Educational center unveils world's largest learning map

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Likened to the human genome project for education, the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium, led by the University of Kansas' Center for Education Testing and Evaluation, has unveiled the world's largest learning map, a structure of student learning that includes more than 3,000 skills students should master by high school graduation and more than 5,000 pathways, or connections, between skills.

The 30-feet-long by 6-feet-wide map made of lightweight fabric was unveiled during the National Council on Measurement in Education's annual conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, last week. The map is part of the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System, a next generation of alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Set for implementation during the 2014-2015 school year, it is funded through a $22 million grant—the largest in KU history—awarded to DLM by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, in late 2010.

"The map is not yet in its final form, and we wanted to provide people the opportunity to edit the map and give feedback so that the map gets stronger," said Neal Kingston, director of the center. "Providing a visual representation of the map outside of a computer where it normally resides was the best way to show people the learning map."

Kingston added that the map's skills and pathways are based on extensive research evidence of how people learn. To view a two-minute video of the unveiling, visit here.

In June, the map will be expanded when the center brings together a group of special education experts to add additional pathways that students with significant cognitive disabilities may take in their process of learning. Later in 2012, cognitive psychology experts will review the map, and then it will be validated through the extensive collection of student data in the 13-state DLM Consortium.

The map includes 3,015 nodes, which represent the skills and concepts in math and English language arts that students need to acquire by the end of high school. It also includes 5,288 pathways between skills, which represent the multiple paths students may take in order to acquire those skills and concepts.

Conference participants viewing the map were impressed by its complexity and the range of skills included. Many said it was a great foundation upon which to expand the map in the future.

“The learning map is a great starting point and a really, really important idea,” said conference participant Dorry Kenyon, director of language testing at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., who has more than two decades of experience in test development. “I know the map will be refined over time, but if you don’t have a starting point and know where you’re going, you don’t know if you’ve got there. So, this map looks like a great starting point.”

More information: www.dynamiclearningmaps.org/

Provided by University of Kansas