

### Using Objects of Reference (OOR)

An 'object of reference' is, as the name implies, an object which has a particular meaning associated with it. For example, a spoon may be the OOR for dinner. The object is closely associated with and comes to represent a **Person**, another **Object**, a **Location** or an **Event (POLE)**. These objects **need to be used consistently** to give the learner information about what is going to happen and can be used to support the development of their understanding.

So OOR are basically a simple method of communicating, initially to inform the learner of what is going to happen next and then for them to use to make choices and requests.

The objects should have relevance for that learner, for example, an orange arm band to represent swimming is not suitable if they use a different flotation aid.

#### Procedures

- OOR are kept in an OOR bag. New users will need to be provided with their own OOR bag containing a suitable set of OOR.
- OOR should be safe for unsupervised use.

#### Types of OOR

There are at least three 'types' of OOR schemes: **shared**, **differentiated** and **individualised**.

##### Shared

Under a shared scheme, all learners use exactly the same OOR to represent a particular **POLE** within their daily lives (for example: all learners use an identical cup to represent a drink).

##### Differentiated

Under a differentiated scheme, all learners would use the same object but the object itself may vary (for example: all users use a cup to represent a drink but each learner has his or her own particular cup – different styles, colours, shapes, textures are allowed).

##### Individualised

Under an individualised scheme, one learner may use a cup, another user might use a straw, and yet another any item used specifically at this time.

### In a preschool/school setting where several children are using OOR

**Shared** schemes are seen as easier to maintain and to manage. Communication, by definition, should be shared. In order for individuals to communicate with each other they have to share symbol sets. Communication between peers would be impossible with individualised symbol sets. OOR can be used at a number of levels:

#### 1. Real life objects used in the activity

Involving an actual object that the child uses in an activity; a cup that is used every time he or she has a drink would become an object of reference for a drink.

- Example: Chris enjoys cooking. He has a wooden spoon that is kept on a piece of card but is removed and given to him to indicate that the cooking activity is about to begin. He uses the spoon in the cooking, and when the activity is finished the spoon is replaced on the card until next time it is used.

#### 2. Objects not used in the activity

A different cup could become an object of reference, a smaller one perhaps, or just using a part of one, e.g. the lid or handle. (This would be useful if the child uses a large amount of objects to reduce the space they take up).

- Example: Jatinder enjoys cooking. He has a wooden spoon mounted on a piece of card that indicates cooking. The spoon stays on the card and is not used in the activity.

#### 3. Objects with a shared feature

An object of the same material/feel could be used.

- Example: Lucy enjoys sitting in the swing chair, which is made of cane material. She has a small twig of this to indicate 'swing chair'.

#### 4. Miniature Objects

A miniature representation of the item could be used.

- Example: Nazma has a miniature spoon from the dolls' house to indicate 'dinner'. At school her teacher lays out a number of miniature objects each day to indicate the sequence of activities. Nazma uses a miniature brush for 'washing face or brushing hair' and a miniature car for 'going in the car'. Most of Nazma's objects are miniature but these have only been chosen because she has demonstrated that she understands the connection between the object and the activity.

### How to use OOR

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- Make sure your learner has a set of OOR.
- Initially the learner's OOR set will be limited in number. Start with 3 to represent very frequently occurring events (personal care, break, and meal). The more frequently the OOR can be reinforced the greater the chance the learner will develop understanding of what it represents.
- As the learner becomes more familiar with OOR, more OOR may be included in their OOR bag.
- OOR should be presented **immediately** prior to a change of POLE.
- On presentation of the OOR staff should move with the learner to the POLE with NO delay. If there is a need to open doors to allow for the movement of a wheelchair, for example, then the door should be opened prior to the presentation of the OOR.
- The learner should be encouraged to take the OOR directly from the OOR bag. The bag should be presented with the appropriate OOR at the fore. If the learner is physically unable to take the OOR the adult should assist the learner.
- The adult should always accompany the presentation of an OOR with **simple language** and **sign** where applicable. Encourage the learner to interact with the OOR's sensory aspects, i.e. the feel, sound, look of it. If the learner has physical problems in interacting, the adult may assist with this process by (for example) gently rubbing the OOR on the learner's skin (where the feel of the OOR is seen as important).
- Where possible, the adult should allow the learner to lead the way to the POLE on presentation of the OOR. Does the learner demonstrate an understanding of where s/he is going? If the learner is obviously 'lost' then the staff member should guide the learner to the POLE allowing the learner to lead taking the final few steps into the room.
- When the POLE is reached the learner should return the OOR to the bag. Learners must never return from a POLE clutching the OOR for the POLE as this presents a very confusing message.
- It may only be after many thousands of presentations that a learner may begin to make an association between OOR and the POLE. Therefore, it is essential that adults are consistent and diligent in their use of OOR.
- Where possible, the OOR may itself be labelled with a symbol/photo of it (laminated and attached to the OOR with a treasury tag) when presenting the OOR to the learner, the fact that the two are paired allows opportunity for future progression to symbols.
- When learners indicate a need for their OOR bag or present an OOR to an adult, the adult should **immediately** react to this presentation as if it is intentional i.e. the learner really

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meant to communicate. They should move to the POLE or provide the requested object or event. The OOR should then be returned to the bag, as is the normal procedure.

- Once the OOR have been fully established, they should be used to give the learner an element of choice in their day; once they understand what each object represents, they may be able to indicate a choice, perhaps through eye pointing, reaching, etc.
- Learners should take their OOR sets with them if they move on from the school.

### Problem Solving

- The learner drops or throws the OOR. The adult should pick up the OOR and repeat the activity. This should happen approximately three times on each occasion. The adult can then carry the OOR him/herself and accompany the learner to the new POLE occasionally displaying the OOR for the learner to see.
- The learner ignores the OOR. The adult should attempt to get the learner to acknowledge the presence of the OOR and then place it in line of vision (on the learner's knee for example) before moving to the POLE.

### See also

Ockelford, A (2002) Objects Of Reference, RNIB , London

Objects of reference: Supporting understanding no commentary  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHPcV\\_Vb45M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHPcV_Vb45M)

Objects of reference: Supporting choice with commentary  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcJfP5Myd8>