



# Teacher and researcher positionality in praxis:

Adapting dynamic assessment to increase learner agency in  
classrooms

Matthew E. Poehner, Dmitri Leontjev, Ari Huhta

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# DD-LANG (Dynamic Diagnostic Language Assessment) Project



Research to advance the **theoretical, empirical and practical basis** of foreign language (L2) assessment supporting learning

- funded by the **Research Council of Finland** and University of Jyväskylä  
Sept. 1. 2022 – Aug. 31. 2026
- focuses on **reading** and writing in English as a foreign language in upper secondary schools in Finland (16–18 -year-olds) during preparation for national Matriculation Exam (ME)

## 2 major goals:

- 1) Elaborating assessment framework to support teaching & learning by integrating **dynamic** and **diagnostic L2 assessment**
- 2) Combining **online dynamic-diagnostic assessment** and **classroom assessment**, teaching, and learning

## **DD-LANG Project Goals: Goal 2 -> Classroom assessment & online dynamic-diagnostic assessment**

### **Increase synergy of teacher practice & external assessment to provide teachers & learners with**

- (a) increased individualized **information about learner development** and
- (b) **input & guidance for classroom activities to better promote learner language development**

# Praxis Orientation to Research

## In Praxis:

- Theory guides what teachers might try and adapt to their own contexts, the results of this practice feed back to theory for further elaboration & refinement at conceptual level
- Goal to understand world through processes of change (change that is intentional, directed, but also responsive to new dynamics and goals)
- Quantitative or qualitative methods (e.g., examination of scores, interviews)
- Researchers as 'critical friend' (Carr & Kemmis, 1986)

# The Study

- Research Questions:
  - How does iterative praxis engagement with teachers lead to shifts in teacher thinking about assessment in relation to teaching & learning?
  - How does iterative praxis engagement with teachers provide new insights into teacher needs & goals that can inform continued development of DD-LANG?
- Context: **7 upper secondary schools** in 4 cities in Finland, EFL classes
- Participants: EFL teachers (n = 14)
  - 12 female, 1 male, 1 not known
  - 14 - 24 years of teaching experience
- Timeline:
  - **2023**: teacher questionnaire and interviews
  - First half of **2024**: teacher workshops >>> **2026**

# Procedures and Data Collection

- Open-ended questionnaire (n = 46) and **8 interviews**, individual and small groups, as baseline data
- **Teacher Workshops (research-led, dialogic)**
  - On-site; Audio-recorded (4 teacher groups, length: av 2.5 hours)
  - Discussion of
    - SCT concepts (ZPD, mediation) and framework of DA
    - mediation + excerpts from human-mediated DA (mediation piloting)
    - Learner profiles
- **Follow-up meetings with teachers, both online and F2F (both both teaching and research-led, dialogic)**
  - Audio- (& video-)recorded
  - Depending on teacher needs and availability, **2 to 4** meetings with participating teacher, both individual and groups, varying length
  - Discussion of
    - learners' **mediated performance** in learner profiles
    - learners' engagement with chatbot
  - Learner performance data to inform our discussions; focus on **developing classroom practices** while simultaneously **developing DD-LANG tasks, mediation**, etc.

# Praxis in DD-LANG Project

“Building airplane while flying it”

**Iterative process of researcher-teacher dialoguing** to:

- Understand context, incl. teacher conceptions about & practices & experiences with L2 teaching, learning, & assessment
- Offer alternate conceptualizations of assessment & relation to teaching/learning based on theory & research
- Brainstorm implications of theory & research for local assessment practices
- Reflect together on relevance of computerized DDLANG assessment for teaching, learning, & Matriculation Exam preparation

# Phase I: Generating Mediation for DD-LANG

Reciprocal relation between

(a) teacher responses to introduction of mediational principles in Vygotskyian theory during initial interviews & discussions and

(b) design of specific mediation sequences to guide/orient teacher reconceptualizations of teaching, learning, & assessment during subsequent workshops & meetings

**\*Centrality of both teacher expertise (practices, experiences) & researcher expertise (theoretical, research-based) in praxis\***



## Workshop Dialogue Excerpt: Quality of Info emerging from assessment

**R1:** [explaining provision of mediation in DA] ... with dynamic assessment, it's saying that what if we **take some of this teaching and allow it to occur during the assessment** ... It's **very systematic** in order, because if it's not systematic, then you don't know what kind of information you're getting. ... How much do you really know? So it's a **very specific kind of teaching that takes place as an element or as a part of the assessment**.

**OPE3:** I thought it was interesting what you said here. I guess, you know, what **we're used to doing is having a test at the end of the course**... But I guess you could tweak it a little bit, like if you were having a test, you might even give the students a chance like to get acquainted with some, let's say, grammar. And you'd sort of, in your class, you'd interrupt everything and teach that grammatical point that you're trying to get across at that time and then have them go on with the test and **that would be a great motivator for sure**, you know.

