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# The Effects of Multiple Accommodations on Student Engagement and Work Completion in Fifth Grade Students with Reading Disabilities

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The Effects of Multiple Accommodations on Student Engagement and Work Completion in Fifth  
Grade Students with Reading Disabilities

A Project Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty of  
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

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Requirements for the Degree of  
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## THE EFFECTS OF ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of several accommodations that may benefit fifth grade students who have been identified with a reading disability in the general education classroom in order to increase engagement and work completion during English Language Arts instruction. Data was collected through teacher surveys, teacher interviews, and on-task/off-task observations. Surveys were conducted prior to the study, mid-study, and post-study. Teacher interviews were conducted at the planning meeting biweekly and observations were completed prior to the study, mid-study, and post study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the study was not able to be conducted the way it was written so an autoethnographic research design was used, through journal entry data, to determine the main themes I experienced during the COVID-19 extended school closure. These themes included: communication, collaboration, technology, and remote teaching and learning.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **General Problem/Issue**

English is one of the most complex languages in the world. Not only do English speaking children struggle to learn how to read, write, and comprehend English, but so do English language learners and students with disabilities in reading. Learning disabilities is the largest category of students, accounting for approximately 42% of students, receiving special education services (Cortiella, 2014). Including children in the general education classroom to the greatest extent possible has become best practice. Inclusion requires general education teachers to develop flexible curriculum and activities to meet students of all abilities at their level. These needs may be met through differentiated instruction, and a variety of accommodations.

This was the first year in my school district that special education students were included in the general education classroom during English language arts instruction. Previously, students identified with a learning disability in reading were pulled for reading instruction during this time and included in the classroom during independent reading activities such as read to self, word work, and supplemental iPad app instruction. However, this year the district decided to pull the students with reading disabilities for instruction during independent reading activities, so they were able to participate in the English language arts instruction which many times includes social studies topics. Ultimately, my goal as a special education teacher, is to help my students overcome their difficulties so that they can be successful in the general education setting. My students have been supported in the classroom with accommodations and modifications in the past; however, the accommodations and modifications have been broad and not specific to the English language arts curriculum. I wanted to find out what accommodations and modifications the general education teachers believed would best support students, who were identified as

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having a reading disability, in being successful in their classroom during English language arts instruction and activities. Furthermore, I wanted to find out which accommodations were easiest for them to implement.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of several accommodations that may benefit students who have been identified with a reading disability in the general education classroom in order to increase engagement and work completion during English Language Arts instruction. Furthermore, this study investigated the accommodations that were easiest for general education teachers to implement for students who have been identified with a learning disability in reading.

### **Subjects and Setting**

**Description of subjects.** Research participants were fifth grade boys and girls who attend a Midwestern elementary school. There were seven participants: three boys and four girls among three different general education teachers. Two students were receiving English language instruction at school. Four students were identified as African American and three students were identified as Caucasian. Five students from this group receive free or reduced lunch at school. Participants were all receiving special education services due to a specific learning disability in reading. Students vary in the severity of their reading disability; some students were reading multiple grade levels behind, while others were reading one grade level behind.

**Selection criteria.** These students were on my caseload for reading intervention services during the 2019-2020 school year. They were identified as having a learning disability in reading and participate in the general education classroom for English language arts instruction for fifty minutes daily.

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**Description of setting.** This study took place in an elementary school in a Midwestern elementary school. The school had 532 attendees, 48% identifying as African American, 7% identifying as Asian, 36% identifying as Caucasian, 5% identifying as Hispanic and 4% identifying as Native American. The school received a grant which allowed all students to receive breakfast and lunch for free for the 2019-2020 school year, so the school is 100% free lunch. This was the second year the school was open. Thirty percent of the school received English language services. The school received Title I funding in which 27 % of the school participated in these services. This school had a large transient population; this year alone there were 129 move ins/move outs.

**Informed consent.** Informed consent was obtained through a written form describing the purpose of the study, risks, benefits, confidentiality, contact information, and agreement statement. Assent was obtained verbally through a one-on-one discussion with each participant to explain to them the effect of the study, their choice in participating, and the timeline of the study. I explained to students that this would not affect their grades and answered any questions they had.



## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms**

#### **History of Inclusion**

Inclusion is when all students, those with and without challenges and disabilities, are placed in a general education classroom that is age appropriate and will provide the necessary instruction, interventions, and supports they need to be successful. Amendments to PL-142 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has caused “inclusive special education [to] become common” (Kilanowski-Press, 2010, p. 2). There has been a slow, but steady increase in students with disabilities participating in the general education classroom. Data collected from the National Center for Education Statistics in 2015 found that 94.8% of students identified with a disability are served some of their academics in the general education classroom; broken down, 62.5% of students are educated in the general education 80 percent or more of the day, 18.7% are educated in the general education classroom 40-79 percent of the day, and 13.6% are educated in the regular education classroom less than 40 percent of the day. Inclusion offers students access to flexible curriculum that can be challenging and engaging through multiple modes of implementation and “a variety of instructional reports ranging in intensity” (Kilanowski-Press, 2010, pp. 3-4). However, many general education teachers do not have adequate training to differentiate instruction or include students with special needs in their classroom.

Korkmaz (2011) conducted a study with sixty-six teachers to gather information about elementary teacher’s perspectives on the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classroom. The study found that over two-thirds of the teachers surveyed believed that either: 1) “regular curriculum was developed for non-disabilities students, so it is difficult for disabilities students to follow regular curriculum”, or 2) “classrooms are so crowded and teachers do not

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allocate enough time for disabilities” (Korkmaz, 2011, p. 179). In addition, Korkmaz (2011) found that teachers felt superintendents had a lack of knowledge about inclusive education which prevented them from being able to help the teachers in their classrooms (p. 180).

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.** Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is the legal term used to describe the environment a student’s learning takes place in and is most like their nondisabled peers in which their academic goals can be met. A student’s absolute least restrictive environment would be in the general education classroom “to the maximum possible degree” as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). Inclusion is a term that refers to the “educational service provision in the least restrictive environment, contingent upon student strengths and needs, encompassing a substantial continuum of possible supports” (Kilanowski-Press, 2010, p. 1). Finally, for inclusion to be successful it must offer a variety of instructional delivery formats based on the strengths and needs of the student.

### **Accommodations**

**Technology.** Today’s students have been exposed to technology since birth. According to Morgan (2014), brain research has shown that technology affects student learning favorably and internet searching is more stimulating than reading for these students (p. 36). Some tools that can be used for differentiation are programmed into the technological devices while others may need to be downloaded in order to implement.

**Basic strategies.** Stetter provides basic accommodations that can be provided to students who need assistance in reading. One skill Stetter mentions is using graphic organizers to help students organize story events in order to increase comprehension (Stetter, 2018, p. 4). Graphic organizers provide students with a visual to refer back to when recalling story details or other story elements. Previewing stories is another way Stetter suggests teachers can differentiate their

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instruction to meet the needs of students who struggle to remain focused and comprehend on the first cold read.

***Read aloud tools.*** Text-to-speech is a program that uses “digital sounds...to read unknown or new words to students” to help assist in timely work completion and comprehension (Stetter, 2018, p. 2-3). When text is read aloud to a student, they are less focused on sounding out the word correctly and more focused on the comprehension itself.

**Across task choices.** One type of choice teachers can give students is choice across the task. In other words, teachers can allow students to choose the sequence in which they complete tasks during an allotted amount of time (Lane et al., 2015, pp. 482-483). For example, the teacher can write on the board three things that need to get done that day and each student gets to choose the order in which they complete the three tasks as long as all the tasks get done.

**Within task choices.** Teachers who give students within-task choices allow students to choose their choice of materials, environment, etc...to complete the activity. Examples of activities that provide within-task choices are: 1) having students illustrate a story and allowing them the choice of art supply to use to complete the task, or 2) allowing students to complete their activity either in the classroom or in the hallway (Lane et al., 2015, pp. 483-484).

**Whole group response strategies.** During whole group instruction, it can be difficult to determine what students know versus what their neighbor knows. In order to maintain active learning, teachers must be proactive in their strategies to engage students in the activities. One strategy teachers can use during whole-group response instruction are hand signals to facilitate group discussions. Students hold up a 1 if they want to add to a classmate’s idea or a 2 if they want to contribute a new idea to the conversation (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 244). Another variation which could be used to gauge comprehension: students hold up 4 fingers if they understand and

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can explain it to the class, students hold up 3 fingers if they understand it, students hold up 2 fingers if they think they understand it, or students hold up 1 finger if they do not understand it (Nagro et al., 2016, p. 244). Another strategy teachers can use are response cards that can be differentiated to meet then needs of the current activity. Students hold up “cards with predetermined answers to respond to a teacher-initiated prompt” which can include responses such as true/false, yes/no, multiple choice (ex: a, b, c, d), or content specific words such as “vocabulary words, parts of speech, or story elements...[or] a list of key words” (Nagro et al., 2016, pp. 245-246). Providing students with predetermined answers eliminates the aspect of stage fright as no verbal answers are given; furthermore, students are actively engaged in their learning. These whole group response strategies provide immediate feedback for teachers regarding student comprehension allowing teachers to react to student needs and provide additional examples or questions as needed to ensure comprehension of the material.

