

ADHD LEARNERS - TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

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ADHD LEARNERS IN POLISH SCHOOLS

My point of view is that Polish schools are still not fully adjusted to hyperactive learners' needs.

There are so called integrative schools and integrative classes, but in fact they are still not adapted to effective teaching of ADHD learners. In Poland integrative class means the gathering of learners having different problems. There is no division into classes for ADHD learners, children with mental or physical disorders. Learners are all put together in one class and it seems that the only criterion is their age or level of mental abilities. It is true that there are less learners than in common classes, but in fact it does not change much.

It is really impossible to pay that much attention to ADHD learners that they need. Even if there are supporting teachers. Unfortunately, the same situation takes place in case of special schools. Theoretically, they are intended for differently disabled learners. Classes are not numerous and there are few learners, but it still is of no importance, because hyperactive learners have to share the same classroom with autistic children, children suffering from Asperger's Syndrome, Down Syndrome and other mental disorders. In such class it is not possible to pay attention to only one learner and work only with him, because the rest of the learners also requires constant teacher's attention and supervision.

In my opinion ADHD learners should work in small classes containing five children having similar problems.

CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATION

“Children with ADHD often have difficulty adjusting to the structured environment of a classroom, determining what is important, and focusing on their assigned work. They are easily distracted by other children or by nearby activities in the classroom. As a result, many children with ADHD benefit from accommodations that reduce distractions in the classroom environment and help to stay on task and learn. Certain accommodations within the physical and learning environments of the classroom can benefit children with ADHD” (Henderson, 2004: 22)

Teachers claim that it is essential, while working with hyperactive learners, to reduce any possible factors that may distract the students. It is important to arrange the classroom in a way that is most adequate to learners’ needs and, at the same time, facilitates teachers’ work.

It is suggested to seat the hyperactive learner as close to the teacher as possible. Such accommodation enables the teacher monitor learners’ work and behaviour or encourage them for further work. The proximity of the teacher and ADHD learner is really important and it means constant and sudden control over the learner’s work.

ADHD learners should sit close to the teacher, because then the teacher is able to give the learner sudden hints or he can redirect learners’ actions if there is such a need.

If the learner is auditory distractible, he may tend to turn around in order to find out what is happening behind him. If it happens so, it may be a good idea to seat him near the middle of the classroom. In such situation the teacher still must have control over the learner, so he must be able to move around the classroom to have contact with the learner. This practice is called “Management By Walking Around”.

In case of visually distracted learners, students benefit more from being seated in the first row, because their attention is not dispersed and is not being caught by pictures, classroom objects etc. ¹

¹ www.addinschool.com

Proper selection of the learners hyperactive students can sit next to or with is a very important issue connected with their class work. The choice of learners cannot be accidental and it has to be carefully thought over by the teacher. It is obvious that ADHD learner cannot decide who he wants or would like to sit with. In fact, the teacher must monitor the choice of hyperactive learner's classroom partner. There are certain principles and guidelines the teacher has to follow.

ADHD learner ought to be seated next to intelligent, calm and quiet learners, preferably the girls.² Such selection is reasonable and quite obvious. Smart and calm learners are less prone to ADHD students' behaviour, they do not react impulsively. Moreover, they may also be helpful and instruct hyperactive learners on how to complete tasks they do not understand.

Such "(...) seating arrangement provides opportunities for children to work cooperatively and to learn from their peers in the class" (Henderson, 2004: 22)

Considering hyperactive learners' working place it is suggested that the students should sit individually. Seating alone reduces the risk of distracting learners' attention. What the teachers should certainly avoid is placing ADHD learners in the group of peers. Group may influence hyperactive student's behaviour, there are too many stimuli within the group and ADHD learner needs to be focused, not unsettled.

On the other hand, hyperactive learners cannot be isolated from the rest of the students all the time. There are situations in which the teacher should change the learner's working place. These are, for instance, group projects of any kind or discussions. In case of group projects hyperactive learners cannot sit individually and they have to actively participate in the project. But still, the teacher's control is needed. Considering class discussion it is suggested to arrange the tables in a horseshoe shape. Then the learners can see each other well, the teacher has control over the whole class.³

Hyperactive learners must be kept away from any possible factors that may distract their attention. They should not sit near the window or the hallway, because they may want to check what is happening outside the classroom and it will be difficult for the teacher to focus their attention on the lesson again.⁴

² www.addinschool.com

³ www.addinschool.com

⁴ www.addinschool.com

Hyperactive learners' work and working places must be well organised. It is impossible to conduct a lesson without any teaching aids, but the teacher should choose only the most important and necessary ones. If we do not want or cannot get rid of our aids, we have to save up at least a part of the room free from auditory and visual distractions. The learners get distracted when they are being surrounded by excessively colourful, shiny or loud objects. In other words, the classroom should be low-key or at least some of its part ought to be adjusted to hyperactive learners' needs. It is also important to remember that factors such as appropriate lightning and temperature inside the classroom may influence our learners' behaviour and their level of concentration.⁵

It becomes more popular to play quiet classical music in the classroom background. Students become more concentrated on their work when they hear for instance baroque compositions.⁶ Classroom has to be perceived by the learners as the quiet and friendly working space where they feel comfortably.

