INTEGRATION OF DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES IN FIRST GRADE ENGLISH ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM-AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The current paper reports the theoretical aspects underpinning the concept of Dynamic Assessment (DA) in education along with the results of a qualitative study focused on the integration of DA procedures within first grade English elementary classroom.

DA provides a conceptual framework for both teaching and assessment which means that becoming aware of the learners' abilities and also determining their development are two integrated activities. Given the fact that current literature lacks too much empirical research on the application of DA in the L2 classroom (Poehner, 2009), the study will explore the application of DA in an EFL classroom and will look at DA as a strategy that could be successfully implemented within the foreign language curriculum for young learners.

Keywords: assessment, dynamic assessment, methodology, zone of proximal development, scaffolding, group dynamic assessment, young learners

The theoretical basis for DA is grounded in the writings of Vygotsky (1978) and mostly in his conceptualization of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Poehner, 2009). Vygotsky (1978) defines the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". Accordingly, Vygotsky (1978) considered that assessment of a child's present knowledge does not equal the possible assessment of that child's potential. He believed that it is more important to assess what a child can do with assistance than what he/she can do individually since it would offer more insight into the child's potential. In order for instruction to be productive, it should be adjusted to the child's ZPD, which brings about an assessment based on mediation to encourage learners perform beyond their actual abilities. According to Lantolf & Poehner (2004), DA is a procedure that "integrates assessment and instruction into a seamless, unified activity aimed at promoting learner development through appropriate forms of mediation that are sensitive to the individual's (or in some case a group's) current abilities. In essence, DA is a procedure for simultaneously assessing and promoting development that takes into account the individual's (or group's) zone of proximal development." This is the most complex definition in the literature concerning DA because it reflects the interactive aspect of DA, the learner's ZPD and also the learner's response to mediation, which is meant to promote development. DA is thus a framework for conceptualizing teaching and assessment as an integrated activity of comprehending students' abilities by constantly encouraging their growth (Poehner, 2008).

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Most of the theoretical and empirical work related to DA reflects an emphasis on the one-to-one, mediator-learner procedures. Vygotsky (1978) himself does not elaborate on the concept of group ZPD, but he mentions the concept while describing the ZPD as "the optimal time for teaching both the group and each individual." Group DA (G-DA) follows the same principle as one-to-one DA (Poehner, 2009), in mediating learners to co-construct a ZPD, but the difference between the two consists in the fact that G-DA must not ignore the ZPD of the group. Within G-DA, the group is involved in an activity that no group member could perform independently, an activity during which all group members need different forms of mediation, which may vary from level to quantity (Poehner, 2009). In order for the G-DA to enhance growth in all group members, the mediator should equally engage all the group members but also provide individual mediation directed to the whole group. Therefore, Poehner (2009) distinguishes between primary and secondary interactants in G-DA. When the teacher offers support to one particular learner in the group, the teacher and the learner are primary interactants and the mediation has a potential effect on the others as well, the rest of the members becoming secondary interactants.

Also Poehner (2009) differentiates between cumulative and concurrent approaches to group DA. In the cumulative approach, the students would "take turns engaging directly as primary interactants with the teacher, with the understanding that each subsequent one-on-one exchange will have the advantage of building on earlier interactions that the class witnessed" (Poehner, 2009). If a student gives an incorrect answer, then the teacher would provide several mediation prompts until he/she would reach the correct answer. Lantolf &Poehner (2011) observed that within the cumulative approach, not only the primary interactants are involved, but also the secondary ones.

On the other hand, the large group concurrent approach occurs when the student having difficulties is not given the opportunity to correct his mistake. The teacher offers mediation and then chooses another student to reformulate the answer (Poehner, 2009).

DA studies in the language classroom

The literature on DA contains studies on general intelligence, first language development, abilities in reading and Math as well as vocational training (Haywood & Lidz, 2007). L2 research on DA looked at lexical, phonological and cultural issues in listening comprehension (Ableeva, 2008), reading comprehension (Kozulin & Garb, 2002) and also verbal tense and aspect (Poehner, 2008). There are two important works which are quite relevant in the field of G-DA: Donato's (1988) and Gibbons' (2003). Both of these studies involve a teacher mediating a group of students and co-constructing ZPDs. Lin (2009) also conducted a DA study with children learning EFL in kindergarten. This study underlines the fact that DA procedures are mostly attractive when it comes to young learners because as Beaty (2002) points out, assessment of young learners should take a more positive approach. As Lin (2009) acknowledges, DA is appropriate for assessing young learners because it does not prohibit scaffolding from the assessor and provides the young learner with support when needed. Lantolf & Poehner (2010) also reported the way an elementary school teacher of Spanish as a second language applied principles of DA during daily instruction. They pointed out that her use of the DA reflected a combination of theory and practice, theory informed her practice but at the same time practice extended theory, since she elaborated her own mediating prompts while conducting DA.

