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# Teaching English To Children With ADHD

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**Teaching English to Children with ADHD**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
the Master of Arts in Teaching degree  
at the  
School for International Training  
Brattleboro, Vermont USA

October 22, 2010

IPP Advisor: Elka Todeva

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This project by Natalia Turketi is accepted in its present form.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is primarily put on enhancing the ESL teaching process and making foreign language learning successful and manageable for every student. The paper explores the process of teaching English to children who experience difficulties in learning languages due to their attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder problems. The author considers the process of second language acquisition for children with ADHD in terms of input and output speech issues, motivation problems and learning preferences. The ESL methodologies that can be applied effectively in addressing such learners' needs and the rationale of their choice are then argued for. Examples of activities that will make the foreign language learning process fruitful, both for the children with such specific educational needs and their peers who do not have ADHD, are also discussed within the framework of this paper.

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors

Second Language Learning

Creative Teaching

Teaching Guides

Group Instruction

Teaching Methods

**Teaching Language to Children with ADHD**

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## INTRODUCTION

The past few decades has seen the debate on Learning Differences (Disabilities) become an increasing focus of attention for many modern psychologists and educators. The rationality behind this reflects the acknowledged learning difficulties many students face. The debate addresses the necessity of making the educational process manageable and successful for every student, regardless of his or her individual learning abilities and styles. A great deal of work has been successfully gone into the investigation of the exploration of a little known territory, to better define such Learning Differences as Dyslexia (reading difficulties), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), Dysphasia (speech and language disorders), Dyscalculia (a math disability) and many others. Centering on the use of medicine, psychology and psychiatry, a number of avenues have been pursued to better manage these conditions. However, comparatively little research has gone into the methodology of teaching in this regard, particularly concerning the field of TESOL, where students with learning differences still experience significant problems.

General thought and understanding insinuate that the majority of ADHD children do not require special educational services per se and therefore can receive competent education in general school settings. However, nearly all children with ADHD need specific adjustments and accommodations regarding the organization of their learning process in order to make it productive and successful.

Although sometimes unintentional, the lack of teachers' awareness or access to the know-how resources can result in their being unable to manage their ADHD students properly. This, in turn, leads to poor academic progress, as well as a variety of relationship issues and general stressful atmosphere in class. That is why it is imperative for teachers to understand such students' needs and how to address them

properly.

The focus of my paper is teaching English as a second language (ESL) to ADHD students, who, in spite of their circumstances, can be successful language learners, provided their educator's teaching style addresses their needs in an appropriate manner. The premise of this paper is that the specific ESL teaching processes that work effectively for such learners will benefit all students, thus creating a successful learning experience for all.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder has long been considered a Learning Disability called a Minimal Brain Dysfunction that results in the lack of concentration, impulsivity, restlessness and a way of processing information that is different from that of other learners. Recently, it has been classified as one of the *Learning Disorders (or Differences)* caused by a specific brain development.

Previously, such students were often considered to be lazy and unmotivated learners, in spite of their natural abilities, knowledge and creativity. Even today, many teachers, especially those who are not trained in working with ADHD students, have a hard time maintaining discipline and the attention of their pupils during a lesson.

Not all ADHD children are equally hyperactive and restless, yet most of them have a short attention span, are easily distracted and experience difficulties with focusing their attention on a required task. This, however, does not support the idea that such children are not able to pay attention to anything at all; in fact, their learning difference has its inception in paying attention to almost everything that surrounds them at the same time. Therefore, they often experience difficulties with staying focused and organized with one task at given moment.

Typically, an ADHD student is thus a socially impulsive person, one who often fails to control his own behavior and to follow teachers' or caretakers' instructions. It

is also very challenging for such a student to predict the consequences of his actions and finish his work, on time or at all. The student's productivity is inconsistent and often unpredictable. Poor judgment and planning abilities are the characteristics of an ADHD person as well. Children with ADHD are often self-conscious, painfully aware of their differences from the other kids, as is often displayed through their defensive behavior –either being disruptive and aggressive or silent and taciturn.

This paper will not go into all the symptoms that can help us identify a child affected by ADHD, as there are already numerous studies in many languages dedicated to this precise problem easily attainable via the Internet and in most libraries. The primary purpose of my paper is to help and encourage ESL and EFL teachers to identify the optimally effective ways of teaching English to such students that best cater to their needs. Learners with ADHD often receive psychological assistance and medication. However, without their teachers' understanding and awareness, such students often fail to succeed in the task of language learning.

As the statistics shows, about 5-10% of school-aged children experience learning and social functioning problems caused by ADHD in the US and around the world (Flick, 2010, p. 23). This in turn implies that there will be at least one or two ADHD students needing special teachers' assistance in every classroom, highlighting the necessity to devote close attention to this issue.

Despite the number of difficulties caused by the disorder, many characteristics of ADHD children, such as being spontaneous, enthusiastic, stimulating, creative and being 'the life of the party' can be considered advantageous as they are not necessarily found to the same extent in non-affected children. An ESL educator can hence find benefits in these characteristics and plan lessons accordingly, making the learning process more effective and exciting for all the students. For example, when involved

in interactive activities of high interest that demand creativity, a lot of movement and engagement, an ADHD student can demonstrate surprisingly focused attention, be productive and a very successful learner. Not only does the student experience success in the individual activity, but he also finds acknowledgment among his peers, gains confidence and inspires everyone with his energy and enthusiasm.

The research conducted and presented in this paper is based not only on a number of psychology and pedagogical studies dedicated to this issue; it is also based on my personal experience of working with ADHD kids at elementary and secondary schools in Russia. The first part of my thesis will focus on the specificity of the process of second language acquisition for ADHD students, where I will consider the language problems that such students often experience and the general strategies to handle them. In the second part I will illustrate how ESL methodology can be effective in teaching ADHD language learners. In the last chapter, I will consider some examples of activities that can be used in teaching vocabulary, grammar and discourse to the elementary and secondary school children with ADHD.

ADHD learning differences often shroud the affected children, parents, as well as teachers, in a cloak of frustration and even despair. In this paper I seek to lift off that societal veil, not only through a survey of the research done on ADHD, but also by drawing on my own experiences. Detailing a variety of activity examples, analyzing the major language acquisition problems that ADHD learners experience, and demonstrating different general teaching strategies and methodologies, the paper will hopefully prove beneficial to those who want to make sure all of their students experience successful language learning.

## SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: OBSTACLES FOR STUDENTS WITH ADHD

Learning a foreign language usually poses a problem for students with ADHD. As the statistics show, about 50 % of them have different speech and language disorders caused by a central nervous system dysfunction (Cantwell, 2006). Some recognize the root of the ADHD problem as an impairment or underdevelopment of the front lobe of the brain, which is responsible for the major language functions (Swanson, 2006). Some studies have shown that the language abilities of an ADHD child are affected by a deficit of working memory (Witton, 1998).

Whatever the medical underlying factors actually are, frequently the initial warning of language difficulty presents itself during the period in which a child with ADHD acquires his first language. Typically, both speech input and output are impaired, making the process of language acquisition rather challenging and confusing for such learners. Many of them have difficulty speaking, listening, reading and writing in their native language, struggles that usually carry over and have a negative impact on second language learning as well (Sparks, 1992).

In this chapter I will consider the characteristics of input and output speech issues for ADHD students, as well as such aspects of second language acquisition as motivation and learning styles, which are specific for children with ADHD and related to the ways they learn languages.

