

From Vygotsky's concept of ZPD to the current practice of dynamic assessment

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The notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is often presented as a theoretical basis of the dynamic assessment. However, the theoretical scope of ZPD is much wider than the current practice of dynamic assessment. Vygotsky presented the notion of ZPD in three different albeit interconnected theoretical contexts: developmental, educational, and assessment-related. He suggested that ZPD as applicable not only to such “pure” cognitive functions as perception, attention, and memory, but also to more complex cognitive processes associated with reading, writing, and mathematical reasoning. Historically the majority of dynamic assessment studies focused on a rather narrow task of demonstrating how this type of assessment helps minority children and children with special needs to reveal their “hidden” potential. As a result, some potentially important questions related to ZPD remained poorly elaborated. One of them is the distinction between cognitive performance and learning potential not only in underachieving or special needs students but in all types of learners including high functioning children and adults. Another important question is that of modularity: Does learning potential constitute a general trait of an individual, something like a learning equivalent of general intelligence score (*G*), or is it modular, dependent on modality and content of the tasks. Finally, whether the ability to learn quickly from cues, models, and other prompts is distinct from cognitive modifiability that requires generalization and transfer? All these issues will be illustrated by recent empirical results of dynamic assessment studies.