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Free time activities in enhancing an Asperger learner's reading and writing skills in English as a foreign language: a case study

It is widely believed that children with ASD (autistic spectrum disorder) function considerably better in all spheres of life when properly rested and not stressed out. To keep their attention, concentration and perception levels when dealing with both school and everyday life duties at an optimal rate, children with autism should have a sufficient amount of free time for relaxation and entertainment to compensate for the period when they perform compulsory tasks. During their free time they usually devote themselves to their passions, which not only brings them considerable satisfaction, but also contributes to their development. The aim of this presentation is to give an account of a case study whose purpose is to investigate whether the non-stress period can be used with ASD children for guided educational activities. A primary school learner with AS (Asperger Syndrome), a boy at the age of 9, who is a participant of this study, is encouraged in an indirect way to use English reading and writing skills during his leisure time, which is to support his learning the language. The authors examine several stages of their collaboration with the learner and present some anticipated challenges and problems as well as expected positive outcomes.

Key words: Asperger Syndrome, ASD, free time, reading skills, writing skills

1. Introduction

Despite facing numerous difficulties, many children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have various passions and talents. One of the disordered areas that blocks their potential is associated with language and communication deficits. Usually even the high functioning autists, need some assistance to make progress in the aforementioned field. Working towards development of their literacy skills requires extensive knowledge of the condition and individually tailored interventions involving parents, peers and all the professionals in the learner's environment.

The aim of the present case study was to examine the effectiveness of the selected therapeutic strategy in the process of informal acquisition of a foreign language during the Asperger child's own activities at home.

2. Background to the study

2.1. Autism versus Asperger's Syndrome

According to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, ICD-10 Asperger's Syndrome belongs to pervasive developmental disorders also referred to as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The so-called *triad of impairment* summarizes the difficulties of the autistic child, but the actual manifestation of these can vary. The three problematic areas are 1) qualitative impairments in reciprocal social interaction, 2) qualitative impairments in communication and 3) restrictive, repetitive and stereotyped behaviour (WHO, 1993). Rynkiewicz (2009) claims that the major diagnostic difference between Asperger's Syndrome and autism is that in the former there is no general delay or retardation in language or in cognitive development so most Aspies are characterised by normal general intelligence. Like other autists, however, they are very likely to be noticeably clumsy. Moreover, they exhibit the Theory of Mind deficit, which is inability to read and understand both your own and other people's mental states such as goals, emotions and beliefs (Baron-Cohen, Leslie, Frith, 1985).

2.2. Selected forms of work and therapy with ASD individuals

Among many methods of working with autists there are directive and non-directive ones. The former, as claimed by Szeler (2007), are based on the assumption of shaping adaptive behaviour or reducing undesirable behaviour by manipulating rewards and penalties. Kielin (2017) maintains that teachers and specialists usually work here from the position of dominance. They know what to accomplish with the student and strive for it. An example of a **directive therapy** is Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Therapy, where an important goal is to generalize and maintain effects over time, as well as to engage learning situations in the context of the child's daily activity.

The non-directive methods, as observed by Olechnowicz (1997), constitute the approach refraining from giving instructions or evaluating in a therapeutic situation and while playing. The goal of the **non-directive therapy** is to reduce anxiety in people with autism and to teach skills and behaviours needed in the environment. Virginia Axline, the author of a non-directive Play Therapy, believes in man's tendency to self-update. From infancy, man takes advantage of individual development opportunities and has a strong innate drive to realize these possibilities and abilities (Bokus, 1979). Barry Neil Kaufman (1994), who developed Option Method (also known as the Son-Rise Program) on the basis of his family experience of working with an autistic child, claims that the main assumptions of

his non-directive therapy include: 1) acceptance and approval attitude, 2) constant motivation of a small patient, and 3) development of an individualized therapeutic program.

Nowadays specialists of many fields collaborate with special pedagogy therapists in order to help ASD individuals. An example of this is Mentalization-Based Treatment Adherence and Competence Scale (MTB-ACS), where psychotherapists follow their own tried and tested principles with the intention of enhancing self-reflection, communication and socialization skills of the disordered. The therapist should balance being challenging and supportive and highly selective about what they want to battle (therapeutic strategy). The patients 'unconscious trust' (alliance) is built by the therapist's ability and willingness to identify, investigate and directly confront the patients' defences (the comfort zone) in a clarifying process (Karterud et al., 2013). Linguists and methodologists, in turn, suggest an array of scaffolds that enable special educational needs students to plan, structure and execute their production outcomes. One of such tools is Johnson's model of Process Writing with pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing stages (Johnson, 2007).

Presently, it is generally maintained that a well-written therapeutic programme, proper socialization or upbringing process must contain both directive and non-directive forms. There is evidence that the **eclectic approach** benefited numerous ASD individuals (Kielin, 2017; Szeler, 2007).

2.3. Receptive and productive skills in high functioning autism

All individuals with ASD encounter some kind of language and communication difficulties. Referring to receptive skills such as reading and listening, they may have problems with how they hear and process language, which affects their comprehension and chances for an appropriate response. Another challenge is pragmatics, where understanding of the actual words does not go with understanding the meaning and social function of the language (Delaney, 2016). Oftentimes they have a literal understanding of language misinterpreting the hidden meaning of idioms, metaphors and irony (Błeszyński, 2010). At school they find it easier to deal with reading rather than listening tasks as there is a chance to reread the text gaining more time to process the information.

Time factor is also the key to understand why Aspies prefer writing to speaking. Vermeulen (2004) explains that out of the two productive skills writing is a much slower process. Its effect is a visual representation and this form of communication does not require simultaneous looking at the interlocutor. As confirmed by Likens (2012: 89), one of Asperger individuals, contrary to verbal communication writing appears to be much easier and natural in terms of production. Taking part in a conversation especially with more than one person proves to be extremely challenging as it requires double-thinking of what, when and whom to say a particular thing.

Regardless of their preferences, Theory of Mind deficit could account for several shortcomings of the writing of people with High Functioning Autism Spectrum

Disorder (HFASD) such as difficulty in writing about thoughts and feelings (Capps, Losh, Thurber, 2000) or difficulty in taking the perspective of the reader, leading to a lack of background information or context (Colle, Baron-Cohen, Hill, 2008). Another problematic issue is failing to monitor text coherence due to limited processing resources and not knowing when to draw inferences (Perfetti, Landi, Oakhill, 2005).

Apparently, that is why some HFASD individuals perceive comic strips as the most effective and convenient way of writing as what cannot be cohesively described in words can be illustrated by images. Grandin (2006: 19), a HFASD Professor of Zoology, maintains that she thinks in pictures whereas the words are like a second language to her. She translates both spoken and written words into full-colour movies, complete with sound, which run like a VCR tape in her head. When somebody speaks to her, his/her words are instantly translated into pictures. It proves understandable why one of recommendations for educators of such students is to combine literacy skills tasks with pictures and other forms of visualization such as charts and templates.

2.4. Asperger Syndrome - strengths in learning foreign languages

According to Notbohm (2009), oftentimes high IQ of people with Asperger predisposes them to analytical thinking which is useful when learning grammar rules and structures. Additionally, they excel at memorization and may be able to learn a large vocabulary which fosters their understanding and replication of formal written and spoken language. Most with Asperger Syndrome are good at rote learning and some have a fascination for using this new code for familiar objects. Most can achieve functional competence in phatic language use by performing language functions in communication skills such as ritual enquiries about health, weather and basic social contacts with others (Duda, Riley, 1990). Wire (2005) claims that AS students tend to be good "literal" mimics of the foreign language and lack the self-consciousness of their peer group in trying to copy a foreign accent from the teacher or tape. They have a potential to have the best accent in the class, or, as claimed by Attwood (2006), may even acquire a native accent.

However, Moghadam, Karami and Dehbozorgi (2015) state that compared to typically developing children who learn FL to communicate with foreigners or understand FL cartoons, ASD pupils do not always know why they should learn a foreign language. It appears indispensable then to give them a reason and motivation for learning the second language, which usually means engaging them in topic-based activities (e.g. a short talk or description) centred on their interests with the application of their well-mastered skills such as acting, drawing, IT etc. Wire (2005) also emphasizes the importance of the predictable, distractor-free (e.g. flickering lights) learning environment with constant repetition and scaffolds. Mastering the second language gives Aspies the opportunity to have a learned profession and a successful career in the field of translation (Attwood, 2006).

