



Here comes the nice weather!

Stéphanie Melanson, M. Ed.

Learning Specialist, Autism Learning Partnership

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

It can be challenging for learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to generalize their skills in different settings and contexts. When concepts are taught in the environment in which they will later be applied, it is much easier for the learner to implement those concepts effectively. Teaching in the natural environment allows team members to teach target behaviours while taking advantage of the learner's interests and the reinforcers present in the environment.

The playground or even school trips can certainly be suitable for teaching and learning certain skills. Adults working with the learners should thoroughly plan these teaching periods. Here are 7 steps that could help you plan interventions in the natural environment.

Step 1: Identify the Target Behaviour

It is important to target a specific behaviour and to define that behaviour in such a way that one can observe it and measure it. The team can use the objectives of the learner's educational plan and further specify the expected result.

Example:

Target behaviour: Ask a question to a peer (Christian will ask a question that is at least 3 words. He will not ask the same question to the same peer).

Step 2: Collect Baseline Data

As with any teaching strategy, it is necessary to collect baseline data in order to have an actual picture of the learner's current level. In the case of the previous example, the team could collect current data using the following table:

Date	Place	Number of words	Comments
<i>April 27</i>	<i>Playground (a.m.)</i>	<i>3; 4; 3; 2</i>	<i>Conversation with his friend</i>
<i>April 27</i>	<i>Classroom</i>	<i>2; 1; 4*</i>	<i>*Very good question, nice interaction</i>
<i>April 27</i>	<i>Cafeteria</i>	<i>2; 2; 3; 2</i>	
<i>April 27</i>	<i>Playground (p.m.)</i>	<i>3; 2; 1; 2; 1</i>	<i>Some frustration due to problems understanding the game</i>
<i>April 27</i>	<i>Classroom</i>	<i>2; 2; 3</i>	

Step 3: Identify Targeted Contexts for the Intervention

The team must find creative ways to integrate the teaching of specific skills into the learner's daily activities while considering his interests and motivations. If Christian enjoys playing soccer with his peers during recess, the team could target this context for intervention.

Step 4: Offer Training to Team Members

Because interventions in the natural environment occur throughout the day, it is often necessary to involve several people in the implementation of those interventions. Adults who will work with the learner should understand the target behaviour as well as the strategies used to encourage the learner to show the behaviour.

Step 5: Organize the environment to encourage the targeted behaviour

In order to offer motivating and reinforcing activities to learners, the team should:

- Choose some of the learners' preferred material or objects.
- Target a routine or a specific activity, such as recess, which occurs on a regular basis and can therefore be a predictable learning opportunity.
- Identify peers able to properly follow given instructions, if intervention requires peer participation.
- Intentionally organize the learner's environment so that he or she has to start an interaction (i.e. an adult holds on to the soccer ball so that Christian has to ask for the ball).

Step 6: Encourage targeted behaviour

If the intervention is well planned and the environment is well structured, learners should initiate the target behaviour themselves. In the case of Christian, if the objective is for him to approach peers and ask them questions, the environment could be organized so that the peers play a game he really likes at the playground. This could motivate Christian to approach his peers and ask them, "Can I play?". An adult could help Christian formulate the question properly, if necessary, but should wait until Christian starts the interaction before encouraging him.

Step 7: Collect Data and Monitor Progress

Data collection is necessary during intervention, just like for any other intervention based on Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) principles, in order to monitor learners' progress. It helps the team adjust the intervention, if needed, to help learners meet success.

Reference:

https://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/sites/csesa.fpg.unc.edu/files/ebpbriefs/Naturalistic_Steps.pdf

About Us

Autism Learning Partnership, a branch of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) in New Brunswick (Canada), is the sole provider of the Provincial Autism Training curriculum for preschool autism agencies and educational personnel in New Brunswick. The Autism Learning Partnership provides bilingual, evidence-based, high-quality professional learning and resources to support families, preschool agency personnel and educational personnel in the province, and has a mandate to establish partnerships with organizations nationally and internationally.