Hyperactive learners' desks have to be kept clean. Only necessary objects should be there. Learners have a tendency to bring things that are not necessarily connected with their actual work. They like being surrounded by toys or mascots they take from their home. Forbidding them to do so may actually not really work. It may be a good idea to give the learners a few minutes to show their toys to other learners and then ask them to put them back into their schoolbags.⁷

⁵ www.addinschool.com

⁶ www.addinschool.com

⁷ www.addinschool.com

STIMULATING ADHD LEARNERS

MOTIVATION TYPES

Hyperactive learners often do not know how to work and learn effectively or they do not really pay attention to the learning process. For that reason the teacher has to motivate them. There are different types of motivation that are helpful and useful while working with ADHD learners.

Kelly Henderson states: “Effective teachers use a number of behavioural intervention techniques to help students learn how to control their behaviour. Perhaps the most important and effective of these is verbal reinforcement of appropriate behaviour. The most common form of verbal reinforcement is praise given to a student when he or she begins and completes an activity or exhibits a particular desired behaviour. Simple phrases such as “Good job” encourage a child to act appropriately. Effective teachers praise children with ADHD frequently and look for a behaviour to praise before, and not after, a child gets off task” (Henderson, 2004: 17).

Henderson gives some feedback on how to praise hyperactive learners:

- The desired behaviour ought to be determined at the time the praise is being given to the learner. This means that the praise must be exact for the learner’s positive behaviour. Teacher’s words, comments have to respond to what the learner did well, they should relate to what exactly the learner did right. The teacher should not praise hyperactive learner for not behaving wrong or not disturbing other learners, but rather for completing the task in time or fulfilling teacher’s instructions or assignments.
- Praise must be sudden, it must be given immediately, right after the teacher noticed the desired behaviour. The praise should be given as soon as possible. Then the learner is more likely to repeat the desired behaviour again.
- The comments of the teacher should be varied. Then the praise is more valuable for the learner. If the teacher repeats the same statements all the time or every time the learner does something well, it is very probable that its value will be weakened.

ADHD learner may quickly get used to comments that are being constantly repeated. When he hears the same things, the praise may no longer play its role.

- Teachers must be sincere and consistent when they praise their learners. It is important to praise appropriate behaviour consistently. Consistency is essential if the teacher wants to avoid confusing situations. Students are smart and they observe their teachers, they easily get used to how teachers behave or react during the classes. For that reason the learners are more than likely to know and notice if the teacher's praise is insincere. If it happens so, the insincerity will be immediately noticed and will not be effective any more. (Henderson, 2004: 17)

Henderson points out to the fact that the teacher should focus on praise, not on punishment. Hyperactive learners need positive stimuli. Once they hear they are doing something wrong or not in a way that is being expected from them, they get discouraged. Negative comments may influence learners' behaviour. Inappropriate behaviour may become more intensive or frequent.

Another aspect of punishing the learners is that it shows the learners what they should not do and how they should not behave. It does not strengthen positive attitude and does not improve expected skills.

Reinforcement must be positive, because it changes learners' attitude and it influences their behaviour over the longer period of time. (Henderson, 2004: 18)

Another aspect of motivating hyperactive learners is rewarding them. Children like being given a tiny prize.

As suggested at www.addinschool.com "Develop a reward system for in-school work and homework completion. One example of a system that reinforces both work quality and work quantity involves translating points earned into "dollars" to be used for silent auction at the end of grading period. For ADD ADHD children needing more immediate reinforcement, each completed assignment could earn the child a "raffle ticket" with her/his name on it . Prizes or special privileges could be awarded on the basis of a random drawing held daily or weekly."⁸

⁸ www.addinschool.com

Hyperactive learners get easily reluctant to work. They are frequently not able to work for the whole lesson without even a short break. ADHD students should be given short breaks. They work more effectively when they do not have to focus their attention on one long task. It is reasonable to divide planned assignments into smaller, not so much complex activities. (Henderson, 2004: 7)

ADHD learners need clear instructions and teacher's directions. When we teach in the classroom in which not all the students are hyperactive, we should first give directions to the class treated as a group, but then the teacher should again focus on hyperactive learners. In order to be sure if they understood the instructions, the teacher has to first ask them individually if they know what to do and, if necessary, repeat the instructions again. Another way of giving clear instructions is writing them down on the blackboard. If the teacher wants the learners to do certain exercise from the book, he should write the page number on the board and tell the learners to have a look at it if they forget what they are supposed to do. (Henderson, 2004: 7)

While giving instructions, eye contact with the learner is a very important factor. When the learner is looking at the teacher, he is being more focused on teacher's words and he understands instructions better.

