

Special Education Observation Report – Autism Support Classroom (Grades 2–3)

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 14, 2025

1. Type of Classroom Setting Observed

- Autism Support Classroom (self-contained)
- Grades 2–3 (ages 7–9)
- Highly structured environment using ABA, TEACCH methods, and visual supports
- Instruction aligned with IEP goals and communication needs

2. Context of the Setting Observed

A. Setting

Suburban elementary school serving K–5 students.

B. School Level

Elementary – Autism Support Program (self-contained)

C. Type of School

Public school with specialized district-supported autism programs.

Needs represented in the class:

- Autism spectrum disorders
- Sensory processing challenges
- Receptive/expressive language delays
- AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) users
- Social skills needs
- Behavioral regulation needs

D. Number and Type of Educators Present

- 1 Special Education Teacher
- 2 Paraprofessionals
- 1 Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) (push-in support)
- 1 Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) (30 minutes of push-in)
- 1 Occupational Therapist (OT) (brief sensory support period)

Number of Students Present: 6

- 2 students with AAC devices
- 1 primarily nonverbal child
- 3 verbal but requiring explicit social communication support
- Sensory, behavioral, and academic needs varied widely

E. Date & Time of Observation

Monday, December 14

9:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Observation Overview

The structured morning included:

- Arrival and predictable sensory regulation routine
- Visual schedules and morning check-in
- Social communication small-group lesson
- Targeted 1:1 instruction stations (literacy + math)
- Movement break and sensory room rotation
- Whole-group social skills activity
- Snack and toileting

The classroom followed a TEACCH-style structured layout with individualized workstations and clearly defined zones.

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

Domain 2: Learning Environments

2a. Cultivating Respectful and Affirming Environments – D

The teacher worked with exceptional patience and attunement to diverse communication styles.

Evidence:

- Students were greeted using their preferred method: AAC, spoken word, or gesture.
- When a student covered his ears during the noise, the teacher softly said, *“Thank you for showing me you need quiet. Let’s take a moment.”*
- Teachers celebrated all communication attempts, spoken or otherwise.
- Staff used identity-affirming language: *“Your words matter.”*
- *“Thank you for telling me with your device.”*

Summary:

Respect, understanding, and emotional safety were the foundation of the environment.

2b. Fostering a Culture of Learning – D

Learning expectations were clear, routine-based, and accessible through visual supports.

Evidence:

- Individual visual schedules and first-then boards were used consistently.
- Students were prompted to transition using timers, gesture cues, or tactile symbols.
- The teacher framed challenges positively: *“Let’s try this together. You’re getting stronger every day.”*
- Reinforcement systems were individualized to each child’s IEP and motivation profile.

Summary:

A strong learning culture was maintained through predictable structure and encouragement.

2c. Maintaining Purposeful Environments – D

The environment minimized anxiety and maximized independence.

Evidence:

- Clear zones:
 - Workstations
 - Sensory corner
 - Social skills table
 - AAC station
 - STEM center
- Visual boundaries and labels supported organization.
- Sensory materials accessible: weighted blankets, compression vest, squishy fidgets.
- Students were matched with tasks that aligned to IEP goals.

Summary:

Each space was designed to support independence, focus, and sensory needs.

2d. Supporting Positive Student Behavior – D

Behavior support emphasized regulation, communication, and skill-building.

Evidence:

- When a child became dysregulated, the BCBA calmly guided him to a break space, saying, *“Let’s breathe together. You can tell me when you feel ready.”*
- Teachers taught expected behaviors explicitly using social stories.
- AAC was used to replace behaviors like grabbing or yelling (“Help,” “Stop,” “Break”).
- Reinforcement included praise, tokens, sensory choices, and movement options.

Summary:

Behavior was always treated as communication. Supports were therapeutic and proactive.

2e. Organizing Spaces for Learning – D

The structured environment reduced sensory overload and increased independence.

Evidence:

- Students worked at personalized TEACCH workstations with left-to-right task organization.
- The quiet corner had dim lighting and noise-canceling headphones.
- Pathways were uncluttered, reducing anxiety for students who struggle with transitions.
- The sensory room was used appropriately for scheduled and unscheduled regulation breaks.

Summary:

Physical layout showed expert understanding of autism-specific learning needs.

Domain 2 Overall Summary

Domain 2 was consistently **Distinguished**.

Students experienced emotional safety, structure, predictability, and compassionate supports tailored precisely to their needs.

Domain 3: Learning Experiences

3a. Communicating About Purpose and Content – D

Instruction was clear, visual, concrete, and multimodal.

Evidence:

- Directions paired with gestures, pictures, or modeled actions.
- Each task began with:
“First we ___. Then we ___. ”
- SLP used picture cards to teach conversational turn-taking.
- The teacher explained why skills mattered:
“We practice taking turns so we can play games with friends.”

Summary:

Purpose and instructions were accessible to all communication levels.

3b. Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques – P

Questioning methods were adapted to each child’s communication style.

Evidence:

- AAC users answered questions by selecting icons.
- Nonverbal students used gesture choices, yes/no symbols, and eye gaze.
- When one student said one-word responses, the teacher expanded them:
Child: “Car.”
Teacher: “Yes, fast red car!”

- Peer interaction was modeled and scaffolded.

Summary:

Questioning supported communication development and social connection, though discussion remained teacher-supported.

3c. Engaging Students in Learning – D

Engagement was high due to individualized pacing and sensory-responsive teaching.

Evidence:

- Hands-on activities like sorting, building with blocks, and tactile letter cards.
- Students rotated through speech, social skills, academic tasks, and sensory breaks.
- When a student lost focus, the teacher adjusted by offering a movement activity or a shorter task.
- Activities were short, structured, and reinforced with immediate feedback.

Summary:

Engagement was strong because instruction matched attention spans, sensory needs, and learning profiles.

3d. Using Assessment for Learning – P

Ongoing assessments guided instruction throughout the morning.

Evidence:

- Quick data sheets at each workstation documented:
 - Imitation skills
 - Turn-taking
 - Reading fluency (for emerging readers)
 - AAC vocabulary use
 - Fine motor tasks
- BCBA tracked behavior data for progress monitoring.
- SLP documented functional communication attempts during play.

Summary:

Assessment was consistent and informed instructional adjustments, though long-term tracking wasn't displayed.

3e. Responding Flexibly to Student Needs – D

Flexibility was a hallmark of the classroom.

Evidence:

- A child refusing a new literacy task was offered a choice board to regain agency.
- When a student unexpectedly pressed the “finished” icon on his AAC, the teacher modified the task to reduce demands.
- Seating was individualized: wobble chairs, yoga balls, or floor cushions.
- Visual supports were instantly adjusted when a child appeared confused.

Summary:

Instruction was fluid, respectful, and tailored to each child's needs in real time.

Domain 3 Overall Summary

Domain 3 demonstrated **exceptional skill in sensory-aware, individualized instruction**.

Instruction was clear, adaptive, multimodal, and deeply respectful of autistic communication styles and processing needs.

Final Summary

This Autism Support classroom exemplified high-quality special education instruction. Teachers combined structure, flexibility, positive behavior supports, AAC access, and sensory-responsive teaching. Students were supported as whole individuals—emotionally, academically, socially, and communicatively. The environment promoted independence, communication, self-regulation, and meaningful learning — reflecting strengths in autism-specific teaching practices.