



NORTH DAKOTA
**DEPARTMENT OF
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Dynamic Assessment

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Dynamic Assessment

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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.

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 opportunity to learn (i.e., cultural or linguistic differences or impacts of COVID) or a true-disability related need
3. determine the need for specially designed instruction and inform intervention

There may be conditions or situations where dynamic assessment may not be necessary or may not yield new or additional information. These include:

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 Utilize Dynamic Assessment?

Dynamic assessment is an active process that can assist evaluators in determining whether a disability exists and provides evidence to distinguish 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 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 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...differences from disorders is test-teach-retest (Gutiérrez-Clellen and Peña 2001; Peña et al. 2014). Key components of dynamic assessment, like designing a

Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) and assessing a student's modifiability, help ensure the process is 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 a multi-tier system of supports (MTSS). MTSS is defined as a framework to provide students with the best opportunities to succeed academically and behaviorally in school with a focus on high-quality instruction and interventions. 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 MTSS. It is a time-limited, active process for both the student and the evaluator and is implemented within the context of an evaluation.

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.

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

- **Intentionality:** The practitioner explicitly teaches the purpose of the activity.
- **Meaning:** The practitioner explains why they are working on a specific task or skill.
- **Transcendence:** The practitioner helps the student understand what happens in everyday situations when they do not have the skill.
- **Competence:** The practitioner 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

Dynamic Assessment Guidance Tool

The purpose of the first tool is a self-check for evaluators when creating Mediated Learning Environments (MLE) during the dynamic assessment process. This self-check tool is not a checklist. Practitioners may use this self-check when describing the MLE in report writing. Pre-Test and Post-Test information should be a part of documentation, as well as the student's modifiability to the MLE. The second tool is a visual to guide practitioners in considering the student's modifiability during the MLE. The visual and corresponding questions are guides for SLPs during the dynamic assessment process.

MLE SELF Check

Intentionality

	Did I explain the goal of the task to the student?
	Did I explain the learning target to the students?

Meaning

	Did I explain to the student why we are performing the task?
	Did I explain to the student why it is important to know how to perform this task or to learn this target?
	Did I share with the student which parts of the task are important?

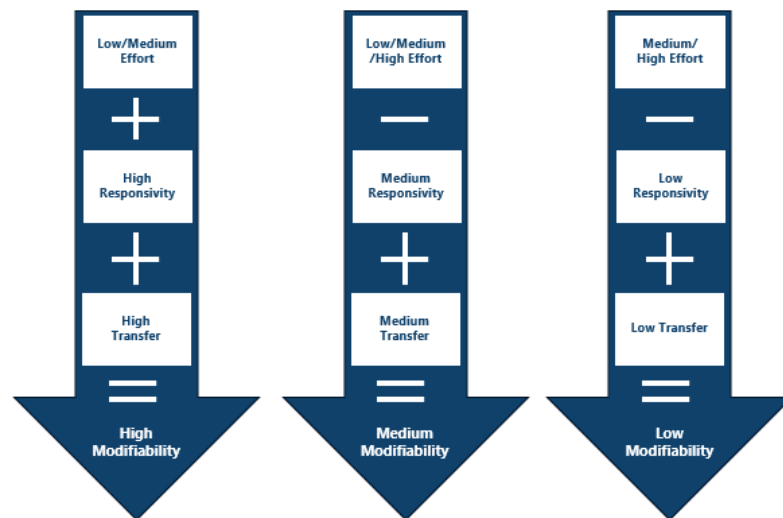
Transcendence

	Did I give the student examples of when to use this skill or perform this type of task?
	Did I tell the student who (e.g., parents, teachers) values this skill and where it may be important to know (e.g., classroom)?
	Did I encourage the student to think of their own example for needing this skill and any consequences for not having this skill?

Competence

	Did I observe that the student understood the skill and its importance?
	Did I see the student coming up with a strategy for performing the task independently?
	Did I observe that the student was attentive and engaged during the interaction?
	Did the student provide examples of successfully performing the skill?
	Did the student relate the skill to other environments in which it would be needed?

Based on your answers to the questions below, please circle your perceptions of the levels of examiner effort, the child's responsivity, and the transfer of skills to a new task:



Using these results, qualitatively describe Child Modifiability.

Student Modifiability

1. Examiner Effort:

- How much effort went into explaining the task and its importance to the student?
- How much effort did it take to relate the skill to the student's prior knowledge and experiences?
- How many examples did I have to give the student regarding the usefulness or relevance of the skill?

- How much effort went into helping the student think of examples of when they may need the skill, who may want them to have the skill, and where they might use the skill?
- How much effort was it to assist the student in developing a strategy for performing the skill on a subsequent task?
- How much effort went into maintaining the student's attention?

2. Student Responsivity

- How engaged was the student with me in terms of staying on topic and maintaining attention?
- How interested was the student in learning about the goal, meaning, and purpose of the task?
- How quickly did the student grasp the concepts and make connections to prior knowledge and previous experiences?
- How motivated was the student to develop a strategy for performing the skill?

3. Transfer of Skills:

- Did the student attempt to apply their learning to previously administered tasks or examples of their own?
- Did the student want to improve and demonstrate their ability to use their new strategy?
- Did the student apply their new strategy to items on a post-test of the skill?
- Did the student need support (e.g., cues, reminders, additional demonstrations or repetitions) in the form of scaffolding techniques to perform the skill on a post-test?
- Did the student exhibit learning by getting additional items correct on a post-test of the skill?

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.

Additional Resources & Supports

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) has four modules on their website that include video models of this process provided by Dr. Elizabeth Peña. Go to the ASHA website and search Dynamic Assessment.

Additional Dynamic Assessment resources can be found on the Leaders Project website. This site includes a lot of language resources and information on assessment of multi-lingual students.

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