Selection of Objects –
Further Considerations

• Selection of type of object referent depends on a learner’s visual, hearing, motor, and cognitive abilities and meaningfulness.

• It is also important are motivational issues such as one’s preferences

• Using objects to communicate about high-interest topics is much more motivating than such activities as toileting or dressing.
Further Considerations, continued

• Objects used should reflect a learner’s preferred colors, textures, and sounds. For instance, if the learner experiences a type of cortical vision impairment, it should be determined if black and white or colors such as red and yellow allow for better vision use.
Further Considerations, continued

• Age of the learner should factor into the appropriateness of object selection and use.

• Using a rattle to indicate recreational/leisure time is not appropriate for a learner in high school. A more suitable object to represent it could be puzzle pieces mounted to a piece of board or a computer mouse or a music compact disk. Each of these can represent a favored spare time activity.
Further Considerations, continued

• Objects should be:
  – **easy** to tactually discriminate—different enough from one another that the learner can tell them apart;
  – **convenient** to use in terms of portability and **accessible** so that learners can respond to them via touching, pointing, picking up or eye gaze; and
  – perceived as **pleasant** by the learner.
Further Considerations, continued

• Responding to an object should be by a means with which the learner is most capable and is most understood by others. Looking at or pointing to an object is easily understood as a response by a partner.
Further Considerations, continued

• “The specific cue that is used is not critical. However, the consistency of a cue across person, time and settings is critical if the learner is to derive meaning from those cues and demonstrate appropriate responses” (Rowland & Stremel-Campbell, 1987, p. 65).
  – For example, the cue used to specify exercise time at the fitness center should be the same whether used at home or at the high school.
Further Considerations, continued

– The learner uses a locker key at home to signify the fitness center and a membership card at school to represent the fitness center.
– Both objects are good choices, but the learner could have difficulty deriving meaning because of the lack of consistency.
– Collaboration and co-planning amongst all team members including family, can help to insure that the type of object, what it will represent, and how and when it is presented are steadfast for the learner’s sake.
Further Considerations, continued

- Activities should be **frequent** enough to provide many opportunities to utilize the object as a manner of interacting with others.

  - Going to the fitness center may occur three times a week whereas a ski trip may happen only once a year and so having a cue is not as necessary.
Further Considerations, Activity

• Assign each small group one or two activities or tasks a learner with deafblindness may be expected to do or participate in (such as riding in the car to the store or having snack in the classroom).

• Using the learner profiled in the previous activity, brainstorm ideas of objects and use of the objects to cue the activities or tasks.

• Report why those objects were selected and how they meet the considerations discussed, such as learner preference, ease of discrimination, convenience, etc.
Communicative Functions of Objects

• Just as words, signs and symbols can be used to communicate about activities, events, people, and ideas, so can objects in both a receptive and expressive fashion.

• However, it is necessary to consider why a learner at the object level would be using those items.

• What are the receptive reasons for making use of concrete items?
Communicative Functions, continued

• Objects can:
  – serve as a bridge to more abstract modes of communication such as a photograph, line drawing, or word. From understanding that a piece of chain represents a swing at recess time, a learner may progress to using a photograph of a swing, a more abstract mode.
  – assist in developing an awareness and comprehension of surroundings by signaling what is about to happen. When shown a coin purse, a learner may realize this is an opportunity to make a purchase from the concession stand.
Communicative Functions, continued

– serve as an aid to memory or a means of sequencing the events of the day or week. Having an actual object makes less of a demand on memory and recall.

• Objects used originally as receptive cues can eventually be used in an expressively, thus continuing the shared experience.
Communicative Functions, continued

• The understanding and responsiveness to objects can allow, for example, the expressive functions of protesting, requesting, and attracting attention.

• For example, looking away from an activity cue may indicate the learner does not want to participate in it.