2.5. Talents, limited interests and routines vs Comfort, Performance and Danger zones

It is often maintained that whoever works with ASD people should let them be autistic without forcing out not understandable behaviours and should rely on their strengths, special interests and unique skills (Grandin, 2006; TEDx Talks, 2017). Attwood (2006, p. 80) provides a list of potential hobby areas of Aspergers, which reads: transport, dinosaurs, electronics, sciences, foreign languages etc. and claims that oftentimes their focus on words, objects or collection of those objects turns into fascination with the related topics. Święcicka (2012) observes that the intensity and devotion to their passion may exclude other activities leading for example to neglect of school duties and rather infrequently serves the purpose of socialization and sharing as Aspies tend to be monothematic and do not pay attention to the interests of others.

The best course of action would be then to strike a proper balance between the time AS individuals spend on their favourite, however irrational, activities and the time they are ready to compromise and learn new things of a more standard and practical nature, which may facilitate their successful functioning in the world of neurotypical people. The researchers observed that the time of those repetitive actions and routines involving passions and interests is the Aspies' non-stress period, which can be compared to the so-called comfort zone (Figure 1) used in literature in the context of productivity of the learning process.

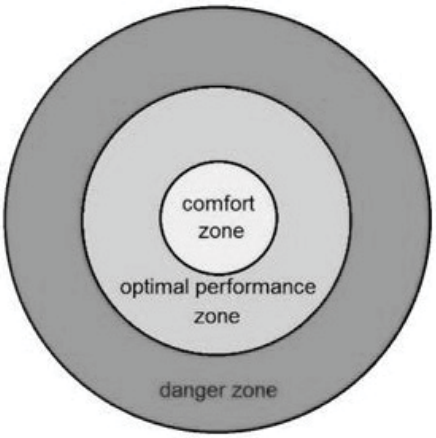

Figure 1. Comfort, Performance and Danger zones (White, 2008)

White (2008) defines the comfort zone as a behavioural state within which a person operates in an anxiety-neutral condition, using a limited set of behaviours to deliver a steady level of performance, usually without a sense of risk. This implies that, providing there is no change in the 'anxiety' or the skills applied, the performance output will remain constant. The objective is to push or lead the subject into the optimal performance (learning) zone so that their skills are increased and they become comfortable with the higher amount of anxiety, thus enabling them to consistently deliver the improved performance. The problem is

the danger (panic) zone where the subject may face failure as their level of stress is pushed to the limits and thus the deterioration of performance can be observed.

3. The case study

3.1. The purpose of the study

The aim of the present case study was to illustrate how the eclectic approach facilitated using the non-stress period of an ASD primary school child for guided educational activities to support his learning English as a foreign language. Specifically, the learner was to develop his self-expression in a written form in the foreign language in tandem with advancing his self-study and revision skills.

3.2. Methods, tools and strategies

In order to create the learner's profile the triangulation method was applied. The data were gathered from three independent sources such as document analysis, interview and observation. The studied documents included diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome given by a team of qualified professionals, IQ test results, health record documents, referral letters, Individualised Education Plan, end-of-year school certificates and mid-term school reports. The interviews were conducted with both the student and his therapists and educators. To complete the picture of the learner, the researchers, who are also biological parents of the learner, took their own observations notes into account.

On the basis of the pre-study findings the researchers presumed that being in his comfort zone and devoting himself to his passions, like many other Aspies, the learner not only felt relaxation and pleasure, but also catered for his own unhurried self-development ruled by the conviction of no pressure. The researchers noticed a linguistic potential of the learner and resolved to address it with the application of a self-devised eclectic intervention of entering and battling the learner's comfort zone with elements of the Son-Rise Program as well as Mentalization-Based Treatment Adherence and Competence Scale (MTB-ACS) and Johnson's 5-stage Process Writing.

The strategy of entering the learner's comfort zone was based the non-directive parent-driven Son-Rise Program (Kaufman B., 1994), where the researchers had to exhibit unconditional acceptance of the rules of the autistic world, imitate some of the actions of the boy and use the language of simplified instruction. This was to build mutual trust with the learner and then engage him in a new linguistic activity. The belief was strengthened by Raun K. Kaufman, the miraculously cured autistic individual, who explains that one can only hope for influencing on the autistic child's behaviour when there is green light on their part. That is when they are properly rested, unstressed, fully accepted and thus subconsciously willing to make adaptations to their way of behaviour (Kaufman R., 2016).

The modelling of the therapeutic strategy was also inspired by th directive approach. Elements of MTB-ACS, presented by Karterud et al. (2013), were supposed

to aid brainstorming processes of the learner and challenge his pessimistic nature paired with tendency to give-up upon encountered failure. To structure their actions of assistance in the learner's actual writing, the researchers relied on Johnson's 5-stage model of Process Writing. which provided the necessary framework for pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing (Johnson, 2008). So after establishing a personal bond with the learner in a non-directive way, the plan was to confront his defences in the comfort zone, strengthen an alliance and build epistemic trust. The child's willingness to consider new knowledge from the researchers, as experienced teachers of English, was to ensure the success of the intervention.

3.3. Context and general characteristics of the participant

The learner was a 10-year-old boy living with his parents and two younger sisters, aged 5 and 3. At the age of three diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified, he was then re-diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome at the age of 7. The child scored 107 IQ points on the Wechsler's scale proving to be within an intellectual norm. From the age of three he had undergone multi-faceted therapy, had been on sugar, soya and wheat-free diet and periodically on medication regulating his sleep or concentration levels.

He attended regular nursery school to follow with primary school integration class with eighteen students including five other disabled children. In the first three years of school education his academic record and behaviour, as proven by his mid-term school reports and end-of year school certificates, was good and very good. In the first two months of the fourth grade his academic achievements could be rated as average. His academic preferences involved humanities, arts and nature, whereas difficulties related to exact sciences and PE. From the age of 7, the learner was interested in one dominant topic area, namely dinosaurs. He had three friends sharing his interest, but generally felt uncomfortable in new situations and avoided new people, places and activities.

3.4. Design and procedure

The case study was conducted over a 4-month-period. It lasted from June 2018 to October 2018, which embraced the end of the learner's 3rd grade, the holiday period and the beginning of the 4th grade of primary school education. Before the action research began it was possible to create the learner's profile on the basis of the observation notes and interviews with the student and his educators. Then, the authors examined the learner's spare time activities to assess which, if any, of the reading and writing skills were used by him with a substantial degree of pleasure. Next, the list of activities of potential educational value was drawn up. Some of them were to be indirectly suggested in a modified, but still attractive way with the intention of enhancing the learner's written production, self-study and revision skills in learning English as a foreign language. A strategy of entering and battling the learner's comfort zone was adopted. Some anticipated

challenges and problems as well as expected positive outcomes were predicted. The implementation of the modified free time activity was guided by the Johnson's 5-stage Process Writing. Table 1 presents a more detailed account of the study.