Davin (2011) also considered that DA could promote development with groups of learners and he investigated the implementation of group DA in a combined fourth and fifth grade elementary Spanish classroom as learners were studying interrogative use and formation. He also concluded that DA could be integrated into the language curriculum of early language learning programs.

Formative Assessment versus Dynamic Assessment

Formative assessment is 'instruction-embedded', it is carried out by classroom teachers with the purpose to adjust instruction to learners' needs. Therefore, formative assessment practices attempt to feed back into teaching (Poehner, 2008) by offering information about the students' strengths and weaknesses which informs the instructional activities. Formative assessment takes place during the learning process as well, however, the feedback received by students is not aimed at affecting in a way the students' performance during that particular assessment. Feedback is different from mediation, which is meant to support learner development and occurs during the assessment itself, not after. However, Ellis (2003) describes incidental formative assessment, which happens when teachers engage in conversation during classroom activities. Ellis (2003) further distinguishes between 'internal' and 'external' incidental formative assessment. Internal incidental formative assessment reflects 'teaching questioning and probing' as well as feedback during the performance while external incidental formative assessment aims at promoting teachers' and students' thoughts on the performance either during the activity or after. It is true that incidental formative assessment is similar to DA, however researchers (Torrance and Pryor, 1998) concluded that these 'conversations' are not explored, they are not carried in a systematic way and also they are not informed by a theory of development.

The context of the empirical study

The researcher conducted the study in a private primary school, carrying out instruction for multilingual students from kindergarten to grade 4, located in a large city from north-west Romania. English is studied in the school as a foreign language and it is introduced to students since grade 0, being fully integrated into the school curriculum, with 5 hours/week of 45 minutes each. The data for the current study were taken from one class of six (3 girls and 3 boys) 7 year-old students in their second year of schooling. The researcher is a full-time teacher at this school and at the time of the study, she was in her fourth year of teaching English and her third year in the school.

Methodology of the study and the procedure of data analysis

Action research relies mainly on observational data and observation is the mainstray of action research because it allows teachers to document and reflect on classroom interactions.The current study is framed as a participatory action research study and the interpretive analysis was the preferred method of looking into the content of interactions. The technique used for collecting observational data was video recording. Only two activities during the implementation of the DA principles were video recorded and nine exchanges between the teacher and the learners were transcribed. During both tasks the teacher documented learners' performance during the activity and their response to mediation by filling in an interaction grid with each learner's name alongside several columns. The

teacher implemented cumulative group-DA because of her familiarity with the context and her overall understanding of the learners' ZPD. Accordingly, she arranged the mediation prompts from the most implicit to the most explicit attributing a numerical value to each of them. The implicit prompts were aimed at drawing students' attention that there was a problem, while the explicit prompts would lead learners to correct the mistake. Given the fact that the teacher took into account the learners' age and also their ZPD's, she did not find necessary to include a very explicit prompt, such as explaining the mistake. The mediating prompts (Poehner, 2011) that are associated with the classroom exchanges under analysis are given below:

1. Pause

2. Repeat the whole phrase questioningly

3. Repeat just the part of the sentences with the error

4. Teacher indicates that something is wrong

5. Teacher asks either/or question

6. Teacher identifies the correct answer

Using the mediation scale above, the teacher gave students enough support that was useful to them, but not so much support that they weren't involved at maximum in the process of the activity. As Poehner (2011) implies, there is in DA an important place for learners to struggle a bit, for them to be pushed to do what they are not yet able to do independently, but what they can do with support. As to data analysis, the researcher transcribed the data by using the standard transcription scheme of conversation analysis, then the data were coded according to the numerical value of the mediation prompts provided, assigned to each interaction separately.

The transcription scheme of conversation analysis (Burgess, R. & Bryman A. 1994, Jefferson, 2004)

[…] denotes omitted material;

(0.4) numbers in round brackets measure pauses in seconds (in this case, 4 tenths of a second);

(.) denotes a noticeable pause, too short to time;

Mm:. hh (3.5) *Silence* – numbers in parentheses represent silence in tenths of a second;

British: underlining denotes emphasis;

she wa::nted: Colons show degrees of elongation of the prior sound; the more colons, the more elongation.

