

Special Education Observation Report – RVCC Children’s Campus (Preschool Special Education Classroom)

Observation Report Form for ART-CC
Introduction to Teaching at Raritan Valley Community College
Dr. Kathryn Suk – Fall 2025

Observer: Seema Goel
Date of Observation: December 10, 2025

1. Type of Classroom Setting Observed:

- **Special Education Preschool Classroom**
- Ages 3–5
- Self-contained special education environment with individualized supports

2. Context of the Setting Observed

A. Setting:

Suburban, located inside RVCC Children’s Campus.

B. School Level:

Preschool Special Education (ages 3–5)

C. Type of School:

Campus-Based Early Learning Center

- Special education classroom serving students with:
 - developmental delays
 - speech/language impairments
 - sensory processing needs
 - autism spectrum diagnoses
 - behavioral/emotional regulation challenges
- Followed IEP-driven instruction and individualized support strategies

D. Number and Type of Educators Present:

- **1 Lead Special Education Teacher**
- **1 Full-Time Paraprofessional**
- **1 Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP)** who pushed in during the observation
- **1 Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA)** who entered briefly to support a sensory intervention

Number of Students Present: 7

- Highly diverse abilities
- Varying levels of communication, mobility, and sensory regulation
- 2 non-verbal children
- 3 children with emerging verbal skills

- 2 children communicating using speech, gestures, and PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

E. Date & Time of Observation:

Wednesday, December 10th
9:15 AM – 11:45 AM

Observation Overview

This Special Education classroom was uniquely structured to meet a wide range of developmental needs. Instruction was highly individualized, routine-based, visual, and sensory-responsive. The morning included:

- arrival and calm sensory entry time
- structured play centers
- targeted speech/language small-group instruction
- whole-group social skills circle
- fine-motor and OT-supported activities
- snack and toileting
- movement break and regulation period

The observation emphasized how the teacher balanced **IEPs, specialized supports, communication strategies,** and **behavior regulation needs**, while always centering emotional safety, predictability, and inclusivity.

I will analyze the classroom using **Domains 2 and 3 of the Danielson Framework.**

Domain 2: Learning Environments

Ratings: US – Unsatisfactory | B – Basic | P – Proficient | D – Distinguished

2a. Cultivating Respectful and Affirming Environments – D

This classroom showcased compassion, patience, and deep understanding of diverse developmental needs.

Evidence:

- Every child entered at a different arousal level—some excited, some withdrawn—and staff responded individually.
- The teacher greeted one child who often struggles with separation anxiety by kneeling, smiling, and offering a tactile fidget the child uses for comfort.
- There were **visual emotion cards** used throughout the morning to help students express feelings.
- When a child became dysregulated and started crying loudly, the teacher calmly said,
 - “You’re telling me you need a break. Let’s go together to the quiet corner.”
- No behavior was ever treated as “misbehavior”—instead, it was understood as communication.
- Teachers used **affirming language**, such as:
 - “You tried so hard!”
 - “Thank you for showing me with your picture.”
 - “I see you’re frustrated. I’m here to help.”

Summary:

Respect and emotional attunement were foundational. Every child’s communication—verbal or not—was honored.

2b. Fostering a Culture of Learning – D

The environment supported learning through a structured, predictable, and visually accessible setup.

Evidence:

- An individualized **picture schedule** was provided for each child.
- PECS binders were visible and consistently used across activities.
- Walls displayed minimal but meaningful visuals—colors, shapes, simple charts—avoiding overstimulation.
- The teacher embedded learning into routines:
 - labeling emotions,
 - narrating actions,
 - modeling counting during cleanup,
 - scaffolding language (“More bubbles? Here’s the ‘more’ card.”).
- Reinforcement strategies were individualized (stickers, squeezes, praise, tokens).

Summary:

Learning was supported through structure, consistency, and targeted strategies aligned with student needs.

2c. Maintaining Purposeful Environments – D

The classroom allowed for meaningful engagement without sensory overload.

Evidence:

- Clearly designated centers:
sensory, fine motor, communication station, blocks, calm corner, pretend play, therapy area.
- Materials were intentionally chosen:
 - weighted lap pads
 - textured fidgets
 - visual timers
 - adaptive scissors
 - chunky crayons
 - communication-picture boards
- Children were guided toward centers based on goals:
 - One student worked on hand strengthening with playdough.
 - Another practiced turn-taking in the pretend kitchen.
 - A non-verbal child used the sensory table first to regulate before joining a peer activity.
- The teacher allowed child-led pacing while ensuring goals were met.

Summary:

The room was highly purposeful, supporting regulation, independence, and targeted IEP goals.

2d. Supporting Positive Student Behavior – D

Behavior was addressed through emotional coaching, sensory regulation, and positive supports.

Evidence:

- The teacher used a **first–then** board:
“First clean hands, then snack.”