Table 1. The design of the study

Case study	
Pre-study	
Methods, tools and strategies	**Objectives**
Triangulation method (3 sources of data): – document analysis • health institutions: ASD diagnosis, IQ test results, speech therapist opinion, hospital reports, • school: mid-term grade reports, and end-of-year certificates – interview • with educators • with parents • with the learner himself – observation of the learner's free time activities • at home • at school's common room	Researchers will find out about the learner's: – functioning levels and general health condition – academic strengths and weaknesses – preferences pertaining to school subjects – performance and motivation levels at school referring to reading and writing skills both in L1 and FL – favourite spare time activities – range of free time activities of potential educational value Researchers will: – devise a list of activities of potential educational value – outline the intervention plan encouraging the learner to use and learn English in his comfort zone – adopt a strategy of entering and battling the learner's comfort zone – anticipate potential challenges and problems – put forward expected positive outcomes
During the study / Action research	
Methods, tasks and strategies	**Objectives**
Authors' own 7-phase intervention with elements of the Son-Rise-Program, MBT-ACS and Johnson's Process Writing – a casual suggestion (phase 1) – breaking the ice (phase 2) – reinforcement (phase 3) – negotiation (phase 4) – consent (phase 5) – battlefield (phase 6) based on the Process Writing – achievement (phase 7) based on the Process Writing	Researchers will: – enter the learner's comfort zone by gaining his trust and making an alliance with him – battle the learner's comfort zone by presenting a modification of one of his favourite free time activities – guide the learner throughout the process of writing until publishing his work – enhance the learner's self-study and revision skills in learning English

– elements of the Son-Rise Program • copying the actions of the learner • showing interest in and respect for the learner's favourite activities • establishing personal bond with the learner • using simplified language of instruction – elements of MBT-ACS • modelling therapeutic strategy • alliance • epistemic trust – Johnson's 5-tier Process Writing • pre-writing • drafting • revising • editing • publishing	Learner will: – establish a greater bond with the researchers – agree on suggested goals and tasks – create a comic strip in English rather than in Polish – practice his writing skills in FL including planning and self-correction – revise previously mastered vocabulary and structure – learn to use an online dictionary and google translator – learn new vocabulary and structure – improve spelling – practice reading aloud – generate interest in learning English
Post-study	
Method, tools and strategies	**Objectives**
Triangulation method (3 sources of data): – document analysis • school: grade report card – interview • with educators • with parents • with the learner himself – observation of the learner's free time activities • at home • at school's common room	Researchers will find out about the learner's: – performance and motivation levels at school referring to reading and writing skills both in L1 and FL after the study – preferences pertaining to school subjects after the study – favourite spare time activities after the study – attitude to using and learning English beyond formal instruction time at school Researchers will: – be able to juxtapose and analyze the data collected before and after the study – be able to evaluate the intervention

4. Discussion

The research findings will be discussed after the learner's attitude, cooperation and final work are analysed and juxtaposed with a similar kind of his output in the native language. Taking into account limitations of the study will allow evaluating the effectiveness of the pursued intervention pertaining to the participant's foreign language reading and writing skills.

4.1. The analysis of the pre-study findings

Cresswell (2013) claims that in order to be able to make use of the collected data in a case study, it is advisable to categorise it with a view to designing the specific, learner-tailored course of action to be taken.

On the basis of the gathered data, the authors of the work noticed the following **strengths** of the learner: intellectual norm, good memory, good fine motor skills, conscientiousness, full engagement in tasks within his areas of interest involving role-play activities, aptitude for a play of words and creation of neologisms. On the other hand, there were observable **weaknesses** such as a narrow range of interests, quite frequent deconcentrating, slow pace of work and processing of information, problems with understanding complex instructions, poor self-organisation and planning, poor perception of time and space as well as pessimistic nature.

Yet, the underlying observation was that the learner's performance and motivation levels were at their best when he was allowed enough time for his routines and repetitive actions including his passions. In other words, cultivating the familiar in his comfort zone served him well. Involving the participant in a new activity such as using and learning English beyond formal instruction and hence making him leave his comfort zone and learn something different in this non-stress period proved to be a challenge. It was essential to determine which of his spare time activities could be of some educational value so that he felt that his comfort zone is enriched by a slight modification of relatively familiar and pleasurable activities rather than violated by new tasks of unknown nature.

The total of the observed favourite free time activities both at home and at school's common room was subcategorised under four headings. The sample presented below appeared to be potentially useful: **drawing and writing skills** (writing stories full of dialogues, creating captioned drawings and comic strips about dinosaurs, Minions, cuddly toys, fish etc.) (appendix 1); **reading skills** (reading aloud what he has written); **audio-visual skills** (recording himself, listening to his own recordings and watching his own videos) and **kineasthetic skills** (playing with toy dinosaurs - make believe, re-enacting Jurassic Park and Jurassic World film scenes).

Taking into account the above findings, the researchers resolved to integrate all the skills in order to facilitate entering the learner's comfort zone and ensure the potential success of the planned intervention which was to **encourage and help him create a comic strip in English** rather than in Polish on the topic of his choice.

It is noteworthy that, despite top marks at school, English was not rated as one of his favourites among the school subjects. Polish, in turn, was perceived as 3rd most popular after Arts and Nature Studies. The learner did not mind writing but dismissed reading regarding it as time-consuming and tiring. As observed by the learner's teacher of Polish editing self-produced text in mother tongue proved to be challenging enough as he struggled with filtering out unnecessary information and focused on details rather than obtained a bigger picture. He could edit the text in terms of correct spelling or minor grammar problems but it was far more

challenging for him to ensure coherence and cohesion. The suggested application of linking words and control over reference devices such as pronouns led to a rather repetitive syntax.

Obviously then, creating a text in a foreign language was bound to pose even greater difficulties. Additionally, the authors anticipated a number of challenges and problems during the action research. The list read as follows: objection to creating something in English in his free time; possible violation of his comfort zone triggering an avalanche effect with meltdowns and raised anxiety; production of something of poor quality in terms of content and accuracy resulting in developing language errors; inability of independent planning or finishing the task; self-doubt in his language skills; potential dislike of English in case of failure or highly increased anxiety.

The aim of the study, though, was to achieve **positive outcomes** and therefore it was expected that if properly guided the learner might practise creativity, begin to use English in a written form, revise previously mastered and learn new vocabulary and structure, practise reading aloud in English and generate interest in learning English beyond school time.

4.2. The analysis of the during-study intervention

Having resolved on the comic strip as a form of expected output, the authors followed a self-devised 7-phase intervention with elements of the Son-Rise-Program and MBT-ACS. The first five phases present what was done to allow the learner enter the comfort zone, the next two show how it was battled via following 5-stage Process Writing so as to achieve the anticipated performance in a foreign language.

Phase 1 called *A Casual Suggestion* was a combination of praise and polite encouragement to engage the learner in creating a comic strip in English rather than in Polish. As expected, the researcher (the father) faced refusal as typically it is not enough to introduce any change in the learner's comfort zone with one simple request. What is more, further kind requests to do the new activity could trigger unnecessary anxiety and totally discourage the learner from trying to perform this particular task. The purpose of this phase was to let the learner know that there was an option rather than an obligation for a change.

Phase 2 (*Breaking the ice*) required entering the learner's comfort zone by imitating his actions next to him rather than with him, which was to ensure his security. The boy was creating the table of contents of his newly-started encyclopaedia of animal species in his mother tongue whereas the researcher started creating a translation of the table of contents of the learner's book in English. At some point, the learner became interested and eventually joined in the activity suggesting some of the translations of animal species himself. The time spent together left the learner with a positive impression that doing something in English in his spare time may be an option to consider.

Phase 3 (*Reinforcement*) also involved entering the learner's comfort zone and doing one of the activities that the boy found attractive without exerting pressure on him to do it together. This time the researcher borrowed the learner's toy dinosaurs and figures and started to play at make-believe with humans landing on some dinosaur island. The language of simple spontaneous conversation between the figures was mostly English. It was an independent choice of the learner to take part in the play, use English when playing as well as inquire about more useful foreign language expressions to be used.

Introducing elements of English into the learner's comfort zone proved to be successful because he made positive associations with the language without any sense of violation of his personal time and space. Having achieved that, the researcher believed it was time for phase 4 (*Negotiation*). During a random conversation about popularity of Youtubers, the learner was encouraged to create a comic strip in English with a view to publishing it on the Internet. It was agreed that the learner would keep it a secret from his mother and that he would be recorded while reading the finished product aloud. His mother would be the first to see it and then, if he wanted, the online audience would be able to view it, too. Phase 5 called *Consent* came when the learner enthusiastically accepted the idea.

In phases 6 and 7 (*Battlefield* and *Achievement,* respectively), the learner ventured out of the comfort zone to the new grounds with a clearly-set goal of producing and publishing his first ever work in English with the assistance of one of the researchers (father) guided by Johnson's 5-stage Process Writing.

