



Introduction to Adaptations

Why the Need and Important Considerations

What can I do to meet the diverse needs of the students in my classroom? How can I accommodate Julian's needs and still meet the needs of my twenty-five other students? How can I provide adaptations that don't require an inordinate amount of my time? How can I provide adaptations that don't cost a lot of money?

Are you looking for practical answers to these questions? If so, this book is for you. Loaded with practical ideas, this book is designed to meet your needs. You have taken the first step to making your classroom a more user-friendly place for your students with special needs.

The number of students with special needs in general education classrooms is increasing, along with the expansion of the inclusion movement. This calls for development of effective adaptations, useful modifications, and needed accommodations for students with special needs. Additionally, the push to include most students in our assessment system has brought to the forefront the need for accommodations in assessment. To be successful in the general education curriculum, students with special needs require support through adaptations.

You may hear colleagues say, "It's not my job to accommodate students with special needs—if I had wanted to work with students

with special needs I'd have gone into special education." While such an attitude is problematic in today's classrooms because of the diverse needs of the children, we all must be cognizant of the needs of the classroom teacher. Classroom teachers are bombarded with expectations from school and society. They are expected to work with a large group of students—some classrooms may have forty students in them. Teachers feel a tremendous sense of pressure because of our focus on high-stakes testing. The scores of the students may be published in the newspaper, and often teachers are blamed for low test scores even when they do not have control over all the variables influencing the children within their classroom.

Teachers at the secondary level are content specialists and are expected to cover a specific amount of material by given dates. All teachers feel the pressure to teach to standards, even when they question whether all of their students are prepared for those standards. Students in any given classroom read at different levels, may have attendance problems, and may come with the emotional baggage of not liking school.

At the same time, we expect teachers to work with more diverse students, even though many of them have had only one special education class during their training programs.

Because of the many challenges classroom teachers face, we must all be reasonable in the adaptations that we expect them to make. It is unreasonable to expect a classroom teacher to spend three hours a day recording a reading book for a student or for a general education teacher to work with an individual for two hours during the school day—what happens to the other students during that time?

Classroom teachers must be active participants in discussions about what adaptations are reasonable to make within the classroom and what adaptations will require assistance to make. I remember participating in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for a high school student. All of the high school teachers were present and the discussion focused on whether a word bank might be appropriate for a student during testing. One of the teachers had a blank look and asked, "What is a word bank?" I was delighted that he spoke up and admitted he did not know what it was.

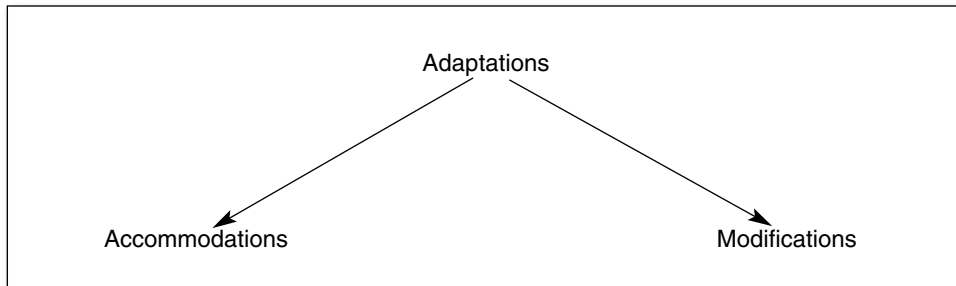
Many teachers are willing to make accommodations but need assistance to make them. The purpose of this book is to give teachers an array of adaptations that are not labor intensive for their students and will make teaching easier. A teacher may discover that an adaptation for one student works for other students as well.

This chapter sets the stage for the remainder of this book. It outlines the meaning of the terms *adaptations*, *accommodations*, and *modifications*. It also includes the legal basis for adaptations. It reviews the cautions in the use of adaptations, discusses the importance of record keeping, and provides helpful tips for collaboration.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

You may hear people use the terms *adaptations*, *accommodations*, and *modifications* interchangeably; however, these terms are different. The following graphic and definitions will help you distinguish among the terms.

Figure 1.1



Adaptations. Consider this an umbrella term that encompasses all modifications and accommodations. Practical adaptations are strategies to support students with special needs and to improve their learning.

