

Ania does not want to go to school

The Background

Ania is my elder daughter and she is 4,5 years old. She is very ambitious – she is a real life example of Adidas’s advertisement campaign “Impossible is Nothing”. At the age of 2,5 she went to kindergarten. Some time later we heard about a very special school which teaches from the age of 4. This was something absolutely new since in Poland still many children don’t get any preschool education and school normally starts only at the age of 7.

Finally after finishing her first year in kindergarten Ania, then age 3,5, went to the International School Of Poznan (ISOP). ISOP is an international English school which teaches according to IBO standards. We were absolutely amazed how much she loved it. She was learning a lot of interesting things and in the meantime had a lot of fun. For the first couple of months she kept complaining almost every Saturday that there wasn’t any school. In June 2008 Ania, at the age of 4,5, finished class K1 and was already speaking pretty fluent English, which she had learned mostly at school (at home we speak Polish).

Ania had been very anxious about starting her second year of school and going to class K2. That year the school time-table changed and the base program had fewer hours but there was several additional classes afterward that kids could take if they liked to. We talked with Ania, and she decided to take a class almost every afternoon: Arts, Music, German and Spanish. After those classes she goes to the “common room” where she plays with other kids waiting for us (her parents) to pick her up.

The Conflict

Then one evening in October 2008 after a long day at school, Ania was supposed to go to sleep, because the next morning she was due to go to school. Ania, to our surprise, for the first time said:

(A): “I don’t like school, and I don’t want to go to school”.

When the day after she repeated this statement I knew it was serious. I remembered almost every kid I knew, also from my own education experience, thought that school was boring and that they “had to” go to school. How much easier it was for my daughter since she truly liked going to school. I didn’t want this to change, so I decided to solve the problem at its birth and asked her:

(P): “OK. So if you don’t like school why do you keep going to school?”.

(A): "Well I go to school, because mommy says it's good for me, and I should go to school."
(P): "So we have a problem: you don't want to go to school but on the other hand you want to please your mom who thinks you should go to school. Is this the conflict you are facing?"
(A): "Exactly!"
(P): "Would you like to solve it?"
(A): "I don't know if it is possible."
(P): "Maybe we will try to find a way – let's make a cloud."
(A): "Daddy! Your'e silly – clouds are in the sky – you can't just make a cloud."
(P): "I'll show you a tool, I mean a new game. We will have a lot of fun and maybe we can find an answer to our problem."
(A): "Why not! Let's try."

The Cloud

(P): "Ania tell me why you don't want to go to school?"
(A): "I don't know!"
(P): "Is there something you don't like about school?"
(A): "Well not really."
(P): "So maybe there is something you would prefer to do instead of school. So If you didn't go to school what would you do?"
(A): "Well I guess I would be playing... I know. I don't want to go to school because I don't have enough time to play on my own and to do other stuff."
(P): "So you would like to have more time for yourself?"
(A): "Exactly!"
(P): "OK – So now we know what you really need – more time for yourself. And why do you think mommy thinks school is good for you?"
(A): "Well she always says that I will be bright if I go to school?"
(P): "Do you think that's the only reason?"
(A): "Well I really don't know... Can you help me?"
(P): "What about your English?"
(A): "Well mommy says that I am very lucky to learn English at such an early age."
(P): "Very well. Do you have anything else?"
(A): "Please"
(P): "OK I'll help you out. Look who or what do you like most in your school?"
(A): "Well I like most playing with my friends Borys(Poland), Chawan (India), Laura (Sweden), Christian (Germany) and Natalia (Poland)."

(P): "I know you have a lot of friends! Do you think they are important for Mommy?"

(A): "For sure – Mommy says it's important for me to get to play with other kids?"

(P): "So now I think that we have all the needs Mommy has in mind when she wants you to go to school."