Phase 6 (*Battlefield*) was then subcategorized into the following four Process Writing stages. Stage 1 (pre-writing) involved brainstorming ideas about the title of the comic book (*Land of Dinosaurs*), characters, place of action and potential content (adventures, language) (appendix 2). Stage 2 (drafting) meant that the researcher offered help and guidance by teaching the learner how to use an online dictionary and google translator. At this stage the learner refrained from colouring his pencil-made pictures, just in case they were to be changed (appendix 3). Stage 3 (revising) concerned developing the plot as well as adding more characters and adventures. Altogether there were three human characters and five types of dinosaur species (appendix 4). Stage 4 (editing) involved correction of spelling (*probaply, runing, galimima*) and grammar mistakes (*He can't eat we, It's ostrich*) in tandem with improving and colouring the drawings (appendix 5).

Phase 7 (*Achievement*) was parallel with Johnson's Process Writing Stage 5 (publishing) and involved reading the final product aloud to his mother, recording the learner while reading aloud and uploading the video on Youtube for a selected audience.

4.3. The analysis of the learner's production process and final output

It must be noted that throughout the whole creation process the learner was predominantly driven by enthusiasm and open-mindedness. He was truly eager to learn how to use an online dictionary and google translator with the option of listening to the accurate pronunciation of the selected phrases and expressions.

The key motivation was the promise of publishing his work on the Internet and reading it aloud to the audience of his choice starting from his mother.

Guiding the learner through 5-stage Process Writing proved to be challenging although problematic in some areas. To begin with, the learner sometimes wanted to create language beyond his capability and felt disappointed with not being able to communicate in English as much as in Polish. Another problem was that he overused or misused google translator when working completely on his own, which either hindered his own creativity and revision skills or led to unacceptable mistakes usually connected with the negative transfer. To make matters worse, the learner severely objected to some forms of editing which resulted in some minor compromised mistakes in the final version of his work. Lastly, the pace of creation was at some points considerably slowed down by his Aspielike self-enforced elements of ill-perfectionism in colouring or drawing.

On the whole, the finished product (appendix 6) contains a few mistakes (*in home; I have not got drinking*), but is fairly satisfactory in terms of cohesion and coherence as well as a range of vocabulary and structure that often extends requirements of the A1 English level *Brainy* coursebook syllabus for 4-graders (Beare, 2017) (see Table 2). In fact, improving cohesion and coherence in comic strips is much easier and appears attainable as what cannot be expressed on lexical level may be easily depicted in comic images. It was of special assistance to the learner, who like many other Aspies struggles with describing one's state of mind.

Table 2. Proficiency correspondence of applied vocabulary and structure

	Level (A1) parallel with the learner's English coursebook realized at school	**Level (A2+) above the learner's English coursebook realized at school**
Structure	*"to be"; "there is"; "can"; "have got", "Let's", imperative; Present Simple; Present Continuous*	*modal verbs "may", "be able to"; Past Simple; Future Simple*
Vocabulary	*I don't know, let's go home, climb a tree (expressions), big, friendly, funny, hungry, thirsty, long, scared (adjectives), sit down, calm down, look, eat, drink, run, jump, ride (verbs), sisters, mum, home, mug, giraffe, neck, river, water (nouns) very, here (adverbs and adverbials,) but, in, from (conjunctions and prepositions) I, me, we, our, they, he, it (pronouns), oops, yuck, wow, okay, oh no, hooray, weee, boom, (interjections and onomatopoeic)*	*What's happening? How do I know? That was close, I want to see, you betcha, back home, the end (expressions), author, illustrations, direction, secret, coconuts, portal, ostrich, rhinoceros, triceratops, brachiosaurus, tyrannosaurus, velociraptors, gallimimus, (nouns), looks like, went away, go out, cross (verbs), far, amazing (adjectives), quiet, suddenly, probably, again (adverbs and adverbials), us (pronoun)*

Taking the content of the comic strip into account, it must be stated that the selected topic was relatively predictable. His work entitled *Land of Dinosaurs* deals with the time travel to the prehistoric era. What must be emphasized though is the

pro-social projection of his adventures as he chose a company of his younger sisters rather than a solitary venture to his imaginary world. Instead of secluding himself from society in the world of his dreams, he preferred to share his experiences with the nearest and dearest. Interpreted in such a fashion, the work does not only appear to be merely an experimental linguistic playground, but a mirror of his social self-expression. This gives grounds for further mentalization based approach to let him find out more about himself in the context of socialisation.

4.4. The analysis of the post-study findings

After the study ended, the range of favourite leisure time activities of the learner have remained relatively similar with watching Jurassic series films, cartoons and videos and subsequent re-enacting the favourite scenes with toy figures. Drawing and cutting out dinosaurs, dialogue-oriented story and comic writing mainly in Polish are also at the core of his interest. Like before the study, most of his free time written projects are still unfinished, which may suggest that his planning and execution skills have not improved. It is noteworthy, though, that he pays more attention to the quality of his writing applying frequent self-correction of not only spelling and orthography, but also style and cohesion.

It must be pointed out that some of his comfort zone activities now involve English. For example, he creates a few pages of his own dictionary of English words used in Wally Kazam cartoon and rewrites rather lengthy subtitled lyrics of one of animated Jurassic Park video clips in English. Even though the text contains many mistakes, the determination of the learner to produce a text far beyond his proficiency level (A1) is praiseworthy. It should also be appreciated that he is able to translate the lyrics into Polish with a satisfactory degree. On several occasions he comes back to the self-created comic strip in English and is proud to present it to the home visitors offering them immediate translation into Polish in case they do not know English. However, he has taken an independent decision not to show off with his project at school.

Generally, English has entered the group of his favourite school subjects and it is observed that now his usual test and in-class grades in English are paired with a considerably higher level of self-esteem concerning his foreign language skills is considerably higher. Moreover, his teacher of English has reported the learner's increased activeness and motivation to learn and focus more during the classes. At home, the willingness to do English homework is now comparable to that concerning his still favourite Arts, Nature Studies and Polish.

What surpassed the researchers expectations regarding the positive outcomes of the study is the fact that the learner has recently chosen to use English as defence in the context of school bullying and teasing. Reportedly, his response in English, puzzled the bullies to the effect that they left him alone. As a result, in the light of all the above reasoning the intervention must be viewed in positive terms.

5. Limitations of the study

Typically, a case study findings can hardly be generalised and referred to a larger population. This particular action research intervention may not be universal enough due to an additional reason, namely the fact that the researchers are also biological parents of the learner. Firstly, it is much easier for parents to establish a mutual bond with the learner than for other researchers. Secondly, unlike school or therapy centre, home context provides a fairly unlimited amount of time for intervention to take place. Next, for psychological reasons parents should always act as parents rather than perform other social roles towards their own children. Finally, parents are hardly ever fully objective about their own child. All the above mentioned limitations cast a shadow over the research findings. Hopefully, at least to some extent, the study findings may appear to be useful to some parents and educators of ASD children.

6. Conclusions

On the basis of the study findings it must be stated that it is possible to use free time activities as a ground for enhancing an Asperger learner's writing and reading skills in English. Thanks to the researchers' input of careful analysis of the participant's condition and hobbies, it is feasible to enter the learner's comfort zone, viewed as non-stress period, enabling him to spread his wings while devoting himself to his passions. Being inspired by the Son-Rise Program and Mentalization-Based Treatment Adherence and Competence Scale and Johnson's Process Writing, the researchers devised a 7-phase intervention plan which facilitated the learner in the creation of a comic strip in English.

The intervention can be considered a success from the perspective of both the learner and the researcher. As for the learner, the achieved positive outcomes embrace four areas of improvement. Firstly, in terms of his self-expression in English he has managed to develop his productive skills by creating a satisfactory level of content. Secondly, he has been taught how to apply self-study tools such as an online dictionary and google translator, which helps him to revise previously mastered and learn new vocabulary and structure. Thirdly, he has improved the quality of such language aspects as spelling and reading aloud. Fourthly, as for his motivation to learn English, the learner has shifted his attitude from neutral to positive, become more active during the school lessons and begun to spend his free time focusing on the language.

