

SOME PROBLEMS OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO DISABLED STUDENTS IN THE ESL CLASSES

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It is estimated that the number of people affected by learning disability ranges from 5-20% of the population. It is possible that many of the ESL students whom we view as poor language learners are struggling because they too have learning disability. In many countries learning disabilities are not recognized or, in some cases, they are recognized but not dealt with.

Many of us who teach ESL have found ourselves wondering at one time or another whether a certain student might have a learning disability that is impeding his or her progress in English. Yet many of us work in settings where we do not have ready access to consultation, guidance or referral advice and special needs professionals. It is the purpose of this paper to provide basic information about learning disabilities, also to raise awareness among English language teachers that there is a growing problem with students who don't learn the same way as "normal" students and therefore need special attention. It will describe classroom behaviors associated with several common learning problems generally manifested by students who have learning disabilities and common sense techniques that can be incorporated into classroom routines to vastly improve the classroom environment for students having learning disabilities.

Learning disability is a disorder that creates a difficulty in acquiring and using skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and reasoning, or math skills. Such disabilities affect both children and adults. The impairment can be quite subtle and go undetected throughout

life. But learning disabilities create a gap between a person true capacity and his day to day production and performance. A learning disability is not indicative of less intelligence. In fact, people who have a learning disability are often very bright, even gifted people. It is true; however, that their short circuit or processing glitch causes them to see things differently and sometimes obscures their intelligence. While they cannot be cured, they can be taught compensatory strategies. We as mainstream classroom teachers can help in this process.

One of the most common kind of learning disability is *Dyslexia*, which is the term currently used to cover a very broad range of learning disabilities involve language processing deficits. In brief, these dysfunctions are described in terms of problems relating to:

- Attention, the most common kind of learning disability.
- Language, difficulty in interpreting or remembering verbal messages and instructions.
- Spatial orientation, poor reading and spelling skills.
- Memory, difficulties with retrieval of presumably stored information.
- Fine motor control issues, which cause ideas to break down between the head and the paper.

In order for the teacher to be able to help students with learning disabilities he or she needs to, first of all be aware of the problem. Secondly, he or she needs to be well informed in the language that is to be taught. And thirdly, needs to have an Attitude towards the child that does not discriminate or think less of the child but rather encourages learning.

However, recent studies have found that teachers generally don't have these essential skills. These studies point out the very significant observation that since many learning disabled students are thought to read in general educated classrooms, it becomes the responsibility of the

general education teachers to provide explicit reading instruction for these children. This is particularly true for foreign language teaching because the special education programs mainly concern instruction in the child's mother tongue.

Students who have had no prior difficulties with language learning in their mother tongue suddenly experience difficulties in foreign language learning.

Due to the fact that teachers are not made aware of this issue, teachers more or less often just assume that when a student is not doing as well as the other classmates, he or she just stupid and uninterested in learning, of course, there are those teachers who are well aware of this and have an open mind which is great, but still there are quite a few general education teachers who need to be informed of this issue. Due to various reasons, not all children with learning difficulties receive the special education they need, which is mainly thought due to lack of funding but also, to some extent, due to teachers not being adequately informed about the importance of early recognition and intervention. Because, at the end, the general education teachers who are the first one's to encounter the problems, they need to be better equipped in order to meet the special needs of dyslexic children.

What strategies should be followed to help such kind of students?

Multi-sensory teaching strategies supported by kinesthetic movements and mnemonic strategies are methods with which general education teachers can assist dyslexic children in foreign language. It's of great importance in order for the children to succeed in overcoming their difficulties, but it must be remembered that every dyslexic child is different and needs an individual learning program that fits his or her specific impairment.

Multi-sensory teaching means that as many senses as possible are stimulated during the learning process and the purpose of this is to enhance the encoding of learned material. This is achieved by reinforcing

the storage of knowledge in anagrams (unit of memory) through several different modalities or “memory pathways”, like e.g. visual memory, auditive memory, kinesthetic memory (body movements) and tactile memory (sense of touch). This also means that the retrieval of information is easier and smoother as the student then has more quests to trigger recall if only one modality had been used. Examples of multi-sensory teaching methods are listening to a recorder version of a text while reading it, tracing the form of a letter while pronouncing the sound and also looking at a picture of the letter while hearing the corresponding sound (sound- symbol training), the idea behind the techniques was to compensate for weaknesses in visual or auditive modality with instruction through other modalities.

