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GROUP DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT IN A SECONDARY SPANISH CLASSROOM:  
STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Given recent trends in education such as differentiation, it is clear that each student needs support at his or her own level, especially in second language classes where language proficiencies may vary greatly. However, even experienced teachers can feel swamped with the need to assess each student and then design instruction to meet his or her level. Dynamic assessment proposes a solution to these problems. This paper gives a brief explanation of the origins, formats, and recent studies of dynamic assessment, particularly as pertaining to second language learning and group dynamic assessment conducted from an interventionist approach. The original research presented in this paper examines the perceptions of participants in a group dynamic assessment strategy as used in a secondary Spanish classroom. Participants in the study, including the student teacher, mentor teacher, and students, agreed that the strategy affected student effort and attitude when providing answers in the classroom, but they encountered problems with the amount of time necessary to use a series of eight prompts arranged from most implicit to most explicit to promote student learning. The conclusion provides suggestions for further research in the field of dynamic assessment.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

New teachers try their hardest to use the techniques and strategies they have learned to create the best learning environment possible for their classes, yet they may be overwhelmed or feel that something is lacking. Given recent trends in education such as differentiation, it is clear that each student needs support at his or her own level, especially in second language classes where language proficiencies may vary greatly. However, even experienced teachers can feel swamped with the need to assess each student and then design instruction to meet his or her level. Dynamic assessment proposes a solution to these problems. Dynamic assessment, as a type of assessment that reconciles assessment and instruction while aiming to tease out subtle differences in levels of learner proficiency, is an approach based on sociocultural theory that has recently been introduced to the field of second language learning. Over the past ten to fifteen years a number of studies have examined various aspects and formats of dynamic assessment in the language classroom, but very little research has been done at the secondary level. Additionally, how students and teachers feel about dynamic assessment and its use in the classroom has not been a topic of discussion. This paper presents the findings of a study aimed to garner information about students' and teachers' perceptions of how dynamic assessment functions in practice in a secondary Spanish classroom.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Sociocultural Theory and Dynamic Assessment**

The ideas behind dynamic assessment have been around since the 1960's and 1970's, since the term was coined by A.R. Luria in 1961 and later popularized by Reuven Feuerstein (Poehner, 2007, p. 325). Poehner and Lantolf explain in their 2011 guide to dynamic assessment for teachers that dynamic assessment is a product of a sociocultural theory of learning based on the ideas of Lev Vygotsky, who originated the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). These ideas originally developed as a reaction to traditional IQ tests that measured students' learning potential and produced a number. Vygotsky was not satisfied that this number adequately reflected a child's ability to learn, since some children were able to demonstrate an ability to learn rapidly when aided by an adult or 'more capable peer' while others who received the same score were not (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011b, p. 27; Vygotsky, 1986). Thus, dynamic assessment was born as a method to capture this difference in ability. Dynamic assessment also has the distinct characteristic of simultaneously providing assessment and instruction, since the mediation provided while dynamic assessment is being carried out is intended to work with the learner in their zone of proximal development, where learning takes place according to sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2009, p. 356). It does this by providing prompts ranging from most implicit to most explicit, so that learners receive only as much support as they need to complete the task successfully, and teachers can make note of the level of support necessary (Lantolf, 2009, p. 360). As one can assume from its origins and the purpose of its development, since its

conception dynamic assessment has been commonly used as an alternative IQ test (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011, p. 14). It has also been used similarly in the field of special education as a way to identify and work with students with diverse needs (Haywood & Lidz, 2007; Lantolf, 2009, p. 359; Poehner & Lantolf, 2010, p. 312). More recently however, the field of second language learning has seen the introduction of dynamic assessment because of its ability to reveal subtle differences in language ability that are invisible in the results of typical non-dynamic assessments (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994, p. 468), especially assessments that claim to represent learner “proficiency” or “fluency”, since these concepts, while frequently discussed in the field of language learning, are by no means well defined or easy to measure. Dynamic assessment as related specifically to second language learning will be discussed in greater depth later on in this review of the literature.

### **Terms and Formats of Dynamic Assessment**

As the concept has spread and become more widely recognized in the academic sphere, research on dynamic assessment has branched out into a number of different categories and formats. Several of these terms and formats will be discussed here to display the variety of ways that dynamic assessment can be packaged for use and study by researchers, as well as teachers and other professionals.

First of all, dynamic assessment is typically divided between the two categories of ‘interventionist’ and ‘interactionist’ dynamic assessment (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011, p. 15). These two terms are useful when discussing situations in which dynamic assessment is used, and will be repeated multiple times in the context of this paper. Interventionist dynamic assessment, as defined by Lantolf, is “a prefabricated and fixed set of clues and hints [that] is determined in advance and offered to learners as they move through a test

item by item” [it is important to note that in the context of this quote a ‘test’ is not strictly defined, and such dynamic assessment can happen with multiple kinds of assessment formats or classroom activities] (2009, p. 360). On the other hand, in interactionist dynamic assessment, the mediation “is not predetermined but is instead negotiated with the individual, which means that it is continually adjusted according to the learner’s responsivity” (Lantolf, 2009, p. 360). To put it simply, interventionist approaches are more quantitative, and interactionist approaches are more qualitative. Whether to use an interventionist or interactionist approach is typically a choice made by the teacher/researcher based on his or her beliefs and theoretical background, as well as the factors constraining the situation in which the dynamic assessment takes place.

Beyond the terms ‘interventionist’ and ‘interactionist’, two other terms that have been coined to describe different formats used in dynamic assessment are ‘sandwich’ format and ‘cake’ format (Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2002; Davin, 2011, p. 15). The use of food terms provides an easily recognizable metaphor for the two types of format used when conducting dynamic assessment. In ‘sandwich’ implementation, students complete a task or test in a traditional non-dynamic assessment manner, undergo dynamic assessment mediation, and re-do the traditional task, such that the dynamic assessment is the ‘meat’ of the assessment sandwiched between the two tasks. The second format is ‘cake’ format, in which dynamic assessment mediation is provided throughout the task, much like all the ingredients in a cake are mixed together to create an even texture. With these terms it becomes easy to visualize how mediation is provided to learners within the context of the activity.

Another important distinction in the way dynamic assessment is implemented is whether it is administered one-on-one between a student and a mediator, or between a group of students and a single mediator (Poehner, 2009). Each of these two styles present a different challenge, and researchers/mediators typically find it appropriate to match certain formats of dynamic assessment with each other because of the characteristics of each. Because interactionist dynamic

assessment relies heavily on the mediator's ability to adjust mediation according to the learner's responsiveness, as mentioned above, it is impractical to use interactionist dynamic assessment in a group setting because there would be too many learners for the mediator to adjust to; in fact the definition of interactionist dynamic assessment quoted earlier emphasizes that mediation "is not predetermined but is instead negotiated with the *individual* [emphasis added]" (Lantolf, 2009, p. 360). For this reason, group dynamic assessment tends to use an interventionist approach. Individual dynamic assessment, on the other hand, can make use of either an interactionist or an interventionist approach with ease, so it is up to the researcher/mediator to decide which method to use. However, the mixing and matching of these approaches is an area that still remains open for exploration in the field of dynamic assessment, so researchers may take different standpoints in the years to come.

One factor that could impact the use of various formats of dynamic assessment such as those that have been discussed so far is the introduction of computerized dynamic assessment. With the advent of technology's omnipresence in education and especially foreign language education, it was only natural for dynamic assessment to follow the trend and experiment with mixing this approach with technology. Specific examples of research with computerized dynamic assessment will be presented later in this literature review, but put simply, in computerized dynamic assessment the mediator is replaced with a computer. After all, Vygotsky said that learning within the ZPD takes place with the aid of a more capable peer, without specifying that the peer must be a human counterpart. Additionally, computerized dynamic assessment provides different challenges and opportunities than human-mediated dynamic assessment. For a computer, it makes no difference whether a classroom has one or ten or one hundred students because it can provide mediation to all students at the same time (although so far the possibility of computer mediation with an entire group of students interacting with each other simultaneously, such as one might see in a classroom, has not yet been explored).

Furthermore, computerized dynamic assessment naturally lends itself to an interventionist approach because of the quantitative set-up called for by that approach; an interactionist approach would be more difficult for a computer to handle, although technology continues to develop so that possibility cannot be ruled out definitively (Lantolf, 2009, p. 360). In short, computerized dynamic assessment is another recent advance that continues to be made in the field of dynamic assessment that provides an additional way for this approach to be introduced to classrooms and other educational settings.