### **Modifications**

**Assignment format.** A students’ lack of academic skills may require them to participate in completely different work than that of their peers. Assignment format can vary from subject to subject but could include a different presentation format for various learners; for example, “separating individual worksheets from a stapled packet and giving students the worksheets one at a time...[cutting] math worksheets containing 30 subtraction problems into 5 or 6 separate paper slips” (Hua et al., 2014, p. 102). Student work completion increased when they were able to control the assignment format or the reinforcer (Hua et al., 2014, p. 102). In the example above, a student may prefer the cut-up math worksheets because of the format, but it could also be because the act of getting up to escape work for a minute while grabbing the other sheet is reinforcing in itself.

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**Assessment format.** There are many different formats in which teachers can allow students to demonstrate a culmination of their learning including: oral presentations, written reports, web-based research, art projects, or multimedia projects (Blazer, 2017, pp. 8-9). Again, allowing students to demonstrate their learning through their preferred learning profile may provide a clearer picture into students actual learning.

### **Promoting Engagement in the Inclusive Classroom**

Engagement is a multifaceted concept which includes “students’ degree of involvement, connectedness and commitment to school as well as their motivation to learn” (Rangvid, 2018, p. 266). Student engagement can be affected by many things including school climate, parent perceptions of school, teacher and peer behaviors, and culture. Engagement can be broken down into emotional engagement and behavioral engagement. Emotional engagement is the attachment students’ feel toward school and their sense of belonging at school (Rangvid, 2018, p. 266). Behavioral engagement is what most people think of when they think of engagement. According to Rangvid (2018), this is the “effort, positive conduct, involvement in, and motivation for learning (p. 267). It is common for there to be a gap in engagement between students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers. Students with disabilities have significantly “lower levels of engagement and perform less well in reading and math tests” than their nondisabled counterparts (Rangvid, 2018, p. 281). Teachers must be creative and proactive about developing opportunities for engagement for students with disabilities to increase motivation and participation in the classroom.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

It is a teacher’s goal to make sure that all students learn effectively and with a sense of satisfaction. Differentiated instruction is an approach to teaching that has become common to

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ensure all students are able to access curriculum at their level and learn. Differentiation can be defined as “proactively [modifying] curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products to address the diverse needs of individual students...to maximize the learning opportunity for each student in a classroom” (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 121).

Instruction can be differentiated in many ways such as evaluating student readiness, interests, and learning profiles, modifying student assignment format, or incorporating technology.

Unfortunately, many teachers do little to modify their instruction to reach the diverse populations they teach. These teachers may see differentiated instruction as a desirable goal, but are unable to incorporate it because of predisposed ideas about it, it is not feasible in their current classroom setting, or they have tried it and it seemed ineffective. Tomlinson et al. stated that there are many reasons teachers may reject differentiation because:

They feel doing so calls attention to student differences, they feel it is not their job to do so, they are unaware of learner needs, they believe special treatment is poor preparation for a tough world that does not provide special treatment, or...because they do not feel students need adaptations.” (p. 122)

These predisposed ideas cause teachers to be more reactive instead of proactive. Teachers are improving modifications as they are teaching instead of preplanning the modifications and implementing them with fidelity. This affects students as they are not receiving meaningfully differentiated instruction. When instruction is not differentiated and not at each student's level the student learns little and becomes disengaged. Special education teachers may attempt to change the thinking of general education teachers by “[assisting] with planning, instructional adaptation, and modification for particular students” (Kilanowski-Press, 2010, p. 6).

Collaboration between the general education teacher and the special education teacher facilitates

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the design and implementation of effective strategies to meet the needs of all learners in a classroom. Furthermore, when students feel they have a say in their learning and are being met at their level their work completion rate increases as well as their engagement in appropriate behaviors.

**Considerations for differentiated instruction.** When teachers have students with learning disabilities in their classroom there are three student attributes they must consider: student readiness, student interest, and student learning profile.

