OBSERVING GAPS IN ACADEMIC ENGLISH

ESL and classroom teachers can work together to pinpoint the words, grammatical structures, and uses of connected text in content area instruction that are formal and academic in nature, so that they can better help English learners become proficient in this kind of language. Developing academic English is especially challenging for English learners, and instruction should go well beyond the specialty words that subject area teachers highlight for all students.

This simple observation record is designed for teachers to use in gathering information about how English learners understand and use academic English. The observation is not designed to look at teacher behaviors, but rather to attempt to **better understand student responses to instruction**. It is suggested that ESL teachers serve as observers and then debrief with their content colleague to determine how they can best collaborate to support students' development of academic English.

Using the observation form, the observer makes notes about the aspects of academic English that are challenging for students and then analyzes that information with the classroom teacher using questions such as those below.

1. How often did the observed student fail to respond to a teacher prompt at all or not engage in an instructional activity? If you saw a general lack of engagement, how would you explain it and what strategies come to mind to remedy the situation?

2. As the observed student was engaged in instruction, which areas of academic English seemed to give the most trouble? Consider the following options:

   a. Not being familiar with particular academic content words or phrases;
   b. Insufficient skills with particular grammatical structures at the word or sentence level (e.g., verb tense or voice, comparatives, etc);
   c. Insufficient skills at the paragraph or discourse level (e.g., how to write a well-structured paragraph or understand main points in material presented orally by the teacher); or
   d. Confusion about words commonly used to provide directions for response (e.g., demonstrate, verify, sequence)?

   What improvement strategies might be helpful?

3. Academic English is pertinent to all four language modalities—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In the lesson you observed, did the English learner use all four modalities? Which seemed to be most difficult?

4. If the student you observed had difficulty responding or completing tasks, was the source of the problem lack of academic English, lack of underlying content knowledge, or both? How could you improve your methods of teaching language and content together?

Academic English Observation:
Student Response to Instruction and Practice

In all cases, the observer must be physically proximate to the student being observed to see and hear student responses. The observer should focus on one student during the full instructional sequence for a subject (e.g., a complete science lesson). Part I should be used when the teacher is providing instruction to a group. Part II should be used when the student is working on an assignment independently or with a partner.

Student Name _____ Grade Level _____ Subject_____
Teacher _____ Beginning Time: _____ Ending Time: _____

PART I. DURING TEACHER'S WHOLE OR SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION:

A. When teacher prompts group for response, student responds accurately. (Tally for each opportunity.)	No (tally)	Yes (tally)
If NO, describe teacher's prompt where student fails to respond or responds inaccurately. Example: *Teacher asked*: *Which type of cell is this? No response from student.*		

B. When teacher provides direction for independent response, student is able to proceed (e.g., complete matching task or write topic sentence). (Tally for each opportunity.)	No (tally)	Yes (tally)
If NO, describe direction given by teacher. Example: *Fill in the missing word with an adjective. Student wrote synonyms for nouns within sentence.*		

C. When teacher is teaching specific vocabulary/terminology, student uses word correctly (e.g., through response to teacher, writing in sentence, etc). (Tally for each opportunity.)	No (tally)	Yes (tally)
If NO, identify word or structure teacher is focusing on along with student misperception or mis-use. Example: *In lesson about use of comparative forms, student says that the giraffe is the "most higher" of animals.*		

II. PRACTICE: WHEN THE STUDENT IS WORKING INDEPENDENTLY OR WITH ANOTHER STUDENT:

A. The student follows directions for working independently or as a partner. (Tally for each opportunity.)	No (tally)	Yes (tally)
If NO, identify the task that the student doesn't grasp. Example: *Student doesn't seem to understand how to transfer raw data to bar graph format.*		

B. The student asks for assistance when confused about the task. (Tally NO when student seems unable to proceed with assigned task after approx. 3 minutes.)	No (tally)	Yes (tally)
If NO, identify the task that the student doesn't grasp. Example: *Student doesn't know how to find synonyms for list of words.*		

C. The student asks for the meaning of particular words, phrases, or structures. (Tally YES for each instance—student can seek help from partner, teacher, other adult, and so forth.)	Yes (tally)
If YES, identify specific words, phrases, or structures. Example: *During geography activity where student is required to match picture to phrase, student asks for clarification about these terms: range of mountains, sand dunes, arid plain.*	