



# STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

Internal Communique • Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled

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## DYNAMIC LEARNING MAPS: English Language Arts Texts Questions and Answers

### How are texts presented to students?

Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) stories and informational texts are presented in a “page-by-page” or screen-by-screen format within English Language Arts (ELA) testlets, with one to three sentences per screen and a photographic illustration. This parsing of the text is intended to mirror the format of beginning texts found in the primary grades and decrease the cognitive demands as the complexity of the texts increases marginally across the grades. A systematic analysis of text complexity across grades is currently underway. In general, the amount of text per screen increases within grades by the linkage level. The amount of text per screen also increases across grades, with progressively more text on screen starting in Grade 6 through high school.

### Why do students read DLM texts twice in an assessment?

DLM embraces a dynamic model of text comprehension (Rapp & van den Broek, 2005; Sparks & Rapp, 2010). From the dynamic view, it is necessary to consider both online processes engaged *during reading* and the actual information *represented as a result of those processes* (Rapp & Kendeou, 2007, 2009). In a DLM ELA testlet, students first read a story or informational text in its entirety in order to initiate this dynamic process of text comprehension. Then, students read the text a second time. In the second reading, items are presented embedded within and/or at the conclusion of the story or informational text. Embedded items are designed to assess student recognition, identification or understanding *as he or she comprehends a text*. Conclusion items assess student *understanding or memory of elements from the text*. The paired readings allow for a variety of assessment opportunities in the second reading while reducing the cognitive load required to represent and remember text elements.

### Why do the texts seem so simple?

DLM texts are written to maximize readability. DLM’s Claim 1 in ELA is “Students can comprehend text in increasingly complex ways.” To provide access to a wide range of students taking the DLM assessment, we have held the surface complexity of the text relatively constant, while increasing the complexity of the tasks students take between linkage levels within a grade as well as across grade levels. DLM texts are also very brief (50-200 words) to allow for paired readings without imposing an undue test administration burden.

### How do you account for the diversity of student ability in the DLM ELA Assessment?

DLM has adopted a stratified model of reading comprehension for use in test development, which is represented in The Learning Map. Each EE has a target node. Each EE target is linked in the map to precursor skills. The precursor skills often precede traditional notions of reading comprehension. Many items associated with precursor skills are not traditional reading comprehension items. In these testlets, the story or informational text provides a context for assessment, but is not the target of assessment content. An example of a skill identified as an ELA precursor in the DLM system is “can determine similar or different based on physical characteristics.” This skill is found at the distal precursor level for RI.3.8: Identify two related



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points the author makes in an informational text. Being able to identify similar or different objects based on physical characteristics is not a reading comprehension skill; however, it is a critical skill on a developmental trajectory toward the eventual ability to identify relationships between points made in a text.

### Where do you get the photos?

DLM uses free, publicly available photos from the Creative Commons section of Flickr. As each text is written, the photos are identified from among the millions of photos that people have contributed to Creative Commons. Given the number of texts being created to support the dynamic aspects of the DLM assessment (approximately 1,000 by spring 2015), it is not possible to source photos that are created specifically for the text. Instead, the best possible set of photos is selected. Some of the DLM texts authored early in the item writing process used photos that did not consistently represent characters in stories. Those photos are being replaced and all texts in the operational DLM assessment will consistently represent important text elements. It is also important to note that the photos intentionally play a secondary role in the DLM texts. The intent is to ensure that the text can be fully understood *without* reference to the photos, *and* that the text cannot be read only through reference to the photos. The goal is building text comprehension rather than the ability to interpret images.

## Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Strategies

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It is important to implement strategies that address the needs of the *individual*. We recommend that you apply these strategies across home, school, and community contexts.

### Communication

- Ensure that the student has a way to appropriately express their wants and needs.
- Identify and establish appropriate functional communication system (e.g. sign language, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), voice output, etc.).
- Ensure that the student has access to their (portable) communication system across all contexts, all of the time.
- Reinforce communication attempts (e.g. their gestures, partial verbalizations) when the student is non-verbal or emerging verbal.
- Understand that picture schedules and functional communication systems are NOT the same thing; they do not serve the same purpose.
- Paraphrase back what the student has said or indicated.
- Simplify your language, highlighting what is important. For example, for a non-verbal student, simply say "Sit in chair" instead of "Sit in your chair please."
- Label areas in the room with words and pictures.
- Use sequencing cards to teach order of events.
- Use clear and unambiguous language.
- Avoid sarcasm (students with autism may have a hard time understanding).
- Explicitly teach the meaning behind puns, idioms, figurative language, etc.
- Try to be as literal and clear as possible.
- Use words in addition to gestures and facial expressions.
- Help student interpret conversations.
- Remind other students that some students may not get jokes or non-verbal language.
- Repeat instructions and check for understanding.
- Use short sentences when giving instructions.
- Engage student in role-plays to target reciprocal conversation.
- Program for generalization of communication skills across all contexts.

