

## Natural Environment Teaching (NET) in an Early Intervention Setting

Presented 8-8-08

By

Michelle Mistishin, BCBA, Classroom Teacher  
Danielle Vokes, BCBA, SLP and Internal Coach  
Kristin Johnson, BCBA, School Psychologist  
Western Wayne School District

## Who are we?

- Wayne County Consortium for Early Intervention
- Northeastern Pennsylvania
- The Consortium serves 3 school districts including Western Wayne, Wallenpaupack Area, and Wayne Highlands
- The Consortium serves approximately 170 students ranging in age from 3-5.

## Our History:

- The Western Wayne School District applied for participation in the Pennsylvania Verbal Behavior Project in 2003.
- The Early Intervention classroom was selected as a Project site during the 2004-05 school year.

## Our History:

- Initially, we attempted to embed verbal behavior strategies into a "typical" early intervention program.
- We selected target students to evaluate with the ABLLS (the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills).
- We developed individualized programming for target students based on the principles of applied behavior analysis.

## However...

- The demands of 10-12 students with varying developmental needs interfered with the integrity of the behavioral programming.
- The classroom was not staffed appropriately.
- The staff required extensive training in the areas of ABA and VB.
- The 2 ½ hour day did not provide enough time to implement adequate 1 on 1 teaching.

## Our Solution:

- Identify the classroom as an Autistic Support Early Intervention setting.
- Limit class size to 8 students.
- Acquire and train the required number of educational assistants to meet the students' unique learning needs.
- Professional staff pursued ABA coursework and BCBA certification.
- Extended classroom from 10 hours per week to 16 hours per week.

### [ Current Classroom: ]

- Meets from 8:30-12:30 Tuesday through Friday.
- 1 BCBA Teacher.
- 1 BCBA Speech Therapist (assigned in the classroom 3 of 4 days).
- 3 Educational Assistants.

### [ The Result: ]

- The early intervention classroom was identified as a model site for the PA Verbal Behavior Project in May 2007 and again in May 2008.
- The staff identified additional need areas, including natural environment teaching (NET) to promote best practice in the classroom setting.

### [ Additional Needs: ]

- Too much “down time” for students between structured group activities or 1 on 1 teaching sessions.
- Educational assistants did not have clear purpose when interacting with children in play.
- Additional IEP goals not addressed adequately (e.g., social interaction and play skills, etc).

### [ Our Solution: ]

- Develop Natural Environment Teaching (NET) programming to meet students' needs.
- Train educational assistants in NET programming and data collection.
- Monitor students' growth in NET setting.

### [ Our Goal: ]

- To provide opportunities for instruction away from the highly structured intensive teaching setting.
- To teach new skills and generalize mastered skills to a variety of settings and materials.
- To develop a user-friendly data collection system.

### [ Characteristics of NET taken from September 2005 Training ]

- Learner initiated activities.
- Tasks and activities vary frequently.
- Preferred items/activities chosen by child serve as basis for learner-teacher interaction.
- Reinforcement is direct and specific to the activity.
- Loose structure and multiple exemplars support generalization of concepts.

### [ Barriers and Concerns: ]

- Several students are early learners and demonstrate poor instructional control.
- Scheduling: Difficult to address all IEP goals and objectives during short duration of EI day.