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“I like talking about life”, says Marianka, the girl with Asperger’s Syndrome

I met Marianka 4 years ago – in 2015, when she was almost 9 years old. Her mother had concerns regarding her schooling. When Marianka was 5 years old, she was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome. She needed assistant in the school who helped her to cope with some common situations she could not deal with on her own. She had problems with concentration, tempo and speed of a teaching-learning process and her parents were looking for how to help her in meeting the school’s requirements. Attending a common elementary school, she preferred art education, reading classes and sometimes English courses. However friendly girl, due to her diagnosis she sometimes had tantrums or got oversensitive about common events, situations. In her leisure time she loved baking and cooking, painting, reading books, swimming and visiting her 2 closest friends.

We agreed on a dynamic assessment, particularly LPAD (Learning propensity Assessment Device), as a first step. When I met Marianka, she was very friendly, talkative, polite and uninhibited. We were working for 2 days (8 hours in total) during which I could observe her high potential and intelligence with a good appetite to talk and share but also frustration and disappointment periods her parents have referred to me. We were looking for samples of change and retention of what is learned to indicate areas for cognitive modifiability and need for mediational intervention.

The tests we were working on were:

- Raven’s Colored Progressive Matrices + Raven’s Standard Progressive Matrices, series C, D, E
- Tri-Modal Analogies
- Organization of Dots
- Complex Figure Drawing Test
- 16 Words Memory
- Diffuse Attention Test

Marianka enjoyed all the tasks she was introduced to and she found them more joyful than the tasks in the school, as she said. She was cooperative and open to mediation. She worked mainly with confidence although sometimes she commented herself as stupid.



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Tirelessly she was searching for the right structure of her answers – she called it “appropriate form” – especially in the Raven’s matrices. We could not leave the task before she was satisfied with the “form”. She was methodical, used logical evidence and analogical thinking and applied the super-ordinate concepts. She was able to find the relationship between the elements and could work with more sources of information. Only mediation was given to help her to formulate her answers accurately, using the labels for stimuli and their characteristics.

Marianka solved most of the tasks of the standard matrices quickly and easily, using her knowledge of concepts, in some cases though she found it difficult to find and articulate the principle. Mediation for focusing, systematic exploration and labeling was enough for her to find the solution. Communicating the response improved comparing with the colored matrices and she said she was aware of it. The test showed that her abstract thinking is very well developed and she can solve complex problems on her own.

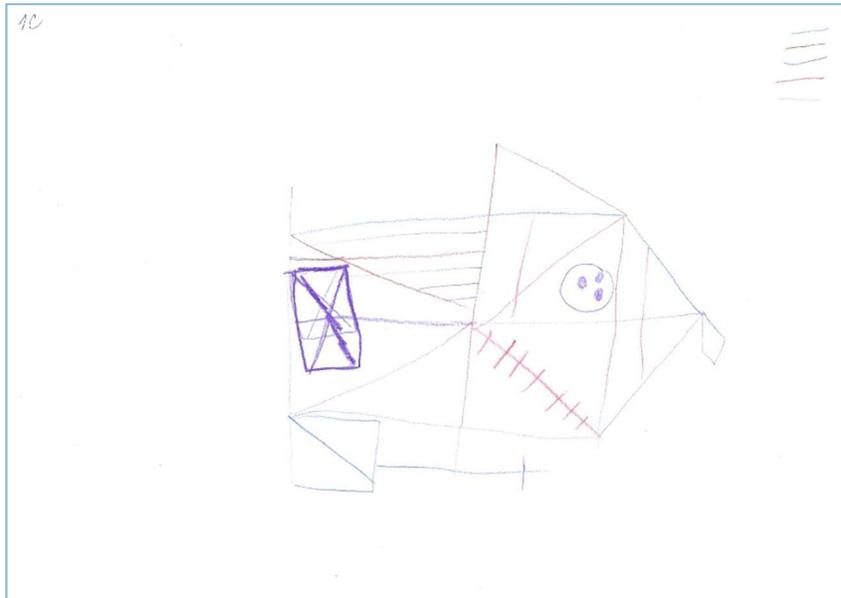
Tri-modal analogies showed the preferred modality of Marianka – pictorial and figural - in verbal modality light mediation was given regarding the word’s comprehension and categorization. Marianka was able to gather information quickly, precisely, elaborate effectively.