CAPITALS- mark speech that is louder than surrounding speech.

The interpretive analysis of the data enabled the emergence of the following themes:

1. *The role of mediation prompts in raising individual and group awareness about the language feature under study*
2. *The effect of teacher-student interaction on the whole group*

In the following exchanges the class is involved in an activity which required them to make picture sentences about the food preferences of the characters in their textbooks. Therefore, each student in the class had to make oral picture sentences and report them to the teacher. Each of the exchanges given below reflects one student's performance of the task and it is framed as a dialogic interaction between the teacher (T) and the student.

The students had to use food related vocabulary they have studied for the past week, however given the fact that they would need to mark subject-verb agreement in the third person singular, the focus of the lesson is grammatical.

1.The role of mediation prompts in raising individual and group awareness about the language feature under study

Exchange 1: The teacher (T) and the first student to report, Victoria (V)

1. T: What does Roxy like?	4. T: Roxy is (0.4) like meatballs?
2. V: Roxy is like meatballs.	5. V: (3.5)
3. T: (0.4)	

The first thing that the teacher did was to pause since this is the most implicit form of mediation, allowing the student to realize that she has made an error, however, the student was not aware of it and therefore the teacher used the second form of implicit mediation, by repeating the entire structure questioningly meaning "are you sure that this is what you want to say?". Even if the student realized that she had made an error, she was focused on the lexical content of the structure, not on the grammatical feature, therefore another implicit prompt would not have enabled her to self-correct. The student waited for the teacher to prompt her again in a more explicit way. Accordingly, the teacher used prompt 5 giving an alternative to the student, a prompt which is very explicit, but which enabled the student to choose the correct option.

6. T: "is like or likes?"	12. V: (0.4)
7. V: likes meatballs	13. V: Sandy doesn't like salad.
8. T: Well-done Victoria!	14. T: Excellent!
9. V: (0.4)	15. V: Toby is like yoghurt.
10. V: Morris likes grapes.	16. T: (0.4)
11. T: Very good Victoria!	

The teacher paused, waiting for Victoria to realize that she has made the same error as before in line 15. The fact that Victoria has made the same mistake twice is quite revealing because it points out that at this stage she does not have full control over that particular language feature. The teacher continues to prompt Victoria by repeating only the part of the sentence with error, since the previous interactions enabled the teacher to detect the specific error Victoria makes.

17. T: <u>is like</u>?

18. V: (0.4)

19. V: Toby <u>likes</u> yoghurt.

20. T: Very good Victoria!

21. V: Fifi <u>is like</u> kiwis.

22. T: (0.4)

In line 19 Victoria self-corrects after pausing and continues the task, however in line 21 the same mistake is made and the teacher decided to draw the other students into the interactions between Victoria and her in order to check whether the class has benefitted or not from the mediation prompts given to Victoria so far.

23. T: How it's correct, *IS LIKE* or *LIKES*?

24. Class: LIKES

25. T: Well-done!

26. V: (.)

27. V: Fifi likes kiwis.

[…]

This exchange made the teacher consider the thought of what would have happened if she had only provided the correct answer without giving any prompts. If the teacher had done that, all she had ever known during that particular exchange, was that Victoria was not able to correctly mark subject-verb agreement in the third person singular, she would not have known to what extent Victoria needed support or what was the constant error she made. The process had an instructional quality by allowing the rest of the students to go through it in order to understand how to arrive at the correct answer.

The following exchange also reflects the role of the mediation prompts in raising students' awareness about a particular language structure.

Exchange 2: Yolanda (Y), the second student to report and the teacher (T)

1. Y: Fifi <u>doesn't likes</u> honey.

2. T: (0.4)

3. Y: (3.5)

4. T: <u>doesn't likes</u>?

5. Y: (3.5)

6. T: is it correct DOESN'T LIKES?

7. Y: I don't know

8. Y: (0.4)

9. T: <u>doesn't like</u> or <u>doesn't likes</u>?

10. Y: doesn't like

11. T: Well done!

12. Y: Morris (0.4) doesn't (0.4) <u>like</u> bananas.

13. T: Excellent!

14. Y: Grandfather (0.4) doesn't <u>like</u> kiwis.

15. T: Very good!

16. Y: Harry (0.4) doesn't (0.4) like lemons.

17. [...]

