

**MASARYK UNIVERSITY BRNO**

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**Teaching English to children with specific  
learning difficulties**

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## **Prohlášení**

*Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci zpracoval/a samostatně a použil/a jen prameny uvedené v seznamu literatury.*

*Souhlasím, aby práce byla uložena na Masarykově univerzitě v Brně v knihovně Pedagogické fakulty a zpřístupněna ke studijním účelům*

Brně dne 26.července 2006

Mgr. Pavla Tlustošová

Věnováno všem, kteří mi pomáhali a byli velkou oporou po celou dobu studia.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this thesis is to look at teaching English to children with specific learning difficulties.

Our country needs more teachers specialising in this area because the number of children with learning difficulties is increasing. According to the Ministry of Education, on average there are 3-4% of children with some kind of specific learning difficulties in the classroom; however, teachers claim that the actual figure could be as high as 20%.

The teaching children with LDs (I will use LDs as an abbreviation for learning difficulties) is challenging. There are many barriers to the learning of a foreign language.

Children with LDs are individual and unpredictable, with both positive and negative features, so the approach to teaching them must be a process of individually targetting the specific needs of each child. Effective teaching of these children is thus much concerned with finding the best employment of each teacher's knowledge and skills.

I am a teacher at a primary school and I meet such children every day; moreover, I completed a special training course in this pedagogic area last year, and would thus like to use the knowledge and experience gained in my subsequent teaching career.

Although I try to approach these pupils individually, I have to face up to some problems - the high number of pupils in English lessons, the lack of cooperation between parents and the school, and the inevitable financial constraints imposed by the education system.

The aim of this diploma work is to describe and sum up manifestations of specific learning difficulties, show how these difficulties manifest themselves, and from there go on to suggest some possibilities and suitable approaches of how best to teach these children in the elementary school.

I will focus on children with dyslexia - dysgraphia and dysortographia particularly - because these difficulties cause the biggest problems in the teaching of languages

The work will consist of two parts – theoretical and practical.

In the first part I will describe the topic of specific learning difficulties, dyslexia, dysgraphia and dysortographia, their basic causes and symptoms, as well as dealing with teaching methods.

In the second part I shall demonstrate some methods that could help these children to learn English.

## **2. THEORETICAL PART**

### **2.1 LEARNING DIFFICULTIES ( LDs )**

Learning Difficulties ( LDs ) are neurologically-based processing problems. These processing problems can interfere with learning basic skills such as writing, reading or maths. They can also interfere with higher level skills such as time planning, organisation and abstract reasoning .<http://www.lidaamerica.org/>

LDs are not contagious, but they are probably inherited. It is possible that children with LDs probably have other family members who have had some learning troubles, too. However, most learning disabilities are unexplained, there is no known cause and often, the effects of LDs are seen throughout a personal life.

Generally speaking, it is a disorder characterised by difficulty in the acquisition and the processing of information. <[www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)>

According to Dr. Levinson's research, Dyslexia and Learning Disabilities are the same. In other words, Dyslexia is a syndrome of many and varied symptoms that differ in intensity. Thus some dyslexics will have severe spelling, reading and speech difficulties, whilst others will have problems with maths, concentration and memory. It is caused, according to Levinson, by dysfunction of the brain.

LD is a term that refers to a group of disorders. There are many different types of learning disabilities:

- Dyslexia
- Dysgraphia
- Dysortographia
- Dyscalculia
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity (ADHD)



Learning disability according to the definition provided in US federal code (Section 300.7(c)(10) of 34 CFR Parts 300 and 303) in <[www.bdadyslexia.org](http://www.bdadyslexia.org)> stav k 2006-02-23:

*“(i) General. The term means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. (ii) Disorders not included. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.”*

Having a learning difficulty does not mean people *cannot* learn. On the contrary, people who have a learning difficulty are often smart, even talented, but unfortunately, they are often labelled dumb and stupid, or even lazy. But actually, they only learn differently. Many actually possess average or above average intellectual abilities; their problem lies with the *processing* of information. <[www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)>

LDs vary from person to person. Put simply, one person may not have the same kind of learning problems as another person with LDs. One person can have trouble with reading and writing and another may have problems with understanding math. <[www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)>

They cannot be cured, but they can be taught compensary strategies and ways to get around the learning disability. With the right help, children can and do learn successfully, and teachers clearly have a prime role in this process.

