

Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education

Volume 1
Number 6 *Electronic Journal for Inclusive
Education Vol. 1, No. 6 (Fall 2002)*

Article 2

Fall 2002

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Verbeke, K. A. (2002). Identifying Accommodations for Inclusion Settings: A Strategy for Special and General Educators, *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education*, 1 (6).

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Identifying Accommodations For Inclusion Karen A. Verbeke

A Strategy for Special and General Educators

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Abstract

Identifying accommodations for students with disabilities is an important part of the collaboration that must take place between special and general educators as a result of the regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997). The law has placed more emphasis on having students with disabilities receive the majority of their instruction in “regular” classes with the use of supplementary aids and services. Identifying these accommodations can be a daunting task for new as well as veteran teachers because there are so many possible accommodations. One strategy, PRESS, has been effective in the training of new teachers and is based on the Learning Strategies Approach (Deshler, Ellis, & Lenz, 1996). It helps teachers work through the identification process, ensuring that the possible categories of accommodations have been considered. Details about how the strategy is presented to new teachers and examples of its use are described.

Introduction

With the implementation of the new regulations accompanying the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997), there is increased emphasis on collaboration and co-teaching in inclusion settings. The law specifically requires that:

“to the extent appropriate, children with disabilities....are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be attained satisfactorily.”
(IDEA Sec. 612 (5) (B)).

By definition inclusion means that students with disabilities are receiving their instruction in the general education classroom with any special accommodations being made available to them on-site. The vision of inclusion emerges out of a belief that all students should be educated in their neighborhood schools in the general classroom with individuals their own age (O’Neill, 1994/1995). Inclusion has changed the way instruction is being delivered to students with and without disabilities. In reality students with disabilities are not the only ones who are benefiting from the accommodations;

their non-disabled peers are often able to receive support from the additional resources, whether they be attention from another teacher, knowledge of a new strategy or assistance from some type of equipment or technology.

As special and general educators begin to work together to plan collaboratively for their students (not yours and mine, but ours!), it becomes important to focus on both the unique individual and group needs of the students. Accommodating these needs is a challenge, but anticipating areas where students may encounter difficulty becomes easier when two professionals engage in the preparation and delivery of instruction together. An accommodation is an adaptation or change in the way instruction is presented or in the way an assessment tool (i.e., individual and group measurement and evaluation) is administered. Instruction and assessment can be adapted or changed to help students meet the established standards – goals, objectives, and outcomes. This implies that the standard is not reduced or minimized in any way, but that students have taken an “alternate route” in meeting the standard (Verbeke, 2001). This is an important feature of an accommodation – one that needs to be consistently communicated to all who are involved: parents, teachers and students.

For students with disabilities, specific accommodations are specified in their individualized education plans (IEPs). Recently there has been more attention given to the need for documenting accommodations, particularly in light of the trend toward statewide testing which is now being used as an exit requirement (i.e., graduation). Many states are now mandating that any accommodation requested for a student with disabilities on statewide assessments must have been documented on that student’s IEP and implemented during instruction prior to the statewide testing. Thus the accommodation is not a “last minute” attempt to give the student some sort of emergency strategy or “crutch” to rely on, but rather it is an intentional, purposeful, practiced alternative strategy or tool to accomplish the same goals as all other students.

As designers of curriculum and assessment, teachers must have a repertoire of accommodations in order to meet the many varied needs of students with disabilities. In particular, general education teachers may not feel as confident in their ability to identify the areas in which they need to consider the use of accommodations.

Strategy Instruction

Strategy instruction, a technique used to help students with disabilities become more independent learners, is effective in assisting individuals in identifying and executing appropriate techniques for particular problems or tasks (usually of an academic nature) that they encounter. The strategy is the “tool” which helps students in identifying the demands of a task or problem. It helps them make decisions about how to approach or solve a problem and ultimately assists them in monitoring the effectiveness of the process they used. These strategies are effective because they reduce time and consistently produce accurate results (Deshler & Lenz, as cited in Mercer & Mercer, 2001).

One popular strategy used by students in editing and revising written work is called “COPS.” Students are encouraged to remember strategies through some mnemonic, often an acronym, which represents a meaningful term or phrase. In this case, students are to remind themselves that a good paragraph will include the capitalization, overall appearance, punctuation and spelling.

