

Observing the Classroom Environment Procedure

Use this observational tool to determine how you can make the classroom a more inviting environment that encourages the student to communicate. It is an informal way to explore key classroom characteristics in relation to the student who uses AAC. It is also a helpful tool that provides a more systematic way to document participation at baseline and after change or intervention. In addition, it can help you to address issues such as vocabulary and access on the student's AAC system.

DESCRIPTION OF OBSERVATION FRAMEWORK:

Learning Contexts

What is the effect of the learning contexts on the student's communication? How do different learning contexts affect how the student communicates? (e.g. increased or decreased) How many different contexts are observed?

Description of Contexts:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Teacher directed class – teacher is in primary control of topics and asks questions to elicit student participation | 4. Cooperative Learning Group – students work on group activity with minimal teacher participation |
| 2. Small Group – teacher interacts with a small group (<7) as in a traditional reading group | 5. Seatwork – independent study |
| 3. 1/1 instruction – teacher directly instructs one student | 6. Transition – moves from one activity to the next |

Teacher Communication Behaviors

Does the teacher communicate often, sometimes or rarely with the student? Is he/she asking the right types of questions to encourage the student's response or participation? How does the teacher respond to the student's communication attempts?

Description of Teacher Behaviors:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Provides pause time – provides adequate time to respond (e.g. After reading directions, teacher pauses to give student time to ask a question.) | 4. Asks questions requiring short phrases – (e.g. What is today? Who should read next?) |
| 2. Offers choices – allows student to choose between two items or answer a content question by providing two choices | 5. Reinforces students communication attempts – addresses the communication message whether correct or incorrect |
| 3. Asks open-ended questions – questions that require more complex answers (e.g. What do you think will happen next?) | 6. Simplifies vocabulary and sentence structure – may rephrase complex directions to adapt to the skills of the student |

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Classmates' Communication Behavior

What are the communication needs of students within a particular learning context? What vocabulary items do students use in this environment? What other communication function(s) might be exhibited? What are the communication behaviors that are used to successfully participate in the learning context or activity? By observing other students, you might find answers to address the needs of the student using AAC: What vocabulary items or communication functions might we put on the device to facilitate more communication in this environment?

Description of Classmates' Communication Behaviors:

Observing Vocabulary:

Sample vocabulary used by a typical student in a specific learning context or activity

Communication Functions:

Observe what typical students use to successfully participate in the activity or learning context: Recite? Answer questions? Offer information?

Student's Communication Behavior

An AAC "system" is more than the communication board or device. The student also communicates in spoken words, basic signs or eye gaze. Chalk Talk developed some categories to observe.

Description of Student's Communication Behaviors:

1. Adequacy of Communication Mode – How adequate is the communication mode for the learning context? For example, sign is not adequate for a teacher who doesn't know sign. Voice output may not be functional in providing quick answers in a teacher-directed context (may use another low tech system that just has the numbers recorded).

2. Availability of Communication Aides – What are the aides (manual boards, device or other)? What are issues that may be interfering with availability?

3. Communication Aide Features – **a. Input features:** position, power source, adequacy of displays, switch placement, scanning rate/type **b. Output features:** intelligibility, appropriateness of output type (pointing, voice output, printed output), volume control

4. Vocabulary Access – Does the student have the vocabulary necessary for successful participation?

Ask yourself the following questions based on your observations:

- Is the student able to communicate the same types of messages as his/her classmates?
- If not, what is the student unable to communicate?
- What could be added to the student's communication system to help him/her participate more fully in this learning context?
- During this observation, what supports helped the student to communicate successfully (e.g., following a peer model, when the teacher asked a certain type of question)?

Identify changes to make in this learning context.

Adapted from: Culp, D., & Effinger, J.(1996). Chalk talk: Augmentative communication in the classroom. The Assistive Technology Library of Alaska. Anchorage.

Observing the Classroom Environment

Student: _____ Date: _____

Teacher: _____ Examiner: _____

Class/Activity: _____ Total Time (min): _____

General Observations of Learning Contexts:

Teacher Communication Behaviors:

Rate the Communication Observed as: **O** = often; **S** = sometimes; **R** = rarely

_____ Provides Pause Time	_____ Asks Questions Requiring Short Responses
_____ Offers Choices	_____ Reinforces Student's Communication Attempts
_____ Asks Open-Ended Questions	_____ Simplifies Vocabulary and Sentence Structure
_____ Other	

General Observations of Classmates' Communication Behaviors:

General Observations of Student's Communication Behaviors:

Adapted from Chalk Talk: Culp and Effinger, 1996

Is the student able to communicate the same types of messages as his or her classmates?

What could be added to the student's communication system to help him/her participate more fully in this learning context?

Identify changes to make in this learning context: