

A Closer Look: In the Classroom

Education is a foundation of life, and regardless of a person's mental or physical limitations, she or he has the ability to learn. For children with CdLS, like five-year-old Emily, a structured learning environment is essential to development. And throughout the learning process, teachers, like Emily's teacher, Janet, find themselves learning valuable lessons from their students with special needs.

Emily has been Janet's student at Newtown Preschool in Newtown, CT, since she was three. Although she teaches a variety of students with special needs, Janet had no prior experience with, or even knowledge of, CdLS. Throughout their years together, Janet learned about the cognitive effects of CdLS, along with how best to help Emily succeed educationally amidst her many inherent challenges.

During the 2008-09 school year, Emily attended school two full days and two half days each week. While there, she participated in physical and occupational therapy twice a week, along with daily speech therapy.

At school, Emily received one-on-one attention, which helped her focus on the task at hand and learn at her own pace. During this time, Janet used Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) techniques, which provide structured activities designed to reach a variety of learning goals. With a little help from her teachers, Emily has learned how to spell and write her name, understands and communicates more than 70 signs, counts, and colors. She also took on independent tasks, such as feeding herself and washing her hands. Towards the end of the school year, her teachers and speech therapist introduced a new "Go Talk" augmentative communication device to supplement and enhance her communication skills (see page four for more information about communication devices).

Emily's classroom has always been integrated, with about half of the students having special needs. This integration allows Emily to grow socially and learn to communicate with her peers while promoting acceptance among all classmates. Playtime focused around different play stations, in which Emily interacted with other classmates for a specific amount of time. And at "Circle time" Janet led Emily and her classmates in reading, singing and dancing, all of which were accompanied by basic sign language.





Communication between Emily's teachers and her parents was key. Throughout the year, teachers sent home daily reports of Emily's activities, behavior and accomplishments. "This communication with Emily's teachers was very important to us because we wanted to know what she was learning so we could build upon it at home," said Lori, Emily's mom. Emily has made great strides, literally. "When she first went to school, she couldn't even walk," says Lori. "Now, she's running."

This fall, she'll be running right to kindergarten.

