

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ADAPTING INSTRUCTION IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Introduction

Accommodations and modifications. What are they? How are they used? And how are they implemented correctly? What happens if they are NOT implemented correctly? Regulations and practices have been clearly defined throughout the years although most of the mandates have only been associated with assessments. Accommodations are usually more assessment and test centered. Accommodations are generally seen as an “assistance” in the course, location, timing, scheduling, expectations and student response on an assessment or test. Some examples being extended time, frequent breaks, preferential seating and use of notes and calculators.

Accommodations do not fundamentally alter or lower the standard or expectation of the course or test. “They are designed to “level the playing field” and to insure that we are measuring the student’s abilities, not their disabilities. Modifications are actual changes to the assessment/test. Changes in the order of the administration of the assessment/test, use of sign language (depending on the student), large print, using a computer instead of writing or repetition of directions. Modifications are more instructional, or program-centered and “they change the field your playing on” as oppose to leveling the field it as accommodations are intended to do. Some accommodations and modifications are appropriate in some situations while some others are not. Once a student qualifies for special education, an IEP team is formed to look at all aspects of the student’s learning levels and tendencies. The IEP team which usually consists of a general education teacher, special education teacher, school psychologist, school administrator and whoever else is needed based on that student’s assessment results. A school nurse or speech pathologist may also be in attendance.

Upon developing an initial IEP, the following is a typical determination: “If the student needs an accommodation and modification and if it is included in their IEP and used in instruction, then they can be used to employ that accommodations and modifications in testing situations.

It is the purpose of this study to understand their use and importance in regards what are the affects of how those accommodations and modifications are implemented and what is the result if they are implemented correctly or incorrectly. Both accommodations and modifications should be reviewed and discussed as to how they will work in a general education program and teachers and parents and everyone involved in the student’s education should be aware of the differences in learning and the variation of methodology necessary to allow an opportunity for learning for all students”.

Results

Three students with disabilities where given a science quiz in their general education with their accommodations and modifications. The three students used in this project were chosen because they have some of the same accommodations and modifications like small group, extra time on tests, provide additional notes (or they can use their Cornell notes) and credit for partial work completed etc. The same three students were given the same test in a resource room without their accommodations and modifications. The results were dramatic! Appendices A, B, and C shows how the students performed on the quiz in the general education classroom with their accommodations and modifications. The students were able to take full advantage of the use of their accommodations and modifications and were even allowed to use their Cornell notes. Cornell notes are notes that the students take with their general education teacher during a lesson that is taught prior to them taking the test. Appendices D, E, and F show how the students did on the same quiz in a resource room without their accommodations and modifications. All three students were unable or refused to take the tests without their accommodations and modifications.

They asked could they use their Cornell notes or their Science book for assistance. Due to auditory and visual processing disorders, they were unable to recall the information given in class about the test and they did not know how to begin the test without the assistance of their Cornell notes. The use of accommodations and modifications for these students is of utmost importance because they provide a starting point for these students and they help fill in the gaps related to their disabilities in regards to recalling what was taught in class. The accommodations and modifications act as a support for these students and it also levels the playing field for these students. One could imagine how this students would perform over the course of a year without their accommodations and modifications being in place. This in fact happens to many students through the city, county, and state and it causes many of these students to receive failing grades in their classes because they are being graded based on what the non-disabled students are able to do as oppose to what these students can actually do. This is unacceptable and unfair and most of all it is illegal.

Conclusion

Some suggestions for moving forward are:
Special education teachers need to make sure that the general education teachers receive and understand the accommodations and modifications for each student with a disability in all of their general education classes

Special education teachers need to meet with the general education teachers frequently to make sure the accommodations and modifications are followed. Special Education teachers should make sure that the general education teachers are actually modifying the tests/assignment to make sure the student with disabilities are given the same tests/assignment in modified version. Special education teachers along with the general education teacher needs to make sure that the curriculum is not a watered down version of an assignment/tests and that the assignments/tests are based on the students needs and that they are the same assignments/tests that will generate the same outcome goals of their peers.

General education teachers need to be reminded of the implications of not providing accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities. They are legally obligated to provide these services and they can be held accountable and may have to pay a judgment if found guilty of not providing accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities.

For further information

For more information, contact Marc Gordon

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Literature cited

Smith, D.K. (2001) Modifying tests for Students with Student Disabilities. Assessment: Issues and Challenges for the Millennium