## **Language Input**

In the classroom, children with ADHD take in a great amount of information—they hear many different sounds, see a number of static and dynamic objects, colors, symbols and characters. In addition, their sensory receptors are constantly at work—they may unceasingly touch, fidget with whatever gets into their hands and attracts their attention. Too much information often creates a chaotic state in their brains, not because they see or hear more than other students do, but because they cannot resist this great number of distractions and process out the irrelevant information from that which is important. Their Language Acquisition Device (LAD) (a term suggested by Noam Chomsky (Chomsky, 2000) indicating that its primary function is to distill linguistic sounds from non-linguistic ones) seems to be affected due to their poor abilities to focus on the sounds in order to distinguish them.

According to Mapou, an ADHD person has “a weak span for auditory-verbal information” that causes problems with listening comprehension (Mapou, 2009). An ADHD child may start listening to what is being said but in a short period of time the concentration drifts away as if being attracted by something that presents more interest at that given moment. Even if an ADHD child is interested in a teacher’s speech and continues listening, he may often only be able to catch some unimportant (or slightly important for the general content) detail that grasps his attention. As a result, he starts to focus on the one smaller portion of what is taught without knowing or following the key-points and main ideas of the topic, naturally resulting in an unsatisfactory outcome.

However, if the input is enhanced, for example, if the key vocabulary or grammar phenomenon are presented in an interesting way and are reinforced several times, an ADHD child will be more likely to grasp the essential language material to

be learned. For even greater input enhancement, a multiple sourced input should be utilized, not the monotonous repetition of the language material.

As Stockman points out, “The acquisition of complex human skills, language included, is undoubtedly, a multisensory task, involving collaboration of all the senses” (Stockman, 2009). Thus, the more connections and attention stimuli are provided, the more likely an ADHD student will benefit from the lesson.

For instance, while getting acquainted with a new word, a child should hear the word, see its spelling and the picture representing its meaning, see and touch the object that this word denotes (when possible), get an idea of its function in a sentence, or ideally, in a real situation, with a number of examples.

In their book called “The Kinesthetic Classroom: Teaching and learning Through Movement”, Michael Kuczala and Traci Lengel suggest some general ideas to provide effective speech input in instruction (Kuczala, 2010, p. 18). I believe that these suggestions can be successfully applied to the fostering of the language learning process as well:

- Find a pattern
- Make connections
- Develop personal interest
- Associate it with prior experience
- Engage emotionally
- Practice it

From my teaching practice at the elementary level, I would often notice how an inattentive child suddenly spruced up his interest and started paying attention when I gave examples of some vocabulary that were related to the life experience of this very child, pointing directly at the student. For example, I would say, “Anton can

play basketball', "Rita can sing", "Anya can dance". Each child felt special to be spoken about and started to focus on what was going on. To establish such 'insider knowledge', not necessarily known by the class, I would talk to these children during the breaks or anytime I had a chance, in order to figure out what they were interested in and good at. As a rule, ADHD children often suffer from the lack of confidence and feel pleased when somebody acknowledges their interests and abilities. I believe that when doing this, we as teachers, provide these children with vital pedagogical and psychological support, creating an atmosphere of success and corroboration, which is so vital for such learners.

It is very important how an ESL teacher gives instructions to the class, having ADHD students present. The instructions should be simple, concrete and explicit. Before giving them, the teacher needs to have all of the students' attention. It is also helpful to accompany auditory directions with written instructions, careful to give one direction at a time. If the child still does not get to work, instructions should be quietly repeated to him. Even after that, in order to check for understanding, a teacher may need to ask the child to repeat the instructions and make sure it has been understood in full. ADHD youngsters may consistently misunderstand or not follow the given instructions for the fact that they simply were not paying attention to them.

When it comes to reading, an ADHD student may have frequent problems with skipping letters, words and even lines, confusing similar characters (or confusing their order), misunderstanding and misinterpreting the content of what is being read, missing the key points and main ideas. ADHD students have difficulties with understanding the meaning of polysemous words and figurative language. ADHD children are usually slow readers, because it takes them more time to process a written language due to their poor decoding skills.

In my experience, such children sometimes refuse to read when being called on, especially when they feared that the amount of reading was too much for them or if they sensed they might have trouble with it. Goldstein explains such behavior, the tendency of an ADHD person to avoid the task he believes will lead to failure, in his book “Clinicians' Guide to Adult ADHD: Assessment and Intervention” (Goldstein, 2002). They develop so-called “coping strategies” in order to procrastinate and avoid situations that may lead to mistakes and embarrassment. I often heard ADHD children saying: “I don't know how to read”, “I don't know how to study”, or “I will always be making mistakes anyways”. As Goldstein points out, “...a major feature of the mindset of many individuals with ADHD is their belief that they are not very competent, that they are destined to fail, and they do not control their own destiny.” (Goldstein, 2002, p. 136) As he theorizes further, if we simply leave ADHD people to their wishes in such a situation, it usually only provides them with a temporary relief lasting a few moments, but in general further contributes to their feeling of dissatisfaction with their abilities. Regret quickly replaces the respite, making them feel even more self-conscious and insecure in the end.

As an example from my experience, it is obvious that concentration on a difficult reading task for a longer period is an arduous undertaking for most ADHD learners. Hence I would normally ask my ADHD students to read only small parts of a text, often observing how they were actually able to accomplish the task with relative ease, finding an 'oasis' in knowing they had to read “only this small paragraph” and then have a short break when somebody else would continue reading. This confidence lowered their affective filter and the anxiety level, encouraging them to stay focused and continue working.

It should be kept in mind that the English language in particular presents a big

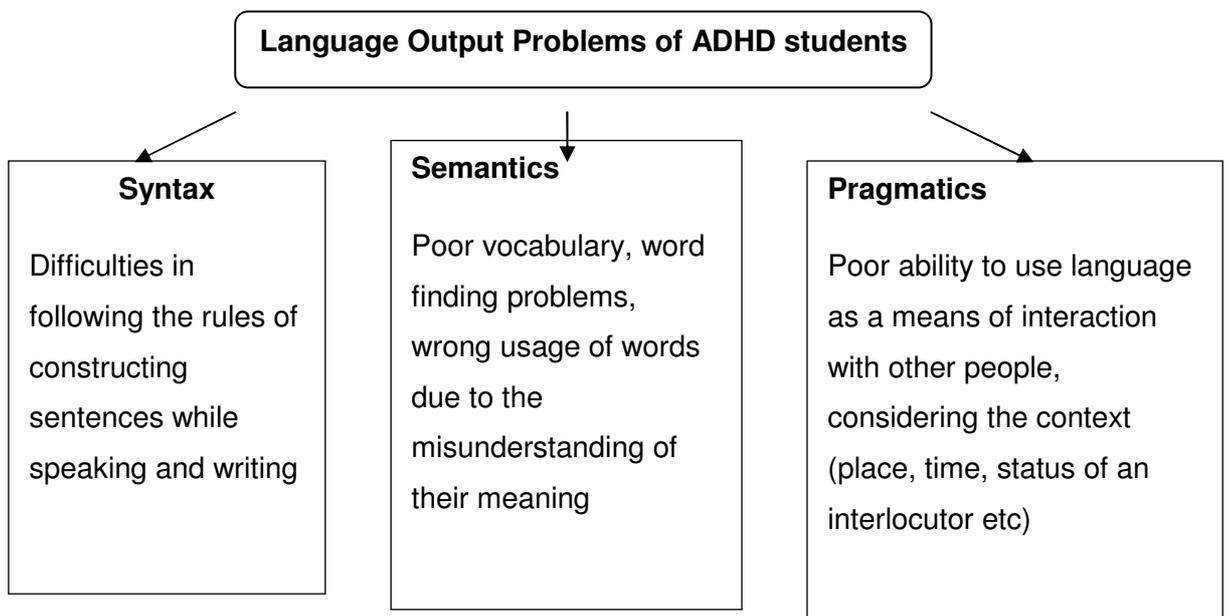
challenge in terms of reading for such learners. It is not an easy language to read. English has 22 letters and 44 different sounds representing them in oral speech. The same letters can be read differently depending on their surroundings (neighboring sounds and letters) and their position in a word. Not to mention how a great number of reading rules is accompanied by numerous exceptions.