No wonder that LDs are often diagnosed when children start to attend school because it is school that focuses on the things such as reading, writing, maths, listening, speaking and reasoning that may be difficult for the child.

LD children need sustained and individualized support through their school career. Special education and related services are naturally important sources of help for school-age children. With hard work and the right support, they *can* learn more easily and successfully. Of course, these children may need help at home as well as at school.

### 2.1.1 Signs of a Learning Difficulty

British Association quotes ([www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)) succinctly and comprehensively lay out all the detectable signs of LDs, viz.:

When a child has a learning disability, he or she:

- may have trouble learning the alphabet, rhyming words, or connecting letters to their sounds;
- may make many mistakes when reading aloud, and repeat and pause often;
- may not understand what he or she reads;
- may have real trouble with spelling;
- may have very messy handwriting or hold a pencil awkwardly;
- may learn language late and have a limited vocabulary;
- may struggle to express ideas in writing
- may have trouble remembering the sounds that letters make or hearing slight differences between words;
- may have trouble understanding jokes, comic strips, and sarcasm;
- may have trouble following directions;
- may mispronounce words or use a wrong word that sounds similar;
- may have trouble organizing what he or she wants to say or not be able to think of the word he or she needs for writing or conversation;
- may not follow the social rules of conversation, such as taking turns, and may stand too close to the listener;
- may confuse math symbols and misread numbers;
- may not be able to retell a story in order (what happened first, second, third); or
- may not know where to begin a task or how to go on from there.

Children who have difficulty acquiring and processing information can take diagnostic tests. If it is found out that they have a learning disability, an individual action plan to aid their learning can be drawn up.

In our country if it is suspected that a child has LD, they are sent to a pedagogic-psychological advisory centre (PPP), or special pedagogic advisory centre (SPC), where a team of specialists can identify the particular problem(s), and then suggest suitable procedures to improve the child's learning skills.

Many children with LD remain in the same classroom with other students. Special help is provided by their teachers who cooperate with specialists.

Where necessary, teachers co-operate drawing up individual action plans for targetted pupils with LDs and work to these accordingly.

### **2.1.2 Dyslexia**

This word derives from the Greek *dys*, (meaning poor or inadequate), and *lexis*, (language). In other words children with dyslexia process language poorly.

*„Dyslexia is defined slightly differently in different countries. Even within one country definitions vary. It is safe to say though that dyslexia is understood as a language processing difficulty to varying degrees that affects mainly reading and writing in letter, number and/or musical symbols. These difficulties occur because of differing abilities of the brain to process auditory and/or visually presented information. While dyslexia cannot be cured, specific accommodations through professional teaching can provide the dyslexic individual with successful coping strategies. (Augur 1993: 1, Birsh 1999)“* in E. Schneider, M.Crombie.“

Dyslexia belongs to learning disabilities. International Dyslexia Association defines dyslexia as a specific language disorder where the brain is unable to distinguish, process and codify coherently; its most usual manifestation is in problems with reading and spelling. There is no necessary connection between the disorder and academic ability or lack of it.

< [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)>

- here the definition is virtually identical to the one above, save the lack of qualification about connection with academic ability. (*International Dyslexia Association, 2003*) in [www.bdadyslexia.org](http://www.bdadyslexia.org).

International Dyslexia Association stresses that the causes of dyslexia remain largely unknown, and that there is no ‘cure’. It varies in its effect from individual to individual, and that it has some strengths as well as weakness.

Each child has a unique profile of strengths and weaknesses. Such problems may not necessarily be connected with early reading and writing, but in the more advanced stages of grammar and syntax acquisition, and in such tasks as essay writing. Problems may also manifest themselves in speech, where comprehension and expression may both be impaired. <[www.interdys.org](http://www.interdys.org)>

Most children read at levels lower than typical for children of a similar age and intelligence.

