



Structured assessment dialogue in the UK

Structured Assessment Dialogue (SAD) bears some similarities with the well-known “hot seating” activity that is often used in lessons in the UK. The idea is to get the whole class to reflect on a discussion that takes place between the teacher and one focus student, and then between the focus student and a group of feedback students. In SAD, the teacher selects the focus and feedback students in order to ensure that the discussion will neither be too easy or too hard to follow. The remainder of the class watch the interactions between the focus student-feedback students-teacher, and reflect on what this tells them about how an inquiry should be done. In this way, they can think about their own inquiry and whether it has some of the strengths or some of the faults that they recognize in the inquiry of the focus student. The process therefore provides feedback both to everyone in the class so that they consider the quality and strength of their inquiry so far and what they might do next.

The SAD activity was enacted during a Y10 physics inquiry lesson on Floating Oranges (<http://www.sails-project.eu/units/floating-orange.html>). The activity involved one teacher-focus student interview, followed by a peer-feedback discussion in front the whole classroom. Each discussion lasted for about 4 minutes. The teacher, focus student and feedback students were sitting in a group in front of the class. The remaining students sat in rows, facing the teacher and their peers. The lesson was structured so as to let students first develop and test their investigation method and then use the SAD activity to support them to reflect and make adjustments to their methods and experiments before collecting and analysing experimental data.

The teacher’s questions are aimed at probing student’s ideas regarding their choice of investigation method and the links to the scientific ideas that were being tested. Some of the questions were aimed at encouraging the student to articulate her thinking and to promote discussion. Other questions aimed at narrowing down the discussion to a particular aspect, and also to encourage the student to provide a clarification on a specific point. The discussion focused on both procedural knowledge and conceptual knowledge.

The teacher’s questions during the feedback discussion are aimed at eliciting feedback from the students and to support them in articulating their ideas students’ feedback comments show that their feedback was focused on valuing or correcting the statements made by the focus student. These comments were focused on factual and procedural knowledge. Some feedback students also provided suggestions for improvement of the investigation method.

The two excerpts below present, respectively, parts of dialogue that took place between the teacher and the focus student, and the teacher and feedback students. The questions focus on skills and conceptual understanding.

Excerpt of SAD between teacher (in bold) and focus student Sarah



Teacher: What was the first thing that your group did once I set this challenge and started you off?

Sarah: We decided to talk about what different factors there was of the orange that would make it float or sink and we thought about having, the first thing we came up with was having a skin on and then peeling it and then we thought about the size ...

Teacher: Okay, once you had come up with the factors, what did you decide to investigate first and why?

Sarah: Whether the mass of the orange affected the floatiness.

Teacher: Okay, excellent, how did you do that, how did you...?

Sarah: We got a tub of water and we weighed the oranges and we put them both in at the same time. Making sure that we did it at the same time, so it was fair, yeah.

Teacher: Okay, next question is, what scientific ideas do you and your group think you were testing when you were trying to answer the question what makes an orange float or sink?

Sarah: I don't know but Fred came up with a good idea that the orange would sink when it didn't have the skin on because it wasn't, like, trapping the air in there.

Excerpt of SAD between teacher (in bold) and feedback students (Kate and Bill)

Teacher: So my feedbackers, based on my questions and based on Sarah's answers, what feedback could you give her about one of two strands? There were two strands to my questions, some of them were skills, about how the group went about it. And it can be positive feedback or it could be, not so much questions, make it more sort of statements. So the skills side of it, versus then the bit about the reasons, the scientific ideas behind why they were doing it. Kate?

Kate: I thought it was good, the way that they weighed the oranges, 'cause it made it more fair.

Teacher: Okay, can I ask you a quick question? That's a really good point to raise. Can I ask, you said made it more fair, could you just elaborate a little bit for Sarah on how you think that's a good point and how it made it more fair?

Kate: Well, it made it a fair test because it was more accurate, the way that they knew more knowledge to say that about the oranges.

Teacher: Ah, okay, good, Bill, have you got any feedback?

Bill: ...like is there a different mass ... so it's like why does the mass impact if it floats or not?

Teacher: Okay, interesting. Taking it to the next level, hopefully getting progress. Have you got any input on the sort of Science ideas,? Can you give Sarah any feedback perhaps about things that she might have been testing scientifically?

Bill: Maybe see if the orange isn't just different, not just in the mass but like, maybe there was like something different about them. How they're like; they have a different like pip or other things in them..