CHAPTER THREE
Integrating Accommodations with Instruction

Every day, teachers work hard to provide effective educational programs for the students in their classes. They must provide instruction that meets the needs of all students, including students with disabilities. Teachers need to identify the accommodations and decide how they will be used in instruction and assessment. In addition, they must monitor the impact of the accommodations.

Identifying Accommodations

Forms used for IEPs or 504 plans vary in the way information about accommodations is documented. Accommodations may be listed separately for classroom instruction and statewide assessments or referenced in other parts of the IEP or 504 plan. A sample from the Classroom/Instructional Accommodations section of the IEP included in Portal for Exceptional Education Resources (PEER) is provided next. PEER is used in the majority of Florida districts to develop and track ESE processes required by federal law and state statutes (BEESS, 2016).

Classroom/Instructional Accommodations

These guiding questions are intended to be part of a systematic process for selecting, implementing and evaluating accommodations. Be sure to check the accommodations the student is currently using.

1. What instructional and assessment tasks are difficult for the student to do independently? Are these difficulties documented in the present-level statement?
2. Why are these tasks difficult for the student?
3. What accommodations will allow the student to access the information and demonstrate performance of the tasks?
4. How will the IEP team know if the accommodation is effective?

☐ The IEP team has considered the guiding questions prior to the selection of the accommodations.

Presentation	Initiation Date	Duration Date	Frequency	Location
☐ Signed presentation of directions				
☐ Signed presentation of items and answer choices				
☐ Oral presentation of directions				
☐ Oral presentation of items and answer choices				

Eligible students with disabilities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 may have a Section 504 plan that documents their needs and accommodations. An excerpt from the form in the *District Implementation Guide for Section 504: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (BEESS, 2011, p. 139) is provided as follows:

Matching of Need and Accommodations. Please use the following tool to ensure that each of the student's needs identified in the evaluation are addressed in the accommodation plan. (Attach additional pages where necessary.)

Each student need identified by the evaluation	Accommodation(s) designed to address the need
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

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After reviewing IEPs and Section 504 plans, teachers are urged to confer with the students, teachers, parents and other staff. They can provide additional guidance about the students' learning needs and describe how accommodations were provided in the past. As students become more skilled in self-advocacy, they will be able to take on more responsibility to initiate conversations about their need for accommodations.

Planning for Classroom Accommodations

When planning instruction, teachers think about what all of their students are expected to learn and the activities they will use. Many teachers find it helpful to keep a simple list with the names of the students and their accommodations in lesson plan books. This becomes an easy reference when they plan their instruction each week.

Sample Accommodations List

Maria—Sign language interpreter for all instruction and assessment activities; sign language-to-English dictionary and thesaurus; graphic organizers to plan reports and essays

Alex—Concrete and visual representations of mathematical concepts and processes; biweekly collaborative planning with fifth grade mathematics teacher and ESE specialist

Jerez—Behavioral monitoring to maintain acceptable interactions with peers during free time between classes; small-group (five to six students) instruction for writing

Teachers can check the accommodations list when they are planning instruction to see what they will need to provide for individual students. They can also write a reminder in their lesson plans so they have enough time to prepare. Teachers may need to locate specialized materials or equipment or create cue cards; however, many accommodations only require that teachers remember to prompt the student.

Implementing Accommodations

Teachers may find that they have to take additional steps to make sure students with disabilities can use their accommodations effectively. The student may need orientation and instruction on how to use a new accommodation. The student may also need to be reminded when to use the accommodation. The student will gain independence as the student becomes more proficient and comfortable with the accommodation. At times, a student may require the development and use of a structured behavioral support plan to encourage the use of some accommodations.

Maria, Alex and Jerez's teacher will refer to the aforementioned Accommodations List when planning instruction. He will ask the ESE department about arrangements for the sign language interpreter and sign language-to-English dictionary. He will create graphic organizers for Maria and set up biweekly meetings with the ESE specialist to discuss Alex's progress. He will ask the mathematics teacher to provide the visual and concrete materials for Alex. The teacher must also make sure that Jerez has small-group instruction for writing and his interactions are monitored during free time. This preparation will help to ensure that Maria, Alex and Jerez can participate fully in class.

Universal Design for Learning

The goal of education in the 21st century is not simply mastery of content knowledge or use of new technologies. Education should help turn novice learners into expert learners—individuals who want to learn, who know how to learn strategically, and who, in their own highly individual and flexible ways, are well prepared for a lifetime of learning. The UDL helps educators meet this goal by providing a framework for understanding how to create curricula that meets the needs of all learners from the start (Center for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2011, p. 4).

