Teaching Threads

AMAs: Adaptations, Modifications, and Accommodations

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Teachers have always made adjustments in how they teach and how students respond to instruction to accommodate individual learning needs, skill levels, strengths, and weaknesses. Good teachers are aware of their students' needs and effectively differentiate instruction and assessment. This practice is required for students with identified or suspected learning difficulties or disabilities as included in IEPs, 504 Plans, and RTI Intervention Plans. Instructional, assessment, and environmental adjustments are referred to as adaptations, modifications, and accommodations. I like to refer to them as AMAs.

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Adaptations =
Modifications + Accommodations

AMAs   are something supplied to satisfy a student need.
AMAs   level the instructional playing field.
AMAs   enable all students to benefit from instruction to the greatest degree possible.
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ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations are practices and procedures in the areas of presentation, response, setting, and timing/scheduling that provide equitable access during instruction and assessments for students with learning differences or difficulties. Accommodations are intended to reduce or even eliminate the effects of a student's learning difference or difficulty; *they do not reduce learning expectations or content*. Accommodations enable the student to learn the same content and achieve the same objectives as all other students. In most cases the same accommodations are provided to a student during classroom instruction and assessments. It is critical to note that some accommodations appropriate for instructional use may not be appropriate for use during assessment. There are four basic types of accommodations.

- Presentation Accommodations- Allow students to access information in alternative ways - such as auditory, multi-sensory, tactile, and visual, text, discussion, computer, and lab.

- Response Accommodations- Allow students to complete activities, assignments, and assessments in different ways or to solve or organize problems using an assistive device or information organizer.

- Setting Accommodations- Change the location in which an assignment or assessment is given or the conditions of the setting.

- Timing and Scheduling Accommodations- Can increase the allowable length of time to complete an assignment or assessment and/or change the way the time is organized.

MODIFICATIONS

While accommodations do not reduce learning expectations or content, modifications refer to practices that change, lower, or reduce learning expectations and/or content. The decision to modify a student's curriculum must be given serious consideration because, modifications can increase the gap between the achievement of students with learning difficulties and disabilities and expectations for proficiency at a particular grade level. The results of using modifications could adversely affect a

student throughout their educational career.

Consider this example. The 3rd grade weekly spelling list is 15 words, but Mary's IEP team has agreed to modify her weekly list to include 10 words. Each week her classmates learn 15 words and Mary learns 10. After 8 weeks, most 3rd graders have learned 120 words while Mary has learned 80. Now, 10 words a week may be a very appropriate goal for Mary, but all the IEP team members need to consider how this modification increases the gap between Mary and her peers every week.

Examples of modifications include:

- Requiring a student to learn less material - e.g., fewer objectives, shorter units or lessons, fewer pages or problems;
- Reducing assignments and assessments so a student only needs to complete the basic problems or items;
- Revising assignments or assessments to make them less complex - e.g., crossing out half of the response choices on a multiple-choice test so that a student only has to pick from two options instead of four; or
- Giving a student hints or clues to the correct responses on assignments and tests.

BASIC IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

1. Set the purpose/s for the AMA/s.
2. Gather current information related to student learning strengths, deficits, and differences and the demands of the classroom instruction and assessment activity.
3. Brainstorm possible AMAs.
4. Select one or more AMAs to try. Select AMAs that are seen as reasonable and acceptable by the teachers and student. Select age-appropriate and easy-to-implement AMAs first.
5. Implement the AMAs.
6. Evaluate the results and make changes if needed.

Consider classwide AMAs. Many educators find that implementing selected AMAs on a classwide basis not only benefits several students at the same time but also reduces any possible stigmatization toward individual students. When considering possible AMAs for Gavin, a student with auditory processing difficulties, the suggestion was to provide Gavin with written or posted assignment info in addition to the verbal assignment announcement the teacher provided to the class. Team members felt that many students would benefit from written or posted assignment info. The final decision was to establish a permanent assignment info section of the bulletin board – a classwide AMA that made it easier for Gavin and his classmates to obtain accurate assignment info each day.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS for AMAS

- Learn as much as you can about your students, their abilities, needs, differences, and motivations.
- Learn what factors influence student learning, participation, energy, concentration, and social, emotional, and behavioral functioning, inside and outside the classroom.
- Be aware that no two students with are exactly alike and that AMAs appropriate for one student may not be appropriate for another. Even if two students have Autism for example, they will be very different.
- Talk with your students and his/her parents and really listen to what they say.
- Acknowledge individual differences enthusiastically – Celebrate diversity.
- Remember that you are a model for your students. They will learn from your

behavior and attitudes. Show your appreciation of student differences.

- Develop class slogans such as "My way is only one way - it is not the only way."
- Make extra efforts to help all students be accepted and valued members of the class.
- Use AMAs to enable students' full participation in classroom activities and partial participation when full participation is not possible.
- Seek info from occupational and physical therapists on adaptive equipment and assistive technology and learn the basic operation of equipment the student uses daily.
- Consider AMAs that would be beneficial for your entire class of students.
- Observe guidelines for confidentiality of information on student differences. Share info on a student's learning differences or disabilities only with colleagues directly involved in that student's education.
- Develop efficient procedures to allow students to receive AMAs, services, medications, or other supports during the school day without stigmatization, penalty, or hassle.
- For students receiving special education services - Be involved on the IEP team, identify appropriate AMAs for your classroom, implement the AMAs as required on IEPs, and maintain open and frequent communication with the student, parents, teachers, and support staff.

As always, my intent in presenting these activities is to help teachers answer this question –

What can I do to make it easier for my students to learn and behave?

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