As far as the researchers are concerned, they have succeeded in achieving the self-set objectives. They managed to enter the learner's comfort zone by establishing a stronger bond with him and gaining his trust as well as simultaneously ensured that the learner remained in his comfort zone most of the time not being deprived of the resting period. As a result of the careful management of the comfort zone, the learner was skilfully pushed to the performance (learning) zone where he eventually used English and boosted his confidence level as for his production skills in the language.

Last but not least, Attwood (2006: 104) maintains that when Asperger children learn to do something, they may not be able to transfer this practical knowledge into a different context and may fail in applying the already mastered skill in other situations. Their lack of generalisation skills as if "one-track mind" does not let them discover that what has been learned may have multiple usage in multiple contexts. Present study findings have proven to contradict the above reasoning as the participant of the applied intervention has displayed the mastery of the new linguistic skill in a number of unrelated situations after the completion of the study.

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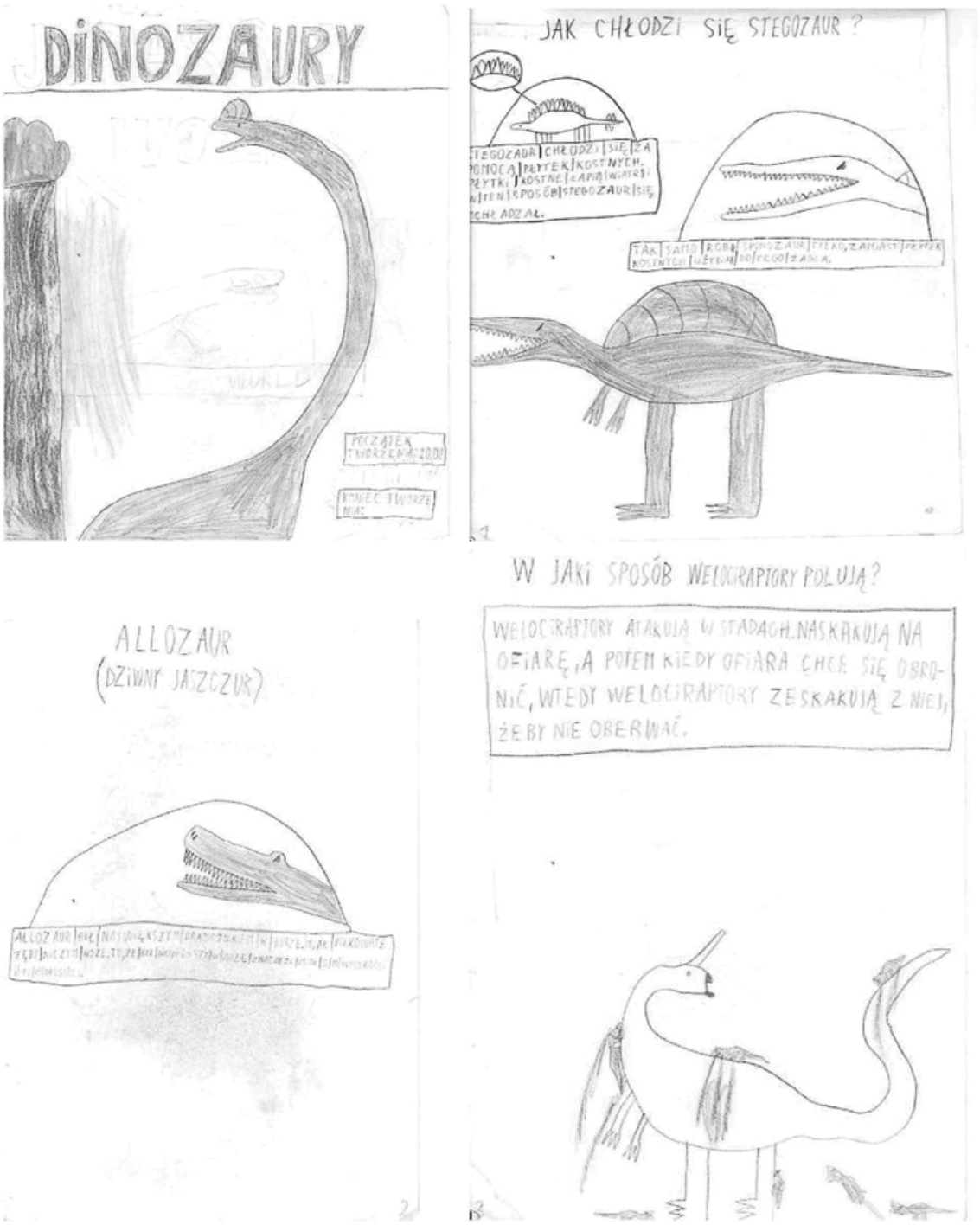
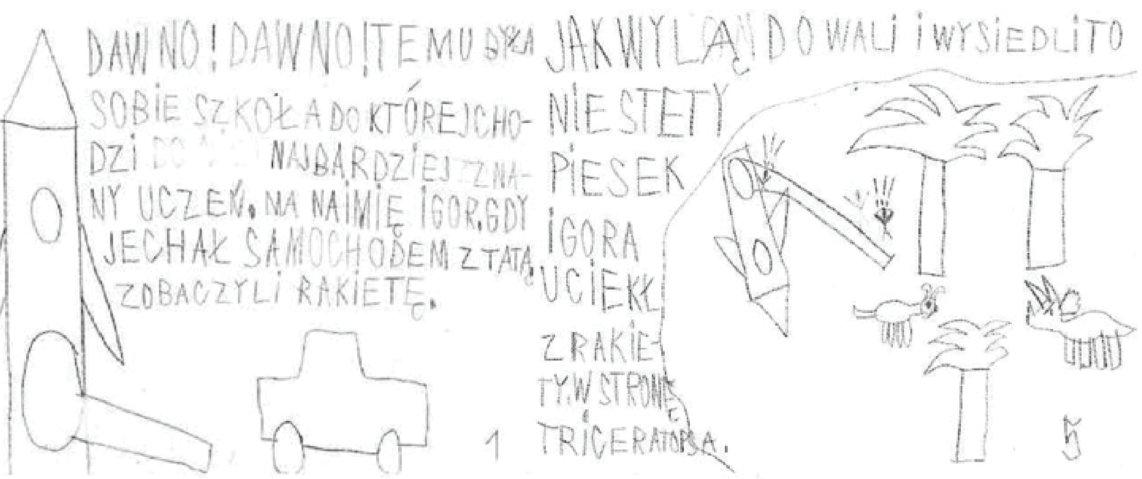
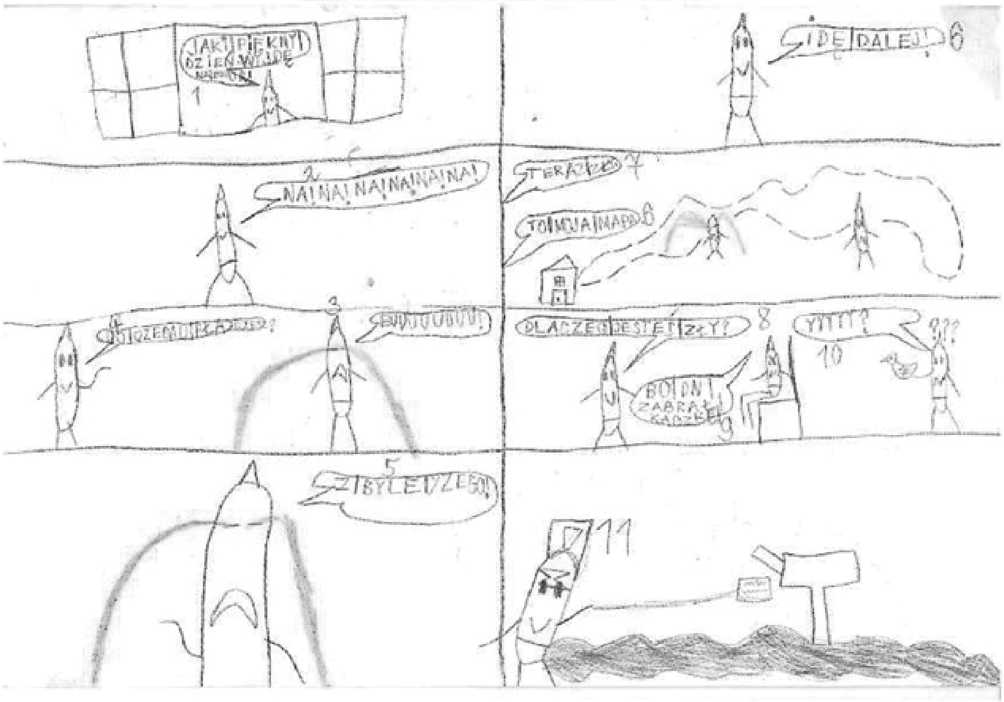
Appendices

Appendix 1.