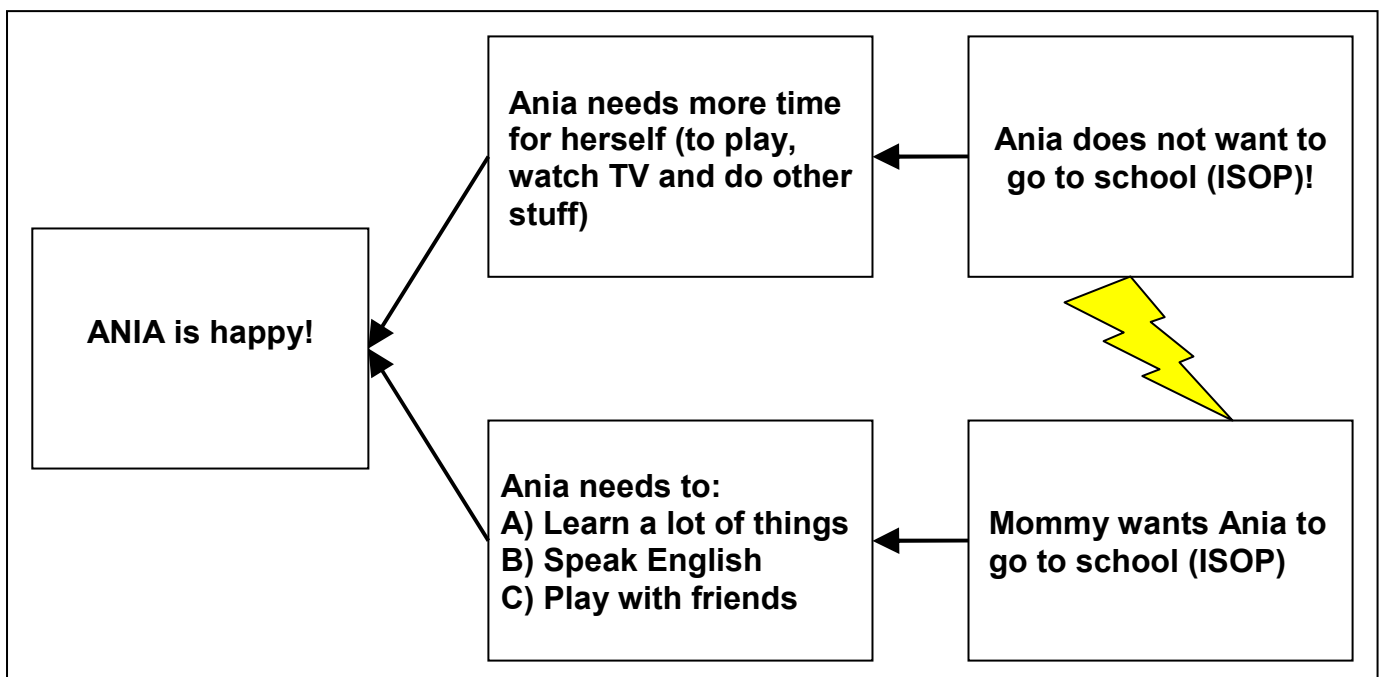
(A): "And now what?"

(P): "What will your mood be if you have a lot of time for yourself and at the same time you get to learn a lot of things including English and you get to play with friends."

(A): "Well I guess I would be very happy."

(P): "So now we have a very well stated conflict!"

As Ania has only started to write and she can write only a couple of words we decided to draw a cloud. I learned about such a possibility during the 2008 TOCFE Conference. Getting to the real problem, and then drawing the entire cloud took us about an hour and a half. It simply was not easy to put into words explicitly what the needs were, and then putting words into pictures in the cloud. This is the written version of the cloud:



The solution

(P): "Is not going to school the only way to have more time for yourself?"

(A): "Well I guess not."

(P): "What other way can you think of so you have more time for yourself?"

(A): "If I wish I could get to decide what I do after school and on weekends."

(P): "Why would deciding about your own time be important for you?"