**Readiness.** Student readiness refers to the zone of proximal development and meeting students where they are at while offering them a moderate challenge for learning to occur. Students are “more likely to sustain efforts to learn even in the face of difficulty” when tasks are at moderate levels of difficulty rather than too challenging (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 127). Additionally, he stated that when tasks are outside a student’s ZPD, but there are minor modifications to the task, it does not correct the discrepancy between the learner’s current level and the task. Furthermore, when there is a large discrepancy between a student’s readiness level and academic tasks the impacts were negative as both student achievement and feelings of self-worth decreased. (Tomlinson et al. 2003, p. 127).

**Interest.** Showing students how a subject matter relates to a topic they are interested in increases student engagement and work completion because they can visualize the importance of the subject matter to their life (Morgan, 2014, p. 36). Tomlinson et al. had the same findings stating, “tasks that are interesting to students are more likely to lead to enhanced student engagement with the task...[and lead to] increased student productivity” (p. 128). Positive learning behaviors and self-determination increase as well as being willing to accept challenge when student interests are taken into consideration.

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***Learning Profile.*** A learning profile refers to a student's preferred mode of learning which can be influenced by factors such as culture, gender, or learning style. The different modes of learning were defined by Howard Gardner and his multiple intelligences theory which include: logical, verbal, musical, visual, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. When student learning profiles are considered Tomlinson et al. found that achievement and attitude gains were increased (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 130). Blazer (2017) found that student engagement and participation increased when students were allowed to choose activities based on their preferred learning style (p. 8). Furthermore, even when final assessments are not in a student's preferred mode, students perform better if their assignments were in their preferred mode during the learning process (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 130).

### **Learning Theories**

**Zone of proximal development.** All children learn best when they are in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as described by Lev Vygotsky. The ZPD is the "level at which a student can perform a task with the guidance of an adult or a more capable peer" and are not new concepts that are too difficult to grasp which can cause frustration (Morgan, 2014, p. 35). Tomlinson et al. (2003) states the zone of proximal development more simply as giving students "a task slightly more complex than the child can manage alone, and, thus, push forward the area of independence" (p.126). Teachers may have to provide more scaffolding for students who lack basic skills so that they are able to learn at their current level. Brain research has found that when students are learning material that causes them to become frustrated their brain releases noradrenalin which "leads to withdrawal or inappropriate conduct." Conversely, if students are learning material that is below their zone of proximal development then the brain releases less noradrenalin causing a less stimulating classroom environment. (Morgan, 2014, p. 35) Therefore,



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the teacher's job is to coach students to success with tasks that challenge the student but are not above their level so that they can become independent learners in the classroom.

**Multiple intelligences.** Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences include the various modes in which students learn which can include: logical, verbal, musical, visual, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic (1983). All students learn differently and through different modes; thus, teachers must "allow learners to solve problems using [their] preferred intelligence" because it allows students to be more successful (Morgan, 2014, p. 35). When teachers use a uniform form of teaching many students are failed because there is so much variety in student learning styles (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 126).

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions are defined:

*Specific Learning Disability:* A disorder in one or more in the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

*Reading Disability:* When a person has trouble reading words or understanding what they read (What are reading disorders?).

*Accommodation:* An alteration of environment, curriculum format, or equipment that allows an individual with a disability to gain access to content and/or complete assigned tasks (What is the difference).

*Modification:* a change in the curriculum. Modifications are made for students with disabilities who are unable to comprehend all of the content an instructor is teaching (What is the difference).

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*Engagement:* the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they must learn and progress in their education (Partnership, 2016).

*Work Completion:* the amount of academic work completed during the given academic period (ex: ELA work is completed during ELA).

### **Hypothesis**

I hypothesize that when accommodations and modifications are implemented in the general education setting for students with reading disabilities during English language arts then their engagement will increase. Furthermore, I hypothesize that when accommodations and modifications are implemented in the general education setting for students with reading disabilities during English language arts they will complete more work.

## Chapter Three: Research Methods and Ethics

### Research Questions

As a special education teacher, it is my job to ensure my students develop skills that benefit them outside of my classroom. The students that participated in this study were behind grade level in reading and it was my goal to help them have access to the general education curriculum in a format that was at their ability level. With these goals in mind I developed the following research questions:

1. What accommodations are general education teachers most comfortable implementing when including students with disabilities in their classroom?
2. How do a variety of accommodations affect student engagement and work completion during English language arts (ELA)?