It is also essential not to give too many directions at the same time, because the learners may simply forget what the first one was. Such situations cause confusion and learners do not know what to do.

If the teacher wants to be sure if the hyperactive learner understands instructions, it is reasonable to ask him to say in his own words what is being expected from him. That way teacher checks learner's comprehension.⁹

⁹ www.addinschool.com

CHANGEABILITY OR ROUTINE

Teachers often consider what to do to keep their hyperactive learners interested and focused on tasks, exercises and class assignments. Actually, there are two ways in which the teacher can conduct the lesson. One of them bases on changeability, another one is certain routine. Both ways have certain advantages and disadvantages, but the teacher has to choose one of them that would be appropriate for ADHD students.

Usually, the elements of surprise may work well, but in case of hyperactive learners this kind of teaching does not have to guarantee the success.

Kelly Henderson suggests routine or even predictability in teacher's actions and course of the lesson. She points out to the fact that ADHD learners need consistency. Even a little change may distract their attention and cause confusion.

Hyperactive learner's world has to be organised and put in certain order. Learners have to know what teacher's expectations are, what kind of activities they are supposed to do.

If the teacher decides to change the routine he should inform his learners about this fact and explain why the changes are necessary. (Henderson, 2004: 6)

SUGGESTED TEACHING AIDS

Proper teaching aids are essential while teaching hyperactive learners. There are many ways of making lessons more attractive. The coursebook is not enough to conduct a really interesting and successful lesson.

Depending on what the teacher is being focused on and what he wants to teach, the following teaching aids are being suggested while working with hyperactive learners:

- **“Storyboards.** Ask the child to make storyboards that illustrate the sequence of main events in a story.
- **Word bank.** Keep a word bank or dictionary of new or “hard-to-read” sight-vocabulary words.

- **Board games for reading comprehension.** Play board games that provide practice with target reading comprehension skills or sight-vocabulary words.
- **Computer games for reading comprehension.** Schedule computer time for the child to have drill-and-practice with sight vocabulary words.
- **Recorded books.** These materials, available from many libraries, can stimulate interest in traditional reading and can be used to reinforce and complement reading lessons.
- **Board games for phonics.** Have students play board games, such as bingo, that allow them to practice phonetically irregular words.
- **Computer games for phonics.** Use a computer to provide opportunities for students to drill and practice with phonics or grammar lessons.
- **Picture-letter charts.** Use these for children who know sounds but do not know the letters that go with them.
- **Dictionary of misspelled words.** Ask the child to keep a personal dictionary of frequently misspelled words.
- **Manipulatives.** Use cutout letters or other manipulatives to spell out hard-to-learn words.
- **Color-coded letters.** Color code different letters in hard to-spell words (e.g., “receipt”).” (Henderson, 2004: 10)

TECHNIQUES THAT WORK

INTRODUCING NEW ISSUES

Hyperactive students learn better if they come across something they already know. For that reason each new lesson should be based on the previous one. The students are more self-confident then.

A completely new material, not based on learners' actual knowledge may not be that easily acquired by them. It is a good idea to have a certain revision of what the learners know and remember and introduce new material with reference to things that ADHD learners are familiar with. (Henderson, 2004: 5)

EFFECTIVE TYPES OF CLASS WORK

As suggested by Kelly Henderson, ADHD students should work in pairs or in small groups of learners, because their work is more effective then.

Cooperative learning enables hyperactive learners, as well as the rest of class peers "maximize their own and each other's learning" (Henderson, 2004: 8).

Pair work or group work enables hyperactive learners to share their ideas with other learners. Such types of class work do not make them isolated from the rest of the students.

Group work is desired while making different big class projects. Pair work works well in many different situations. These are for instance:

- **Partner reading activities.** Pair the child with ADH with another student partner who is a strong reader. The partners take turns reading orally and listening to each other. (Henderson, 2004: 9)
- **Partner spelling activities.** Pair the child with another student. Ask the partners to quiz each other on the spelling of new words. Encourage both students to guess the correct spelling. (Henderson, 2004: 11)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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