Kinesthetic movements are easy and simple physical activities that enhance the neural pathways in the brain. For instance, Brain Gym consists of 26 easy movements or exercises. These exercises are based upon extensive research in kinesiology, which is the science of body movements babies and young children naturally perform in early childhood.

The enhancing of neural pathways improves learning by relieving stress, building up the student’s self-esteem and enhancing both concentration and physical coordination. Brain Gym movements promise results in areas such as memory, reading, writing, organizing, listening etc. The effects of this training program have been positive.

The teacher can use kinesthetic body movements e.g. to calm the students down before class or to relax the students and relieve stress. Stress is a major factor that prohibits learning and the continuous failure to read or comprehend will certainly cause enormous amounts of stress in the learning disabled student.

Mnemonic strategies are specific memory enhancing techniques that provide the students with better ways of encoding information and make it easier to retrieve or remember this information. This strategy can

make the comprehension easier to understand certain things when the facts and rules underlying are easily remembered. This can be of enormous help for dyslexic children since memorizing by reading over and over again. The most common strategies used are acronyms, acrostics, rhymes and songs, method of Loci and keyword method. Acronyms and acrostics are very helpful when a sequence of words need to be remembered in a certain order. They are formed by taking the first letter of each word that needs to be remembered and combining so that they make up a new word (acronyms), e.g. the names of the Great Lakes in USA: *Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and superior* can easily be remembered by transforming them into the acrostic *HOMES*.

Acrostics follow the same pattern but instead of forming a word the teacher forms a sentence consisting of words with the same initial letter as the words to be memorized. Method of Loci, on the other hand is based upon associating the words the teacher needs to memorize with a path he knows well and the items or landmarks he visualizes. The keyword is also one that emphasizes associating the things that the teacher needs to remember to something familiar e.g. talking about learning the capitals of states with the help of this mnemonic strategy, and giving an example of *Florida* and its capital *Tallahassee* that have the corresponding keywords *Flower* and *Television*. By then creating an image of these two together (*a flower on top of a TV*) the encoding and retrieval of the capital and the state will be easy.

Learning disabilities in adult ESL classrooms

For a long period of time it was thought that learning disabilities were a children's issue. That once the child finished school, the problem would disappear. Research has shown that learning disabilities do not disappear when one leaves school and that they can occur across an individual's life span.

The difficulties vary in severity, may persist across the life span, and may affect one or more areas of a person's life, including learning, work and social and emotional functioning. In adult ESL classrooms, we may see, more often than we have realized, successful ones, the ones who have a learning disability but ultimately did well in school because they were able to devise their own compensatory strategies as no diagnostic or remedial intervention had been available. These students may have since forgotten about the problems they had learning to read and write. Then, they have difficulties again when they arrive in new circumstances (such as studying in a foreign country) which places new, language related demands on them. It is possible that a number of the student whom we view as poor language learners are struggling because they have a learning disability.

Areas where learning disabilities may affect adults include:

- Education – Difficulties in spoken or written language.
- Vocation – Errors are commonly found in filling out employment.
- Self-esteem – Being criticized, put down, teased or rejected.
- Social interaction – Demonstrate poor judgment of other's mood and attitudes, less sensitive to other's thoughts and feelings.
- Independent Living – Responsibilities such as writing checks or taking phone messages may present problem for them.

Learning disability affects learning in any language and must therefore be a guiding factor in designing instruction for the adult learners with disabilities, following suggestions below provides instruction:

- Teachers should be highly structured and predictable.
- Teaching small amounts of material at one time in sequential steps.
- Including opportunities to use several senses and learning strategies.
- Providing multi-sensory reviews.

- Recognizing and building on learner's strengths and prior knowledge.
- Simplifying language but not content.
- Emphasizing content words and make concepts accessible through the use of pictures, charts, maps, etc.
- Reinforcing main ideas and concepts through rephrasing rather than through verbatim repetition.
- Teachers should be aware that learners often can take in information, but may experience difficulty with retrieving it and sorting it appropriately.
- Providing a clean, uncluttered, quiet, and well-lit learning environment.
- Taking an inventory of how students think they learn best. Having students make a chart of their strengths and challenges so that they, as well as the teacher, can learn from their perceptions of how well they read, write remember, listen, speak, attend, and get ideas out.

Technology has potential for assisting adult learners with learning disabilities to acquire a second language; computers have proven to be particularly useful. In fact, adult ESL learners who have had limited success in learning English report that working one-on-one in the computer lab with a teacher seems more comfortable and productive than being one of many students in a crowded classroom. Using assistive technology can build self-esteem as well as provide immediate feedback.

