Dynamic Assessment

Dynamic assessment is based on the work of Vygotsky and looks at cognitive development within the context of social interactions with others who are more capable. These experiences are influenced by language and culture. He states that learning takes place within the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD); that is, what learners can do today with help and resources, they can do in the future on their own. The ZPD establishes the differences between what the child can do with assistance and without assistance. The goal of the assessment then is to determine the types and amount of scaffolding needed to assist the child in moving towards independent skill mastery.

Four methods of dynamic assessment that get to the child's best performance or understanding are:

Testing the Limits - Traditional testing procedures are modified by rephrasing the question, posing it differently, or encouraging the child to show what s/he knows. In dynamic assessment, the examiner would go beyond simple feedback (saying "That is correct") to elaborated feedback (such as asking the student to provide the reasons why the answer is correct).

> Example: When testing vocabulary, if learners who are Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) get the word correct, say "Good, why did you say that?" If they miss the word, explain why the response was incorrect and ask them to try again.

Clinical Interview - A form of testing the limits, clinical interviewing allows for modifying the administration of a test to generate questions in order to help children understand how they are thinking about a test question and to facilitate their awareness of targeted skills.

> Example: During testing, the examiner would ask the CLD learner, "How did you know this?" or "What would happen if..." in an attempt to understand why they responded the way they did.

Graduated Prompting - In an attempt to identify the ZPD, the student is provided a series of verbal clues that are graduated in difficulty from the easiest to the most difficult. The examiner focuses on that point where the student is able to demonstrate knowledge or proficiency, judging the distance on a continuum (no transfer, near transfer, far transfer, very far transfer).

> Example: In language proficiency testing, the student who is in the Silent Receptive stage and can only produce one-word responses is prompted, "This is a baby," then asked, "What is this?" then prompted, "Ask me what is this" (in reference to the picture of a baby).

Test-Teach-Retest - The examiner provides an intervention designed to modify the student's level of functioning in the target area. By first assessing, then teaching the principles of the task, then assessing again, the examiner can determine the extent of learning that occurs.

> Example: CLD learners may be asked to tell a story about a picture book while the examiner evaluates the use of story ideas, structure, and language. Then teaching occurs in which the examiner targets two areas where the student had difficulty. Finally, the student is asked to re-tell the story and the test-retest gains are assessed along with ratings of listener effort, responsiveness, and modifiability.