- A child who attempted to hit during frustration was gently blocked with the teacher saying, “I won’t let you hit. Let’s breathe together.”
- Break cards and sensory toys were offered proactively.
- When a child successfully used a PECS card instead of screaming, the teacher celebrated earnestly: “You used your words! Amazing asking!”
- No behavior was punished; everything was reframed as a need.

Summary:

Behavior support was deeply empathetic, proactive, and therapeutic—ideal for a special education environment.

2e. Organizing Spaces for Learning – D

The space was safe, accessible, and supportive for a range of sensory, motor, and communication needs.

Evidence:

- Soft lighting helped reduce overstimulation.
- Noise-canceling headphones were available.
- A “quiet corner” with a weighted blanket and soft lights was used frequently and appropriately.
- Furniture was arranged to prevent running or chaotic movement.
- Every area was clutter-free and accessible for children with delays in motor planning.
- The room accommodated both small-group therapy work and free exploration.

Summary:

The classroom’s physical design was exceptionally supportive of diverse abilities and sensory needs.

Domain 2 Overall Summary

Domain 2 was consistently **Distinguished**. The classroom blended warmth, respect, structure, and flexibility. Children were safe, supported, affirmed, and understood. Every space supported both learning and regulation. The environment demonstrated expert-level early childhood special education practice.

Domain 3: Learning Experiences

Ratings: US – Unsatisfactory | B – Basic | P – Proficient | D – Distinguished

3a. Communicating About Purpose and Content – D

Communication was clear, visual, simplified, and tailored to each child’s mode of understanding.

Evidence:

- Teachers used spoken words paired with gestures, pictures, or sign language.
- Directions were broken into steps:
 - “Stand up. Walk to the table. Sit down.”
- Visual timers were used to prepare for transitions.
- The teacher explained *why* they were doing tasks: “We’re squeezing playdough to make our muscles strong.”
- The SLP reinforced targeted vocabulary with matching picture cards.

Summary:

Information was delivered using multimodal strategies, ensuring access for all learners.

3b. Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques – P

Questioning was adapted for varied communication abilities.

Evidence:

- Teachers used yes/no boards when verbal answers were not possible.
- Open-ended invitations like:
 - “Show me.”
 - “Which one do you want?”
 - “Can you point?”
- The SLP modeled expansions:
Child: “Ball!”
SLP: “Yes! Big red ball!”
- Peer interaction was scaffolded during circle:
 - “Can you pass the drum to your friend?”
- Children used PECS to respond to questions about songs, snacks, or activities.

Summary:

Questioning supported language growth, identity, and communication access but stayed realistic for the group’s abilities.

3c. Engaging Students in Learning – D

Engagement was strong due to individualized pacing, sensory supports, and multi-sensory activities.

Evidence:

- A tactile art activity with sponge painting kept every child invested.
- During circle time, children engaged through music, drumming, scarves, or personal visual cues.
- When a student lost focus, the teacher adjusted by offering a fidget or allowing movement.
- Activities were short, hands-on, and varied—ideal for short attention spans and sensory needs.
- Students worked on individualized goals without feeling singled out.

Summary:

Engagement was high because instruction was adaptive, sensory-driven, and emotionally supportive.

3d. Using Assessment for Learning – P

Assessment was constant, embedded, and individualized.

Evidence:

- Teachers wrote quick notes on a clipboard after each small-group rotation.
- The SLP measured expressive and receptive language use across activities.
- Staff took data on:
 - joint attention
 - imitation
 - fine motor tasks
 - communication attempts
 - sensory regulation

- Assessment directly informed next steps:
When a child successfully tolerated a new texture, the OTA introduced a second sensory material.

Summary:

Assessment was ongoing and actionable, guiding real-time instruction.

3e. Responding Flexibly to Student Needs – D

Flexibility was the defining strength of this classroom.

Evidence:

- A child overwhelmed during circle was given a movement break with the paraprofessional and calmly returned when regulated.
- When a non-verbal child handed the teacher the “finished” card unexpectedly, she immediately modified the activity.
- The teacher adapted every routine for individual children:
 - hand-over-hand for motor needs
 - simplified visual steps
 - extended time for processing
 - alternative seating options (bean bags, wobble cushions)
- No child was forced to participate if dysregulated; the philosophy was “connection before compliance.”

Summary:

The teacher demonstrated expert flexibility and profound understanding of children’s needs.

Domain 3 Overall Summary

Domain 3 reflected **Distinguished-level practice**. Instruction was intentional, sensory-aware, individualized, and inclusive. Engagement strategies were proactive and matched to each student’s communication, sensory, and cognitive profile. The classroom embodied the highest standards of early childhood special education.

Final Summary

The Special Education classroom at RVCC Children’s Campus demonstrated exceptional instructional quality. The teachers integrated individualized supports, multimodal communication tools, sensory regulation strategies, and developmentally appropriate instruction throughout the morning. Every child was met where they were—with compassion, structure, flexibility, and encouragement.

The classroom fostered belonging, skill development, autonomy, emotional safety, and meaningful learning. This observation highlighted the complexity and artistry of special education teaching, showcasing a team deeply attuned to the diverse needs of young learners.