



WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION TEACHING (ECT)?

Environmental Communication Teaching (ECT) presents techniques that teaching Staff can use to deliver communication interventions within the student's natural environments.

A team (teacher, speech language pathologist, teacher aide, others) convenes for a series of five specialized training workshops to learn and immediately begin to apply ECT techniques.

Those attending the training will receive instruction in the use of ECT techniques and in methods for observing and evaluating the communication development of students who require augmentative and alternative communication. Feedback concerning their use of the ECT techniques with their students will be given.

There is no registration fee for the sessions but space is limited. Every team member is expected to attend all five days. Dates established for the workshop sessions held during the 2004-2005 school year are:

Day 1&2 - Sept. 23 & 24, 2004

Day 3 - Dec. 1, 2004

Day 4 - Feb. 25, 2005

Day 5 - TBA

The educational field has long realized two-fold training needs for students with severe communication disabilities. First, communication partners such as teachers, aides, therapists, and others must learn successful and efficient interaction techniques. Secondly, these techniques must be incorporated into the everyday activities of the students. These needs led to the design and development of ECT techniques. Team members who complete training in these two areas are better able to set up the environment and plan opportunities to facilitate functional communication for students. They have the methods and the means to evaluate student progress in acquiring a repertoire of communication interaction skills.

Past teams have reported increased communication, interaction, and participation from the selected target students. Communication occurred more frequently in differing settings with a larger number of partners using a variety of modes. Teams noticed that other students in their classes benefited as well from the techniques implemented.

The Assistive Technology Educational Network of Florida is approved by the CEB of ASHA to sponsor CE activities in speech-language pathology and audiology. This program is offered for 2.4 CEU's, Introductory level; Professional area. ASHA Approval of CE sponsorship does not imply endorsement of course content, specific Products, or clinical procedures.

Overview of ECT Training Program

Purpose

The purpose of this manual is to acquaint individual who may wish to replicate the Environmental Communication Teaching training project developed at Purdue University during the period of 1989-92 with the philosophy, principles, and methods involved. This project was supported by a research grant from the Office of Special Education, U.S. Department of Education (#H023C9005). This manual provides an overview of the project's design, intended audience, target population and components of the intervention approach. It also provides potential trainers with a more detailed discussion of each of the areas incorporated into the overall training process. Included within the appendices are the agendas, presentation outlines, originals of overheads, handouts, and assignments needed by others to replicate the training workshops and intervening activities.

Background and Project Design

Environmental Communication Teaching has been designed to assist classroom teams in delivering communication intervention within the context of existing natural environments. These natural environments will include a variety of educational, vocational, and community integration activities. For communication intervention to be effectively integrated into these activities, the major members of the classroom educational team must be actively involved throughout the training process. The classroom team is defined within this project as being at least the classroom teacher, the teacher aide(s), and the speech-language pathologist assigned to that classroom's students. For students at the secondary level, vocational (or community) teacher or trainer should also be included as this person may have the most frequent interactions with the students during their vocational or community skills instruction. Other support personnel, e.g., OT, PT, or vision skills specialist, may be included especially where they are in frequent instructional contact with the students.

*{In 1994-1995, PennTech staff is piloting the Environmental Communication Teaching training with children in the early intervention population. Throughout Dr. Karlan's training information, all references are made to students in classrooms. It may be necessary for the trainer to reference terminology and give Examples common to the early intervention populations and settings. Also try to remember to use "person first" language when referring to children with Disabilities.
Information in {} has been added or suggested by PennTech staff - 10/94.}*

Intended Student Population The students who are considered appropriate for ECT intervention are those who meet **one** of the following criteria:

- The student already has some **minimal competence in the “operation” of an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) approach**; e.g., an electronic device even as simple as Tech Talk, a communication board, book or wallet, a light pointer, a small set of manual signs, etc. The student need not yet be using this spontaneously or even very functionally;
- The student **can use an AAC approach to respond** in some structured “eliciting” situations;
- The student demonstrates one of the following three characteristics:
 - **some “desire” to communicate** or to make and maintain social contact or nearness, or
 - **strong preferences or dislikes** for certain people, objects, activities, or events or
 - **attempts to maintain participation** in one or two activities or events.