Finally, as related specifically to group dynamic assessment, a paper by Poehner brings to the discussion two additional terms to differentiate between ways of conducting group dynamic assessment. These terms are ‘concurrent group dynamic assessment’ (sometimes referred to as ‘concurrent G-DA’) and ‘cumulative group dynamic assessment’ (sometimes referred to as ‘cumulative G-DA’) (Poehner, 2009, p. 478). In ‘cumulative G-DA’ the teacher mediates single students through series of prompts until they reach the correct answer in front of the entire group of students. In contrast, ‘concurrent G-DA’ refers to an approach in which the teacher interacts with the whole group at once by moving from student to student within the prompting sequence. The need to differentiate these two approaches arises from the different kinds of student-teacher and student-student interactions and atmospheres created in the classroom as a result of different sequencing of student responses. As Poehner puts it, “Cumulative G-DA attempts to move the group forward through co-constructing ZPDs with individuals, but concurrent G-DA supports the development of each individual by working within the group’s ZPD” (Poehner, 2009, p. 478). This discussion of these ways to refer to two types of group dynamic assessment will be brought up again later in the ‘findings’ section of this paper during analysis of the participants’ perceptions of the group dynamic assessment intervention used during the present study.

## **Generalizability and Validity**

Other research that has been conducted recently in the field of dynamic assessment as a result of needs found by prior research relates to the generalizability and validity of dynamic assessment. The concepts, which are important in traditional, non-dynamic assessments, have different relationships with dynamic assessment because of its nature of combining instruction and assessment. While not of great specific concern to the study at hand, these factors are important to consider as dynamic assessment achieves more recognition among educators.

Firstly, the question of validity in dynamic assessment asks if it fulfills its intended purpose, which is an important question to ask of any assessment. For dynamic assessment, the real questions are, does it provide insights into learner abilities that are still forming, and does it promote learner development? (Poehner, 2011, p. 244). Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into much detail about validity, Poehner elaborates in his article on the subject that there are two types in dynamic assessment, micro and macro validity. Micro validity is concerned with the instructor's interpretation of the learner's contribution and the validity of the subsequent prompt(s), whereas macro validity looks at whether the overall session of interactions proves successful in assessing and aiding the learner. This way of looking at validity is analogous to analyzing the validity of a single item compared to the whole test in non-dynamic assessment (Poehner, 2011, p. 256). In short, dynamic assessment retains the same need as non-dynamic assessment for examination of validity in order to be certain that the assessment is working as intended.

Next there is the question of generalizability. Again, a full treatment of this aspect of dynamic assessment is beyond the scope of this paper, but the topic will be briefly touched upon here to recognize recent research on the subject. To begin, typically the term 'generalizability' refers to the idea that the results of a test accurately relate to student performance in other

contexts. Unlike with the concept of validity, the characteristics of dynamic assessment that set it apart from non-dynamic assessment have an impact on how researchers and analysts think about generalizability in dynamic assessment. In a recent article, Poehner states that because dynamic assessment “fully integrates assessment with instructional activities since both involve providing appropriate mediation to support learner development[,] generalizing assessment performance to classroom activities becomes a nonissue because instruction is part of assessment just as assessment is ongoing during instruction” (2007, p. 334). That is to say, since assessment and instruction are one and the same, there is no need to compare one to the other. However, in exchange for the reduced focus on generalizability in dynamic assessment, teachers and other dynamic assessment administrators instead need to pay close attention to factors involved in tracking learner development, such as “the types of problems learners encounter, the mediation they require to overcome these problems, their responsiveness to mediation, and their efforts to gain greater autonomy” in order to ensure collection of data necessary to compile an accurate picture of each learner for the ‘assessment’ part of dynamic assessment (Poehner, 2007, p. 334). Finally, this discussion of generalizability in dynamic assessment will close with the idea of transcendence: Poehner argues that rather than generalizability in the traditional sense (as described earlier in this paragraph), what users of dynamic assessment should focus on is *transcendence*, also known as ‘transfer’, or the ability of learners to apply their knowledge to more difficult and novel tasks (Poehner, 2007, p. 325). Dynamic assessment with these types of tasks is necessary to observe and assess what learners are able to do with tasks that challenge them, as well as what kind of prompts and support might be necessary for their continued development. This is the kind of transfer that is the focus of ‘generalizability’ in dynamic assessment.

## **Group Dynamic Assessment in Second Language Learning**

### **Early Research in Dynamic Assessment in Second Language Learning**

Having briefly summarized the various formats and methods according to which dynamic assessment can be implemented as well as having looked into how the concepts of validity and generalizability relate to dynamic assessment as compared to non-dynamic assessment, this literature review will now move on to a discussion of individual studies done on the topic of dynamic assessment, and in particular group dynamic assessment, as it has related specifically to the field of second language learning over the past ten to twenty years (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Much of the fundamental research concerning dynamic assessment as it relates to second language learning has been conducted within this time period, including numerous new studies on a variety of languages and contexts. As a result, it is clear to see that dynamic assessment is a fairly new approach in this field. Over the years research on dynamic assessment as a theory has moved from its place as a diagnostic tool in a variety of fields, into a tool to work with English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, spread out to a wider variety of languages at the college level where an interactionist approach was typically used, and now has begun to branch out into a wider variety of contexts in second language learning such as elementary and language schools in addition to gaining a wider research base on the use of interventionist approaches (Ajideh & Nourdad, 2012; Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Davin, 2011; Lantolf, 2009, p. 359; Lin, 2010; Oskoz, 2005; Poehner, 2009; Shabani, 2012). So far researchers of dynamic assessment in the field of language learning have found the strategy to be useful for “multiple purposes such as determining program placement for language learners, assisting an examiner in the diagnosis of the source of a learner’s misconceptions, and promoting student proficiency in the target language” (Davin, 2012, p. 24). The body of research in dynamic assessment in second language learning is



growing in a number of directions, yet at the present moment seems to consist of a variety of disparate studies that cover much ground but yet leave many holes to be filled by future research. The following discussion will focus on some recent studies that have made contributions to the field, particularly those of an interventionist and group dynamic assessment nature. These are also the studies that had the greatest influence on the design of the research at hand.

One of the fundamental studies related to dynamic assessment is described in a paper by Aljaafreh and Lantolf published in 1994. Although this study occurred before the term ‘dynamic assessment’ came into popular use in the field of second language learning, it is clear to see that it was conducted within a socialcultural framework (based on the work of Lev Vygotsky and his theory of the ‘Zone of Proximal Development’, or ZPD) and made use of various levels of prompts describing the different levels of support required by learners to produce correct language forms, and thus it can be considered as a forerunner of research on dynamic assessment in the field of second language learning. In the design of this study the researchers worked with three ESL students at the university level to revise their writing. Feedback was given and recorded over the course of five weeks, and at the end the researchers had observed and described “five general levels of transition from intermental to intramental functioning as the learners moved through the ZPD toward self-regulation and control over the target structure” (Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994, p. 470). That is to say, students displayed five levels of development as they gradually relied less and less on prompts from the mediator and were able to improve their English writing skills. These five transitional levels were then determined by the researchers to represent three general stages of development, moving from “other-regulation” to “partial self-regulation” and finally to self-regulation. These levels are important in the process of learning to write because students who are at the level of self-regulation can edit their own work, while students at the stages of “other-regulation” and “partial self-regulation” are unable to recognize their own mistakes, and require input from another source in order to correct their errors. This

distinction may be particularly helpful for teachers of writing classes who need to decide how to spend their time working with students of various abilities. Furthermore, Aljaafreh and Lantolf presented more specifically “a listing of the levels of help, or regulation, that were identified in the analysis of the interactions that occurred during the tutorial sessions” arranged from lowest (most implicit) to highest (most explicit) as seen below.

Figure 1: Prompts devised from Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994)

0. Tutor asks the learner to read, find the errors, and correct them independently, prior to the tutorial.
1. Construction of a “collaborative frame” prompted by the presence of the tutor as a potential dialogic partner.
2. Prompted or focused reading of the sentence that contains the error by the learner or the tutor.
3. Tutor indicates that something may be wrong in a segment (e.g., sentence, clause, line)— “Is there anything wrong in this sentence?”
4. Tutor rejects unsuccessful attempts at recognizing the error.
5. Tutor narrows down the location of the error (e.g., tutor repeats or points to the specific segment which contains the error).
6. Tutor indicates the nature of the error, but does not identify the error (e.g., “There is something wrong with the tense marking here”).
7. Tutor identifies the error (“You can’t use an auxiliary here”).

8. Tutor rejects learner's unsuccessful attempts at correcting error.
9. Tutor provides clues to help the learner arrive at the correct form  
(e.g., "It is not really past but some thing that is still going on").
10. Tutor provides the correct form.
11. Tutor provides some explanation for use of the correct form.
12. Tutor provides examples of the correct pattern when other forms of help fail to produce an appropriate responsive action.