When working with elementary school students I would also often observe my ADHD pupils having a hard time with some particular English characters (especially consonants “b”, “d”, “p”, “q”) much more frequently than the other children in class. They got easily confused when reading them, probably because these letters are quite similar in appearance to each other (and to some Russian Cyrillic characters as well). The basic language difficulty of differentiating the characters presented an additional challenge on top of the initial obstacle in their attention.

The acquisition of English reading skills can be a very complicated process for those students whose first language (like Russian, German or Italian) does not present such a variety of reading rules and exceptions. In these languages most letters represent only one sound each and you need only to read only what you see, character by character, without paying additional attention to any combinations of letters, their position in a word or a phrase etc. It may demand a whole paradigm shift in the students' mind when they start reading in a foreign language. It follows that when asked to read in English, the ADHD learners experience confusion and frustration to a greater extent than their unaffected peers and their reading performance repeatedly lags far beyond their teachers' normal expectations.

## Language Output

As mentioned previously in regards to speech output issues, ADHD students often encounter troubles with speaking and writing, both in their native and target languages. Typically, they experience language problems on the syntax, semantics and pragmatics levels. The main features of these problems are presented below:



The language output problems of ADHD children are caused by their input difficulties. Poor comprehension of language structures, word meanings and the role of context, slow speed processing of written and spoken language lead to derivative problems in the speech production of an ADHD student.

When listening to how an ADHD child speaks, one can feel a lot of emotions, excitement and sometimes frustration as they fail to express ideas in full. It is often hard to interrupt such a person, but at the same time they tend to interrupt an interlocutor now and again, blurting out answers before a question has been finished. One can also see a compensatory mechanism at work: a lot of gestures, movements and sounds that are to counterbalance for the lack of vocabulary and convey the

meaning of the ideas expressed. The speech of young ADHD children is often ungrammatical and produces many errors, compounded by the inability to stop as quickly as their normal peers in order to correct themselves (Renz, 2003).

While learning a foreign language, these symptoms (or characteristics) become even more severe, because the vocabulary and grammar knowledge of a foreign language is usually much more limited than the native tongue. Some of my ADHD students at the Russian schools often tended to switch to Russian when they could not recall or did not know the corresponding word(s) in English (even when encouraged several times not to do so). Being impulsive and having problems with self-regulation, yet still willing to respond, they were often unable to control their behavior and keep in mind the language restrictions.

In my teaching practice many times I observed situations when a child clearly had something to say, the verve of their desire palpable, seemingly having the answer on tip of their tongue, but momentarily unable to utter it due to the poor vocabulary or inability to recall a particular word. As a consequence, the children might often get either excited or frustrated (depending on the situation) and finally resign themselves to simply admit: "I don't know how to say it" or simply: "I don't know". In a situation as this, teachers may be tempted to jump to the conclusion that the child truly does not know the answer in the end, and instead of helping the student in this struggle they abandon him by choosing to call on somebody else.

It is also difficult for ADHD students to organize their thoughts logically and produce coherent utterances, especially when asked to explain or describe something in depth (answers consisting of more than one or two sentences, or involving the use of some complex linguistic material). ADHD students often speak louder than the other children, failing to modulate their voice volume. According to Rosemary

Tannock, this occurrence is related to “an immature motor system” that an ADHD person possesses (Tannock 2005).

As Tannock wrote further, “Pauses during continuous speech are believed to reflect the planning of forthcoming verbal output (what to say and how to articulate it)” (Tannock, 2005). That is why the speech of ADHD children often contains a lot of false starts, repetitions and ambiguous references.

I believe that it is imperative for a teacher to always give such a child an additional time. Appearing understanding, patient and unhurried in seeking the response, perhaps counting to themselves to at least 15, all in order to allow every opportunity for the student to get ready for answer when being called on, thereafter to scaffold or have another student give some prompts. Naturally, this word-finding problem may also occur with a child or even an adult who does not have ADHD, but for some reason ADHD children experience this difficulty much more readily.

Writing, as one of the key language acquisition issues, in all likelihood presents one of the biggest learning challenges for students with ADHD. Due to the affected input, many of them end up writing in the same manner as they read or hear – that is, how they perceive and process speech and written information. They make similar mistakes in writing as they do in reading: skipping letters and words, writing down what they hear while unable to comprehend and utilize grammar and spelling rules, often resulting in the omission of chunks of information.

Writing is a productive skill, symbiotic to the way in which oral utterances are produced (speaking). Again, we can find a lot of similarities and connections between these two language skills – ADHD students write very comparably to the way they speak: containing a lot of “false starts”, starting to write a letter in a wrong manner, or the whole word with a wrong letter at the beginning. Their sentences are usually short

and incoherent because of the tendency to take a lot of breaks when writing and their thoughts drifting as if all over the place.

All these factors often turn writing into a very frustrating experience for such learners, not because they produce more errors as they do in reading, listening or speaking, but because here they can be a direct witness to their own poor performance. This unfortunately coincides with an important area by which they often are assessed, in accordance with the academic system of most schools.

From my experience, when an ADHD student sees the evidence of his unsuccessful learning in the written work, it often changes his attitude to the language learning process drastically. It becomes strongly negative with the child refusing and avoiding writing wherever possible. To avoid such discouragement, one of the things that an ESL (EFL) teacher can try in this situation is to attempt to change the child's attitude first, praising the student for even the smallest success in his writing, and developing an alternative grade system. For example, an educator may provide written works with a feedback instead of giving particular grades, especially at the very beginning of the course. When giving the feedback, it is important to effusively highlight the strong points of the work before bringing up its drawbacks and errors.

I often employed an activity with my Elementary School learners when, after a written task, I asked them to take a minute and highlight or underline letters or words that they liked best in their composition. Interestingly, some ADHD children appeared to be very critical of themselves, and did not underline some letters or words that were not good enough in their opinion. I frequently came over saying: "Look, this one is also good, why don't you underline it too?" Some of them were still persistent in their negative opinion and dismissive by comments like: "No, I don't like this one. It's a bit bigger or smaller than it should be". Nevertheless, I perceived how they appreciated

the fact that their teacher still liked it.

I would follow up this positive seeking exercise by focusing on the mistakes that might have been made, such as: “Now look at the letters (or words) and pick two or three that you think you can make better”. “Now underline or highlight them”. “Now go to the empty line below and try to write these words better this time”.

I believe that it helped my students in developing an awareness of their own performance and contributed to the general atmosphere of success in my classes, which is especially crucial for ADHD learners. I believe that awareness is one of the key issues of Teaching English as a Second Language, and a lot of attention should be drawn to its development as far as the second language acquisition is concerned. (For more examples of activities see Chapter 3).

Development of writing skills is essential for ESL learners, forming an important bridging part of their second language learning. It is also an integral part of most school curricula, and for an English teacher it is hardly possible to omit this element, in spite of a number of children, especially those ones affected by Learning Disorders, who keep struggling with this around the world.

As is apparent by the above, all four language skills often present a variety of challenges for such students. Regardless of that issue, it is usually necessary for Elementary and Secondary school ESL and EFL learners to focus on all of them in order to make the SLA process successful.

Due to these factors, we, as English teachers cannot devote much longer to a work on some particular skills while relatively ignoring or leaving others out in our attempt to adjust to some of our students’ abilities (or disabilities). But what we can actively attempt is to explore our students learning preferences related to their individual ways of learning, defining what skills they are good at in order to support

their weaker aspects. This brings us to the issue of learning styles which I am going to elaborate on in the next few paragraphs.

