From Assessment of Performance to Dynamic Assessment of Learning

Retrieval practise and the positive effects of test-taking have become popular in education. When we actively retrieve and elaborate on what we know and vary the format of learning—for example, through low-stakes testing or presenting a summary to a peer—we simultaneously strengthen the coding of knowledge into memory.

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Have you ever taken a test—a high-stakes test—and failed on an answer and afterwards been hit with an insight? What could have helped you reason, elaborate on what you knew or did not know, and arrive at a different conclusion? Maybe you felt that you "almost knew it". Of course, it depends on the task you were presented with. Certainly, it mattered if you had the pre-knowledge and had been taught it. But still, it was not only a matter of whether you knew or did not know the answer. It was also a matter of how the knowledge might become accessible.

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only after a delay. The authors stated that most things we perform we tend to be forgotten in the long run. They also stressed that the active use of knowledge is central to learning. Following this, retrieval practise and the positive effects of test-taking have become popular in education. When we actively retrieve and elaborate on what we know and vary the format of learning—for example, through low-stakes testing or presenting a summary to a peer—we simultaneously strengthen the coding of knowledge into memory. In their article, they point out that even making errors and experiencing difficulties can be beneficial for long-term learning. Does this difference between performance and learning apply to assessments, which often involve test-taking situations, in any way? This illustrates that when we introduce time as well as the active elaboration and

use of varied strategies, the dynamics of learning change. This is the case, particularly when we consider assessments based on expected standardised performance at a single point in time compared to a process over time. Today, assessments come in many formats and serve different purposes, to inform policies, development, and interventions at different levels. However, even for large-scale educational assessments, an individual is still placed in a test-taking situation; there are tasks presented and questions asked, and there is a result and expectations around what the result implies. In addition, you rarely get a second chance.

"Assessment refers to the ways teachers and other people involved in a pupil's education systematically collect and then use information about that pupil's level of achievement and/or development in different areas of their educational experience (academic,

behavioural, and social)" (Watkins, 2007).

Historically, the assessment of children in educational settings has been used for sorting, diagnosing, and placing children based on their abilities (Watkins, 2007). Assessment has been a gatekeeper to different educational opportunities or resources for children with special educational needs. This has created a conversation, and it has been argued that some of the procedures and tools used in assessment have contributed to a negative bias in this process, potentially unfair to vulnerable groups of children or those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Dynamic assessment was originally developed as a response to the shortcomings of traditional, standardised assessments of performance. It evolved mainly in the field of psychological assessment during the 1970s (Haywood & Lidz, 2006). Dynamic assessment is

an umbrella term describing several tools, procedures, and approaches that share some common characteristics and principles. Firstly, most dynamic assessment approaches introduce processes over time as a factor in assessment through the test-intervention-retest format. The idea is that measuring or capturing performance only at a single point in time is not enough. To measure growth, change, or development, learning opportunities should be presented. Secondly, in dynamic assessment, some sort of intervention, feedback, or teaching takes place that is intertwined with the assessment process. It is suggested that introducing a structured intervention and evaluating the response and change after that intervention can add information about the plasticity, propensity, or potential of the individual. This data can then be used to improve accuracy in diagnosing or revising instructional recommendations for teachers.

Conceptually, in dynamic assessment research, reference is often made to Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (1978), which states that it is not appropriate to consider only the current level of functioning (cognitive, language, etc.) in children but also their emergent and potential level of functioning, given appropriate instruction or support. Central to the early development of this field have been the works of Professor
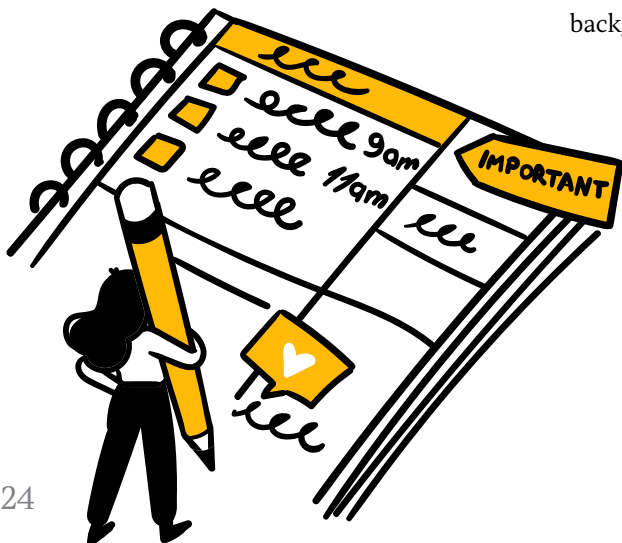
Reuven Feuerstein, who proposed that Cognitive abilities are not fixed traits; they can develop over time through the enrichment of appropriate forms of instruction. The definition of dynamic assessment, in Feuerstein"s words, "refers to an assessment of thinking, perception, learning, and problem solving by an active teaching process aimed at modifying cognitive functioning"." (cited in Tzuriel, 2021).