Modifications. This term involves changes in the general education curriculum, course content, teaching strategies, manner of presentation, or timing. For example, a student could be assigned fewer spelling words to memorize or be given an easier history text to read. The teacher might use materials that provide a high level of interest for older students but that use lower vocabulary than typical grade level materials. The teacher also might use off-grade level material for some students. That is, the student might be in the sixth grade but with math skills at a third-grade level, so the teacher opts to include third-grade math problems. When you modify content or instruction, you are monkeying with the content. A picture of a monkey may help you remember that a modification changes or monkeys with the content.

Accommodations. These are applied to the curriculum and instruction and assessment. Accommodations do not change the content but rather provide “the extension ladder” for students to get where they need to be. For example, if I need to change a fluorescent lightbulb in a ceiling that is eight feet tall but I am only a little over five feet tall, I will need a ladder to change the lightbulb. I have the skills—I am “otherwise qualified” to do this job—but I must use a ladder to get me to where I need to be to change the lightbulb. Glasses and hearing aids are accommodations. A wheelchair is an accommodation for a person who cannot walk. Extended time to take

a test is a frequently requested accommodation. Another example of an accommodation is permitting a student with a fine-motor disability to use a word processor to take a writing test.

Accommodations in assessment should match the accommodations in instruction. For example, if a student is to be provided with a calculator for a specific math assessment, that student should be taught how to operate the calculator and should use it during classroom instruction.

Examples of accommodations might include a large print book for a student who has a visual impairment or a student with a learning disability who has difficulty tracking the text. A pencil grip, a word processor for writing, or being able to write on the test booklet rather than having to put the answers on a bubble sheet are also accommodations. There are quite a lot of accommodations, which may or may not be appropriate for the student, and this book discusses many of them.

WHY THE NEED FOR ACCOMMODATIONS: WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Several laws govern the appropriate use of accommodations and modifications for students with special needs. These laws serve to protect students and their families, as well as to provide guidance to all educators on implementation of the provision of services for students with disabilities. It is critical that all educators understand the basic requirements of these laws.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

In 1997's IDEA, for the first time, the general education teacher was required to participate in the Individualized Education Program process. Teachers' organizations had voiced serious concerns that, with the movement toward inclusion, they were being expected to provide significant services and accommodations for students with disabilities within their classroom yet were not involved in the decision-making process. There was also an addition in the focus of the IEP process. Previously the IEP team addressed the needs of the student alone. With IDEA, language was added to support school personnel. Consequently, if teachers state, within the IEP process, that they need additional training to meet the needs of the student, then the training must be addressed within the IEP process (Johns, 1998).

The subsequent reauthorization of the act (still known as IDEA) in 2004 retained these important revisions.

Thus, the IEP team is charged with examining the needs of the student, planning goals, and then determining how and where those goals can be met. It is critical for the IEP team to consider the whole range of student

needs. Students who have a disability that results in an adverse effect on educational performance require specialized instruction to meet those needs. They also require sufficient accommodations in assessment and instruction. They may require specific modifications to the general curriculum. They also may require related services coordinated with their special education program and placement. It is the IEP team that makes these decisions and the general education teacher is an integral part of that process.

IDEA also requires that students are educated in the least restrictive environment—that means that students are educated to the maximum extent appropriate with their nondisabled peers. It doesn't mean that all students are educated within the general education classroom, but it means that children with disabilities are educated as appropriate with their peers. The IEP team determines placement.

No Child Left Behind

School personnel struggle to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, which looks at all students and at what level they achieve as compared to their grade level peers, while at the same time educators must also address the individual needs of the student as the cornerstone of the IDEA-2004. NCLB focuses on accountability for results for all students. Students must take a state-determined assessment, and then each state's department of education compiles the results of the tests. Each state must report the information back to the school district, while also reporting the school and district results to the public via the newspaper and Internet. All students must make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in reading, math, and science. Scores are disaggregated for specific groups of students—students with disabilities may be a disaggregated group of students, depending on the number of students that the state has determined as the minimum size of a disaggregated group. Data is disaggregated for students by poverty levels, race ethnicities, disabilities, and English Language Learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

For students with disabilities, the IEP team determines whether the student takes the state assessment with or without accommodations. If the student takes the test with accommodations, the IEP team determines the specific accommodations that should mirror the accommodations made within instruction. The IEP team may determine that the student can take one part of the test without accommodations but for another part of the test the student does need accommodations. The student may be able to take the math test with no accommodations but needs to be accommodated when taking the reading test. No more than 1 percent of all students with the most significant cognitive disabilities may take an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards. An additional 2 percent may be eligible to take an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards. All of these decisions are made by the IEP team.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability. Section 504 also provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities and those accommodations are to be determined within the scope of a Section 504 accommodation plan for the student who has a disability but may not be eligible for special education. A few examples of accommodations that might be made for a student who requires a 504 plan but is not in special education might include periodic bathroom breaks for a student with diabetes, dietary requirements for a student with specific allergies, or removal of barriers for a student who uses a wheelchair.