The test of Organization of Dots showed that Marianka has very well-developed differentiation skills, projection of relationships and representation. Overlapping and rotation was no problem for her and she could work independently and with joy. The only mediation she needed was for focusing and planning her work – overcoming her impulsivity.

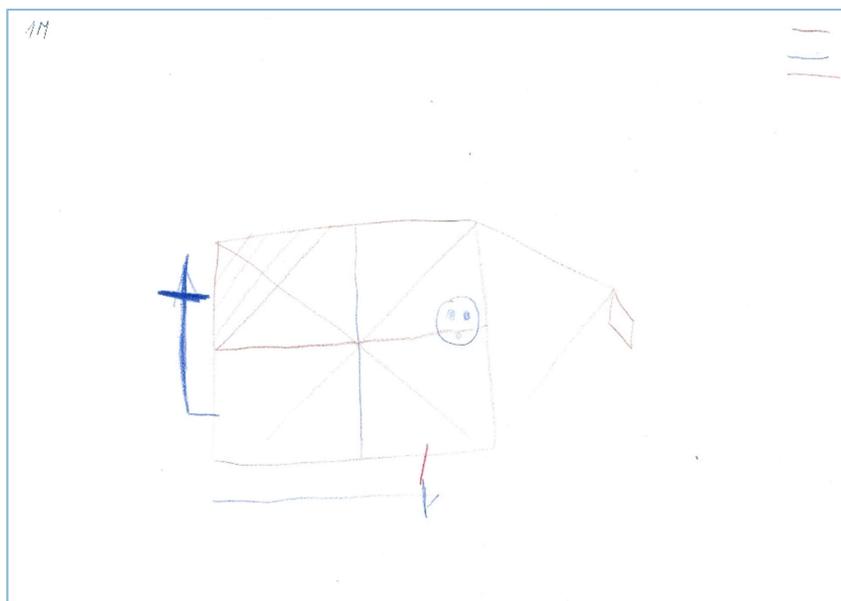
During the Complex Figure Drawing Test, I could witness frustration and feeling of incompetence, as Marianka labeled it. Although she registered most of the elements of the drawing, she had difficulties to find relationships between them.



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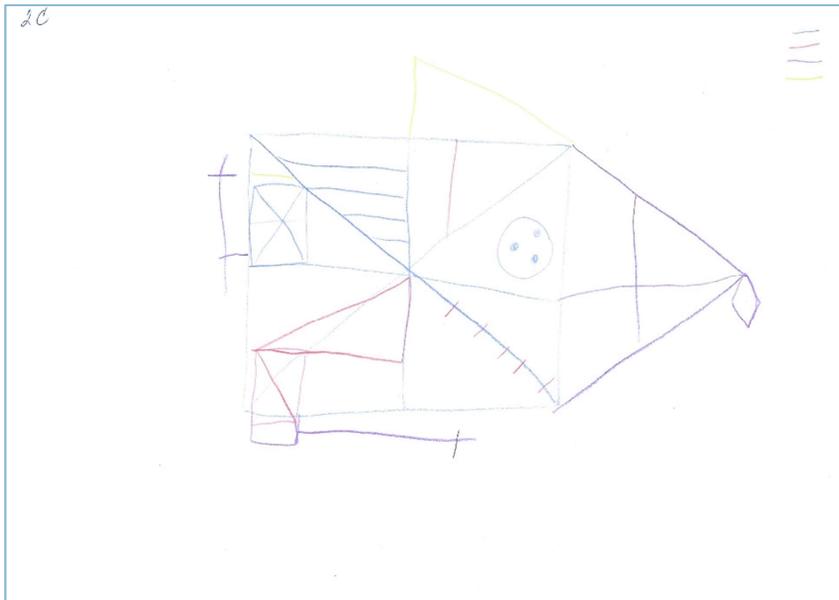