The student needed the 5th mediation prompt in line 9 since the previous implicit mediation prompts did not have the expected outcome and she was not yet able to use the structure independently. The forced choice was designed to help the student move up to a higher level of ZPD, therefore, the prompt had both and instructional quality, but also an assessment feature by enabling the teacher to find out the extent to which Yolanda needed support. During the following interactions, Yolanda formulated correct picture sentences, however, what is very interesting is that whenever she had to use 'doesn't like' she would pause and think, then she would be quite hesitant while uttering the structure showing that she still needed support from the teacher. This aspect related to confidence building in assessment is crucial when it comes to young learners who need to be constantly encouraged while assessed. Yolanda cannot perform independently, still, based on the exchange above, she is much closer than Victoria to doing so because she makes a mistake, but then she focuses more before uttering a sentence, the pauses being relevant evidence.

2. The effect of teacher-student interaction on the whole group

As Lantolf and Poehner (2009) state, from the perspective of cumulative G-DA it is very important to evaluate the potential effects that the interactions between the student and the teacher had on the class itself. Since the interaction between the teacher and the students took place in the class, during regular instruction, the rest of the students also participated as secondary interactants (Lantolf and Poehner, 2009). The students in the following exchanges have been secondary interactants during the previous exchanges and the following examples aim at showing the decrease in the level of mediation prompts provided by the teacher.

Exchange 3: Andrew (A), the third student to report and the teacher (T)

Andrew is the third student to make frontal picture sentences. He had no problems with marking subject-verb agreement, therefore he was given 0 in the mediation chart. However, he seemed to experience some problems with the negative form.

[...]

1. A: Morris doesn't <u>likes </u>strawberries.

2. T: (0.4)

3. T: <u>Morris doesn't likes strawberries</u>?

The teacher paused, using the most implicit meditational prompt, then she reproduced the learner's sentence in a questioning tone, which in some cases is enough for the learners to reconsider their answer and self-correct. After

being given prompt number 2, Andrew paused, which shows that he was going indeed through a thinking process before providing another answer.

4. A: doesn't (0.4) like strawberries

5. T: Very good Andrew!

The mediation prompt gave Andrew the possibility to self-correct and allowed the teacher to provide only the support that the student actually needed, neither more nor less. For instance, it would have been unnecessary for the teacher to simply state that the answer Andrew gave was incorrect, because it wouldn't have given Andrew the possibility to go through a thinking process which enhanced development.

6. A: Bella (0.4) doesn't (0.4)

8. T: Excellent Andrew!

7. A: doesn't (0.4) like yoghurt.

9. […]

This interaction is highly important since it shows that Andrew did not randomly give an answer, the pauses are relevant evidence to account for the process that enabled Andrew to arrive at the correct solution. Andrew's hesitant voice shows that he has been struggling with the solution, which is exactly what Poehner (2011) notices as one of the main features of DA. In both interactions Andrew needed implicit mediation prompts, however he wouldn't have been able to perform completely independently. The quality of Andrew's performance could be attributable to the mediation the teacher provided Victoria and Yolanda in the first two exchanges but it is also likely that Andrew had a better command of those forms. The first three exchanges differ significantly from the perspective of the ZPD since neither student could completely perform autonomously. The use of DA procedures revealed that the students needed a different kind of support and that Andrew might be developmentally ahead of Victoria and Yolanda. The following interaction is part of an exchange between Maria, another student in the class and Andrew, representing evidence that the mediation prompts had an effect on students' development and on their increased awareness about the language structure they have been studying. The student made a mistake and immediately another student prompted his classmate, which suggests that the students themselves are likely to internalize those mediating prompts in order to use them on a regular basis to self-correct.

Exchange 4: Maria (M), a student in the class, and Andrew (A), the student previously reporting

1. M: Morris like pizza.

3. M: likes

2. A: like or likes?

4. […]

Even if Andrew used the 5th prompt, the significance of Andrew's intervention is twofold. First, he remembered that the explicit prompt would enable his classmate to reformulate her answer and secondly, it is evidence that the student benefitted from the mediating prompts given in the classroom.

As to peer mediation, Wertsch and Hickmann (1987) observed that students rather tend to spontaneously provide a correct answer, or the most explicit form of mediation, which occurred in the case of Andrew, instead of actually

helping the peer to arrive at the correct solution through a thinking process. As Davin (2011) acknowledged, peer mediation is largely explicit and unconsciously given and the students' intention is not to further the development of their classmates.

