

Teaching Students With Specific Education Needs

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Abstract – Special education needs (SEN) must be identified as early as possible so that lessons and methods will be able to correct the students' behavior and ability of learning. The research claim that earlier SEN kids get special teaching and treatment, the better results they show in school and their further studies. Even so there are up to eight students in Israeli SEN classes, each of them needs an individual approach because they are people with different personalities. Specific individual programs and teaching methods need to be created in accordance with the students' learning styles in order to develop learning skills, which are necessary for the final exams. Moreover, learning English in small groups gives students with SEN such important skills as working with others, understanding social language and expressing opinions. The results show that despite SEN, kids might be very good at art, music or computer technology, which can be used for classroom presentations.

Keywords – Dyslexia, Learning Technology, Motivation, Special Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to A.M. Smith, kids with different kinds of learning disabilities (LD) experience "some sensory processing issues, difficulties with co-ordination and some may also feel that their social skills are not as strong as those of their classmates". While doing tasks in the classroom they complain on problems with memory, self-esteem and fatigue. Generally, they have "good and bad days". The most typical SEN are the following ones:

Dyslexia: misspelling, problems with phonological processing, text processing and explaining ideas.

ADHD: restlessness, fidgeting, lack of focus, emotional control and short concentration span.

Dyspraxia: problems with coordination, articulation, sequencing and temporal awareness.

Dyscalculia: problems with numerical and temporal concepts, sequencing, tenses and time expressions.

Asperger's Syndrome: misunderstanding metaphorical language, problems with social interaction and intolerance of changes in routine.

Learning technology has become very popular and made a great progress in education. Usually SEN students lack motivation when it comes to grammar learning and practicing it in the classroom when they are taught in a traditional way. They make a lot of mistakes and get frustrated or even start making troubles. But audio-video activities make lessons much different from the traditional ones and provoke the students' interest. It is also a sort of learning autonomy that makes each student busy and motivated. Since LD kids have difficulties with reading and spelling they can have a real help from computer technology which corrects their mistakes. In addition, it can be successfully used on the exams, which is done in the range of the countries including Israel.

II. VAK LEARNING STYLES

The research in both educational theory and cognitive psychology claims that SEN students are not the same and have different learning styles that refer to a range of different theories about individuals' learning. These theories propose that all people can be classified according to their 'style' of learning. "Students preferentially take in and process information in different ways: by seeing and hearing, reflecting and acting, reasoning logically and intuitively, analyzing and visualizing, steadily and in fits and starts." (M. Felder, 2002).

Walter Burke Barbe and colleagues proposed three learning styles (often identified by the acronym VAK):

1. *Visual*
2. *Auditory*
3. *Kinesthetic*

The VAK learning styles model helps educators to design learning methods and experiences in accordance with learner's preferences:

Visual learning style involves the use of visual aids both online and the traditional ones, such as pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, etc. Visual learners like to learn through written language, such as reading and writing tasks.

Auditory learning style involves the transfer of information through listening. It can be done with the help of the speaking, reading orally or recorded sounds. Auditory learners often talk to themselves or read the material out loud. They may have difficulty with reading and writing tasks, so they prefer listening to their teachers and peers and recording what they say.

Kinesthetic learning involves physical experience - touching, feeling, holding and practical hands-on experiences. When listening to lectures they may want to take notes in order to move their hands. Taking notes does not always mean writing, it can be drawing pictures, diagrams or doodling as well. When reading, they like to scan the material first, and then focus in on the details and highlight them.

According to the VAK or modality theory, one or two of these receiving styles is normally dominant and defines the best way for a person to learn new information. This style may not always to be the same for some tasks. For example, the learner may prefer one style of learning for one task, and a combination of others for a different task. Thus, many LD students prefer visual and auditory style for storytelling, while some prefer the kinesthetic one for doing reading comprehension.

