

**Pigeonhole Questions and Comments**  
**Paper 10. Colby-Kelly**

**Q: How can we operationalize "development" into our assessments so that we can quantify the amount of scaffolding/assistance that test-takers need to successfully complete the task?**

*There are a couple of things to keep in mind relative to this question. Certain conditions are required in order to be able to use quantified assessment results to promote further learning. From an LOA stance, it may or may not be very helpful to know, for example, that a learner can produce 8/20 forms accurately, unless we know more about why that is. In an LOA approach, the focus is on qualitative information about student progress.*

*LOA seeks to look at quantified information, and to move beyond it, delving deeper into questioning what learners need in order to progress to the next step. In taking an LOA approach to the example above, we could ask What forms were correctly produced? What kinds were incorrectly produced? Is there a pattern to the answers that could inform on why the learner succeeded in 8 instances and was unsuccessful in 12? What insights might the learner himself provide about these results? What factors may have impeded the successful progression of learning, at this time, for this learner? What constraints, or perhaps lack of helpful influences, have had an impact on these test results? How can LOA inform on the student's needs, in order for this learner to move ahead successfully?*

*The raison d'être of LOA is to direct assessment towards an understanding of the individual learning context, in order to more accurately assess the quality of learning gaps, so teachers are better positioned to make lesson planning decisions and to provide more precise tools and assistance to learners in order to help them move forward. So, in a sense LOA may work with quantitative or observable information (evidence of a learning gap) and then ask Why is this so? What can be done next to foster the development of learning in this instance?*

*In teachers' busy classroom settings, this may seem to be a challenging goal. However, by encouraging greater learner autonomy, teacher-student learning and assessment goal sharing, self- and peer-assessments, co-constructed assessment and learning activities, as well as computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and computer-assisted language testing (CALT), LOA has proven to be very successful. Additionally, diagnostic assessment and dynamic assessment are important tools for pinpointing learning gaps, to assist in scaffolding learning from actual towards potential gains. For example, Fox and Harwick (2011) studied university students grappling with their academic studies in the L2, and used diagnostic assessments to uncover previously undiscovered problems with listening skills which affected their learning, which could then be addressed. Dynamic, interactive assessment techniques were used by Hamp-Lyons and Tavares (2011) to assist and scaffold learning during assessment instances in their study of secondary students' L2 learning.*

*In summary, quantified information can tell us a great deal about students' learning success, of course. Added to that, qualified information can serve to create a more comprehensive picture of learning, by identifying the nature of learning gaps in order to effectively address those stumbling blocks, so that future gains in learning outcomes continue.*

*Teachers and learners can avail themselves of assessment tools and techniques, such as diagnostic assessment and dynamic assessment and those mentioned above, to operationalize "development" in assessments. This approach could help teachers and learners more accurately determine what kind and amount of scaffolding and assistance were required for successful task completion.*

**Q: SLA research has long highlighted the difference between knowledge about language and ability to use language. Is this distinction important for AFL? (or LOA or DA)**

*Historically, L2 teaching has sought to foster learners' acquisition of automatized language use through various means, some of which have proven more successful than others. I believe that LOA/AFL does make a distinction between knowledge about language and the ability to use it automatically in speech or other language acts, in its learning goals. As with many other methodologies, LOA seeks to use instructional classroom-based activities to influence learner knowledge about language and awareness of gaps in proficiency, or 'noticing,' as well as practice using language, towards the goal of helping learners become more proficient in their automatized language ability. In other words, LOA seeks to foster an instructional environment enhancing metacognition and use, and potentially, uptake.*

*Most LOA proponents take a Vygotskian, socio-cultural standpoint about this process, in which learners progress through interaction, in co-constructed learning and assessment activities with more proficient 'others' (teachers, peers, and so on). In addition, James (2006) discussed a cognitive (and to a lesser extent, behaviourist) view of language learning. She found that learners need to engage actively in creating individual cognitive schema for constructing meaning. These schema could contribute to learner 'noticing.' Moreover, the diagnostic and dynamic assessment practices of LOA could also serve to promote learner attention to proficiency gaps by contributing to increased learner metacognition. Thus, taken together these LOA perspectives and practices seek to enhance learner metacognition or knowledge about language, as well as learner automatized language use or the ability to use language.*