

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Pedagogical Flexibility, Adaptations and Modifications for Special Needs Students



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Introduction

School staff members are asked to implement pedagogical differentiation¹ as a means of ensuring success for all students. In particular, the ministerial orientations set out in the *Québec Education Program* (QEP) present pedagogical differentiation as the main lever for the success of all students.

In the *Policy on Special Education*, the partners are also asked to work together in order “to help students with handicaps or social maladjustments or learning disabilities succeed in terms of knowledge, social development and qualifications, by accepting that educational success has different meanings depending on the abilities and needs of different students, and by adopting methods that favour their success and provide recognition for it.”²

The purpose of this document is to clarify the notions of pedagogical flexibility, adaptation and modification of anticipated outcomes in connection with QEP requirements.³ The methods available to support students in learning and evaluation contexts are also clarified.

1. E.g. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec Education Program, Preschool Education, Elementary Education* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2001), p. 4; Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec Education Program, Secondary Cycle One* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2004), p. 12-13; Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec Education Program, Secondary Cycle Two* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2007), Chapter 1, p. 21; Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Policy on Special Education* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1999), p. 20; Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Policy on the Evaluation of Learning* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2003), p. 16.

2. *Policy on Special Education*, p. 15.

3. The term *modification* will be used in the remainder of the text, for the sake of simplicity.

Support to be provided to students with special needs

Differentiation, in the form of **pedagogical flexibility, adaptation or modification**, is used to support students with special needs.

Pedagogical flexibility can be used by teachers to address the interests of and provide motivation for groups of students with different needs. It can also fulfill a supportive function.

However, for certain students with special needs, pedagogical flexibility may not provide enough support for them to make satisfactory progress towards the achievement of QEP requirements. In these cases, the process of the individualized education plans, in which both the students and their parents are involved, can be used to agree on additional measures.

The individualized education plan process begins with an analysis of the student's abilities and needs. Any adaptations and modifications required in addition to pedagogical flexibility are agreed upon and included in the plan, so that they can be taken into consideration by all the teachers working with the student, if they are applicable to the subjects concerned.

Adaptations and modifications alone are rarely sufficient for students to develop satisfactory levels of competency. To be effective, they must be used as part of a teaching approach that targets the student's specific learning needs, to allow for progress and encourage success.

Pedagogical flexibility will still be required even when adaptations or modifications have been introduced for a given student. Similarly, the fact of modifying anticipated outcomes should not exclude the use of adaptations.

It is also important for support measures to be monitored frequently, in every context in which they are applied, to make sure they are still relevant and effective, and to take the student's progress or changing needs into account.

The monitoring process will allow for adjustments to be made where appropriate, and for the measures to be removed if necessary.

Decisions concerning the use of adaptations or modifications should be consistent with the content of the *Administrative Guide for the Certification of Studies and Management of Ministerial Examinations*,⁴ and should reflect the Guide's requirements more closely as the student progresses.

4. <http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/references/publications/resultats-de-la-recherche/detail/article/guide-de-gestion-de-la-sanction-des-etudes-et-des-epreuves-ministerielles-formation-generale/>.

The next section of the document clarifies the notions of pedagogical flexibility, adaptation and modification.

Pedagogical flexibility

The aim of pedagogical flexibility is to allow all students to perform the activities proposed in the classroom, and to progress with their learning in line with QEP requirements for their group class level.⁵ Pedagogical flexibility should be applied in all subjects, as a means of promoting educational success.

To do this, teachers can expand their intervention options, for example by adjusting their teaching strategies, modifying teamwork arrangements for students, changing their visual presentation of proposed situations, and so on.⁶

Teachers can use pedagogical flexibility to provide support or guidance individually or in small groups for students in difficulty, and also to encourage the students to take part in classroom activities and continue to learn.

In the case of ministerial examinations, the directives from the respective administration guides must be applied.

5. For special education groups, the level should correspond as closely as possible to the student's chronological age.

6. *Québec Education Program, Secondary Cycle Two*, Chapter 1, p. 20.