Exchange 5: Alexander (A), the fourth student to report and the teacher (T)

1. A: Toby like honey.

2. *T: (0.4)*

3. A: Toby <u>likes </u>honey.

4. T: Excellent!

5. A: Sandy <u>doesn't likes</u> candies.

6. T: (0.4)

7. T: <u>Doesn't likes candies?</u>

8. A: (0.4)

9. T: <u>doesn't likes?</u>

10. A: Doesn't li::ke

11. T: Very good!

12. A: and Bella doesn't like ice cream.

13. T: Excellent!

14. […]

Alexander is the fourth student who has been provided mediation during the same task. It is important to notice that in line 2 the teacher provided the most implicit mediation prompt aimed to make him realize that he has made a mistake. The teacher's skeptical look and pause were the only indicators that he must go through the thinking process and reformulate his answer, which, compared to the previous performances is the most important progress. This might suggest that he benefitted from the previous exchanges, but he is not yet able to perform independently. In the 5th line, Alexander makes the same mistake as Andrew, he didn't react to the first prompt, therefore the teacher used prompt 3. For the following interactions he received 0 in the mediation grid as he did not need any support.

The following exchange illustrates the best the effect the previous ones had on the class as a whole being the last one that occurred during that particular task. In the case of Michael, the frequency of mediation prompts decreased to zero, which might be an indicator that the learner's ZPD was at a higher level than at the beginning of the task.

Exchange 6: Michael (M), the fifth student to report and the teacher (T)

1. M: Roxy <u>likes </u>grapes.

2. T: Excellent Michael!

3. M: Sandy <u>doesn't like</u> yoghurt.

4. T: Well-done!

5. […]

The analysis of the above exchanges showed not only that that there are indeed important individual differences between the students' developmental level but also the fact that they needed decreasing levels of support, which indicates that the entire group might have benefitted from the mediation prompts that the teacher provided to learners individually.

The following exchanges took place two days later and the class was still working in the same unit. The students were given as homework the previous day to ask their parents about their food preferences and tick accordingly in the table they were given to fill in. The exchanges presented below reflect the way students reported to the teacher the food preferences of their family and moreover they attempt to render students' progress in terms of internalizing the subject-verb agreement issues in the third person singular.

Exchange 7: Maria (M), the first student to report and the teacher (T)

1. .M: Daddy doesn't like candies.
2. T: Okay
3. M: Daddy like sandwiches.
4. T: (0.4)
5. T: Daddy like sandwiches?
6. M: Daddy like (0.4)…ye::ah
7. T: There is a problem with 'like', Maria
8. M: (3.5)
9. M: likes
10. T: good
11. M: Daddy don't like milk.
12. T: (0.4)
13. T: don't like?
14. M: don't like
15. T: is it correct 'don't like'?
16. M: (3.5)
17. M: Daddy doesn't like milk.
18. T: Very good!
19. […]

In this exchange, Maria manages to self-correct after being prompted. In line 5 the teacher repeated the part of the sentence containing the error, still this did not draw Maria's attention. The teacher then considered that Maria needed to be told that there was a problem with 'like', using thus prompt number 4, adapted for the current situation. This prompt was enough for Maria to self-correct, which she actually did in line 9 and the teacher approved. In line 11 Maria made another mistake, the teacher paused and used the most implicit prompts in order to enable Maria self-correct again, however since the student did not respond to the prompt, the teacher indicated that there is a problem with 'don't like', using prompt number 4, which allowed Maria to self-correct and reformulate her sentence. The learner continued reporting without needing any other support, therefore the teacher noted 0 in the interaction grid.

In the following exchange, Michael was only prompted once by the teacher and made him reconsider his statement by repeating the part of the sentence containing the mistake with a rising intonation.

Exchange 8: Michael (M), the second student to report and the teacher

1. M: Mummy doesn't likes pizza.
2. T: (0.4)
3. T: doesn't likes pizza?
4. M: doesn't like
5. T: very good!
6. […]

Two other students, Andrew and Alexander have performed without any kind of support, for both negative and positive statements, therefore the teacher noted 0 in the interaction grid. Yolanda, who lacked confidence during the

exchanges in the first task, made only one mistake in the second task, but she managed to self-correct, therefore the teacher noted 2 in the interaction grid.

Exchange 9: Yolanda (Y), the third student to report and the teacher (T)

1. Y: Daddy <u>doesn't likes</u> pizza.

2. T: (0.4)

3. T: <u>doesn't likes</u> pizza?

4. Y: (0.4)

5. Y: doesn't like

6. [...]

