

ACADEMIC SKILLS AND LEARNING POTENTIAL IN MILD MENTAL RETARDATION

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Detecting the difference between “actual” and “potential” development, as stated in Vygotskij’s theory of “Zone of Proximal Development” (ZPD), is of most importance in the teaching process, especially in the perspective of a “person-tailored teaching”. The actual level of development corresponds to independent problem-solving skills, whereas the potential level can only be observed after mediating to the child the way of performing the task.

Therefore, teaching should more strictly correspond to the level of potential development, rather than to that of actual development. The learning potential can be detected using three indicators: the maintaining of what has been learned, the quality and amount of mediation required, and the transfer.

In our paper, we reported cognitive profiles and academic learning of two girls with mild mental retardation without any associated diagnosis, matched on chronological age, mental age, IQ and school achievement. The assessment of academic skills showed markedly discrepant performances. Those differences in learning corresponded to a different size in the learning potential, as confirmed by the administration of the Learning Propensity Assessment Device - LPAD (Feuerstein, 1979).

Dynamic Assessment, indeed, highlighted a higher potential in the girl presenting with a larger repertoire of academic skills, who had benefited from a more consistent amount of mediation.

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