Answering these questions helped me better understand what accommodations my students need to be successful in the general education curriculum during ELA.

### Methods

**Data collection.** Data was collected through teacher surveys, teacher interviews, and observations. Survey data were collected through hard copies and used a Likert scale to determine the frequency of implementation of accommodations, student engagement, and student work completion (see Appendix A). The survey given prior to the study included a checklist for several accommodations teachers believe would: benefit these students, were easiest to implement, and were already implementing. This survey was conducted prior to the study, mid-study, and post-study. Observational data was collected through anecdotal records taken by the classroom teacher regarding student engagement and work completion. Qualitative data was collected through three observations using an on-task/off-task partial interval recording data

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sheet (see Appendix C). On-task data provided insight into the amount of time students were engaged in the activity. The observations were collected prior to the study, mid-study, and post study. After the initial data was collected, I met with the fifth-grade teachers to discuss upcoming activities, projects, and assignments for the next two weeks and developed a plan for differentiated instruction. We discussed options such as assignment format, assessment format, whole group response answers, and technology implementation. The teachers and I met every two weeks to review the upcoming curriculum, develop a plan for the students in the classroom, and discuss the implementation process of differentiated instruction. These planning periods began with interview questions on student engagement and work completion, as well as how they felt the implementation process was going, and answered any questions they had (see Appendix B).

**Data analysis.** Data analysis was summative. As determined by averages from the Likert Scale, trends between the frequency of accommodation implementation and student engagement, and frequency of accommodation implementation and work completion was analyzed three ways: all of fifth grade, by individual classroom, and by each participant. Teacher interview data was collected in an anecdotal format and was summarized biweekly. Finally, qualitative data was analyzed into percentages to determine if students were more engaged in the curriculum after multiple accommodations were implemented by tracking the amount of time students were on-task. Data was analyzed for the following periods: pre-study, mid-study, and post-study.

### **Ethical Issues**

**Protection of human subjects.** Participants and their parents were informed of the purpose of this research as well as the expectations of the participant including disclosure of risks and benefits of this study. Students were at no more than minimal risk because this study

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examines the implementation of accommodations in the students' everyday academic activities by the general education teacher. General education teachers were at no more than minimal risk because this study does not change the curriculum being taught, only the format in which it was presented. Therefore, there was a low probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated by the subjects. All surveys, consent forms, data, and identifying information were kept in a locked drawer in an unmarked folder.

**Researcher bias.** As a special education teacher, I may be biased toward certain strategies and how to implement them as I have background knowledge about which strategies work better than others. Additionally, I may be biased on how strategies are implemented and may unknowingly coach teachers through the implementation process. These biases could have an impact on the results of my research.

**Permissions.** Permission from the school principal and district staff where the research was conducted was obtained.

**IRB approval.** Permission was obtained by the Institutional Review Board at the University and by the school principal where the research was be conducted.

## Chapter Four: Results

### Data Collection

This study was originally going to investigate the effects of several accommodations that may benefit fifth grade students who have been identified with a reading disability in the general education classroom in order to increase engagement and work completion during English Language Arts instruction. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the study was not able to be conducted the way it was written so an autoethnographic research design was used, through journal entry data, to determine the main themes I experienced during the COVID-19 extended school closure. Therefore, my research question became: What was my experience as a teacher during the COVID-19 extended school year closure?

An autoethnography is a research design used to describe and systematically analyze personal experiences with a goal of understanding cultural experiences. When using an autoethnographic research design, the researcher conducts a content analysis through qualitative data collection such as journal entries. The research determines the level of analysis and then continues to code the data collected by noting the topic, not the content. After coding the data, in my case journal entries, the researcher makes a list of all the topics and then highlights similar topics in the same color. After clustering together similar topics, the researcher chooses the best fitting name for the cluster of topics from the codes in the data document. A table is made with the major topics at the top, minor topics in the middle, and the leftover topics are in the final rows. Finally, the researcher assembles all the meaningful segments related to each theme that were coded from the data document into one place.

### Results

*What was my experience as a teacher during the COVID-19 extended school year closure?*

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My journal entries were analyzed in order to find common themes throughout my experience. The primary themes included: communication, collaboration, remote teaching and learning, and technology.

