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Benefits of Modifications and Accommodations Training

Brandie J. Malm

Northwestern College - Orange City

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Benefits of Modifications and Accommodations Training

Brandie J. Malm

Northwestern College

An Action Research Project Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education

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Dr. Sara Waring-Tiedeman

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research project was to determine the relationship between modifications and accommodations training for school staff and the academic experience of special education students. Participants were three special education students in a public, inclusive, elementary school setting. Data was collected through I-Ready reading and math testing in August and December of this school year and compared to the same data from the previous year. The research question guiding this study was, would special education student's educational experience improve when the special education teacher provides a comprehensive modifications and accommodations training for general education teachers and paraprofessionals? Various modifications and accommodations specific to each child were explained and modeled in depth to the general education teacher and paraprofessionals through conferencing with the special education teacher. Any data variances from the I-Ready testing were recorded and later analyzed to suggest that training opportunities affect student achievement in a positive manner. By collaborating with general education teachers and paraprofessionals, special education teachers can better meet the accommodation and modification needs of special education students.

Benefits of Modifications and Accommodations Training

The majority of special education students being served in regular schools are spending the plurality of their schooling in general education settings. In order to thrive in that environment, special education students depend on modifications and accommodations to be an active participant in the general education classroom. The use of these special education strategies is mandated by a special education student's individual education program (IEP). The accommodations and modifications are determined through observations, data analysis, and collaboration of the IEP team. The modifications and accommodations are specific to each child's needs and are utilized to provide access to education for children that may otherwise be unable to participate to the extent needed to progress in the general education setting. The special education student will use the accommodations to meet the benchmarks required of their peers. Modifications are exercised to provide access to education suitable to the needs and ability of the student. These strategies are not put into place to give students unfair advantages over typical learning students; in contrast, it is providing a student with a disability the support to overcome challenges so they may academically share in instruction and learning as their peers do. These supports are required to be fulfilled by the special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals in all interactions and instruction of those special education students as deemed necessary for academic and behavioral growth or progress. Paraprofessionals historically came in to existence to improve education in school districts by assisting however needed. In the past teachers were inexperienced and unprepared to utilize the extra help in the classroom. Common practice for paraprofessional's duties was to be assigned to grade papers and supervise recess. How special education students participate in education has changed due to the evolution of education, advancements in instruction and interventions

nationwide. General education teachers and paraprofessionals are obliged to implement modifications and accommodations consistently and correctly in all educational settings. A common obstacle for teachers and paraprofessionals is lack of experience and training in how to implement the required accommodations and modifications. The impact of those modifications and accommodations, or lack of, reflects as success or failure for special education students. Without the supports of accommodations and modifications that are deemed fundamental in the child's individual education program, the child will not flourish in educational environments. The individual education program progresses and changes through yearly meetings held by the IEP team and evaluations of special education student's requirements to achieve success. This also means that the program will have amendments to needed accommodations and modifications as the student experiences growth and the current grade levels change. Familiarity with modifications and accommodations for classroom teachers and paraprofessionals improves the ability to perform these actions and strategies with integrity. Awareness and support gained through training provided by special education staff can combat lack of experience in special education techniques and build confidence in general education teachers and paraprofessional's abilities to implement modifications and accommodations. When the staff feels prepared and capable, the likelihood of the modifications and accommodations occurring should increase. There are difficulties in not knowing if the training is enough to affect the experience of the students in the general education classroom. Teachers and paraprofessionals understand the importance of modifications and accommodations, but confusion lies in the implementation as well as a lack of accountability. Accountability is crucial to ensure that all staff is diligent in providing the mandatory modifications and accommodations.

The focus of this research is to implement a comprehensive modifications and accommodations training with the goal of improving academic performance of special education students. Research says that general education teachers and paraprofessionals are spending more time with special education students that are practicing inclusion than special education teachers (Brock, Seaman, & Downing, 2017). Due to this increased student exposure to staff that is untrained in special education procedures and strategies, the need for comprehensive training is extremely important. In the district that this research took place, there is one special education teacher, five general education teachers, and seven paraprofessionals. The special education teacher is spending at most two hours with two children, and on average thirty minutes during scheduled times with the majority of students. Students are spending the majority of their school day with general education teachers and paraprofessionals. Commonly the general education teachers and paraprofessionals feel uneducated in the proper ways to implement the required modifications and accommodations. The school district where this research occurred had a history of only making teachers aware of the modifications and accommodations briefly the day before school starts without providing any sort of training on the provided information. Previously teachers were given a copy of the services listed on the IEP and the special education teacher read through it. The entire briefing occurred in the days before school started and only lasted anywhere from ten to fifteen minutes. Paraprofessionals were given very limited prior training, as most of their training came in modeling once they were working with students, comparable to what would be considered on the job training. It would greatly benefit staff to be administered extensive training on the accommodations and modifications for the students they are working with each year. Once those modifications and accommodations are in action the

student's success should improve. Therefore, the benefits of trainings for teachers and paraprofessionals transcend into benefits for the children, which is the purpose for teaching.

Review of the Literature

General education classrooms have made many changes since the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Before advocates and lawmakers brought attention to the needs of special education students, those with disabilities were often segregated or excluded from schools entirely. According to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, 95% of students being served under IDEA were enrolled in regular schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Of those students, 63% spent 80% or more of their day in general education settings (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). With advancements of education laws, those special education students are now afforded free and appropriate education and are educated side by side with typical learning students. Daniel (1997) states that with the regulations defined in education laws and acts such as the IDEA, provisions have been set forth for administrators, teachers, parents, and attorneys to protect the education of students with special needs. Increased numbers of students with special needs participating in general education classrooms pushes schools to integrate evidence-based accommodations and modifications into all educational settings (Kratz, Locke, Piotrowski, Oullette, Stahmer, & Mandell, 2014). Due to the broad use of inclusion, the need for appropriately trained teachers and paraprofessionals is higher than ever before (Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, & Pelsue, 2009).