## Learning Styles

In order to understand how to support the learning path of an ADHD individual, it is very helpful to determine his learning style. In her article “Language Disorders and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder” Philippa Greathead suggests the following characteristics that may help to identify them:

<b>1. Visual learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learn best by looking, watching and observing</li><li>• Want to see how things are done</li><li>• Enjoy poster, visual overhead, colors</li><li>• Learn well from videos</li><li>• Doodle and draw</li><li>• Work well with information mapping systems (e.g. Mind-Maps)</li><li>• Picture well (visualize) inside their heads</li></ul>
<b>2. Auditory learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learn well by listening and communicating with others</li><li>• Learn well from audio recordings</li><li>• Have good auditory discrimination for sounds</li></ul>
<b>3. Print-oriented learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read to learn and for pleasure</li><li>• Have good reading comprehension</li><li>• Write well and write for pleasure</li></ul>
<b>4. Interactive learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learn well by interacting with others</li><li>• Learn from discussion and dialogue</li><li>• Group work and cooperative learning</li><li>• Have an ability to lead, follow and be flexible socially</li></ul>
<b>5. Kinesthetic learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use their hands and whole bodies to learn</li><li>• Create things, make things, put things apart and rebuild them</li></ul>

It is apparent that ADHD students belong mostly to the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> types.

Due to their poor auditory and reading comprehension skills, they are less likely to

enjoy learning from books or lectures. They also may have frequent problems interacting with their peers due to their tendency to be easily distracted and inability to sustain a goal.

However, they are usually good kinesthetic learners. Moving around when learning is crucial for such students. They need to move almost all the time due to their hyperactive and restless nature. But the difference between the child fidgeting or squirming in their seat and a planned physical activity is that the latter is a movement with purpose. An ADHD brain starts paying attention to a certain goal to be achieved as a result of the movement and is able to sustain this attention for quite a long time. It has been proven by scientists that physical movement and brain activities are interconnected (Kuczala, 2010). It has also been discovered that physical exercise facilitates the learning process by stimulating the growth of brain cells (Kuczala, 2010), and especially vital for ADHD students, it creates positive emotions and helps them to stay focused.

Usually ADHD students enjoy playing games (especially those in which they are asked to move a lot) even more than their other peers. It gives them a chance to release their hyperactivity, take a break from the learning routine and even stay focused on their learning goal much longer. Games also help to improve their interactive skills, fostering communication and cooperation. (The examples of games and activities developed for teaching English to ADHD learners will be given below, in Chapter 3).

Most of students with ADHD are also good visual learners, due to the fact that visually attractive material immediately grabs their attention. That is why the use of different kinds of visual aids (pictures, posters, flashcards, mind-maps, videos, objects, etc.) can be very effective in teaching English to ADHD students. However,

there should not be too many of these visual aids and it is better to avoid ones containing a number of small details - unless it is necessary for some learning goal.

Philippa Greathead, in her article, “Language Disorders and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder” states, that one of the biggest learning problems ADHD children have is that they are unaware of their own learning styles. They do not develop their own learning strategies, therefore leaving it up to the teacher to pay attention the students’ strengths and determine which learning styles are complementary in order to help them study better.

## **Motivation**

One of the most frequent conclusions that many teachers tend to make when challenged by the presence of ADHD students in their classroom, is that these students do not study well because they are not motivated enough. I often witnessed both senior and younger teachers conducting parent conferences and/or conversations with the students themselves, bringing up the topic of the pupils' low motivation, searching for possible ways to increase it. Teachers also often lectured on the role of education in a general context of life, asking the students if they want to ruin theirs by failing to enter a college or citing other possible failures. As a rule, such drastic measures had little or no effect on ADHD students' learning successes, as they are already aware of such information lying heavily on their hearts.

At one of the workshops dedicated to teaching foreign languages at SIT Graduate Institute (the Silent Way Workshop) I had an opportunity to pose a question concerning motivational problems to Shakti Gattegno, a President of Educational Solutions organization and one of the founders of the Silent Way method in teaching. I asked: "What can we do, as ESL and EFL teachers, to solve the problem of motivation for some of our students who do not want to learn foreign languages, especially in such countries like Russia, where in most areas students will never get a chance to apply English in a real communication outside their classroom?" She replied: "Do not try to solve global problems. Engage the moment. Try to make your lessons interesting and your students will want to learn English".

I believe this statement to be highly applicable, and I hold it dearly in my principles, especially when dealing with an ADHD learner who has a poor ability to

sustain even a short-term goal. It can be even more applicable when thinking about goals such as college and learning in a life context. Long-term goals often mean very little to a child with ADHD, as he does not see the immediate connection of his current reality with the posed distant future situation. But if the teaching style of an ESL/EFL educator is engaging, stimulating and captivates the interest of the learner, there will be almost no need to ponder solving the problems of motivation.

In this regard some general educational methodology that can be helpful in enhancing an ESL/EFL teaching process will be discussed in the next chapter.

“Methods and approaches in teaching English to children with ADHD”.

## METHODS AND APPROACHES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO CHILDREN WITH ADHD

Modern ESL (EFL) methodology is characterized by a great variety of different methods and approaches developed for teaching English both to children and adults. Most of them are universal (Communicative Language Teaching, Content-Based Instruction, Task Based Language Teaching, The Silent Way, etc), though some are oriented to suit a particular type of learners and learning goals (ESP - English for Specific Purposes).

It is my current opinion that for teaching English to ADHD children no separate method or approach need to be developed per se, since the ESL (EFL) methodology already has a rich variety of feasible tools which can be successfully applied in teaching English to students with these learning differences. The problem of successful implementation lies in making a choice of those pedagogical and methodological means that can be most efficient in addressing ADHD needs and learning preferences.

Currently, considering the specifics of the Second Language Acquisition for ADHD learners described in the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter of this paper, I have settled on selecting the following general approaches and methods for my EFL teaching: TPR –Total Physical Response, The Silent Way and the Task-Based Language Teaching. Understandably, I expect this list to grow and expand in the course of my further exploring the ADHD field and the associated ESL methodology.

In my teaching practice, I opt to not single out any method or approach in particular, but to use a combination of methods, whereby a proportion of each flexibly

depends on the teaching and learning circumstances, such as the learning goal, language material to be covered, students' interest etc. This chapter will focus in detail on the methods and approaches that are enumerated above and the rationale of my choice, grounded both on personal research in the fields of ESL (EFL) and ADHD, and my EFL teaching experience.

### **Total Physical Response**

The Total Physical Response Method developed by Dr. James J. Asher, a professor of psychology at San José State University, California, has its roots in the coordination of speech and action where, according to this approach, language learning is facilitated by physical (motor) activity (Richards, 2001). Asher defines this process as “a body-language conversation” when a teacher speaks and a student “answers with a physical response such as looking, smiling, laughing, turning, walking, reaching, grasping, holding, sitting, running and so forth” (Cook, 2001).

Asher finds the Second Language Acquisition process similar to the child’s First Language acquisition, where communication between a parent or a care-taker and a child consists predominantly of commands to which the child responds physically before beginning to retort verbally (Richards, 2001).

I believe acceptance of this method yields many advantages in teaching foreign languages to ADHD students. Grounded on physical activities, it addresses ADHD learners’ need for action, reduces stress and lowers affective filter. When learning languages by this method, ADHD students who usually find themselves in a disadvantaged position based on a traditional school setting, often start experiencing sudden success, inspiring them in their language learning experience. While focusing on action, the learner also, possibly unconsciously, focuses on the learning goal as well.