The definition of a disability was changed as a result of the reauthorization of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 amended the definition of a disability. The term *disability* means a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of the individual. Major life activities include but are not limited to caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working. An individual meets the requirements of having an impairment if the individual establishes that he or she has been subjected to an action because of an actual or perceived physical or mental impairment, whether or not the impairment limits or is perceived to limit a major life activity. The determination of whether an impairment substantially limits a major life activity is made without regard to the ameliorative effects of mitigating measures such as medication, medical supplies, equipment, or appliances including low-vision devices, prosthetics, hearing aids, and cochlear implants. It does not include the effects of ordinary eyeglasses or contact lenses (ADA Amendments Act of 2008).

Under Section 504, an appropriate education means an education comparable to the education of other students without disabilities, unlike IDEA, which defines an appropriate education as one that meets the individualized needs of the student.

A student with a disability may be eligible for the provisions of Section 504, yet not eligible for services under the IDEA. For a student to be eligible for services under IDEA, the student must exhibit a disability that results in an adverse effect on educational performance. First, the evaluation team determines whether there is a disability. If a disability is determined to exist, then the team determines whether it has an adverse effect on educational performance. If there is no adverse effect, then the student may need accommodations for his or her disability and will require an accommodation plan under Section 504. If an adverse effect exists, then the student would be eligible for special education and need an IEP.

Doe v. Withers

In the case of *Doe v. Withers*, 20 IDELR 422 (West Va. Circuit Court, 1993), the court ruled against a history teacher for failure to make the necessary

accommodations for the student. The teacher clearly knew that the accommodations were to be made and refused to allow the student to have tests read orally to him. The principal attempted to persuade the history teacher to make the accommodations but the teacher would not do so. The state court in West Virginia ordered the history teacher to pay a judgment of \$5,000 in actual damages, plus \$10,000 in punitive damages, for failure to administer the tests to the student orally (Zirkel, 1994).

CAUTIONS IN THE USE OF ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations are not an instructional substitute

In schools today, we all work hard to ensure that students receive the accommodations that they need to be successful in both assessment and instruction. However, all educators also must make sure that the student with a disability who is in special education also receives the specialized instruction that the student needs and that specialized instruction is individually tailored to meet that student's needs.

As an example, Jessica may be in sixth grade but reads at a second-grade level. When Jessica is in her general education classes, it is critical that she receive accommodations for her reading problem—her books may be on tape, someone may be reading the text to her, or her materials may be digitized. However, at the same time, Jessica must be taught how to read in a way that is individually tailored for her. She must receive specialized instruction by a special educator. Accommodations are not enough for Jessica.

In another example, students often are given the accommodation of extended timelines for taking tests or completing assignments. However, extended timelines may not be beneficial to a student who has not been taught how to manage his or her time.

Accommodations are not giveaways

I once heard a general education teacher say that she would not allow her students to take a test in the special education room. When I asked her why, she replied that she was afraid the special education teacher would give the student the answers to the questions. I explained that the job of the individual who administers the accommodation is not to provide the the answer; it is to read the question to the student so the student can offer an answer. Accommodations were never designed to give away answers to students, and anyone who administers specific accommodations must be very careful that they do not give the students clues that should not be given. They are not to answer the question for the student, but to simply administer the test with the needed accommodation. They must be careful even that voice inflection does not give away an answer. If the student requires a scribe (the student verbally relays the answer and the individual accommodating writes down exactly what the student says), the adult must not write down what he or she

wanted the student to say. Those who administer accommodations should have extensive training in not giving answers to students.

Accommodations must address the preferences of the students

The preference of the student for a specific accommodation must be strongly considered. Some years ago, I participated in an IEP for a secondary student who had a processing deficit in the area of auditory skills—specifically in auditory memory. He was failing one of his classes because the teacher primarily used the lecture method. We were discussing the possibility that the student might use a tape recorder in the class so he could take it home and listen to the lecture more than once. The student quickly spoke up: “I hate using tape recorders.” It was back to the drawing board for the IEP team. After all, an accommodation is designed to help a student—not force that student to use an unwanted tool.