• Extending an object may be a learner is asking for more of that activity or wanting to comment on it.
Communicative Functions, continued

- Self-determination can be realized when choices are offered in the form of objects. For a teen hanging out with friends, it is important that the learner has a choice to go to the mall (object cue= purse) or rent a movie (object cue=DVD movie case).
Communicative Functions, continued

- Some learners with severe vision and hearing loss find it difficult to attend to objects.
- Joint attention and joint action with teachers and caregivers is critical to facilitating understanding of objects and the beginnings of social interactions.
- One example of joint attention and action is touching of the object while talking about it or passing it back and forth.
Communicative Functions, continued

• Items needed to take a bath such as the washcloth, bubble bath or soap, and toys are used during the bathing routine but also provide a rich exchange.

• With consistency, these items begin to take on meaning.

• The learner is more apt to attend to the object because it serves a functional purpose within routine activities.
Communicative Functions, continued

• Because the cloth, soap and toys now have meaning and there is anticipation of the routine, it is more probable that joint attention to the object or with a partner can occur via a joint action such as bath time.

• As the learner begins to understand asking for “more” of an activity (i.e., playing tactile dominoes), he or she should be encouraged to manipulate the object itself (i.e., handing a domino on cardboard backing to a potential partner), instead of manipulating the partner (i.e., taking the partner to the game shelf).
Communicative Functions, continued

• The object itself becomes the tool to affect the environment rather than the partner.

• Thus, joint attention and action involving an object can progress into a learner utilizing that object to communicate a request, comment, choice, etc.
Communicative Functions, Activity

• Listen to the audio about the communicative function of objects at http://mast.ecu.edu/modules/db_2/lib/media/photo01a-video.html.

• Using the learner, and the objects and activities identified in earlier activities, small groups discuss what communicative function might be achieved.

• Consider with whom the communication might occur and how the identified objects can be used in receptive and expressive communication modes.
Steps in Developing Interactions

• Once it has been determined that a learner is indeed a candidate for using objects to communicate, sequential strategies can be used to expand a learner’s abilities to receive and share concepts, thoughts and ideas:
Steps in Developing Interactions, continued

1. The learner needs to display recognition of some objects as an indicator of what is going to happen in the daily routine. For instance, when Jill is given her backpack, she stands up and moves toward the door. After being handed her special blanket, she heads to her bedroom. She fusses when the pill bottle is shaken because she does not like to take medicine. Her sunglasses bring a smile to her face because she loves the outdoors.
2. When the learner shows understanding that an object represents an activity, he or she is ready to have a calendar box, in a set location, that contains an object related to an activity. When beginning to use a calendar box, use an object that is a part of the activity. Before engaging in the activity, the learner goes to the object, takes it to the activity and returns it afterwards to a different container to signify “finished.”

Talk and sign about the object and activity so that the interaction becomes social in nature and not an isolated situation. It is not necessary to have an object for every activity; rather, start with a few and be consistent in their use to facilitate comprehension.
3. More objects can be added gradually with some that are more symbolic than being an actual part of the activity. It will still be important to keep some connection that the learner can perceive. These might include a paintbrush for art class, bells for music time, or a bow for birthday parties.
4. As the learner grows in awareness, a series of boxes can be arranged with the day’s objects in order of occurrence. Again, the learner and partner can go to the boxes, look at and talk about the object which represents the next event.

Following the activity, the learner can go back to the object and place it in the “finished” box. By keeping the calendar box an interaction between the learner and partner, it remains a shared experience.
5. In due time, the learner may understand the calendar concept enough to start the day by talking about all of the objects in sequence. When doing so, it challenges the learner to use basic time concepts such as anticipating beyond the present moment, to acquire the notion of later, and to be able to look forward to the activities enjoyed most.
Steps in Developing Interactions, continued

• When this calendar routine is established, it could be made more interesting by:
  – beginning the day with all of the objects on a tray.
  – As each object is talked about, the learner can place it sequentially in the appropriate box.
  – At the end of the day, objects that are in the finished box could be commented on together.
  – Again, the interaction becomes social and communicative in nature and not in seclusion.
Here are some examples of how objects can be displayed and organized per learner’s abilities and needs.