Inclusion benefits both special education students and typical students. Special education students are entitled to receive instruction, including supports from highly qualified educators for

the growth of their personal progress (Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, & Russell, 2010). Classes that are inclusive demonstrate higher levels of academic progress, enhanced communication and improved socialization for all students (Fisher, Frey, & Kroener, 2013). Research shows evidence that inclusion is associated with increasing socialization and the sense of acceptance versus seclusion from general education students (Stiefels, Shiferaw, Schwartz, & Gottfried, 2017). When children with special education plans are challenged to be successful in a general education setting, collective support should come from the general education teachers, special education teachers and paraprofessionals working together to plan and implement those plans (Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). This collaboration promotes teamwork of all educators and support staff including administration. The areas of general education and special education are often separated by curriculum and discipline starting with college courses (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). This division leads to a lack of disability preparedness for general education teachers (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). Research proposes that collegiate teacher preparation programs could do much to improve equipping general and special education teachers with the tools to adequately approach educational diversity in the classroom (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). Teachers graduating at different decades and from various institutions will have different comfort levels and education on collaboration, including varying personal knowledge of disabilities in the general education classroom. These differences create obstacles in creating positive collaboration for successful inclusion.

Special Education Students in General Education Settings

The goal of inclusion is for students of differing abilities to share in scholarly experiences while being supported to reach individual instructional goals (Webster, Blatchford, Brown, Martin, & Russell, 2010). Properly implemented accommodations and collaboration increases a

sense of belonging for students that are differently abled (Webster et al., 2010). Laws regarding least restrictive environment have enabled special education students to receive education in the general education setting. Special education students require strategies that support their education, promoting educational growth in general education settings. In order for special education students to prosper in general education classrooms, they require the support of accommodations and modifications so that they can access an equal education to that of their peers. The need for inclusion strategies in general education classrooms is indisputable (Zagona, Kurth, & MacFarland, 2017). This is true considering that 63% of the 95% of students being served under IDEA in regular schools are spending the majority of their day in general education settings (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). To support special education students included in general education settings, teachers need to be comfortable and have competency in accommodations and modifications (Zagona et al., 2017).

Accommodations. Accommodations provide students with the foundation needed to progress in their education. Accommodations are significant and applicable adjustments made to provide access to learning specific to each child (Webster et al., 2010). Accommodations do not change what the student is learning; rather they vary how the child is receiving their education (Lee, 2018). In order for accommodations to be successful, they need to focus on specific challenges that the accommodation can alleviate. A productive accommodation facilitates a student with special needs to bridge the gap caused by their disability and unveil their abilities (Giusto & Ehri, 2018). Research also suggests that accommodations that are valid for testing should be practiced during instruction as well to create consistency and practice so students can use them effectively during assessment (Witmer, Cook, Schmitt, & Clinton, 2015). Examples of accommodations would include input or presentation,

which simply means the same information is presented but the delivery system varies to meet the need of the child (Lee, 2016 & 2018). A peer, adult, computer, or tablet can read text to a student that is unable to do so independently. Large print text or braille can provide the proper delivery system for students that have vision deficits. Input or presentation is one of the most common accommodations used in today's classroom. Reading aloud to a student remedies a common deficit of reading below grade level and is an accommodation that requires low monetary investment. Now that technology is available that allows students to have a computer, tablet or phone read text, students are given independence and an option that can grow with them as they move into upper grades and even college or the work force as an adult. A frequently used accommodation for special education students is how they are allowed to share their responses. The special education student completes assignments or tests changing how they communicate their answers. For example, the student can verbally give answers to prove comprehension when they are unable to proficiently write their own responses. Some students may need to answer by drawing pictures or creating a project to demonstrate mastery of a subject. In order to provide the best suited accommodations, the student's shortcomings will have to be further assessed to determine the underlying cause of the deficit (Giusto & Ehri, 2018). An inability to communicate answers on a test may signal a weakness in processing information or lack of decoding skills, which causes spelling deficiencies while the result is the same, the causes are very different and require specific solutions or supports.

An accommodation that can prove successful is altering where the student receives education. This would mean the child's environment is changed to provide surroundings that are free of distraction and creates a positive learning and testing setting (Lee, 2016 & 2018). Not only does this option invite focus it also deters competition to finish when peers do, which can

cause rushing or guessing. An example of accommodation for setting is preferential seating. The student is given an assigned seat near the teacher or with a peer, that is a role model. When providing seating near or next to a model student the student with disabilities will be exposed to a peer that demonstrates positive learning habits and appropriate classroom behavior. Intentional pairing of special education students with responsible peers optimizes social experiences and modeling of responsible behaviors (Webster et al., 2010). Preferential seating can provide a student with enhanced auditory or visual abilities enabling the student to follow along with lessons at a more capable level. Preferential seating can also help to lessen distractions and promote quality attention. Preferential seating provides the teacher or paraprofessional the ability to quickly assess, motivate, and guide students (Webster et al., 2010). Proximity to the teacher can encourage students to stay on task while enhancing student to adult interactions (Webster et al., 2010). Avoiding clutter or distractions can assist students that struggle with focus. Students that find it difficult to keep hands still or eyes on target will benefit from clean workspaces and materials prepared to be used for specific activities or classes (Webster et al., 2010). Furniture should be given attention. Students should use furniture that is appropriate size and fit for student and their needs to promote positive educational experience and academic success (Webster et al., 2010).

