SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE: DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING PROCESSES IN CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISTURBANCES

JOSEPH LEBEER

Abstract: This article elaborates three case studies of children - one with autism, one with brain damage and one with Down syndrome whose learning processes were evaluated using Feuerstein’s LPAD (Learning Propensity Assessment Device). The dynamic evaluation showed the children’s modifiability, their capacity for higher abstract thinking and development. This opened up a different perspective on the child’s educational potential and consequently a more active educational intervention. The examples have been drawn from a series of 250 children with learning disabilities, with varying degrees of severity and etiology, whereby Feuerstein’s LPAD (Learning Propensity Assessment Device) has been performed. The LPAD is based on Feuerstein’s theory of Mediated Learning Experience and Structural Cognitive Modifiability, which basically has a dynamic and constructive view on intelligence. In dynamic assessment there is a teaching phase and the examiner interferes with the process, so as to produce a mediated “peak” performance. The examples show that test outcomes may be significantly higher after mediating learning processes and strategies. They show what kind and amount of mediation are needed to bring about change. They suggest that dynamic assessment may bring about a positively influential cycle in the family and school system and is more suitable for educational planning than a classic, psychometric and static testing paradigm.

Introduction

In educational counseling, “classic” psychometric testing is often deceptive. It is called “static” because the child’s performance is measured in a static way, no changes are recorded and no intervention is allowed by the examiner, this for the sake of so-called objectivity. While originally conceived by Binet as an instrument to plan education, psychometric testing has been criticized for reinforcing pre-established pessimism, for not going beyond a mere labeling of dysfunctions, for lack of giving proper advice as how to change the child’s learning, for not doing justice to the child’s potential (Dias, 2001). Psychometric testing however is a short and relatively cheap way to rank a child’s performance in a population of the same age and may give quick information as to diagnosis.

Feuerstein et al. (1979) criticize the psychometric testing paradigm for being too “static”: it is static because it is based on the assumption

1 University of Antwerp, Faculty of Medicine, Disability Studies, Project of Learning Enhancement & Inclusion. Address of correspondence jo.lebeer@ua.ac.be