SPECIAL EDUCATION GUIDANCE

Dynamic Assessment
Revised Spring 2022

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What is Dynamic Assessment?

Dynamic assessment is a method of assessment whereby a student's ability to learn a skill (i.e., a student's modifiability) is measured after a teaching phase led by an evaluator. During the teaching phase, the evaluator provides scaffolded supports and explicit instruction around an identified area of need (as identified on another measure such as a norm-referenced assessment or language sample) to determine the student's learning potential and present level of functioning (Lidz and Peña 1996; Orellana et al. 2019). Dynamic assessment is a practice that may be considered within the context of a comprehensive special education evaluation and is part of the Comprehensive Assessment Model. Information about the Comprehensive Assessment Model can be found on the Wisconsin DPI Speech-Language Webpage.

Quick Read

The rationale for using dynamic assessment during an initial evaluation for special education is to:
1. address the bias of standardized testing
2. aid in determining whether student needs are from a lack of exposure or due to cultural or linguistic differences.
3. determine the need for specially designed instruction and inform intervention.

There may be conditions or situations where dynamic assessment may not not be necessary or may not yield new or additional information:
1. Enough information has been gathered to obtain an understanding of the whole student using other measures.
2. The student provides evidence of their learning without engaging in this process.
3. Observations and teacher reports give enough information about the student as a learner.

Why Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) Utilize Dynamic Assessment

Dynamic assessment is an active process that can assist evaluators in determining whether a speech-language impairment exists and also provides evidence to distinguish speech-language impairments from differences due to cultural and linguistic diversity (e.g., English as a Second Language, English Learner, dialect, culture) or lack of exposure (e.g., socioeconomic factors). The dynamic assessment process yields data-based recommendations for use in classrooms and intervention (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE] 2018). Data collected from dynamic assessment may be used when determining if a student has a speech or language impairment, assist in determining whether exclusionary factors exist, and also may assist in determining IEP services, writing IEP goals and measuring student progress.

Decontextualized, norm-referenced tests are static instruments that capture a student's skill at one point in time. Dynamic assessment includes active engagement by the evaluator and student and contributes to the picture of the whole student to balance the

limitations of norm-referenced tests (Lidz and Peña 1996). Kate Crowley from the Leader's Project (2012) argued that:

> "Static assessment tests...assume all children have had the same experiences and opportunities prior to evaluation when this is clearly not the case. Additionally, the skills evaluated by these tests are often more associated with culture or socioeconomic status, such as vocabulary, rather than a true language impairment."

In addition, norm-referenced tests artificially isolate speech and language skills and may not be related to classroom demands.

The American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) recommends the use of dynamic assessment especially when evaluating students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (n.d.a.). One common type of dynamic assessment used in distinguishing language differences from disorders is test-teach-retest (Gutiérrez-Clellen and Peña 2001; Peña et al. 2014). Necessary components for dynamic assessment, including creating a Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) and measuring the student's modifiability, make the process more standardized and replicable. The evaluator is not only looking at what the student learns (i.e., pre-test and post-test scores) but also how they learn it (Lidz and Peña 1996; Gutiérrez-Clellen and Peña 2001; Shay 2017; Peña et al. 2006).

What Dynamic Assessment is Not

Dynamic assessment is not Response to Intervention (RtI). Response to Intervention (RtI) is defined by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2017) as "a multilevel system of behavioral and academic supports designed to increase success for every learner" (p.4). Because dynamic assessment is time-limited (i.e., one or two sessions of 30 minutes or less) and within the context of an evaluation, it is not considered RtI.   It is a time-limited, active process for both the student and the evaluator and is implemented within the context of an evaluation (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction 2009). For more information see The Role of Speech-Language Pathologists in Wisconsin's Multi-Level Systems of Supports.

Procedures and Tools for Dynamic Assessment

Mediated Learning Experience (MLE)

The core of dynamic assessment is the MLE (Gutiérrez-Clellen and Peña 2001). During the MLE, the evaluator provides support within the Zone of Proximal Development, defined by Vygotsky as the student's level or learning between what they know and what they do not yet know (Gutiérrez-Clellen and Peña 2001). The MLE includes verbally modeling the thinking process which leads to unvocalized thought or self-talk. Through this interactive, collaborative process the practitioner determines whether the student is able to learn with guidance from a "more knowledgeable other," using scaffolding, explicit teaching, and exposure.