1st memory

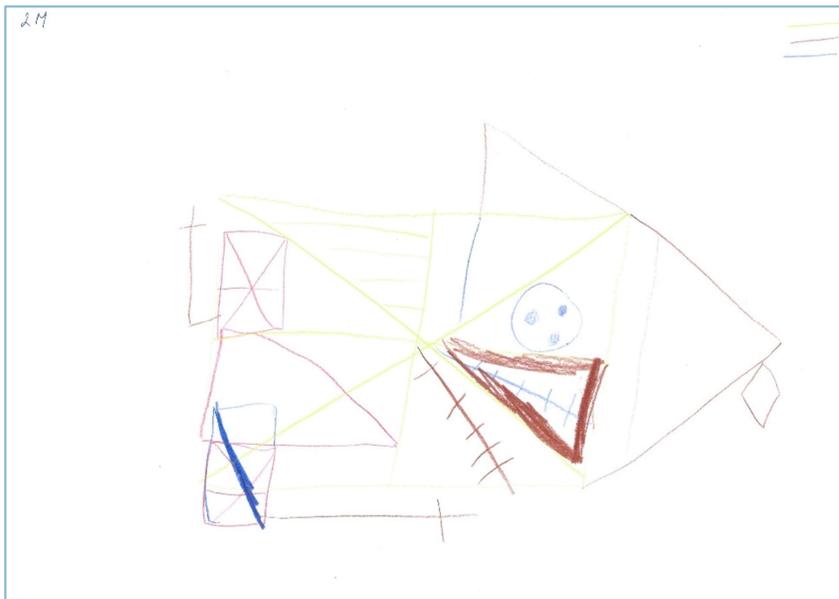
The teaching phase focused on analyzing the figure thoroughly including labeling the elements, placing them correctly to the figure and sequencing the work so that it would be easier to remember what is the next step. After this mediation phase, Marianka was eager to draw again and internalize what she learned during the mediation. She used the labels and sequenced her work, and thus improved visibly.



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2nd coopy



2nd memory

The 16 words memory test showed that Marianka has a good memory, if provided with the structure of how to approach the task, she can learn quickly and effectively.



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Marianka was calm and concentrated during the diffuse attention test. She internalized the task very quickly and worked thoroughly. Clear perception and ability to differentiate the figures helped her in her work, it however was difficult for her to find a strategy to work independently, e.g. without the help of the model, it was also difficult for her to maintain her attention with the same intensity throughout the work, but she worked with a high level of determination.

During the two days assessment I observed Marianka completing successfully tasks with high level of abstraction demanding analogical and relational thinking, deductive reasoning as well as dealing with several sources of information. She shared her thinking processes with joy, however sometimes she felt frustrated of not being able to articulate the answer precisely. She has a clear perception and can use concepts with ease. Sometimes she is a bit impulsive and does not work systematically. Marianka was able to select relevant information, find the relationship between them and use logical evidence. Planning behavior is however something she needs help with. She faced difficulties in tasks where organizing, structuring and ordering was needed. After mediation, on the other hand, she was able to apply and utilize the mediated structure or work sequence. Throughout the assessment Marianka worked hard and with intrinsic motivation. When she was not in optimal conditions usually it was enough to assure her of her capability to fulfil the task and ease the pressure. When mediation was needed Marianka was open to it. In general, Marianka can solve difficult task on her own and has high potential and great ability to profit from mediated learning experience.

