



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO  
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# Dynamic diagnostic language assessment

Toward an integrated assessment  
framework in support of L2 learning

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# Points for discussion

- 1) What points of divergence do you see between dynamic and diagnostic assessment and how they can be reconciled?
- 2) What difficulties/considerations do you anticipate in the integration of dynamic and diagnostic assessment?
- 3) How can dynamic and diagnostic assessment frameworks complement one another?

**Potential integration of Diagnostic Language Assessment with Dynamic Assessment?** (Ableeva & Huhta, 2012; Anton, 2018; Poehner, Huhta, & Leontiev, in progress)

Vygotsky (1998): “determining the actual level of development [observations of independent functioning] not only does not cover the whole picture of development, but very frequently encompasses only an insignificant part of it”

# Diagnostic Language Assessment

- **Diagnostic Assessment (DiagA):** Alderson (2005) -> distinct from 'achievement' or 'placement' testing; aims to identify learner **strengths & weaknesses**
- Jang & Wagner (2014) -> DiagA characterized: by (1) **constructs** to be measured **clearly defined & specified**, incl. sub-areas of knowledge/ability; (2) procedure should generate **detailed feedback** pertaining to particular dimensions/sub-areas in need of improvement
- L2 DiagA elaborated through research programs since early 2000s, particularly work of Alderson & colleagues at Lancaster U. (e.g., Alderson, Haapakangas, Huhta, Nieminen & Ullaknoja, 2015; Harding, Alderson, & Brunfaut, 2015; Harding, Brunfaut, Huhta, Alderson, Fish, & Kremmel, 2018)
- **DIALANG, DIALANG 2.0**
- **DIALANG** (Alderson, 2005): Included assessment of five language 'skills': reading, writing, listening, structures (morpho-syntactic knowledge), & lexical knowledge
- Multi-step procedure that included learner self-assessment (linked to CEFR descriptors), assessment, & feedback (advice) to learners re. how they can improve

# DiagA Illustration

**'Idealized Diagnostic Procedure'** (Harding, Alderson, & Brunfaut, 2015):

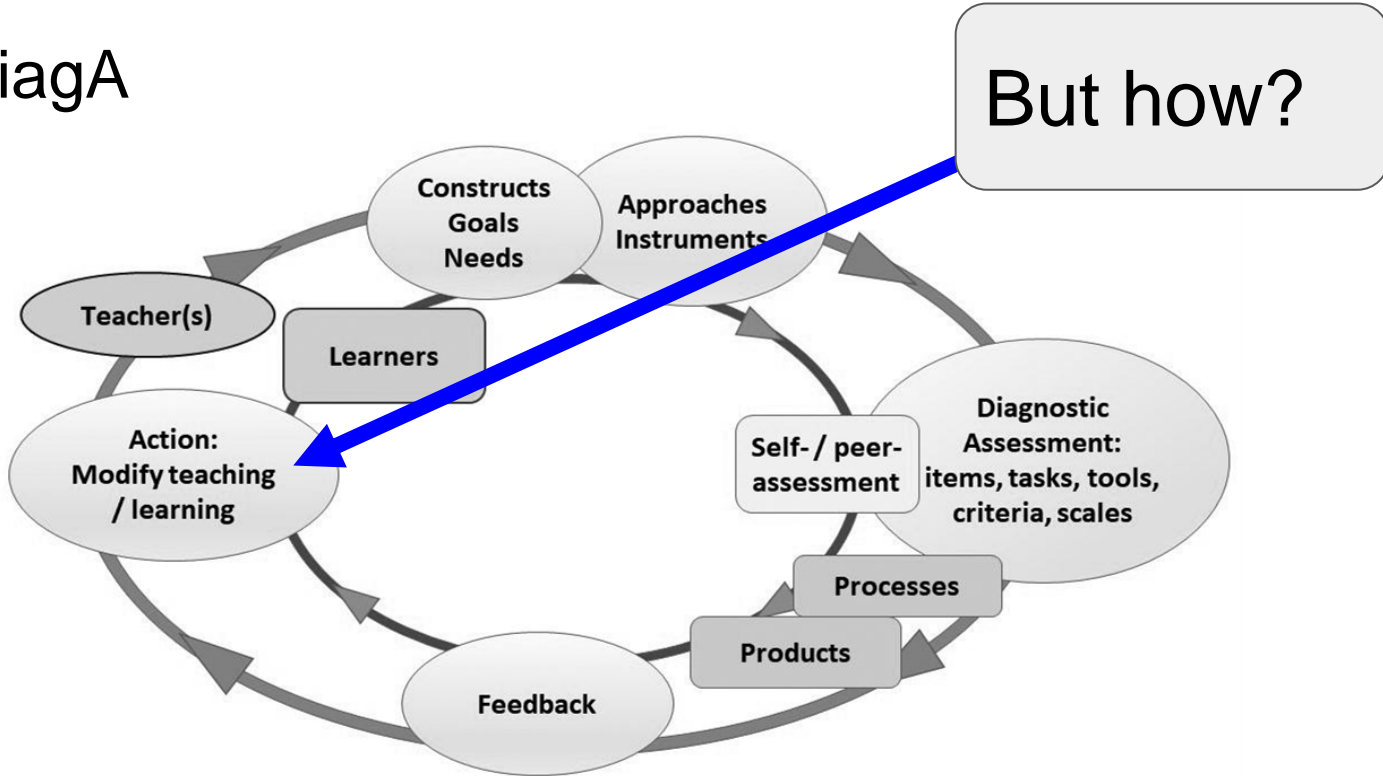
**Listening and Observing:** teacher listens to student perceptions & observes student performance in class (incl. test performance)

