

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development.

I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective.

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. I am Chris Reeve, and I'm excited you're joining us.

We have been spending the last few episodes talking about working with other adults in the classroom and building classroom teams and conflict resolution and oh, such fun exciting topics like that.

And today I'm going to talk about another one which is being observed. In my job as a consultant I spent a lot of time over the years in other people's classrooms. And that can be an amazing experience with lots of new ideas flowing and cool things you get to share. Or it can be a really awkward experience because the person doesn't like to have you in their classroom being observed.

I once went to set up a classroom with a teacher who was very stressed, just with other things going on in her life. And everything I moved in her room, she came behind me and moved it back, because it was just too much for her.

Now, obviously, I prefer observations to be a great experience of collaboration. I also think that when you are the teacher receiving the observation, you may not always view it positively, even when the principal shows up in your room for no apparent reason.

Or even when someone has recommended that a teacher come and see your room. And we see that happen a lot. Where we see somebody whose classroom is working, we send everybody to that classroom. But that may not be something that you are feeling particularly positive about.

Having anyone come in and observe your classroom can be a stressful experience. And this is true whether the observer is a consultant, an instructional coach, an administrator, a fellow teacher, or sometimes even just a related service provider. All of those situations can be stressful.

But there are obvious benefits of having all these people come into the classroom. And there are times that we don't have a choice, the principal is going to come in and do an observation. And I will share some blog posts that I have about being observed in that situation.

But I think it's important to recognize that having somebody observing your classroom gives you opportunities to make your classroom better. It is stressful, because change is stressful. And having someone watch you is stressful. But it can be useful for a number of reasons.

So let's think for a minute just about some of the reasons that you might have someone observe or some things that you might want from them.

One is they give you a fresh perspective. So even just having another teacher come in and observe in the classroom can be remarkably helpful. Because they see your classroom from a completely different perspective, it's really hard to see your own environment from a bird's eye view, when you're in the middle of it trying to run it.

You're busy teaching, making it difficult to look at anything else going on around you. So having someone come in and give you an outsider's perspective can actually give you some really good insight about some things that are going on.

It's why sometimes it's really helpful to have that extra person come in and do some observations for a behavior plan or a functional behavior assessment. Because we may see a side of the student that you didn't see because you're with him as his teacher. And so we may have noticed or seen solutions or problems that you didn't know were there as well.

So for instance, it's hard to tell how instruction is going in other centers with your paraprofessionals when you are running your own small group, another set of eyes can help give you feedback on other parts of the room.

Another is that people have complementary skill sets. So in addition to that first set of eyes, the observer also brings a different set of skills than those that you have in your classroom.

So for instance, if you've never used a picture exchange communication or a PECS system, a speech pathologist or coach may have experience with it and feel that it works well for one of your students. And you might not have ever thought of it because it wasn't something you were familiar with. And then that person can also help to provide support with implementing new strategies within the classroom.

They can bring new ideas that maybe you've never thought of, experience with different curricula, and other strategies that can help your students be more successful. So having different points of view could build that as well.

So when you've been told that someone is going to come observe your room, or the person just shows up without you knowing about it, it's something that you really have to work at. Because these are some tips that make the feedback discussion productive.

Sometimes you've asked somebody to come in your room, sometimes someone has told you someone's coming into your room, sometimes someone is coming in to evaluate you. But I think

it's important to remember it from the point of view that you can get some good ideas from someone as an outsider, and someone with a different experience than yours. And even if that isn't going to happen, then you may want to just think of ways for the impact of it on your classroom to be minimal.

So the first thing is the hardest thing, which is to try to avoid becoming defensive. This is one that I really struggle with. And it's one that my supervisor and I used to get into, because she would say, "You get defensive."

There's no way to defend yourself against that. Because the moment someone says you're defensive, and you say, "I am not defensive," you're being defensive.

But it's really hard not to be defensive when someone is giving you a suggestion, or just even just when you feel like they're watching you.

Whoever is observing may have some knowledge about giving feedback effectively, I hope that they do that will make it a more positive experience. But regardless, you could benefit the more that you try to just open yourself up and let the information come.

You don't have to let it all stick. You don't have to use it all, unless it's your principal and then maybe you do. But it's absolutely okay to take the information in and process it on your own.

It's also absolutely okay to let the observer know that you're nervous or apprehensive about getting their feedback. But be sure to listen to what they have to say before you jump in and try to start explaining why you do something.

You may have a very good reason for the way that you were doing something in the classroom that the observer wants you to change. But it pays to hear the person out and then decide if it might be helpful to try something new, or stick with what you're doing.

Try to put aside your feelings that they are telling you that what you're doing is wrong, they probably are not telling you that you're wrong. What they're doing is just saying maybe there's another way to do it. So focus on what they're saying. And if you feel that that's okay, the way they are, share that. If you feel that it should stay the same, share that when they're done telling you why and have a discussion about it.

The next is to tell the observer what you think is working. Hopefully, the person that is observing and saying things can give you suggestions and that they will ask for and seek your feedback about what's working in the classroom, and what situation or the specific situation, what is working.

If they don't, ask if you could share that with them. Tell them that you feel that there are certainly things that you can change. But some things are working for you in the class and you'd like to

discuss those as well. There's no reason why your discussion with the observer needs to only focus on things that aren't working.