Although unaware of this teaching method, I applied the main TPR principles with Elementary School students intuitively rather than consciously during my teaching experience in Russian schools. The educational settings there offer little

exposure to this type of approach. Traditional teaching methods are still ingrained in the Russian educational system, with many Western methodologies not being included or mentioned in teachers' training programs. Hence I did not have an opportunity to familiarize with the actual theory of the TPR method till I began to take ESL Teacher Training courses at the SIT Graduate Institute in Vermont. I also had a chance to test out its principles, first, in a peer-teaching experience class and later on during my internship at a Riverside Language Program (English school for immigrants) in New-York City.

When teaching English to Elementary School students in Russia, simply integrated some physical activities into my lesson plans, driven by the awareness which came from the experience and observations that “small children need to move a lot” and it is very difficult (especially for some of them) to remain seated and keep quiet for a long time.

I would teach my students some simple verbs such as: sit, stand, run, jump, swim, fly, read, write, smile, laugh, etc; acting out each word and verbalizing it at the same time. I also asked the students to repeat both the word and the action after me. It was usually a fun activity to do, with lots of laughter, excitement and moving around. During some lessons I would also use an activity which is similar to “Simon says” (that many teachers are well familiar with) and which will be described in the next chapter.

Gradually it dawned on me that students who normally experienced difficulties with paying attention felt much more comfortable when they learned English while undertaking some physical tasks, rather than working on the same language material from a blackboard or textbooks. I also noticed that their peers, who did not have ADHD, also enjoyed the process of moving around, acting out and

making faces while learning English at the same time. In these situations, the hyperactivity of particular children did not stand out that much; moreover, it was actually welcomed and encouraged. Everyone was in the same boat, regardless of his or her learning differences and abilities (or disabilities); no one was put on the spot as all children in the classroom had to follow the same instruction and were doing the same activity at the same time.

An additional benefit of these activities was how these children also tended to remember the language material for a longer period of time. Jensen explains this phenomenon by a physiological factor: “the body remembers as well as the mind” when involved in a hands-on experience (Jensen, 2008, p.105). An association of a word or a phrase with some physical movement provided additional connections in their brain.

I would also call on my ADHD pupils after a sufficient practice of the target vocabulary, and ask them to test other classmates. These children were to act out the learned vocabulary while the other students had the task to shout out the word they meant. This provided an extra opportunity to move and release their hyperactivity, and at the same time, provided an additional language input practice (the majority of the children answered correctly). To participate was not at all difficult for the ADHD children due to the sense of no perceived pressure, as no language output was expected of them. This exercise would assume a standard role in my class structures, with two or three children delegated this task during a vocabulary review.

According to the classical TPR method, beginner students can only be exposed to the target language words and structures when listening, comprehending and responding to them physically. Only after a certain number of hours of language learning they can attempt verbalizing and are supposed to start speaking

spontaneously only when they feel they are ready for it (Richards, 2001). However, in my teaching practice I would ask my students to pronounce the words at the same time as they had to act them out, starting from the very first lesson. I believe that when students have little exposure to the target language (for example only 2 hours of English per week set under curriculum guidelines as it was in my case), it is imperative to have the students produce language structures every time they are undertaking a corresponding physical activity. Under such time limited circumstances, the input-only approach unfortunately simply does not produce expected results.

When dealing with Elementary School children I tried to introduce no more than 5-7 new lexical items per lesson and always revised them during the following lesson as well. I believe that the constant recycling of language material is important for a successful language learning path, that is why an ESL teacher should always provide his or her students with a lot of language practice (but not monotonous predictable repetitions).

The other advantage of the TPR method is that it normally requires no translation. All the vocabulary needed to be learned is presented via actions, real objects or pictures. Since ADHD children are mostly visual learners, this is more beneficial for their second language learning than translating words directly from their first language into the target one and vice versa. Students can see what each vocabulary item represents and associate it with a particular object, action or an attribute, but not with the corresponding word in their native language, which also makes their Second Language acquisition more natural, similar to the process of their First Language acquisition.

Another beneficial quality of TPR is that the grammar of the target language is taught implicitly. As it has already been mentioned, ADHD children are characterized by poor analytical skills and it is normally easier for them to perceive grammar structures and internalize them intuitively. The human brain in general is better at memorizing whole patterns and chunks of information rather than some isolated items. Before starting to manipulate nouns, verbs and adjectives in a sentence; children are able to internalize a considerable amount of phrases, words and even whole sentences, using them in oral speech as ready-made units.

In general, the TPR method makes the language learning process enjoyable and satisfying, but it is important not to overuse this method in one's teaching practice. ADHD children are easily attracted by a novelty, but on the flip side can also quickly tire if similar activities are repeated often. Experience has taught me that blended with a combination of other language teaching methods, the TPR approach plays a key role in progressing ADHD students, while also serving well as a warm-up or a break between other activities during a lesson.

## **The Silent Way**

The Silent Way method was founded by Galeb Gattegno in the early 70s as an educational theory based on the cognitive principles of the learning process. A considerable amount of his work is dedicated to the problems of language acquisition where he regards language as “a substitute for experience” (Gattegno, 1972, p.8) pointing out that the second language learner “cannot learn another language in the same way because of what he now knows” (Gattegno, 1972, p.11).

Gattegno finds it imperative for a learner to mobilize his or her inner abilities, figuring out its meanings and functions inductively, with the teacher only providing enough of language materials and visual prompts in order to stimulate the students’ autonomous learning. The teacher remains silent most of the time thus giving the students enough space to contemplate their own language practice abilities. He believes that in silence students are able to concentrate on the task and its accomplishment much better (Gattegno, 1972). The teacher also facilitates students’ self-correction and helps them to develop awareness of their own learning. Some teachers might find it daunting to use the Silent Way in teaching languages to ADHD students, but I think that in this approach lie a number of advantages in comparison with many traditional methods used in TESOL.

Foremost, it is based on visual and experiential (hands-on) learning. It deviates from the standard practice by requiring no textbooks, with the teaching tools consisting of a set of colored rods (Cuisenaire rods), a Sound/Color Wall Chart, Word Wall Charts, pictures and a pointer. A teacher uses these visuals to teach grammar,

vocabulary and pronunciation. When learning pronunciation, children associate a certain color from the Sound Chart with a particular English sound which is usually easier for visual learners to grasp than making a distinction and a connection between a letter and the transcription character it represents. I urge for the ESL (EFL) teachers focusing on particular sounds to cover the rest of the chart symbols with post-it notes or something similar, so that the students cannot see all the sounds on the chart at the same time. I speculate that it can be a challenge for an ADHD child to openly visualize so many colored figures while trying to focus their attention only on a selected few. When I was observing my senior colleagues' teaching at Riverside, I often witnessed ADHD adult learners experiencing this problem. They seemed to be paying attention to particular colors for a certain period of time and made good inroads by following their teacher's instruction, only to suddenly stop in their progress and complain that there were too many colors on the chart making them confused. Since adult and child ADHD students can be closely compared in their levels of attention deficit, it can be assumed that it will also perplex the younger ADHD learners.

When "hiding" some sounds (or words, if a word chart is being used) deliberately, students' curiosity is provoked. They start waiting for some new color (or word) to be opened to them as a new sound or a vocabulary item, making their attention more focused. It is essential to introduce only a small number of sounds and words each time, else the ADHD mind will be confused EASILY and start to wander off the topic.

Transcription characters can be introduced later in their association with the Color Chart, if they are integrated into the school curriculum and their knowledge is considered essential to the particular educational standards.

When learning Grammar and Vocabulary, students physically manipulate the colored rods, making the target language more tangible for them (rods representing sounds or words and their special organization – particular grammar phenomena). It is crucial for ADHD learners and their second language acquisition to be able to “see” and “touch” the language, as well as operate with its elements physically. Again, care should be taken to not give students too many rods at the same time, only those needed for the immediate activity. It is also vital to model the activity first and only then give the rods to the children. Otherwise, kids may simply start playing with the rods and not pay attention to their teacher’s silent instructions.