This learner’s schedule is displayed on her desk. Her visual and motoric skills do not allow for her to physically access the objects herself. As she moves through her day, objects are taken off of her desk and handed to her so that she can be cued as to what is next in her schedule. As she finishes each activity, the object is placed in the “finished” basket. The communication partner both speaks and gestures to the learner as her day is talked about.
This learner’s vision ability requires objects to be presented on a contrasting background. As he moves through his day’s agenda, he is presented with the cues for art, woodshop, physical education, and music classes. These are all objects that are similar to the ones he uses within each of these activities.
Steps in Developing Interactions, continued

• Objects that are infused into a learner’s day serve as focal points for interaction and develop into channels for receptive and expressive functions of communication. Remember to use verbal and nonverbal input (i.e. facial expression, body position, etc.) along with the object referent.
Developing Interactions, Activity

• Being able to anticipate what is going on in our lives and what will be happening in our lives is important for all of us.

• Reflect on how many times you refer to your watch or calendars in order to prepare yourself for the next event in your day, week, month.

• This allows us to reduce anxiety, prepare for activities, anticipate enjoyable events and converse with others about what is going on in our lives.
Developing Interactions, Activity continued

- When developing an object calendar, remain consistent in the selection of and use of objects representing activities, people and places.
- Both home and school should use the same objects to refer to the same activities to avoid confusion.
Developing Interactions, Activity continued

- Developing an Object Calendar- Create an object calendar for a schedule of activities at school or in the community.
- Examples of how objects can be infused to represent the learner’s activities can be found at [http://www.unr.edu/educ/ndsip/tipsheets/objectcalendar.pdf](http://www.unr.edu/educ/ndsip/tipsheets/objectcalendar.pdf)
Use of Objects in a Daily Routine

• The following slides show how and why a learner’s day might incorporate objects to facilitate interactions and engagement with others.
• Note the functions identified for each object and its relationship to the scheduled activity.
Use of Objects in a Daily Routine, continued

• Writing the intended communication on each object referent will allow all partners to know what the learner is trying to understand or express.
Use of Objects in a Daily Routine, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Object referent and function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Morning circle time</td>
<td>Piece of carpet – acts as a <em>bridge</em> between concrete cue (i.e. the entire carpet square) to a more abstract cue such as a piece of carpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Art class</td>
<td>Art apron – serves as a <em>reminder</em> to learner that she needs to put it on for class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Sharing/show and tell</td>
<td>Name necklace – learner holds this up to attract teacher’s <em>attention</em> when she is ready to share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Preparing to go home</td>
<td>Seat belt buckle – acts as a more abstract <em>signal</em> to let the learner know to gather her things before getting on the bus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use of Objects in a Daily Routine, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Object referent and function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Walking the family dog</td>
<td>Leash – acts as a <em>signal</em> to learner about her responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Pre-meal chores</td>
<td>Placemat or wooden spoon – offers <em>choice</em> to learner for setting the table or mixing the drink for the meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Recreation/leisure</td>
<td>Headphones – learner hands these to caregiver to <em>request</em> assistance with CD player and disk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Hygiene time</td>
<td>Piece of a towel – acts as a <em>bridge</em> between concrete cues (i.e. bar of soap or hairbrush) to a more abstract cue such as the piece of towel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use of Objects in a Daily Routine, Activity

• Create a daily schedule- develop a partial daily schedule for a learner with whom you are familiar or for the learner profiled in the earlier activities.

• Each schedule should include at least four activities and at least one object referent and function for each activity.
Summary

• When looking at the continuum of communication, there are some learners with deafblindness who are at the object level of representation.

• Objects can be used by the learner as a receptive and expressive means of communication to receive and send information.