(p. 471)

Thus, as described in this brief summary, the study began with an interactionist approach where the mediators freely gave learners the prompts they needed, but in the end created a tool useful for what we now know as the interventionist approach. This is a precedent set for other research in dynamic assessment that may seek to develop appropriate prompts to be used in interventionist dynamic assessment interventions with any variety of learners and settings. The way in which specific prompts such as these are used by mediators and students during interventionist dynamic assessment is described in this excerpt from an article by Poehner:

In contrast to many educational applications of the ZPD in which mediation unfolds dialogically (e. g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994), the Graduated Prompt Approach [a term used by Palinscar, Brown, and Campione in 1991] follows a standardized approach to interaction: Mediation is scripted prior to the assessment and standardized as a series of hints arranged from most implicit to most explicit. When learners encounter problems, the mediator

first offers the most implicit hint in the repertoire. If this hint is sufficient for the learner to overcome the problem, they move on. Otherwise the mediator provides the next hint, and so on until, if necessary, the mediator actually reveals the solution to the problem and offers an explanation of the principles involved (2007, p. 326).

As will be apparent in the design of future studies to be discussed later in this literature review, this early study by Aljaafreh and Lantolf was the basis for numerous other subsequent studies in second language learning that have since used scripted prompts in the style of the as-of-then-undeveloped interventionist approach to dynamic assessment.

### **Research in Group Dynamic Assessment in Second Language Learning at the University Level**

A study by Oskoz in 2005, more than ten years after the study previously discussed, elaborated on some of the ideas brought up by Aljaafreh and Lantolf's research to look at the use of dynamic assessment with university students studying Spanish (Oskoz, 2005, p. 521). This time the study was computer-based, and focused on students' use of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC, also known commonly outside of academia as 'instant messaging') and students' mediation of one another to show stages of learner development from the perspective of dynamic assessment. In the study, five classes of students at various proficiency levels used the SCMC technology in pairs, and their responses and moves to mediate each other were later analyzed to separate students into five levels of ability depending on the amount of support learners needed to correct their errors (Oskoz, 2005, p. 521). Although

this study employed a mostly interactionist approach to dynamic assessment, it gives insight into the way technology might be used to create computerized dynamic assessment, and also offered an early look at using dynamic assessment with a foreign language in a U.S. context.

Two other studies done very recently, in 2012, were also conducted within a university context, but in these cases the studies were conducted at universities in Iran with students learning English as a foreign language. Both were focused specifically on reading comprehension, and used an interactionist approach to handle large numbers of students (50 in one study and 197 in the other study) (Ajideh & Nourdad, 2012, p.146; Shabani, 2012, p.19). During the study by Shabani, fifty students were assessed based on five levels of prompts delivered in a computerized format of dynamic assessment. For the assessment, students were expected to read a paragraph and select the best one-sentence summary from ten multiple choice options. The first level of prompting was the absence of a prompt, assuming students could answer the question without support (Shabani, 2012, p. 20). The other prompts were as follows, with the first two being described as implicit, and the second two being described as explicit:

Figure 2: Prompts used in Shabani (2012)

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Read the text again.</li><li>2 Look at the first picture and read the text again.</li><li>3 Look at the second picture and read the text again.</li><li>4 Look at the third picture and read the text again.</li></ol> |
|--|

(p. 20)

Each prompt was accompanied by a picture that got progressively more explicit; see Shabani (2012, p. 23-4) for further details.

In contrast, the study by Ajideh and Nourdad was done with similar students and focused on a similar skill, but was administered differently, without the use of computers. In this

study students were required to read passages and answer multiple choice questions. Three prompts for each question were provided in written form along with the questions, labeled A, B, and C from most implicit to most explicit; if students were still unable to correctly answer the question after using all three prompts, the question was determined to be beyond their ZPD. Contrary to the other study where the prompts were primarily pictorial in nature, prompts in this study were written out and were given in Persian so that they could be accessed equally by all students, including students with low levels of proficiency in English. To track which prompts students used, the students indicated on a form which of the prompts they used for each question (Ajideh and Nourdad, 2012, p. 147). The results were then assessed to determine if using dynamic assessment was an effective way to improve students' reading comprehension. On that note, these two studies show the direction being taken by some researchers in interventionist dynamic assessment who are looking at university contexts, specific skills such as reading comprehension, and different formats included computerized and non-computerized dynamic assessment as possibilities to be explored.

### **Research in Group Dynamic Assessment in Second Language Learning at the Elementary Level**

Going a few years back in time, another study conducted outside of the U.S. focused on students learning English as a foreign language, but this time looked at much younger students, taking place in a kindergarten setting in China. Over the course of 20 weeks, Lin conducted a study with approximately 60 students in a bilingual kindergarten that involved students participating in dynamic assessment twice a week with a mediator outside of the context of their regular classroom (Lin, 2010, p. 280). The mediator in this study used three levels of prompts: first he or she would repeat the command; secondly nonverbal cues would be used; and

finally he or she would use the student's L1 (Lin, 2010, p. 281). The number of prompts and length of the mediation was kept to a minimum because students of that age tend to have limited attention spans (Lin, 2010, p. 280). As a result of the study Lin was able to make recommendations on the kinds of prompts that are appropriate when working with kindergarten-aged second language learners, and also conclude that dynamic assessment was effective in both assessing said students' abilities and need for mediation as well as acting as a learning activity that promoted second language learning by serving real communication purposes (Lin, 2010, p. 284-6). This study is significant relative to the topic of the present study because previous research using an interactionist approach to dynamic assessment had primarily taken place with students at the university level, as noted towards the beginning of this literature review. Thus, it can be seen as somewhat of a breakthrough in the field to attempt to bring the strategy of dynamic assessment into a context applicable to teachers at the K-12 level.

In that vein, two more studies have subsequently been done with learners at the elementary level, on both occasions in Spanish classes in the U.S. For her doctoral dissertation, Davin (2011) examined a wide variety of aspects of a dynamic assessment intervention she conducted in her classroom over the course of 10 days. Her class consisted of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders who had Spanish class every day for fifteen minutes. During her study, the class worked on Spanish interrogatives (who, what, where, etc.) (Davin, 2011, p. 39). The five prompts she used during this time were focused on helping students to achieve grammatical accuracy, and are listed below.

Figure 3: Prompts used in Davin (2011)

<b>Level of Explicitness</b>	<b>Mediation Move</b>
Prompt 1	Pause with skeptical look
Prompt 2	Repetition of entire phrase by teacher
Prompt 3	Repetition of specific site of error
Prompt 4	Forced choice option
Prompt 5	Correct response and explanation provided

(p. 144)

Each session during Davin’s study was videorecorded and later transcribed. An observation protocol was also used to record the question formed, the mediation provided, and the reciprocal move for focal students in the study. It appears from the dissertation that the teacher did not use this protocol in the moment of teaching and that it is likely that this information was observed by a third party or coded from a recording, leaving the teacher free to focus on teaching and providing mediation during the lesson. The significance of this will be noted later in this paper.

In a study similar to Davin’s but conducted previously, Poehner (2009) describes a teacher, ‘Tracy’, who used dynamic assessment also with elementary students in a Spanish class that met for fifteen minutes a day. During the intervention described, students worked on “substantive-modifier concord”, or grammatical agreement between the parts of the sentence. In this instance, the teacher used an inventory of eight prompts with her learners, altered slightly to account for the content of each lesson, but listed in the study as follows (Poehner, 2009, p. 481):



Figure 4: Prompts used in 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.

(p. 481)

‘Tracy’ used a chart to record her use of prompts during the group dynamic assessment mediation sessions. This chart had columns for the names of students, columns for three interactions which would be filled in with the number of the most explicit prompt used, and a column with space for comments (typically used to record the students’ initial responses) (Poehner, 2009, p. 482). Poehner reports that as a result of using this strategy, Tracy was able to quickly record the prompts needed by her students, make adjustments to her lesson plans based on those observations, and keep a log of students’ development over time in terms of what prompts were required. These prompts and the set-up of the recording charts used by Tracy were duplicated in the present study in order to find out how such an approach might work in a secondary classroom rather than an elementary classroom.

