FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND ADHD LEARNERS AT PRIMARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

OSVOJOVANIE SI CUDZIEHO JAZYKA U ŽIAKOV S PREDIKCIOU ADHD NA PRIMÁRNOM STUPNI VZDELÁVANIA

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Abstrakt

Príspevok koncipuje základné princípy vyučovania anglického jazyka u žiakov s predikciou hyperaktivity a poruchy správania na ZŠ. S dôrazom na potrebu zvýšenej aktivity a na potrebu častej zmeny činnosti sa zameriavame na využitie aktivných a dynamických prvkov tvorivej dramatiky vo vyučovaní jazyka. Cieľom takého vyučovania pomocou tvorivej dramatiky je posilnenie sekundárnej socializácie žiakov so ŠVVP a vytvorenie uvoľneného atmosféry v triede. Príspevok prináša výsledky prvotnej výskumnej sondy a navrhuje možnosti realizovania ďalšieho výskumu.

Kľúčové slová: osvojovanie si cudzieho jazyka, žiaci so špeciálnymi výchovno-vzdelávacími potrebami, žiaci s predikciou ADHD, sociálna interakcia, sekundárna socializácia, tvorivá dramatika

Abstract

The article depicts the basic principles of teaching English to the children with prediction to ADHD at the elementary level of education. The teaching process is focused more on dynamic elements of teaching, especially creative drama. The special emphasis is paid to strengthening of the secondary socialization of such students and to creating friendly atmosphere in the classroom. The article also brings results of the first phase of the research.

Key words: Foreign language acquisition, learners with difficulties, learners with prediction to ADHD, social interaction, secondary socialization, creative drama

1. INTRODUCTION

The nature of foreign language teaching to learners with the prediction of ADHD lie in enjoyable and playful atmosphere. Teaching such learners requires appropriate and professional approaches. Rarely, they are simply defined and attained, however. This article develops the idea of active and playful learning in friendly atmosphere, regardless of intellectual or emotional levels of students’ personalities.

2. CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Based on further content analysis of English written publications there is the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities definition from the year 1989: Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed
to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic factors (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences (Myers, Hammill, 2010).

Apparently, a prediction to any disability of learners leads to difficulties with learning, and thus, makes processes, learning and teaching, much more demanding and difficult than learning and teaching of common learners. The following part of the article focuses on prediction known as ADHD.

### 2.1 Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

Our main focus is students with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). They represent a group of children often described by teachers and parents as over-energetic and overactive. Based on Rief’s (1999) definition of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder children, the main characteristics of such children are as follows:

- high extent of physical activity;
- impulsiveness and low self-control behavior;
- difficulty to adapt to another activity in the classroom;
- aggressive behavior, over-exaggerated responses to the smallest impulses;
- lower social competence;
- lower self-esteem and high level of frustration.

Based on Munden and Arcelus’s (2006) conclusion about Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder students, the main symptoms are: hyperactivity (they are physically over-active), impulsiveness (they respond to actions too quickly), and attention deficit (lack of longer period of attention). Overall, every student is an individual and the extent of their deficits is different case to case. All of the above mentioned characteristics may appear into certain level in behavior of any child. Nevertheless, it is alarming when it appears too often and too intensively, thus, child may be diagnosed as ADHD. Considering teaching of ADHD students there are many factors influencing work and teaching process itself. Among others there are the following (Munden, Arcelus, 2006, p. 21):

- flexibility of teachers and their personal engagement;
- long-life process of education of teachers;
- creative, interactive and attractive teaching methods;
- team work;
- less homework and less writing;
- reinforcement of students strengths, increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem;
- sensitive approach to students (no humiliation or mockery; their self-esteem is low enough).

The main focus is laid on abilities of the ADHD students rather than disabilities. As Reif (1999, p. 21) states, in teaching of students with learning difficulties it is necessary to avoid:

- General belief that such a student is lazy, antisocial, and non-active;
- Judgments of ADHD student based on your responses to their disorders and disabilities;
- To use only traditional teaching methods;
- Other co-teachers who consider students with learning difficulties as losers unable to achieve high quality education.
Serfontein (1999) focuses on several main characteristics of ADHD students. Here we pay attention to some of them. He develops the following concepts:
- impulsiveness;
- attention disorder;
- hyperactivity;
- lower social development;
- lower self-esteem.