Timing and scheduling are accommodations that designate testing or instruction to the most desirable period for each student (Lee, 2016 & 2018). This may be a specific time or an amount of time. Timing and scheduling accommodations afford the student extended time to complete assignments and assessments in order to allow for the time that student needs to first process then share information and comprehension of the materials. Timing and scheduling may be a specific time of the day or an amount of time that is a maximum before taking a break or

moving on to another activity. Some students require breaks in order to stay in an optimal learning mindset or to physically calm their body. Examples would be to complete least preferred curriculum before allowing a break or a preferred activity. If a student has difficulty completing reading stations, setting a timer requiring twelve minutes of work and then three minutes of free choice. Utilizing timers to set goals and limits can also provide better organizational skills. Timers determine a set time to finish tasks and educate students on realistic timelines for how long tasks should take. Organizational skills can be supported through providing highlighted notes, organizing materials with binders, and using schedules (Lee, 2016 & 2018).

Modifications. Modifications are adjustments to what the student is expected to know or learn. Modifications require simplifying the content or holding different expectations of what will be learned compared to peers. Any changes that do adjust content that will be learned compared to other learners would be a modification. Modifications are customarily put into action when students are unable to keep up with grade level standards (Lee, 2016, & Morin, 2017). Examples of modifications would include (Lee, 2016) fewer or different instructional leveled problems than peers on assignments and assessments. Special education students are sometimes afforded alternative projects or assignments to replace assessments. Curriculum modifications are used when the student will be learning different material. Students may be working on instructional level materials that are below grade level, while peers work on grade level material (Lee, 2016 & 2018). While teachers follow, a quality curriculum it often is necessary to modify that curriculum content and how it is shared or practiced due to multiple levels in one classroom (Webster et al., 2010). Special education students will be graded on different standards due to the instructional level they are working on. In some instances, it will

be necessary to exclude some assignments or projects. Timing and scheduling can be presented as a modified school day by shortening time working on curriculum or actual time student is in the school building (Lee, 2016 & 2018). Students may have half day schooling to provide for their physical demands or intellectual needs. Setting may be modified to meet the special needs of the student for example teacher travels to their home or they attend a special school that assists the special education student in attaining access to education.

Benefits of Collaboration when Implementing Accommodations and Modifications.

Lalvani (2013) found while interviewing teachers it was common for teachers to have the opinion that special education students were in their classroom as a privilege and their success depended solely on the student's abilities and not the guidance given by teachers. Some teachers attempt to avoid accountability by claiming they are unable to provide proper instruction to the students that require accommodations and modifications due to their training. While inclusion is the current norm in classrooms of the present and has the full backing of special education advocates, not all-general education teachers support the trend (Lee, Yeung, Tracey, & Barker, 2015). Research suggests that general education teachers are concerned that inclusion causes distractions in the classroom to the detriment of the education of all students and worry those special education students will experience no academic gain through inclusion (Daniel, 1997). Now that schools have had decades to create and improve proper protocols for educating students with different abilities, schools have come to the realization that the environment provided to the child is more of a factor in their success than the variable of which disability they are diagnosed with. The staff's mindset whether negative or positive will create the environment where the students are learning. Positive mindset will encourage teachers to deliver the necessary supports needed for a differently abled child to be successful in general education.

Working together teachers, parents, and differently abled students can highlight needs that should be addressed with accommodations and modifications (Webster et al., 2010). By working as a team, the accommodations and modifications will become routine for both the students and staff creating consistency allowing the children to thrive. Studies show that the 72% of teachers accept students with certain disabilities such as speech and language as well as advanced or gifted students, while only 50% percent of teachers are wanting to willingly welcome other types of special needs students such as those with autism, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, visual impairment, hearing impairment, or attention deficit disorders (Lee et al., 2015).

Commonly teachers and paraprofessionals lack belief in their ability to provide special needs students with supports in the general education classroom especially the scopes of accommodations and modifications (Fisher et al., 2013). It is vital to support the staff this in turn will increase the teacher's self-confidence in providing appropriate instruction to special education students (Fisher et al., 2013). Research shows that districts that provide staff with effective training reap the benefits of efficient interactions and program implementation that outweighs the time and monies invested in the training (Conley, Gould, & Levine, 2010). Training also improved school climate and lowered staff turnover (Conley et al., 2010). Technology has made it simple to share curriculum and instruction information through email or documents, encouraging communication between all members of the IEP team (Webster et al., 2010). By setting planned dates for meeting, the team can discuss past incidents and brainstorm for future implementations. Collaborative problem solving fosters the teamwork mentality and enhances productiveness of the group. Completing training and conferencing as a team ensures that all staff continues to learn and improve their abilities to meet the needs of their students. Including conferencing about modifications and accommodations during collaboration times

throughout the year adds a component of accountability to implement the strategies faithfully as learned in training. The benefit of this teamwork will reflect on all members and provide educated decision making for the student's educational paths. To ensure consistency between both general education settings and special education classrooms for students who are on IEPs, a joint effort and clarifying conversations among all staff providing instruction is necessary (Korinek, & deFur, 2016). All staff benefit from a shared vision of what inclusion looks like and what they consider to be appropriate when it comes to least restrictive environment (Webster et al., 2010). The administration or school district can lead unified ideas of inclusion and clear expectations for each staff member's positions for the IEP team (Webster et al., 2010). Team member's responsibilities must be fair and balanced; a lack of support from one or more members then comes at the cost of the others. Collaboration creates positive mentoring relationships between teachers making for future planning and teaching experiences (Webster et al., 2010). The child being affected the most because of lack of true teamwork between the education team (Fisher et al., 2013). Communication is vital for all members of the educational team to support the general education teachers as they increase self-confidence of their own ability to provide appropriate instruction to special education students (Fisher et al., 2013). When members of the team have a positive experience with the partnership, they are more likely to put maximum effort into the collaboration (Malone & Gallagher, 2010). Research has found that when teachers are lacking in training, they admit to depending on special education teachers to plan inclusion in general education classrooms while they take limited actions to include those children in their planning (Gavish & Shimoni, 2011). The most common complaints when collaborating were scheduling time for communication and lack of commitment of all members to the process (Malone & Gallagher, 2010). Studies determined paraprofessionals are the most

successful with assigned tasks when they were given supervision, provided clearly defined expectations, had training for the specific tasks, and attended planning meetings (Kratz et al., 2014). Those planning meetings allowed for teamwork to develop and all members to validate their experiences and opinions for the future education plans. When collaboration or conferencing time is scheduled, the agenda has more priority and the continuing discussion provides for better engagement between members of the educational team. The frequent praise for collaboration between special education and general education included providing improved interventions for students and it was rewarding for all members to have an outlet for sharing feedback (Malone & Gallagher, 2010).

