Using Objects and Symbols with Deafblind Learners

COMMUNICATION HIERARCHY		
Pre-symbolic Communication		
Levels	**Description of Level**	**Link to Objects**
Level One: Pre-intentional behaviour	A reflex action, such as a cry in response to being hungry, which is interpreted by the competent partner as a request for food.	When using objects with a learner who is working at a pre-symbolic level, we need to use objects that are Concrete Objects (real objects). The objects should be those used in the actual activity or event. When we use concrete objects in this way, they are called Object Cues, as they are cueing in the learner that something is about to happen. They will help the learner to develop anticipation and predict what may come next.
Level Two: Intentional behaviour	Intentional acts: a deliberate (rather than reflex) action which does not have communicative intent. E.g., pushing away an unwanted meal. Again, meaning is inferred by the competent partner.	
Level Three: Non-conventional pre symbolic behaviour	Idiosyncratic, context bound communication; where meaning is clear and intentional within a specific situation E.g., a movement which asks for a repeat of something. This communication requires the competent partner to know the learner and their idiosyncratic communication.	
Level Four: Conventional pre symbolic behaviour	Conventional early communication. This can include eye gaze or pointing or waving. Although general, the meaning can be understood by anyone.	
Symbolic Communication		
Level Five: Concrete symbolic communication	Limited use of concrete symbols to represent environmental entities - one to one correspondence between symbol and referent. Concrete Symbols: actual objects or photographs of objects themselves, which are a direct representation of the event to which they refer.	Learners may have some Object Cues and some Objects of Reference. For an object to be an Object of Reference the learner must demonstrate the following: • The learner can distance the referent in space and time from the event it refers. • Have intentional means of communication. • Understand one to one correspondence (the object is a referent to something else). • Have an

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		understanding of object permanence. When we use Concrete Objects as an Object of Reference it should be an object that is not the actual one used in the activity. E.g., a different cup than the one from which they drink from.
	Limited use of graphic symbols to represent environmental entities - one to one correspondence between symbol and referent. Graphic Symbols: a depiction of something, with a raised line drawing or an object on a card, which is representationally linked to the thing to which it refers.	At higher level 5 we can start to use Object Symbols (object attached to a card). These may start as miniature version of the object, then parts of the object and then more abstract objects.
Level Six: Abstract symbolic communication	Limited use of abstract symbols to represent environmental entities. Symbols are used singly. This can include spoken words, brailled letters and non iconic sign.	The learner is using Object Symbols which are abstract and are able use them to express themselves at a singular level.
Level Seven: Formal symbolic communication	Formal language: the use of a rule bound, grammatical system, such as speech, print, braille, sign language. At this stage, the learner will use more than two words together.	

The original Communication Hierarchy was created by Rowland and Stremel Campbell, (1987). The example above was taken from Hodges and Pease (2002), which includes and additional section within level 5.

TERMINOLOGY	
Term	**Definition**
Symbols	Symbols can be described as things that represent or stand for something else, for example a picture of a sun to represent a sunny day or a cup to represent the activity of a drink.
Tactile Symbols	Tactile is derived from the Latin word touched. Tactile symbols refer to a range of different symbols with a raised component in order for it to be perceived. They are used to support communication. They begin with concrete objects that are part of a familiar routine activity to a more abstract system. Object cues, objects of reference and object symbols are all tactile symbols.
Tangible Symbols	Tangible Symbols tends to be used the same as Tactile Symbols.

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Object Communication	Appears to be a term being used in America, which some schools in the UK have adopted. It refers to objects being used as a form of communication.
Concrete Symbol	Actual objects or photographs of objects themselves, which are a direct representation of the event to which they refer.
Concrete Object	An actual real object that is a direct representation of the event/activity. For example: a cup to signify drink time.
Graphic Symbol	An object on a card or part of an object that is a representation of something that it refers. For example: a toy spoon on a card to signify snack time. These can become more and more abstract. It can also be a raised line drawing of something.
Abstract Symbol	Arbitrary symbols such as spoken words, brailled letters or non-iconic signs.
Object Cue	An object cue is a concrete object which is used to represent a person, place or event and which is used within the actual situation or activity the object represents. E.g., Arms bands are used as an object cue for a child to inform him/her that the next activity is swimming, and these arms bands are used in the lesson. Object cues may be effective as part of a range of cueing strategies for learners at stages 1-4 on the communication hierarchy to help the learner to predict the next activity in context.
Objects of Reference	Objects of reference are concrete three-dimensional objects that are used to 'stand for' (or represent) a particular meaning or event. E.g. a piece of fake grass to represent the school field. The difference between an object cue and an object of reference is that the object that is used in the activity or event should be one that is NOT used in the activity/event. Objects of reference should only be used once a learner is able to distance the referent in space and time from the event to which it refers and has developed one to one correspondence.
Object Symbols	Object symbols are increasingly abstract three-dimensional symbols, including parts of objects, which are less related to the object themselves, and have an increasingly symbolic link to an event. Some authors use Object Symbols interchangeably with Objects of Reference which can cause confusion. Object Symbols are being used in the same way as Objects of Reference as they are a referent for something else.

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Good Practice for Using Objects
• Any objects that are used with a learner need to be personalised and meaningful to them. They need to be able to smell, mouth and mark their objects in order to identify them. Think about how the learner experiences that activity and what they might associate with it. • The learner's physical ability to manipulate objects and gain enough tactile information must be considered before objects are used. • The use of Object Cues, Objects of Reference or Object Symbols must be appropriate for the developmental stage of the learner. • Any new object must be introduced within an activity or event first before being used outside of the event or activity. • Any objects that are used as part of a learner's communication should be discussed and agreed between home and school, so that the objects can be used consistently. A communication passport is a good way to develop a consistent use of objects. • The number of objects used with a learner needs to be developed over time, depending on learners age and ability. • Objects must be used regularly and consistently for the learner to develop one to one correspondence. • The learner MUST be given time to explore the object through touch, as this type of exploration will take longer. • • In order to encourage expressive communication through the use of objects, the learner must be able to access their objects so they can initiate communication.