Adaptations

Adaptations included in an individualized education plan process are designed to help the student **to acquire and demonstrate the same learning as other students**. The fact that they are stipulated in the plan also ensures that they will be **monitored**.

Adaptations should have the following characteristics:

- They allow the student to **meet QEP requirements, like any other student**. In other words, they do not give the student an advantage; they therefore respect the principle of equality.⁷
- They give the student access to the learning and evaluation activities proposed in the classroom, by **mitigating any obstacles** the student may encounter as a result of his or her personal characteristics; they therefore respect the principle of equity.⁸
- They do not change the nature or requirements of learning or evaluation situations, since it is still the student who makes the choices and decisions, mobilizes the resources and so on.

Adaptations may be applied to different elements, such as the working environment, the conditions in which activities are performed,⁹ reading, writing and calculation assistance, and so on.

It is important to make sure adaptations are consistent with ministerial orientations and guidelines. This means ensuring the student's cognitive engagement: in other words, the student, at all times and with support from the adaptations, must perform cognitive and metacognitive actions that allow him or her to acquire or demonstrate the proposed learning autonomously. The following diagram gives some examples.

7. "Fair evaluation is also conditional upon the equality and equity of the evaluation process. Equality requires above all that all students have an equal opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned.

... Equity requires that evaluation practices take into account the individual characteristics of certain students or the common traits of certain groups to ensure that evaluation does not contribute to increasing existing differences... The values of justice, equality and equity are in constant interaction. Thus, there can be no justice in the evaluation of learning unless equality and equity are ensured. Each student must be able to demonstrate the development of his or her competencies." *Policy on the Evaluation of Learning*, Chapter 2, p. 7.

8. *Idem*.

9. The phrase *conditions in which activities are performed* refers to the time at which the student performs the activity, the duration of the activity, the sequence in which its elements are performed, and what the student produces.

Diagram 1 – Examples of actions showing the student’s cognitive engagement



Modification of anticipated outcomes in connection with QEP requirements

A modification is included in the individualized education plan as a means of helping the student to progress to the best of his or her ability towards the learning set out in the QEP for the academic level of his or her classroom group. **A modification involves reducing anticipated outcomes in connection with QEP requirements.** Consequently, it may be expedient to initially consider implementing adaptations.

Introducing a modification means making certain choices with respect to QEP program content (e.g. the features of the competencies or the evaluation criteria), in both learning and evaluation situations. It does not, however, mean using QEP content from a previous cycle or year.

Modifications may apply to one or two competencies or one or two subjects. However, it is important for school staff members, the student and his or her parents to be fully aware of the impacts such decisions may have on the student's educational path.

For example, information in the Comments area will be included on the student's report card, stating that the student has been evaluated using modified expectations. A distinctive indicator will also be used to denote the fact that anticipated outcomes in connection with QEP requirements have been modified for the student, and the student's results will not be included when calculating the group average for the subject. At the secondary level, the student will not obtain credits for the subject in question, even if only one of the competencies was modified.

Ongoing discussions are held with school staff members throughout the school year, to ensure, first, that the choices made are still relevant and effective, and second, that the student continues to progress.

The following table presents the main differences between support in the form of pedagogical flexibility, adaptation and modification.

Table 1 – Differences between support in the form of pedagogical flexibility, adaptation and modification

Pedagogical flexibility	Adaptation	Modification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows the student to acquire and demonstrate the same learning as the other students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows the student to acquire and demonstrate the same learning as the other students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows the student to acquire and demonstrate the learning identified in the individualized education plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets a need that arises occasionally, or works in conjunction with an adaptation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets a need that arises in several different contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implemented in exceptional cases, to allow the student to progress in a different way than other Québec students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned by the teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned jointly as part of the individualized education plan process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned jointly as part of the individualized education plan process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implemented for a specific teaching period or for a specific number of activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implemented in the subjects for which the adaptation is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implemented in the subjects for which the modification is needed
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Denoted by a distinctive indicator in the report card

Conclusion

Pedagogical flexibility, adaptations and modifications all play a role, in their own way, in the success of students with special needs. However, if the students are to be given appropriate support that is consistent with ministerial orientations, the decision to use any of these three elements must be considered carefully.