*Impulsiveness* is the most complicated of most of the symptoms. He suggests it is vital to teach the child how to keep order in what they do and how they act. Moreover, teach the child to think more thoroughly before acting. First think then do, write, or say.

A child with *attention disorder* has problems to focus on one activity for a longer time. Serfontein suggests that such a child should be placed as close to the teacher as possible and there should be no other disturbers. The other principle is to divide one activity in more partial activities.

*Hyperactive child* Serfontein states is the most common phrase parents use to identify their child with ADHD syndrome. Some of them, however, behave differently. Their activity does not show to be higher than others. On the other hand, there are individual cases that show even lower extends of activity (hypo-active child). Hyperactive child appears hyperactive when it disturbs others, when his activity is higher than others. Most commonly it is present when the classroom is quiet working individually on various tasks.

*Lower social competence* is probably the most permanent trait of male population of attention disorder students. Their social behavior usually seems very infantile both at school and at home. It is largely common that such students act as fools among the others just to create moments of attraction towards them. The other trait of lower social competence of such a child is emotional shallowness. Many parents are concerned and complain about their children that they do not show emotions openly, or they show it inappropriately, for example, they may cry over a dead hamster for weeks but do not show any kind of emotions over their grandmother’s death.

Apparently, extend of *self-esteem* is so low among these students that it may gradually grow into serious difficulties in later teen years – into a secondary disorder of self-esteem. Their confidence and self-esteem lowers with each negative experience through years of school and creates vital damages in his emotional development occasionally leading into a very specific mental disease: paranoia. Thus, it is effective to reinforce his strengths as much as possible.

Generally, it is vital to focus on child’s strengths. As it is mentioned in the interview with a 15 years old ADHD student, Joseph, who suggests to teachers:”Teachers should respect students as much as students respect teachers. Lessons should not be stressful. There should be friendly atmosphere on the lesson. Teachers should not make fun of students or humiliate them. I enjoy active learning; project learning and I prefer oral presentations to written forms” (Rief, p. 31). Obviously, ADHD students prefer kin-aesthetic dimension of learning, they enjoy moving, looking around, touching objects (haptic aspect of learning). Successful teaching of such students should include the latter mentioned aspects to provide classroom to be a place for productive and effective learning. When teachers prefer active teaching and try to create friendly atmosphere their teaching may become successful even for a student with the prediction of ADHD.

According to professor Komarek, (http://www.drama.cz/periodika/mz/mz.html) a Check pediatrician and neurologist, there is no physical (structural) difference between the brain of an ADHD child and a brain of any other child without the prediction of ADHD. The problem is not the structure of such a brain but in atypical functional connections. ARAS
- the ascending reticular activating system modulates wakefulness; this system awakens cerebra when any sensory information comes to the brain stem. Komarek follows that an ADHD child responds to actions impulsively and unpredictably. The original intention of such a child to follow the teacher’s instruction is suddenly distracted by another piece of information, for example, by a nice smell of nearby sitting girl. The distraction causes changes in the system of his/her behavior.

According to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) (http://www.suite101.com/content/adhd-and-teaching-english-as-a-foreign-language-a325634#ixzz1JV1ohORJ, ADHD is categorized into three types: Inattentive, impulsive, hyperactive, which can combine to form three types:

1. The predominantly inattentive type
2. The predominantly hyperactive impulsive type
3. The combined type (inattentive, impulsive, hyperactive)

Predominantly Inattentive Type Behaviours show poor listening skills, easily distracted, preoccupied, unfocussed, forgetful, unable to find things, not capable of completing assignments, frequently “off-task”, repeatedly misplacing items, unsuccessful at finishing tedious tasks, unable to complete an activity if interrupted, slow to get going, recurrent daydreaming, and disorganisation. Thus, inattentive behaviour may surface in the foreign language classroom as such: appear dreamy and tuned out, doodle and fiddle, write instructions and information down incorrectly if at all, forget or lose books, equipment, and homework, produce work that does not reflect their true ability, misunderstand oral instructions, be unable to sustain their concentration, forget to take material home, behave as if they were not present in the previous lesson.