• Either dimension provides a way to establish joint attention via objects thus providing a social and communicative interaction.
Summary, continued

• Must consider:
  – the learner’s visual, hearing, motor, and cognitive characteristics before selecting the type of object to be utilized;
  – the characteristics of the object such as meaningfulness, motivation, ease of access, and others for responding; and
  – if the object can be incorporated into frequent, consistent routines.
• Once these issues are decided, objects can be selected and infused into a learner’s daily schedule, moving from the concrete to more abstract in representation if appropriate.
Focus and Reflection Questions

• What would you do to insure that objects are used with consistency across environments, people and activities?

• This is very important as objects, at least for a time, might very well be the “language” of learners with deafblindness and/or severe multiple disabilities.
Focus and Reflection Questions, continued

• Imagine if your native language were only spoken in certain circumstances, environments, or people. This could prove frustrating and debilitating in developing and maintaining communication exchanges for learners.
Application & Extension activities


For students with deafblindness or those experiencing severe multiple disabilities, books may take on a different look but still encompass the same principles: print (written or braille), a topic and a way to gain information about that topic.
Application & Extension activities, continued

- Object books incorporate tangible items which make the experience of a topic meaningful to the learner. In addition to the ideas for developing an object book on the website, further suggestions of topics and materials needed that can apply to learners of all ages include:
Application & Extension activities, continued

• Elementary: Social Studies – “A Trip to the Grocery Store”. Text could cover the experiences the learner has while shopping. Materials could include a wallet or coin purse with real money in it, a sale flyer, a canned good, an boxed item such as cereal or fruit snacks, etc.
Application & Extension activities, continued

• Middle School: Science – “Be a Paleontologist!” Text could cover what a paleontologist does and experiences while pursuing his/her career. Materials could include different fossils, digging tools, cap, sunscreen, etc.
Application & Extension activities, continued

• High School: Health – “Fit for Life!” Text could cover different types of fitness activities and the importance of keeping active. Materials could include a pedometer, swimming goggles, sweatband, water bottle, etc.
Application & Extension activities, continued


- Conversation boxes allow our students who have limited communication skills to engage with others utilizing meaningful objects.
Application & Extension activities, continued

• The “topics” of conversation could include activities that the learner participates in with family or friends.

• The following are examples of topics that different age groups might find interesting and meaningful PROVIDED THAT THE ITEMS USED ARE ENJOYED AND EXPERIENCED BY THE LEARNER!
Application & Extension activities, continued

• Elementary: A camping trip with the family might be a great experience to share with others. Phrases and materials could surround s’more ingredients, sunscreen, pinecones or stones found while hiking, tree bark, backpack, etc.
Application & Extension activities, continued

• Middle School: A shopping trip to the mall with family or friends could provide a rich exchange with others. Phrases and materials could include jewelry, perfume, coin purse with money, nail polish, lotion, cologne, a music cd, etc.
Application & Extension activities, continued

• High School: A trip to the baseball park could provide a fun conversation with others. Phrases and materials could consist of a ticket stub, a baseball, popcorn, soda straw, cap, etc.
Application & Extension activities, continued

3. Developing a Tangible Symbols Vocabulary
List- Participants will devise a template that will identify a symbol, when it will be used, what it will represent (activity, people, concepts, places) and what additional meaning or function it will possess.

- This can serve as a great communication tool between staff, home and school, related service personnel and others who interact with learners.
Application & Extension activities, continued

• A Tangible Symbols Vocabulary List is especially important when learners are transitioning between grade levels, schools, post-graduation agencies or other environments.

• If people “receiving” the learner have an idea of what is familiar and meaningful to her, they can follow through with these symbols without re-creating the wheel.
Application & Extension activities, continued

- The template might include such components as the date object symbols were added, what the symbol is and what activity, person, place or concept they represent or signify.
Self-Assessment

• A self-assessment with response feedback is available at FILL IN URL. Participants may take this assessment online to evaluate their learning about content presented in this module.
Session Evaluation

• A form for participants to evaluate the session is available in the Facilitator’s Guide.