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Introduction

An educator's task is not only to make curriculum engaging but to ensure that all learners can access that curriculum. All teachers want to design beautiful lessons packed with insightful material and multifaceted activities, but that is not enough if the assessment shows that multiple students have not mastered the concepts. Reteaching a lesson is a reactive solution; this book helps teachers proactively ensure education equity. But what is equity in education? It is not the same as equality, which means providing the same instruction and support for everyone. Equal divvying of resources may result in a fair education for all students, but “fair is not always equal” according to authors Richard L. Curwin and Allen N. Mendler (1988, p. 31).

Providing an *equitable* education means focusing on meeting each student's individual needs, considering the whole student and the multitude of contexts in which his or her needs change. To do so, educators must recognize and alter the existing structures and practices within classrooms—how they provide support and teach content, for example—thereby adapting learning to meet those needs. Education research further highlights the need for all educators to embrace the idea of all students having access to the general education curriculum, and that approach requires equity (Crockett, 2011; Shepherd & Hasazi, 2008). What does adapting learning entail? The following section explains.

About Adapting Learning

Adaptations include any support, change, or alteration that allows students to access any part of their school day. They differentiate instruction and come in a variety of forms: curriculum changes, support that staff or peers provide, technology devices, or environment changes. Two education approaches fall under the adaptations umbrella. *Accommodations* supply students with the tools and strategies they need to access curriculum: content, standards, instructional level, and performance criteria, while lessons remain unchanged. In contrast, *modifications* change the curriculum and objectives and adjust the standards (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Accommodations and modifications are both differentiation.

Accommodations can take the form of environmental changes (such as dimming lights) or activity changes (such as oral versus written directions). Modifications take the form of, for example, changing, “Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact)” (RL. 5.3) to “Identify and describe one character, setting or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (for example, what the character looks like)” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010). This book focuses on accommodations as well as modifications, offering real-world examples set in the classroom and the teacher’s lounge.

The terms *accommodation* and *modification* are often used together or interchangeably. This book will purposefully use them in accordance with the definitions we’ve given, even though one can debate whether a specific change or support is an accommodation versus a modification. Systems thinking, the basis for Unstoppable Learning that we explain in chapter 1 (page 11), compels educators to focus not on terminology, but on the big picture: Are all students getting what they need to succeed?

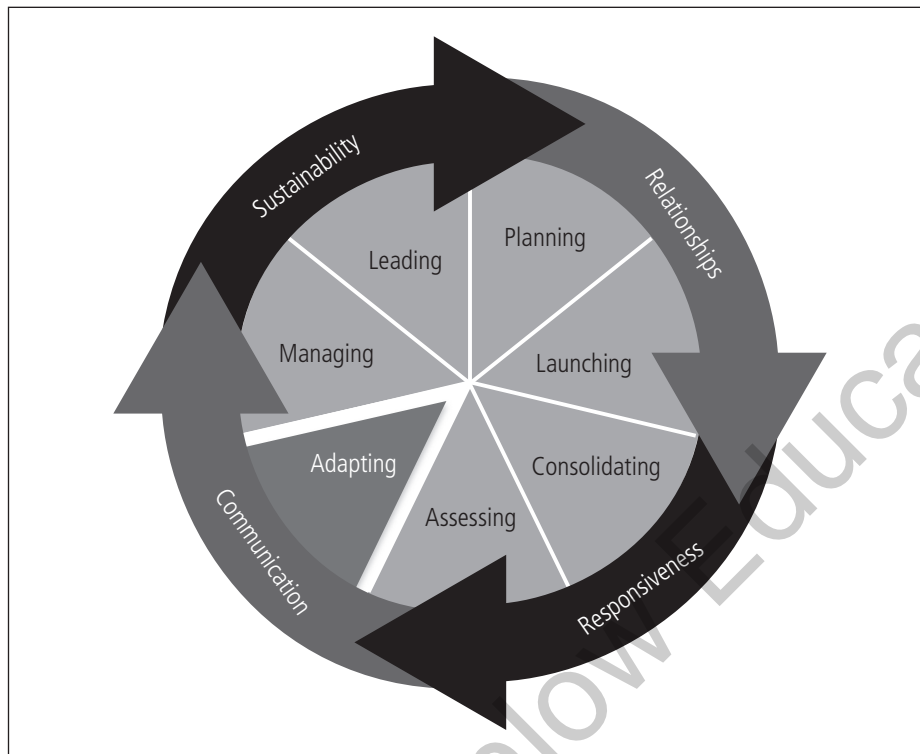
Adapting Unstoppable Learning helps educators give students what they need by espousing the principles in Douglas Fisher’s and Nancy Frey’s (2015) *Unstoppable Learning* and then bundling them with the so-called triangle of support and universal design for learning.