Predominantly Impulsive Type Behaviours means inability to anticipate the effects of their behaviour or actions, interrupting, difficulty queuing or taking turns, lack of self-control, make hasty decisions, trouble delaying gratification.

Predominantly Hyperactive Type Behaviours mean high energy levels, constant motion, unusual amounts of fidgeting, incessant touching or playing with objects, excessive talking. Impulsivity and hyperactivity may surface in the foreign language classroom as such: beginning tasks without paying attention to instructions – verbal or written, starting before thinking or planning, rushing through assignments without self-monitoring, lack of desire to check over completed work, making frequent errors – not connected to lack of knowledge, untidy, disorganised, incoherent work, displaying little restraint regarding improper remarks, emotions and behaviour.

3. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

European Commission published a document called Teaching Languages to Learners with Special Needs (http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/doc647_en, 2005) with the main contributions from the experts from Finland, Hungary, Germany, and UK. The authors discuss widely the themes of teaching and learning processes including difficulties in teaching process and terminology of special needs learners. They encourage teachers to get acquainted with various aspects of the program, and continue with suggestions:

- Listen and respond to foreign language songs, poems, or stories, which have rhyming or repeated words. Staff may vary the repetition by saying things loudly, quietly, quickly or slowly.
- Listen carefully and discriminate between sounds, identify some meaning from words and intonations, and develop auditory awareness, for example, using audio, video tape or CD-ROM.
- Respond to a certain word or phrase, for example, a greeting.
- Use symbols and audio-recordings, for example, a Language Master, to associate a word and object, and to record themselves or others.
- Increase social skills by providing new context for communication and interaction, for example, taking part in pair and group work and developing turn-taking skills.
- Express their own views about people, places and environments by showing a preference or by expressing likes and dislikes, for example, using a growing vocabulary of words, symbols, gestures and facial expressions.
- Develop general language skills through new learning experiences, resulting in the positive acquisition of a simple, relevant vocabulary that can be used for practical communication at a level appropriate to their ability.
- Respond to, use and understand words and phrases which are reinforced with visual aids, for example, in a game with real objects, using puppets, video, picture flashcards and gestures.
- Communicate messages by sending information in the form of pictures or text by e-mail.
- Enhance self-esteem through opportunities for new achievements.

We draw our attention to the common features of ADHD students mentioned in previous chapter. When we turn the syndromes of the students into positive aspects of their education we may be successful in teaching them foreign language. Considering suggested approaches and various general ideas about teaching students with learning difficulties we regard creative drama to be an effective medium for teaching foreign language to ADHD students.

3.1 Students with Learning Difficulties in Primary Level Language Classrooms in Slovakia.

In order to conduct the research of language acquisition to students with difficulties we conducted first phases of analysis of the situation in the integrated schools in various parts of Slovakia. We used an anonymous questionnaire to find out if there are some children with learning difficulties at all in the classrooms in Slovakia, and how language teachers manage teaching process with such students in their teaching environment. Here we present first results:

1. The average age of the teachers participated in the research was 33, 6 years.
2. There was a prevalence of female teachers to male teachers.
3. All respondents teach at the primary level or secondary level of education, most in the state schools, some in private or private religious schools.
4. 21, 8 percent of respondents answered they do not teach learners with difficulties. One of the respondents teaches in a private school, 4 of them teach at secondary grammar school (8 ročné gymnázium), 5 of them teach in small village (under 10.000 inhabitants) schools.
5. Teachers - respondents stated that 25 percent of learners with difficulties in their classrooms have a prediction to ADHD.
6. We focused our research on five most frequent problems with the learners with difficulties: 1. teaching of cognitive structures (teaching grammar, vocabulary and skills), 2. Interaction of such a learner with other students, 3. Interaction with the
teacher, 4. Adjustment of the learner to the new style of teaching, 5. Negative behavior of the learner in the classroom.

Many teachers consider problem with teaching grammar and adjustment to the new styles of teaching as the most frequent problems in the classroom. Based on teachers’ responds, the interaction of such children with the teacher and their behaviour in the classroom are the least problematic. There is a possible correlation between appearances of ADHD children in the class and the type of school; private schools and secondary grammar schools show almost zero number of learners with difficulties. Also, small schools in villages with low number (less than 15) of children in the classroom have almost no learners with difficulties.

