11 AUG 2020

GUIDANCE
FOR CONDUCTING CLASS® OBSERVATIONS OF
VIRTUAL TEACHING

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Due to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, a large number of schools and programs have decided to adopt either a totally online program of instruction or a hybrid model of instruction for the beginning of the 2020 school year. This has prompted questions about whether or not the CLASS measure may be used for observing in virtual classrooms and, if so, what observers need to know prior to conducting observations.

> CLASS observations can be conducted in virtual classrooms, as the core CLASS concepts—namely, the importance of teacher-student interactions—hold true regardless of the setting.

For instance, the CLASS measure is valid for observing family child care, child care centers, school-based instruction, and after-school programs. That said, due to the lack of research on coding virtual classrooms with the CLASS measure, Teachstone recommends that data obtained in this manner be used for the purpose of professional development.

Observers should take a number of considerations into account when observing teaching outside of traditional classrooms. This document spells out general guidance for observing virtual classrooms with the CLASS measure.*

* Teachstone® recognizes that synchronous, virtual instruction is not the only way that teachers are supporting children and their families as learning moves out of physical classrooms. We will be releasing additional guidance on other out-of-classroom supports.

DEFINING THE VIRTUAL OBSERVATION

There are a variety of virtual learning models, including but not limited to:

- Asynchronous learning: Videos or online activities are posted for children/families to access without scheduled sessions
- Synchronous learning: Teachers and students meet in real time via web interface
- Hybrid model: A combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences

This document focuses on synchronous learning experiences. There are two ways to conduct CLASS observations of synchronous teaching. The first is for the observer to be present during the session. The second is for the observer to code a recording of the lesson. In both of these cases, observers can find some applicable recommendations in Teachstone's guidelines for observing from video.

GUIDANCE FOR CONDUCTING OBSERVATIONS

CYCLES

The scheduled length of time for virtual sessions will vary widely as schools and organizations implement their own guidance for virtual instruction. Some programs may have children attend virtual classrooms for 4–6 hours, while others may use shorter sessions, particularly for the youngest learners. Teachstone recommends that observers follow the observation protocol found in Chapter 2 of the CLASS manual to the extent possible (30-minute cycles: 20 minutes of observing and 10 minutes of coding). If the time planned for the virtual session does not allow for a full 30-minute cycle, we suggest observing cycles of at least 10–15 minutes. Prior to beginning the observation, the observer should discuss the schedule with the teacher to determine how long the session will last and establish cycle number and length based on this information. Below are some suggestions of how observation cycles may be completed in a live-streamed session:

- 30-minute virtual session: Two 10-minute observations cycles consisting of 10 minutes of observation and 10 minutes of coding. The observer assigns codes for the second cycle after the session ends.
- 45-minute virtual session: Two 15-minute observation cycles consisting of 15 minutes of observation and 10 minutes of coding. The observer assigns codes for the second cycle after the session ends.
- 60-minute virtual session: Two 20-minute observation cycles consisting of 20 minutes of observation and 10 minutes of coding. The observer assigns codes for the second cycle after the session ends.

While observing in this manner is not in line with the typical observation protocol, it is important to remember that virtual observations should be conducted for the purpose of formative assessment and professional development. Shorter observations are typically sufficient for these purposes. Programs/schools should develop clear protocols for cycle number and length and use these protocols consistently across observations.

THE OBSERVER AND THE CAMERA

Upon entering a virtual classroom, observers should have their camera on. This will allow observers to introduce themselves to the teacher and ask about the expected number of children for the group, if this information is not already known. Once introductions have been made, observers should turn their camera off. This will help observers to observe discreetly, without distracting the teacher or children. Additionally, observers can mute the session while they are coding, to reduce distraction for themselves.

OBSERVER FOCUS

Live-streamed observation sessions should be viewed in gallery view, even if not all children are on camera. This helps observers get a sense of how many children are talking and engaged. As observers watch the live video stream, their gaze should move across the screen. If virtual sessions are recorded for later review, we recommend that observers request that the session be set to gallery view by the person recording.

It is possible that some older children will use chat boxes to respond to teachers' or peers' remarks and questions instead of responding verbally. In this instance the observer should also monitor the chat box for conversations that may be happening.

