What is Design to Learn?

Design to Learn was developed through a research and demonstration project funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The goal of the project was to develop a classroom-wide approach to promoting learning and independence for children who have pervasive developmental disorders (PDD), including autism. This research showed that there was a strong relationship between the learning opportunities provided in classroom activities and the development of communication and cognitive skills on the part of students (Rowland & Schweigert, 2000).

Design to Learn is an environmental inventory used to determine the learning value of a specific activity for a specific child who has PDD, autism or other severe disabilities. It may be used by teachers to identify and create opportunities for active participation and steady learning in typical classroom activities.

Design to Learn reveals to what extent a specific activity is encouraging learning and independence for a particular child and exactly how it is or isn’t doing so. The idea is that a teacher should be able to look at any activity (and ideally all activities) and pinpoint certain generic strategies that are especially conducive to learning and independence. If appropriate strategies are not in place, Design to Learn suggests ways to implement them.

Design to Learn Inventory is available for download for $15 at the Design to Learn store.

Design to Learn store



Opportunities to Communicate

It is important to target a variety of communicative intents, rather than only targeting requests. In this section we list ten common communicative intents, followed by an example of a strategy for deliberately providing an opportunity to practice or develop each intent. As noted earlier, these intents are taken directly from the *Communication Matrix* (Rowland, 1990, 1996), which may be used to assess the student's communication skills. The intents that are targeted represent those that seem to appear by about 30 months of age in most children. This is by no means an exhaustive list of intents. Many more subtle intents exist, but they are difficult to target and may require fairly sophisticated cognitive and communicative abilities on the part of the student.

Note that for these opportunities, the targeted changes may be slightly different than for other sections of *Design to Learn*. Other statements in *Design to Learn* refer to conditions that are either present or absent: if absent you will want to consider adding them to the activity. In this section, however, you may want to target change for a type of opportunity that you are already providing. In other words, you may want to change the manner in which you are presenting the opportunity. As an example, you might decide to provide an opportunity for the student to gain your attention by withholding your attention when you are in close proximity, rather than expecting the student to attempt to gain your attention when you are further away. Or, you might want to change the communicative behavior that you are targeting. You might decide that when you are in close proximity it is more appropriate or easier or more effective for the student to gain your attention by touching you rather than by attempting to vocalize for attention. Finally, you might decide to change the frequency with which you are providing a particular type of opportunity. If you are providing only one choice-making opportunity in the activity, you might decide to offer several.



F1 Gain Attention

Example: delay interaction until the student attempts to gain your attention.



F2 Request More

Example: give the student small portions of the materials or brief turns within the activity so that he must request more.



F3 Request Something New

Example: offer choices of new activities, materials, actions or partners so that the student may request something new.



F4 Request Absent Item (Symbolic only)

Example: allow student to request objects, actions or activities that are not immediately present (that is, they are out of sight, hearing or touch). This will require the use of some sort of symbolic system.



F5 Protest

Example: offer non-preferred items or violate the students' expectations to elicit a protest.



F6 Greetings/Social/Affection

Example: greet the student or make her aware of your presence to elicit a greeting, anticipatory or social response; withhold requested items to elicit "please".



F7 Label/Comment (Symbolic only)

Example: comment on or ask questions about the materials or activity to elicit comments or labels from the student. This will require the use of some sort of symbolic system.



F8 Confirm/Negate

Example: ask yes/no questions for the student to answer.



F9 Ask Questions

Example: switch roles with the student or vary a familiar routine to elicit questions from her.



F10 Direct Attention

Example: withhold your attention from an interesting event to encourage the student to direct your attention to it.

F Opportunities to Communicate

OPPORTUNITIES TO COMMUNICATE The following 10 items are communicative intents. You may provide the child opportunities to express these intents, either through presymbolic or symbolic means.	Targeted changes for this section might include how you present the opportunity, changing the frequency of the opportunity, or changing the communicative behavior you are targeting to express this intent.		
	CIRCLE IF OBSERVED	Comments/Actions	Action Dates
1 **GAIN ATTENTION** Example: delay interaction until the child attempts to gain your attention.	1st 2nd 3rd		
2 **REQUEST MORE** Example: give the child small portions of the materials or brief turns with an activity so that he must request more.	1st 2nd 3rd		
3 **REQUEST SOMETHING NEW** Example: offer choices of new activities, materials, actions or partners so that the child may request something new.	1st 2nd 3rd		
4 **REQUEST ABSENT ITEM** (Symbolic only) Example: allow child to request objects, actions or activities that are not immediately present (that is, they are out of sight, hearing or touch).	1st 2nd 3rd		
5 **PROTEST** Example: offer non-preferred items or violate the child's expectations to elicit a protest.	1st 2nd 3rd		





F Opportunities to Communicate

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	CIRCLE IF OBSERVED	Comments/Actions	Action Dates
6 **GREETING/SOCIAL/AFFECTION** Example: greet the child or make her aware of your presence to elicit a greeting or anticipatory response; withhold requested items to elicit "please".	1st 2nd 3rd		
7 **LABEL/COMMENT** (Symbolic Only) Example: Comment on or ask questions about the materials or activity to elicit comments or labels from the child.	1st 2nd 3rd		
8 **CONFIRM/NEGATE** Example: Ask yes/no questions for the child to confirm or negate.	1st 2nd 3rd		
9 **ASK QUESTIONS** Example: switch role with child or vary familiar routine to elicit questions from her.	1st 2nd 3rd		
10 **DIRECT ATTENTION** Example: withhold your attention to an event to encourage the child to direct your attention to it.	1st 2nd 3rd		



