

Differentiation for Inclusive Settings in the United States of America

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Students with disabilities in the United States are entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) according to the federal legislation Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004). This idea of "inclusive" education has grown in popularity in the United States, with more schools across the country including students with disabilities in the regular education setting at a greater rate each year. In fact, more than 60% of students with disabilities spend 80% or more of their school day in a general education class (Smith & Tyler, 2010). Inclusion can be defined as "the belief that students with disabilities are valued members of the school community, accepted by others, and participate in the academic and social community of the school" (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2010, p.3). For this model of inclusive education to be successful however, teachers must be savvy at differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching in order to create the most positive outcomes for students.

Differentiated instruction for students with disabilities is an essential component of any effective inclusive setting. Differentiated instruction can be defined as instruction that recognizes students' varying background knowledge, readiness, learning preferences, and interests (Tomlinson, 2001). It is a process for

teaching different ability groups within the same environment. It means that teachers proactively plan varied approaches to what students need to learn, how they will learn it, and how they will demonstrate their learning so each student can achieve the highest success. Components of differentiated instruction include flexible grouping, providing meaningful tasks, and continual assessment. Teachers can differentiate instruction according to a student's learning profile, preferences, or readiness for the subject being taught (Tomlinson, 2001).

Because students with disabilities are legally entitled to curriculum and instructional adaptations within the classroom according to federal law, teachers must have the appropriate toolkit for adapting instruction to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. There are essentially nine different ways teachers can adapt curriculum and instruction within the classroom. Some are considered ***accommodations***, meaning the standard of learning remains the same, and as such grading is the same as the rest of the class. Some are considered ***modifications***, meaning the standard of learning has been affected, perhaps lowered or substituted, and therefore the grading must be modified to reflect that change (Castegna, Fisher, Rodifer, Sax, & Frey, 2003). The nine ways of adaptation are: quantity, time, output, input, participation, level of support, alternate goals, substitute curriculum, and difficulty. The *Grid of Nine* (Wright, 2005) (attached) provides definitions of each adaptation, whether it is considered an accommodation or

modification, and examples for helping teachers understand the process of adaptations

Ultimately the role of teachers is to ensure that all students in the classroom learn and achieve the highest outcomes possible. In America, classrooms are highly diverse. Students come from different backgrounds, speak languages other than English, and have different abilities and needs. There can be no one size fits all approach. Differentiated Instruction is a way for teachers to vary their instruction, procedures, assessments, and learning activities to best fit the needs of each student in the classroom. It is effective instructional practice that allows students from different backgrounds and abilities to participate as valued and fully participating members of the school community, something every student wants to be.

References

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Nine Types of Curriculum Adaptations

Quantity * ●

Adapt the number of items that the learner is expected to learn or number of activities student will complete prior to assessment for mastery.

For example:

Reduce the number of social studies terms a learner must learn at any one time. Add more practice activities or worksheets.

Time *

Adapt the time allotted and allowed for learning, task completion, or testing.

For example:

Individualize a timeline for completing a task; pace learning differently (increase or decrease) for some learners.

Level of Support *

Increase the amount of personal assistance to keep the student on task or to reinforce or prompt use of specific skills. Enhance adult-student relationship; use physical space and environmental structure.

For example:

Assign peer buddies, teaching assistants, peer tutors, or cross-age tutors. Specify how to interact with the student or how to structure the environment.

Input *

Adapt the way instruction is delivered to the learner.

For example:

Use different visual aids, enlarge text, plan more concrete examples, provide hands-on activities, place students in cooperative groups, pre-teach key concepts or terms before the lesson.

Difficulty * ●

Adapt the skill level, problem type, or the rules on how the learner may approach the work.

For example:

Allow the use of a calculator to figure math problems; simplify task directions; change rules to accommodate learner needs.

Output *

Adapt how the student can respond to instruction.

For example:

Instead of answering questions in writing, allow a verbal response, use a communication book for some students, allow students to show knowledge with hands on materials.

Participation *

Adapt the extent to which a learner is actively involved in the task.

For example:

In geography, have a student hold the globe, while others point out locations. Ask the student to lead a group. Have the student turn the pages while sitting on your lap (kindergarten).

Alternate Goals ●

Adapt the goals or outcome expectations while using the same materials. When routinely utilized, this is only for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

For example:

In a social studies lesson, expect a student to be able to locate the colors of the states on a map, while other students learn to locate each state and name the capital.

Substitute Curriculum ●

Sometimes called "functional curriculum"

Provide different instruction and materials to meet a learner's individual goals. When routinely utilized, this is only for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

For example:

During a language lesson a student is learning toileting skills with an aide.

* *This adaptation is an accommodation if the student can demonstrate mastery of the standard on an assessment.* The key concept is: Will the student ultimately master the same material but demonstrate that mastery in alternate ways or with alternate supports? If standards are not fundamentally or substantially altered, then this adaptation is an accommodation to a learning or performance difference.

● *This adaptation is a modification if the student will not demonstrate mastery of the standard on an assessment.* If routinely utilized, these adaptations are modifications and require individualized goals and assessment.