Three principles are followed in UDL for the design of curriculum, instruction and assessment:

- Provide multiple means of engagement,

- Provide multiple means of representation, and

- Provide multiple means of action and expression.

These principles align well with the purpose and intent of accommodations. A UDL classroom includes a variety of instructional materials, tools and equipment available for all students. Multiple means of representation (i.e., flexible formats, e.g., print, digital text, auditory and video formats); expression (i.e., flexible modes of response, e.g., writing, speaking and drawing); and engagement (i.e., flexible schedule and structure and options for sequencing and organizing) are provided as a regular part of curriculum and instruction. Curricula created using UDL principles are intentionally designed to meet the needs of all students. This includes students who are gifted and talented, students who have disabilities, and students with different abilities, backgrounds and motivations (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2013).

In a UDL classroom, all students have options, not just students with disabilities. One of the critical outcomes of a UDL classroom is that all students will learn how to self-accommodate and determine what supports or scaffolding they need for instruction. Planning for the expected variability of students includes providing options for engagement, representation, and action and expression. Choice and flexibility are key elements of UDL; however, this does not mean that students always have choices in all areas of instruction. Students need opportunities to learn in ways in which they have strengths, and they need to improve in areas in which they are less strong.

Technology and flexible digital content are important aspects of the materials used to implement UDL; however, technology and flexible content do not define UDL. Technology and materials must be accompanied by established goals and standards for learning with flexible means of achieving them. Teachers can use different methods to engage all learners. They can use assessments that enable students to show what they know and are able to do, rather than just reaffirm what they cannot do.

The *UDL Guidelines, Version 2.0* (CAST, 2011) includes recommendations and procedures that make the applications of the principles more concrete and useful. Following these guidelines, teachers can reduce barriers and optimize levels of challenge and support to meet the needs of <u>all</u> learners, including students with disabilities. The following description provides examples of how teachers can employ UDL guidelines when planning instruction (Zabala, J. S., personal communication, October 14, 2015).

<u>Provide Multiple Means of Engagement—the "Why" of Learning</u>

Students differ in ways they can be motivated or engaged in learning. Optimizing individual choice and autonomy can help students increase self-determination, self-esteem and their feelings of connections to what they are learning. Students may not be able to choose the learning objective or standard, but they can make choices about how to reach that objective, the context or situation for achieving the objective, or the tools or supports that they will use for information gathering or production.

Options for self-regulation can help students strategically control or adapt their own emotional reactions and motivation. Promoting positive expectations and beliefs, sometimes called "mindset," can enhance the personal knowledge that each student has about what is motivating. Setting personal goals, establishing sequences and timelines for activities, and participating in self-reflection activities will support the student in achieving the learning objectives.

Coaches, mentors or even simple checklists can be offered to support the students. Students may need to learn how to manage external events that may distract their efforts or produce anxiety. They can learn to deal with frustration, seek emotional support and learn to use effective coping skills to overcome difficult situations.

<u>Provide Multiple Means of Representation—the "What" of Learning</u>

Alternate forms of representation of content are provided so that all students may gain essential information. For example, the novel, *Robinson Crusoe,* is available in print of varying sizes, digital text, auditory (i.e., read aloud), as a movie and in versions written at different levels of readability. Students have opportunities to choose the format (e.g., print, audio, visual, tactile or concrete objects) for obtaining information and may use multiple formats depending upon the specific instructional tasks, environmental factors, and teacher and student preference.

Supports for word recognition are also provided. For example, text-to-speech or a screen reader can be used with digital text. Individual words or phrases may be defined or read aloud just by clicking on the word. A student may annotate text using an embedded notepad or by writing in the margins of the page.

<u>Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression—the "How" of Learning</u>

Depending upon the activity, students may choose to write, speak, draw or use some other method to express what they have learned and what they still need to learn. For example, students may be able to express themselves more effectively using speech or sign language than writing.

Students may need supports for action and expression to strategically plan, organize and produce the desired products. This might be in the form of simple graphic organizers or planning forms or following articulated steps of the writing process. In addition, technology can be used to support the creation of the products. Students may also choose to use different types of writing implements or electronic tools for writing or creating graphic images.

Differentiated Instruction

Teachers follow the principles of differentiated instruction to be responsive to the important ways that learners differ. "There is no patented formula for creating a differentiated classroom. Rather effective differentiation is governed by a philosophy, a set of principles, and some pivotal instructional practices" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 25).