Explain that you're willing to make some changes, but you want to keep certain elements that you think are helpful, useful, and important to the class. And then you can have a discussion about whether or not that makes sense. And whether the observer agrees and things like that.

You can then discuss how to best make any kind of changes if they're needed. So sometimes consultants and administrators feel like they only have one shot to give you all the feedback that they need to give.

You know, when I work with a school district over a long period of time, I know I'm coming back to that teacher. And that allows me to give smaller amounts of things to try versus a one time consultation where I feel like I have to give them everything. And I never want them to get a written report that has things that we didn't talk about.

So hopefully, it's a situation where they can come back to you and you can do things in small steps. But if it's not, understand that they're not trying to completely overwhelm you, but they may be completely overwhelming you.

In that case, I would say if they don't say here is the first thing I would do, and then do this and then do this. If they don't give you a plan for going from A to C, then I would say, "What do you think is the first thing that I should change, what do you think is the first thing I should put in place?"

Knowing a list of things to try is not nearly as helpful as some approach of what order and how to put those things in place. You don't want to upset everything going well in the class. And you don't need to overwhelm you, your staff, or the students.

So perhaps the answer is try one thing at a time and talk about what the priorities are. Perhaps there's a group of things to try that go together. So like visual rules with a visual cueing bell are often things that go together well, because you redirect with the visual cueing. And those cues are what your rules are.

Perhaps it makes sense to start a new strategy with one student at a time. So I tell teachers, when they start visual schedules for the first time, start with the most independent student, and then get that student going well, and then move another to the next most independent student, rather than trying to have everybody in the classroom learning how to do a visual schedule from scratch all at one time.

That keeps it from being as overwhelming for you and for the student. And it also makes it more successful. A good consultant or administrator should observe that they need to help with this, but sometimes we'll miss it. Sometimes we don't see it, sometimes we don't have time for it. And it's going to help you in the future to speak up and ask for help.

You do need to advocate for yourself, and you can do that. Suggestions aren't helpful to anyone if they can't be implemented. So never feel bad about saying, explain to me how I do this.

The next thing is to work with the observer, hopefully, to make an action plan from the observation. And you can do this on your own or you can ask to do it with them. And action plan outlines those steps of things that you're going to try. Typically contains deadlines, and you discuss how long things need to be implemented.

You know, I have a real thing when I say try a token system and someone says, Oh, yes, we've done those, those don't work. And when I ask a little bit farther and say, well, how did you try them, and they say, well, we did it for a day, and then they were not successful.

Okay, token boards are something you have to use for a little while before students understand how they work. One day usually isn't quite enough. So it's helpful to know that information.

Having an action plan also makes it clear what it is that you're expected to do. So if you're in a situation with an outside consultant, or you're in a situation with an instructional coach or an administrator, you want to make sure that you're both on the same page about what their expectations are, that you're going to make happen in your classroom.

It also allows the coach or the observer to outline areas where they can help you by modeling or training staff, or training you in the new strategies. And make sure that as you're making that action plan, you allow for time to make materials if you don't have them to be able to implement the strategy.

And remember that even though it may seem like a weakness, to ask for assistance, or to want to share that what you think is working, and that you don't think you should change it, it's actually a strength. It conveys to the person that you are committed to hearing suggestions, that you're willing to implement them in the classroom, and you're willing to develop a plan to do so.

Those are the teachers that I love to work with. I would much rather have a teacher tell me, this is why I don't think that's going to work or this is why this doesn't work for me. Sometimes I override them. But sometimes it's you know what you're right. That's a really good point, I was not aware of that information.

So I think it's important to recognize, advocating for yourself is a strength. That is something you bring to the table that makes you a stronger teacher.

Doesn't mean advocating and getting defensive, as I said at the beginning, but it does mean saying hey, here's a bigger picture. Because if I'm an observer, I only see a slice of what's going on in your classroom just the time I was observing. So it's important that you can fill out that picture when you feel like something is missing.

I hope that gives you some ideas about ways to handle being observed, ways to take that feedback, you know, obviously, you're going to take feedback from an instructional coach or an administrator, a little bit more seriously than the teacher that was asked to come to observe you in order to help her class. But even that teacher may have something to share that you've never thought of before.

One of the things I loved about my job when I was consulting was that I got to go in a whole bunch of classrooms all over the country and see so many great ideas and connect those ideas with people who would never be able to connect with each other at a time when we didn't have the internet because I'm that old.

And now what I really like to do is get people in the Special Educator Academy to be sharing those ideas on their own. And I think there's a huge place for that collaboration, and you can come collaborate for free in the free Facebook group at [specialeducatorsconnection.com](https://www.facebook.com/specialeducatorsconnection.com).

Or come and join us in the Special Educator Academy where we have that same somewhat smaller support group, as well as tools and strategies and training to help you do what I know you want to do, which is to help your students make progress and watch the light come on in their eyes. You can get a free trial of the academy at [specialeducatoracademy.com](https://www.specialeducatoracademy.com)

Thank you so much for listening. I am so glad that you're joining me on this journey. And I hope that you will be back next week for our next episode. Have an amazing week until then.

Thanks so much for listening to today's episode of the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. For even more support, you can access free materials, webinars and video tips inside my free resource library. Sign up at [autismclassroomresources.com/free](https://www.autismclassroomresources.com/free). That's f-r-e-e or click the link in the show notes to join the free library today. I'll catch you again next week.