III. CONCENTRATION AND MOTIVATION

After the range of failure in class, many children get frustrated and give up studying. Misunderstanding the schoolwork, emotional problems, anger and misbehavior

often take place in SEN classes. “The behavior that accompanies this dampened motivation may range from quitting (“school is boring”), avoiding any attempt (“I’m stupid; why try?”), clowning (for attention), denying (“I don’t care about English”), being impulsive (“There! I’m done!”), or bullying (picking on someone smaller)”. (Great School Staff, 2014). Children with LD and SEN hate school but go there just because they have no choice. They do not feel motivated to succeed at school and stop participating in the lessons even so they still dream about high grades. So the task of their teachers is to make them focused and interested in learning.

“The key to motivating the child with attentional problems is to modify and adjust the learning environment.” (Lavoie, 2015). Many SEN students find it difficult to focus in class, mainly those who have both dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Therefore, distractible children should sit far from the windows and close to the teacher, who should reduce the level of distraction in the room.

Kids will be self-motivated to learn when they feel competent about learning and have some choice and control over their learning – so you need to give them success-orienting tasks and let them choose what to do in class. So give them variety of games, pre-listening, pre-writing and pre-reading activities, as well as pair-work, group-work and class discussions to make ADHD kids interested and motivated in studies. Even so they have unreadable handwriting or misspell too much, they might speak English rather well, so let them feel good at active speaking. If they are good at art, let them prepare a presentation and give it in class, which can be done both individually and in a group. Only when they believe in themselves they will start learning better. Background music is also acceptable but be aware that some students might dislike it. Therefore let them listen to music on their personal devices and use earphones. Remember that they need to feel loved and respected by their teachers and parents.

IV. CREATING A DYSLEXIA FRIENDLY CLASSROOM

Dyslexia-friendly teachers create a dyslexia-friendly atmosphere in the classroom. Supporting, encouraging and motivating students to succeed are the first steps to make your students interested in your lessons.

No child left behind! As a teacher, you should worry about neglecting some very weak students in your class who are afraid of making mistakes or failing tests. Since all the students are different, even in the class of 8-10 students with SEN there can be one or two students who make progress quickly, as well as a couple of those who progress very slowly. That means you probably have to prepare alternative lesson plans for the same lessons, so that you will be able to change the tasks or activities that can be suitable for all the kids: table games, online games, songs, etc. If they are supposed to do some exercises in their textbooks or work pages, give them the tasks in accordance to their level. Usually the exercises in

textbooks for SEN are marked as “Level 1”, “level 2”, etc. Thus, advanced students can do level 3 or 4, while those who have serious difficulties, usually do level 1 or 2. After they have done, they you can check their tasks and ask them to read aloud. Moreover, it makes them practice and improve their reading skills.

Teachers often have at least one student with dyslexia in a regular class and sometimes there are additional students, who have never been diagnosed. The strategies you implement in your classroom for students with dyslexia should benefit all of your students. Thus, more advanced students can help less advanced, which can be done by work in pairs or in small groups. When you make changes to help students with dyslexia, you should make positive changes for the entire class.

Changes You Can Make in the Physical Environment

- Reduce the level of distraction in the classroom. Distractible kids should sit close to you.
- Give SEN students more time to complete their tasks.
- Post sight words and complicated grammar rules around the classroom. This helps to reduce memory work and lets children with dyslexia focus on their skills.
- Give pre-teaching activities. Provide plenty of pre-listening, pre-writing and pre-reading tasks.
- Practice pair-work, group-work and class discussions to make ADHD kids interested and motivated in studies.
- Practice multi-sensory teaching. Teach the language using visual, auditory, mnemonic, tactile and kinesthetic strategies to enhance memory.
- Since many dyslexic kids are good at music, practice teaching English via songs. This can be helpful for auditory learners. For visual learners images on YouTube are very useful because in this way they understand the song better. Kinesthetic students can repeat the song, move their hands and tap their legs, which also gets them involved in the lesson and interested in studying.

