

## The Derbyshire Language Scheme Assessments

The DLS tests are used to establish the child's level of comprehension and expressive language.

In the DLS tests the child can indicate his understanding by carrying out a simple activity or pointing at an object or picture in response to the teacher's request.

The level of difficulty of the request is measured by counting the number of words which the child must understand in order to respond correctly. These are referred to in the DLS as 'information-carrying words'. For instance, if during snack time an adult held out her hand and said to the child 'Give me your cup, please', this request, given the context, is only considered to contain one information-carrying word (ICW) – 'Cup'. The word 'cup' alone was enough for the child to react appropriately.

A request which contains one ICW is described as being at the SINGLE WORD COMPREHENSION LEVEL. If it contains two ICWs, it is at TWO WORD COMPREHENSION LEVEL, and so on.

Judging whether words in a statement or request are ICWs depends on an analysis of the information available to the child from the context in the adult is speaking. We have already seen in the above example that gesture may be important but there may be other clues for the child to the likely meaning of what the adult is saying. For example, if an adult gives the child a flannel while stood at a sink and says 'Now clean your face', the child may not understand a single word. However, if he is used to wiping his face with the flannel as part of a daily routine he may still do exactly as asked.

The DLS comprehension assessment has been constructed carefully so that you can be sure that when a child responds correctly it is due to him actually listening to what is said. In the various test items all contextual clues are carefully controlled. The following are some examples:

The child is presented with a group of objects and asked to give the teacher one of them. The teacher might say 'give me the cup' putting her hand out to indicate she wanted one of the items. The 'Give me' part of the request is redundant and the child can select the correct object only by understanding the name of the object. The request contains one ICW and is at the SINGLE WORD COMPREHENSION LEVEL.

The child is instructed to move one of several objects to one of two or more places as in 'Put the brick on the plate'. This request contains two ICWs – 'brick' and 'plate' and is at the TWO WORD COMPREHENSION LEVEL. Note that understanding of the preposition 'on' is not being tested and any attempt to bring the two objects together is treated as a success.

If the prepositions are to be assessed, the child might be told to 'Put the knife under the plate'. The request now contains three ICWs (i.e. name of object, preposition, and place) and the request is at the THREE WORD COMPREHENSION LEVEL. Note that that putting a knife under the plate is not

the most natural thing to do; the child would normally put a knife on the plate or perhaps next to it.

At the FOUR WORD COMPREHENSION LEVEL the request contains four ICWs. For instance, the child may be presented with some doll's house figures and several pieces of furniture. The request is 'Make daddy sit down under the table'. In this example, the name of the figure, the action, the preposition and the place all have possible alternatives.

The important point to note is that in order for any word in a request to be considered as an ICW the child has to be forced to make a choice about what to do. Consider the following example. The child is playing with a doll, a teddy bear, a toy chair and bed. The teacher asks the child to 'put the teddy on the chair'. The child does not respond and the teacher models what to do saying 'Here's the teddy. I'll put him on the chair. Teddy's on the chair. Now you put dolly on the bed'. A superficial analysis may suggest that this request is at the TWO WORD COMPREHENSION LEVEL. However, the teacher has moved the teddy and only the doll is left near the child and he has clue that he is being asked to do something with the doll. Also, there is only one place left free as the chair is occupied by the teddy bear. Thus, the request may simply act as a signal for the child to do the most obvious thing possible in the context and he is likely to be successful regardless of his level of comprehension.

The comprehension level is indicated not only by the number of ICWs which the child can remember and act on but also the number of times he hears the request. He should hear it once only. If the request is repeated, the child may succeed by taking in the information in several parts. The DLS manual gives the following example in relation to a teacher asking a child to 'wash the little doll'. The child washes the large doll instead and the teacher, knowing the child has the concept of big and little, says 'No, wash the little one'. The child washes the little doll and the teacher scores him as having passed the request at a THREE WORD COMPREHENSION LEVEL. This is incorrect. The child does understand 'big' and 'little' but he could not take in all three ICWs on a single request.

The statements mentioned so far are all examples of COMMANDS where the child has been asked to carry out some simple activity. The DLS assessment also sets out to establish whether a child can understand a DESCRIPTION of an activity being carried out by someone else, e.g. 'Which Teddy is sleeping?' 'Which man is painting a house?' etc. This ability could be assessed using real events, models etc. In the DLS scheme, pictures are used that provide contrasts for the words being tested. For example, a child is asked to identify a picture which illustrates a description of a PERSON carrying out an ACTION in a stated PLACE using the following pictures:

TARGET PICTURE	Man sleeping in an armchair
PERSON VARIED	Baby sleeping in an armchair
ACTION VARIED	Man sitting in an armchair, reading
PLACE VARIED	Man sleeping in a bed

If the child only understands two of the ICWs, there is a high probability of success. Therefore, several sets of similar pictures are used. That way, if the child is consistently successful, the teacher can be sure that the child is at a THREE WORD

## COMPREHENSION LEVEL.

Beyond the FOUR WORD LEVEL, the aim of comprehension activities alters and so does the assessment of comprehension. The comprehension activities of LEVELS FIVE to TEN are aimed to teach the child to respond to a sequence of two commands and also provide a suitable framework for the more advanced stages of expressive language.

In order to introduce the new style of activity the level of comprehension difficulty of the request is reduced. Once the child is able to carry out two activities the difficulty is gradually increased; at LEVEL 7 it is at a similar level of difficulty to FOUR WORD COMPREHENSION LEVEL tasks.

The numerals for Levels 5 to 10 do NOT indicate at level of comprehension difficulty; for instance, LEVEL 5 does not mean that requests contain five ICWs. The numeral simply refers to a group of teaching activities used with a child who is at the appropriate stage in language development.

### The Purpose of the Assessments

A Rapid Screening Test (RST) contains five items which test the child's comprehension ability over a narrow range of sentences. This should establish an approximate level of ability which then serves as a starting point for a more detailed assessment using a Detailed Test of Comprehension (DTC). Each item in the RST is cross-referenced to the section of the DTC which is felt to be of an equivalent level of difficulty.

The tests in the DTC are arranged in order of difficulty. The child is tried on increasingly hard items until gaps in his understanding or expression have been established. This assessment indicates the targets and activities for an individualised language teaching programme.

The DTC also allows opportunities for eliciting expression from the child. On Toy Play tests this is carried out by staging 'role-reversal'. For example, the child has just been asked to 'wash teddy's face, dolly's hands' etc. The teacher then plays with the equipment and by prompts and questions encourages the child to direct her actions. In a Picture Test the procedure may alternate between asking the child to point to a particular picture in a display and asking the child to describe a picture.