About This Book’s Underpinnings

Important concepts support the wide scope of learning adaptations and equitable education. Those concepts include systems thinking (a tenet of unstoppable learning), the triangle of support, and universal design for learning. The following subsections explain each concept and how the triangle of support and universal design for learning lead back to and invariably depend on systems thinking.

Systems Thinking

Unstoppable Learning comprises seven elements that Fisher and Frey (2015) consider essential: (1) planning, (2) launching, (3) consolidating, (4) assessing, (5) adapting, (6) managing, and (7) leading. This book, *Adapting Unstoppable Learning*, focuses on the fifth element. Unstoppable Learning requires that educators infuse each of these elements with systems thinking. Fisher and Frey (2015) explain the concept best: “Systems thinking is the ability to see the big picture, observe how the elements within a system influence one another, identify emerging patterns, and act on them in ways that fortify the structures within” (p. 2). Four principles gird the effective systems thinking classroom: (1) relationships, (2) communication, (3) responsiveness, and (4) sustainability (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Figure I.1 shows the components and principles of Unstoppable Learning.



Source: Fisher & Frey, 2015.

Figure I.1: Unstoppable Learning components.

Driving questions direct both classroom instruction and student supports. Fisher and Frey (2015), in *Unstoppable Learning*, pose driving questions for learning adaptations, and we answer those questions and others in feature boxes and throughout the text.

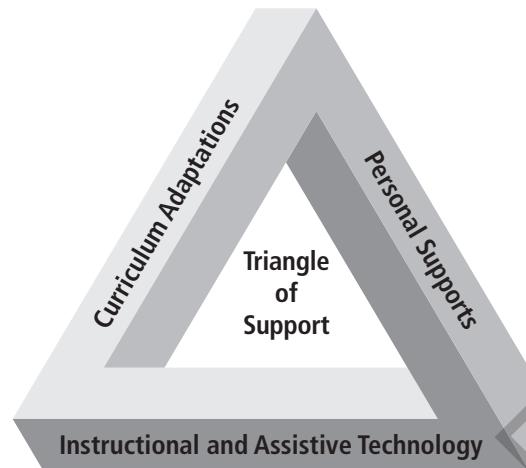
- How can I leverage structures to improve learning?
- Have I checked the results of my curriculum and instruction and taken action to ensure successive approximation?
- What are the short-term and long-term consequences of the adaptations I provide for students? (p. 177)

Structures, curriculum, and adaptations, integral in applying systems thinking, are precisely what the triangle of support addresses. We explain that next.

Triangle of Support

How do educators determine what areas need special attention when a student requires accommodations? The triangle of support names three key areas to focus on, and they reflect the big-picture consideration that systems thinkers require: (1) personal supports, (2) curriculum adaptations, and (3) instructional and assistive technology (Castagnera, Fisher, Rodifer, Sax, & Frey, 2003).

Figure I.2 displays a graphic representation of the triangle of support. Chapter 2 (page 31) looks at these supports in greater detail.



Source: Adapted from Castagnera et al., 2003.

Figure I.2: The triangle of support.

We rely on the triangle of support because in our experience as K–12 educators, some form of support is often lacking when students struggle to access the general education curriculum and meet standards. The triangle of support consistently and accurately guides the key areas worth considering. Personal supports include personal assistance and prompting. Curriculum adaptations allow students to have content and materials made accessible for them by tailoring to their learning needs and styles. A wealth of instructional and assistive technology provides access in a variety of innovative ways.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal design for learning is “a process that maximizes learning for all students, minimizes the need for individual accommodations, and eventually benefits every learner by considering different ways that students’ minds are activated” (Hunt & Andreasen, 2011, p. 168). The universal design for learning framework requires educators to analyze the most effective input and output methods for student instruction and assessment. *Input* is how students receive information, and *output* is how students demonstrate what they have learned. The student profile, infused skills grid, and academic unit lesson plan are tools that aid that analysis. You will find exemplars for tool use in chapter 1 (page 11). Once teachers have used these tools for their analysis, they can funnel the information into the three crucial aspects of universal design for learning: representation, expression, and engagement. Figure I.3 displays a graphic representation of this funneling into universal design for learning, and we discuss it in more detail in chapter 1.