This has been a short summary of work done to date in the field of group dynamic assessment. Aljaafreh and Lantolf set the precedent of using graduated prompts in their 1994 article, and subsequently there have been both computer-based (2) and non-computer-based (4) studies, including three studies at the university level and three studies at the elementary level,

all of which can safely be said to have been conducted more or less according to an interventionist approach using graduated scales of prompts that described the kind of support individual learners needed to make progress. To this researcher and prospective teacher, this body of work leaves quite an obvious hole in that no studies to date on dynamic assessment have been conducted with groups of students at the secondary level, that is to say, with high school students. Given that the majority of language programs in the U.S. within grades K-12 are at the secondary level, this is clearly an area that needs to be addressed by the research if dynamic assessment is to be adapted by language teachers on a widespread scale (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011, p. 261-2). To that end, the goal of this study was to test the use of an interventionist group dynamic assessment strategy within the context of a high school Spanish classroom. Additionally, an analysis of participants' perceptions of dynamic assessment, including the students' and teachers' perceptions, is another integral piece of the puzzle that has also heretofore been missing from research on dynamic assessment. In the early stages of adapting a strategy such as dynamic assessment for a high school classroom, it is important to know the benefits and difficulties of using such as strategy. Thus, due to the limited availability of resources and the relatively small scope of the study at hand, the present study has been limited to focus on how the use of a group interventionist dynamic assessment strategy was perceived by multiple parties, including a student teacher using the strategy, the mentor teacher observing the use of the strategy, and the students in the classroom themselves in order to provide a clearer picture of how dynamic assessment functions in the as-of-yet unobserved secondary language classroom context.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

A description of the methodology used in setting up the present study will be divided into two parts: first the way in which the group interventionist dynamic assessment strategy was implemented in the classroom will be explained, and then a summary of how data was collected about participants' perceptions of the strategy will follow.

#### **Dynamic Assessment Strategy Implementation Design**

Before getting into how the dynamic assessment strategy was implemented in this study, it is first necessary to describe the context of the classroom in which the research took place. The study followed the work of a student teacher as she attempted to implement a group interventionist dynamic assessment strategy in the high school Spanish classroom in which she was placed, in a public school in a small town in the northeastern U.S. The study was conducted with three classes of Spanish I students, so the students ranged between grades 9-11 and had had little to no prior experience with the Spanish language. The classes involved were Period 1, with 23 students; Period 3, with 20 students; and Period 7, with 26 students. Because the focus of this study was to examine the perceptions of participants in the dynamic assessment intervention and because of the limited ability of high school teachers to control the composition of their classes, the classes involved in this study were not modified in any way to account for the introduction of the dynamic assessment strategy.

To move onto the dynamic assessment strategy itself, in an ideal world, teachers could integrate new strategies such as dynamic assessment into their current teaching methods without making major changes that would result in an increased workload in the amount of lesson preparation time required on a daily basis. Fortunately, because it is an instructional strategy rather than specific activities such as prescribed exercises or instructional materials, dynamic assessment is more or less able to overlay pre-established teaching methods. In the case of the student teacher in this study, she was still developing her ability to prepare and deliver effective lessons, so she was unable to incorporate extensive amounts of time refining a dynamic assessment strategy into her planning routine. Thus, she did not specifically create or modify any of the worksheets or classroom materials she would have used without the dynamic assessment strategy to accommodate the use of dynamic assessment in her classroom. Although certainly it would be ideal for teachers using dynamic assessment to have access to materials designed to be used in conjunction with the strategy, at the time of this study it was not a feasible option to develop such materials given time constraints, but that possibility could be an area of development for researchers and educators in the future. This lack of supporting materials could be seen as a detriment, but it also means that any current educators who want to use an interventionist approach to group dynamic assessment are able to do so without a complete overhaul of their classrooms.

The way that the student teacher went about implementing a group interventionist dynamic assessment strategy in her classroom was largely based on the study described by Poehner in his 2009 article entitled *Group Dynamic Assessment: Mediation for the L2 Classroom*. This study, described earlier in this paper in the literature review, used eight levels of prompts, along with charts that were used to record comments as well as which prompts were used for each student. The student teacher selected this study, originally done with elementary students, to duplicate with students at the high school level because the prompts and recording method were

clearly described and transferred well to her classroom: in both contexts students were focusing on “substantive-modifier concord” or agreement between the parts of speech at the phrase/sentence level. Thus, after working with the students in Periods 1, 3, and 7 for approximately six weeks, the student teacher began a four-week group interventionist dynamic assessment intervention while students were studying the three concepts of using the verb ‘estar’ with adjectives, forming the present progressive tense, and differentiating between the verbs ‘ser’ and ‘estar’ in Spanish. In the classroom during these four weeks, the teacher regularly used a sticky note to remind her of the eight prompts along with charts for each class with the students’ names (see Appendices A and B) to implement the group dynamic assessment intervention described.

### **Data Collection Design**

Following is an explanation of how the perceptions of the participants involved in the intervention were collected. Data collection focused on three groups: the Spanish I students, the mentor teacher who observed the classes, and the student teacher herself.

#### **Collection of Data on Students’ Perceptions**

In order to get a marginal degree of both breadth and depth of the students’ perceptions of the intervention, two methods of assessing these perceptions were devised. First, an 18-question Likert scale survey was developed based on the Student Perception Survey for Secondary Students, an established questionnaire with 92 questions developed by The Tripod Project and used by the MET Project (See Appendix C for the complete adapted survey used in the present study) (Ferguson, 2013; MET Project, 2013). The researcher chose to base her

revised survey on the Tripod Project survey because it had originally been developed by an established educational consulting firm for the specific purpose of gathering data about students' perceptions of their classroom environments, and was recommended by the MET (Measures of Effective Teaching) Project, one goal of which was to provide "resources to help address some of the common, practical problems of developing and implementing teaching evaluation systems" (MET Project, 2013); thus it offered a relevant and credible means of gathering data about students' perceptions for the purpose of this study. Questions from the Tripod/MET survey that the researcher felt were most relevant to the dynamic assessment intervention were chosen and assembled into the adapted survey while maintaining the wording of the original questions to preserve the accuracy of the responses gathered. During the administration of the surveys, the researcher attempted to keep the questionnaires anonymous so that students would not be afraid to express their honest opinions. Anonymity was accomplished with a random numbering system and the help of the classroom teacher, who recorded the number assigned to each student during the administration of the questionnaire prior to implementation of the DA strategy. To ensure that individual changes in perception could be observed from the beginning to the end of the intervention, the help of the classroom teacher was again employed during the post-study questionnaire: students were reminded of their previously assigned number which they then wrote on their questionnaire, and in this way the questionnaire results could be matched up between the beginning and end of the study while maintaining students' anonymity. In summary, the purpose of the adapted 18-question survey as it has been described here was to gather perceptions of the class before and after the intervention from all students to showcase the change in their collective perceptions as a result of the group interventionist dynamic assessment strategy.

The second method used to collect students' perceptions of the intervention was short individual interviews conducted with select students from each class after the completion of the intervention. The purpose of these interviews was to gather more in-depth, detailed, and

personal perceptions of how the strategy was used in the classroom. For these interviews the pool of students was limited to students who both turned in permission slips signed by their parents permitting them to participate in the study, and who personally agreed to be interviewed by the researcher. Out of this pool of students and based on criteria mentioned hereafter, the researcher chose eight students overall to participate in the interviews: three students from Period 1, two students from Period 2, and three students from Period 3. Out of these students, three were male and five were female, and each class was represented by at least one male and one female. The researcher also attempted to include a mix of students who tended to do well and students who tended to do poorly in Spanish class, in order to create a more accurate sample group to represent the classes as a whole. Due to time constraints and the difficulty of meeting with students individually outside of class time, the researcher was unable to interview a larger portion of the students; however students interviewed accounted for nearly 12% of the total number of overall students involved in the intervention. Apart from selecting students to interview, the researcher also thought carefully about what questions to ask students during the individual interviews and identified questions that she thought would reveal important aspects of what students thought and felt about the strategy and whether or not it was effective. Additionally, when writing the questions and conducting the interviews, the researcher focused on asking open-ended questions so as not to influence the thoughts of the interviewees. In this way, a number of interviews were conducted with individual students who participated in the dynamic assessment intervention in order to collect their perceptions about various aspects of the strategy.

As is often the case with data collection in research, there were certain limitations placed on the data that could be collected. The main limitation was that there were some questionnaire results that didn't match up between the initial and final administrations, either due to mis-numbering or student absence on the day of either questionnaire, thus making it impossible to compare the perceptions of these students from the beginning to the end of the study. For this

reason, the number of perception surveys reported in Appendix D (56 surveys) does not match exactly with the total number of students in the classes in which the intervention was conducted (69 students). This limitation analysis concludes the segment on the collection of data concerning student perceptions.

