

**Dynamic Assessment with ELLs: A Step-by-Step Tutorial**  
**Lynette Austin, Ph.D.**

**Attendee Questions Remaining Unanswered during the Live Webinar on 10-7-2016**

**Using Dynamic Assessment as Part of a Comprehensive Assessment Question:** Once we ascertain that the child presents with a likely language disorder, what do we do to assess? Do we use an interpreter to assist in standardized testing? Is this ethical to use an assessment that has not been standardized for an individual who speaks this language?

**Answer:** If you were to use a test that is not standardized for those of your client's background, you would consider that assessment a criterion-referenced measure. You could report strengths and weaknesses, but not scores. I would advise you not to score an assessment on a child whose ethnic and/or language background is not represented in the normative sample. This advice also holds for children who are English language learners; the test is then primarily a measure of their English proficiency, if scores are reported.

**Question:** Do you recommend dynamic assessments with preschoolers?

**Answer:** Dynamic assessment is an assessment strategy that can be utilized for any population. You will be testing their ability to learn, transfer new strategies, and their overall responsiveness. There will be modifications for each age group and population that will have to happen due to each population's and age group's abilities.

**Question:** Do you have any suggestions for dynamic assessment with toddlers/preschoolers who are ELL (English Language Learners) and have varying levels of exposure to English?

**Answer:** Remember that in order to complete a dynamic assessment in English, the child has to have basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) in English—a dynamic assessment in English would not be useful for non-English speaking children. A dynamic assessment could be completed in another language using an interpreter. If the child does have some BICS in English, then choose a task utilizing words that are at their age level. With dynamic assessment, we are focusing on their ability to learn and pick up on new material, so you could work on naming skills with a book, or learning some simple commands – again, age-appropriate preschool language tasks.

**Clarification of Terms**

**Question:**

You talked about CLD students in the webinar. What are “CLD” students?

**Answer:** “CLD” is an acronym for “Culturally and Linguistically Diverse” students/clients.

## **Dynamic Assessment Procedures**

### **Question:**

Would you use the same types of targets if you are doing dynamic assessment in L1?

**Answer:** Not necessarily. You would need to check age-level expectations for the child's L1 (first language) to see if the task you've selected "fits in." But many types of tasks can be adapted for different languages: naming tasks, phonological awareness tasks, and narrative tasks are a few examples of some that have been utilized in different languages.

### **Question:**

Can you provide an example of using high frequency vocabulary as dynamic assessment?

**Answer:** The idea here is engaging the child in some novel learning but doing so using language that is accessible to them as ELLs. So, for example, you could have them complete verbal analogies with words that are known to them (hot, cold, big, small). These words appear with very high frequency in the English usage of people around ELLs, but in this example the words are used in a novel task that the children have to *learn* to do via the dynamic assessment process.

### **Question:**

Does the assessment have to be done in one sitting, or can this be done over a longer period of time - more in sync with RTI [Response to Intervention], for example.

**Answer:** Earlier models of dynamic assessment were conducted over longer periods of time – say, for example, a two-week period incorporating several teaching sessions. More recently, clinicians have been interested in knowing if the modifiability shown in a single assessment session is a valid determiner of difference vs. disorder – and research is indicating that it is.

## **Interpretation of Dynamic Assessment Results**

### **Question:**

What are your thoughts on this: On a dynamic assessment given for narrative retells, the student's score does not improve from pre to post-test (scoring a 10 on the pre-test and a 7 on the post-test), but the student showed modifiability and learning with few prompts during the teaching phase with not a lot of effort. So they showed the ability to learn the skills with prompts and even faded prompts, but their post-test score didn't improve.

**Answer:** We do not always focus on their score; we focus on their ability to be modifiable, transfer strategies from the teaching portion and their responsivity. We see in this example that modifiability improved and the level of cueing decreased. That is a good prognostic sign! There could be various factors that affect the client's score. So what would your next step be in this case? I would recheck the child within a few days to see if the new skill had generalized so that they were able to use it later. I would also probably use at least one more dynamic assessment task with them to see if perhaps my choice of task affected the degree of change the child was able to show on a post-test.

**Question:**

Can dynamic assessment be used to indicate that a child needs to be in a class for ELL students rather than enrolled in speech and language services?

**Answer:** The dynamic assessment can possibly do so. It can show you if there is a difference or disorder. Some children may just need ELL services because they haven't had the time or the educational opportunity to learn the English skills. When a child is especially responsive to the teaching component of the dynamic assessment when strategies appropriate for ELLs are utilized, that indicates that ESL would be a very appropriate service for that child.

**Question:**

Often our students come in as full Spanish speakers. A few years later they are losing their primary language. I then need to evaluate in both Spanish and English and it is difficult to determine if I am looking at a language disorder or an ELL. What ideas can you send my way?

**Answer:** In my opinion, dynamic assessment is the assessment strategy that is *most* useful for this population, for the reasons discussed in the presentation. We're asking ourselves the question "what can they do with the English that they have" rather than "what skills do they have in English." When L1 (Spanish) skills have been lost, there is no standardized test that will differentiate between a language disorder and a language difference for that child. Alternative strategies such as dynamic assessment become especially significant. It is important to note that it is possible to perform a dynamic assessment in both languages.)

Research indicates that dynamic assessment is effective at distinguishing between a language difference and a language disorder, especially for children who have culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. My observation has been that when a child is able to make significant changes in short term teaching sessions, they are likely to have simply a language difference. On the other hand, children who are unable to make these changes are more likely to have a language impairment.

**Additional Resources**

**Question:** Is there a resource for materials/ideas for dynamic assessment tasks?

**Answer:** ASHA's website is a good place to check for resources that will aid in dynamic assessment. There are a number of teaching modules on the site, and some discussion of tasks that have been used in dynamic assessments. There is also a reference list available on the site.