Learning Strategies Approach

The Learning Strategies Approach, developed by Deshler and his colleagues at the University of Kansas, is a good example of strategy instruction. Created specifically to assist secondary students with disabilities, this approach is actually a curriculum based on various strands, each with several instructional strategies. Deshler et al (1996) have identified three strands as central to such instruction: acquisition (learning new information), storage (memorizing and retaining new information) and expression and demonstration of competence (applying new learning). They identify three qualities of effective strategies that include:

1. content – the strategy leads to specific, successful outcomes in a sequenced manner, in a reasonable amount of time;
2. design – the strategy is easy to remember and has 7 or fewer steps; and
3. usefulness – the strategy addresses important, common problems and can be used in several situations (as cited in Mercer & Mercer, 2001, p. 538).

One other important aspect of strategy training is that when taught, strategy instruction goes through eight stages. These include:

- Stage #1 – Pretest and Making Commitments (This serves as the motivation for learning the new strategy.)
- Stage #2 – Describe the Strategy (Here the process is clearly presented.)
- Stage #3 – Model the Strategy (The strategy is demonstrated.)
- Stage #4 – Verbal Elaboration and Rehearsal (The learner demonstrates strategy.)
- Stage #5 – Controlled Practice and Feedback (Here the learner practices and is evaluated on performance of strategy.)
- Stage #6 – Advanced Practice and Feedback (The learner practices and receives more formal feedback.)
- Stage #7 – Confirm Acquisition and Make Generalization Commitments (The learner masters strategy and commits to using it.)
- Stage #8 – Generalization (The learner uses the strategy appropriately in multiple settings.) (Ellis & Lenz, 1996, as cited in Mercer & Mercer, 2001; p. 539).

“PRESS”

Not only are learning strategies important and effective for students with and without disabilities, they can also be useful to teachers. One of the most challenging areas that new special educators face is identifying the appropriate accommodations for their students. As a teacher educator, I decided to develop a learning strategy to assist in making this a less overwhelming task. One such strategy that I have been using to help a new special and general educator as they plan together to identify their students' accommodations is entitled, “PRESS.”

In using a modified version of the Learning Strategies Stages, here is how this method is presented:

Stage #1 – Making Commitments

Both special and general educators agree that ensuring that the need of the students with disabilities (SWDs) is important. We discuss the legal and ethical implications of identifying and implementing the necessary accommodations, whether it is for instructional or assessment situations. I stress the need for the special educator, who is the SWD's case manager, to be an advocate. We further discuss the role of an advocate and discover that an advocate will always have to press forward with the needs of the SWDs.

Stage #2 – Describe the Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to help special and general educators identify the various accommodations that will assist SWDs in learning. Since there are literally hundreds of potential accommodations to consider, it is important to categorize them in a meaningful, organized manner so that they can be identified in an efficient way. Since these teachers are advocates for SWDs, they need to PRESS forward with the needs of their students. The word press now becomes the acronym to remember the strategy.

What follows are examples of each part of the strategy, or type of accommodation. At the end of the article in Appendix A is a more complete list of suggested accommodations for each of the five parts of the strategy.

P – stands for presentation. How does the teacher present information?

Teachers now must think of the way they instruct and then consider various alternatives to the presentation mode. For example, if they lecture, SWDs may need to have the material presented in segments, given orally or written in modified outline form.

R – stands for response. How does the student need to respond to the teacher? How does the student need to provide feedback to a given task?

Teachers must consider how their students are asked to demonstrate their understanding of the assigned task and ultimately the performance assessment that they might use to evaluate their SWDs.

For example, accommodations might be to have SWDs give responses orally instead of in writing, to draw, dictate, use the word processor, or to be permitted to use editing devices.

E – stands for equipment. What additional materials, equipment or extra personnel are needed?

Often SWDs need extra tools or even another person to help them complete the task. For example, perhaps a scribe or buddy will be needed to write or read some aspect of the assignment. Other ideas include use of technology, color-coded texts and worksheets, texts-on-tape, pencil gripper, or handouts with enlarged print.

S – stands for scheduling. In what ways can the classroom schedule or time management be improved?

It is not unusual for SWDs to have challenges centering on time management issues. Many have a difficult time focusing for long periods of time, while others have particular times of the day when they concentrate better. Some areas of accommodation might include providing extra time for task completion, permitting frequent breaks, or scheduling most mentally challenging tasks/subjects for “the most productive time of day.”

S – stands for setting. Where can the student learn best?

