



ALTERNATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROJECT

# ALTELLA Classroom Observation Protocol

ALTELLA Tool

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The Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA) project researches instructional practices, accessibility features and accommodations, and assessment of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities to develop an evidence-centered design approach that informs our understanding of alternate English language proficiency assessment for these students.

The ALTELLA project is a partnership of five state departments of education and the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. This collaboration involving Arizona, Michigan, Minnesota, South Carolina, and West Virginia is funded by an Enhanced Assessment Instruments grant from the U.S. Department of Education awarded to the Arizona Department of Education. ALTELLA is housed within the Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

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## Purpose

This protocol can be used by educators and administrators to learn more about the instructional strategies teachers are using with their English learners with disabilities. This classroom observation protocol was created for use by the Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA) project. The original version was used to collect data on English learners with significant cognitive disabilities, an ALTELLA project activity (see Christensen & Mitchell, 2018) and was partially adapted from the National Alternate Assessment Center (2010). This version of the protocol has been broadly adapted to include English learners with any disabilities, not limited to those with significant cognitive disabilities.

## Instructions

Observers are encouraged to rely on handwritten notes (no audio or video recording). Observers should limit interaction with educators and students to maintain a more authentic classroom environment. The suggested length of the observation is 20 minutes. Classroom observations using this protocol should be conducted by a team of two. After the observation the observers should convene to discuss what was observed and address areas of discrepancies.

# ALTELLA Classroom Observation Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Observation start and end time: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Classroom/Teacher ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of students: \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of English learners with disabilities: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Instructional Setting** (choose the best description)

- General Education Class
- English Language Development class
- Special Education class with non-disabled peers
- Special Education class with students with disabilities only
- Homebound/hospital
- Related services (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Instructional Group Arrangement** (indicate all those observed)

- Large group instruction
- Small group instruction
- Independent work
- 1:1 instruction
- Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Content Area Observed** (check all that apply)

- English Language Arts
- Math
- Science
- Social Studies
- English Language Development
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Adult Presence** (check all that apply and indicate how many present)

- Teachers: \_\_\_\_\_
- Paraprofessionals: \_\_\_\_\_
- Related service providers (specify types if known) : \_\_\_\_\_
- Administrators: \_\_\_\_\_
- Family members: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Instruction Delivery** (indicate all those observed)

- Instruction delivered by general education teacher
- Instruction delivered by ESL/bilingual education teacher
- Instruction delivered by special education teacher
- Instruction delivered by bilingual/special education teacher
- Instruction delivered collaboratively by general and ESL/bilingual education teachers
- Instruction delivered collaboratively by general and special education teachers
- Instruction delivered by paraprofessional
- Instruction delivered by peer/peer tutor
- Instruction delivered by related service provider

**6. Instruction Level** (choose the best description)

- Instruction is on the grade level general curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as other typical students of that age and grade level)
- Instruction is based on English language development curriculum
- Instruction is linked to the grade level general curriculum but may be at a lower grade level
- Instruction is delivered in the context of the grade level general curriculum but on different, non-academic skills (i.e., student uses the same materials in the same activities as other students but the expectations for learning are about something else – social, motor, etc.)
- Instruction is not linked to or delivered in the context of grade level general curriculum
- Instruction rationale was not clear.

Place + or - in the designated box to indicate whether the observation indicator was present or not.		
Observation Indicator	+/-	Notes
<p><b>7. Technology is present in the classroom.</b></p> <p>Check all that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Computer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Chromebook</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> iPad</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Smartboard</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other (explain in notes)</li> </ul>		<i>(Provide examples of technology present in the classroom.)</i>
<p><b>8. The instructor uses technology in the classroom during the observation period.</b></p> <p>Check all that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Computer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Chromebook</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> iPad</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Smartboard</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other (explain in notes)</li> </ul>		<i>(Provide examples of technology used in the classroom, e.g. instructor used smartboard to teach math concepts.)</i>
<p><b>9. Teacher uses chronologically age-appropriate materials.</b></p>		<i>(If not, list examples of materials that are not age-appropriate.)</i>

Place + or - in the designated box to indicate whether the observation indicator was present or not.		
Observation Indicator	+/-	Notes
<p><b>10. Teacher has same expectations for student learning as chronologically aged peers.</b></p>		<i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i>
<p><b>11. Instruction and activities facilitate the student's interactions with chronologically age-appropriate, general education peers.</b></p> <p>(must be more than provision of the opportunity: the student must interact or be facilitated to interact)</p>		<i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i>
<p><b>12. Teacher's instructional approach allows for accommodations.</b></p>		<i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i>