In another common example that I have seen, the school provides assignment notebooks for all the students. Personnel find that some students respond well to that while other students are conveniently losing the notebook. Personnel try to figure out why those students are not using a tool that was designed to help them. It may be that the assignment notebook is a weekly guide for students and they are overwhelmed by seeing the whole week at once. The notebook just isn’t a match for the student. Many of us have different types of planners—some people use a day at a glance, others utilize a weekly planner, some individuals want to see the whole month at a time, and some adults prefer an electronic calendar. I prefer to see the whole month at one time and know what I have to do over the month—if you told me I could no longer use a monthly planner, I would probably rebel, because that is not my preference.

You may ask how you can learn about the preferences of your students. Many of them will tell us. Others don’t know enough about various types of accommodations to tell us. We must expose our students to a variety of types of accommodations and let them experience those accommodations and see what works best for them. Not too long ago, I spilled coffee all over my computer and bid my computer goodbye. I was upset by what I had done and was sharing my sad story to a friend; she immediately told me about an excellent accommodation I could use—it was a slip that would go over the keyboard and protect it while still allowing me to type. She even told me where I could order one and I went right home and did so. Initially excited to put it on my new laptop, I quickly discovered I hated the feel of it and couldn’t stand to use it. So much for that accommodation—I instead realized that it would be better if I just made sure I didn’t have coffee or any other liquid anywhere close to my computer.

I was working with a student with a learning disability who required accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Specifically, tests were to be read to her. At the beginning of the year, I met with her to get to know her better. I specifically asked her whether she would like a

proctor to read any tests to her or whether she preferred that I read the test questions into a tape recorder and then she could take the test in a private room where she could listen to the questions as many times as she needed. She preferred the second option because she was not comfortable with having the test read to her by someone she didn't know.

ACCURATE RECORD KEEPING: IF IT ISN'T WRITTEN DOWN, IT WASN'T DONE

Accommodations and modifications for students who are in special education are determined by the IEP team and must be delineated in that document. Accommodations for students who are eligible under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are determined via the Section 504 accommodation plan. Accommodations should be thoroughly discussed and documented in the IEP or 504 plan. It is helpful also to document the results of the use of accommodations and the effectiveness of specific accommodations. As an example, the student's previous IEP may have noted that the student was in need of extended timelines for assessments. However, when the teacher recently observed the student in a testing situation, she noted that he could get the assignment done within the regular timeline. The teacher will want to come prepared to discuss whether extended timelines should be continued.

I can remember attending one IEP meeting in which we had a good discussion of the necessary accommodations for a student. We determined as a group the needed accommodations, but I noticed that the person writing the IEP was not recording any of the information. When we had a break, I told her what I had noticed. She replied, "Oh, there isn't any need—we make those accommodations for anyone in this school district." I explained nicely that if the student moved, the IEP would go with her and that the receiving school district would have no way of knowing what the child needed. The IEP is a portable document. When a student moves to a new school district, personnel there should be able to review the IEP and determine the needs of the student.

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Many school districts employ accommodation checklists for IEPs and some do the same for the Section 504 accommodation plan. Checklists are acceptable if they reflect the needs of the individual child. However, when accommodation plans are included in the IEP and school personnel check all of the accommodations (just in case the student may need them) they are not really considering the individual needs of the student. The accommodations discussion within the IEP should be meaningful for the needs of the child. Accommodations should be designed specific to the types of disabilities. The appropriateness of the accommodation has been noted in

research as interacting with the specific nature of the disability of the student (Fletcher et al., 2009). Through assessment and observation, both the general and special education teacher should come to the IEP prepared to discuss what needs the student has and how those needs can be met.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION IN PLANNING APPROPRIATE ADAPTATIONS

The process of collaboration is based on the belief that individuals working together bring their own expertise to the table and each party can learn from and benefit from each other's time and talent. Successful collaborators recognize the strengths of each of the parties and come to the table with an open mind and a clear focus that the purpose of the collaboration is to help the student succeed.

Collaboration as a delivery system has increased in popularity, especially since 1990. Prior to that time, special educators and regular educators were generally expected to deal on their own with the problems that they faced within their respective classrooms. Those who asked for help were perceived as unable to do their job and such requests may have then been rejected by their supervisors or peers (Kampwirth, 2003).