Benefits for Paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals are highly active members of the school districts and educational careers of the students they work with (Conley et al., 2010). Paraprofessionals are requested by teachers and parents to assist general education classrooms and special education classrooms where special education students are learning (Giangreco, M., Doyle, M., & Suter, J. 2011). Their assistance is needed to support the educational growth of students with intellectual disabilities, autism, challenging behaviors, and many other varying disabilities (Giangreco et al., 2011). Paraprofessionals are now extremely important in not only self-contained settings but also in general education settings where paraprofessionals provide vital support for students with learning disabilities and behavior needs (Devlin, 2008). The paraprofessional population outnumbered special education teachers in public schools due to the great need for their support (Brock, Seaman, & Downing, 2017). Paraprofessionals are given great responsibility in modeling and instructing their charges with little to no training. Paraprofessional training is essential in administering the best special education services for the students (Douglas, Uitto, & Reinfelds, 2018). Commonly paraprofessionals come from varied

backgrounds and are only required at minimum to have a high school diploma (Conley et al., 2010). The wide range of experiences accepted to qualify for employment, means that paraprofessionals will have differing levels of skills and mindsets (Conley et al., 2010). Paraprofessionals who are ill-trained or untrained will model instruction that is of low standard, leaving the child little or no guidance in classroom curriculum they are assisting with (Brock et al., 2017). Substandard instruction can lead to increased behaviors from special education students, which paraprofessionals are often unable to handle (Brock et al., 2017). When paraprofessionals are trained in evidence-based strategies and practices the student experiences less frustration and increased progress. Improved training prepares paraprofessionals to make in-the-moment decisions, modify assignments that teacher's may have neglected to properly prepare according to IEP mandates, and assisting in positive social interactions (Conley et al., 2010). There is confusion of how to define roles for paraprofessionals and providing training for those positions (Brock & Carter, 2013). This lack of clarity has led to paraprofessionals being assigned various roles that may be appropriate as well as inappropriate (Brock & Carter, 2013). Paraprofessionals feel capable and competent when special education teachers and general education teachers clearly explain the expectations and duties of paraprofessionals on their team. Supervising individuals create a better-balanced team atmosphere by assigning activities, stations, or projects to paraprofessionals (Devlin, 2008). Activities such as these independent driven activities led by paraprofessionals prepares the paraprofessionals to properly work one on one with students as a leader to the charge (Devlin, 2008).

When paraprofessionals are trained in evidence-based strategies and practices the student experiences less frustration and increased progress. According to a study of over 300 paraprofessionals conducted by Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, and Pelsue, (2009), the most used

training for paraprofessionals in on-the job training. The other less popular forms of training are in-service, conferencing or unspecified (Carter et al., 2009). Paraprofessionals and students had increased academic success when comprehensive training was partnered with feedback support from supervising individuals (Brock et al., 2017). Creating an open environment invites paraprofessionals to share ideas and insights. This openness allows the paraprofessional to contribute to the classroom and team (Devlin, 2008). Positive feedback paired with active listening involves paraprofessionals as valued participants of the educational team (Devlin, 2008). Paraprofessionals appreciated the ability to ask questions during conferencing and when receiving feedback from supervisors. Brock, Seaman, and Downing (2017) shared in their findings that paraprofessionals were more consistent when they had proper supervision and felt accountable to continue using the training. Brock et al. (2017) also found that paraprofessionals agreed to continue to participate in training offered in the future and recommended to colleagues that participating in training and conferencing was worthwhile. Presenting training that is beyond the minimum required by the school district will support the staff's work with special education students (Devlin, 2008). Academic success was not the only benefit for paraprofessionals and students, they also built quality relationships between the two that led to positive behaviors (Webster et al., 2010). When support staff were consistently using accommodations and modifications as trained, students progressed on specific goals (Brock et al., 2017). Paraprofessionals and students saw increased academic success when comprehensive training was partnered with feedback support from supervising individuals (Brock et al., 2017). Paraprofessionals are generally earning minimal wages and offered hours for only part of the year, a strong sense of belonging and pride in their work compensates for these shortcomings and improves morale (Conley et al., 2010). Special education teachers found that utilizing strategies

commonly used to motivate students such as goal setting, data collection, and reflection can be very successful and empowering to motivate paraprofessionals (Devlin, 2008).

Benefits for General Education Teachers. General education classrooms must differentiate for children with many different abilities in today's school districts. Teachers need the skills to work with students that will need varying instructional formats to best learn (Webster et al., 2010). Teachers in general education enjoy sharing ideas on how to best include special education students in the classroom (Idol, 2006). Research found that teachers felt that they were lacking training in special education mandates and how to implement procedures that are required through that law (Gavish & Shimoni, 2011). General education teachers naturally implement strategies that can be considered accommodations without being mandated. With comprehensive training and support about research-based accommodations and modifications, teachers can best hone these methods to support all student's education in the general education classroom (Idol, 2006).