Poehner (2008) does not define development as autonomous performance, but just as Aljaafreh and Lanotolf's (1994) observed, development in the ZPD can sometimes result only in very subtle changes, and the current paper explicitly pointed out interactions in which learners required less mediation prompts and also instances in which they actually began to respond in a more autonomous way. What is important to mention is that learners may develop during one single interaction only (Poehner, 2008) and this aspect was also highlighted in the current paper.

Discussion and Conclusions

In previous research, DA was mainly implemented in outside of the classroom studies (Feuerstein, Rand & Hoffman, 1980; Pena & Gilliam, 2000; Poehner, 2008) and it was Lantolf and Poehner (2011) who actually tried to bring DA in the actual language classroom, the current study representing a similar attempt. Poehner (2011) considers that conducting studies in the language classroom with the focus of implementing DA procedures in the language curriculum would further determine more ways in which DA could be used effectively in the classroom. The data in the first task revealed the extent to which the mediation prompts could further learners' development and also examined the impact that the interactions between the teacher and the learner has on the rest as well. This framework reflects the fact that no group member could perform independently and that within the group each member needed different forms of mediation (Poehner, 2009). By using the prompts, the teacher was thus able to dynamically assess students' performance, which is similar both to Davin's (2011) and Poehner's findings (2009). Similar to the findings of Poehner (2009), the data suggest that the students benefitted from the mediation provided but also from the exchanges they have witnessed in the classroom. The analysis of the interactions between the teacher and the first three students showed that they were developmentally different, still the mediation prompts would offer the teacher an insight into the learners' individual abilities (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994) with the purpose of furthering development. The last exchange in the first task, between Michael and the teacher, is important because it also echoes the findings of Poehner and Lantolf (2011) who recognized the potential benefits that the mediation prompts may have on the class as a whole. As Poehner (2011) notices, "observing other students work through a process can be developmentally beneficial for learners and also working through that process themselves could be developmentally beneficial". The main difference between the two tasks consisted in the length of time required for the students to report. Interestingly, even if the first task required longer time, the second task reflecting an

internalization of the language feature under study required less than expected, the students showed an increased confidence, which is comparable to the findings of Lantolf and Poehner (2011). This aspect also suggests that DA procedures are more attractive to young learners and as Beaty (2002) points out, assessment of young learners should take a more positive approach. The findings of the study, which echo Poehner, Lantolf (2009, 2011) and Davin (2011), account for the possibility to introduce DA procedures in language pedagogy. As Poehner (2011) suggests, there is no "right or wrong" way in DA procedures and each teacher can implement and conceive mediation prompts which would enable him/her to get a fair diagnosis of the learner's abilities. Also the current study showed that by working through the process with the students, they could come to understand how to arrive at the correct solution and the fact that the responsibility to arrive at the solution also rests with them, not only with the teacher (Poehner, 2011). Since the study was qualitative in nature, the focus being on the content analysis of the interactions that occurred between the mediator and the students, it would be beyond the scope of the study to affirm that there is significant decline in the quantity or quality of the mediation prompts provided to the students. However, the performance of students during the second task showed that individual development occurred since in most of the cases a mere pause was enough for the students to self-correct. It is true that they still made mistakes, but they showed greater confidence in their abilities and the capacity to self-correct. Davin (2011) considers that development is defined as the ability of the student to perform independently in subsequent tasks. The performance in the second task revealed that while some students, such as Andrew, Alexander and Michael managed to move through their ZPD almost immediately, others, such as Victoria, Yolanda or Maria were still not fully capable of independent performance, which echoes the findings of Davin (2011) as well.

The current study illustrates how DA could be integrated into the regular classroom instruction, offering not only more opportunities for students, but also for the teacher to learn information about the students' individual abilities echoing the results found by Kozulin and Garb (2002). Poehner (2009) looks at the potential that group DA could have by stating that it sensitizes teachers to learner development, it re-envisions groups as cohesive units whose development is strongly interrelated with the development of individuals themselves, however Poehner (2009) also points out that not every exchange between the teacher and the student is likely to have a developmental importance for all the learners in the group. The development of the group can be noticed both through the individual performance of the group members, but also through the group's attitude and response to the support received from the teacher.

In the context of the current literature on DA, the current study is notable since it attempted to integrate DA in daily classroom practices and to show its potential advantages with young learners in particular. As far as assessment of young learners is concerned, DA represents a feasible approach to assessment since it is process oriented, it is anxiety-free and it offers much more insight into the students' individual abilities by specifically taking into account young learners' charactersitics of vulnerabiliy and development.

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