Table 1  
*Primary and subthemes recorded from journal entries*

<b>Primary Themes</b>	<b>Sub-Themes Related to Primary Theme</b>
Remote Teaching and Learning	Lesson preparation Teacher expectations Calculating attendance Working from home
Communication	Communication with parents Communication with students Communication with school personnel
Collaboration	Collaboration with school personnel Collaboration with community members Collaboration with the online community
Technology	Learning technology Supporting students and parents

### *Remote Teaching and Learning*

The most common theme that emerged was remote teaching and learning. My journal entries indicated that the issues I struggled most regarding this theme was preparing lessons, and the expectations that were put on us as educators during this time. Furthermore, calculating attendance and working from home were concerns that appeared often in my journal entries.

Table 2 summarizes excerpts from my journal entries regarding remote teaching and learning.

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Table 2

*Sub-themes of remote teaching and learning*

<b>Sub-themes of Remote Teaching and Learning</b>
<b>Sub-theme 1: Lesson Preparation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “team was told to prepare for ‘all possible situations’ which none of us knew what that meant”</li><li>• “had to record two lessons (filmed in six different parts) for my math lessons this week which include editing and uploading them to YouTube for my students to have access to them”</li><li>• “spent seven hours recording, editing and uploading these lessons”</li></ul>
<b>Sub-theme 2: Teacher Expectations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “special education students should only be expected to complete 15% of their IEP minutes”</li><li>• Special education students were also expected to “complete the work that the general education teacher was putting out”</li><li>• “my district requires us to work five hours a day and I have found myself working eight or more hours a day checking work, having meetings, calling families, and creating lesson plans that are individualized to each student”</li></ul>
<b>Sub-theme 3: Calculating Attendance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “calculated based on work completion and engagement in the activities posted online”</li><li>• “engagement can include phone calls, video chats, or liking/commenting on a Seesaw post”</li><li>• “some students do not complete any work from the general education classroom so documenting and creating accurate records has been an issue based on the document they provided us with”</li><li>• “many parents were not willing to complete academic work until they were told that it was adversely affecting their child’s attendance”</li></ul>
<b>Sub-theme 4: Working from Home</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “sit at the kitchen table to complete work related tasks...distracted by my husband and his work calls downstairs, the look of the comfortable couch, and all of the TV shows at my fingertips”</li><li>• “it’s hard to find motivation to complete work when you know you can complete your work at any time during the day”</li><li>• “difficult to separate work and personal life because it all happens in the same environment...parents think I am available at all hours of the day to answer questions”</li></ul>

Navigating a new world of remote teaching and learning created many challenges and difficult expectations for me that created overwhelming situations. Furthermore, working from home presented its own distractions and challenges that I was not prepared to encounter.



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### *Communication*

The second common theme that emerged was communication with parents, students, and school personnel. Ensuring all stakeholders were communicating efficiently and effectively was a daunting task that took up a large amount of time. Table 3 summarizes the excerpts from my journal entries regarding communication.

Table 3

### *Sub-themes of communication*

<b>Sub-themes of Communication</b>
<b>Sub-theme 1: Communicating with Parents</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “I spent all week trying to get ahold of my twelve families that I serve and only reached seven of them”</li><li>• Two weeks into online learning – “I am still trying to get ahold of a few parents that I have been struggling to reach...because students were not completing their work”</li><li>• On the topic of virtual meetings – “took twice as long as it normally would...not able to see their nonverbal reactions as they were on the phone”</li></ul>
<b>Sub-theme 2: Communicating with Students</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “each day I was responding to student work that they were completing and encouraging them to continue to complete work to the best of my abilities”</li><li>• “many students have been saying that they are completing work on the apps and websites I provided, but it shows that they have not been on the website on my end”</li><li>• “many students stated that they were excited to have schoolwork to do and to have a routine”</li></ul>
<b>Sub-theme 3: Communicating with School Personnel</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “it seemed that as soon as everything was sorted out new information would come out...a new section to the Contingency Learning Plan (CLP), a new rule regarding video chats with students, new expectations for teachers, new surveys to fill out, etc...”</li><li>• “nothing ever seemed clear”</li></ul>

Communication is essential when working with parents and other teachers, it ensures that everyone knows what the expectations are of each party. Although things got heated sometimes between school personnel, it was clear that student success was our primary goal.

### *Collaboration*

The third common theme that emerged was collaboration. According to my journal entries, collaboration fell into three sub-categories, or sub-themes: collaboration with others at

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school, collaboration with community members, and collaboration with other educators online.

Table 4 summarizes the excerpts from my journal entries regarding collaboration.