V. IF THE STUDENTS STILL DO NOT WANT TO STUDY

Some students are very challenging and refuse to participate in the lessons. They answer back to teachers and complain that they are tired or have a difficult time. In this case, teachers should ask them general questions about the weather, news, and other topics, so that they will get involved in the spoken activities. To provoke their interest in learning they can teach them proverbs, such as “No pain – no gain”, “London wasn’t built in a day”, “Practice makes perfect” or tell jokes in English. Nevertheless, students with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) might misunderstand them and react inadequately, so it is highly recommended to explain their meaning. Table games, such as dominos, snakes and ladders, or bingo make them busy and involved in the classroom activities. You can also show them a film without translation or let them download some apps and do some exercises on their mobile devices, so that they will study in a natural and fun way.

VI. TRADITIONAL AND MODERN WAYS OF TEACHING

Remedial teachers can teach SEN students with the help of traditional textbooks, notebooks as well as learning technology. If textbooks are still used in the class, teachers should read the texts and the instructions aloud because sometimes LD students misunderstand them while silent reading. Since kids affected by dyslexia have difficulties with reading and writing, they can learn new information by seeing it. Presenting pictures, diagrams, and other visual aids can ease the reading comprehension significantly, avoid misunderstanding and motivate them. Since many dyslexic students are good at art, they can prepare their own pictures and share them with their classmates. Multisensory teaching is highly recommended, so remedial teachers should teach the language using visual, auditory, mnemonic, tactile and kinesthetic strategies to enhance the kids' memory.

Learning technology has made a revolution in the process of learning. A great deal of research shows that visual learning tools help students with dyslexia and ADHD retrieve and remember information better. It is especially useful for students with dysgraphia who prefer doing tasks online rather than writing in their notebooks. Therefore, online ESL lessons, in addition to traditional ones, are widely practiced in Israeli SEN schools. "Technology use can be a key factor for some students in turning a learning disability into a learning difference" (O'Connell *et al*).

Class computers and projectors work well while frontal lessons. Audio-video activities make lessons exciting and provoke the students' curiosity. They like singing, so they can pick up vocabulary from songs on YouTube and learn grammar. You can also give them some self-checking tasks to complete on their personal devices in order "to complete the task and to bypass an area of difficulty" (Young and McCormack 2014).

VII. EXAMS AND ACCOMMODATION

Students with SEN have rights for accommodations in the regular lessons and tests. The accommodations need to be individualized to fit the unique needs of the student. After an LD student has been diagnosed as dyslexic, the accommodations are discussed at the school meeting, where the educational team determines, which accommodations will help support student success. Although students with dyslexia will have different needs, there are some accommodations, which are commonly found to be helpful for students with dyslexia.

Since the number of individuals diagnosed with learning disabilities has increased, the Israeli Association for Children and Adults with LD have developed the following technological and academic strategies of the accommodation. Proactively consider these strategies are a part of a process called universal design, which offers the following suggestions:

- Extended exam time, typically time and one half to double time.

- To take exams in a room with reduced distractions.
- The assistance of a reader, scribe, or word processor for exams.
- The option of an oral exam.
- Not to lower grades for spelling mistakes.
- To use an electronic dictionary for exams.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Overall, even teachers that have taught for decades, still ask themselves a lot of questions how to improve the process of studying in SEN students. They try their best to ensure that all students have maximized learning opportunities. However, once you get into the habit of this type of reflection as you plan each learning experience, you will find out that there is no a universal system of teaching that can be suitable for each student. Therefore, you should have two or even three lesson plans in store. Besides, you should always remember, that no two students learn the same, so be patient and continue to differentiate both instruction and assessment as much as possible.

SEN students face greater challenges in learning ESL than their peers and need more support from their teachers who can teach both traditional lessons with printed textbooks and computerized ones. With the help of variety of methods and creativity, teachers can prepare interesting, motivating and success-oriented lessons to help SEN students succeed in school and get a university degree.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



Julia Koifman was born in Ukraine in 1969. Graduated from Simferopol State University in 1995 and got the MA degree in TEFL. In 1999 immigrated in Israel and got a TEFL certification at Shaanan College in Haifa in 2002. In 2006 she became an ENGLISH COORDINATOR in Beit Ekshtein high school for SEN in the settlement of Rupin and still works there. Published some articles about overcoming dyslexia and other SEN. Mrs. Koifman is a member of IATEFL, TESOL and ETAI organizations. Presented in local and international conferences.