Many teachers find that the accommodations they provide for students with disabilities can help other students. For example, a teacher may prepare a study guide for a student with a disability who needs support for reading comprehension. The teacher can make the same study guide available to other students. The following table illustrates the three components of differentiated instruction:

Three Pillars of Effective Differentiation*		
Philosophy	**Principles**	**Practices**
• Regarding diversity as normal and valuable • Seeing every learner's potential for academic success • Accepting responsibility for maximizing each learner's progress • Recognizing and removing barriers that deny many learners equal access to excellence	• Creating environments that are catalysts for learning • Building on a foundation of a quality curriculum • Using assessments to inform teaching and learning • Tailoring instruction to assessment-indicated student needs • Leading and managing a flexible classroom	• Planning proactively to address student readiness, interest and learning profile • Basing instructional approaches on student needs and the nature of the content • Teaching with a growth mindset • Assigning respectful tasks • Using flexible grouping

*Adapted from *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*, 2nd Ed. (p. 25), by C. A. Tomlinson, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

When differentiated instruction is combined with the practices and principles of UDL, teachers can respond more effectively to the challenges of their classroom profile of students (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, n.d.). Teachers who apply these frameworks will be better able to meet the diverse needs of students, including those who need accommodations.

Curriculum Modifications

In many instances, accommodations are all that a student with a disability needs to be successful in the classroom; however, teachers may find that some students with disabilities are unable to meet grade-level standards. These students may need more intensive instruction. Students with a significant cognitive disability may be unable to meet grade-level standards even with accommodations. Such students may require changes to what they are expected to learn. The IEP team may decide that a student

with a significant cognitive disability requires intensive, direct instruction for learning and needs to be instructed on the access points of the state standards. Access points are alternate Florida Standards that reflect modified learning expectations. Parents must give their written consent for their child to be instructed in a curriculum based on the access points and to participate in the statewide standardized alternate assessments as stated in Rule 6A-6.0331(10)(b), F.A.C.; however, this option does not apply to students with disabilities who have a Section 504 plan.

If a teacher thinks that a student with a disability will not be able to achieve grade-level standards, even with accommodations, the following steps are recommended:

1. Check the student's IEP to see if the student has a significant cognitive disability and is working on access points.

2. Consult with the student's ESE teacher or other personnel in the school to find out if curriculum modifications are appropriate for this student.

3. If the student is not working on access points, teachers are encouraged to engage in systematic problem solving with the team to intensify the instruction or intervention to meet the student's needs.

Monitoring and Evaluating Accommodations

The value of any accommodation should be measured in terms of its impact on the performance and attitude of the student with a disability. Some guiding questions to consider when reflecting on the impact of an accommodation include the following:

- Does the student regularly use the accommodation?

- Can the student participate fully in the activity with the accommodation?

- Can the student master the learning objectives with the accommodation?

- Did the accommodation help the student feel a part of the class?

If the answers to the questions are "Yes," then the accommodation is working. If the answer to any question is "No," then troubleshooting is needed to find out why. A different type of accommodation may be needed.

For some students, certain accommodations will always be necessary to be able to perform required tasks, such as using braille materials for reading; however, accommodations can provide a step toward independence as students continue to learn and develop and a student may become less dependent on the accommodations and more reliant on her own abilities. Teachers must continually monitor the student's skill development as well as the use and impact of the accommodations.

Collaboration and Support

Collaboration is essential when providing accommodations for students with disabilities. Teachers who are open to input and ideas will find success when working with others on

behalf of students with disabilities. When problems arise, they are not afraid to ask other teachers or parents for assistance. They often find that others have similar problems and are eager to share successful solutions.

Many individuals share responsibility for the students' educational program. Some schools hire ESE teachers to provide services in general education classrooms. Other schools schedule common planning periods or institute professional learning communities so that ESE and general education teachers can work together. Staff in counseling, school health, speech and language, and occupational and physical therapies can also provide support.

A student's IEP may describe the need for support for school personnel or staff. This support may include professional development activities to develop knowledge and skills to help the student. Support may also include consultant services, collaborative teaching, or assistance from a paraprofessional or teacher's aide. The purpose of collaboration or consultation is to ensure that the educators and parents, if appropriate, confer on a regular basis and keep informed about the student's progress and needs. The collaboration addresses problem solving, identifying needed resources, and monitoring the effectiveness and impact of the instructional program and accommodations. Documentation of the process and outcomes of collaboration must be maintained.

Summary

Accommodations play an important role in meeting the needs of students with disabilities in preparing them to be career, college and life ready. Teachers are responsible for providing accommodations to students with disabilities, and students are responsible for using accommodations and making their best effort in instruction and assessment activities. To have the greatest impact, the student's use of accommodations must be continually monitored and supported through data analysis, intentional planning, implementation and evaluation of effectiveness.