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### **“ASSESSMENT IN DIALOGUE” (AID). ASSESSING THE COMMUNICATIVE ACTION**

*“Assessment in Dialogue” (AID) is a model of Joanna Piasta-Siechowicz addressed to the participants of general education: students-teachers-parents. AID reconciles contradictory tendencies of the philosophy and praxis of student assessment: the pursuit of objectivity of the former and the need of individualisation of the latter. It aspires to combine the objectivity of requirements and evaluation criteria with the need of individualisation. It is also well suited to help teachers in systematic planning of their work. “Assessment in Dialogue” refers to the trisubjectivity (student-parent-teacher) in the planning and organisation of student’s activities and, as a result, in informing about his/her achievements during a lesson. Implemented in a primary school since 2012, “Assessment in Dialogue” is popularised at conferences of principals and teachers in Poland and Ireland, workshops for teachers, publications in methodical journals. It is grounded in the official documents of the Ministry of National Education, European Council recommendations and conclusions from ten years of constant evaluation of the psycho-didactic process in schools as well as the functioning of evaluation system in Poland.*

*KEY WORDS: Assessment, Dialogue, Communicative Action, Multiple Intelligences.*

## **Introduction**

“Assessment in Dialogue” (AID) is a model of Joanna Piasta-Siechowicz addressed to the participants of general education: students-teachers-parents. AID reconciles contradictory tendencies of the philosophy and praxis of student assessment: the pursuit of objectivity of the former and the need of individualisation of the latter. “Assessment in Dialogue” is based on the theory of communicative action of Jürgen Habermas (2015). It aspires to combine the objectivity of requirements and evaluation criteria with the need of individualisation. It is also well suited to help teachers in systematic planning of their work. “Assessment in Dialogue” refers to the trisubjectivity (student-parent-teacher) in the planning and organisation of student’s activities and, as a result, in informing about his/her achievements during a lesson. Implemented in a primary school since 2012, “Assessment in Dialogue” is popularised at conferences of principals and teachers in Poland and Ireland, workshops for teachers, publications in methodical journals. It is grounded in the official documents of

the Ministry of National Education, European Council recommendations and conclusions from ten years of constant evaluation of the psycho-didactic process in schools as well as the functioning of evaluation system in Poland.

### **Triangular communication model**

The theory of communicative action of Jurgen Habermas frames the model of triangular communication between teacher, student and parents. His theory was the outcome of consideration regarding social matters. Its detailed character allowed using it in the context of social actions in school environment that is especially fit to the introduction of communication based on understanding and resulting in the creation of right interpersonal relations between truly engaged participants sharing a common approach towards the world.

Introducing parents as actors in communicative actions creates a commitment of the participants of interaction to share common knowledge that allows for the agreement on versatile matters.

Commonly used model of communication between student-teacher and teacher-parent is based on the exertion of external influence thus resulting in one-sided communication. The actions are induced by the cause-result principle. In effect, teacher is fully responsible for the coordination of actions minimising the internal perspective of the student or parent engaged in a communicative action.

In my opinion, there are five aspects that are crucial to the implementation of the model of triangular communication: (1) communicative situation, (2) plan of communicative action, (3) structure of action, (4) structuring student's knowledge and (5) trisubjectivity of the relation. The model has in turn five characteristics. It is teleological, objective, individualising, supporting and universal.

The first aspect – communicative situation – as it applies to school, means a certain part of the social life of the institution that is restrained to the 45 minutes of a lesson and more often to a specific subject than to a specific problem as well as to the specific space of a classroom that usually enhances one-sidedness of communication. The subject is most often initiated by the teacher. Student does not have a coordinative role.

The second aspect of the model of triangular communication, as it applies to the situation of a lesson, refers to the didactic plan of a teacher that is a set of well-thought statements justified by the main educational aim that initiate the actions of students realised through the interaction with all of the participants in the process of fulfilling the plan. The plan of actions should be comprised of statements that are coherent, which means that the acts of speech are structured in such a manner that provides the information sufficient to achieve the assumed aim, whether in unaided or cooperative action. Illocutionary acts in which performative verbs condition three dimensions of reaction – understanding, taking standpoint and adjusting actions to the assumed aim – are the main means towards the fulfilment of the plan.

The next aspect regards the structure of action. The structure in this context means the organisation of a lesson that allows using students' own knowledge about the chosen

subject to construct new knowledge while influencing each other. Each of the participants of interaction makes efforts towards solving the problem according to the plan in which all of the participants undertake actions knowing their aim, assured by the common understanding of the educational situation.

According to the assumptions of constructivism, the creation of student's knowledge is conditioned by both acquired knowledge and perceptions of the world (Wendland 2011). Students have at their disposal rich knowledge acquired in the contact with nature, society and mass media. Each of them creates his knowledge independently. The creation of senses and concepts is a continuous, active process conditioned by the initial knowledge. Students are responsible for their own knowledge. That creates appropriate conditions for understanding due to the hidden and not evenly conceived common dimensions of understanding that create the "world of life". The world of life can be described as an implicit (supposed, guessed from the context) portion of knowledge that allows us to approach the objective, social and subjective worlds.

