Motor Considerations for Signed Communication

California Deafblind Services
Virtual Training
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Thank you to Marsha Dunn Klein for her amazing resource

*Pre-Sign Language Motor Skills*
And thanks to Dr. Deborah Chen for sending me her copy!
Five Parameters of Signs

- Hand shape
- Palm orientation
- Location
- Movement

Imitation Basics

- Gross movements (e.g., big arm movements) before fine movements (e.g., fingerspelling).
- Movement toward the body (e.g., WANT, LOVE) before movement away from the body (e.g., THANK YOU, BAD).
Imitation Basics

• Movement toward midline (e.g., MORE, SHOE) before movement away from midline (e.g., LARGE, DIFFERENT).

Sign Basics

• Signs that are the most iconic might be easiest to learn (e.g., TOOTHBRUSH, DRINK, COMB).
• Signs where the hands touch the body (e.g., MOM, HUNGRY, HAPPY) or at least where the hands touch each other (e.g., SAME, CANDY, COOKIE) might be easier to do.
Sign Basics

• Signs that are within the child’s visual field (e.g., TOILET, MILK, BLUE) might be easier to do than signs outside of the visual field (e.g., COMPUTER, DIAPER, RABBIT).

• Signs in which right and left hands mirror the same bilateral parameters (e.g., PLAY, MORE, WANT) might be easier to do than those that don’t (e.g., SHOW, HELP, POTATO CHIP).

Sign Iconicity (As Rated By People Who Are Blind)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Iconic</th>
<th>Least Iconic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>up</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eye</td>
<td>potato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nose</td>
<td>medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toothbrush</td>
<td>what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baby</td>
<td>store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cry</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drink</td>
<td>who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>door</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big</td>
<td>color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rain</td>
<td>number</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Hand in Hand: Selected Reprints and Annotated Bibliography on Working with Students who are Deaf-Blind by Pickett, Joffe, Rafałowski Welch, and Huebner. Published in 1995 by AFB Press.
Emilie’s Conundrum

What to do when fine motor skills or abilities limit the number of ways in which the four sign parameters can be combined to make specific signs?