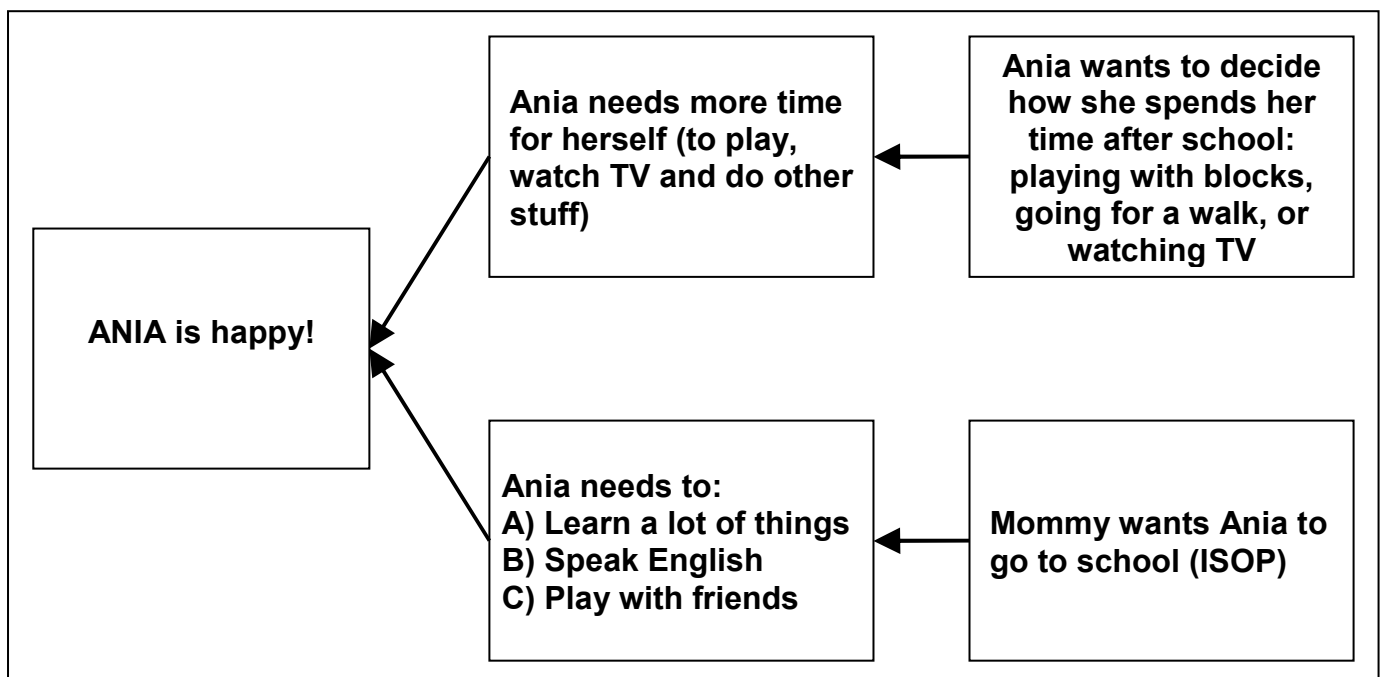
(A): "Well I could decide If I want to play with blocks or go for a walk with my baby sister or watch a DVD story."

(P): "Would that allow you to have a sufficient amount of time for yourself?"

(A): "I think so!"

(P): "So I think we have a solution."

As Ania was drawing her injection on our cloud diagram I saw clearly she had a sense of satisfaction. We restated clearly all the If... then... logic of the new improved cloud. I really didn't expect a 4,5 year old to find a solution so easily. Here is the corrected written version of the cloud:



(P): "Do you think it makes sense?"