### Socialization

- Do not take rude or aggressive behavior personally.
- Recognize that the target for anger may not be linked to the source of that anger.
- Be aware that student may feel very uncomfortable with eye contact.
- Work to expand the student's reinforcer and leisure activities repertoire; work to increase social reinforcers and activities.
- Pair existing reinforcers with new activities to expand repertoire.
- Explicitly and frequently teach social rules and skills, such as turn-taking and social distance.



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- Break down social skills into non-verbal and verbal components.
- Explain rules/rationales behind social exchanges.
- Target perspective-taking skills.
- Teach student to accurately label his/her own emotions.
- Use cartoon conversations, coping comics, and thought stories to teach social responses.
- Be aware of teasing by peers; teach and rehearse appropriate responses to bullying.
- Explicitly teach discrimination between private versus public behaviors.
- Provide modeling and role-play opportunities to teach social skills.
- Program for generalization of social skills across all contexts.
- Build social interactions around common interests.

\*Social Stories can be used to teach social skills to children with autism. A situation, which may be difficult or confusing for the student, is described concretely. The story highlights social cues, events, and reactions that could occur in the situation, the actions and reactions that might be expected, and why. Social stories can be used to increase the student's understanding of a situation, make the student feel more comfortable, and provide appropriate responses for the situation. We recommend that you incorporate visuals into the stories as well. These visuals can be drawings created by the student, imported images from Google, picture symbols / icons, or photographs.

### **Restrictive, Repetitive, and Stereotyped Behavior**

- Reinforce desirable behaviors that serve as alternatives to inappropriate behaviors (teaching the student what to do rather than what not to do).
- Provide clear structure and a set daily routine.
- Ensure that the student knows the day's schedule at the start of each day and can reference schedule throughout day.
- Vary the activities within the daily schedule so that the student does not become inflexible about the sequence of the schedule or routine itself.
- Provide warning of any change of routine, or switch of activity. Present this warning visually.
- Be aware that some change in manner or behavior may reflect anxiety (which may be triggered by a change in routine).
- Be aware of bright lights, loud noises or too much touching.
- Teach student to accurately identify how they feel as often as they can.
- Provide student a "time out" pass for a few minutes of free time to leave the classroom.
- Set up a special time-out location, so student has a place to go to take a break (could be a quick trip to the restroom or water fountain).
- Encourage students to keep their noise levels down.
- Have a "hands to yourself" rule to respect personal space of all students.
- Organize classroom and teach students how to use and maintain organization.
- Ensure understanding of all assignments and tasks (and materials needed).
- Develop routines for organizing materials and work completion.
- Ensure consistency of expectations among all family members and staff.
- Create a structured environment with predictable routines.
- Create a picture schedule with daily routine.
- Allow student opportunities to move during instruction.
- Use consistent classroom routines.
- Teach student to identify signs of stress, anxiety, anger, etc.
- Use visual organizers to help student evaluate appropriate alternatives to maladaptive behavior.
- Use visual scales to label escalating emotions (e.g. 1-5 scales, Volcano scale).
- Teach and practice coping strategies to reduce anxiety, stress, anger, etc.
- Develop a coping plan; rehearse plan with student when they are calm.
- Introduce opportunities for free writing, journaling, or drawing to express feelings.
- Create a "calming area" or a "sensory area."
- Provide stress release activities or items, such as drawing, brushing, squeeze toys, weighted blankets, headphones, and music.
- Be aware of signs of anxiety or difficulties a student may be having with sensory and emotional overload (hands over ears, plugging ears, or repetitive behaviors, like rocking).
- Allow student to avoid certain activities which may cause anxiety (e.g. large assemblies).
- Minimize verbal demands when the student is upset, or escalating. Use visuals instead.



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- Provide clear, explicit feedback on behavior.
- Set up consistent written rules for each classroom.
- Use color-coded system for behavior and class participation.
- Use an individualized points system/token economy to increase target behaviors.
- An individual with autism might display behavior that can confuse others, particularly in public places. We have provided printable cards (<http://www.do2learn.com/disabilities/autismcard.htm>) that might be used by parents, teachers or friends to indicate to strangers what is happening. They are designed to be folded in half to be business card size. They can be handed out or just laminated and shown as needed.
- Behavior management techniques can be used in the home, school, and community settings. Functional Behavior Assessments/Behavior Intervention Plans can be created by examining a student's specific problem behavior, identifying antecedents, understanding consequences that maintain the behavior, and developing strategies to reduce the inappropriate behavior and increase desirable behavior.