### **Collection of Data on the Mentor Teacher's Perceptions**

The mentor teacher involved in this study had been teaching Spanish at the high school where the study took place for over fifteen years. Before working with the student teacher, she was not previously familiar with dynamic assessment. By the time the student teacher introduced the dynamic assessment strategy to the class, the student teacher had already taken over control of the classes in which the strategy was implemented for approximately four weeks, so the mentor teacher, who was constantly in the classroom and occasionally working on other teaching tasks, was able to observe the strategy in use by the student teacher during the majority of its four week implementation period. The mentor teacher's perceptions of the strategy were seen as an important contribution to this study because of her experience with this particular class setting and group of students, meaning that she was able to make judgments based on her past experience in the teaching profession and at that school. For the mentor teacher interview, the questions for the individual student interviews were adapted to elicit the mentor teacher's perception of how she thought the strategy worked for the students, how it worked for the student teacher, and how it worked in the classroom overall, including if she thought it was effective and if she would try using it after having seen the student teacher use it. This interview was deemed to be sufficient to gather the mentor teacher's overall perceptions of the group interventionist dynamic assessment strategy.



### **Collection of Data on the Student Teacher's Perceptions**

Finally, the last participant in the dynamic assessment intervention was the student teacher attempting to implement said intervention. The student teacher had had several previous experiences teaching in a classroom, but none quite as extensive as this student teaching experience. She had worked with periods 1 and 3 three months earlier during her pre-student teaching experience, and had taken over responsibility of periods 1, 3, and 7 for approximately four weeks before beginning to use dynamic assessment while teaching. Although she had been reading and learning about dynamic assessment for over a year at the time the research was conducted, this was her first experience attempting to use the strategy. In order to systematically cover her perceptions of the strategy in use in the classroom, the student teacher took notes on the back of the sheets used to record the dynamic assessment prompts either immediately following the lesson, or more frequently, during lunch or at the end of the school day when there was time to stop and write down her thoughts. This process was in line with her teacher education program, which encouraged her to write journals and reflect on her teaching. While not an exhaustive list of her thoughts about using dynamic assessment, these notes provide insight into some of the challenges and benefits a new teacher might experience from practicing dynamic assessment in the classroom.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

#### **Students' Perceptions**

As mentioned in the description of how data was collected for this study, the students' perceptions were collected in two different ways: through a questionnaire given to all students in all of the periods in which the dynamic assessment intervention was introduced, and through individual interviews with a sample of students who agreed to participate.

#### **Findings from Perception Surveys**

In this process the results of the initial and final perception surveys were gathered and recorded, then analyzed to determine the change in students' perceptions of the class and teaching between the two surveys (at the beginning and end of the dynamic assessment intervention). Appendix C of this document replicates the entire survey as it was presented to students at the beginning and end of the dynamic assessment intervention, and tables in Appendix D show the difference between students' perceptions from the beginning to the end of the intervention for each of the three class periods; a positive number indicates a degree of change towards the 'always' side of the scale, while a negative number indicates a degree of change towards the 'never' end of the scale, and a zero indicates that there was no change between the two surveys.

From analyzing the results of the surveys, overall it appears that there was not much significant change in students' perceptions between the beginning and end of the study. Only on four of the questions was there a significant net change among all the class periods one way or the other. These were questions 7, 11, 12, and 14 (again, see Appendix C for a copy of survey given to which these numbers correspond). Overall students indicated that after the dynamic assessment trial period, they were more inclined to agree that the student teacher accepted nothing less than their best effort, talked to them about their work to help them understand their mistakes, and wrote notes on their work to help them improve. More students than at the beginning of the trial also agreed that they wasted time in the class. The first two findings seem to agree with what this study expected to find, because in the dynamic assessment strategy the teacher gave a great deal of oral feedback in the form of prompts, and pushed students to do as much as they could by giving the least explicit prompts necessary to reach the answer. The finding that the students were more inclined to say that their teacher wrote notes on their work to help them improve was rather unexpected because that was not part of the dynamic assessment strategy that the student teacher intended to implement. One possibility is that students were thinking about the student teacher writing down their responses on the board while giving corrections and prompts, which some students did indicate in the individual interviews to be helpful, though it was not a focus of the intervention (the findings from these interviews will be discussed in more detail later in this section). Finally, the last general finding from the perception survey was that students tended to agree more at the end of the intervention that they wasted time in class. It is true that using the prompts listed as part of the strategy often took more time than simply giving the correct answer to the question, so it is understandable that students would think this way. Thus, overall the perception surveys did not indicate major changes in students' perceptions of the class, though some changes were noticeable in how they perceived

how errors were dealt with, what the student teacher expected of them, and how time was spent in the class.

When analyzed after being differentiated by class period, the perception surveys showed slightly different results. To give the survey some context, one way the student teacher described Period 1 was to say they were a sort of ‘model’ class, with a middling number of students, few behavior problems, and a mix of high- and low-level students. The only outstanding survey result from Period 1 was on question 7, which matched the overall increase in agreement that the student teacher accepted nothing less than the students’ best efforts. Period 3, on the other hand, showed significant change in regards to three questions, questions 1, 8, and 13, and seemed to have a much more negative perception. The student teacher found this to be an interesting result, because of the three class periods Period 3 was the most cohesive group of students (students frequently interacted with other students sitting near them and students sitting across the room, factors which also resulted in a higher amount of side-talk and calling out than in other class periods), so she had thought that that type of environment would be a better match for group dynamic assessment. Returning to the survey results, according to students in Period 3, the student teacher made learning less enjoyable, was less able to tell when students understood the lesson and when they did not, and did not pay as much attention to what all students were thinking and feeling during the dynamic assessment trial period. Since the student teacher did not make any significant changes in how she used the dynamic assessment strategy for Period 3, the researcher concludes that the change in attitude might have been a result of a separate incidental change made in teaching strategy, such as waiting for all students to be quiet and looking up front before giving directions, or another strategy used for the sake of classroom management (as a beginning teacher still developing skills such as classroom management, the student teacher was unfortunately tasked with making other adjustments to her teaching style in addition to implementing dynamic assessment). Such a change might also have been related to the group of

students in the class: as compared to 1<sup>st</sup> period, this class had fewer students, but the students tended to chat more with each other during class (as mentioned above), which in the context of this dynamic assessment strategy was seen as a minorly disruptive behavior. For further comparison, the perception surveys completed by 7<sup>th</sup> period showed still different highlights in the findings. This last period was the largest class, and also tended to work at an overall lower level than the other two classes; they were, however, the most opinionated on the perception surveys, producing six questions with significant differences between the beginning and ending perception surveys (this may be in part a factor of the larger class size and the correspondingly larger number of survey results available). As mentioned overall with question 7 (“My teacher accepts nothing less than my best effort”), the first two positive findings from question 7 and the similar question 6 (“When the work is too hard, my teacher helps me keep trying”) were expected because dynamic assessment would ideally push students to keep trying to give their best by giving them the support they need to improve at an appropriate level for them. In contrast to Period 3, students in Period 7 were more likely to say that after using dynamic assessment the student teacher knew when they understood the lesson and when they did not (question 8), and voiced a similar thought by usually agreeing with question 13 (“The student teacher paid attention to what all students were thinking and feeling”). Finally, 7<sup>th</sup> period was probably the main influence of the overall findings for questions 12 and 14 about writing notes and wasting time, because the findings for these questions were similar between the whole group and the individual class analysis for Period 7. Thus, it appears from looking at both the overall highlights of the perception surveys and the results broken down by class that students had mixed perceptions of how the dynamic assessment strategy went in their classrooms: some were to be expected, such as the push for students to apply themselves, and others not so much, such as writing notes on student work, and some results reflect aspects that need to be improved, such as wasting students’ time, but overall students seemed to have a positive to indifferent outlook on the use of dynamic

assessment in the classroom as gathered through the perception surveys. It was also interesting to note that the strategy did not affect all three classes equally, as noted in the difference in perceptions between Period 3 and Periods 1 and 7.

As might be expected from the results of the perception surveys, overall the students also seemed positive about the dynamic assessment strategy when interviewed individually. Before diving into the results, however, the researcher would like to note that it would be reasonable to say from the interviews that some of the students didn't have a good understanding of what exactly the dynamic assessment intervention strategy consisted, and what were separate techniques and strategies being used by the teacher in conjunction with the dynamic assessment prompts and record-keeping: in the interviews, students occasionally cited strategies such as writing on the board, emphasizing introductory and closing activities, and using classroom management techniques as being helpful to their learning. Nonetheless, many positive thoughts as well as some problems and suggestions were extracted from the researcher's interviews with the students, a discussion of which follows.