# Example of Graduated Mediation Scale Shared During Workshop

1	Look at the key parts of the question and the options. Think about what the question is asking. Then try to find this information in the text, thinking about how you search for it.
2	Once you think you found the place with the details you need, <b>look around this part</b> and think about the <b>meanings of words and phrases</b> you see. Try to connect them to the question and the options. Remember that the details in the text are often said in a different way than in the question.
3	<p>You can also look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The order of details, paying attention to <b>verb tenses</b> and words like <i>first</i> and <i>then</i>.</li><li>• How these details are connected, like <b>comparing</b> using <i>likewise</i>, or <b>contrasting</b> using <i>but</i>.</li><li>• Sometimes you need to choose the details that best match the question and the option.</li><li>• You can also use your knowledge about the topic to find the answer.</li></ul>

## Phase II: (Re-)Interpreting Learner Abilities in Light of Mediation

Sharing initial results of DD-LANG

Thinking together with teachers → insights that emerge into learner development

**\*Researchers (theoretical expertise) & Teachers (firsthand experiential knowledge of students & how they perform in class, on assessments)\***

# Learner profiles discussion

Username	Set	Item count	Attempt count	Correct	Correct on first attempt	Mediation count	Mediation rate
<b>S1</b>	Specific details easy	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
	Specific details difficult	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>S2</b>	Specific details easy	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0.8</b>
	Specific details difficult	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0.8</b>
<b>S3</b>	Specific details easy	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2.0</b>
	Specific details difficult	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.0</b>

# Learner profiles discussion (contd.)

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# Learner profiles discussion with OPE8

**R2:** I found it very positive, the way that you, OPE8, guide the students there, because I think they are they nicely complement those this **meta level kind of thinking** that we are that we'd like them to engage in like the students engage in once they read for specific details.

**OPE8:** if I was able to sort of look at the specific results of a specific student and sort of talk to them sort of one on one, or maybe sort of look at **those different patterns**, like, think about this first three students that there was somebody who didn't need any help with anything. And then the student who **bizarrely got better** as the as the exercises got harder.

# Learner profiles discussion with OPE8 (contd.)

**OPE8:** So I could sort of like, use those statistics to sort of sort of maybe **group them...** And then sort of talk to them about **what their process has been like**, because if they have very similar results, maybe they have some sort of approach that is that they all share. So I think that that that would be interesting.

Phase III (ongoing): AI-Enhanced Chatbot for Additional Reading Comprehension Practice



# Chatbot piloting (cont.)

Choose the best fitting answer to the question.

## Volunteering in Hospitals

Royal Voluntary Service has been there for the National Health Service since the beginning - and we're looking for determined people to keep this tradition going. When you offer your sympathy, commitment and skills as a hospital volunteer, you're helping to improve a patient's experience, support their recovery and ensure that they can return home safely, reducing the chance of them returning as patients. You can also offer help to staff and visitors by volunteering in one of our Royal Voluntary Service Hospital Shops or Cafés. If you haven't tackled anything quite like this before, don't worry. We have an experienced team of people who specialise in voluntary work in hospitals and can help you make the most of your time with us. They'll be ready to guide you through the whole process with plenty of support, showing you how to volunteer at a hospital and answering all of your questions.

What is mentioned as an example of voluntary work?

Creating a positive atmosphere in the hospital

Helping hospital staff in daily caring roles

Providing patients with basic medical care

Selling refreshments at the hospital canteen

Visiting patients at home after the hospital stay

**Learner:** Isn't this answer wrong because the text doesn't specify what kind of work is done for the shops or cafes?

**Chatbot:** The text mentions that volunteers can "offer help to staff and visitors by volunteering in one of our Royal Voluntary Service Hospital Shops or Cafés." While it doesn't explicitly state what kind of work is done in the shops or cafes, it's reasonable to infer that selling refreshments could be one of the tasks, as this is a common activity in such settings. Therefore, the answer "Selling refreshments at the hospital canteen" is not wrong. It's important to remember that in reading comprehension exercises, sometimes you need to make reasonable inferences based on the information provided.

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# AI: from obstacle as pedagogical tool

**OPE10:** was away when AI blew up. And, and mostly I just struggled with the students who ended up plagiarizing everything. So that's, that's been my experience with AI so far... And, I've prioritized kind of, um, asking the students to develop their own thinking over teaching them **how to use AI as a tool**... but I do notice that I have to be more vigilant about AI in terms of actually teaching them how to use it as a tool, to sort of help **develop their own thinking** instead of to replace their own thinking, which is very often what they do. And I haven't figured out how to do that yet.

**R2:** I think we're in the same boat in a way, because we're also kind of figuring out. But I really like the **idea of AI as a tool**, because of the way it kind of is designed, it looks like that it gives you responses as a human being, so we tend to kind of think of it as a kind of interlocutor, but in reality, it's kind of, it's a tool, and it can be used as any tool, you can use it in different ways, and you can use it as a pedagogical tool as well. But the other thing which would be interesting to check if whether in any way this mediation or help that they get in the system would change **the way that they ask the questions** as well.

**Ope10:** Yeah, but it's good, it's, it's still a good exercise to be able to point out **why you came up with that answer** and point out this is the exact part of the text and this is how I interpret it and whether it's one phrase or if it's, like, contextual understanding or if it's, like, to pinpoint that, why did I answer this, why did I get this, um, answer. Yeah, but I think this kind of use of the chatbot **encourages curiosity**.

# Discussion and Next Steps

- Changing teacher & researcher positionality in praxis: ‘researcher’ and ‘participant’ to colleagues learning from each other, together resolving challenges in classroom
- Examples:
  - OPE8 starting to resolve the challenge of teaching individual students, thinking how they can group them to gain insights into reading processes
  - OPE10 building together with researchers new understanding of AI as pedagogical tool, enables learner agency during assessment process, allows learners to ask questions (questions in turn become information that teacher can use in classroom)
- Developing classroom interventions together with teachers
  - using information about student mediated performance and engagement with the chatbot to develop classroom activities in reading



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Kiitos!  
Thank you!

**Matt** [mep158@psu.edu](mailto:mep158@psu.edu)

**Dmitri** [dmitri.leontjev@jyu.fi](mailto:dmitri.leontjev@jyu.fi)

**Ari** [ari.huhta@jyu.fi](mailto:ari.huhta@jyu.fi)

**WWW:** [http://r.jyu.fi/DDLANG\\_en](http://r.jyu.fi/DDLANG_en)