It is possible that the LD can be discovered only in an English lesson , so I will mention some symptoms that indicate dyslexia (according to <[www.bdadyslexia.org](http://www.bdadyslexia.org)> ):

- problems with discriminating sounds within a word;
- confusion of letters like b and d, sometimes reading (or writing) words like “rat” for “tar”, or “won” for “now”;
- elisions, a person sometimes reads (or writes) “cat” when the word is actually “cart”;
- a person reads very slowly and hesitantly, without fluency, word by word, constantly loses his place, leaving out whole chunks or reading the same passage twice;
- a person may try to sound out the letters of the word, but then be unable to say the correct word;
- reading (or writing the letters of a word in the wrong order, e.g. “left” for “felt”, or the syllables in the wrong order like “emeny” for “enemy”, or the words like ”are there” for “there are”;
- spelling of words “rite” for “right”;
- reading with poor comprehension, remembering little of the text;
- poor or slow handwriting.

Dyslexia is a life-long condition and early diagnosis and treatment is very important. But with special help and appropriate teaching methods dyslexics *can* learn to read or write well.

As previously mentioned some educators and scientists do not use the term *dyslexia* as a part of learning difficulties but instead talk directly about specific learning disabilities or language processing disorders.

### **2.1.3 Dysgraphia**

Dysgraphia often co-exists with dyslexia. Sometimes scientists do not distinguish dysgraphia from dyslexia because these two difficulties are very closely connected.

Dysgraphia is a specific learning difficulty in writing and drawing. It generally refers to extremely poor handwriting. Pupils have problem with handwriting even if there is no serious disorder in their locomotive faculties, intellectual and emotional areas.

The definition of Wikipedia <[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dysgraphia](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dysgraphia)> stav k 2006-02-23 says: “*People with dysgraphia often can write, and may even have a higher than average IQ, but lack co-ordination, and may find other fine motor tasks such as tying shoes difficult. They can also lack basic spelling skills (having difficulties with p,q,b,d), and often will write the wrong word when trying to formulate thoughts (on paper). In children, the disorder generally emerges when they are first introduced to writing. They make inappropriately sized and spaced letters, or write wrong or misspelled words despite thorough instruction. Children with the disorder may have other learning disabilities; however, they usually have no social or other academic problems.*”

Z.Matějček (1995) has very similar view on this problem, and in addition mentions problems with nearly illegible handwriting, distinguishing between lefthanders and dysgraphics.

#### ***Signs and symptoms***

According to [www.ldaamerica.org](http://www.ldaamerica.org): detectable signs and symptoms include illegibility, upper/lowercase inconsistencies, omission of words and letters and lack of completion,, inconsistent word and letter spacing, unusual body posture when writing, difficulty with pre-visualising letter formation, poor copying skills, hand cramps when writing, struggling with simultaneous writing and thought.

### **2.1.4 Dysortographia**

Dysortographia is a specific learning difficulty in orthography and grammar.

O.Zelinková (2003) claims that not only dysortographic mistakes are the problems but also skills and application of grammar and syntactic rules.

*“Specific dysortographic mistakes are influenced particularly by insufficiently developed auditory perception, perception and reproduction of rhythm, understanding and content of written text or an insufficient development of graphomotoric.*

*The problems in application of grammar rules are influenced by an insufficient development of speaking, particularly an insufficient sense for the language and languages skills in the mother tongue.”(in Zelinková, O., 2003)*

These children have problems in writing dictation, copying from the book or blackboard. They often confuse letter pairs as b-d, p-q, m-w, or misspell many words. There can occur reversals and inversions in the spelling of common words such as saw/was, they/when.

## **2.2 PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING ENGLISH**

The early identification of children at risk for specific learning difficulties is very important because the earlier intervention is provided the easier the deficiencies are to overcome.

Children with LDs need special help in several areas: differentiation of tasks, using specific approaches for teaching reading and writing, willingness to spend more time in comparison with the others, ability to help the children to develop their own learning strategies, and to choose suitable work in lessons.

It is necessary to respect individuality and dissimilarity in each child because not every approach is suitable for all children. No one model of teaching languages exists and the good teacher should be able to choose from a selection of methods. O.Zelinková (2003) comments that most children with LDs prefer global style learning. They like conversation and learning on the basis of repetition in various situations. The others need a system, comprehension of grammatical rules or use grammatical summary. For that reason, successful teaching must arise from understanding the child's individuality and his needs.