### **Findings from Individual Student Interviews**

Students interviewed were able to say that the dynamic assessment strategy worked in some ways as intended. For one, multiple students agreed that the prompts made them think, especially about what they did wrong and why. A benefit of the strategy that they perceived was the need to think more deeply about the answer in order to figure it out themselves, as opposed to their previous strategy of just writing down the answer. They reported that this strategy helped them to understand what they were doing particularly with the difficult things they were studying while the strategy was being implemented, including present progressive tense, using the verb 'estar' with adjectives, the difference between the verbs 'ser' and 'estar',

and the need to maintain agreement between the parts of speech within the sentences. This call for deeper thinking was a primary benefit of the strategy, a point which was also mentioned by the mentor teacher. Another way in which the strategy worked as intended was that students said they paid attention in class even when they weren't the one being called on. According to one student interviewed, "I listened to see like, if I messed up, because I knew everyone else would probably be called on to do the next question, to do the same question....Whenever I saw something wrong I reread my sentence, and I looked back on it, and I realized the mistake, and it helped me not make it again." The strategy also encouraged students to check their answers to see if they made the same mistakes as other students being called on, which was part of the goal of using the dynamic assessment strategy in a group setting. Additionally, student engagement was high when the strategy was in place because students wanted to see what the right answer was, why they might have made the mistake they did, and why the correct answer was right; another student observed that they thought it might help them on a future test, by "go[ing] through the same thinking process."

Besides engaging students in the process of providing answers and making corrections, students noted an additional benefit of the strategy. Several students mentioned that the dynamic assessment made them feel less nervous and more confident in their answers. Because they had to keep going with the prompts until they got it right, as a result they then knew what they were doing and were able to tell why the answer was wrong and why it was right. This confidence even carried through to when students didn't start out with the right answer, because once they caught themselves and their mistake they usually knew how to fix it.

Other benefits students saw with the strategy were related to the group format in which it was used. In the set-up of the strategy, as a cumulative group dynamic assessment, all members of the class were expected to be paying attention at all times, even when the teacher was focused on providing prompts/mediating interaction with only one student at a time. This meant

that students were often exposed to similar corrections being made to similar responses, so one student interviewed pointed out that hearing over and over what the mistakes were and why they were mistakes was helpful. And although ideally one student fixing their mistakes would have an impact on the learning of all the other students in the class in line with the idea of cumulative group dynamic assessment, it was noted in one interview that it was particularly helpful when the person being corrected was sitting nearby. Otherwise, as much as teachers and researchers like to think all of the students will always be paying attention, some of the students who weren't being called on at that moment tuned out or found something else to think about. This was especially true when it took a while for certain students who needed all the levels of prompts to answer successfully. Nonetheless, when asked about this wait time, some of the students interviewed said they were okay with waiting when the student teacher was calling on other people because everyone in the class needs a chance, and if it takes them a while to answer, that's how it is and there's not much that can be done about it. These were some of the positive outlooks on the time necessary to go through the prompts when carrying out the dynamic assessment. Before moving on to some of the complaints about this wait time as previewed by the results of the perception surveys, there were a few other scattered advantages of the dynamic assessment strategy that the students observed. One student thought that the strategy helped them to 'pick up' (understand and internalize) information more quickly, and another was pleased because she was sure that her grade had improved as a result of the strategy. When asked by the researcher, students also agreed that the strategy was a good way to see if everybody in the class understood, and that the prompts were for the most part comprehensible to students and helped them to check themselves and correct their mistakes. Finally, a student mentioned that as a result of the strategy students spent more time in class engaged and talking when people had questions, especially about the answers that needed correcting, and why they were right or wrong. Thus overall it can be said for



multiple reasons that students found the dynamic assessment intervention to be a valuable strategy to their learning in the secondary Spanish classroom.

Though the students had many good things to say about the strategy, that is not to say they didn't see problems with it as well. Some students did find the time they spent waiting for other students to answer to be boring, and they sometimes tuned out. Other students said they did feel nervous or scared when they were called on if they didn't have or couldn't find the answer, in contrast to the other students who said the strategy made them feel more confident. The longer waits and nervousness also tended to coincide, as students who did not have the answer felt pressure from the class to answer quickly, a problem which the dynamic assessment strategy was not always able to address through its prompts since it took the student teacher a while to go through all the necessary prompts before the student in the spotlight received the adequate level of support. Finally, some students reported that when the strategy was initially implemented, they were confused about what to do and the student teacher would just stand there (understandable given that the first prompt was to pause, but likely incomprehensible to students experiencing the strategy for the first time; this could be solved in the future by explicitly explaining to students what prompts would be used in the dynamic assessment intervention). To sum up, students were sometimes confused, nervous, and/or bored as a result of the strategy, but in most cases other students tended to say that it helped them to understand and feel more confident in their answers.

In the final section reporting what students had to say in their interviews with the researcher, some of the suggestions they had for improving the strategy will be discussed. The most common suggestion from students was to distribute the load of answering questions differently; that is, allow students to help out their classmates when the classmate being prompted is not getting the answer. This idea is also related to the lingering question held by the student teacher about what to do about other students calling out the answer when the teacher was

prompting a single student who wasn't getting the answer, which tended to be a problem. In response to this problem, more than one student made the suggestion that for a question, if someone gets the answer wrong, to call on another student or ask the class for a volunteer to see if they know the correct answer, and if they are able to answer, return to the original student to ask what was wrong with their answer and why the other student changed it, and if they can't answer then explain why. This type of prompt sequencing would be more in line with a concurrent style of group dynamic assessment, rather than the cumulative approach used in this study.

Interestingly, the other main suggestion to arise from the interviews with the students was for the student teacher to give more immediate assistance to the students that she knew were having a hard time understanding, which seems to be in opposition to the principles of dynamic assessment (namely providing the least explicit prompt necessary for a student to reach the correct answer).

The student elaborated that the student teacher could give a student who is having difficulty a chance to answer the question, but if they aren't getting the answer then give them more immediate assistance (jump up a few levels of prompts), and then after a couple times of asking a similar question, allow them to answer another question from the beginning again "to see if they were actually paying attention" in the meantime to what the class was doing. This suggestion seems to align somewhat with the mentor teacher's idea to use fewer prompts, which is one of the things that will be discussed in the following section.

### **Mentor Teacher's Perceptions**

Similarly to the students who experienced the dynamic assessment intervention, the mentor teacher had mixed opinions on dynamic assessment and how it was used in the context of this research, though she thought that overall it was a good strategy. She approved of the strategy because as she saw it, the method forced students to notice and think about their mistakes, so they

had to think critically and couldn't get away with being lazy about their answers (a perception which was also brought up by students during the individual interviews). She also liked the prompts used and said that if she were to try using dynamic assessment herself she would use similar prompts (especially as related to grammatical agreement between the various parts of speech in phrases and sentences), though for reasons mentioned shortly hereafter she admitted she would not use all of the prompts used by the student teacher. Another point she observed related to the students was that although students may have initially been intimidated by the strategy, once students got used to being called on and prompted as part of the strategy, it was "just like normal", and seemed to give them more confidence in their answers once they realized their mistakes (this change is related to the fact that before the dynamic assessment strategy was implemented, the students in these classes tended not to get called on and instead participation was mostly on a volunteer basis, so this difference was a coincidental change brought on by the new strategy; the mentor teacher however did say that calling on students more frequently would be one benefit she would take away from seeing the student teacher use the dynamic assessment strategy). In short, the mentor teacher saw some of the same benefits as the students did, including more time spent by students thinking about their answers, as well as more confidence when answering.

To move on to some of the problems or difficulties the mentor teacher noticed, the main reason the mentor teacher would adjust the prompts to have fewer prompts as mentioned earlier would be because of a problem also cited by students, namely the amount of wait time necessary for the dynamic assessment strategy to work as intended. She too observed that on the occasions when students didn't immediately get the answer and needed multiple levels of prompting, the strategy seemed to bog down the flow of the lesson. She guessed that the students, and especially the smarter students, may have gotten bored of waiting for their peers to respond to the progressively more explicit prompts. This may have been the cause of another difficulty that the

mentor teacher noticed which was that in one of the periods (which was particularly talkative), while the student teacher was waiting and prompting a student through an answer, other students would start side conversations or call out the correct answer. In the other two periods, which tended to talk less and have fewer behavioral disruptions, this problem was not as frequent, and so it seemed to the mentor teacher that the dynamic assessment strategy went better in these classes despite their larger class size. The interference with classroom management and the intended prompting strategy that was particularly observed in the one class but not totally absent from the other classes was what led her to say that if she were to use a similar strategy of dynamic assessment, she would not include as many prompts. Lastly, another feature used by the student teacher that the mentor teacher would eliminate should she choose to use dynamic assessment was the use of the sheets to record what prompts were given to which student. In the mentor teacher's experience, she thought that recording this information during the lesson was difficult, and it would be too much to keep up with among all the grading she had to do otherwise. Interestingly enough, this statement indicates that the mentor teacher did not see dynamic assessment as being a 'grading' activity, indicating that she did not recognize its value as an assessment, or at least an assessment that could contribute to the learner accountability reports she needed to produce (report cards). Incidentally, the student teacher also failed to incorporate the prompt records into students' grades, so this is an aspect of the practical implementation of dynamic assessment and its interaction/interplay with already-established non-dynamic assessment that could be a consideration for further research related to dynamic assessment.