Another advantage of this method is that the grammar of the target language is learned inductively. Students do not have to memorize particular grammar rules which to try and apply in their written or oral speech afterward, a task often difficult for ADHD learners. Instead, they need to figure out from a number of explicit examples how the language laws function and attempt to produce similar grammar structures. (Some examples of the Silent Way activities on teaching vocabulary and pronunciation will be given in Chapter 3).

The Silent Way method stimulates self-awareness and self-correction, the essential skills that most ADHD students lack in their learning arsenal. In everyday surroundings it is hard for them to monitor their output, even if aware how to complete the task correctly. They seldom stop to use this knowledge as normal students might, too many times acting impulsively and in haste.

SW makes the self-correction visual and tangible (and so, easier and more manageable for ADHD learners) with only physical objects – rods, colored charts and hands (fingers) used for this purpose. A SW teacher does not have to correct students’ grammar or pronunciation by highlighting what the errors were. Instead, he/she may

point to a particular color on the Sound Chart, or to a rod (symbolizing a word, sound or a morpheme) which poses the problem in the utterance, encouraging learners to correct the mistakes themselves. If the student is still confused and does not locate the error, a teacher may opt to use other learners as a resource, engaging their help with the student repeating the correct version as a follow-up. This helps to develop learners' attention, cooperation and awareness, which is beneficial for all students in the classroom and vital for those with ADHD.

In closing, my suggestion for using the Silent Way approach coincides with the previous chapters' method of employing it in a combination with others, and to attentively monitor its potential overuse as too much concentration can be very tiring and frustrating for ADHD learners. Some students may also require greater language input in their learning since SW does not provide almost any. The Silent Way method works well with teaching primarily grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation dealing with artificial language situations. As for the discourse aspects, differing teaching methods that foster more natural communication can be used instead, as subjected bellow.

## **Task-Based Language Teaching**

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is considered a part and a logical development of the Communicative Approach to teaching languages. The main premise of this method is founded on a theory that foreign language acquisition can result from a purposeful non-linguistic activity (or a task). The language knowledge gained is a by-product of a meaningful real communication. Tasks are the main vehicles of this method (Richards, 2001), shifting the focus of language learning from the form of the language to the practical use of it. “Learning by doing” or experiential learning of this methodology helps to keep students engaged in pursuing a particular goal. They acquire the target language derivatively when completing tasks at first glance unrelated to the language learning goal.

When answering the question “What did you learn today? What can you say in English now?” a student who learned English via TBLT may respond: “I have learned how to speak about my family in English” or “I can ask for directions and shop in a supermarket if I visit an English speaking country”, instead of saying, for instance: “Now I can make sentences using Present Progressive”.

According to Krashen, the human brain acquires languages subconsciously when focused on something else. This subconscious acquisition fosters productive language skills such as speaking and writing. Everything that is learned consciously helps only to monitor the speech accuracy, not being involved in its immediate production (Krashen, 2002).

For ADHD students this method presents certain advantages in comparison with more conventional language instructions. The key asset of TBLT is providing a hands-on learning experience which keeps the pupils engaged and focused on the task. The teacher does not instruct the class to study a grammar rule and follows up with numerous practice exercises; instead, learners are strategically placed in situations where they have to learn the target words, phrases or grammar in order to accomplish a suggested task. Specific grammar structures or vocabulary items are being taught not simply because “they have them in English”, but because their knowledge is necessary in particular real-life situations. It makes the ADHD brain focus on a goal which is not linguistic in itself, deviating its attention from primarily language issues, the direct learning of which can be challenging for such students. As Nunan points out, this method “shifts our perspective on learning process from knowing *that* to knowing *how*” (Nunan, 2004, p.24).

As Nunan proclaims further, TBLT “promotes intrinsic, rather than extrinsic motivation” which encourages students to learn the language subconsciously. For ADHD students it is easier to focus on an immediate goal rather than some distant complex prospect. In the end the pupils learn English not due to its status as 'the international language' or 'important for educated people', but because the task suggested and planned by the teacher was fun and pleasure to attempt and carry out.

When teaching English to Elementary School children in Russia, I sought to apply a variety of different interactive tasks in my classes, and often presented these to the students as games. I separated them into groups of three or four (I normally had no more than 15 students in one class), with each team set a differing undertaking. The results of their groups' work contributed to a completion of a bigger task that was given prior to the whole class. I purposely teamed up students with attention deficit to

peers who matched their level of English, often setting the group a less complex task based on my judgment as to what they were able to accomplish. I was careful to monitor and exert additional control of these groups while providing extra help when required. I encouraged them to negotiate a strategy in their work, since ADHD children often experience problems in planning their activity. I would ask: “Ok, what is your job here? What do you need to do? What are you going to do first? What are you going to do next?” etc. Whenever possible, I avoided placing two hyperactive students in one group.

It was satisfying to see how a successful contribution to the common task impacted the attitudes of affected children to learning English at large, making it a positive and rewarding experience for all.

It is also helpful to give students the opportunity to reflect on their experience, what they have learned and how they were feeling about it. When prompting them to think about their own learning, it is important to ask concrete questions such as:

- What was difficult for you in this task?
- What was easy?
- What did you learn from it?
- What did you do well?
- What do you think you can try to do better next time?

It helps students to analyze their learning strategies, to contemplate what they can do in order to improve them (or maybe develop some different ones), what they should focus on more in order to succeed next time.

ADHD students characteristically exhibit problems with personal relationships, making it imperative for a TBLT teacher to group the children accordingly. Based on experience, it is important for the teacher to be aware how

these children communicate with their peers, to prevent potential conflicts when forming the groups for lesson tasks.

The method used by the teacher to organize the space is also crucial. The groups should be placed as far from each other as the classroom space allows, to minimize interference from each others' activities. Hyperactive children should be seated closer to the front of the classroom with the closest proximity to the teacher. Never put ADHD children at the back as some teachers are tempted to do (so to not disturb the rest of the class). Sitting at a distance offers ADHD students too many distractions and opportunities to act out and they normally make use of this.

Whatever method or activity applied in language teaching, the teacher needs to be aware of the following:

- Why you are applying it in your lesson
- What is beneficial in it for your students
- How it addresses the needs of all your students
- What will be the follow-up of the activity or a technique
- What learning strategies your students need to develop in order to accomplish the task
- How explicit and clear your instructions are
- How you are going to scaffold, if your assistance is needed
- How your are going to carry out error corrections

Concluding this chapter I would like to highlight the purpose of using a variety of non-traditional methods to their full extent when teaching English to ADHD students. These methods should not be carried out for the sake of variety per se, but to successfully address different learning styles and preferences in depth.

## GRAMMAR, VOCABULARY AND DISCOURSE ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING ENGLISH TO CHILDREN WITH ADHD

While the previous chapters form the backbone of my teaching strategies when ADHD students are involved, here I would like to consider a few examples how the above discussed methodology can be implemented. One can also find a plethora of other interactive activities easily accessed via textbooks and the Internet; however, most of these activities require adaptation by teachers to the needs of the children with learning disabilities. These adaptations do not pose an insurmountable task if the teacher stays aware of the difficulties that students may experience in their learning paths and is eager to address them.

I have also found it very helpful and resourceful to look for class activity ideas not only in books or websites dedicated to TESOL issues, but also in the resources that suggest games and activities (not necessarily related to language learning) designated exclusively for ADHD students. In their core these are usually fun, visual, interactive, and can be successfully adapted to the language teaching environment as well.

## **Vocabulary activities**

### **1. *Action Verbs* – based on the TPR method.**

This exercise gives a great outlet to my students while teaching directly or revising, but at the risk of their energy getting out of hand. It is important to factor the mood of the class into the task procedure, but the benefits of a controlled lesson should be evident in students overall progress.