BEGINNING AN OBSERVATION

In a typical formal observation, 50% of the expected group of children would have to be present before the observation could begin. However, we recognize that the current situation is not typical, and therefore suggest that observers begin as long as at least one child is present. Additionally, it would be ideal for at least 50% of children present to be visible on camera, but observers may continue observing as long as children are audible. If no children are audible, visible, or using tools within the platform that allow them to respond to the teacher, an observer will not be able to code teacher-child interactions.

ADULTS AND CHILDREN IN THE HOME

Observing virtually can provide additional challenges due to the presence of other adults and children in the home. In some cases, an adult or older child may assist with the lesson or technology. The interactions of non-facilitating adults and non-target children should be taken into account in coding only if they observably enhance or detract from children's experiences. For instance, a parent sitting passively at a child's side would not lower a score for effective facilitation by being uninvolved. But a parent having an audible conversation next to a child could affect the score for maximizing learning time if children were noticeably distracted.

MANDATED REPORTING

Observers should be knowledgeable about state and local mandated reporting laws. In the circumstance of any suspected abuse or neglect observed at the time of virtual observation, the observer must report the observed behaviors as mandated by law.

IMPACTS OF VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION ON PRE-K–K-3 CLASS INDICATORS

The following table outlines at the dimension and indicator level how the move to virtual settings may impact the evidence for each CLASS dimension. It also discusses some specific interactions to look for that meet the intent of these dimensions and indicators. Like the behavioral markers in the CLASS manual, the list provided here is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather, to help observers think about some different types of evidence they might capture.

This table addresses indicators and behavioral markers that may look different due to virtual learning. Indicators that are likely to be observable regardless of the virtual learning platform are not included. In instances when children are not visible on screen, observers should still note the types of interactions the teacher sets up and how children respond, whether verbally or by using a chat box, reaction buttons, or emojis within the meeting platform.

We hope this guidance is helpful in answering some of your most important questions, but we recognize that circumstances differ across the education landscape. Please use the CLASS Learning Community as a way to get feedback and dialogue with others about their approaches in this COVID-19 world. If you have thoughts you'd like to share or would like to consult directly with us, we'd love to hear from you. Email us at interactions@teachstone.com.

POSITIVE CLIMATE

Reflects the emotional connection between the teacher and students and among students and the warmth, respect, and enjoyment communicated by verbal and nonverbal interactions

Physical presence is a large part of how people connect with each other. In virtual settings, teachers must make intentional efforts to build these important connections and establish relationships, especially with children who may have recently experienced loss, heightened stress, or trauma.

RELATIONSHIPS

The lack of shared physical space in a virtual classroom session may impact the behavioral markers of **physical proximity** and **shared activities**. Additionally, if children are not on camera, this may limit observers' ability to assess **matched affect**.

However, the relationships indicator is about how **teachers and children enjoy warm, supportive relationships** with each other, and there are many other ways to observe the presence of these relationships in a virtual classroom.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers and children keep cameras on and keep their attention on each other
- Teachers and children share in virtual activities—for example, reading a book aloud or singing songs together
- Teachers and children show matched affect on camera, in their tone, or in their choice of words

POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

Teachers will not be able to provide **physical affection** in a virtual setting.

However, there are many other ways that teachers can convey **positive communication** to children.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Thumbs-ups, air fives, clapping, and other celebratory gestures
- Air hugs, air hearts, finger hearts, "I love you" signs, and other affectionate gestures
- Phrases that show intent of physical affection, such as "I would love to give you a hug"
- On-screen emojis such as clapping hands, smiling faces, and hearts

RESPECT

The virtual setting may impact evidence for the behavioral markers of **eye contact** and **cooperation and/or sharing**.

However, the respect indicator is about how **teachers and students demonstrate respect** for one another, and there are many other ways to do this.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers and/or children look at the screen when others are talking
- Teachers look directly at the camera to create the sense of eye contact with children
- Children take turns speaking and answering questions
- Children listen to one another
- Teachers greet all children by name as they enter the session

NEGATIVE CLIMATE

Reflects the overall level of expressed negativity in the classroom; the frequency, quality, and intensity of teacher and peer negativity are key to this scale

Children and teachers who have experienced trauma or higher levels of stress may demonstrate increased negativity. Nonetheless, teachers should attempt to create an environment free of all Negative Climate behaviors. Children may experience Negative Climate differently during a virtual session than they would in the classroom. For instance, negative interactions might come from non-facilitating adults and/or non-targeted children who appear on camera in a child's home. Additionally, teachers or children might make negative comments about children's home environments, or their ability to navigate technology. Punishments could include telling children to leave the session or excluding them from participating in group play or games.