These students might be briefly characterized as beginning to use AAC or as being candidates for AAC intervention. It should be clearly noted that ECT has not been specifically designed or validated for use with students who are presymbolic or are very low functioning with multiple profound disabilities. While some of the techniques are strategies described within this ECT approach may, with modification, be appropriate, addressing the needs of these very low functioning students was not the primary aim of the ECT development project.

Intervention Components Taught The ECT approach integrates three major intervention components or tools: use of structural analysis and modification, use of facilitative cues, prompts, and feedback, and use of AAC techniques and approaches. **Structural analysis and modification** encompasses knowledge of the various social contexts for communication interaction, how these contexts are regulated socially, and how communicative functions are used within them. It also includes the first major tool for planning ECT interventions, namely the use of Activity-Based Objectives. Within the ECT approach, sequences of **cues, prompts, and feedback** are used to facilitate the initiation and use of age - and activity - appropriate communicative acts by students. They are used whenever an occasion for communication intervention is encountered within the educational, vocational, or community activities in which a student is involved. **Integration of AAC techniques, strategies, and devices** into the process of planning and implementing communication intervention within educational, vocational, or community activities is the first component of the ECT approach.

Workshop Design. The concepts and strategies of Environmental Communication Teaching are presented through a series of five workshop experiences. The intervals between workshops are designed to provide sufficient time for the educational teams to apply the concepts and strategies and to complete the supporting assignments. The overriding consideration for the design of the workshop series and supporting activities is that adults are learners and as such must have the opportunity to apply new knowledge and skills, to have these applications reviewed and evaluated, and to receive feedback, suggestions, and reinforcement for their efforts. Thus, a major component in the process of teaching the educational teams to use the ECT approach is feedback provided both by those who are conducting the training to the educational teams and by members of the team to each other.

The first of the five workshops is intended:

- a) to orient the participating teams to the problems demonstrated by students who use or need to use AAC and to the contributions of the communicative partner to these problems;
- b) to introduce the first two major components of the ECT approach (structural analysis and facilitative cues, prompts, and feedback); and
- c) to guide teams in their application of the ECT approach through exercises and assignments.

There are no specific topics within the first two workshop days which focus upon the use of AAC techniques; consideration of AAC is integrated into the other topics and examples. Following the first two workshops, the teams will attempt to implement the approach in selected activities and will prepare written products and videotape samples which are used by the workshop trainers as a basis for the second workshop.

The third workshop uses a working group format to focus upon the application efforts of the participating teams. Working groups of 3-4 teams are each led by a trainer in an evaluation discussion of the teams implementation activities. Using a prepared review guide, the written activity-based objectives and videotape sample for each team's sample activity are reviewed and discussed by the working group. During the interval between the second and third workshops the classroom teams continue implementation with the selected activities with their selected students. During this period, the SLP on each team is asked to observe the selected activity at least once per week for four weeks and to provide the teacher and teacher's aide with feedback as to their use of cues, prompts, and feedback following each observation. The team will prepare another videotape sample of each selected activity for each target student.

The fourth workshop follows the same format as the third and again focuses upon feedback to the teams concerning their implementation of ECT. Following the fourth workshop, the SLP is asked to continue to provide weekly observation and feedback for an additional four weeks. A final videotape sample is prepared for each target student and activity at the conclusion of this four week period.

The fifth workshop provides an opportunity for each team to make a presentation to the entire group of participating teams concerning their progress and accomplishments and those of their students.

Requirements for Classroom Teams The training process described here requires classroom teams to actively attempt to apply knowledge and strategies. The teams must make a commitment to completing the assignments and preparing the videotape samples according to the timelines requested. To facilitate their acceptance of these additional requirements, a number of strategies are employed.

First, each team is asked to focus upon no more than two students and no more than two activities for each student when selecting targets for their intervention efforts.

Second, the assignments themselves are designed to be both practical and applicable to the activities already involving their students, so that the implementation activities supplement and enhance their current educational activities.

Finally, the tone of the project should be established as being one of building over time. Participants should be made aware that activities are designed to be cumulative. Rather than being asked to accomplish everything at one time, they are asked to simply make a start and the project will assist them to achieve systematic change over time.

The remainder of this document will provide additional details for the four workshops. For each workshop, the major objectives of the workshops will be established, a discussion of the component knowledge or skills to be developed will be provided, and suggestions and guidelines for the use or development of examples and supplementary materials will be provided.

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