### **Daily Living**

- Explicitly teach grooming and dressing skills as needed.
- Break down/task-analyze skills into steps.
- Model targeted skills, then provide practice opportunities.
- Systematically fade prompts to promote independence.
- Teach occupational awareness and exploration, as appropriate.
- Explain rationale behind essential grooming and self-care skills.
- Teach material in relevant contexts.
- Program for generalization of targeted skills.
- Reinforce students for generalizing information across material or settings.
- Use visual schedules and reminders to teach daily living skills.
- Explicitly teach safety and community awareness skills as needed.
- Teach students to provide personal identification information when asked.
- Target functional academics that will best prepare student for independent living and vocational contexts.

### **Academics and Organization**

- Minimize distractions, or provide access to an individual work area.
- Teach what "finished" means, and help student understand when something is finished.
- Break down large assignments into manageable parts.
- Use various means of presentation - visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, etc. Keep in mind that many students with autism tend to process information much better visually than verbally.
- Try to link work to the student's interests.
- Intermix high probability tasks (easier tasks) with lower probability tasks (more difficult tasks).
- Explore computer-based learning.
- Allow access to narrow interests/obsessive behavior as a reward, break activity, or calming activity (but clearly establish rules regarding frequency and duration of access).
- Give fewer choices to reduce confusion.
- Select repetitive motions when working on projects.
- Keep voice low and clear when teaching.
- Use visual schedule along with visual reminders.
- Use picture icons and social stories to encourage appropriate behavior and to maintain attention.
- Use a picture or other system to list the procedures and tasks to be completed.
- Give students a visual menu of appropriate behaviors to use when they become agitated or overwhelmed.
- Use visual reminders of transition times and activities.
- Use a work system to clarify the following: How much work to do, what is the work, when finished, and what's next?
- Provide frequent breaks in response to sensory and attention issues.
- Structure the layout of the room so students know where work areas are located.
- When using worksheets, highlight directions and number the steps to complete tasks.
- Explain the purpose of all activities.
- Provide rubrics or rules with due dates for each part of a multi-step or multi-part assignment.
- Create a color-coding system to keep track of due dates.
- Encourage students to summarize and paraphrase.
- When doing group work, provide a list of clear expectations and tasks for each member.
- Use peer buddies.



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- Teach student how to use and organize daily schedules and planners.
- Set up a routine and procedure for homework, long-term assignments, and tests.
- Laminate daily schedules and place on the student's desk or in the front of a binder.
- List tasks or work assignments to be completed during the day that can be checked off.
- Create a color-coding system for pocket folders or binders in each subject area.
- Separate binder or folder into sections for assignments, homework, and handouts.
- Use notes to prepare or calm students during stressful times.

Certain professionals in the school can provide services to students with autism. Speech-language therapists can help students improve their ability to communicate and interact with others. Occupational therapists can help students with motor skills and find ways to modify tasks. Physical therapists can provide activities and exercise for students that help with motor control and improve posture and balance.

No medications have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration specifically for the treatment of autism, but some medication can treat some of the symptoms associated with autism.

## **DESE'S DEBORAH SANDERSON – BRINGS CREATIVITY AND DETERMINATION TO STUDENTS AT MAPAVILLE SCHOOL**

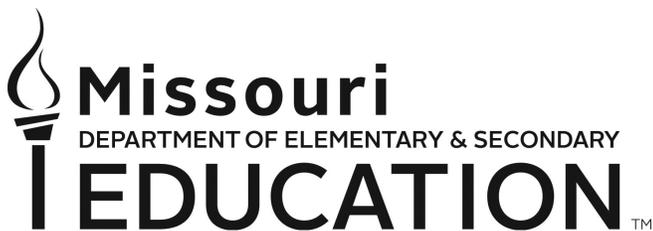
*Posted on Apr 10, 2014 In the Spotlight! Provides a way to let Missouri leaders and citizens know about state employee accomplishments—at work and in our local community.*

For 35 years, Ms. Deborah Sanderson has worked as a teacher with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Mapaville School for the Severely Disabled teaching primary students and all new students age 5 that come to Mapaville School.

Debbie always extends a warm welcome and open arms to her new students and all students in her classroom no matter the challenge. She takes on challenges and turns them into goals for her students. It is amazing the changes the students make under the direction of Debbie.

A few years ago Debbie had a student in her classroom that the parents were told would never walk. Debbie's creativity and patience in working with this student brought determination to the point this student is now walking with minimal guidance. This is just one story of many that shows the triumphs and hurdles the students overcome.

Because of Debbie's creativity, patience, determination, structure, and consistency she deserves to be recognized for her many years of hard work and service to the students at Mapaville School.



**MISSOURI SCHOOLS FOR THE SEVERELY DISABLED**

Website: [dese.mo.gov/special-education/missouri-schools-severely-disabled](http://dese.mo.gov/special-education/missouri-schools-severely-disabled)

**NOTE:** If you have items of interest for Staff Highlights, please call 573-751-0706, 800-735-2966 (Missouri Relay) or forward them to Debbie Downing, Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled, P.O. Box 480, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480; or send an email to [debbie.downing@dese.mo.gov](mailto:debbie.downing@dese.mo.gov).