Triangularity of the relation between student, teacher and parent forms another aspect of the subject. The inclusion of parent in certain communicative actions based on a common plan creates the conditions of the so-called ideal communicative situation in which all of the participants share language competences that are essential to develop communicational competences. Communicational competences are acquired through socialisation after acquiring language competences. To create a situation in which all participants of communicative interaction take actions based on the understanding of that situation and aim at actions that are concentrated on achieving the aim, all of the participants need to have common knowledge. The plan of communicative action based on the understanding of situation and common knowledge of the participants of interaction makes them responsible for understanding.

The crucial aspect of the creation of conditions allowing for successful communicative action, as it is described by Habermas, regards the model of a plan of communicative action which, when applied to school, means a didactic plan of a teacher. That plan should have five characteristics. It should be universal, supporting, individualising, objective and teleological.

Universality requires all of the teachers in a school to share the same communicative model within the society of that school. If the same model is applied by every teacher, it becomes common and the probability of achieving understanding between the participants of interaction increases. It minimises the number of factors organising the acts of communication.

The supporting character of the model means that it assumes a dialogue between teacher, student and his/her parents regarding student's developments in the process of education, his/her interests, strong and weak points. It is secret to the third parties. The subject of a dialogue and the areas of communication stem from the plan of communicative actions accepted by all of the participants.

Individualising character of the plan of communicative actions allows for learning and creating one's own concepts in one's own pace using knowledge acquired in preschool activities as a result of individual interests.

Objective character of the model of communication means that it does not differentiate the requirements described in the plan of communicative actions. Instead, it assumes the differentiation of level and form of actions.

Teleological character guarantees the engagement of students, parents and teachers in achieving the assumed educational aim.

### **Triangular communication model – Assessment in Dialogue (AID)**

Dialogue means a common quest to achieve reciprocal understanding. Optimally, there is a direct contact between the sender and the receiver of a statement, the context of statement is known to both parties of a dialogue, the code that both parties use to achieve agreement is comprehensible, participants of the dialogue assume the approach of willingness to cooperate in the process of deeper and deeper understanding.

Situation of reciprocal understanding requires, especially in the early stages of education, participation in a dialogue of not only student and teacher, but also student and parents, teacher and parents. That situation fosters the striving to achieve the main and common goal – the versatile development of a student/child. One of the institutions set up for the realisation of this goal is school. Cooperation of school and family of a student gives the basis of effective education. Willingness to understand and cooperate with all of the participants of the dialogue enriches the psycho-didactic process with a reciprocal bond and shared responsibility for the optimal development of a child.

Nowadays schools reduce the reciprocal relation of student and teacher to informing the former of the results (expressed in the form of a grade) of selective activities (most often evaluated with a test) emphasising mistakes and deficiencies. Relations of teacher and parent are in turn reduced to the presentation of the results of student's work in the form of a general profile of grades. None of these forms is well suited to inform about the true progress of a student, none presents a holistic picture of the potential of his/her development; none helps the student in unassisted planning of self-development; none motivates the student to further progress in his education; none informs parents/custodians and teachers about the progress and unique talents of a student, none enables teachers to perfect the organisation and methods of their didactic and educational work. It informs solely about the difficulties in learning and behaviour. Additionally, school heads towards substituting the direct relation of student, teacher and parent with electronic communicators (electronic register) that makes the situation of reciprocal understanding extremely limited.

The answer to the above-mentioned problems is the proposal of a new trisubject (student–parent–teacher) dimension of a dialogue directed towards the development of a child. It is called “Assessment in Dialogue” and is focused on stimulating the development of a student in the teaching and learning process through:

- pointing to the advantages of student's activities and advantages of the results of his/her actions, emphasising good features of student's work, pointing to the features that need improvement and informing about the way to achieve better results;
- emphasising individuality of a child and his/her predispositions;
- respecting the right to the pace of student's development;

- noticing even the smallest progress in acquiring competences;
- creating situations in which every student will have the opportunity to present his/her competences;
- informing student (and his/her parents/custodians) honestly about his/her competences.

Transparency of expectations/requirements is a starting point. At the beginning each of the three participants of dialogue: student, teacher and parents get the same set of conditions that would be the subject of their conversations. Thus, a space of reciprocal dialogue is created, the aim of which is to foster the main goal of education – the development of a child.

The set of requirements becomes the plan of individual development of a child in a group. That plan allows to assign a specific aim to successive meetings of teacher and student and to tailor the level and the form of tasks to individual preferences of a student. The teacher gets to know the individual preferences of his/her students thanks to the description of extracurricular activities of a student carried out by a student and by his/her parents. Extracurricular activities of a student are of equal importance to curricular activities, because they inform about his/her interests, allow to diagnose talents and indicate the directions of their development.

Parents share the responsibility for the optimal development of their children due to the knowledge about the requirements that the children should meet and creation of the environment of children's individual development in their homes through conscious supervising of their activities. Such actions are consistent with modern trends of increasing parents' engagement in the education of their children.

