social expectations. Those actually, most of those really could be solved informally if there's want or will to do so. Unfortunately, that's not necessarily the case. But again, having that conversation with that student or helping them to understand what would be the goal What would they want? What's important to share? That should really help dictate when that disclosure piece would happen and the purpose of it. I'm so sorry. I keep trying to switch between the chat and the slides, and it's just moving. Okay. Perfect. I'm going to move on now for time.

Changing communication expectations. This is another significant challenge for neurodivergent students, both in post-secondary but in the workplace. Essentially, neurodivergent people communicate differently, worse, not better, differently. But in workplaces or post-secondary where the hidden curriculum or social norms are just so entrenched that it's hard to think around them, neurodivergent people are seen as poor communicators often or ineffective communicators because of that bias. Now, again, this is where the systems levelling and the skill building is important because we need to have more inclusive workplaces and school settings, there needs to be opportunities for people to communicate differently. Professional communication is important. Here we're lowering, we're making more inclusive, we're allowing a wide range of communication styles to be considered professional. But we also need to equip the neurodivergent individual to build those professional communication skills that still fit within the way they are their identity. So this is where opportunities for skill building are really important but also are often lost. This is where actual help with how to write a professional email, setting up templates or performance, talking about how things are often perceived or what general expectations are. Because if a student doesn't know what the expectation is, then how would they know if they needed a strategy or a support to meet that expectation or if the route to go would be to explain how they work best and that they actually that expectation needs to be understood a little bit differently to allow for that. I'll give an example around feedback. A lot of neurodivergent individuals have what is called rejection sensitivity dysphoria, which is essentially that feedback seems extremely negative. Even just careful feedback can

11

actually be seen as a rejection and that rejection sensitivity can be so sensitive that what might be a casual comment could send someone into a shame spiral or feeling like they're really unproductive or that impostor syndrome. So giving feedback on the way that you best receive feedback can actually be a really important protective factor for neurodivergent individuals. I'm extremely sensitive to feedback and whenever I'm working with a new manager or a director or boss, I actually give this. I'm like, if you want to give me feedback, please give it to me right away. Call me like, Jen, I want to give you some feedback. I'm prepared, I'm ready for it. I can hear what they have to say, and then I may be able to interact with it. Because what happened to me previously in the workplaces is that people wouldn't give me feedback because they're like, why is she doing that or what's going on? Or like, That's odd that Jen's doing that. They're like, Well, maybe she'll just fix it on her own, and then the problem would get worse or but I'm not getting feedback, so I keep doing my thing and the gap keeps getting bigger and then all of a sudden, it's a really big problem. This is exactly what happens to neurodivergent people in the workplace so often. That's my story, but I know it's many people's story. So when it comes to communication, we really need to think about how is that neurodivergent person communicating? If anything is problematic, what would it look like to build some strategies or skills or supports? What would it also look like for that neurodivergent person to communicate to their professor, teacher, faculty, boss, manager, HR around how they work best around communication and the best way to communicate? That's when that really comes together when there's an understanding of the cognitive profile, the strength, the challenge, and actually what could be done about it. This is also, if we think about post-secondary, these are all the challenges with group work as well too. The challenges in group work are the same challenges that end up in teamwork in workplaces. If you are assigning group work, really have a think about what skills you would need to have your students built in order to complete that group work. Often, group work is given assuming that students know how to work well together or can work well together without actually that really consideration of how you would actually need to support students in doing that. Neurodivergent students likely have less experience working collaboratively with neurotypical individuals because they're often not given those opportunities or they are excluded. Explicit skill building is actually really important within knowledge building in post-secondary, but also in the workplace.

Okay. Here's where faculty can either be the greatest champion or also one of the biggest barriers because often faculty are really playing that gatekeeper role of where they're like, This is not what it looks like to be a professional. If you can't do this, you can't be that. If you can't do this, you will never be able to get that job. That feedback is actually extremely harmful. It should not be about if you don't do this like me, you can't be that. It can be that this is the code of conduct for this profession. This is what is expected a profession. Here's how to level up. Here's how to build that skills. But the idea that being a professional looks one way is extremely challenging and detrimental to turn around neurodivergent individuals and just simply not true. Also, if you left a profession many, many years or decades ago, you also might not even know exactly what it looks like currently exactly to be in that profession. So just being cognizant that the one's expertise is not necessarily translatable to everybody. Okay. I'm going to pop along here.

Strategies to strengthen communication, again, explicitly teach communication norms and expectations, provide email templates, scripts, and examples. Show students how you would do something, give them opportunities to learn, offer that structure practice, clarify group roles, create structured opportunities for peer connection, and framing communication as career readiness. Often students, especially in undergrad, they might spend a few years focused on studies without really thinking about how they're actually building career-ready skills. So really talking about how, hey, doing this assign when setting assignment, setting syllabi, setting group work, where are the career ready skills? How can that be made really clear? That also helps a student buy-in and also that skill building.

Okay, executive function, working memory, attention, starting completing tasks, organization, planning, self-regulation. These are skills that are much more difficult for neurodivergent individuals. We generally have functional limitations in some or many of these areas. That means that we are going to struggle with things like staying focused, keeping up with assignments, initiating, completing work, communicating with others, managing priorities, proactively asking for clarification. These are known challenges that neurodivergent students are going to face. What actually helps or what are some evidence-based strategies?