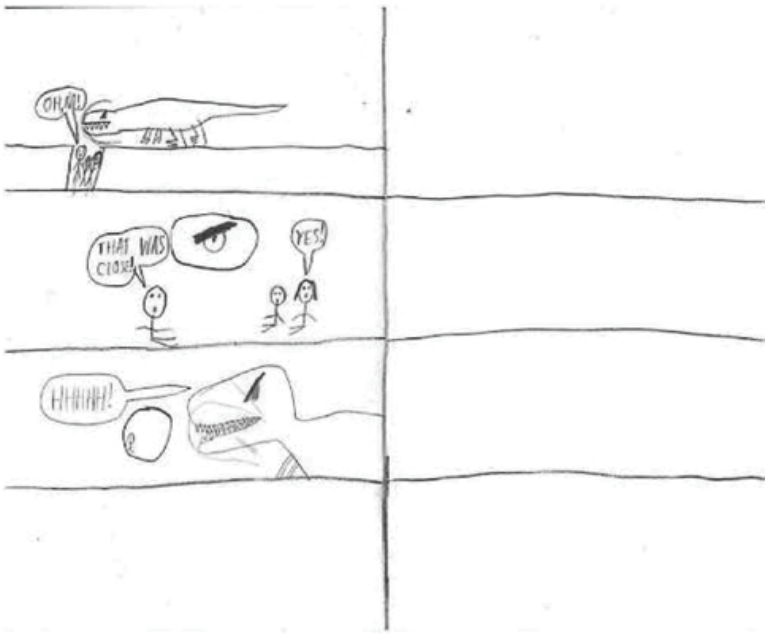

DAWNO! DAWNO! TEMU BYŁA
SOBIE SZKOŁA DO KTÓREJ CHODZI
NAJBARDZIEJ ZNANY UCZEŃ NA NAIMIĘ IGOR. GDY
JECHAŁ SAMOCHODEM Z TATĄ
ZOBACZYLI RAKIETĘ.
JAK WYLĄDOWALI I WYSIEDLI TO
NIESTETY PIESEK IGORA UCIEKŁ Z RAKIETY W STRONĘ TRICERATOPSA.


„4 emocje długopisy”
???
DŁUGOPIS ZDZIWIONY
CZ. 1 „GODZILLA ATAKUJE DŁUGOPISOWO”

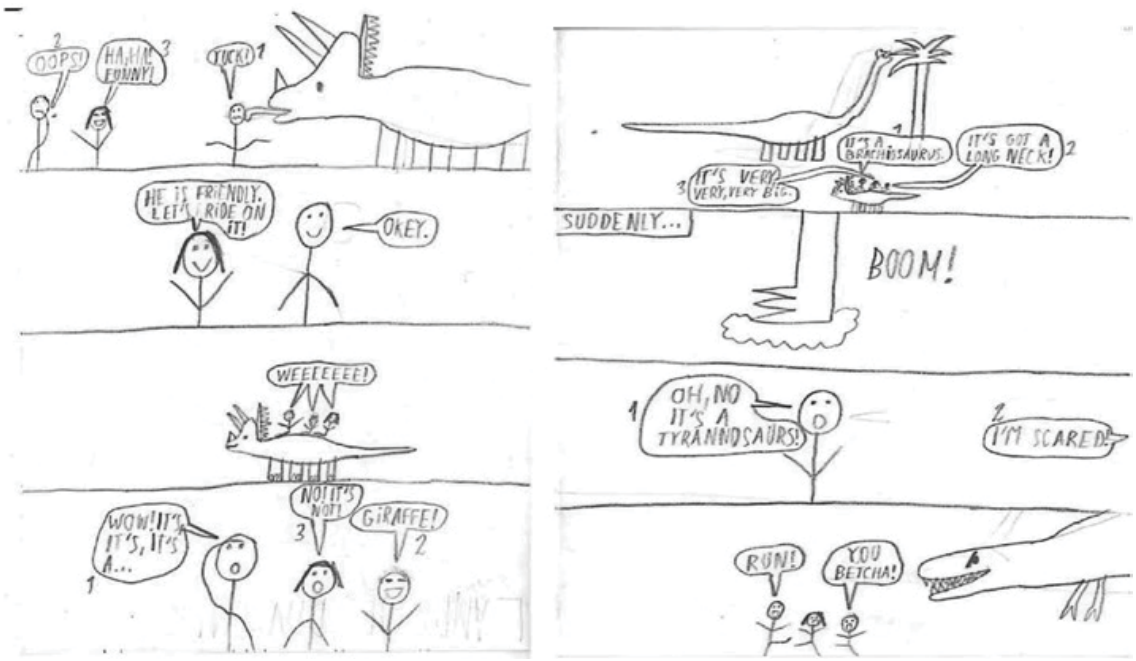

JAKI PIĘKNY DZIEŃ WYJDĘ
NA! NA! NA! NA! NA! NA!
IDĘ DALEJ!
DLACZEGO JESTEŚ ZŁY?
BO ON! ZABRAŁ KACZKĘ
YYYYY?
???
Z BYLE CZEGO!

Appendix 2.

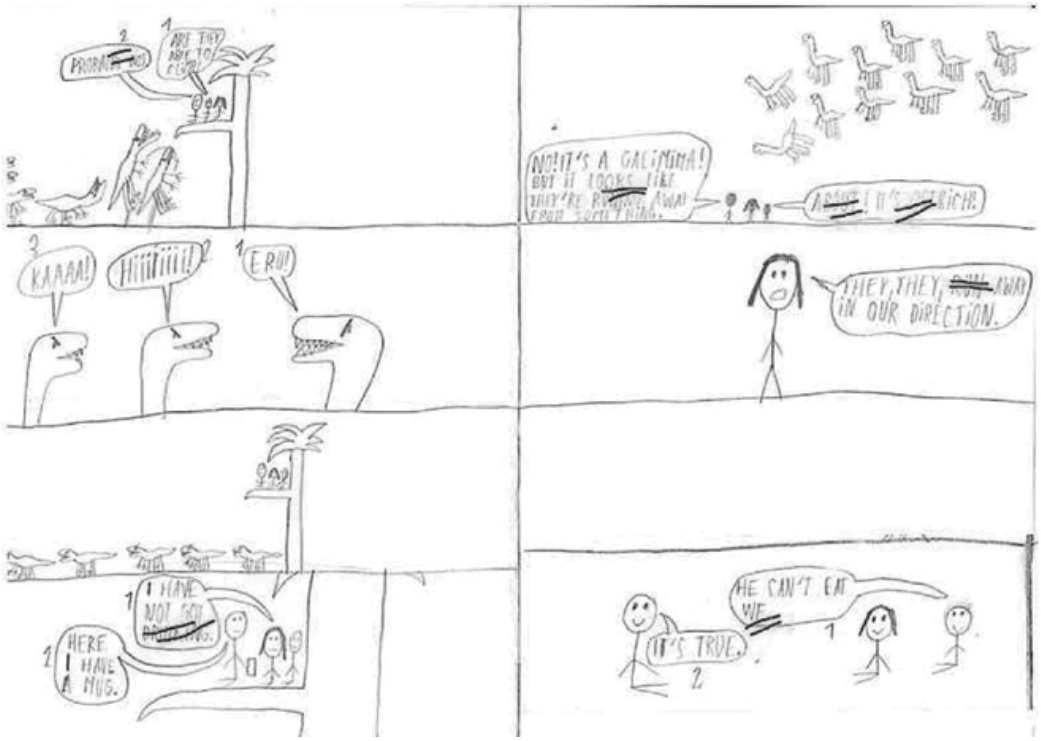
Appendix 3.

