

A GUIDE ON HOW TO

**Adapt reading &
math materials
for an inclusive
classroom.**



Curated by



Access to the mainstream reading and mathematics curriculum is not about the place. Simply placing students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom and issuing them a grade-level textbook is not enough. To ensure the individual student's basic right to learn, teachers need to provide appropriate and reasonable adaptations. But how can this be accomplished? How can the busy professional implement adaptations for the individual children while maintaining the equilibrium of the class as a whole? The answer is flexibility.

Listed below are eight principles for making adaptations in the elementary classroom. These principles are derived from years of research in general education classrooms that included students with disabilities. The principles have been organised using the acronym FLEXIBLE.

1. Feasible

Successful adaptations must be feasible for classroom teachers to implement.

The first principle of making adaptations is that adaptations must be feasible to use. Although teachers may recognise the desirability of an adaptation for promoting student learning, if the adaptation is not doable, it is less likely to be implemented on an ongoing basis. For example, rewriting mathematics word problems using more readable terminology and bullets to highlight key steps may be desirable in helping a student read and understand, but the feasibility of the teacher's being able to rewrite texts week in and week out is not very high.

Some adaptations are naturally more practical to implement than others. Adaptations such as establishing appropriate routines, providing reinforcement and encouragement, and establishing reasonable expectations are relatively easy to accomplish. Others, such as regularly rewriting materials, using alternative materials, and individualising instruction, require some consideration of logistics.

2. Lively

Successful adaptations must be lively, engaging, and fun. The more lively, engaging, and fun the adaptation, the more likely it is that students will like it and will tolerate its continued use. One common criticism of remedial teaching practices is that they are dull, repetitive, and uninviting and that they cause students to become disengaged and discouraged. The same holds true for adaptations for students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

3. Eliminated

Successful adaptations must be developed with the goal of working toward independence, with a gradual fading and eventual elimination of the adaptation. Ideally, an adaptation should serve as a temporary scaffold to support student learning. If the scaffold is not gradually removed, the student does not have the opportunity to work toward independence. Adaptations should be thought of as temporary support that will eventually be faded and be eliminated with supplemental instruction.

4. Explicit

Successful adaptations must have a definite purpose a purpose that is made explicit to students, other professionals in the classroom, parents, and, if necessary, the student's peers. Adaptations are most effective when they are purposeful. If students understand how the adaptation will help them learn and are aware of its potential benefits, the adaptation is more likely to be well received and sustained. The purpose also should be made clear to other professionals working in the classroom and to parents. The more key stakeholders who are informed and supportive of the additional help, the better.

Explaining an adaptation to a student's peers can be a sticky matter. At the elementary level, adaptations can be implemented without taunting and discord if the teacher maintains a positive classroom climate in which individual differences are tolerated and even appreciated.

At times some students think that getting extra help, extra time to take a test, or less difficult homework is simply not fair to the students whose work is expected to meet a different standard. In such cases, a simple, direct explanation may be needed. For the most part, students tolerate adaptations and appreciate teachers who take the time to implement them.

5. Intentional

Successful adaptations should be part of a comprehensive plan for students with disabilities. Classroom observations reveal that general education teachers do make some adaptations for students with mild disabilities. Most frequently, adaptations are made during a lesson when a student doesn't seem to be grasping a concept or mastering a skill. However, such adaptations tend to be idiosyncratic, incidental, and not part of a comprehensive plan for the student. While some on-the-spot adaptations are warranted, successful adaptations should be used routinely and be part of a larger plan to help students grow toward independence.

Adaptations should also be planned in light of the goals set in the student's Individualised Education Plan (IEP). A makeshift adaptation may be overkill or inadequate when considered in this longer-range context. Also, an adaptation should consider the goals set by the state or district, as well as the assessment process for students with disabilities.

6. Beneficial

Successful adaptations should benefit the student with disabilities and enhance, or at least not detract from, the learning of other students in the classroom.

An adaptation should provide an educational benefit for students with disabilities. However, some adaptations are just good teaching techniques that can be used with all students in the classroom. For example, study guides to help students read difficult information can benefit students at all achievement levels.

When considering the selection of an adaptation, the teacher should also bear in mind the needs of students with language differences. If teachers have to make separate adaptations for students with disabilities and for students with language differences, they may be tempted not to make adaptations at all. Students with disabilities and those with language differences have unique learning needs, and teachers should not lump those differential needs into one package. However, many adaptations, such as graphic organisers, are recommended for both groups of students. To the degree that it is possible, teachers should implement adaptations that meet a wide array of student needs.

Finally, a common issue confronting teachers is the “Robin Hood” effect. Some parents, teachers, administrators, and even students are concerned that adaptations require stealing time and resources from the “rich” (higher-achieving students) to give to the “poor” (lower-achieving students).

7. Limelight

Successful adaptations do not place undue attention on the student with disabilities or put the student in a potentially embarrassing situation.

Parents, teachers, and students are all concerned about a child appearing different from other students. As much as possible, the adaptation should be a normal part of the classroom activities. Thus, it is important to think of the questions when planning for the implementation of an adaptation.

8. Evaluated

Successful adaptations are continually evaluated. Once an adaptation is implemented, it needs to be evaluated periodically. The teacher should evaluate the adaptation to see whether desired results are being obtained. If the adaptation is helping the students achieve the desired results, then fading or perhaps eliminating the adaptation may be appropriate. If it is not, then adjustments and alternatives need to be considered.

The evaluation process should also engage parents, students, and, when possible, administration and support personnel. In some districts, support team and IEP meetings include the parents, teacher, resource teacher, administrator, school psychologist, speech pathologist, and others. During parent conferences, the adaptation can be explained and reviewed to obtain parental input about the academic and social impact of the adaptation. Even very young students have definite opinions about what helps them learn and what does not.

From time to time student evaluations of an adaptation can be conducted to find out what students think.

Source:



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