Literacy for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss

Symbol Hierarchy

There is a hierarchy from concrete to abstract when using symbols. Knowing an individual learner's level on the hierarchy allows educators and family members to present vocabulary words in an appropriate format. Being familiar with the progression of the hierarchy allows educators and family members to plan literacy instruction that assists learners in moving from concrete to abstract symbols for reading and writing.

Concrete Symbols are symbols that have an obvious physical relationship with the object or action to which they refer. Concrete symbols include **_tangible symbols._**

> **Tangible symbols** are two and three-dimensional objects used as symbols by learners who have difficulty understanding abstract symbols. These symbols are:
> - Typically customized for an individual child
> - Related to what they represent in a way that is meaningful to the learner
> - Permanent and manipulable
> - Can be discriminated by touch and, therefore, do not rely on sight

Abstract Symbols are the symbols that make up languages, such as speech, manual sign language and printed language. They are arbitrary in that they have no obvious relationship to the person, object, place, activity or concept to which they refer.

Hierarchy

Concrete

Abstract

- Identical object
- Partial or associated object
- Object with one or two shared features
- Tactile symbols
- Colored photographs
- Black and white photographs
- Colored line drawings
- Black and white line drawings
- Blissymbols
- Print
- Braille
- Abstract shapes and graphics

Adapted from:

Rowland, C. (2004). Communication Matrix: A Communication Skill Assessment. Design to Learn Products. Portland, OR. www.communicationmatrix.org

Rowland, C. & Schweigert, P. (2000). *Tangible Symbol Systems: Making the Right to Communicate a Reality for Individuals with Severe Disabilities*. Retrieved 2/28/13 from http://www.osepideasthatwork.org/toolkit/instpract_tan_sym.asp.

Scoggin, K. (2005). *Hierarchy of Expressive Communication.* Washington Sensory Disabilities Services.