**Conducting Initial Assessment (Hypothesis Formulation):** teacher relies on experience, intuition, & knowledge to formulate hypothesis re. student weaknesses

**Hypothesis Verification:** teacher uses tests, resources, other experts (e.g., school psychologist) to gather data & evaluate hypothesis

**Diagnostic Decision & Feedback:** teacher uses data to provide feedback, incl. individualized instructional plan, recommendations

## L2 DiagA



Huhta, Harsch, Leontjev, Nieminen (2023, forthcoming)

# Dynamic Assessment (DA)

- DA differs from other assessments -> basic premise that fully understanding abilities (ZAD + ZPD) requires active intervention in development (mediation, responsiveness)
- Level of practice -> teachers and students **jointly carry out activities**, teachers intervening as difficulties arise to offer mediation
- Sternberg & Grigorenko (2002): provision of **mediation** (prompts, models, feedback, leading questions) as learners encounter difficulty; eliciting verbalizations of learner reasoning; identification of underlying problems;
- **Resultant Diagnosis of Development:** **how much/what kind of instruction needed to bring ZPD into ZAD (bring potential future into present)?**
- Shifting focus **from product of prior learning to processes** of abilities now forming
- Teaching and assessment as **dialectic**, as parts of **process** unified by theoretical principles to identify learner needs & promote development (Feuerstein et al., 2010)
- Haywood & Lidz (2007): single DA *could* promote some developmental change, more likely *sustained effort required*

# Inventory of Mediating Prompts (Poehner, 2009)

1. Pause
2. Repeat the whole phrase questioningly
3. Repeat just the part of the sentence with the error
4. Teacher asks, “What is wrong with that sentence?”
5. Teacher points out the incorrect word
6. Teacher asks either/or question (*negros o negras?*)
7. Teacher identifies the correct answer
8. Teacher explains why

**\*Note:** mediation should be **explicit** as necessary to support learner engagement, **implicit** as possible to allow learner control, **responsive** to learner moves & needs, and **Development-focused** rather than strictly task-focused (Poehner, 2018)



# DiagA & DA: Some Possibilities

- DiagA: constructs & sub-constructs informed by theory of language proficiency, tied to descriptors & scales (e.g., CEFR)
  - high or low ability in specific domains?
  - Mediation & ZPD -> **more than one level on scale simultaneously (ZAD vs. ZPD)?**
- Granularity of abilities, specificity of constructs/ sub-constructs
  - ZPD for language? For listening comprehension? For sub-areas w/in listening comprehension (e.g., phonological awareness)? [**Granularity or Generality of ZPD**]
  - Differing degrees of responsiveness to mediation (**large ZPD or small ZPD** = more/less respons.)
- Instructional plans individualized for learners but informed by ZPD & not ZAD
- Need for continued **cooperation w/ teachers**; understanding of ZPD to **continue to monitor progress, introduce challenge (& mediation) necessary to provoke development**

# **DD-LANG:** Dynamic-diagnostic language assessment – a conceptual and practical innovation in foreign language assessment

funded by the **Academy of Finland** and University of Jyväskylä 1.9.2022 – 31.8.2026

## **GOAL:** investigation of an **integrated L2 Dynamic-Diagnostic Assessment Framework**

**THEORETICAL AIM:** to extend previous applications of dynamic and diagnostic assessment by integrating them in a complementary manner

**EMPIRICAL AIM:** to investigate how combining dynamic and diagnostic assessment may **impact** learning and teaching of English in the Finnish upper secondary schools, including how students and teachers prepare for the the final Matriculation Examination (ME)

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- In what ways does Finnish Gymnasium students' reading and writing ability in English improve during the study? (Impact on language proficiency)
- How useful do teachers and learners find the diagnostic profiles of learner abilities that emerge from the computerized DD-LANG as they continue their ME preparation? (Impact on e.g. how reading and writing but also learning are understood)
- How, if at all, are teachers' assessment practices changed following their participation in training to use DD-LANG in the classroom? (Impact on assessment practices)
- In what ways, if any, does their experience with the DD-LANG framework alter teachers' and learners' beliefs regarding language teaching, learning, and assessment? (Impact on beliefs about the key aspects of language education)
- Based on the findings, in what ways are DA and Diag-A each enriched through the proposed integrated framework? How viable is the integrated DD-LANG framework for use in other contexts? (Theoretical contribution)

# Design

- **Longitudinal intervention** (pre-post control group design)
- **QUAN:** measures of reading and writing; **QUAN/QUAL:** questionnaires about practices and beliefs; **QUAL:** interviews; classroom observation; training sessions and discussions with teachers (informed by Vygotskian **praxis**)
- Experimental group: **dynamic-diagnostic assessment** and go through the enrichment programme in the **Revita system** (the U. of Helsinki) and the classroom
- Teachers in the experimental group will be **trained in the use of dynamic assessment**
- Control group: Revita system but without mediation
- Students tested at the **beginning** and **end** of the study (also in the middle); students' and teachers' beliefs and views about learning, teaching, and assessment are studied

# Collaborators



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Kiitos!  
Thank you!

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