

Dynamic Assessment

There is no need to explain to a certified school psychologist why norm-referenced tests and standardized behavior scales may not be proper instruments for the evaluation of children with an "atypical" background (the so-called "marginal" population, e.g.: children from recently arrived immigrant families or internationally adopted post-institutionalized orphans). We do not need to compare their current level of intellectual functioning with their peers in this country - we know that they are different due to their unique backgrounds. We do know that they are delayed in regard to many developmental skills and accomplishments. We do know that their specific knowledge base is weaker and different from the one acquired by their peers in American schools. Our diagnostic questions should be their amenability to instruction and guidance, their cognitive modifiability, their responsiveness to an adult's mediation and intervention. Is this not what we need to know for effective remediation? Is this not the ultimate goal of our assessment? It is my conviction that the best practice would be "dynamic assessment" in the format developed by C. S. Lidz and R. Jepsen (ACFS, 1997).

The Application of Cognitive Functions Scale

Authors: Carol S. Lidz and Ruthanne H. Jepsen

Who:

ACFS is appropriately administered to typically developing children between the ages of three through five years and to children with developmental delays who function approximately within those age levels.

What:

ACFS taps basic cognitive processes and learning strategies associated with typical early childhood learning activities. There are six subscales, or activities, as follows:

- Classification (materials: blocks; processes: grouping and alternative thinking)
- Perspective taking (materials: paper and crayons; processes: communicating in a way that reflects awareness of another's presence, need to understand, and point of view)
- Short Term Auditory Memory (materials: short stories; processes: short term auditory recall and sequential narrative)
- Visual Sequential Memory (materials: small toys; processes: short term rote recall of visual objects and application of visual memory strategies)
- Verbal Planning (materials: picture sequence; processes: communication of strategic plan for completion of a familiar activity)
- Sequential Pattern Completion (materials: set of diagrams; processes: awareness of repeated shape pattern and completion of the pattern)

How:

Each activity is presented in a "dynamic format or with a pretest-intervention transfer administration. Both the pretest and transfer segments ask the child to engage in the activity without adult assistance, to demonstrate the child's independent functioning. The intervention segment offers standard assistance that emphasizes the strategies and type of processing that is involved in successful completion of the activity. If administered in the standardized format, the procedure can be scored. If the standardized procedure is not strictly followed, the ACFS can be used diagnostically or for individual exploration of the child's functioning in the areas tapped by the activities.

Why:

The ACFS has been developed to yield information that relates to the child's ability to learn as inferred from observation of the child's responsiveness to the instruction that is offered during the course of the procedure. This information should connect directly to the classroom instructional setting, as well as provide in depth insight into the nature of the child's cognitive functioning, as the activities are typical of those found in early childhood programs. If used diagnostically, ACFS should provide insight into successful teaching strategies.

ACFS Subtests

Classification:

Children will group objects on the basis of abstracted features of color, size, function, shape. Children will change the basis of grouping objects when asked to "do it another way".

Subskills:

- ability to detect distinctive features
- ability to respond to directions including "things that go together," and "make groups."
- ability to make groups based on abstracted distinctive feature
- application of grouping concepts across variety of materials, such as toys, clothes, foods (real simulations, as well as pictures)

Perspective-taking:

Children will communicate with another person in a way that reflects awareness of that person's need for information.

Subskills:

- ability to read behavioral cues of others, such as emotions.
- ability to comprehend and distinguish among verbal communications of others, such as statements versus questions versus commands.
- ability to provide verbal and behavioral communications to allow another person to engage in reciprocal interchanges.

Verbal Planning:

Children will tell the steps of commonly experienced activities in correct sequence. Children will determine when they need a plan.

Subskills:

- ability to retrieve and keep in working memory an activity sequence
- ability to detect when something is out of order
- ability to anticipate what comes next
- ability to sequence pictures portraying common activities
- comprehension of planning words such as first, next, last
- use of planning words to communicate a sequence

Short Term Visual Memory:

Children will recall the names of a series of objects placed in front of them and then removed from sight.

Subskills:

- knowledge base for objects (vocabulary and experience)
- strategies for rote recall, such as rehearsal, visualization, grouping
- elaborate self talk during object play

ACFS Behavior Rating Scale Components:

- **Self Regulation:** Child maintains attention and refrains from impulsive interaction with materials.
- **Persistence:** Child completes task without seeking to terminate.
- **Frustration Tolerance:** When child shows upset from frustration, is readily calmed and redirected
- **Motivation:** Child shows enthusiastic reaction to the materials and task.
- **Flexibility:** Child does not repeat unsuccessful task solutions and develops alternative approaches to the task.
- **Responsivity:** Child is willing to learn and open to input from the mediator.
- **Interactivity:** Child engages in turn-taking conversational exchanges with some degree of elaboration.