

# Accommodations & Modifications With Learning in Mind

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Teachers and parents have come to understand the supports and services that all students require as a kind of triangle (see figure). Effective supports and services for students with disabilities are explained through the organization of this triangle. For example, *personal supports* may involve special education teachers, paraprofessionals, or peers providing in-class help on such things as oral tests, note-taking, or redirection. *Curriculum and instructional accommodations and modifications* allow students to access interesting and exciting general education activities that are challenging but not frustrating and overwhelming. *Instructional and assistive technology* ranges from computers to speech output devices to pencil grips.

Keeping this triangle of supports<sup>1</sup> in balance is an important task for the adults who work with students with disabilities. While these four pages will focus on the part of the triangle that represents curricular and instructional support, it's important to remember that an over-reliance on any single aspect of the triangle will tip the balance, and students may not experience success. For example, only providing personal supports and neglecting those related to technology and curriculum will likely result in the student depending too much on adults, and thus the support will actually interfere with learning.

Students with disabilities often require adaptations to the curriculum to be successful. These adaptations come in two specific types: accommodations and modifications. An accommodation provides a student with access to information in order to create an equal opportunity for that student to demonstrate knowledge and skills. Accommodations do not change the instructional level, content, or performance criteria for meeting the standards. A modification, on the other hand, is an actual change in what a student is expected to learn and/or demonstrate. However, while

a student may be working on modified course content, the subject area remains the same as for the rest of the class. (See page iv for a list of common accommodations and modifications, with examples for each.) Interestingly, as general and special educators have collaborated on curriculum accommodations and modifications, many of the supports for students with disabilities are subsequently used with all students. For example, in a middle school science class, students were asked to write the word *insulator* or *conductor* next to a series of items, such as lake, key, pen, etc. To ensure that Michael, a student with a learning disability, could finish this task at the same time as his peers, the IEP team revised the assessment so that Michael was required to list each item in an appropriate column rather than write the words *insulator* and *conductor* 25 times. The classroom teacher realized that this organization

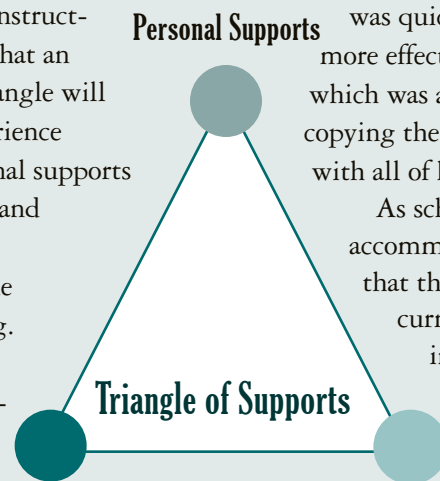
was quicker, but she realized more: that it more effectively served the purpose of the lesson, which was about learning the concepts and not copying the words. So she used the accommodation with all of her classes.

As school teams collaborate on curriculum accommodations and modifications, it is likely that they will begin to develop universal curricula—curriculum and instruction that is inclusive of all of the learning needs of the students in the class.

This Universal Design for Learning (or UDL) consists of three main principles:<sup>2</sup>

- ▶ Provide multiple means of representation
- ▶ Provide multiple means of action and expression
- ▶ Provide multiple means of engagement

These principles can be integrated into the curricular accommodations and modifications that are provided to students. The following pages show how these principles look in one classroom.



## Additional Information

1. For a detailed discussion of the triangle of supports, read *Inclusive Elementary Schools: Recipes for Success* (2nd ed.), by Doug Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Caren Sax (2004. Colorado Springs: PEAK). For more about the work of Fisher and Frey, go to [www.fisherandfrey.com](http://www.fisherandfrey.com).
2. CAST. (2011). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines*, version 2.0. Wakefield, MA: Author. Retrieved from [www.udlcenter.org](http://www.udlcenter.org).

# Accommodations and Mod

## Start!

Like most middle school classrooms, Michelle Santiago's sixth grade social studies classroom is a busy place. There are conversations about the school dance next week and the results of the student government elections. As the bell rings, Ms. Santiago checks in with several students.

Joey, a student identified as having **attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**, is sitting on an outer row of desks so he can stand up and move around as needed without disrupting others. "We're going to be taking notes today during the first part of class, Joey," Ms. Santiago tells him. "You'll want to get your smartpen ready so you can record my voice while you're taking notes."

She then makes eye contact with **Soung**, who has a **significant cognitive disability**. Two of Soung's classmates are making sure she has on her desk the items she'll need for the class. After greeting her, Ms. Santiago places several images on Soung's desk. "I wanted to make sure you have the pictures I'll be using, Soung."

**Bella**, a student identified with **autism**, is searching through her backpack for her materials. "Here's our agenda for today," Ms. Santiago says, pointing to the schedule on the Smart Board. "Do you have any questions I can answer now before we get started?" Bella asks a few questions about the note-taking activity they'll be doing, and Ms. Santiago clarifies the directions.

**Mario**, a student with a **behavioral disability**, is leaning back in his seat and already looks disengaged. Ms. Santiago smiles at him, moves closer to touch his shoulder, and motions for him to put down the hood of his sweatshirt. He makes a small sound of protest, but does so. She smiles again and whispers, "Thank you," to the boy. She offers him the four short readings they'll be using in today's collaborative learning activity. "The members of your group are each going to choose one of these," she explains. "Take a look at these and decide which one you'd like to do, and we'll go from there."