Based on the LPAD test I recommended that Marianka would benefit from Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment Program with focus on:

- Developing receptive verbal tools and ability of labeling
- Developing systematic exploratory behavior and precise data gathering
- Acquiring planning behavior and the ability to structure and organize
- Learning to communicate clearly the elaborated responses
- Increasing frustration tolerance
- Developing positive self-image

Particular attention should be paid to:

- Developing the feeling of competence
- Regulating and controlling behavior
- Building psychological differentiation
- Searching for optimistic alternatives
- Building awareness of self-improvement



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Soon after the test we started working together, in average we met twice a month. So far, we completed the Organization of Dots, Comparisons, Orientation in Space, and now we are working with the instrument Identifying Emotions. There were lessons full of joy as well as lessons full of frustration. Joy brought further motivation and curiosity, will to work. Frustration was overcome by discussing, understanding and bridging.

We bridged a lot to the area of her hobby of baking, where especially organization of work, sequence of steps seemed to be a problem.





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She was also working on her “project” – creating a plush covered tomato that would be used as a bolster. She was working on it for about a year with many issues to be solved, which apparently was a suitable space for practicing principles from Organization of Dots.



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In our work we focus on understanding the instructions, staying calm if difficulties occur, looking for alternatives, if something goes wrong. Very importantly we pay attention to looking at things from the point of views other people could have, being in their shoes.



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Recently, I had a chance to discuss with her why does she like the lessons with me. She told me that it is because:

- She enjoys looking at the world around from new points of view
- It makes her happy when she can “teach” somebody (me) something new by sharing her experience
- She is learning, that she can find different solutions
- She likes talking about life (bridging), she finds it very enriching

Let me describe one very interesting, though difficult situation. That day she came to me in a very bad temper, upset, angry. She could not focus on work at all. She was in a such a bad mood, that talking about her problems made her more and more angry. She cried and cried. After a while I looked at my watch, then she realized the time. She started to cry even more, because she feared we would not “talk about life”. I assured her that we still might have time for discussing the “life issues”, but we need to work a little bit, so that we create the topic for discussion. She slowly calmed down and we started working on the page. I made sure that we would bridge.

When I asked her mother about any changes, she told me, that the changes are not any dramatical. But:

- Marianka is willing to cooperate with others, as well as listen to others
- She endeavors to formulate her thoughts clearly
- Her concentration has improved
- She can control her anger more and she is willing to discuss the situation and think about what happened and why
- She improved her ability to plan – I need to mention now that Marianka loves baking, she can bake birthday cakes on her own and now she can do it with basically a clear plan, clear sequence of steps
- She is better in generalizing

She also mentioned, that it was very important for Marianka, that she has one to one lesson, where she has my full attention and enough space to think about things deeply, she feels respected and understood, it makes her more motivated. She enjoys the lessons, where she can discover different solutions.

Examples of her work:



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M = menší obrazec V = větší obrazec O = obdélník

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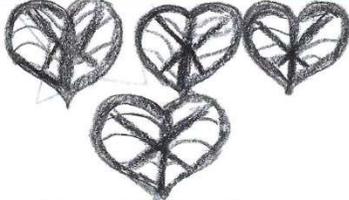
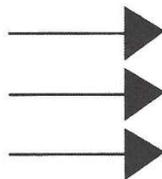
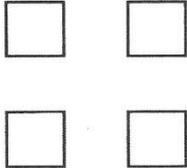
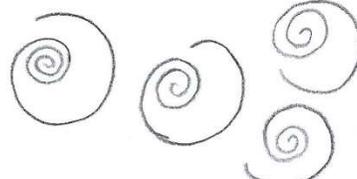
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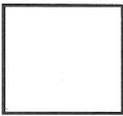
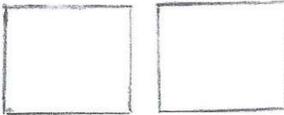
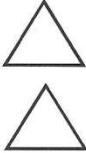
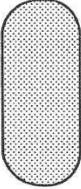
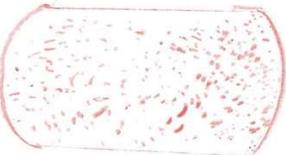
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vzorový obrázek	obrázek 1	obrázek 2
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<p>vzorový obrázek</p> 	<p>obrázek 1</p>  <p>velikost tvar počet barva</p>	<p>obrázek 2</p>  <p>velikost tvar počet barva</p>	
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