



Special Teachers and Exceptional Pupils = Urban Promise

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Important Dates

- **March 19-27:** Spring Break
Resource library closed.
- **April 4:** Summer and fall
registration begins.
- **April 6:** Field advisory rm
1433 4-4:50.
- **May 10:** Advisory Board
meeting rm 3427 4-6.
- **July 15:** Application Dead-
line for Spring 2006 cohort.

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Accommodations, Adaptations and Modifications

One of the primary roles special education teachers have is helping regular educators make accommodations and modifications so that students with special needs can function in the least restrictive environment. Though most special educators seamlessly accommodate, modify, and adapt it is difficult for many pre-service teachers to get a handle on what these terms mean and how to implement them.

What are they? Though each of the terms are similar they differ in what type of modification is made and what it accomplishes. A modification enables an individual to compensate for intellectual, behavioral, or physical disabilities, while promoting the development, acquisition, or improvement of new skills. **Modifications** are designed to help the student to be able to do similar schoolwork but what the student is expected to learn is different from his or her peers. An **accommodation** is a change to the delivery of instruction or the method of student performance that does not change the curricular content or conceptual difficulty in an effort to help the child be able to do the same work as his or her peers. An **adaptation** changes the delivery of instruction or the conceptual difficulty and content of the curriculum, while still assisting the individual in learning in the least restrictive environment.

How do I make them? With each individual student in mind, target their individual strengths and weaknesses. The modifications might reduce the expectations of what output the student makes, lessening required written work (maybe the student could tape record part of a project, or part of a test) or the difficulty of it. Try finding the same book written at a different level (look in anthologies or "Young People's Editions" -- and call a children's librarian for assistance.) Figure out ways to help students wade through a dense textbook, e.g., pick out certain sections or sentences, and have them cover the other parts; read the headings as advanced organizers; have students read picture captions and other "extras." Or, supplant the textbook and provide alternative materials that cover the same ideas. In reading lessons, a teacher can provide a list of vocabulary words and pre-teach them before the reading lesson.

Ultimately the success of the accommodation, modification, or adaptation rests in how well it enables the student to function and learn in the least restrictive environment possible. They are written into the student's IEP, and any changes to them must be modified in the IEP as well. Modifications can include grading scale modifications, giving a student with ADHD two desks instead of one which he can travel between as needed, giving students a visual cue before calling on them in class, among others. Give kids who need to move around (ADHD, BD) a job that allows for that (e.g., watering plants). Make "contracts" or "deals" with individuals that allow them to make choices within bounds, such as: "you can leave your desk twice this period," or "you can go to the restroom twice a day". The goal is to help the student succeed academically. Many books have been written about modifying and accommodating students with special needs including *Differentiating Textbooks: Strategies to Improve Student Comprehension and Motivation* by Forsten, Grant, and Hollas.

Mentor's Musings: Spotlight on Mary Peasely

I'm a teacher at Agassiz School (Pre K to 8th) which is located in the Lakeview neighborhood; most of our students are not from the neighborhood, though. Some come on buses and most by CTA or parents dropping them off.

What do I love about my job? It allows me to be creative (teaching units, bulletin boards, adapting curriculum, dealing with behaviors and emotions--of the students, I mean); my day is busy and never routine; my colleagues are terrific to work with--including the principal, classroom teachers, counselor, teaching assistants; the children at my school are friendly and caring and want to be there.

It may sound trite or cliché, but you really do make a difference in a child's life by teaching him/her; by paying attention and having regard for that student. For more see:

<http://www.uic.edu/orgs/stepup/marypeasley>

Digital Corner

The Web provides many opportunities for broadening educators' ideas about adaptations, modifications, and accommodations. It is a good resource for finding additional input about a student's special need. Teachers do not need to create all accommodations, modifications, and adaptations from scratch

There are also many pages on the subject of modifications. One provides a checklist around processing problems children with learning disabilities might have. These focus on a large number of suggestions for modifying the environment, focusing attention, and motivating the reluctant learner:

http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/teaching_techniques/mod_checklists.html

Sharon Mahoney creates a 10 question format for providing accommodations to students. It encourages educators to look at the specifics of what each student needs.

<http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfsam1/TenQuestion.pdf>

A list of hundreds of possible accommodations are available at <http://www.causeonline.org/accom2.html>. This page discusses many techniques around assorted areas including behavior and presentation.

An excellent booklet on making modifications in reading lessons in the middle grades lays out definitions of terms and suggestions for implementation. It is a great resource, both for those who are first understanding modifications and those who have been using them extensively.

<http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/pubdocs/adaptations/Middle%20Years%20Reading%20Part%20One.pdf>

Current Research

Recent research confirms that we can teach students with learning disabilities how to learn. We can put them into a position to compete! Here are the strategies that work:

Lee Swanson (1999) and his colleagues found two major intervention practices that produced large outcomes. One is direct instruction. The other is learning strategy instruction.

Teachers who were applying those kinds of intervention:

- a. broke learning into small steps;
- b. administered probes;
- c. supplied regular quality feedback;
- d. used diagrams, graphics and pictures to augment what they were saying in words;
- e. provided ample independent, well-designed, intensive practice;
- f. modeled instructional practices that they wanted students to follow;
- g. provided prompts of strategies to use; and
- h. engaged students in process type questions like "How is that strategy working? Where else might you apply it?"

Something else that seems to make a real difference is the practice of scaffolding. Start out with heavily teacher-mediated instruction -- explicit instruction -- then as students begin to acquire the skill, moving down the continuum to more student-mediated instruction. From "Successful Strategies for Teaching Children with Learning Disabilities" at:

<http://www.ldanatl.org/aboutld/teachers/understanding/strategies.asp>