Table 4

### *Sub-themes of collaboration*

<b>Sub-themes of Collaboration</b>
<b>Sub-theme 1: Collaboration with School Personnel</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “teachers came to school to help pack up student things from their cubbies and lockers so parents could come and get all of their child’s belongings”</li><li>• “created books for students and handed them out”</li><li>• “special education team created packets and fathered materials for their students”</li><li>• “many students see multiple special education teachers for academics...made it difficult to coordinate paperwork among five special education teachers working remotely”</li></ul>
<b>Sub-theme 2: Collaboration with Community Members</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “[community organization] donated meals to our school that we could give to families that were ready to heat up”</li><li>• “continued to get our weekly food donation from our local provider”</li></ul>
<b>Sub-theme 3: Collaboration in the Online Community</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “I joined a couple Facebook groups where people were sharing resources for activities that they had made, tutorials for creating activities, and just supporting one another when we felt like we were failing”</li></ul>

Success of all students was the focus when collaborating with others. It was inspiring to see the amount of people from different states and countries coming together to make the transition to remote learning run as smooth as possible.

### *Technology*

The final theme that emerged from my journal entries was the use of technology. I was required to learn how to use Seesaw, our online learning platform, and other online learning resources while also trying to support students and parents solve technology issues. Table 5 on the following page summarizes the excerpts from my journal entries in regard to technology education and support.

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Table 5

*Sub-themes of technology*

<b>Sub-themes of Technology</b>
<b>Sub-theme 1: Learning How to Use Technology</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “spent countless hours in meetings learning how to create activities and assignments in Seesaw, message parents, manage folders, and provide students with the instruction they needed”</li><li>• “scheduled my posts wrong so all of my activities for the whole week went out at one so I had to go into each students’ account and delete them and then reschedule them for the upcoming days”</li><li>• After recording a whole lesson – “I realized the paper I was writing on was backwards in the video and the students could not read what I had written so I had to rerecord the lesson”</li></ul>
<b>Sub-theme 2: Supporting Students and Parents</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “[the first week of online learning] our goal was to get parents and students familiar and comfortable with technology...we had students complete activities on the Seesaw app using the tools and formats provided to see which students are comfortable with the format and which students need additional support”</li></ul>

Teaching students and parents how to use technology when I was unsure of how to use it was challenging. Many of my students had personal difficulties they were dealing with and trying to help them figure out the technological aspect of school may not have been important to them as the other things going on in their life.

### **Conclusions**

This autoethnographic research allowed me to analyze my overarching experiences during the COVID-19 extended school closure. It was clear that navigating a new platform for teaching a learning was the most difficult aspect of this closure. It was difficult to lesson plan and communicate with parents from home while also maintaining a personal life. In addition, lesson planning was challenging at the beginning because I was unsure of how to use the technology we were given and how my students would respond to the lessons. Our school did not have an information technology hotline set up for our parents to access so we were the technology support for many families. This was a challenging role as I was unsure of how to

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complete many of the tasks that parents and students had questions on; therefore, I was unable to answer their questions causing frustration. Communication was also a common theme among my journal entries as it was frustrating that nothing ever seemed clear and I was spending countless hours trying to get ahold of families and parents that were not active on Seesaw. Overall, other teachers and I have devoted many hours to helping our students be successful during this time of uncertainty, but it has brought the educational community together in ways that were inspiring. The collaboration between community personnel and the online community has grown exponentially during this time and has shown me that we were all in this together and that we could get through another large magnitude crisis like this in the future by working together and supporting one another.

## Chapter Five: Implications for Practice

### Action Plan

The purpose of my original study was to investigate how multiple accommodations may benefit students who have been identified with a reading disability in the general education classroom in order to increase engagement and work completion during English Language Arts instruction. Student work completion and engagement during subjects they are included in the general education classroom for is important because it allows teachers to see that students with disabilities can be successful in the general education setting. However, teachers must meet students with disabilities at their level using several accommodations in order to allow those students to be successful in the general education classroom.

Unfortunately, many teachers do little to modify their instruction to reach the diverse populations they teach. These teachers may see differentiated instruction as a desirable goal but are unable to incorporate it because of predisposed ideas about it, it is not feasible in their current classroom setting, or they have tried it and it seemed ineffective. These predisposed ideas cause teachers to be more reactive instead of proactive. Teachers are improvising accommodations as they are teaching instead of preplanning the modifications and implementing them with fidelity. This affects students as they are not receiving meaningfully differentiated instruction. When instruction is not differentiated and not at each student's level the student learns little and becomes disengaged.

