

National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET)

THE PRACTICAL TEACHER

This Month's Topic:

Teaching to the Students' Abilities

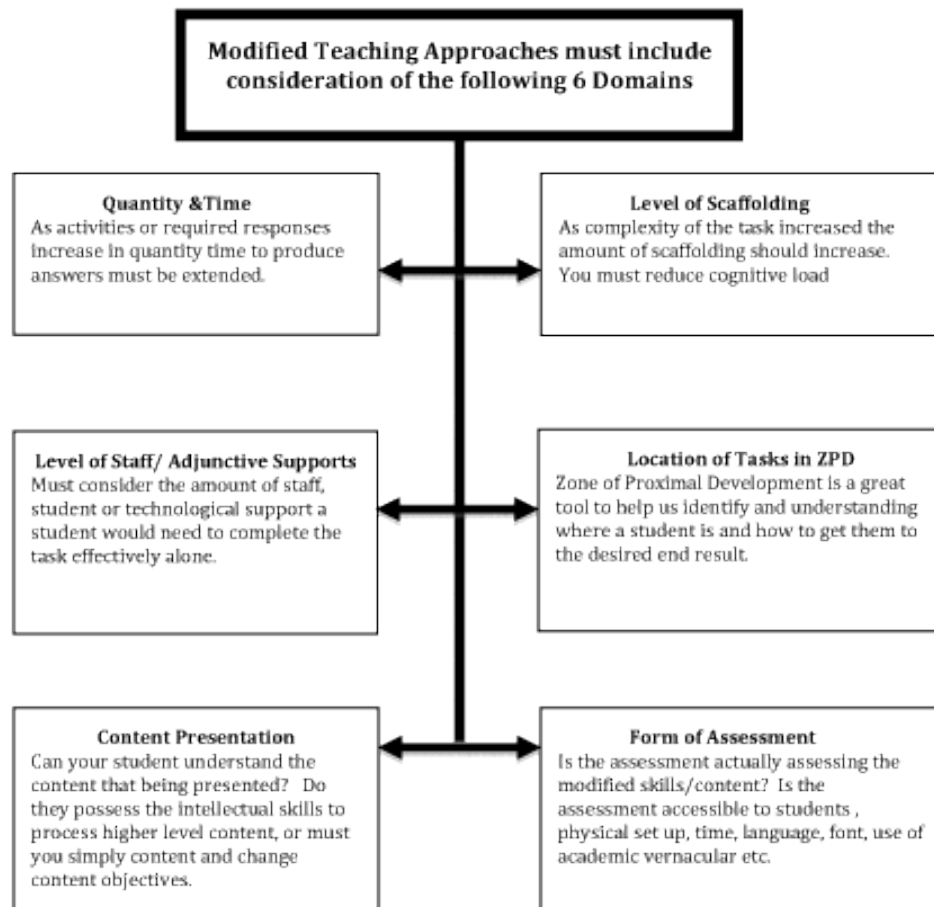
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Setting the Stage

Working with students in multi-ability classrooms or students with learning differences, educators are often faced with a significant challenge. Teachers struggle with how to locate and create educationally appropriate materials when the current curricular materials, while aligned with the standards are wholly inappropriate for your population of students. During a time with budgets are diminishing and funds are limited, teachers are unable to purchase much needed adapted curriculum materials. This article is aimed at providing teachers with a set of tools that will enable them to effectively maximize students performance, implement educational appropriate instruction, and utilize appropriate curricular materials while conserving much needed teacher free time. (as if there is much of that now-a-days).

Adapting Instructional Approaches

In order to provide sound and appropriate educational instruction the teacher must first consider the following instructional domains: (these domains are domains by which most all instruction can be broken down into.)



The chart below has been devised based on the training and experience of the author. It provides more contexts for each domain above. The concepts here are considerations the author makes everyday when teaching students with varied abilities, put into a package if you will to help increase the comprehensible input of the readers. *Examples in this chart are in no way meant to be all inclusive, nor prescriptive. It is the responsibility of all educators to consider each domain and apply your considerations in a manner consistent with students' IEPs as well as sound practice.*

DOMAIN	CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS	CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS
<i>Quantity & Time</i>	-Number of Items -Number of tasks -Number of words in directions - Amount of time to completion	Number of Items should not be so much that students have to rush to finish Number of tasks, too many tasks that are not broken down will overwhelm a student Number of words in directions, if the directions are too wordy students will not get the full message and your assignment will be done incorrectly or incomplete.
<i>Level of Scaffolding</i> Supporting students learning by structuring things so that they are understood.	-pre-teach challenging vocab -provide visuals to assist with text -provide things broken down into the management units - we can go on and on	Doing all of these things and providing appropriate scaffolding will reduce the cognitive load and allow for the student to process and respond more effectively.
<i>Level of staff/adjunctive supports</i> Includes but not limited to: Direct Teacher support 1:1 or in small group, student grouping, use of books on tape, use of computer, use of a scribe etc.	-does the student require staff to re-read directions aloud 1:1 -does the student require the use of books on tape or a kurzweil machine - can the student write on his/her own	Can directions be read aloud with class and allow student access, if not are the directions using too much academic vernacular? Are they too wordy? Do you have access to a set up to support this type of support, if not do you have staff or a student who can read text to the student accurately? How do you expect student to respond? Should they point, and staff record answer, should the verbalize the response, can they cut and paste
<i>Location of tasks in ZPD</i> <i>Zone of Proximal Development as formulated by Lev Vygotsky</i>	- what can the student do unassisted, and what is required to complete said task? -does the student have the skills to complete said task on their own - can cooperative groupings and social interaction help here?	If student lacks all the skills to complete said task then the ZPD model suggests providing just the right amount of support to move the student along the spectrum so they can develop skills . Putting students in groups that are social and can get work done is a good way to address this as well.
<i>Content Presentation</i>	- is content set up in a manner that is accessible to students? - is content simplified but accurate for students to build upon later	-If students are trying to grasp the physics concept of work=Force X Distance, then these concepts must be defined but simplified at first. Work is defined as a force required to change the direction of an object. This idea would have to be simplified for students to understand if they lack higher order thinking skills. Are you using entry points, or access points ?
Forms of Assessment	-Is the assessment accessible to students,? -Is the assessment really assessing the modified content or is it still aligned with the previous content -Academic language?	-if students are asked to write independently, are they able to do so, do they understand how to respond to the test items -is the assessment valid? Has the assessment tool been altered as well to assess the modified skills – if not there is no accurate assessment -do students have the academic knowledge to handle the language of the test.

Conclusion

Effective instructional interventions utilizing educationally appropriate modifications are not only best practice, required by law, and specified in students' IEPs; it is also the only way by which a student can succeed. It may appear that some of the examples and implications above are very vague, that is because no one student is the same. If SPED teachers and/or Regular Education teachers consider the 6 domains as shown above likely instructional approaches will develop that support student success. Working with students in a classroom that have multiple levels of disabilities and whose functional limitations vary, it is very important to look at each domain for each student, when trying to create effective instruction.