Teachers benefit from properly trained paraprofessionals assisting with implementation of accommodations and modifications supporting the general education teacher to better meet the needs of the whole class (Webster et al., 2010). When the class is on task, the teachers are better able to complete lessons with fidelity and seamlessly implement accommodations and modifications. Students with behavioral or academic challenges are able to stay focused with the support of accommodations, which may include a paraprofessional. With the help of a paraprofessional or other evidence-based accommodation or modifications, they are better able to engage in lessons creating an optimal learning environment for all students in the classroom. A survey conducted by Webster, Blatchford, Basset, Brown, Martin, and Russell (2010) found

that teachers felt they were less stressed, more organized and overall more satisfied with work when their classroom had help from paraprofessionals.

The positives for teachers that collaborate is being a valued member of a team as well as improved views and acceptance of all students in the classroom. General education teachers enjoy sharing ideas of how best to include special education students in the classroom (Idol, 2006). Collaborating provides general education teachers advantages of the creativity from sharing more than one view of the situation, student, and subject (Malone & Gallagher, 2010). Teachers begin to appreciate the members of the education team more positively, such as other staff and outside education consultants (Idol, 2006). When general education teachers collaborated, they felt equality in decision making and took more responsibility in implementing necessary accommodations and modifications (Malone & Gallagher, 2010). After receiving training in teaching special education accommodations and modifications, general education teachers looked at the process so positively that they requested to be provided more opportunities of professional development on how to accommodate children with special needs and more training for the paraprofessionals (Idol, 2006). This collaboration fosters unified beliefs of least restrictive environment for learning and the best strategies for inclusion of special education students in the general education setting (Webster et al., 2010). Educators that were properly trained in special education supported inclusion of special education students in their classrooms (Lee et al., 2015). General education teachers that take ownership of instruction for special education students in the classroom are more likely to participate in practices that truly include those students (Webster et al., 2010)

Connection between Successful Students and Accommodations and Modifications

Utilizing accommodations and modifications will increase the quality of instruction students with disabilities receive in the general education setting. Equality in education is found through the justice of providing schooling to all children regardless of their circumstance and upholding a standard of excellence (Zhang et al., 2014). Without accommodations, the true data of a student's capabilities cannot be verified. Accommodations assist children that are differently abled in attaining an education and in the long haul a diploma (Fisher et al, 2013). Accommodations allow children to demonstrate competence and assist teachers in clarifying whether the students are comprehending. This knowledge in turn guides the teacher's instruction. Developing excellence in instructional delivery through paraprofessionals that are trained provides promise to improve student's academic success and behavior (Brock et al., 2017). Properly trained staff ensuring students with specific deficits and needs to find success in the classroom must present evidence-based strategies (Mason, Schnitz, Wills, Rosenbloom, Kamps, & Bast, 2017). When these accommodations are provided with precision through proper training, the student will improve academically. Research shows fidelity of paraprofessionals using accommodations increased when paraprofessionals completed video trainings for one strategy (Brock et al., 2017). Conferencing and supervisor feedback assisted in more fidelity of utilizing additional proper accommodations and modifications (Brock et al., 2017). Paraprofessionals saw student's progress on goals increase when they implemented accommodations with integrity; in turn this motivated the paraprofessionals to continue fidelity of implementation (Brock et al., 2017).

A smaller percentage of students with special needs will not progress towards standard based diplomas due to their disabilities. Modifications will allow those students to continue their journey in education and prepare for their futures by learning life skills and basic academic

competencies to promote independence and success in their adult lives (Fisher et al., 2013).

These students will fulfill participation in high with an alternative diploma or certificate (Graves & Graves, 2015). Modifications allows students to become prepared for a life after high school.

The purpose of education is to prepare children for their adult lives by balancing social, academic, and functional skills (Webster et al., 2010).

Methods

To determine a relationship between accommodations and modifications staff training and success in students the question that guided this research was will special education student's educational experience improve when the special education teacher provides a comprehensive modifications and accommodations training for general education teachers and paraprofessionals? Training is an obvious way to increase quality interactions between staff and students in educational settings. Training of how to implement special education accommodations and modifications is often overlooked and in turn general education teachers and paraprofessionals then fail to properly implement them with fidelity. Training defines the importance of the accommodations and modifications as well as to unify the school districts beliefs of inclusion and acceptance of special education students in the least restrictive environments.

Participants

The action research was conducted in a school district located in a small rural community. The school is part of a consolidated district made up of two rural communities with a total population of approximately 1,400 people in the school district. The school district has approximately 260 students, preschool through twelfth grades operating in one building. The

school district has one elementary special education teacher for students in kindergarten through fourth grade. Each grade has one class and one teacher per level. Four paraprofessionals rotate throughout the day assisting the third-grade special education students. The research focused on three students currently in third grade. The participants are three male students that have received accommodations and modifications for reading two consecutive years in the same district. Two of the students began third grade at a kindergarten instructional reading level. The third student began third grade at a first-grade instructional reading level. This research did not require the students or parents to be informed of the research-taking place.

Beginning this action research project, the researcher conferenced with teachers and paraprofessionals to plan a schedule for training, conferencing, and assessment. Training occurred before school started in August 2018. Paraprofessionals in the building were required to participate in a schoolwide training of paraprofessional expectations. The three levels of special education teachers, preschool, elementary and middle school/high school, wrote a paraprofessional handbook that the administration approved prior to the training. The preschool, elementary, and middle school/high school special education teachers led the training with the supervision of the school principal. The paraprofessionals were each given a copy of the handbook. The handbook was then explained with sections on professionalism, duties, and strategies to use when working with students. The strategies were explained and modeled including how to implement common modifications and accommodations referenced in this research. Training with the general education teacher began with an introduction of the student's IEP with the paraprofessionals in attendance. Following the introduction presented by the special education teacher, strategies of accommodations and modifications were modeled, and visual examples were shared. The group explored tangible items and engaged in open

conversation. General education teachers and paraprofessionals took notes and were encouraged to ask questions for clarification. The special education teacher presented the general education teacher with premade items such as schedules, cue cards, math charts and alphabet strips that the students would require to start off the school year. General education teachers were given a list of modifications and accommodations for ease of reference of each student. Paraprofessionals have access to modification and accommodation information in the special education classroom, so they were not presented personal information for reasons of confidentiality. Conferencing continued weekly examining modifications and accommodations specifically at least once a month or more if necessary, between the general education and special education teachers. Paraprofessionals and the special education teacher met once a week for 30 minutes to an hour to discuss successes and challenges and to build team support. The direct and intentional training time on modifications and accommodations was increased 75% for general education teachers and 95% for paraprofessionals.