My goal through this study was to use quantitative data as evidence to demonstrate the extent to which accommodations benefitted students with a disability in reading. I planned to use this data as a learning tool with my general education teachers to show them how several accommodations could benefit students in their own classroom and allow more students access

## THE EFFECTS OF ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

to the general education curriculum. I will continue to push the implementation of accommodations into the general education curriculum for students with a reading disability during the English language arts period of the day as I know their benefits

### **Future Planning**

During large magnitude crises such as COVID-19, there are many issues that educators encounter including communication and technology difficulties, navigating a new format of teaching and learning, and maneuvering the idea of working from home. When working from home I would recommend creating a place in your home that is devoted only to completing work related tasks. This would help with separating work and personal life and help frame your mindset when you are in that space because you know what is expected of you in your workspace. Additionally, when communicating with parents or students I would recommend using a Google voice number so that families do not have your personal cell phone number. After the extended closure is complete then you can delete the google voice app from your phone and not worry about parents saving your phone number. Regarding technology, I would recommend incorporating more technology into the classroom and teach students how to use it appropriately so that students are comfortable with many different apps and learning platforms that the general education students may be using. Putting the time and energy into the back end of this skill will relieve many headaches and struggles that students and teachers may have if an extended school closure were to occur again. The most important recommendation I could make would be to reach out to other educators for support. These are the people that are going to understand what you are going through and will be able to help support you through uncertain times while you prepare for your future and the future of your students.

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## Appendix A

### Teacher Survey

<p>Rate the frequency in which you implement accommodations and modifications into your English Language Arts instruction and activities?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Always</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Often</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Rarely</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Never</p>	<p><u>Rate your agreement with this statement:</u></p> <p>I am comfortable implementing accommodations and modifications into English Language Arts for students with learning disabilities.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Always</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Often</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Rarely</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Never</p>
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Please use the following definitions and Likert scales to rate each individual student.

**Engagement:** the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they must learn and progress in their education

**Work Completion:** amount of academic work completed during the given academic period (ex: ELA work is completed during ELA)

Rating	Student Engagement	Work Completion
<b>1</b>	Always	85-100%
<b>2</b>	Often	70-84%
<b>3</b>	Sometimes	55-69%
<b>4</b>	Rarely	40-54%
<b>5</b>	Never	Less than 40%

Student Name	Engagement Rating	Work Completion Rating

I believe these accommodations/modifications would **benefit** my students:

graphic organizers

text-to-speech

choice of activity order

choice of how to complete activities

different assignment format choices

different assessment format choices

alternate whole group response choices

I would be **most comfortable** implementing these accommodations/modifications:

graphic organizers

text-to-speech

choice of activity order

choice of how to complete activities

different assignment format choices

different assessment format choices

alternate whole group response choices

I already implement these accommodations/modifications:

graphic organizers

text-to-speech

choice of activity order

choice of how to complete activities

different assignment format choices

different assessment format choices

alternate whole group response choices



## Appendix B

### Teacher Interview/Planning Questions

1. How do you feel the process of implementing accommodations and modifications is going in your classroom?
2. What have you noticed about student engagement since implementing more accommodations and modifications?
3. What have you noticed about student work completion since implementing more accommodations and modifications?
4. What are the upcoming activities, projects, and assignments for the next two weeks in English Language Arts?
5. What accommodations or modifications are needed to make the upcoming activities, projects, and assignments more successful for the students with a reading disability?
6. Any questions, comments or concerns?

Appendix C

Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

Environment: \_\_\_\_\_

Student 1 Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Target Behavior: Work Completion

Student 2 Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Target Behavior: Work Completion

Student 3 Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Target Behavior: Work Completion

**Observation Period:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Second Intervals:** \_\_\_\_\_

Observation 1 - Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Stop Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
1																														
2																														
3																														

Observation 2 - Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Stop Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
1																														
2																														
3																														

Observation 3 - Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Stop Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
1																														
2																														
3																														

**% of Intervals  
with Behavior**

**Observation 1**  
**Observation 2**  
**Observation 3**

**Student 1**  
\_\_\_\_\_%  
\_\_\_\_\_%  
\_\_\_\_\_%

**Student 2**  
\_\_\_\_\_%  
\_\_\_\_\_%  
\_\_\_\_\_%

**Student 3**  
\_\_\_\_\_%  
\_\_\_\_\_%  
\_\_\_\_\_%

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