Finally, it is important for teachers to consider the learning environment, the physical location of where instruction is to take place. Examples of such accommodations might include seating arrangements (e.g., near front, away from particular students, away from distractions), physical proximity of teacher, and attention to ensure appropriate lighting and temperature.

Stage #3 – Model the Strategy

At this stage we now take a hypothetical student and I model the strategy for the class. One example follows with suggested “challenges” requiring an accommodation in italics.

Alfred has poor writing skills. He not only has a difficult time forming his letters, but also with spelling the words correctly. Seeing a lot of “text” on one page easily confuses him – it becomes overwhelming. In addition, his English class of 35 students are scheduled for 5th period, which is immediately after lunch. Alfred does his best work in the morning after he has taken his medication.

(Verbeke, 2001).

P (presentation) – Does Alfred have difficulty with the way the teacher presents information?

Yes. Alfred is confused when there is a great deal of text. What can be done? Reduce the amount of text and provide notes that highlight the most important points in a lesson.

R (response) – Does Alfred have trouble expressing himself or in responding?

Yes. He has a difficult time writing and has poor spelling. What can be done? Allow Alfred to orally respond when possible instead of having to write out all work or do word processing.

E (equipment) – Is there any equipment or other personnel who could help Alfred? Yes, possibly to help with his spelling and writing. What can be done? Allow Alfred to use Spell Check to edit his word-processed assignments (if other students are allowed to edit too).

S (setting) – Does Alfred have any difficulty relating related to where he learns? Yes, he is having a difficult time working in a large class. What can be done? See if Alfred could be placed in an English class that is smaller in size, where he might be able to get more individualized attention, or ensure that his special education teacher or instructional assistant is monitoring this class daily.

S (scheduling) – Does Alfred have any special scheduling needs? Yes. He has his most difficult class in the afternoon after lunch. . What can be done? While reconsidering the English class, see if there is any way that Alfred could take English in the morning when he is more mentally alert and productive and after he has taken his medication.

Stage #4 – Verbal Elaboration and Rehearsal

Here is where I present several examples of other scenarios of SWDs to the prospective teachers so that they can “work through” the same strategy with a partner. We begin with simple scenarios and then build up to more complex case studies.

Stage #5 – Controlled Practice and Feedback

Here additional practice is given in class as warm-ups or reviews with an opportunity for immediate feedback as well. Identifying Accommodations

Stage #6 – Advanced Practice and Feedback

Prospective teachers are given a chance to demonstrate their knowledge with more advanced case studies and on exams.

Stage #7 – Confirm Acquisition and Make Generalization Commitments

We discuss the prior examples and identify possible opportunities for further use of the strategy (e.g., future courses, during field placements and internships).

Stage #8 – Generalizations

Here are the actual opportunities for students to apply the “**PRESS**” strategy in authentic settings. Specific opportunities occur in the development of an IEP for a yearlong case study, during their

transitioning and collaboration courses, and during their internship experience (i.e., student teaching). Ultimately many have reported the use of this strategy as they begin their teaching careers.

Conclusion

Thus the use of learning strategies can be applied more broadly than just to P/K-12 students with or without disabilities. While it was designed to meet their needs, it clearly has potential for future and current teachers, both special and general educators. The fact is that these two groups must collaborate for the “common good” – that of all students. In order to be effective collaborators in the inclusive classroom, all educators must learn to identify and implement the appropriate accommodations for SWDs, and all students for that matter. The strategy PRESS provides an structure for them to do this with relative ease.

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Appendix A – Accommodations and Adaptations for Instruction and Assessment

Presentation: How is information presented to the student?

1. Ensure that worksheets and handouts are clear and accurate.
2. Enlarge the print. Provide a verbal explanation along with a visual presentation.
3. Divide worksheets by cutting, folding, drawing lines, or blocking out areas with an index card to focus students’ attention.
4. Reduce the amount of work assigned.
5. Divide worksheets/assignments into sections; have students work on one section at a time.
6. Assign worksheets/workbook pages one at a time.
7. Give directions orally.
8. Have students repeat directions to ensure that they understand what is expected.
9. When giving multi-step directions, use your fingers to demonstrate what must be done first, second, third, etc. Encourage students to do the same.
10. Assign a “buddy” or partner to read the directions from the board/book/screen/ handout to students.