Students who are gifted but suffer from some disabilities

There are children who are both gifted and learning disabled exhibit remarkable talents and strengths in some areas and disabling weaknesses in others. They can be grouped into three categories:

1. Identified gifted students who have subtle learning disabilities.

2. Unidentified students whose gifts and disabilities may be masked by average achievement.
3. Identified learning disabled students who are also gifted.

The first group is easily identified as gifted because of high achievement or high IQ scores. As they grow older, discrepancies widen between expected and actual performance. These students may impress teachers with their verbal abilities, while their spelling or handwriting contradicts the image. The second groups of students are often difficult to find because they don't flag the need for attention by exceptional behavior. Their hidden talents and abilities may emerge in specific content areas or may be stimulated by a classroom teacher who uses a creative approach to learning. The third group, are the bright children who discovered within the population of students who are identified as learning disabled are often failing miserably in school. They are first noticed because of what they cannot do, rather than because of the talent they are demonstrating. This group of students is most at risk because of the implicit message that accompanies the LD that there is something wrong with the student that must be fixed before anything else can happen. These children often have high-level interest at home. They may build fantastic structures with plastic bricks or start a local campaign to save the whales. The creative abilities, intellectual strength and passion they bring to their hobbies are clear indicators of their potential for giftedness. In brief, these groups need focus attention on the development of the gift by remediation of basic skills, providing a nurturing environment that values individual differences, and encourage compensation strategies.

It is probably fair to assume that the relatively high percentage of students found to be learning disabled. In most countries, however, learning disabilities are not recognized or are recognized but not dealt with. When we see a student floundering, a student who seems capable of

more we have the best indication that the problem may be learning disability. There is much that we see as classroom teachers can in fact do to improve that student's learning conditions.

An important issue is that, teachers should foster an inclusive learning environment that includes sensitivity, attitudes, awareness, accommodations and fostering self-esteem. The better students feel about their learning experience, the harder they try, a positive environment will foster self-esteem in students. The sensitization and advocacy are half of the treatment.

Although a learning disability doesn't affect all areas of learning, it may have a significant impact on the social life and the work of the learner. Therefore, the field, especially of adult ESL must intensify its efforts to assist learning disabled ESL learners and their teachers. Such efforts require greater and more long-term sources of funding for research, specifically in the areas of assessment and instruction, training, and assistive technology.

Famous People Who Had Learning Disabilities

To help students realize that even though they have disabilities they can still be great. They can still serve others, to help the people's self-esteem, to help motivate them to try their best. Listed below are famous people who had learning disabilities:

- **Albert Einstein** had a learning disability and didn't speak until the age of 3. He had a very difficult time doing math at school. It was very hard for him to express himself through writing.
- **Alexander Graham Bell** had a learning disability.
- **Edison** had a learning disability. He couldn't read until he was twelve years old and had very difficult time writing even when he was older.
- **George Patton** had a learning disability.
- **George Washington** had a learning disability. He could barely write and had very poor grammar skills.

- **Milton** had a learning disability. He became blind at age of 43, but went on to create his most famous epic *Paradise Lost*.
- **Nelson Rockefeller** had a learning disability – dyslexia.
- **Stephen Hawking** has Lou Gehrigs Disease and is in a wheelchair. He needs a computer to speak.
- **Walt Disney** had a learning disability.
- **Werner Von Braun** had a learning disability and often flunked his math tests in high school.
- **Winston Churchill** had a learning disability.
- **Woodrow Wilson** had a learning disability. He was severely dyslexic.

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ƏQLİ CƏHƏTDƏN ZƏİF TƏLƏBƏLƏRƏ İNGİLİS DİLİNİN TƏDRİSİNİN BƏZİ PROBLEMLƏRİ

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Məqalə əqli cəhətdən zəif şagirdlərə və tələbələrə ingilis dilinin tədrisində qarşıya çıxan çətinliklərə və onların mümkün qədər aradan qaldırılması məsələlərinə həsr olunmuşdur. Bu problemin həllini asanlaşdıran müəyyən yollar, metodlar və strategiyalar göstərilmişdir.

Məqalənin sonunda təhsil aldıkları zaman əqli cəhətdən zəif hesab olunan, sonralardan isə elm, mədəniyyət və siyasət sahəsində görkəmli simalara çevrilmiş şəxsiyyətlərin müxtəsər siyahısı verilmişdir.