Considering interaction and creative friendly atmosphere in the language classrooms as the basis for successful language acquisition, we suggest creative drama as one of the possible techniques for strengthening social interaction when teaching languages. Furthermore, it is essential to use the impulsiveness and hyperactivity of the learners with prediction to ADHD in the class.

4. CREATIVE DRAMA AND ADHD STUDENTS

How can creative drama help to lower the symptoms a hyperactive behaviour in the child with the prediction of ADHD? Children with learning disabilities are emotionally unstable. However, it is possible to use their impulsiveness, their learning disability in the context of creative drama. Lukavská (Tvorivá dramatika, 93, 3) presents results of her qualitative research with hyperactive children in one of Czech schools for integrated children. She worked with 8 children during one school year. She met with them once a week. Lukavská states her results in several points:

1. Hyperactive children respond to music more sensitively than other children. They felt tension when listening to noisy dramatic music and relaxed when listening to relaxing music.
2. They were able to act out the content of music (their own interpretations) using motion (their bodies).
3. They accepted positively even demanding tasks.
4. They were able to pay respect to common regulations in the classroom when they were encouraged by physical contact with the teacher.
5. They enjoyed working in the groups. There was almost no aggression in the interaction with others.
6. However, socially deprived children still showed insecurity. They also showed no interest in the classroom activities.
7. During the research children showed lowered appearance of aggressive behavior.

Furthermore, Lukavská considers the nature of their success to lie in the atmosphere of acceptance of the children and working in friendly atmosphere. Children could feel positive and friendly relationship from the teachers (from the adults).

Apparently, creative drama may function only in the context of group or team work. Although learners contribute as individuals, a purpose of development of relationships in the classroom should be co-operation. The meaning of group cooperation is highly relevant in the class learning of learners with difficulties. Cooperation increases communication and social perception of learners themselves and helps to perceive the others. Authors Lambert and
O’Neill also state the following: “Cooperative activity is rare in our schools. Too often, pupils are trained to work as individuals and to be competitive and possessive about their achievements. The meaning of creative drama is build up from the contributions of individuals, and, if the work is to develop, these contributions must be monitored, understood, accepted and responded to by the rest of the group“ (1982, p. 13).

Thus, when the contributions of individuals are accepted and we respond to them in a way, drama has the purpose and meaning. Students in order to cooperate need to be aware of the importance of their own contributions. Every drama activity should be built on the foundations of individual contributions and active mutual interactions. The writers encourage teachers to have a particular social objective for each lesson:
- increased social competence and confidence;
- the ability to work purposefully with the others;
- willingness to accept and respect the ideas of others and build on team;
- willingness to accept responsibility;
- the opportunity to escape from existing self-image or ”role” in the group group-clown, trouble-maker, outsider.

In the future we will carry on the research with the following objectives:

- Emphasize the importance of creative drama for language skills acquisition in foreign language teaching to the special educational needs students, with the closer accent to the learners with ADHD prediction.
- With the special emphasis on non-cognitive education, consequently prove the positive influence of creative drama as a highly motivating and effective tool of socialization and social interaction in the group of participants, integrated students.
- Motivate English language teachers and other language educational leaders to include the tools of creative drama into their own teaching styles, thus, laying the accent on innovation of creative drama techniques.

We lay our attention on the capabilities of such learners and our possibilities as teachers to include them into our education as naturally as possible to help them to create better perspective for their future personal and professional lives. The further research questions are the following:

1. What are the main obstacles in foreign language teaching to ADHD students in the integrated classes?
2. How does implementation of creative drama influence foreign language acquisition?
3. What is the influence of creative drama use in foreign language teaching?
4. What is the impact of creative drama on interpersonal communication in foreign language teaching to ADHD students?

5. CONCLUSION

Clearly, common idea of all definitions is the environment, atmosphere and space that creative drama creates and offers to an individual in the process of education. It is atmosphere of self-identification, social interaction, creativity, self-expression, imagination development. Creative drama is a medium for exploration of reality through as if reality.
6. LITERATURE


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