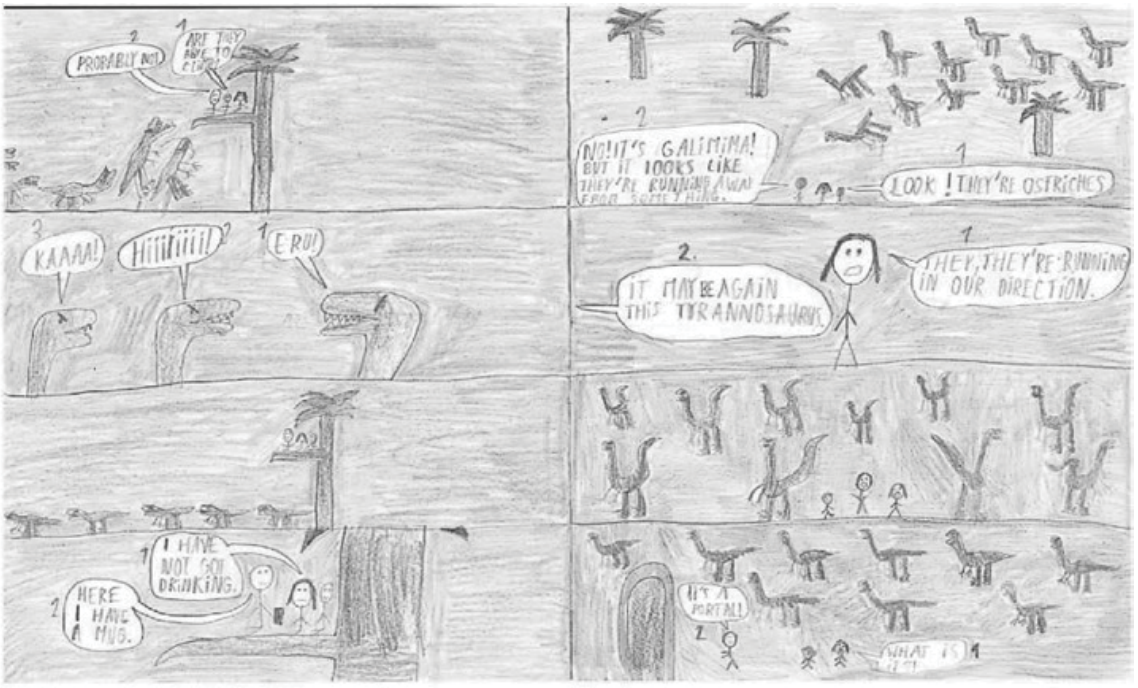


Appendix 4.



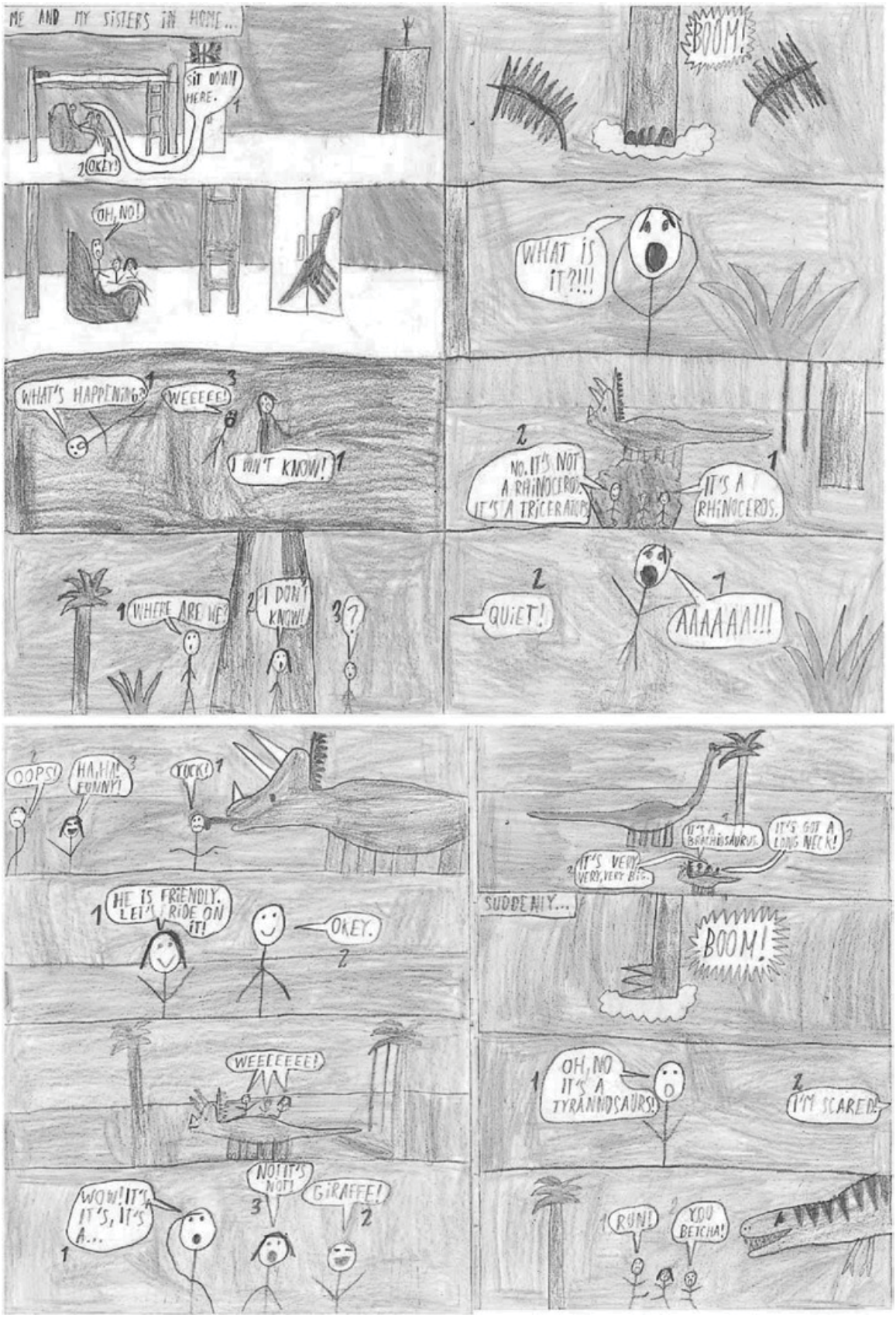
Appendix 5.

