



Using object schedules to facilitate communication for students with deaf-blindness

“The quality of life is not determined by having three signs or more; it’s determined by the quality of connection a child has to people, environment and meaningful experience.”

Jan van Dijk

Language for a typically developing child is acquired through direct interaction and as a result of incidental learning. For children with deaf-blindness incidental learning does not usually occur. Instead these children must be taught all expressive and receptive communication through direct instruction.

One way to facilitate the development of communication is to use calendar systems, also known as object schedules. Calendar systems provide a way for students with deaf-blindness to communicate using concrete objects and eventually moving to more abstract forms of communication. Calendar systems can be used to teach communication but it is important to remember that they are not a communication system.

Calendar systems help facilitate communication both receptively and expressively by providing a way for children with deaf-blindness to communicate as well as a reason for communicating.

Reasons for communicating may include: requesting, rejecting, responding to questions, social engagement and sharing information.

Calendar systems help to facilitate communication is by providing them with opportunities to make choices, participate in decision-making and turn taking.

Calendar systems develop word knowledge by linking the symbol to a word or sign.

To implement a calendar system the child’s collaborative team must first consider appropriate goals and objective for the student. These goals and objectives should specifically include:

- What information is to be communicated
- Targeted vocabulary
- Appropriate symbols, pictures, or objects to be used
- Routines for use
- Personnel responsible for consistent application

You cannot develop a calendar system; pick appropriate symbols, etc. if you do not know what you want the child to communicate. (Request, reject, initiate a conversation, make choices, use object cues, etc.) You should not begin a calendar system if activities and routines are not in place so they can be represented on a calendar.

There are many different types of calendar systems. When choosing a calendar system first consider the needs and abilities of the student. Some students may benefit from anticipation calendars that help to teach students the concept of immediate future and immediate past. Other students may use a daily calendar, which consists of several items in a calendar system that helps with sequencing daily activities.

To begin using calendar systems choose the activities that your student will participate in daily. The team should begin with a few activities and then add to the number of activities slowly. Choose objects to represent each activity, keeping in mind that the objects you choose must be meaningful to the student. In order for the student to anticipate an activity is about to occur give the student the object from the calendar system. Give the student time to handle the object and explore. Talk about the activity. Take the student where the activity is going to occur immediately. When an activity is completed give the student a “finished basket” so the student will develop the concept of “finished”. Placing an object in a “finished basket” cues the student that an activity is finished. Always set up the calendar system in the same location in the classroom making sure you bring the student to the object. You do not want to bring the object to the student.

One way to develop pre-symbolic object-based communication is to give the student a basket of all of the objects on their calendar system to explore. If the student picks up an object and plays with the object take the student to that activity, talk about the activity and finally complete the activity with the student. If a student begins to search for an object in the basket then they are demonstrating pre-symbolic object-based communication. www.oregondb.org

Below are steps to remember when using a calendar system. (*Taken from the Texas school for the Blind*) www.tsbvi.edu

- Find the symbol
- Dialogue about the activity
- Find the materials
- Travel to the place
- Complete the activity
- Put materials away
- Carry the symbol back to the calendar
- Discuss the activity that just took place
- Return the calendar symbol to the calendar or finished box and designate as finished."

Students with significant cognitive delays to include deaf-blindness will need extensive time to learn and use a calendar system. Lots of repetition and experience will be required before meaning can be attached and learning occurs. It is important to remember that it may take months or even years before a student comprehends and uses a calendar system. Symbols will change over time as the student learns to recognize them so it is important that collaborative time with other team members occur in order to evaluate objects and activities associated with the calendar system.

Examples of Calendar Systems