While some of the dynamic assessment approaches preferably use the term dynamic testing and rely more on scoring in assessment, other approaches have a more qualitative and non-standardised approach. Dynamic assessment originated in cognitive psychology; however, curriculum-based dynamic assessment has evolved as a specific assessment approach in education, combining elements of curriculum-based measurement and dynamic assessment to identify a student"s instructional needs within the context of their specific curriculum. Curriculum-based dynamic assessment shares characteristics with formative assessment, which has been expanded upon by Black and Wiliam (2009), as well as with the Response To Intervention (RTI) approach, which involves providing targeted

interventions for struggling learners and closely monitoring the progress of these interventions to determine their effectiveness (Grigorenko, 2009).

Central to dynamic assessment is actively involving the individual during the process of assessment. Some proponents stress that the individual's metacognition and metacognitive strategies (e.g., self-judgement

of knowledge and awareness of strategies) play an important role in learning, and thus an increased and active participation of individuals in the dynamic assessment process has been called for (Partanen, 2016). More concretely, this means that during the intervention or teaching phase of dynamic assessment, the

assessor should promote metacognitive reflection about current and potential strategies both for problem solutions and for self-regulation during problem-solving. This is particularly important as research shows that students often foster inefficient metacognitive strategies in learning (Bjork & Bjork, 2020).

Therefore, dynamic assessment can contain a range of feedback formats, from inquiry, prompting, and cueing to the explicit teaching of strategies, modelling, and demonstrations.

Several research reviews and meta-analyses have suggested that dynamic assessment has advantages in the assessment of learners, tapping into additional information about the plasticity and potential of cognitive, language, and reading abilities, including the improved classification accuracy of language and reading disorders (Caffrey et al., 2008; Dixon et al., 2023). This, in turn, has led to recommendations from cross-disciplinary experts and authorities to incorporate dynamic assessment into the practises of clinical as well as school professionals in dealing with language difficulties, particularly in settings that include children from socioeconomically

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disadvantaged and second-language backgrounds (Bishop et al., 2016).

There are, of course, limitations to dynamic assessment: it is time-consuming compared to standardised single-point-in-time assessments, and since it strives to measure plasticity and the potential for growth, learning, and change, it also comes with challenges in regard to how to capture these qualities reliably or how to interpret the findings into feasible interventions that are valid for individuals. Dynamic assessment is thought to be more tailor-made for tapping individual and personalised needs. However, it is well known that operationalizing and measuring individual needs is complex, and there is a need for more research regarding feasible interventions and instructional value from an educational perspective. Dynamic assessment should also be placed in a larger context; there are other external factors for the individual that might hinder or promote learning and development. Also, dynamic assessment is dependent on access to training and assessment tools, which vary in different countries. However, developments in digital accessibility might change this in the future. To conclude, dynamic assessment can inform some of the elements to consider in teaching and tailoring special educational support.

After conducting a large number of both standardised and dynamic assessments, as well as serving as a trainer and supervisor of school staff, I have often observed school staff feeling the intense urge to support the child by offering prompts and cues during the assessment. This spontaneous need to "dynamize" the assessment situation comes from the observation that some children are close to arriving at the correct solution to a problem or might benefit from a small cue that would make a big difference and then a second try. This observation is what, in dynamic assessment, is called the emergent function or emergent ability. This is also how development occurs, not as a dichotomous event, from "cannot" (zero points in a test at a single point in time) to suddenly "can" (one point), but instead as a gradual move

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to mastery through "can almost" or "can with certain support" or "can in certain situations". This is precisely what assessment should contribute to: an increased understanding of what kind of support and under what circumstances the child can progress from "cannot" via "can almost" to "I can!", and later to full mastery. ∎

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