Components of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE)

The following components are characteristic of a MLE (ASHA n.d.b.; Peña et al. 2001):

- **Intentionality**: The SLP explicitly teaches the purpose of the activity.

- **Meaning**: The SLP explains why they are working on a specific task or skill.

- **Transcendence**: The SLP helps the student understand what happens in everyday situations when they do not have the skill.

- **Competence**: The SLP ensures the student has understood the teaching by providing the opportunity to practice and demonstrate the skill.

Modifiability

"Modifiability is the way we describe the [student's] response to a MLE based on our observations during a training session" (ASHA n.d.b.). The following are the components comprising modifiability (ASHA n.d.b.):

- **Student responsivity**: how the student responds to the activity and their ability to pay attention and maintain attention to the task

- **Transfer**: shifting from one activity to another, the student is able to apply the newly learned skill

- **Examiner effort**: the amount of work you as the evaluator need to apply to the situation to help the student be successful

- A student is considered to have a high rate of modifiability when they have success in learning (i.e., are responsive) to a MLE and there is relatively low examiner effort. Conversely, a student is considered to have low modifiability if they struggle to learn a skill within the context of the MLE despite high examiner effort

Examples of Dynamic Assessment Tools

The following are example tools SLPs may use when conducting dynamic assessments and may assist the evaluator in documenting the dynamic assessment process:

- [Wisconsin Dynamic Assessment Guidance Tool](#)

- [Oregon Dynamic Assessment Protocol](#)

- [Bilinguistics Dynamic Assessment Protocol](#)

- [DA for School SLPs - Tutorial and Report Template](#)

Summarizing Assessment Data and Reporting Results

Results from dynamic assessment assist the evaluator in answering the following questions:

- How quickly the student learns: did the student improve on the retest?

- How easily the student learns: how much effort did you put into teaching (i.e., the MLE)?

- How many cues or what type of support did the evaluator have to give for success?

- Whether or not the student can transfer the skill to a new task: did the student demonstrate learning and respond differently when given the opportunity?

When reporting the results of a dynamic assessment:

- First, state the components of the MLE that were included as well as any observations that were made during the examiner-student interactions.

- Next, provide pre-test and post-test data in either quantitative or qualitative terms. For example, "the student's score increased from 1 out of 5 correct on the pre-test to 3 out of 5 correct on the post-test." OR "The student improved from needing a repetition on 4 out of 5 items to needing a repetition on only 1 out of 5 items."

- Then, report on the student's response to the teaching phase (i.e., effort, responsiveness, transfer of skills, modifiability) based on your clinical judgment of the MLE.

- Finally, include this descriptive information into your report summary and use this information when considering eligibility as well as therapeutic and educational recommendations.

It is important to consider the results from dynamic assessment within the context of the entire evaluation (case history, observations, informal and formal assessments). For example:

> Student x demonstrated difficulty with narrative retell on formal and informal assessments, parent and teacher reports, and observations. Dynamic assessment indicated low modifiability for independent use of story grammar elements even with visual support. This indicates that, despite heavy support from the Speech-Language Pathologist, the student struggled to retell a story to include all story grammar elements even with the use of a graphic organizer.

When determining a student's academic or functional performance in any area, the team cannot rely on a single data point (i.e. one assessment or test score). Triangulating data is a strategy that can be used to compile multiple (at least 3) types of data from different sources. Any documented delay must impact the student's education (i.e., academic, social, emotional, vocational) in order for eligibility in schools.

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Appendices of Resources and Tools

- ASHA: Dynamic Assessment
- ASHA: Dynamic Assessment: A Basic Framework
- Dynamic Assessment: Developing Your Own Plan (YouTube video)
- Dynamic Assessment: Additional ASHA Resources
- Bilinguistics
- Leader's Project
- WI DPI Eligibility Considerations Form

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