# Flexibility

# Help

# Participation

Ms. Santiago then introduces a new unit of study for her students about the ancient kingdom of Mali. She uses slides and images to portray the riches of this African kingdom, and its wealth of gold and salt. Soung has these images on her desk, and Ms. Santiago asks a classmate to check to make sure she has the correct picture in front of her as she follows along. Ms. Santiago discusses the kingdom's dominance in the region from 1200 to 1600 C.E., and tells her students about the legendary fierceness of its armies. "Others didn't want to fight them because they were so afraid of them," she explains. She then poses an essential question for her students: "What causes a powerful nation to fall?"

# ifications in the Classroom

## Adapt!

Knowing how important it is for learners to have choices—and that choice is especially vital for Mario—Ms. Santiago invites her students to move into their groups of four for a collaborative discussion of four short readings. She has placed the four students with disabilities in different groups so that curricular needs aren't magnified in any single group.

She had given **Mario** more time to make a choice about which reading he would use because she knows he has difficulty making rapid decisions. By the time the group was coming together, he was ready. "I'd like to do the one about how the army used poisoned weapons in battle," he says.

**Soung** is in a group of five, and she has a podcast version of a reading on the gold trade that was recorded earlier by Monica Reyes, a special educator. Another member of her group has the same reading, and the two of them will provide their group with information about this topic.

**Bella** has a small laminated card she carries that reminds her about social behaviors for group discussions. She had created this card with Ms. Reyes at the beginning of the school year. "Remember to use your discussion card to help you with this," Ms. Santiago says quietly to the girl.

**Joey**, who has difficulty with organizing information as he reads, will listen to the podcast a second time after he reads about why salt was such a valuable commodity in sub-Saharan Africa.

## Engagement

The forthcoming collaborative discussion has become routine for the students in this class. Each member has a different short reading on a related topic. They'll read their own silently and make notes on one quadrant of their conversation roundtable sheet (go to [www.calstat.org/infoAdditionalResources.html](http://www.calstat.org/infoAdditionalResources.html) to download) and then summarize the main points for the other members of the group. In turn, each group member will make notes about their classmates' oral summary in a corresponding quadrant. At the end of this activity, they will each have notes on their own reading as well as on the three others. Their final task will be to write a sentence or two that synthesizes the four readings, and each student will turn this in to Ms. Santiago.

## Choice

## Support

**Soung** has clip art images of salt, gold, war, and kings that Ms. Reyes chose to represent each of the readings for this activity. Soung will sort these images into the correct quadrants.

**Joey's** smartpen will record the voices of his group members as they discuss their readings, giving him a means to play back information as needed when he misses a key point.

Both **Mario** and **Bella** will submit conventional notes, thanks to the added emotional and psychological supports they've been given—and that they need in order to be contributing members of their groups.

# Succeed!

By the end of the period, each group has successfully completed the task, and the notes her students took provide Ms. Santiago with a record of what occurred in each.

“I can’t be in every group simultaneously, but the conversation roundtable notes give me a good idea about

their individual contributions,” she says. She offers words of encouragement to students as they leave her classroom and then says, “I used to think making accommodations and modifications meant I had to do things differently for some students. What I’ve realized over the last few years is that it’s just good teaching.

“My job is to make sure they learn about the world around them. How can I say that I’m doing that if I’m not taking the steps to make sure that world is accessible?”

Accommodations	Examples	Modifications	Examples
<p><b>Size:</b> Lowering the number of items a student completes, with no change to difficulty.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Teacher reduces the number of assigned multiplication problems from 20 to 10, with no alteration in the difficulty of the problems.</li> <li>▶ Teacher reduces the chapter review questions from 25 to 15, selecting key questions that assess understanding.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Same only less:</b> The number of items is reduced to change the level of difficulty.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Teacher reduces the number of possible answers on a multiple-choice quiz from five to two.</li> <li>▶ Teacher reduces the timed fluency measure to meet the developmental needs of the learner.</li> <li>▶ Teacher selects a book at a lower reading level for the student.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Time:</b> Adjusting the period allotted for learning, task completion, or testing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Teacher allows extra time to complete a test.</li> <li>▶ Teacher helps student develop a timeline and checklist for completing an extended project, with regular check-ins from an adult.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Streamline:</b> The assignment is reduced in breadth or focus to emphasize the key point.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Student creates a list of main points in English instead of an essay.</li> <li>▶ Teacher simplifies vocabulary for a social studies unit on explorers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Input:</b> Changing the way instruction is delivered to the learner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Teacher provides a recording of a book for a student to listen to after reading the section in a class book club.</li> <li>▶ Teacher gives student note pages in earth science.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Same activity with infused objective:</b> IEP objectives or skills are emphasized.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Student answer yes/no questions using his eyes to locate words on a lap tray.</li> <li>▶ The goal of learning measurements is practiced in each science lab.</li> <li>▶ Student practices sight words with peers as part of a “read the room” activity (reading printed matter posted in the classroom).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Output:</b> Changing the way the learner can respond to instruction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Student has the option of creating a poster instead of a research paper for world history.</li> <li>▶ Teacher allows a student to dictate answers on an “addition facts” worksheet.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Curriculum overlapping:</b> The assignment for one class may be completed in another and is a replacement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Student works on a poster for social studies and receives a grade in language arts as well.</li> <li>▶ Student uses a science lab report as a report of information to replace a writing assignment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Level of support:</b> Changing the amount of personal assistance to an individual learner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Student records a conversation with her teacher for later use in writing, using a smartpen.</li> <li>▶ A peer aids a student in constructing a diorama of the first Thanksgiving.</li> </ul>		