While evidence for Negative Climate may look different in the ways described above, any of the standard behavioral markers could be present.

TEACHER SENSITIVITY

Encompasses the teacher's awareness of and responsivity to students' academic and emotional needs; high levels of sensitivity facilitate students' ability to actively explore and learn because the teacher consistently provides comfort, reassurance, and encouragement

Virtual learning is relatively new to children and it may take some time for them to get used to this new way of going to school. Younger children may not immediately recognize that the person they see on screen is their teacher, while older children may have difficulty navigating online learning platforms. Online formats may also make some children uncomfortable and less likely to exhibit comfort in the classroom. Teachers can support children through these challenges by showing consistent sensitivity.

AWARENESS

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- The teacher **anticipates problems and plans appropriately** by recognizing that younger children aren't used to sitting for long periods of time and building in wiggle breaks
- The teacher **anticipates problems and plans appropriately** by providing additional time for children to respond, knowing that there may be a lag in audio transmission
- The teacher **notices lack of understanding and/or difficulties** by paying attention to cues of disengagement, such as looking away from the screen and not responding
- The teacher **notices lack of understanding and/or difficulties** by monitoring the chat box and/or on-screen emoji reactions

RESPONSIVENESS

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- The teacher **provides individualized support** through the use of a breakout room or by setting up a time to meet individually with children outside of the whole group session
- The teacher **provides comfort and assistance** by verbally checking in on children regarding their academic and emotional well-being
- The teacher **provides comfort and assistance** by offering children strategies for self-soothing, such as deep breathing or self-hugs

ADDRESSES PROBLEMS

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- The teacher **helps in an effective and timely manner** to resolve problems related to navigating the online platform

STUDENT COMFORT

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- Children **seek support and guidance** related to navigating the online platform
- Children **freely participate** by answering questions, asking questions, or using the chat box
- Children **take risks** by showing themselves on camera or volunteering when the teacher asks the class for someone to help with a lesson or activity

REGARD FOR STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Captures the degree to which the teacher's interactions with students and classroom activities place an emphasis on students' interests, motivations, and points of view and encourage student responsibility and autonomy

Teachers must make a concerted effort to provide flexibility and space for expression within the structure imposed by the virtual classroom setting. While the virtual setting may limit children's access to specific roles, materials, and movement opportunities they would have had in the classroom, teachers can still provide children with choices and focus on their interests and motivations. Providing choices empowers children who have experienced trauma and high levels of stress to feel a sense of control over their environment, which is crucial for healing.

SUPPORT FOR AUTONOMY AND LEADERSHIP

Some of the typical ways that teachers **give students responsibility**, such as setting the table or cleaning up a play area, are not applicable in virtual settings.

However, there are many other ways for teachers to **enable students to be as independent as possible** within the virtual classroom.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Children choose which books the teacher will read
- Children read aloud or offer explanations to their peers
- Children take attendance
- Children lead songs and other routines

RESTRICTION OF MOVEMENT

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- The teacher **allows movement** while children are on screen, not requiring them to stay seated and still in front of the camera
- The teacher **allows movement** by offering opportunities such as stretch breaks
- There may be guidelines on how children should set up their computers, such as "keep your computer on a stable surface," but the teacher **is not rigid** in enforcing these guidelines

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

Encompasses the teacher's ability to provide clear behavioral expectations and use effective methods to prevent and redirect misbehavior

Many children will be learning new rules and procedures as they transition to online learning. Teachers can ensure that their virtual classrooms run smoothly by providing clear, explicit behavior expectations for both whole group sessions and breakout rooms. Additionally, children who have had stressful experiences during the pandemic may let teachers know through their behavior. Teachers can support these children with proactive and positive behavior management strategies.

CLEAR BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- The teacher provides **clear expectations** and/or rules for all virtual sessions, including expectations for breakout rooms and chat sessions

REDIRECTION OF MISBEHAVIOR

The lack of a physical presence will prevent teachers from employing some **subtle cues to redirect**, such as physical proximity or a light tap on a child's shoulder.

However, there are many other ways that teachers can **effectively redirect misbehavior**.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- The teacher asks a question about the current activity to redirect off-task behavior
- The teacher quickly and calmly says a child's name to redirect them

PRODUCTIVITY

Considers how well the teacher manages instructional time and routines and provides activities for students so that they have the opportunity to be involved in learning activities

Online learning calls for teachers to manage instructional time in new ways. Teachers must consider whether material is best delivered in a synchronous format, or better suited to asynchronous or offline learning. Teachers must also develop strategies to engage children in the material and ensure that all children have access to supplemental materials in advance.