In light of these problems, the mentor teacher had a few more observations and suggestions to make about using a similar strategy for dynamic assessment in the future. First, there were her suggestions corresponding with the problems she saw, such as using fewer prompts and moving them along so as not to take as much time. She also had some ideas on how to tackle the difficulty of individual students needing many prompts and a lot of time. First of all,

she responded to the student teacher/researcher's proposal of moving on to another student quickly without guarantee to return to the first student after he/she was slow to respond by saying that that kind of action would not be ideal because if the first student was not getting the answer, by moving on to someone else the first student still wouldn't get it. Instead she, like the students, suggested moving on to a second student after a short wait time, and then returning to the first student to ask them why that was the correct answer, again a sequencing of the prompts that is more in line with concurrent group assessment than the cumulative group assessment used throughout this study. In addition to this she added that after seeing a student struggling to respond to prompts to reach the correct answer, she would find time to work with him or her one-on-one outside of the pressure brought on by answering in front of the whole class (potentially using the same set of prompts as used with the whole class, although the mentor teacher did not bring up this possibility herself). Finally, she also noted that using a strategy like the one used in this dynamic assessment intervention would be ideal in a smaller classroom, alluding to the constant trouble in education that large classrooms with many students mean less personal attention to each student.

These benefits, difficulties, and suggestions about the strategy came from an experienced teacher who had the benefit of being able to watch the dynamic strategy in action without the cognitive load of having to run the class while doing so. As just described, she echoed some of the same thoughts as the students themselves, and also had a similar thought process to the student teacher herself, as described below.

### **Student Teacher's Perceptions**

As described earlier in the methods section, the student teacher herself kept track of her thoughts most days after using the dynamic assessment strategy in order to reflect on how she

thought the strategy worked in terms of its effectiveness in the classroom, the ease of using the strategy, and any aspects that were confusing or problematic. Her perceptions did not always align with what was predicted before the study took place, but nonetheless her perceptions of how the strategy worked in a secondary Spanish classroom may prove useful to other teachers attempting to implement a similar strategy.

To begin with the benefits of the strategy as seen by the student teacher, organization seemed to be one of the main benefits of using an interventionist style of dynamic assessment. She reported that the approach felt systematic, and gave order to some of the classroom processes that sometimes prove difficult for new teachers, such as knowing which students to call on. Although it was not intended to be their primary purpose in the dynamic assessment intervention, the recording sheets helped her have a plan for who to call on, keep track of who participated, and make sure that everyone in the class participated. On a more dynamic assessment-related note, she also said that having the eight prompts constantly on a sticky note on her recording sheets helped remind her to think about what prompts she was using when responding to students so she wasn't giving more explicit feedback than necessary, and also to reminded her to check her assumptions about which students knew what; sometimes the 'poor students' knew the answer right away, and sometimes the 'good students' needed prompting too. Finally, although she sometimes found it hard to stick to using the prompts in order and decide when recording the prompts on the fly which prompt she had actually ended up using, there were occasions in which the prompts and student responses lined up perfectly, which was an encouraging development in validating the use and order of the prompts.

Although the student teacher observed some benefits of using the prompts such as those mentioned above, she also ran into difficulties using them. As was just stated, sticking to the prompts was sometimes difficult for the student teacher. Despite having read quite a bit about dynamic assessment and examples of it in use before using it in her own teaching, the student

teacher found that this preparation did not necessarily have much transfer into using the strategy herself, even after reading through Lantolf and Poehner's teacher's guide to dynamic assessment (2011b), which was written to prepare teachers to use dynamic assessment in their classrooms. She found that especially towards the beginning of the intervention, she did not have the prompts memorized, so she had to keep a sticky note with the prompts written on it attached to the recording sheet she was using, and remember to transfer this sticky note to each new recording sheet when starting a new class period. This caused other trivial problems such as having to move the sticky note on occasion to write down prompts, or run to the back of the room at the start of each class period to retrieve the sticky note from the last period's recording sheet on her desk. While these may be minor problems, teachers can attest that students can quickly lose attention in the span of a few moments, and for a beginning student teacher these aspects of the way the recording sheets for dynamic assessment were put into use were less than ideal. Another physical problem that the student teacher found with the set-up used in this study was that she didn't have much time to both write down the prompts and keep the lesson moving, and it was sometimes difficult to write down the prompts because of the need to simultaneously write on the whiteboard and/or have a surface nearby on which to write. Such situations also produced heavy cognitive loads for the student teacher, who sometimes found herself trying to focus on recording prompts, calling on students, maintaining order, and administering new prompts all at the same time. Again, these concerns may be minor and fixed easily with greater teaching experience or a change in various aspects of how the study was set-up, but they are things to keep in mind when doing further research and developing dynamic assessment interventions. A final concern specifically about the prompts was the difficulty the student teacher had in sticking to the order of the prompts. She sometimes found certain prompts, such as initial prompts of pausing and repeating the whole phrase questioningly, to be confusing or redundant. For example, it sometimes seemed not to be apparent to the students *why* the student teacher was pausing, or

sometimes the student teacher just needed the student to repeat their answer because she could not hear well enough or was writing down the response and did not remember the end of what the student had said. Other times the student teacher ran into difficulty when students had more than one error at a time- for example, a problem with both number and gender agreement. She found it hard to convey to the students that they had errors with both of these aspects. According to the theory of dynamic assessment this is supposed to be a problem that will get cleared up as the prompts get more explicit, but at the same time it took time and was confusing to students. These were some drawbacks of the strategy that the student teacher saw related to the prompts.

The other difficulties that the student teacher encountered when using dynamic assessment were related to classroom management factors, such as timing and student participation. She had hoped that group dynamic assessment as a strategy would engage all students in learning within their ZPD, but she found it difficult to manage the group. Instead of engaging the attention of the whole class while prompting a single student, having the student teacher focus most of her attention to work one-on-one with a student while in front of the whole class tended to result in other students becoming impatient with the time it took, and calling out the correct answer. This might be an instance in which the students' and mentor teacher's suggestions to use a more concurrent approach to group dynamic assessment might be relevant-again, a question for further research. The student teacher was also stumped about what to do about volunteers to answer questions, because part of the idea of using dynamic assessment was to call on all students in the classroom and not all students volunteered, but not calling on students who volunteered ran counterintuitive to the student teacher's sense of wanting to recognize students who wanted to contribute.

Keeping in mind these difficulties, the student teacher gathered through her notes a list of questions remaining for future work with group dynamic assessment, some of which relate to



what has been discussed in this paper, and some of which are possible questions for further research:

Figure 5: Remaining questions held by the student teacher

- How does the teacher decide who to call on?
- How can the teacher keep the prompts moving so other students don't get bored?
- How can the teacher prevent students from calling out the answer?
- How should the teacher move between students answering the same question? How can these moves be recorded?
- Is it possible to compare the prompts recorded between different activities?
- With what kinds of activities can dynamic assessment prompts be used?
- How can the teacher use the data gathered from recording what prompts were used during class?
- Is it possible to integrate group and individual dynamic assessment in a classroom setting?

To correspond with this list of lingering questions, the student teacher also came up with some suggestions or possibilities of ways to improve on group dynamic assessments that might be carried out in secondary language classrooms in the future. Related to difficulties with using and recording the prompts, to improve visibility of when students understand their answer and when they do not, the teacher can add a prompt separate from the numbered prompts, to question the student about why the correct answer is right (This prompt is included in the list of prompts in Appendix B). This suggestion was in fact given to the student teacher by her teaching supervisor, who has some familiarity with the principles of dynamic assessment. This idea could also be extended so that the teacher asks the student why they answered how they did regardless of whether their answer was correct or not. Another adjustment to the prompts might include a way

distinguishable from the prompts at hand that allows the teacher to indicate that he or she didn't hear the student properly without it seeming like there's something wrong with the student's answer. Ideally, and as seen in the studies examined in the literature review, the best way to develop prompts would be to start with a set of prompts such as the ones used in this study, then continue to adapt and revise the prompts for specific activities based on observed errors, similar in particular to the process described in the study done by Aljaafreh and Lantolf in 1994 (p. 469-71). Finally, an interesting idea would be to integrate whole-group and individual dynamic assessment within the same prompt sheet: for example, a student would be prompted in front of the class and the results recorded, and later if the teacher were to circulate as students were working and prompt that student one-on-one, those prompts would also be recorded.