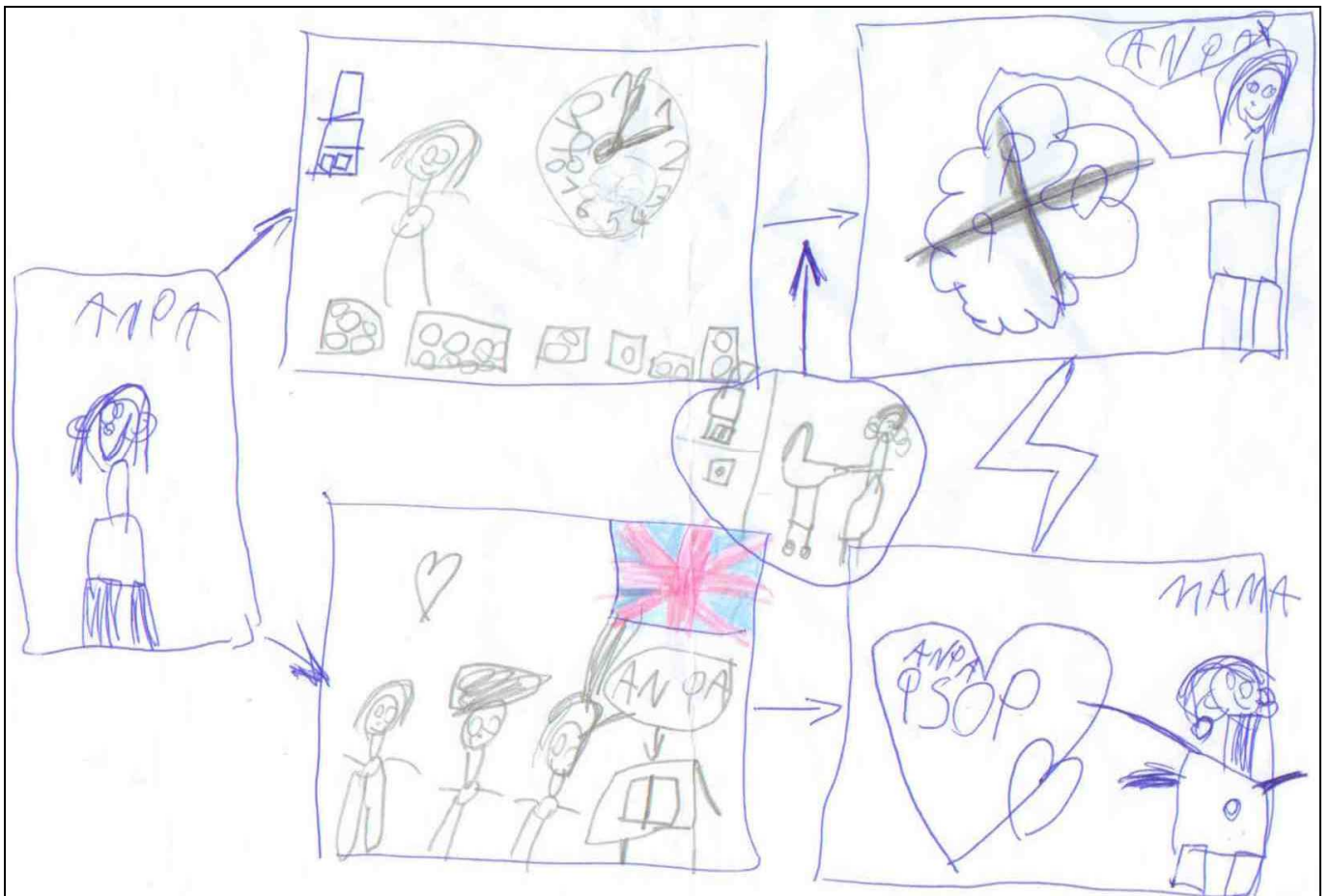
(A): "I think so. And you know what Daddy... It's me who decides how long I stay in the common room and most of the time I want to stay very long!"

(P): "What do you mean?"

(A): "Well I make the choice of staying at school longer myself. So If I feel I still don't have enough time for myself I can always chose to come back home earlier."

(P): "Great Idea."

This was more than I could take. She just invented a second solution. I had used the TP tools in business applications for a couple of years, but the ease with which my 4,5 year old daughter solved her problems with my guiding exceeded my wildest dreams. Here is Ania's original cloud with her drawings.



As Ania was very proud of her findings she wanted to share them with her teacher. So 2 days later we went to see Miss Monika before class and showed her Ania's cloud. Ania did most of the explanation. I only helped her out in the harder places. The teacher loved it.

The beginning of a movement in Poland

As I have been involved in a few projects helping to develop the school I decided to show Ania's cloud to the coordinator of the school's educational program. This is the person who chooses teachers and decides who teaches what and how. She was really impressed and asked me to learn more about TOCFE. After showing her a couple of materials and discussing the subject some more, the coordinator confirmed they wanted to implement TOCFE into their educational program! At this moment we are preparing a big EU Grant financed program implementing TOCFE not only in this school but in the entire Poznan region.