MAXIMIZING LEARNING TIME

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- Teachers provide **choice when finished** by preparing alternate online activities for children who finish their work ahead of others
- Teachers ensure **few disruptions** by quickly addressing distractions that appear on camera—for example, someone's dog wandering into the frame
- **Pacing** may be impacted if teachers wait for all children to be online with materials ready before starting class

ROUTINES

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- **Students know what to do** during the session, as evidenced by their use of conventions established by the teacher—for instance, raising their hands
- **Little wandering** is observed, with children not frequently moving away from the computer/camera

INSTRUCTIONAL LEARNING FORMATS

Focuses on the ways in which the teacher maximizes students' interest, engagement, and ability to learn from lessons and activities

The virtual format may limit teachers' usual strategies for drawing children into lessons and activities, such as moving around the room and sitting down with children to join directly in their play. Additionally, children who are experiencing high levels of stress may have difficulty concentrating. In these cases, teachers will need to employ new strategies to encourage children's engagement.

EFFECTIVE FACILITATION

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- Teachers demonstrate their **involvement** by asking children questions about their work
- Teachers **expand children's involvement** by modeling how to complete a task
- Teachers **expand children's involvement** by suggesting additional ways to do things

STUDENT INTEREST

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- Children demonstrate **active participation** with verbal, chat, and emoji responses to the teacher's questions
- Children show that they are **listening** by looking at the screen, responding to the teacher, and nodding in agreement with classmates

VARIETY OF MODALITIES AND MATERIALS

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- Teachers use a **range of visual opportunities** such as holding up books or using a brief slideshow
- Teachers use **interesting and creative materials** such as short video clips or online whiteboards
- Teachers provide **hands-on opportunities** by having children do fingerplays or bring pre-assigned materials (books, paper, pencils, crayons) for use during sessions

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Measures the teacher's use of instructional discussions and activities to promote students' higher-order thinking skills and cognition and the teacher's focus on understanding rather than on rote instruction

Shortened class sessions, audio lags, and children's lack of familiarity with technology may limit the frequency, duration, and depth of instructional discussions in virtual settings. Teachers can still promote higher-order thinking skills by asking children questions and making connections aloud, even when it is not feasible to develop the topic into a discussion, and by taking advantage of moments when they can work closely with small groups to have deeper conversations. Concept Development interactions specifically directed around conversations about COVID-19 and its effects can be an important part of helping children make sense of what is going on in the world around them.

While evidence for Concept Development may look different in the ways described above, all of the behavioral markers should be present to the extent that is typical.

QUALITY OF FEEDBACK

Assesses the degree to which the teacher provides feedback that expands learning and understanding and encourages continued participation

Shortened class sessions, audio lags, and children's lack of familiarity with technology may limit the frequency, duration, and depth of back-and-forth exchanges focused on understanding in virtual settings. Teachers can still promote children's learning and understanding by responding to their comments and actions with hints, assistance, questions, information, and encouragement, even when it is not feasible to continue the exchange, and by taking advantage of moments when they can work closely with small groups to have deeper exchanges. Quality of Feedback interactions can be an important part of motivating and instilling confidence in children who have experienced high levels of stress during the pandemic.

While evidence for Quality of Feedback may look different in the ways described above, all of the behavioral markers should be present to the extent that is typical.

LANGUAGE MODELING

Captures the quality and amount of the teacher's use of language-stimulation and language-facilitation techniques

Shortened class sessions, audio lags, and children's lack of familiarity with technology may limit the frequency, duration, and depth of natural conversations in virtual settings. Teachers can still promote children's language development by encouraging peer conversations within groups and using self- and parallel talk and advanced language to provide language, even when it is not feasible to engage in a dialogue. Teachers should also take advantage of moments when they can work closely with small groups to have more authentic conversations. Language Modeling interactions can be an important part of providing children with the words they need to process and communicate their experience of the pandemic.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- Teachers help **students respond** by allowing additional time due to potential lags in audio transmission

SELF- AND PARALLEL TALK

All behavioral markers could be present to the extent that is typical, but they may be demonstrated in new ways. For instance:

- Teachers **map student action with language** by describing their actions in a shared online document or platform—for instance, "you're pointing to the circle"