Data Collection

The collection of data was through test results of the I-Ready reading diagnostics that were taken by the students in September and December of 2017, and September and December 2018. The diagnostics assessed the students reading abilities in six domains of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, informational text comprehension, and text comprehension of literature. The action research question to be answered was, “Will special education student’s educational experience improve when a comprehensive modifications and accommodations training is provided for general education teachers and paraprofessionals?” Since special education students are included, in general education settings it is vital that their needs are met with the designated modifications and accommodations to assist in their education.

The action research question will answer how increasing training on modifications and accommodations will affect student's academic progress in reading. Students are assessed for reading in the fall and again in the winter using I-Ready. I-Ready is an adaptive diagnostic reading computer program for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade that assigns lessons to improve reading deficits. The assessment takes anywhere from 20-30 minutes depending on the pacing of each child. The I-Ready reading program assesses in six domains: phonological awareness, phonics, high-frequency words, vocabulary, comprehension of literature, and comprehension of informational text. Each domain has projected estimates at what grade level students will typically master the skills assessed. Phonological awareness is extended through first grade and focuses on how children recognize the sounds in spoken sounds. High-frequency words are extended through second grade and is the ability for children to identify the words seen most frequently at their grade level. Phonics is extended through third grade and target the ability to decode written words. Vocabulary and both types of comprehension are continually assessed for growth through middle school. The six domains are analyzed and placement for the student's instructional level is determined from the collected data. The progress from the fall assessment to winter assessment was analyzed for growth. The same data from the previous year was evaluated and then compared to the rate of growth of the current year. The students took the first I-Ready reading diagnostic on September 4th and the second diagnostic on December 17th, 2018. Throughout the first semester of school, the paraprofessionals would meet weekly with the special education teacher to discuss student progress and challenges. Paraprofessionals were encouraged to ask questions and then practiced how to address protocols and strategies in the future. The general education teacher and special education teacher met once a week to address the students' needs and successes in the classroom. The special education teacher reiterated the

importance of the mandated accommodations and modifications monthly or as needed in conversations of observations and collected data.

Findings

Data Analysis

The researcher measured the data collected from the I-ready diagnostics to show if there was growth.

Table 1

I-Ready Math Scores

Student	Fall 2017	Winter 2017	Growth	Fall 2018	Winter 2018	Growth
A	367	397	+30	428	440	+12
B	372	414	+42	414	475	+61
C	358	378	+20	333	425	+92

The average I-Ready diagnostic growth of this research in 2017 was 31 points. The typical expected growth for children of this age group and placement for 2017 is 39, the participants of this research scored 8 points below the expected growth. The average I-Ready diagnostic growth of this research in 2018 was 55 points. The typical expected growth for children of this age group and placement for 2018 is 36, participants scored 19 points above the expected growth for students of this age group and placement. Two out of the three students were improved by more points in 2018 versus 2017 after the training for staff on accommodations and modifications had occurred. One student showed gains both years, but at a

lower rate in 2018 after training for general education teachers and paraprofessionals.

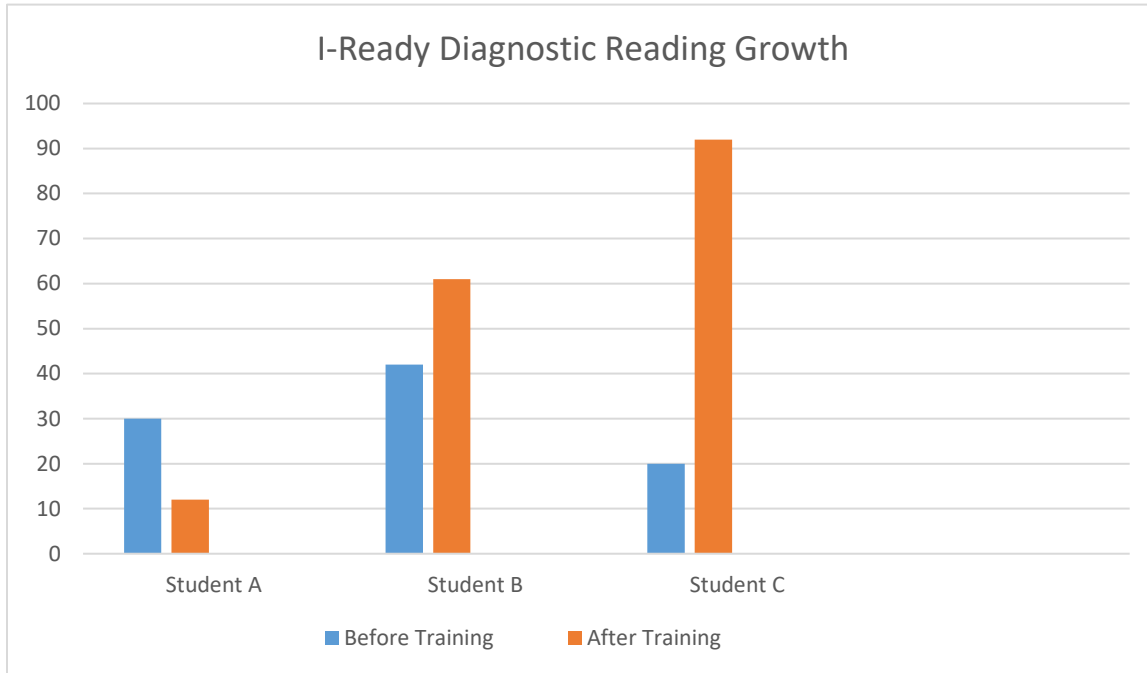


Figure 1. The I-Ready Diagnostic Growth for each student in 2017 before accommodations and modifications training and in 2018, after accommodations and modifications training.