Place + or - in the designated box to indicate whether the observation indicator was present or not.		
Observation Indicator	+/-	Notes
<p><b>13. Instruction is individualized for each student.</b></p>		<i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i>
<p><b>14. Types of instructional tasks observed.</b></p> <p>Check all that are observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> cloze</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> cooperative learning</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> drills/ repetition</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> experiential learning</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> guessing game</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> information gap activities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> interviews</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> jigsaw tasks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> music/singing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> negotiating meaning</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> problem solving</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> read aloud</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> retelling a story/ event</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> role-play</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> simulations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Total Physical Response (TPR)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (explain in notes)</li> </ul>		<i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i>

Place + or - in the designated box to indicate whether the observation indicator was present or not.		
Observation Indicator	+/-	Notes
<p><b>15. The instruction provides various options for the student to have access to the instruction.</b></p> <p>Check all that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> concrete objects</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> bilingual resources</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> manipulatives</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> picture cards</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> sign</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> simplified syntax</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> symbol based text</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> tactile cues</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> text reader</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> worksheet</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (explain in notes)</li> </ul>		<p><i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i></p>
<p><b>16. The students in the classroom use various tools to demonstrate what they know or are learning.</b></p> <p>Check all that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> adapted keyboards</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> bilingual resources</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> custom overlays</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> dictation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> drawing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> eye gaze</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> picture cards</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> pointing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> sign</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> switches</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> verbal response</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> word prediction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> worksheet</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (explain in notes)</li> </ul>		<p><i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i></p>



Place + or - in the designated box to indicate whether the observation indicator was present or not.		
Observation Indicator	+/-	Notes
<p><b>17. In the classroom, the student has a way to communicate that matches their communication level.</b></p>		<p><i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i></p>
<p><b>18. Informal assessment observed:</b></p> <p>Expectation for students at this level is set at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> recall/routine task (recall fact, information, or procedure)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> discriminate similarities/differences (simple analysis of presented concepts)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> application (use of conceptual knowledge in new and concrete situations)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> strategic (requires reasoning, developing a plan or a sequence of steps)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> extended (requires an investigation, time to think and process multiple conditions of the problem)</li> </ul>		<p><i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i></p>

Place + or - in the designated box to indicate whether the observation indicator was present or not.		
Observation Indicator	+/-	Notes
<p><b>19. The student responds to opportunities to demonstrate language skills.</b></p> <p>Check all that are observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> expressive language</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> receptive language</li> </ul> <p>To what extent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> adaptive equipment (AAC device)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> eye gaze</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> head nods</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> picture exchange cards (PECS)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> pointing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> signing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> verbalization</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> vocalizations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (explain in notes)</li> </ul>		<i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i>
<p><b>20. Please note the language domains observed.</b></p> <p>Domain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> listening</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> reading</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> speaking</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> writing</li> </ul>		<i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i>
<p><b>21. The teacher utilizes the student's home language in the classroom</b></p>		<i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i>

Place + or - in the designated box to indicate whether the observation indicator was present or not.		
Observation Indicator	+/-	Notes
<p><b>22. The student utilizes their home language in the classroom.</b></p>		<i>(List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i>
<p><b>23. The use of language learning strategies is evident in the lesson.</b></p> <p>Check all that are observed:</p> <p>Cognitive strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> bilingual support materials</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> classification</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> goal setting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> learning styles</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> listening/repeat</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> making inferences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> note taking, highlighting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other mnemonic strategies</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> pronunciation/phonetic strategies</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> self-evaluation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> use of graphic organizers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> use of imagery</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> use of real objects/role play</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> visuals to imagery</li> </ul> <p>Social/affective strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> asking questions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> encouragement, lowering affective filter</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> social-mediating activities, empathizing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> overcoming limitations in speaking through circumlocution, gestures, coining words, etc.</li> </ul>		<i>(Observers should familiarize themselves with each language learning strategy. List examples of evidence to support your observation.)</i>

## References

- Christensen, L. L., & Mitchell, J. D. (2018, September). *Classroom perspectives on English learners with significant cognitive disabilities*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin–Madison, Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA). Retrieved from University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research: <http://altella.wceruw.org/resources.html>
- National Alternate Assessment Center. (2010). *National Alternate Assessment Center student/program observation tools*. Retrieved from the National Alternate Assessment Center: <http://www.naacpartners.org/toolsforAA/observationTools/NAACObsTools1009.pdf>

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