- Teach a short list of verbs (jump, run, smile, jump, swim, fly etc), presenting each verb with a corresponding action or gesture. (Students stand around in a circle and repeat the words and the actions after the teacher). Do it several times.

- Teach or review the names of three to five animals with the help of pictures and (or) gestures.

- Divide students into four or three groups.

- Give each group a name, e.g. “Tigers”, “Elephants”, “Cats”, “Bears”

- Give commands to the groups randomly, e.g. “Tigers, jump!”,

“Elephants, run”, “Bears, say: ROOOAAAAAAR!”, “Cats say: MEEEW!” etc.

Children perform a corresponding action and repeat the utterances after the teacher.

- Gradually increase the tempo of your commands. The game usually gets a little bit wild at the end which makes it even more fun for the children, but the teacher needs to be aware and notice that moment approaching, bringing the activity to an end soon afterward.

This activity is usually very dynamic; children are to move around a lot while practicing the new vocabulary. In that lies the importance for ADHD kids learning, as

they focus their attention on both the actions and the words, many enjoy shouting them out, energy overflowing. If the groups are not very big, you can have each student give one command to the group he or she belongs to, and perform it altogether. As a follow up, teach your students to correctly answer questions as: “What can tigers do?”, “What can bears do?” and the like. Students generate answers along the lines of: “Tigers can jump”, “Bears can run” etc.

To give them further practice, have the students seated in a circle with you. Then start clapping, not very fast, but with a particular rhythm. Let the students clap with you and then start speaking as if chanting. Students repeat after you.

T: What can tigers do?

Ss: What can tigers do?

T: Tigers can jump.

Ss: Tigers can jump.

T: (asking the student- next to him (her)): What can bears do?

Ss (all): What can bears do?

S1: Bears can swim.

Ss (all): Bears can swim.

S1: What can cats do? (to some other student sitting next to him (her)).

Ss: What can cats do?

S2: Cats can run.

Ss: Cats can run (and so on).

Students keep generating sentences and clapping till everyone in the circle has finished. From my experience, ADHD children, being kinesthetic learners, react well to a rhythm and are easily motivated to participate. However, it is important not to start the speaking part of the activity with these students as leads; it normally takes

them a little more time in comparison to the other students to properly understand what needs to be done in such tasks.

## 2. **“Simon Says” – Vocabulary Review (based on the TPR method)**

The famous game “Simon Says” works surprisingly well with the English teaching repertoire. This activity is fun and based on sustaining participant’s attention. It consists of a series of commands which students are to follow only if the command is preceded by the words “Simon says”. As an example from my class:

- Have all students stand in a circle.
- Teacher prompt: “Simon says jump”. “Simon says run”. “Sit!” (In general, students who have problems with attention deficit are likely to follow the last ‘incorrect’ command also. But gradually they re-adjust and start paying closer attention to what their teacher says.)
- Ask different students take turn leading the games.

## 3. **“Chase The Fly Away!” (Vocabulary Review)-based on the TPR method.**

This exercise is also fun, and the teacher's enthusiasm can be very infective on students’ participation level.

- Have your students seated.
- Ask them to close their eyes and imagine that they have a fly over their head. (Produce a buzzing noise to make it more realistic)
- Tell them the fly is very annoying and how it will try to sit on them all the time. They should chase it away with a hand, but only when the teacher informs where the fly is. But they should not open their eyes.

- Teacher makes a strong buzzing sound and then suddenly stops to say: “The fly is on your nose!” “The fly is on your arm!” “The fly is on your leg!” etc.

- Students try to chase the fly away from the corresponding body parts.

This activity forces students to concentrate on their teacher's commands.

Moreover, with their eyes closed, they are not distracted visually. They cannot see the other pupils to judge who fails to perform the task, while the teacher can easily tell who needs more help with the vocabulary review and which vocabulary items are to be reinforced.

## **Grammar activities**

### **1. “Family members” (grammar and vocabulary activity) - based on The Silent Way Method.**

For this activity you need a set of rods, a Sound Chart, a Word Chart and your big family picture with parents, children and grandparents.

- Start with sounds. Teach your students 4 new sounds that are in the phrase “This is” or review the structure and the sounds if they are already familiar with them with the help of the sound chart.
- Point to the corresponding sound and say it only once, emphasizing the articulation.
- Have all students repeat the sound after you. Use students who pronounce the sounds best as your recourses. If a student has troubles with pronunciation, point to a learner who did it successfully as a command to demonstrate the sound for the class. Then go back to the first student and seek to have the sound repeated till it improves. Show your appreciation of the learners’ success with a nod or some other silent gesture.
- Teach all the 4 sounds in the same way.
- Elicit the words “This” and “is” from the students, pointing at the corresponding sounds on the chart. Have students practice it.
- Point at yourself and say your name. Exclaim: “This is Natalia” with the help of the sound chart and a gesture (students should be already familiar with the Phrase “My name is”, so as not to confuse here).

- Point at some other students and state: “This is Tanya”, “This is Misha” and so on. Have the students practice this for a while.
- When ADHD students are involved I would often shift activities this point, by doing some TPR activity using the same structure and the already known vocabulary, e.g. “This is a tiger. Tigers can jump” (see similar activities above). Have students move around.
- When students are back in their seats, point to yourself and repeat again: “This is Natalia”. Then sequence the same gesture to say: “This is I (me)”.
- Have all students point at themselves and repeat the same phrase until you see they have internalized it.
- Choose a medium or small size rod of any color; show it to the students and say: “This is me”. Have each student select a rod of their liking and practice “This is me” again.
- Take another rod and say: “This is my Mom (Mother)”. Students should be already familiar with the word “my” from the phrase: “My name is”. Point to the picture of your family and repeat the phrase: “This is my Mom” and ensure the content understanding. Let the children choose rods representing their moms, dads, and other members of the family and teach the rest of vocabulary in the same way.
- Do not attempt to teach too many words at a time, depending on where progress of the class lies and the target goals, initially teaching basics like “Mom, Dad, Sister and Brother” will probably suffice with 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. Have them practice the utterances while working in pairs.
- During the following lessons you may continue with the rest of the Family Members vocabulary, gradually adding new grammar, e.g: “You have, he has, she has” and so on. Part of a homework task can involve students bringing their own

family pictures and talking about them, or/and draw a picture of some animal's family with a view of describing it to the other students.

- Recycle the learned language material during every class and to plan new lessons based on the progress made.

## **2 Getting Words Together (A Task-Based Activity)**

The following activity can be applied to review both grammar structures and vocabulary. It is usually short and can be used as a warm-up or a break between other language activities.

This activity needs some preparation:

- Select two sentences from the previous lessons containing vocabulary and grammar you want to review.
  - Write the sentences on a piece of paper with large letters.
  - Cut the sentences into separate words.
  - Mark each word from the first sentence with a big colored dot next to it. (one color for all the words)
- Do the same thing with the second sentence, marking each word with a dot of a different color.
  - Cut each word into 2 parts.
  - In class, hand the sheets of paper out (you can also use index cards instead for this activity).
- Have your students mingle and find their partners so that they could make up the words.
- When everyone is done, ask each couple read their word aloud. Make sure they read it correctly.

- Ask students to pay attention to the colored dots on their cards. Have them separated into 2 groups according to their dots' color.
- Ask students to make sentences from these words and when they are ready, to stand in the correct word order holding their words. Every couple reads their word, and another group checks if the sentence is correct.

### **3.Rod Battleship. Prepositions Review. (Based on the TBI).**

This activity is similar to a regular battleship game. Students, working in pairs, should not see what each of them is doing. One student constructs a 3D picture with the help of the rods (on his or her side of the desk). Both of them have the same set of rods.