11. Allow a peer with good note taking skills to photocopy his/her notes for the students.
12. Summarize key points of the lesson to ensure that students have recorded important information.
13. Pair students for reading assignments. Students can take turns reading or one can read to the other.
14. Set a purpose for each reading assignment. Emphasized that we read in different ways for different purposes. Teach students to skim to get a general overview or to read carefully to locate specific information.
15. Periodically review the students' notes to ensure that the most important information is being recorded.
16. Have students' review each other's notes.
17. Teach the book "format" to the students.
18. Review the table of contents, index, glossary, etc. to ensure that students know how to use the parts of the book.
19. Write key points on the board for students to copy for studying during a lecture or oral presentation.
20. Write a step-by-step model of a class problem/example on the board/chart/ overhead for students' reference.
21. If using a web-based course, include a set of class notes for each class session with step-by-step models or examples.
22. Provide an individual model for students' desks and/or notebooks.
23. Alter the rate of your speech.
24. Give a partial sentence, gesture or visual aid as a clue, if necessary.
25. Shorten the time for direct instruction.
26. Provide ample "wait time" for students having difficulty answering questions.
27. Alternate instructional tasks. Short direct instruction can be followed by an independent activity with a return to another short direct instructional activity.
28. If students have difficulty reading, recruit a "reader" from another class or pair with a peer.
29. Provide additional practice activities.
30. Provide a glossary in content areas.
31. Provide an outline of the lecture/class ahead of time or a partial outline and have students follow and/or fill in the outline as the class progresses.
32. Develop reading guides.
33. Use graphic organizers.
34. Provide a written and oral overview of the lesson before you present it.
35. Tests and quizzes could be given orally. Use an instructional assistant or parent volunteer to assist.
36. Reading assignments could be presented on tape.
37. Make arrangements for homework assignments to reach home with clear, concise instructions.
38. Use an assignment sheet or notebook.
39. Board work and assignments may need to be printed in manuscript format as opposed to cursive writing format.

40. Quietly repeat directions to student after they have been given to class; then have the student repeat and explain directions to you. This can also be done in pairs with the entire class.
41. Accompany oral directions with written directions for students to refer to later.

Response: How does the student need to respond to the teacher? How does the student need to provide feedback for a given task?

1. Have students tell you how they solved a problem or arrived at a particular answer. Ask them to explain written answers that make little or no sense to you.
2. Allow students to dictate responses to an assignment or test on tape.
3. Permit students with poor handwriting to respond verbally or present papers orally rather than in written format.
4. Allow students to check and correct their own assignments against a model, either individually or in-group.
5. Have students skip every other line (or double space) on a rough draft. This will give them extra room to edit.
6. Have students follow test directions carefully. Rehearse them on how to mark true or false questions, multiple choice or recording responses on computer scoring paper (e.g., scantron).
7. Permit students who have difficulty writing to answer questions orally or via word-processing.
8. Permit students to record their answers on the test rather than on an answer sheet (e.g., scantron).
9. Select test formats that reduce writing requirements. For example, short answers, multiple choice, matching and completion may be less likely to penalize a student with poor motor skills. Have them use a scribe for short answer/essay questions. Specific test modifications include using a word bank for completion items, having the same number of items in both columns of matching, and reducing the number of alternatives on a multiple choice test to three. Also make sure that the test is written on a reading level at or lower than that of the students. Provide plenty of spacing, being sensitive to the motor and visual demands.
10. Allow students to make drawings or diagrams to further explain their responses.
11. Teach students how to plan their work on timed tests.
12. Teach students how to use Spell Check and other programs that will enhance the accuracy and quality of their responses when word-processing.
13. Teach students a simple editing system so that they can “proofread” and edit their own work before turning it in to the teacher.
14. Accept homework papers dictated by them and recorded by someone else or on tape.
15. Allow students to present their projects through demonstration, picture, video, or other models.

Equipment and Extra Personnel: What additional materials, equipment or extra personnel could help?