The teacher begins to work honestly for a high level of professionalism both in his/her subject and in pedagogy, because he/she becomes a participant of a trisubject dialogue. A starting point of the preparations to meet student during a lesson is now placed on tailoring the form of tasks to individual preferences of a student and searching for the best ways of making use of the development opportunities of each child instead of filling in the handbook used as the main didactic tool.

New dimension of the dialogue called "AID" ("Assessment in Dialogue") is a proposal that gives a school the opportunity to be up to date with times and conditions that are constantly changing. It is an idea of effective and safe communication based on a constructive and neutral evaluation of achievements that is additionally supported with a precisely designed consistent tool for each of the fields of school education: humanities, language, history and society, mathematics, IT, technics, nature, music, art, sport/health. It gives a holistic picture of the development of a child in modern school environment that is thus reformed from inside. Thus, the deficiencies of the Polish education system are being improved.

Creating a bond between teacher, student and parents using the integrated tool AID has been initiated as the effect of perennial experiences in searching for the best way to communicate school with a child and his/her family and social environment. AID is the result of a struggle to reconcile contradictory tendencies of philosophy and praxis of student

evaluation: the pursuit of objectivity of the former and the need of individualisation of the latter. When implemented in primary school, it became the source of changes in the dialogue with a student and his/her parent. It influenced the change of the organisation of work with a student and encouraged teachers to carry out their own search for effective ways of teaching taking into consideration individual preferences of students. It directed the dialogue of student and teacher towards the pursuit of optimal effects – the individual accomplishments of a student.

AID is both a plan of teacher's work and a plan of results that are to be achieved by students on every stage of education regarding a three-year education cycle. The plan defines education goal (specific) for every lesson unit that is at the same time a specific requirement that the student should meet. The specific goals (requirements) are grouped into blocks / tables / sets of expectations that become the criteria of the evaluation of student's work (File/Portfolio).

General requirements defined in the curricular policy of the Ministry of National Education as education goals that are often ignored by teachers planning their work, become the starting point for the creation of the plan. They become the main goals and specific goals that are interpreted as specific requirements for a student as well as education contents are grouped around them. Such reading of the curricular policy inspires to create multiple ways of achieving education goals / general requirements, because each of them is repeatedly seen from different angles through various contents of education / specific goals.

Example: Polish. 2nd stage of education

General requirement: Statement creation

Main requirement: *Student develops the ability to express statements in speech; student cares about the correctness of his/her own statements and forms it according to their aims; using his abilities he/she develops his/her knowledge about the language.* This requirement states one of the aims of education.

Specific requirements are grouped in several tables of abilities. The aforementioned main requirement has the following specific requirements: reading aloud; declamation of poetic and prosaic text; speaking, conversation, discussion. Every table summarises the specific requirements (assessment criteria) corresponding to one main requirement.

To prepare students for the assessment of their abilities, for example the ability to read aloud, I teach them specific requirements first: clear pronunciation and clear speaking as the next step. The following lesson is devoted to explanation of the intention of the text, one more to the word stress, the other – to the pause, and finally the last one is devoted to the use of correct intonation. Only after the fulfilment of aims (specific requirements) described above I can assess the spoken statement of a student which in that case would be reading aloud of a text. The assessment is based on the criteria that are now understood by a student. Each of the specific requirements is expressed in a language that can be understood by a student.

Table 1: **Reading aloud. FILE "Assessment in dialogue". Polish. II stage of education**

Creating a statement. <i>Reading aloud</i>	
Specific requirements / Criteria Pupil:	Description of requirements in pupil's language
reads clearly	I speak words clearly.
conveys text's intention	I express i.e. acceptance, negation, with my voice.
accents correctly	I accent words correctly.
introduces a pause	I do short intervals to emphasise the meaning of certain fragments.
uses adequate intonation	I read with the consideration of punctuation marks.

Source: created by the author.

## Conclusions

"Assessment in Dialogue" (AID) is a proposal of a model of learning-teaching and evaluation that is:

- universal (uniform to every kind of education);
- supporting (secret to the third parties, it assumes a dialogue between teacher, student and his/her parents about the progress achieved by a child, about child's interests, his/her strong and weak points);
- individualising (enables learning in one's own pace, takes into consideration extracurricular student's activities and his/her interests);
- objective (does not differentiate requirements, but assumes differentiation of difficulty levels and form of tasks);
- teleological (students, parents and teachers are equally involved in achieving the main goal – development of a child).

"Assessment in Dialogue" refers to the trisubjectivity (student-parent-teacher) in the planning and organisation of student's activities and, as a result, in informing about his/her achievements during a lesson. Implemented in a primary school since 2012, "Assessment in Dialogue" is popularised at conferences of principals and teachers in Poland and Ireland, workshops for teachers, publications in methodical journal *Język Polski w Szkole IV–VI* [Polish Language in School IV–VI] (*Język Polski* 2015 / 2016) and a book of articles *Jak budować dobrą szkołę? Potencjał i bariery ewaluacji w oświacie* [How to create a good school? Potential and barriers of evaluation in education] (Piasta-Siechowicz 2015: 267–282).

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