The blue on the vertical bars on the chart in figure 1 represents the growth results of the I-Ready reading diagnostic growth from fall to winter in 2017 before accommodations and modifications training. The orange bars on the chart in figure 1 signifies the growth results of the I-Ready reading diagnostic growth from fall to winter in 2018 after accommodations and modifications training. The growth points are the difference between the fall score to the winter score. Each student is represented separately to compare the student’s independent growth of the two years individually. The students B and C both made gains from 2017 to 2018, while student A decreased in amount gained from 2017 to 2018.

Table 2

I-Ready Instructional Reading Level Identifications for 2017 and 2018

Student	Fall 2017	Winter 2017	Growth	Fall 2018	Winter 2018	Growth
A	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	No change	First grade	First grade	No change
B	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	No change	First grade	Second grade	Two grade levels
C	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	No change	Kindergarten	First grade	One grade level

The I-Ready diagnostics are classified for students to typically be graded as early, mid, and late of each grade level. Therefore, students would advance twice a year improving half a grade level by the winter diagnostic (mid-year) in both 2017 and 2018. Student A showed the same growth in both years that were analyzed, which was actually no growth. While student A improved placement from fall 2017 to fall 2018, there was no growth at the winter diagnostics of either year. Student B showed no growth in grade level in 2017 from fall diagnostic to winter diagnostic remaining in kindergarten placement the entire year. In 2018, student B increased two grade levels, kindergarten to second grade, from fall diagnostic to winter diagnostic. Student C showed no growth in grade level in 2017 from fall diagnostic to winter diagnostic. In 2018, student C increased one-grade levels from fall diagnostic to winter diagnostic. Both student B and student C showed no grade level reading growth in 2017 before specialized training on accommodations and modifications. Both student B and student C showed considerable increase of reading level growth in 2018 I-Ready reading grade level placement after the comprehensive accommodations and modifications training for paraprofessionals and general education teachers had been implemented.

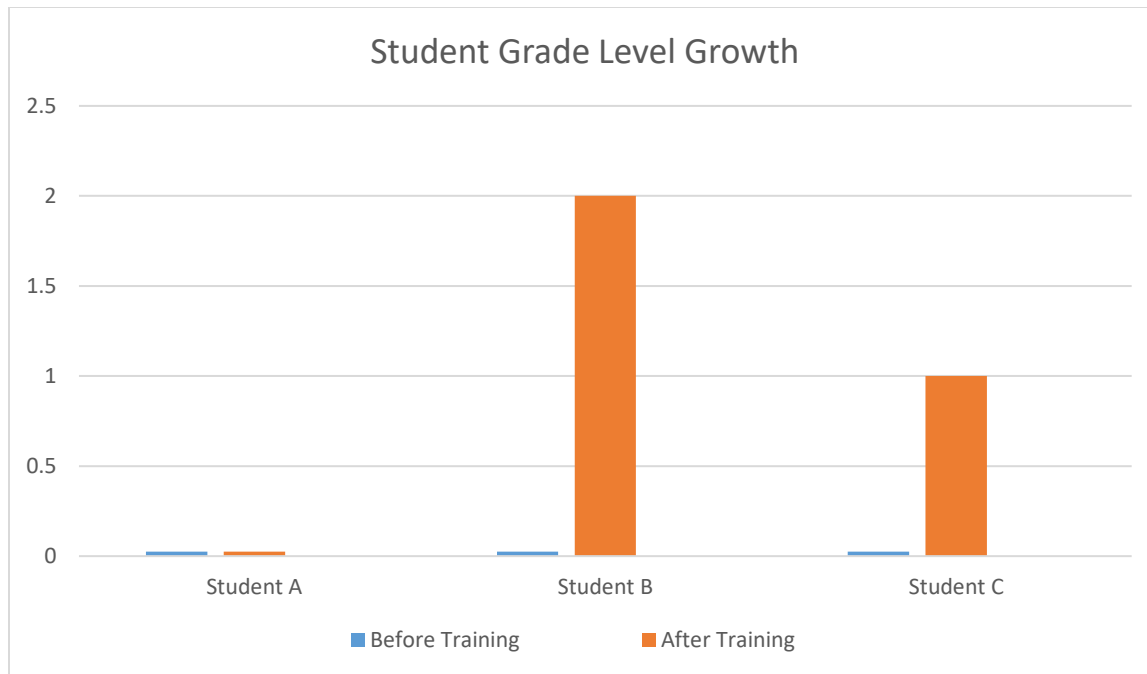


Figure 2. I-Ready Reading grade level for each student in 2017 before accommodations and modifications training and in 2018, after accommodations and modifications training.

The blue on the vertical bar chart in figure 2 represents the growth results of the I-Ready reading diagnostic grade level from fall to winter in 2017 before accommodations and modifications training. The orange bar on the chart in figure 2 signifies the growth results of the I-Ready reading diagnostic grade level from fall to winter in 2018 after accommodations and modifications training. Each student is represented separately to compare the growth of the two years individually.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

The overall data of this action research shows increased reading progress when general education teachers and paraprofessionals participated in a comprehensive training on accommodations and modifications from the special education teacher for the majority of

students. The I-Ready reading diagnostic that assesses the student's abilities in six reading domains, shows growth after the training in two out of the three participants. The typical expected growth for children of this age group and placement for 2017 is 39. This means the average expected growth of the participants was below the typical expected growth for peers in 2017. The typical expected growth for children of this age group and placement for 2018 is 36. This means that the three participant's average of I-Ready growth was 19 points above typical expected growth for children of this age and placement with their average of 55. Student C made extreme growth with 92 points of increase from fall diagnostic to winter diagnostic. Student B made impressive growth of 61, which is 25 points above the typical expected growth. Student A did not meet expected growth for children this age and placement by scoring 24 points less than 36.

