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PROLOGUE

This guide is designed to familiarize teachers with an innovative pedagogical approach known as Dynamic Assessment (we'll refer to it as DA throughout most of the text). DA brings instruction and assessment together into a seamless and unified process. It is based on the premise that a full picture of learner development not only requires evidence of what an individual is able to achieve when acting alone but it also necessitates knowledge of how the person responds to assistance, or mediation, when attempting to carry out tasks that are difficult or impossible to complete independently. More formally, DA can be defined as an approach to assessment that “takes into account the results of an intervention” (Sternberg & Grigorenko 2002: vii), the purpose of which is to help the individual not just to perform better on the assessment but to develop greater ability in the subject matter under study. In essence, DA integrates instruction as a central component in the assessment process. Without it, any assessment is incomplete. This means that while a dynamic procedure provides us with a broader picture of learners' abilities, it also supports the development of those abilities. In *The Teacher's Guide* we will consider how assessment and instruction can be fully integrated in order to optimally – and simultaneously – understand and promote development.

Researchers and educators interested in language testing and assessment have recently called for a closer integration of assessment and instruction (see Bachman and Cohen 1998). In general, testing specialists have sought to bring instruction and assessment closer together through what they call the **washback effect** of tests. Although in a narrow version, this is often interpreted to mean that teaching must focus on preparing students for whatever tests are used in a curriculum to assess learner proficiency, achievement, placement, etc. In a broader version of the proposal,

“washback” means that instructional programs should establish goals and a means for evaluating these from the outset and that effective teaching, and effective testing, must keep these in mind. In short, there shouldn’t be a mismatch between what is taught and what is assessed. While we think the weaker version of washback is an important development in improving the quality of instructional programs, we believe that it doesn’t go far enough in bringing assessment into a nexus with instruction.

The guide contains five chapters. The first introduces the general theory of human development on which Dynamic Assessment is based. The theory originates in the writings of the Russian psychologist, L. S. Vygotsky, who argued that human mental functioning is mediated by artifacts, concepts, and activities organized by human culture. It is important to understand Vygotsky’s theory in order to effectively implement DA procedures that are flexible and adaptable to the particular needs of students. As we will see, DA is not a technique to be rigidly followed, but is instead a principled approach to assessment and instruction that requires us to provide assistance that maximally promotes the linguistic and cognitive development of learners. It is therefore important to understand the central principles of human development that underlie DA. This is the major focus of Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 addresses the specific theoretical concept that is most immediately connected to DA – the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD, is the place, or perhaps better said, the activity, where mediated development takes place; that is, the activity whereby appropriately organized and enacted instruction leads to development. In Chapter 3, we will discuss the different approaches to DA that researchers and educators have developed since the concept was first introduced to North American audiences by Vygotsky’s colleague, A. R. Luria in 1961. Chapter 4 will focus on DA as it pertains specifically to foreign and second language education.

We will consider four studies that illustrate different uses of DA in language programs. Each of the first four chapters contains a number of reflection/discussion questions for you to consider either alone or together with your colleagues. Chapter 5 contains a series of case studies that provides you with the opportunity to gain some experience in how to conceptualize assessment activity from the DA perspective. Finally we include a set of video clips illustrating DA procedures as they were implemented with advanced learners

of French. The full text of each video and accompanying analysis is included in written form in the Appendix. Even if you do not understand French you should have little difficulty appreciating the video. Each clip includes English subtitles and we also provide an explanation of the language feature at issue. Although we highly recommend that you read through each chapter of the *Guide* before viewing the video clips, you can probably appreciate the analysis of the clips without working through all of the case studies contained in Chapter 5. But we do recommend that you at least work through case studies 1 and 2.

Once you've had the chance to read the *Guide*, work through the case studies, and view the video, we would very much like to receive your thoughts and feedback. We are particularly interested in learning about your use of DA in your own teaching. For this reason, we have set up a DA Discussion Forum that you can access on the DA project page of CALPER's website: **calper.la.psu.edu**.

In addition to the *Guide*, you can listen to a series of Pod Casts where the authors discuss DA and respond to questions posed by an experienced classroom teacher who is familiar with DA. The Pod Casts can also be found on the DA project page of CALPER's website. Finally, you can find additional information and an exceptional bibliography on DA as it relates to general education at the following address: **<http://www.dynamicassessment.com>**.

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