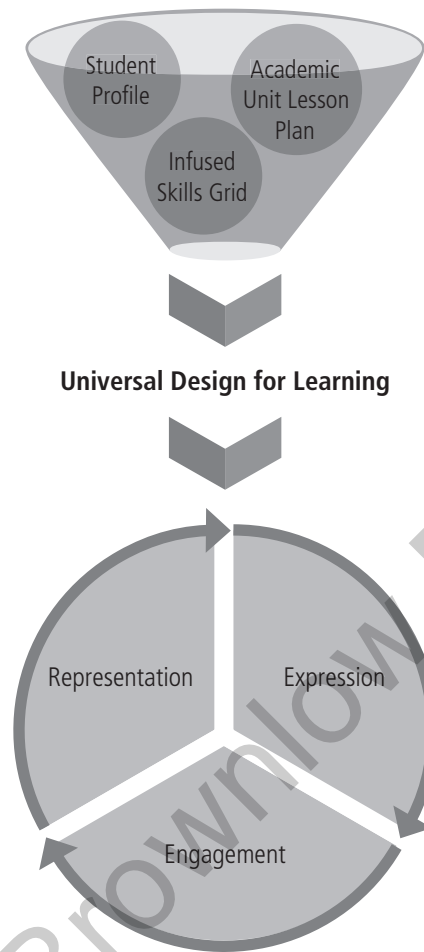


Figure 1.3: Universal design for learning.

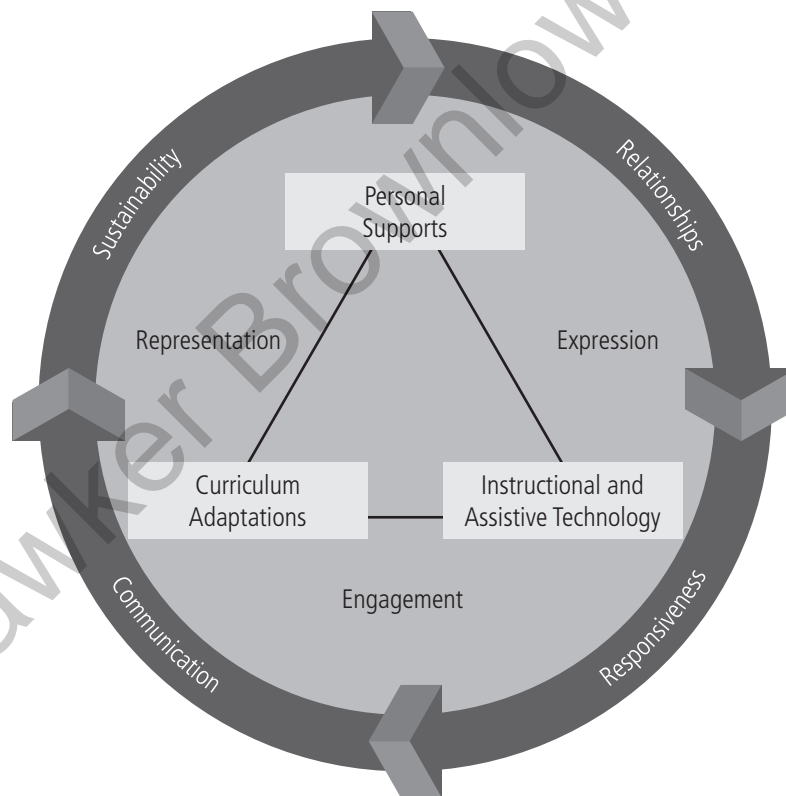
An Elegant Melding

The elegant melding of systems thinking, the triangle of support, and universal design for learning forms a fortified learning environment where students do not have to be concerned with how they will access the curriculum they encounter and instead can focus on enjoying the process. They receive the tools they need to be successful.

The systems thinking approach intertwines with the triangle of support when educators purposefully develop meaningful *relationships* with the key players on a student's education team while maintaining consistent *communication*. Alertness to learners' constant changes, which we define as educator *responsiveness*, fosters a *sustainable* foundation from which educators can build student success in learning. Incorporating universal design for learning into purposeful planning allows the education team to anticipate struggles, consider differentiated instruction, and evaluate the need for additional adaptations. Teachers can accomplish this by embedding differentiation methods and other adaptations into the curriculum and lesson design

from the beginning. Implementing universal design for learning provides the opportunity to differentiate and adapt the representation, expression, and engagement of any instructional activity.