- As the first student takes each rod and makes a rod picture, he or she gives directions to the partner so that he (she) could build an identical picture. For instance: "Take the green rod. Put it on the desk. Take the red rod. Put it on top of the green rod (one). Take the blue rod. Put it to the left of the green rod." And so on.
- When the picture is built, students compare the results.
- After that, they change roles.

This activity is visual and requires paying attention to the instructions. That is why I recommend not to put two ADHD children to work as partners, they will not benefit from it. It is also important not to give more than 10 rods to each student. ADHD children may get easily tired or distracted, especially if they attempt to concentrate their attention for a long time.

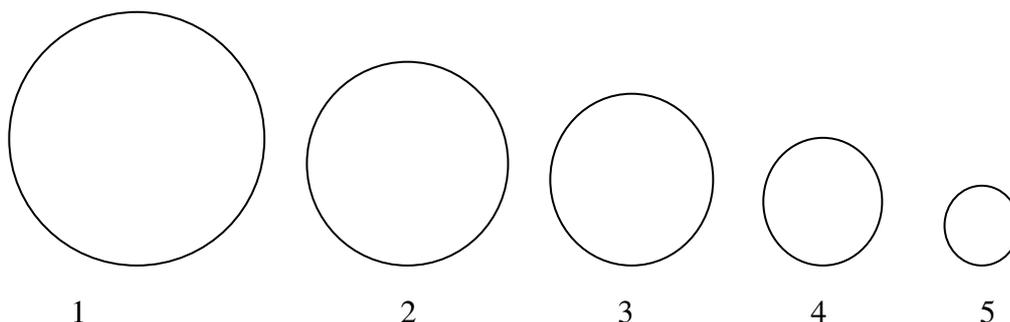
## Discourse Activities

### 1. Colors - based on TBI.

The activity is visual and based on a hands-on learning experience. Students' knowledge and comprehension are easily tested and they learn to follow teacher's or peer's instructions – an essential skill for ADHD learners to focus on.

- Pre-teach or revise colors with the help of flashcards.
- Give each student crayons and copy of a worksheet with few pictures to color in. They can be in shapes of circles, animals, or other figures with numbers.

For e.g:



- Dictate for students to color in the cards or have them dictate it to each other while working in pairs:

“Color number one brown”

“Color number two green”

“Color number three red” etc

### 2. *Family Members and Colors* (review), (a Task-Based activity).

This activity being also visual and interactive stimulates the practice of the set number of vocabulary and grammar items without their monotonous repetition. It

requires some extra teacher's preparation and materials (slips of paper, glue, construction paper).

- Have each student draw a slip of paper from a "magic" box. The slips have written on them: "The Red King" or "The Blue Princess" or "The Yellow Prince" etc.
- Ask students if they can guess what the words "Prince, Princess, King and Queen" mean. Some of these words (e.g. Prince and Princess) sound similar in many languages, so it is better to elicit their meaning from students rather than simply tell or explain what they mean.
- After the students learn the words sufficiently, gather them into family groups that are: The Red family, The Yellow Family etc. There should be 3 or 4 students in every group.
- They make simple crowns from construction paper of the same color as their family and write on it who they are. That is, "The Red King" makes a red crown and writes "King" on it.
- Then students go around the room with another member of their family introducing themselves to each other, with a dialog along the lines of:

--Good morning, Yellow Prince.

--Good morning, Blue Queen.

--This is my son, Blue Prince.

--Nice to meet you. This is my sister – Yellow Princess.

--Nice to meet you too.

(Best to model this activity first before having the students practice it, but as always improvisation can play a part).

- In a few minutes give the students a signal to change their partners so that they can practice more vocabulary. The activity should be controlled with the teacher's assistance provided when necessary. You can also have some cheerful music playing and stop it when you want your students to stop.

## 2. **Getting to Know One Another**

This activity is aimed at recycling grammar and vocabulary while encouraging students to talk about themselves when reviewing the learned language material. Students need to focus their attention on each others' speech as to perform the task successfully. It is important to make students aware of this stipulation before the start of the activity.

- Have the learners seated in a circle.
- Give the class a moment to think about what they can do (recycling the vocabulary from the previous lessons).
- You can begin as a model for the task, introducing yourself: "I am Natalia and I can dance".
- The student next to you repeats what you have said and adds his or her own information: "You are Natalia and you can dance. I am Igor and I can play football".
- The third person repeats what the second student said and adds his or her information, and so it continues round the circle.

Before implementing these or any other classroom methods or activities, an ESL teacher should always try to stop and think : "Why am I teaching this? Will this be helpful for all my students in their learning? Will it be interesting for all my students? What changes do I need to make to my teaching style in order to make the

learning process more beneficial, interesting and engaging for all of them?” “What learning strategies should I teach my students to be able to perform this activity?”

Naturally, this is not an easy set of questions, and often ones that cannot be met with an outright successful policy. But I am convinced that being open to the students' needs, self reflective to one's personal teaching practices, able to make corresponding changes and open to applying innovative techniques will ultimately lead to the continuing development in the unique teaching style of an ESL (EFL) educator who has at heart the best intentions of making the language learning process successful for every student.

## CONCLUSION

Learning foreign languages is an exciting experience that not only develops students' mind, skills and attitudes, but also offers possibilities of changing one's entire life, bestowing opportunities not dreamt of. My personal journey, in now being a Fulbright scholar, offers one concrete example in this respect. Approximately 20 years ago in a small Siberian village with no English teachers available at its school, who would have foreseen a small girl eventually studying at an American Graduate School? Learning a few simple English words out of a book at that young age has changed my life dramatically, gradually opening my eyes to a variety of things I had never been aware of, creating wonderful new friends and colleagues, but best of all, providing me with confidence in my life and a profession that I have a calling for.

That is why I passionately believe that changes and opportunities are possible, even in "old-style" institutions with seemingly unshakable attitudes. In my career of teaching English at Elementary and Secondary Schools in Russia I would often encounter children with special needs among my class and I can attest to the changes possible. I taught many children whose teachers had previously given up on them, who then became good learners, succeeding in class, their eyes bright with understanding and excitement for learning.

I am convinced that the onus is on the teacher to institute these changes, to make students aware of their own potential. A child perceptibly senses when his teacher loses confidence in him (especially if he has a learning disability), thereafter easily feeling abandoned or at best misunderstood. Our job as teachers is to be a guide

in this fog, encourage all our students to use their stronger abilities in order to compensate for the weaker ones.

I believe the first step for the special needs educational sector is for the teachers to educate themselves, be open to a variety of teaching styles and exhibit the willingness to implement or experiment with them. Perhaps too many educators, parents and even students still tend to believe that some people are “hard-wired” with their learning disabilities, where progress can almost never be achieved no matter the effort attempted. This leads to a misguided resignation and belief that these students were just born that way and this is simply how their brain functions. However, as the recent results in neurology and human brain development show, this is not the case at all (Shaw, 2001; Schwartz, 2003; Doidge, 2007; Goldberg, 2009, Fernandez, 2009). Research shows that the brain of learning disabled people is able to reorganize and evolve, with its stronger areas supporting the underdeveloped ones. When taught and instructed properly, children with ADHD, Dyslexia and other learning problems are able to experience perhaps not instant but ultimately sustainable success in their studies.

In the field of TESOL there is no reason for us, teachers, to feel hopeless or frustrated when having students with learning differences in our classrooms. In fact, by focusing on the needs of these learners we actually live up to our teaching goal and make the learning process successful and enjoyable for all our students. We should discard the notion that the presence of ADHD and other students in our classes, whose learning abilities demand the use of non-traditional methods and techniques, poses some kind of an obstacle or encumbrance for our teaching. We should look deeper, use them as a source of inspiration, imagination and creativity, and enable them to

bring out their inborn abilities so that they in turn can bring exciting and rewarding changes to our world.

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