The first aspect to consider is the student's individual needs. Any support given, regardless of the means chosen, must **address a learning-related need, whether in a learning situation or an evaluation situation.**

To determine whether the chosen support measure consists of pedagogical flexibility, adaptations or modifications, it is important to consider the **pedagogical aim, the context (learning or evaluation situation) and the student's cognitive engagement (cognitive and metacognitive actions performed autonomously by the student).**

Decisions concerning adaptations or modifications are made as part of the **individualized education plan process.**

Given the impacts on the student's educational path, it is important, when deciding whether or not to modify anticipated outcomes in connection with QEP requirements, **to consider both the advantages and the disadvantages of the choice, in the short and long terms.**

Appendix 1: Determining the type of support considered

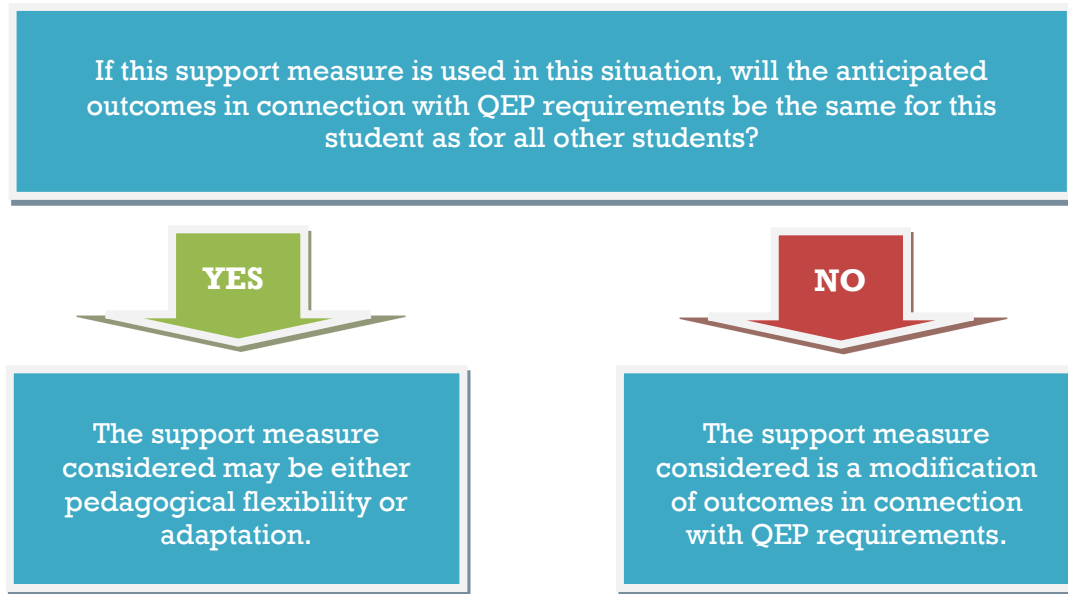
When determining whether the support considered for a student with special needs consists of pedagogical flexibility, adaptations or modifications, it is important, first, to consider those needs in detail, and second, to examine the situation from the standpoint of the following elements:

- pedagogical aims
- situational context
- the student's cognitive engagement

Table 2 – Analysis to determine the type of support considered

Pedagogical aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What learning does the situation target?• What outcomes are anticipated from the learning?
Situational context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will the target learning be evaluated?• Will the evaluation serve as a support to learning or as recognition of learning?
Student's cognitive commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• With this support, will the student perform the cognitive and metacognitive actions autonomously in order to acquire or demonstrate the learning?

Diagram 2 – Questions used to determine the type of support considered



As Diagram 2 shows, pedagogical flexibility and adaptations both allow students with special needs to satisfy QEP requirements. This is not the case for modifications.



A word cloud featuring the words: Achieve, Share, Read, Learn, Exercise, Succeed, and Persevere. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping pattern, with some words appearing larger and more prominent than others.

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