Using universal design for learning principles in lesson planning, as well as in the areas that the triangle of support identifies (personal supports, curriculum adaptations, and instructional and assistive technology), allows educators to see that there are various ways to meet the same learning target. Universal design for learning implements the best way for all students to have access, requiring educators to explore ways for all students to reach the same goal. Educating students is about allowing them to explore their own learning styles, exposing them to not only content knowledge but knowledge of how they learn best and the supports that best help them. Teachers can provide a supportive learning environment through systems thinking, reflecting, and focusing on how they can best adapt instruction to reach all learners—to make it universal. Figure I.4 is a graphic representation of how teachers can enshrine universal design for learning and the triangle of support within systems thinking.



Source: Adapted from Castagnera et al., 2003; Fisher & Frey, 2015.

Figure I.4: Unstoppable Learning, the triangle of support, and universal design for learning melded.

About This Book's Student Beneficiaries

Though teachers often consider adaptations for students with disabilities, adaptations are not solely provided to students receiving special education services. Some students simply struggle with certain concepts. All students can benefit. In fact, Tracey E. Hall, Anne Meyer, and David H. Rose (2012) declare:

One of the clearest and most important revelations stemming from brain research is that there are no "regular" students. The notion of broad categories of learners—"smart-not smart," "disabled-not disabled," "regular-not regular"—is a gross oversimplification that does not reflect reality. By categorizing students in this way, we miss many subtle and important qualities and strengths. (p. 2)

With this end in mind, educators must acknowledge a variety of considerations when implementing instruction, activities, and tests, and keep rigor intact. The examples in this book, for instance, are from our professional classroom experience with actual students. The existence of various learning differences and styles, disabilities, cultures, languages, and home-life challenges calls for educators to implement culturally responsive pedagogy that facilitates adaptations in the classroom.

These types of instructional decisions are complex. Systems thinking requires that educators make these decisions while considering all issues. Regardless of the challenges, the central focus should be on what best serves the student. We reiterate that equality refers to sameness. It's equity that should be at the forefront to ensure that teachers account for and address differences.

About This Book's Readers

This book is for general K–12 teachers, special education teachers, instructional assistants, paraprofessionals, and related service providers including but not limited to speech-language pathologists, counselors and psychologists, occupational and physical therapists, assistive technology specialists, audiology and mobility specialists, and deaf and hard-of-hearing specialists. These educators work with students who need adaptations, though not all students who need adaptations require staff support in addition to their classroom teacher. Communication, integral to systems thinking, becomes crucial to teaching via teams.

Administrators and district leaders who read this book and embrace the systems thinking mindset—focusing on relationships, responsiveness, communication, and sustainability—will clearly see that learning adaptations are not a place, a label, or a particular person. They are accommodations, modifications, and supports that meet students where they are. Making this shift in thinking allows all stakeholders to see adapting learning as an integral part of students' learning experiences and to see the school community as a place where everyone can reap the benefits of a supportive classroom environment.

About Using This Book as a Resource

It's important to note that when integrating accommodations and modifications, teachers must keep in mind any existing guidelines for determining how adaptations may affect students meeting graduation requirements and attaining a diploma. For those students, ensure that the provided adaptations do not alter the standards for the curriculum and that students who are receiving these supports are meeting their school's course requirements. The question of whether the chosen adaptation changes the standards determines if it is an accommodation or a modification. Universal design for learning and accommodations that do not alter the standards provide an array of supports for students receiving a diploma.

In any respect, this book provides real-life examples and explains what adaptations an education team needs to provide for the variety of ways students learn. It highlights the intersection of Fisher and Frey's (2015) systems thinking approach with adapted learning. Chapter 1, "Creating an Adaptation-Friendly Systems Thinking Classroom," further discusses the principles that underlie systems thinking and, hence, Unstoppable Learning. The chapter also explores the triangle of support and universal design for learning tools, which blend with systems thinking to direct educators as they create equitable adaptations. Chapter 2, "Making Accommodations and Modifications While Ensuring Rigor," details specific adaptations and explores gifted and *twice-exceptional* learners (learners who have giftedness and a disability). We discuss the different levels at and forms in which staff and peers can provide support in chapter 3, "Determining Personal Supports." To that end, chapter 4, "Communicating With Key Collaborators," considers the various stakeholders who co-plan together to design learning adaptations.

The driving questions that Fisher and Frey (2015) pose in *Unstoppable Learning* encourage educators to think deeply about their own curriculum design and presentation and the way students demonstrate their knowledge and skills. These driving questions appear in feature boxes throughout this book to take readers on an inquiry-based path to explore their pedagogical philosophy. Here are just a few of the questions that educators will answer in the course of reading *Adapting Unstoppable Learning*.

- What adaptations can I make to assignments and classroom activities?
- What tools facilitate universally designed lessons and support system implementation?
- How can I make adaptations while maintaining rigor?
- How can I integrate personal supports and technology into my classroom?