

Iacono, T. A. (1986). *A comparison of physical shaping and imitation techniques in teaching signs to intellectually disabled individuals*. Unpublished master's thesis, Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences, Victoria, Australia. Carl Parsons (Advisor): 101 pages of text, 139 references, 4 appendices, 10 tables, and 2 figures.

This study compared the techniques of physical shaping and imitation in teaching signs to two groups of intellectually disabled individuals who varied according to the level of their disability.

A total of 40 individuals from schools for the intellectually disabled participated as subjects. Of these subjects, 20 were classified as profound-severe and 20 were classified as moderate-mild according to the results of a measure of adaptive functioning. An equal number of subjects from both groups were randomly assigned to either a physical shaping or an imitation treatment condition. The subjects were taught two basic signs from the Makaton vocabulary.

The results indicated that the moderate-mild group required fewer training trials and fewer prompts than the profound-severe group ( $p < .05$ ) to learn the signs. No significant interaction between the two treatment conditions was found ( $p > .05$ ). A failure to demonstrate any improvement in learning the signs was found in four of the profound-severe subjects in the imitation condition. All subjects in the physical shaping condition evidenced some improvement. A significant correlation was found between the subjects' performance in learning the signs and the variable of level of intellectual disability, mean length of utterance, and performance on gestural imitation probes.

The results indicated that moderately to mildly intellectually disabled individuals require fewer training trial to learn signs, but that those who are profoundly to severely retarded may require significantly more training and that some may fail to learn signs all together. Factors which were found to correlate with performance in learning the signs were not accurate indicators of success with some subjects. The implications for the use of correlational findings in determining prerequisite skills for entry into sign programmes were discussed. Although the study failed to find a difference between the two treatment conditions, physical shaping was recommended on a trial basis for those who are profoundly to severely disabled and who may be non-imitative. The applicability of group designs to the population of intellectual disability was questioned in light of the problems on obtaining an adequate number of subjects and the marked heterogeneity found between subjects.