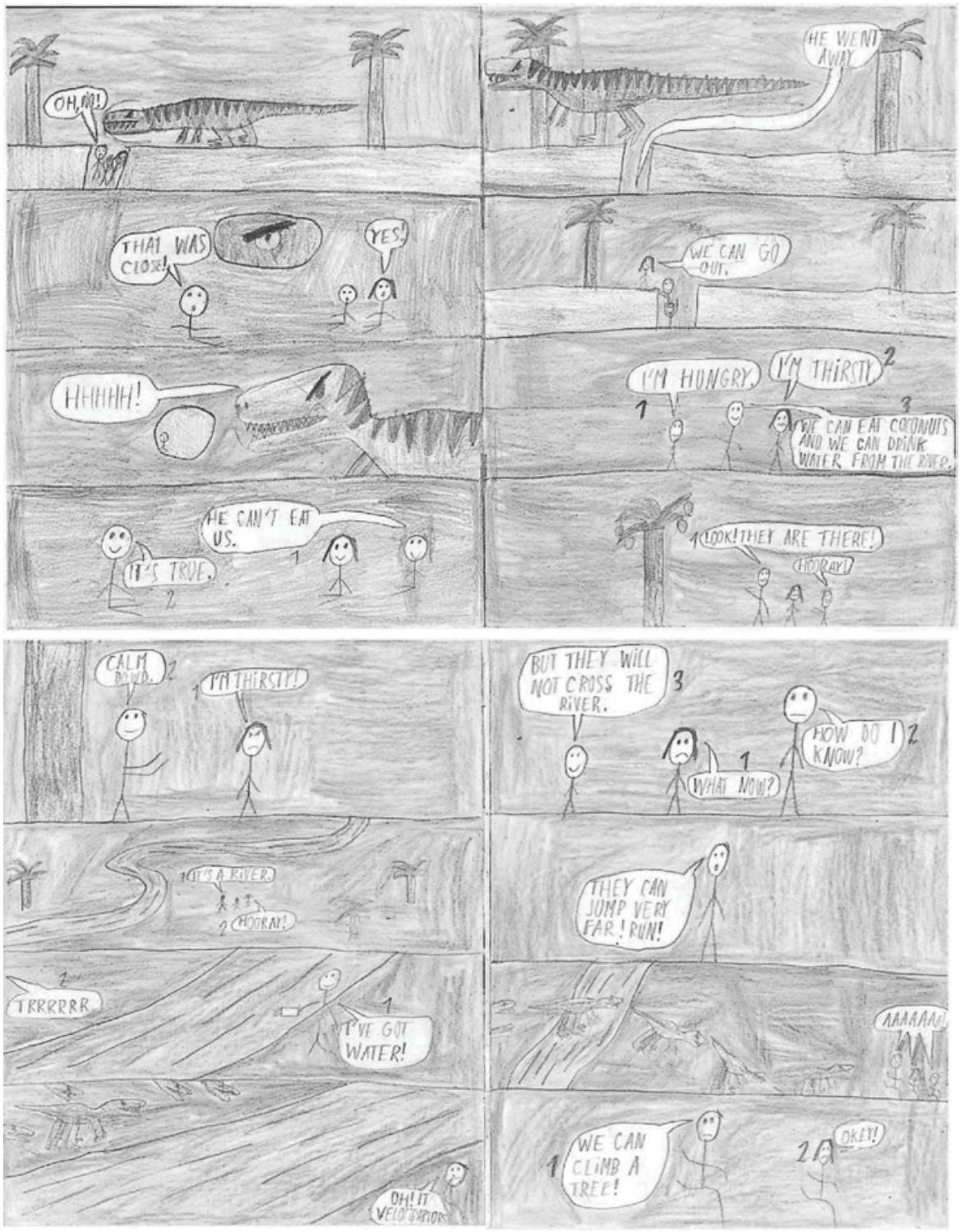


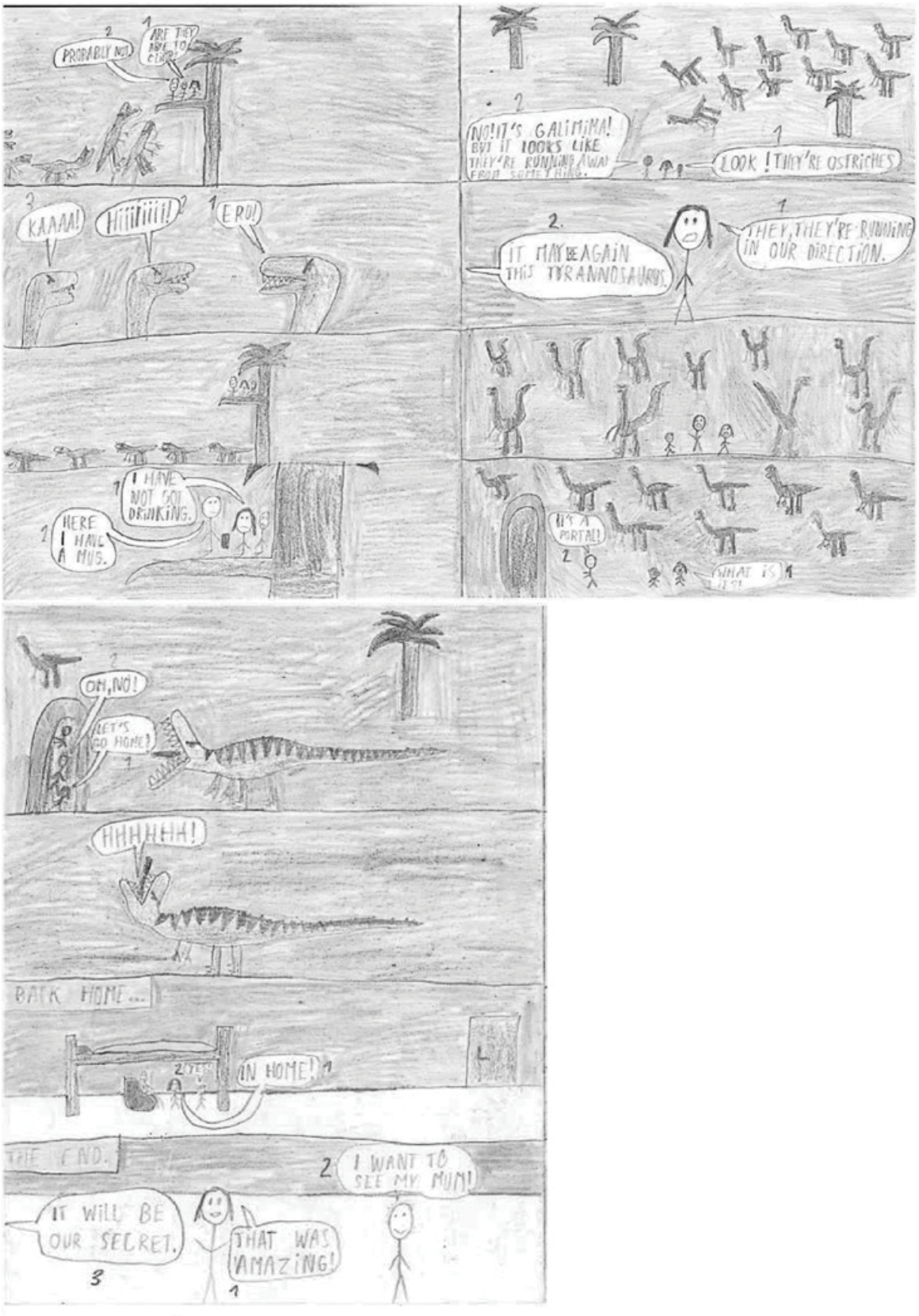


Appendix 6.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8HWywRr6qE&t=32s


ME AND MY SISTERS IN HOME...
SIT DOWN HERE.
OKEY!
OH, NO!
BOOM!
WHAT IS IT?!!!
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
WEEEEE!
I DON'T KNOW!
NO. IT'S NOT A RHINOCEROS. IT'S A TRICERATOPS.
IT'S A RHINOCEROS.
WHERE ARE WE?
I DON'T KNOW!
QUIET!
AAAAAA!!!
OOPS!
HA,HA! FUNNY!
YUCK!
IT'S A BRACHIOSAURUS.
IT'S GOT A LONG NECK!
IT'S VERY, VERY, VERY BIG.
HE IS FRIENDLY. LET'S RIDE ON IT!
OKEY.
SUDDENLY...
BOOM!
WEEEEEEE!
OH, NO IT'S A TYRANNOSAURUS!
I'M SCARED!
WOW! IT'S, IT'S, IT'S A...
NO! IT'S NOT!
GIRAFFE!
RUN!
YOU BETCHA!


OH,NO!
THAT WAS CLOSE!
YES!
HHHHH!
HE CAN'T EAT US.
IT'S TRUE.
HE WENT AWAY
WE CAN GO OUT.
I'M HUNGRY.
I'M THIRSTY.
WE CAN EAT COCONUTS AND WE CAN DRINK WATER FROM THE RIVER.
LOOK! THEY ARE THERE!
HOORAY!
CALM DOWN.
I'M THIRSTY!
IT'S A RIVER.
HOORAY!
TRRRRRR
I'VE GOT WATER!
BUT THEY WILL NOT CROSS THE RIVER.
WHAT NOW?
HOW DO I KNOW?
THEY CAN JUMP VERY FAR! RUN!
AAAAAA!
WE CAN CLIMB A TREE!
OKEY!



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