The Informal Social Thinking Dynamic Assessment Protocol (ISTDAP), developed by Michelle Garcia Winner, is a means of identifying and quantifying in real-time a student’s social competencies as well as connecting the dots between a student’s social learning abilities and possibly related academic strengths and weaknesses.

The ISTDAP is not intended to be a diagnostic tool; instead it’s to be used with people who have already been identified as having a social skills problem but the team is unclear where to start in the treatment process or how deeply they are impacted socially. The ISTDAP was created after Michelle grew increasingly frustrated with the limitations of standardized testing, namely that they are unable to currently measure a student’s true social competencies. The ISTDAP consists of a number of non-standardized tasks which were first introduced through Michelle’s book, Thinking About YOU Thinking About ME, 1st edition (2002) and 2nd edition (2007).

These user-friendly assessment tasks help to more quickly identify a student’s social learning ability to interpret and respond to social stimuli in the moment of interaction. The assessment tasks also explore Theory of Mind, Executive Functioning and concepts related to Central Coherence. Since information about this informal assessment process was first published, the tasks and related philosophy have received very positive reviews from a range of professionals (psychologists, counselors, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, behaviorists, educators, etc.).  ISTDAPs (our assessment) are usually scheduled concurrently with clinical trainings, in which a group of professionals gathers in our clinic to learn the Social Thinking process. The assessment will be observed through a two-way mirror and participants would typically have no knowledge that they are being observed.

While anyone can read about these assessment concepts in the book, Thinking About YOU Thinking About ME, only therapists who have sought specific training to demonstrate mastery over this informal dynamic assessment process are permitted to provide assessments to clients in our communities. Therefore, not all clinicians working for our licensed Social Thinking clinics provide these assessments. In fact, the majority is not yet fully trained. Hence, both Social Thinking Boston and Social Thinking-Santa Clara, the two sites that provide this assessment process, have waiting lists.