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How to help to parents and teachers with children with learning challenges

Case study

The role of dynamic assessment in general is:

- to identify obstacles to more effective learning and performance,
- to find ways to overcome those obstacles,
- and to assess the effects of removal of obstacles on subsequent learning and performance effectiveness.

The aim is to give suggestions to parents, teachers, educators regarding what can be done to defeat the pessimistic predictions based on normative tests, what kinds and amount of intervention will be necessary to produce significant improvement and the probable effects of such intervention.

Dynamic assessment looks for samples of change and retention of what is learned to indicate areas for cognitive modifiability and need for mediational intervention.

Marcel

Marcel is a typical 13 years old teenager, a little shy, very well-mannered and friendly. During the assessment he was motivated, participated cooperatively and willingly and completed the tasks he was asked to do. Marcel was very happy about the results he showed. He responded, thought about his answers and checked himself while controlling his behaviour and his answers. However, he was easily distracted by noise, responded in a rushed way and showed signs of blocking. As soon as Marcel got moved to a quiet area, he could continue the test.

Marcel was referred by the school psychologist. According to the report, he often gets lost in the tasks and usually doesn't know how to start. This happens in all the subjects. It seems that Marcel has a problem with memory, tends to be passive and gives up easily. The result of a test from two years ago showed above average abilities, more efficiency in non-verbal skills, good abstract thinking and general knowledge. It showed difficulties with attention, auditory processing and in motoric skills. Marcel was offered and accepted to receive some help from an assistant in the classroom. He sits in the front and the assistant helps him frequently to get started. During the last two months, he became less active during classes. **Teachers see his potentials, but don't know how to support him.**



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Marcel attends year 7 at secondary school. He has a twin brother, who is not in the same class and an older, 22 years old brother, who studies at the university and lives with the family. Marcel's favourite subjects at school are languages, English and Spanish. He does not attend any extra-curricular activities at school. At home he exercises with his father self-defence. He likes to play computer games and to read science fiction. Currently, he is writing a book by himself. Marcel says he has friends who sometimes come over and they watch films together, play computer games or go outside.

The tests we worked on during the three days assessment:

- Organization of Dots
- Complex Figure Drawing
- Variations of Progressive Matrices
- 16 Words Memory Test
- Positional learning
- Numerical progressions
- Representational Stencil Design
- Organizer

Organization of Dots

Marcel understood the task quickly and he used planning and strategies in systematic way. Mild verbal mediation was offered to him when he got lost looking for where to start and also when he got blocked by the increased intensity of sounds in the surroundings. In average Marcel showed good ability to learn and use some effective strategies. ***Calmness in his learning environment and mediation of self-competence can help him to overcome blocking and be more efficient.***

Complex Figure Drawing

The test showed well developed summative behaviour as well as need for precision in drawing the elements of the figure. Verbal mediation focused on how to structure and organize the elements of the figure - in and out of the main rectangle – was needed and accepted, thus Marcel understood and kept the structure of the complex figure. He recognized that naming elements and their positions, as we did during the analysis in the mediation phase, helped him keep them in mind and his results improved significantly. Marcel is able to internalize complex strategies and improve his organizational skills. ***He needs time and support to apply the newly learned strategies.***

Variations of Progressive Matrices

Work on Raven's standard matrices showed that Marcel is able to find relationships, verbalize the process, use superordinate concepts. Mediation of feeling of competence together with mediation of meaning



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improved his ability to apply strategies in very complex tasks in the series E and his feeling of self-competence improved as well. The results of the test indicate good perceptual vision, 'Gestalt', figural analogies, ability to deal with more sources of information and permutations. ***If provided with mediation of feeling of competence and meaning Marcel can solve complex problems and rely on his potential for analysis and synthesis.***

16 Words Memory Test

According to previous reports, Marcel has trouble to recall auditory information. To work on his real potential, we took him to a separate room to eliminate noise as a distractor. The test confirmed what the previous tests showed about his auditory modality, we needed to provide him with high level of mediation discussing numbers, counting the words, grouping, word/group order; speaking more about using imagination. And just then Marcel could fulfil the task and list the words. Therefore, we can say that Marcel needs more time, distance, peaceful and quiet environment to adapt and apply new strategies. ***He needs to eliminate sources of disturbance, to help him focus and to support him thinking about and using better strategies.***

Positional Learning

Marcel's responses were correct after the first trail. He could verbalize the concept of the grid and the positions in the grid. In his reflection he even defined the relationship between the first and second pattern. During the test he was very motivated to be precise and demonstrated high level of concentration.