Times have changed. The IEP is a team process, and teacher assistance teams or student support teams are more common in schools. Educators are realizing that they do not have all the answers, that two heads are better than one. Such role changes indicate a trend in society in general. In contrast to earlier times when the majority of workers toiled in isolation on assembly lines, the majority of jobs available today require much interaction with fellow workers and customers. We are all bombarded with so much information that we cannot have all the answers to all of the problems. We must work actively with our colleagues. We want our students to grow up and work collaboratively in teams in the workplace. Educators are role models, so it is critical that students see their teachers working together in the spirit of teamwork.

The classroom teacher has the expertise in the area of the general curriculum and how typical children learn. The classroom teacher has realistic expectations of what may be accomplished in a classroom of twenty-five to thirty students. The special educator has knowledge about specialized interventions and how to accommodate and modify instruction and assessment. When they come together, they can brainstorm effective strategies for students.

When classroom teachers collaborate with families, they share with the parents the progress the student has made within the classroom and the areas of concern that might exist. The parents bring their expertise of knowing the strengths, weaknesses, and interests of their child. Webster-Stratton and Reid (2002) summarized the research literature on the key features of effective parent programs. Those that are collaborative result in more parental engagement.

Strategies for Effective Collaboration

- **Be a good listener.** The ability to “listen” may be 80 percent of the special and general education teachers’ role as a good collaborator (DeBoer, 1986, 1995).
- **Be realistic.** When collaborating with a fellow teacher, a parent, or a related services provider such as a social worker or psychologist, teachers should be realistic in what they expect these colleagues to do and recognize their time or money available, or other challenges they face.
- **Be empathetic.** Teachers must make every effort to put themselves in the other person’s place and see the issue from the other perspective. Active listening can help in understanding the feelings of coworkers and better understanding the other person’s needs.
- **Be positive and upbeat.** It is important that educators be positive and upbeat and provide a sense of hope to those with whom they collaborate. If the classroom teacher is feeling down or feeling like a failure because the special needs of a student are not being met, the other individual should encourage and support the teacher in his or her everyday work.
- **Be dependable.** It is important for members of the team to have confidence in other members. If you say you will do some task, do it in a timely fashion. Otherwise another member of the team may lose confidence in you.
- **Be in tune to the needs of others.** All behavior is a form of communication. Teachers may be telling others what their needs are through their behavior. For example, a teacher may be resistant to working with a particular student and communicate that resistance through a variety of behaviors, such as exhibiting attention, power, revenge, and inadequacy (Dreikurs, 1964). For example, the teacher might appear to be too busy to work with the special educator to meet the needs of the student, when the teacher is really fearful that he or she won’t be successful with the student. The teacher might complain often about the size of classes as a way to say that she or he doesn’t want the special education student within the classroom, when in fact the teacher is saying he or she needs more assistance in working with the student. The teacher might say, “I don’t have time to do this,” when in fact the teacher is really saying he or she needs help to make the accommodation.

I have always believed that all educators must be lifelong learners—we never have all the answers to the challenges that we face in today’s schools. We read and study, attend professional development, and work together with our colleagues. Sometimes we are too close to a situation and need to work together with others to get a fresh perspective about a situation. We may think we have tried everything but then a colleague comes up with an idea we hadn’t considered. The beauty of collaboration is that we learn from each other.

Summary: Just 3×5 It

I can still remember a colleague, who wanted to let me know that she didn't want a long explanation of something, telling me to "Just 3×5 it." She only wanted a brief summary of the key points. I sometimes like to make 3×5 review cards for my students as a handy reference for them to use to remember key points. They can then carry the cards around with them.

All of the chapter summaries provide 3×5 review cards.

The summary of this chapter, and all subsequent chapters, is designed to give you the key points from the chapter and a quick review of what you have learned.

1. *Adaptation* is the umbrella term used to describe both accommodations and modifications within the classroom. Accommodations don't change the content. Modifications do change the content.
2. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the special education law that protects the individual rights of children with disabilities who are in need of specially designed instruction based on their needs.
3. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) focuses on assessment and accountability, and it also stresses testing of students at given grade levels.
4. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against any individual with a disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides protections to individuals throughout their lifetimes in work-place and society.
5. *Doe v. Withers* was a case that dealt with a classroom teacher's refusal to make accommodations for a student with a learning disability.
6. Cautions in the use of accommodations that educators should monitor to determine their appropriate use include that accommodations are not instructional substitutes nor giveaways, and that they should be individualized and based on the preferences of students.
7. Accurate record keeping and documentation about the effectiveness of accommodations is critical.
8. Collaboration provides us with an important avenue to gain expertise about interventions from other educators and families.