Two out three students also showed in the data that they progressed by grade levels in reading. The average grade level that a student progresses is a half of a year from fall diagnostic to winter diagnostic. Student A was at an instructional level of kindergarten reading level at the diagnostic of fall 2017 and remained at kindergarten reading level in winter of 2017 making no progress. In 2018, student A did advance to first grade level at the fall 2018 grade level reading diagnostic but remained at first grade reading level at the winter 2018 reading diagnostic, again making no progress. Student B was at an instructional level of kindergarten at the diagnostic of fall 2017 and remained at kindergarten reading level in winter of 2017 making no advancement. In 2018, student B began with an instructional level of kindergarten reading as the year before but advanced two levels to second grade reading level by the winter diagnostic. Student C was at an instructional level of kindergarten at the diagnostic of fall 2017 and remained at kindergarten reading level in winter of 2017 making no increase in reading level. In 2018, student C began

with an instructional level of kindergarten reading as the year before but advanced from a kindergarten reading level to a first-grade reading level by the winter diagnostic. Data showed that two out three students made great progressions by improving by twice to four times the expected rate in the 2018 data collection.

Limitations of the Study

One limitations of this study were a small number of participants. Due to the need of data from the previous year, the research was limited to students that had attended the school district the previous year, participated in the I-Ready diagnostics, and received accommodations and modifications in reading on their IEP's. These student participants all happened to be in the same class and shared the same teacher. It would have added depth to the results to include other classrooms, other teachers, and more students. The special education teacher did the same preparation and conferencing with all general education teachers with special education students in their classroom but they did not have students that qualified to participate in this research due to not living in the district the previous year or students were too young to have taken the diagnostics in 2017.

Another limitation of this research is accountability of proper implementation. While teachers and paraprofessionals attended the training and then were later conferenced and interviewed, there is not a way to account for 100% fidelity of usage of the accommodations and modifications, as the special education teacher is not always present in the general education setting. This limitation was attempted to be combated by the continued conferencing. The paraprofessionals and general education teacher did share times that they felt unsure of proper protocol or implementation of strategies. With conversation and modeling, the special education

teacher was able to address challenges and reteach methods, but there is no promise that implementation occurred 100% of opportunities presented.

Further Study

All staff involved enjoyed the process and expressed that they felt better prepared than in previous years. Paraprofessionals in particular shared their gratitude for being included more as part of the special education team. Paraprofessionals that were working at the district previously for two and three years communicated that they had not understood how to properly implement accommodations and modifications in years before and were now more confident in implementing their duties. General education teachers stated that the modeling and continued conferencing made them more aware of the strategies and more likely than in the past to continue them the entire school year. Staff and administration also made decisions to increase training for paraprofessionals and offer training for certified staff more specific to special education students needs in the classroom.

Conferencing with paraprofessionals was less difficult to implement than conferencing with the general education teachers. Paraprofessional's schedules were more accessible making paraprofessionals more available to meet consistently using an agenda. Teachers on the other hand frequently had conflicting meetings, duties, or obligations making conferencing to be spur of the moment and often interrupted. Conferencing with general education teachers often turned to discussion of the performance of the paraprofessionals instead of the performance of the students. Utilizing an agenda could possibly help to keep conferences between special education teachers and general education teachers more productive. Time during conferencing with the teachers did evolve to include providing suggestions of how to manage the extra adults in the room as the teacher was uncomfortable with supervising paraprofessionals and giving

instructions for adults. In future studies including more information on managing paraprofessionals and their duties in the classroom in private conferencing between the general education teachers and special education teachers would be helpful. Perhaps once a month the teachers and paraprofessionals could conference together with the special education teachers to assist with collaboration balance and duties.

Conclusion

The unexpected positive of the research was the overwhelming appreciativeness of the paraprofessionals and general education teachers. The special education teacher appreciated the improved relationships with the teachers as well as the paraprofessionals. Working together as a team increased communication and improved implementation of the accommodations and modifications. The open format of continued conferencing increased cooperation and willingness to try new things for both paraprofessionals and seasoned teachers that showed resistance before training. There was decidedly more hesitation from general education teachers, but they shared that trying the new things routinely opened their eyes to the importance of the IEP and they began to understand why accommodations and modifications were not only fair but justified for students with special needs. The comprehensive training encouraged teachers and paraprofessionals to apply the accommodations and modifications with fidelity. The results that teachers and paraprofessionals experienced when implementing accommodations and modifications inspired staff to continue the strategies.

In conclusion, most special education students were able to improve reading scores in general education classrooms when the general education teachers and paraprofessionals were supported by proper training on implementation of accommodations and modifications as defined in special education student's IEPs. Since paraprofessionals and teachers were more

aware of the accommodations and modifications, staff contributed more ideas of amendments to current accommodations and modifications when updating IEPs or conferencing over what worked and what was unsuccessful. While student A didn't progress at the rate expected they were able to maintain their scores without regressing. Student B and C both made immense strides of improvement in reading level and reading domains by improving above and beyond the expected growth of students in their age group and placement in I-Ready test scores and grade level reading placement. These results support that the research was successful in proving that student's educational experience did improve when the special education teacher provided comprehensive training in accommodations and modifications for general education teachers and paraprofessionals.

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