Numerical Progressions

Marcel was able to solve tasks that need abstract thinking efficiently with good concentration and very little support for careful perception and control of behaviour. He was familiar with the identification of the relationships between the given progression of numbers, used basic mathematics and differentiation, segregation, hypothetical and inferential thinking, and deductive reasoning. He was given little verbal mediation in regulation of behaviour, focusing on the need to gather complete data, after which he continued quickly and accurately using more strategies to new tasks.

Representational Stencil Design Test

Increased self-confidence and no blocking were observed during this test. After a short learning phase with low/medium mediation, Marcel could verbalize the strategies used and synthesize the different stencils in the correct order. He was very motivated to solve this visual task proving that visual modality is very important for him.



Organizer

Marcel showed great level of logical and systematic thinking. He was able to concentrate, focus on the task and work systematically, in a peaceful and quiet environment. He read meaningfully, used meta-cognition and manipulates information mentally on quite a high level. He is able to concentrate on a task and work for an extended time, even with difficult tasks. As this was his last LPAD test Marcel's learning process could be observed as he was working with strategies and applying them to his work. He showed no hesitation using new strategy.

Summary

Throughout the process there was a good quality of interaction between Marcel and the mediators. He happily accepted the mediation, benefited from it and from the mediators' attention, and his self competence improved as a result. Throughout the three days of testing, Marcel became more and more confident, knew when to ask for help and what strategies helped him, to solve a problem. His ability in dealing with abstract tasks was very good in different levels of complexity. He can rely on his visual perception, good concentration and systematic-thinking. He learns languages with ease and has a very rich imagination. Marcel showed more self-confidence when he feels supported.

TO MEDIATE EFFECTIVELY, PARENTS AND EDUCATORS MUST BELIEVE THAT CHILDREN CAN LEARN
EVEN IF THEY APPEAR TO HAVE COGNITIVE CHALLENGES MAKING THE LEARNING MORE DIFFICULT. IT
IS IMPORTANT TO INTERACT WITH THESE CHILDREN WITH ENTHUSIASM, JOY AND OPTIMISM.

Recommendations

To teachers:

Marcel's thinking ability is high, but because of low auditory perception his self-competence is low and it's important for him to be motivated to rely on written notes, and the help of teachers. His auditive attention would increase or strengthen by making written notes, drawings and/or mind-mapping of the given information. Due to his low auditory perception, taking notes *in different ways* (e.g. tables, outlines, mind-maps) would be very helpful for him. Marcel would also benefit a lot if he knows, how to signal the teacher in case he is lost in the task, blocked or does not know how to start the task (help him with the first step). As soon as it gets too noisy, he can't concentrate well any more. Giving him quiet working space (when it is possible), headphones or ear plugs to exclude noise can increase his level of achievement. Intense mediation of competence with mediation of meaning is recommended to help Marcel believe in his abilities. A course of the FIE: (Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment Program) is highly recommended. This will help him apply his skills to areas of difficulty, improve his focusing and reduce his frustration and improve his elaboration processing speed.



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To parents:

The parents can be proud of Marcel's abilities.

Providing Marcel with enough space and time during the family routine would help him to plan and organize his time and school preparations.

Since Marcel needs a quiet room while learning, the family should find a solution for it (e.g. learning in a different room of the apartment, on the corridor, outside, providing him with noise cancelling headphones/ear plugs).

The family can help Marcel to build up his "noise-resilience" by increasing the levels of noise step by step while he pays attention to something different. This can be trained by various online programs (e.g. dys2.org; tablexia.cz).

Marcel is the second of the twins and also the third child in the family, he might get overlooked easily (also, because he is quiet and peaceful). Paying extra attention to Marcel could built up is self-confidence, self-competence and self-esteem.

A few words from the LPAD assessor

Regarding the benefits to parents and teachers as well, in this case it was the unfolding / conforming that Marcel has excellent abilities to learn and he likes learning. It is also easy for him to learn. The fact that he is quiet is just the information for us to pay him more attention, because it is easy to forget about him. His mother was absolutely happy and the boy came into blossom in front of us (it has to be noted that his grades in school were rather poor). He understood and realized that, yes, he can and his self-confidence raised. The so-called disadvantage – quietness and modesty – we turned into his advantage and he started to perceive these characteristics differently, positively. It was extremely helpful that we learned about his weakened auditory modality. His mother told me thank you at least a million times, she needed to find the route to her boy, apparently the LPAD offered it to her.