1. Color or highlight worksheets to cue students who have difficulty reading important words and concepts.

2. Have a color-highlighted textbook available in the media center/library or online for students.
3. Permit the use of index cards to help students keep their place and focused on the material.
4. Arrange for students to use word processing instead of handwriting. Make certain that they know a word processing program as well as supportive programs such as Spell Check, Thesaurus, etc.
5. Arrange for students to have access to electronic spelling devices (e.g., Franklin Speller).
6. Permit the use of calculators when problem solving. Encourage students to use it to check their work too.
7. Use visual props and concrete examples.
8. Have other academic activities such as learning stations or hands-on materials available when students lose attention or need additional support.
9. Use graph paper or turn-lined paper vertically to help students organize math problems and to create charts.
10. Provide models as part of the room decorations. For example, in math the bulletin board could show how to solve a problem step-by-step.
11. Encourage students to use an assignment sheet or notebook. Check to make sure that students are recording the assignments and that they are doing so accurately.
12. Assign a "buddy" to a student who has difficulty in changing classes or is constantly late to class.
13. Label specific content-related materials (e.g., laboratory equipment) that may be difficult to read and/or are very technical but important.
14. Suggest that students place color-coded marks (i.e., round, colored adhesive dots) on books, notebooks, folders, disks or other materials that they keep in their lockers to remind them of what they need for specific classes (e.g., morning, afternoon; English, math, biology).
15. Provide texts-on-tape.
16. Provide wide spacing for written materials. Have few items per page and clear, large print (no less than 12-point font).
17. Use the overhead projector, computer-projection, etc., to highlight, organize, motivate and focus attention.
18. Use a language master to reinforce specific facts and concepts so that students can have a multi-sensory reinforcement/review (i.e., visual and auditory).
19. Use self-correcting materials in learning stations, interactive bulletin boards and games so that students receive immediate reinforcement and know whether or not their work is correct/accurate.
20. Provide a pencil/pen gripper for students who may be applying too much pressure when they write.
21. Have a scribe for students who have difficulty with writing. Make sure the student and scribe have been trained to work together.

Scheduling: In what ways can the classroom schedule or time management be improved?

1. Permit additional time for students to complete assignments or tests.
2. Give frequent quizzes (e.g., every other day; weekly) that cover specified topics instead of one, long unit exam/test.
3. Divide tasks/assignments into parts; give one part at a time.

4. Provide distributed practice and drill for new and previously learned tasks and skills.
5. Allow frequent breaks; vary activities often.
6. Check often for understanding.
7. Identify the students' most productive "time of day" and schedule mentally challenging tasks at that time.

Setting: Where can the student learn best?

1. Seat students at a carrel to reduce external stimuli.
2. Adjust the lighting and temperature in the room.
3. Have students who require special attention sit in the front of the room or in another preferred seat.
4. Reduce the number of visual and/or auditory distractions in the room. Be aware of the open spaces, bulletin boards, displays, etc.
5. Wear clothing and accessories that are not distracting.
6. Seat students close to the board or area where writing or demonstrations are taking place.
7. Seat students away from the windows to avoid the glare.
8. Seat students away from his/her other students who may serve as a distraction.
9. Reduce the amount of physical activity in the classroom to eliminate additional/unnecessary distractions.
10. Increase the likelihood of a student attending to instruction by standing close to him/her. Touch the student's desk as a reminder to focus and pay attention.
11. Make sure the students' work areas are clear of unnecessary material that may serve as distractions.

Appendix B – Simple Scenarios for Identifying Accommodations Using "PRESS"

Example #1:

Your teacher is giving oral instructions about how to do an assignment. There are 5 steps that you must follow in order to complete the assignment. A student has poor auditory memory skills and can only remember 2-3 of the steps. What could the teacher do to help?

Which type of accommodation is needed? (Answer: Presentation)

Example #2:

A student consistently has a difficult time filling in the "bubbles" on those scantron sheets, which are machine-scored. The teacher gives most of her tests with a scantron response sheet. What can the teacher do to help?

Which type of accommodation is needed? (Answer: Response)

Example #3:

A high school student has several “basic facts” in multiplication and division which he has not mastered after several years of practice. He is required to do more advanced math that requires him to know those facts in order to solve problems. What could help this student?

Which type of accommodation is needed? (Answer: Equipment or extra personnel.)

Example #4:

A middle school student has a very short attention span. Her classes are 50-minutes each. One of her teachers likes to lecture and the student has a difficult time concentrating. What could the teacher do to help this student?

Which type of accommodation is needed? (Answer: Scheduling)

Example #5:

A student is very distracted by bright colors. What could a teacher do to help this student in his classroom?

Which type of accommodation is needed? (Answer: Setting)

What accommodations can you make for each of the above five examples? Here are some possible accommodations.

Presentation – Provide the student with a set of written instructions.

Response - Permit the student to write answers on the test.

Equipment/extra personnel - Allow the student to use a calculator or multiplication chart.

Scheduling - Provide instruction in shorter chunks of time.

Setting - Reduce the amount of stimulation in the classroom; move student to a carrel or to another less distracting area.