It's actually been really interesting to see how post-secondaries across Canada are building in some suites of executive function support. So I'll just highlight some here that are actually doing really great work and that students are sharing that are effective. But some post-secondaries are doing workshops on focus and attention, actually the University of Toronto actually gives an entire presentation or session on this for students and actually practical strategies of how to do this. Often students just think they're bad at it. But the great, the great thing about executive dysfunction is that it can be taught. Executive function can be taught. It can be scaled up, it can be leveled. But if you don't know what the problem is, you can't find that solution. Access to learning strategies and ADHD coaches, this has been a huge game changer for a lot of students and really having that individualized support of someone who understands their cognitive profile and can suggest actual actionable things. Study skills courses, especially paired with a reduced course load, reduced course loads are very hard to sell students on sometimes, much like part time work as opposed to full time work can be a difficult shift. But again, neurodivergent students often socially and emotionally, can be a few years behind their peers, and the executive function load makes courses more difficult. Slowing down and doing a little bit less better is an evidence based strategy, even though it can be unpopular because I think why do five years of school when you can do it in four. But what we see with this sample is most neurodivergent students don't finish on time. A lot of them are taking extra time. So normalizing that, again, it costs an entire lifetime and especially a lot of us if we're in our 40s, 50s and beyond, we know the difference of a year or two really means very little. But when you're 18 or 19, that seems like a lot. So careful conversations around that is important. Templates for task management, anti-procrastination strategies. There's lots of apps and fun things that can help with that. Assistive technology is essential. I have yet to meet a neurodivergent person who's not benefiting from leveraging assistive technology, so there's

lots of options there. Again, just the knowledge. If you're a neurodivergent, you've probably not learned a lot about yourself and your cognitive profile because you've not been given that chance. The more opportunities students have to reflect on how they work best, how their brain works, what works for them, and then how to ask for it in a way that actually is possible. Instead of being like, I need this because blah, blah, blah, I work best like this and just changing that conversation and the way that that happens because otherwise, sometimes neurodivergent students come off as very demanding because they're very concerned about getting what they need and that can be challenging sometimes to manage. Sometimes helping a neurodivergent student figure out the way to ask for something can be the bridge that they really need. And then experiential learning, work integrated learning, again, is such a helpful bridge, but neurodivergent students are underrepresented in work integrated learning because all those barriers exist here. Also, getting will placements outside of co-op, also very challenging as well and inclusive employment pathways just really aren't existing. This is why I'm planning that next study looking specifically at this piece because work integrated learning theoretically has a lot of opportunities to solve this challenge, but it's either not inclusive or not acceptable currently. If you're interested in this, hopefully I can catch up uh, with the group maybe next year and come back and talk about work integrated and learning specifically around it and neuro inclusion. I am coming close to the end here. I just want to highlight that a transition to workforce program ranked highly as a desired support across most diagnostic groups. Again, these students recognize the value of this but don't necessarily know how to go about participating. Of the last couple of pieces I wanted to point out that social skill building is actually workforce preparation. I think this is seen the opportunity to participate in clubs or peer mentorship or those types of opportunities are seen as nice to have or additional opportunities on campus. But neurodivergent individuals really are not are really going to struggle to engage with others and to build friendships and meaningful friendships and social connections without some supports or structures or opportunities to meet people like them. Because neurodivergent people often neurodivergent, neurodivergent generally have very few communication challenges, neurotypical and neurotypical. Very few communication challenges, neurotypical and neurodivergent, lots of communication challenges. It's actually not a deficit in either group, it's a clash between the two. Opportunities to build social skills, opportunities, get used to working with different groups of people, really, really powerful and often not really leveraged by this group or neuro social clubs or peer mentorship simply just doesn't exist in most institutions. So it's a missed opportunity.

Great. The last point I want to talk about is just a few things about career exploration really specifically. A lot of neurodivergent students and just any students actually get really fixated on job titles and career fit. They're like, I want to be a teacher, I want to be a doctor, I want to be an IT specialist, and they're really like, that's what I want to be. They're thinking about that one job that they know. But most jobs or roles exist across sectors. An accountant works across every single sector. An educator can work as a trainer across any sector, for example. Lots of roles do this. I think it's really helpful to pull back, especially for a neurodivergent student and just really think about... Here we go.

What are the talents that they're bringing? Where are their strengths lying? Let's think back to that spiky skill profile. Are there strengths in pattern recognition or deep focus? Is it around systems thinking and efficiency? Is it around problem solving or persistence? Or what about creativity and visual thinking? These are just categories, but they give a place to start around career exploration. Be if you're not working in an area of strength or interest, it's really very unlikely that you will be very successful. For neurodivergent people, when skills meet interest, especially special interest, it's amazing what can happen. Again, trying to figure out where a special interest might be and where that meets a skill and then what employment opportunities for that might look like. I just also included some questions here around, how would you actually have a conversation with a student to surface some of these things? Questions like, what helps me perform best? Where does my live experience bring different understanding or new solutions? Or what gaps or problems do I notice? Ask a neurodivergent, what doesn't work well? They will absolutely tell you what is not working well and be like, what would work better? Going through those processes to identify where do strengths lie, where interests lie can be really a helpful place to start.

Now before I end, I just wanted to mention that some institutions are starting to actually bring in specific neuroinclusive or targeted neuroaffirming programming. This is University of Calgary. Also seen quite interesting things that MacEwan, Algonquin, and Laurier as well have neurodiversity accelerators or programs specifically for this group. If you're interested in more, I can share some more examples. But there is innovative things happening, but progress is slow. Again, with the state of post-secondary right now, I know there's a lot of constraints. But what I'm hoping that is coming from the presentation is how individual practice and actually supports do really make a big difference even as systems can take a while to change and respond. I'll stop for questions. But if anyone, I'm hoping there's questions here or people want to share practice or ideas or challenges. But also, if you'd like to follow up with me after you feel free to email me. Also if you're on LinkedIn and want to stay connected to new research that is coming through, I always post and share there as well too. That may be a place to find more information as well.