

Dyslexia & Language Teaching: Experiences from a Hungarian primary school

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General Experiences

- 14 dyslexic students for one academic year
- Special classes for dyslexic students
- Seriously disadvantaged sociocultural background
- Heterogeneous group
- Discipline
- Low self-esteem
- Additional problems

Main objectives

- To use and study methods that are successful in teaching English as a foreign language to young dyslexic learners,
- To handle discipline problems,
- To deal with the heterogeneity of the group,
- To put an emphasis on compensating the sometimes neglecting and cold family backgrounds by trying to create a tolerant and accepting atmosphere in the class where effective learning could happen.

Definition

- Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty best described as a combination of abilities and difficulties of neurobiological origin that persists across lifespan. It affects the learning process in one or more areas of reading, spelling, writing and sometimes numeracy.

Symptoms in L1

- Poor working memory
- Low concentration
- Poor organization and time management
- Difficulty with planning
- Tendency to clumsiness
- Difficulty with sequencing
- Confusion with directions and opposites
- Poor confidence and low self-esteem

Symptoms in L1 continued

- They may confuse letters such as 'd' and 'b' or 'u' and 'n' or words such as 'on' and 'no'
- Transpose letters in words
- Omit letters, or add extra letters to words
- Poor handwriting
- Troubles with reading comprehension

Symptoms in L1 continued

- Problems in processing complex language at speed
- Problems with phonological awareness
- Problems with phonemic awareness
- Problems with auditory discrimination
- Difficulty in learning letter-to-sound correspondence

Wash-out effect

of design, font type size, contrast and layout, are the focus. The colour of a font, such as light, regular, medium and bold create a certain contrast with the background. The challenge is to find the right contrast (character colour and paper colour) that complements the character. This can be accomplished with the right weight of a typeface in combination with the right colour paper, avoiding the wash-out effect.

River-effect

preferences regarding all readers, dyslexics in particular, centred can be used for headings or titles. Aligned right and justified causes problems, aligned right causes confusion with flowing to the next line. Justified text creates non-consistency of word spacing, and this can lead to the river-effect distortion. Very important is the strong advice against hyphenation, the words split and there fore causes difficulty in comprehension. As an overall remark I'd like to emphasise not to provide a 'learn-how-to-read' visual, but to focus on clarity, consistency and space, used initials

Swirl-effect

Read Regular is created without copying or mirroring shapes. Therefore the frequency of repeated shapes in a text is decreased. This results in a minimum chance of visual distortions (swirl-effect). The aim is to create interesting typography that will maintain the readers' interest and will prevent them from getting bored or frustrated. Diversity in text knows many variations. We must understand the fact that typography for a novel is different from a magazine or a publication for education. Even so a novel has the potential to be clear and interesting. This can be achieved in any level of creativity, thinking on type size, leading, the amount of words on a sentence and the character/paper combination.

Language learning problems of dyslexic students

- Contrary to popular belief dyslexic students do not only have problems with spelling and reading in L2, but in all major areas of language learning.
- Due to the difficulties experienced students' motivation often deteriorates, they have low self-esteem and therefore put insufficient energy into language learning.

L2 reading problems

- Students cannot find the sounds corresponding to letters
- They mix up letters while reading in L2.
- Students with learning disabilities are not able to read aloud and pay attention to what they are reading simultaneously.
- They have difficulties reading longer texts.
- They have comprehension problems.

L2 writing problems

- They cannot copy words from the blackboard,
- Leave out and mix up the order of letters, use capital letters incorrectly, sometimes mix Hungarian and English spelling
- Write down the words as they would pronounce them in Hungarian.
- Dyslexic student also find it difficult to fill in gaps in written texts.

Problems in learning foreign language vocabulary

- Students mix up similarly sounding words
- Students find it difficult to memorize abstract words, and they find it easier to learn nouns than verbs and adjectives.
- In the case of compound words, it happens that they either remember the first or the second part of the word and they cannot segment compound words.

Problems with the pace of learning and memory

- Slow pace of learning in the language classroom
- Need more time
- Phonological memory problems make constant revision necessary

Seriality problems

- They know that what letters might appear in a word but not in which order.
- Memorizing sequences of words, which can be observed in students' mixing up numbers (e.g. 34 with 43)
- Using inappropriate word order.
- Above the sentence level they cannot memorize a series of three or four instructions. They lose the thread at the first instruction, and even though they would be able to do all of them, halt and do not know what to do.

L1 related problems

- a smaller range of vocabulary in their L1
- names of months and the days of the week
- students face difficulties understanding grammatical relations in their L1

What do dyslexic students value in the teaching process?- Lessons from interviews with dyslexic learners

- Helpful, kind and friendly teacher
- Individual attention
- Reasonable strictness
- Pace of learning adjusted to their needs
- Clear explanations
- Interesting and relevant tasks
- Constant revision
- Assessment procedures that take into consideration their dyslexia

Materials used

- *Shine* (J. Garton-Sprenger & P. Prowse, 1999)
- *Practise with Puzzles!* books 1 and 2 (M. & D. von Ziegesar, 1978)
- *Chatterbox 2* (D. Strange, 1989)
- Materials from the Internet
- Materials prepared especially for the students

Methodology 1.

Basic principles of teaching dyslexic students

- multisensory
- structured
- cumulative
- thorough
- active
- useful

Meixner-method

- gradual development in smaller steps
- triple association
- prevention of the development of the homogeneous inhibition

Methodology 2.

- Structured with gradual development in smaller steps
- Triple association:
 - Acoustic perception of the sounds/words
 - Speech-motoric memory of the sounds/words
 - Visual perception of the sounds/words
- Prevention of the development of homogeneous inhibition
- Multisensory and thorough teaching

Methodology 3.

- Development of the students' body scheme perception, rhythm
- Practice language items in different contexts
- Mistakes should be corrected immediately
- Explain difficult concepts in Hungarian
- Continuous memory development
- Enhancement of different learning strategies

Methodology 4.

- Develop routines
- Amelioration of social skills
- Easing the students' distress
- Personalization technique
- 'Useful' teaching
- Active learning

Discipline

A definition

“Classroom discipline is a state in which both teacher and learners accept and consistently observe a set of rules about behaviour in the classroom whose function is to facilitate smooth and efficient teaching and learning in a lesson” (Ur, 1996, p. 270).

Keeping discipline

- Change the seating order
- Stay calm and do not shout
- Keep eye-contact
- Give responsibilities
- Use the students' names
- Cross-checking

Keeping discipline continued

- Set the right level of challenge
- Routine
- Establish the code of conduct
- Proper methodology
- Careful lesson planning and classroom management

Careful lesson planning and classroom management

- Smooth transitions between the tasks
- Regular change of activities
- Set homework
- Clear and short-cut instructions
- Do not advance rapidly
- Graduality
- Appropriate timing

Teacher's roles and attitude

- Create an atmosphere in which the students feel comfortable, which breeds cooperation and motivation
- Respect the students' personalities
- Students should feel that what they get helps them in their learning and enhances their language skills
- Role of a facilitator, supporter, mentor, coordinator
- Adapt his/her methodology to the students' needs, personalities and interests

Teacher's roles and attitude 2.

- Should be firm and stay calm
- Should not take students remarks and attitudes personally
- Should be spontaneous and use some humour
- Compromises with students
- Cooperate with the students, parents and colleagues
- Has to be methodologically prepared