Continuing on with suggestions and ideas for future research/implementation of dynamic assessment strategies, concerning problems observed with participation, one suggestion to address the difficulty of knowing which student to call on could be to use a random name generator. This, in conjunction with explicit instruction for students about when it's appropriate to volunteer and when volunteering is not preferred, would be a way to handle potential volunteers when carrying out group dynamic assessment. Another idea that might improve the dynamic assessment strategy that was used in this study is to track student prompts/participation from day to day on the same prompt record, so that the teacher would know when students had been called on more or less frequently over time, and attempt to balance out which students are called on and prompted. This may require a change in the prompt recording sheet, and another change might be called for on the sheet to account for the teacher moving between students within a single question/prompting sequence, and the need to record such an action. Perhaps the device used to record the prompts could even be digital in nature; again an idea for future research.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has given a brief explanation of the origins, formats, and recent studies of dynamic assessment, particularly as it pertains to second language learning. Within that context, the literature review focused on group dynamic assessment conducted from an interventionist approach. The present study examined the perceptions of participants in a group dynamic assessment intervention in a secondary Spanish classroom. From the findings of this research several main ideas have emerged. Both students and teachers concluded that group dynamic assessment as used in this study requires more effort on the part of the students and more in-depth discussion of student errors and their causes than in non-dynamic assessment activities, and also corresponds to students having greater confidence when providing answers in the classroom. It may also be perceived to waste time due to the use of an extended series of prompts: A correlation was hypothesized to exist between student nervousness and the time taken to move through an extended series of prompts before the correct answer was reached. Results of a perception survey given to all students showed a few changes in student perception after the dynamic assessment intervention; when differentiated by class, different perceptions were highlighted than with all learners combined, indicating the likelihood that such an intervention works differently with different groups of students; in group dynamic assessment, one size does not fit all. Of special interest to teachers were the suggestions that a similar approach could aid in organization of student participation, and that perhaps in future studies fewer than eight prompts would be recommended. Other observations led to possibilities for future research: it would be

interesting to conduct a study similar to this one but use a concurrent approach to group dynamic assessment rather than a cumulative approach, and see how the results differ. Although the present study worked by simply overlaying a dynamic assessment strategy onto typical classroom activities and the teacher did not have to make major changes to her methods, another direction that the research could take would be to develop materials specifically designed to be used in support of a dynamic assessment intervention. Finally, based on the mentor teacher's perceptions, it seems evident that there is also still work to do in determining what place dynamic assessment has alongside non-dynamic assessment in mainstream classrooms. More incidental questions that could provide the basis for future research in dynamic assessment can be found above in Figure 5. In conclusion, this study gave insight into how group dynamic assessment works at the secondary level in second language classrooms, examined how participants in the strategy felt about it and its benefits and drawbacks, and proposed ideas for further research in dynamic assessment. The researcher looks forward to seeing how the present study may contribute to current understanding of dynamic assessment, and how the field of dynamic assessment in second language learning develops in upcoming years.



## **Appendix B**

### **Prompts Used in Dynamic Assessment Intervention**

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.

Supplementary Prompts (added partway through the intervention):

- A. Didn't explain [Could not explain why]
- B. Explained [Able to explain why]

## Appendix C

### Student Perception Survey Questions

Note: 'Code' refers to the space where students wrote the number given to them that enabled the researcher to match up the initial and final surveys.

Student CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

1. My teacher makes learning enjoyable.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
2. My teacher knows the things that make me excited about learning  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
3. I get bored in this class.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
4. In this class, we learn a lot every day.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
5. In this class, it is more important to understand the lesson than to memorize the answers.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
6. When the work is too hard, my teacher helps me keep trying.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
7. My teacher accepts nothing less than my best effort.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
8. My teacher knows when we understand the lesson and when we do not.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
9. If I don't understand something, my teacher explains it a different way.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
10. My teacher explains difficult things clearly.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
11. My teacher talks to me about my work to help me understand my mistakes.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
12. My teacher writes notes on my work that help me improve.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
13. My teacher pays attention to what all students are thinking and feeling.

- Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
14. We waste time in this class.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
15. My teacher respects me as an individual.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
16. School work in this class is too easy.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
17. I ask for help when I need it.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never
18. I feel like I do a good job in this class.  
 Always     Most of the time     Some of the time     Never



## Appendix D

### Change in Students' Perception Between Initial and Final Perception Surveys

Positive number = move towards 'always'

Negative number = move towards "never"

Note: 'Code' refers to the number given to each student to match up the initial and final surveys. Numbers omitted in the sequence did not correspond to surveys that could be matched up between the initial and final surveys due to student absence or fewer than 26 students in the class. An 'X' signifies that an answer was not given for that particular question.

Table 1: Change in perceptions in Period 1

Code:	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	16	17	18	21	22	24	
<b>Period 1</b>																				
Question																				
1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	-1	0	-1	0	1	0	0	-1	0	1	0	
2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	-1	1	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	1	0	0	
3	2	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	1	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
4	-1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	-1	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	-1	
5	0	1	0	-1	-2	0	1	-1	1	-1	-1	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	
6	0	-1	1	0	0	-1	1	0	-2	0	0	1	1	-1	X	-1	0	0	0	
7	0	0	1	-1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	-1	
8	-1	0	0	0	0	-1	1	0	0	1	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	0	-1	
9	0	0	0	1	1	-1	1	0	-2	1	-1	0	0	0	1	0	-1	1	-1	
10	-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	-1	1	0	0	1	-1	0	
11	0	1	1	0	1	-1	2	0	1	0	-1	0	1	1	-1	1	0	0	-1	
12	0	0	-2	-1	0	0	2	0	1	0	-2	0	0	0	0	0	X	0	0	
13	1	-1	0	0	0	1	2	0	-2	0	0	0	-1	1	1	-1	1	0	-1	
14	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	X	0	1	1	0	
15	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	-1	0	-1	0	2	-1	1	0	-2	
16	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
17	0	1	1	0	0	-1	1	0	1	0	-1	0	0	0	0	2	-1	-1	1	
18	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	

Table 2: Changes in perceptions in Period 3

Code	1	2	4	7	8	9	12	15	16	18	19	20	22	23	24
<b>Period 3</b>															
Question															
1	0	-1	0	1	-1	0	-1	-2	0	0	-1	0	-1	-1	0
2	0	-1	0	2	0	1	0	-2	0	-1	-2	1	1	0	0
3	-1	0	0	-1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	-1	-1	0	0
4	-1	0	0	1	2	0	1	-1	0	1	-2	-1	0	0	-1
5	0	-1	-1	0	2	-1	-1	1	1	1	-2	-1	0	1	-1
6	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	-1	-1	1	0	-2	1	-1	0	0
7	2	-1	0	0	-1	1	0	-1	-1	1	-1	0	0	1	0
8	0	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	-2	-1	1	-2	0	0	X	0
9	2	-1	-1	0	0	0	0	-1	1	1	-2	-1	0	0	1
10	0	-1	0	1	1	0	1	X	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	1
11	2	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	-2	0	0	1	1
12	0	-1	-2	1	0	1	0	2	-1	0	-1	0	-1	0	0
13	1	-1	-1	1	0	-1	0	1	1	-1	-1	-2	-1	-1	-1
14	0	2	-1	-1	0	0	-1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
15	0	-1	-1	0	2	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	1
16	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	-1	0	0	-1	0
17	1	-1	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0	-3	0	0	2	0
18	-1	-1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	-2	0	1	-1	0

Table 3: Changes in perceptions in Period 7

Code:	1	3	4	5	6	8	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
<b>Period 7</b>																						
Question																						
1	-1	1	0	1	0	1	-1	-1	-1	0	-1	0	1	1	1	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0
2	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	-1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	-1	-1
3	0	0	0	-1	1	-2	0	1	0	-1	2	0	-1	0	-1	1	0	0	-1	-1	0	2
4	0	0	0	-1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	1	0
5	0	0	0	0	-1	2	0	0	0	1	-1	0	2	1	0	1	-1	-1	0	2	1	-1
6	1	0	0	0	-1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3	1	0	2	1	1	0	-1	1	-1
7	0	1	1	0	-3	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	2	-1	0	-1	3	0	2	-1
8	1	1	1	0	-2	1	-2	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
9	0	-1	0	0	X	1	-1	0	0	0	-1	-1	1	2	1	-1	0	0	0	1	1	1
10	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	1	0	0	-1	0	1	1	1	-1	-1	0	-1	1	-1
11	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	-1	-1	2	0	1	0	-1	0	-1	-3	1	2
12	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	-1	0	2	-1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	3
13	1	1	-1	1	0	0	-1	0	0	1	-2	0	1	2	1	1	-1	-1	0	X	2	1
14	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	-1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	-1	0
15	0	0	0	0	-2	-1	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	-1	0	1
16	1	0	-1	0	2	0	0	-1	0	0	1	0	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	1	0	0	-1
17	0	0	0	-1	-2	1	-1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	0
18	0	0	-1	0	1	2	-1	-1	-1	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0

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