## **2.3 TEACHING METHODS**

### **2.3.1 Multi-sensory teaching approach**

*„This approach uses more than one of the senses to help a child learn. Most people with dyslexia need help from a teacher specially trained in using a multisensory, structured language approach because for these children, the brain is not exactly divided into two areas, which can separate and deal stimuli. So it is important for these individuals to be taught by a method that involves several senses (hearing, seeing, touching) at the same time. The process of learning is not just logical, it is sensual because „involving the use of more of child’s senses, especially the use of touch and movement will give the child’s brain tactile and kinetic memories to hang on to, as well as the visual and auditory ones.“ < [www.interdys.org](http://www.interdys.org) > stav k 23.2.2006*

O.Zelinková (2003) claims that the pupil should have many opportunities to speak, repeating the words and connecting them with reality. (S)he should listen to his/her pronunciation, compares it with the pronunciation of the teacher or with others in the class. Visual reproduction with highlighted words is effective.

### **2.3.2 Communicative approach**

B.Pechancová, A.Smrčková(1998) have chosen some features that are suitable for these children:

1. The aims are focused on development of communicative skills rather than grammatical aspects.
2. Methods are focused on learning language in common communication in a daily life.
3. The fluency of speech is preferred to correctness.

This approach requires skills to perceive the speaker, understand what he/she is saying, express personal thoughts and needs and to be active in lessons.

Pupils are encouraged by teacher and the teacher helps and leads them.

### 2.3.3 Total physical response

This method is based on the concept of learning a foreign language in a way similar to the assimilation the mother tongue. O.Zelinková (2003) calls this approach *a mother method*.

At first, a child mainly listens and starts to react to orders of his schoolmates without speech. The development of speech starts when the child is able to understand and react physically.

This method is suitable for children with LD because it is entertaining. It develops a sense of direction and allows a movement that is very important for these children.

B.Pechancová, A.Smrčková(1998) recommend it for its amusing character and popularity with children.

## 2.4 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Because specific learning difficulties can affect many areas of language and thus have an impact on all subject areas, teachers must be aware how to present information, how to help students interact with information, find out how to support children with LDs and how to evaluate acquisition of information.

Here are some suggestions that may prove helpful:

- *„give students the opportunity to inform you privately of any disability they may have;*
- *avoid "labelling" students; they are all individuals and may feel very sensitive about their disability;*
- *encourage students to sit near the front of a class. (This may aid concentration.)*
- *provide handouts;*
- *make your notes available to borrow;*
- *allow the recording of classes on cassette;*
- *allow for variation in learning styles;*
- *incorporate small group activities to maximise interaction;*



- *indicate the most important books on a reading list;*
- *remember that too much information on a board may cause confusion;*
- *give students time;*
- *Encourage students to work independently. (In particular regularly working with a "study-buddy" and / or a tandem partner can be beneficial.)*
- *Suggest the use of technology for independent study, e.g. videocassettes and CD ROM's;*
- *promote the use of mnemonic strategies to aid recall;*
- *consider using consistent colour-coding to distinguish between the gender of nouns;*
- *be careful about the use of gap-filling / reordering exercises;*
- *when working on grammar, always give an explanation + an example;*
- *ensure that the format of an exam is familiar;*
- *allow the extra exam time;*
- *always make everything explicit.* “< [www.bda-dyslexia.org](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org)> stav k 23.2.2006

M.Šigutová (2004) recommends:

- *„differentiation tasks;*
- *extra time;*
- *support of the development learning strategies, self-image;*
- *suitable organisation in the classroom or outside;*
- *motivational assessment;*
- *using the modern technologies;*
- *specific methods for development skills.“*

It is obvious that LDs cover a wide spectrum, and therefore it is better to seek specialist support rather than struggle on alone. Specialists can recommend and design strategies that are relevant and convenient.

## 2.5 ASSESSMENT

Evaluation and assessment of children with LDs follows effective directives – Dir: 13710/2001-24. It recommends using different forms of assessment, e.g. point evaluation, evaluation with the number of mistakes, and so on. The motivational factors should be emphasised in relation to everything that the pupil has managed and achieved.

Verbal assessment is preferred. It is an alternative form of assessment that the teacher chooses with the approval of the headmaster and parents, together with the recommendation of the advisory centre.

*„We should include only the basic knowledge and everything of what a child has managed. It means the basic acquisition of vocabulary, collocations and common phrases, primarily in an oral way – be able to speak about common topics.*

*The words, written phonetically the right way, should be tolerated. We do not include writing and reading into the assessment if it is markedly worse.*

*We can take knowledge of songs, poems, rhymes, anecdotes that children know into consideration as well. We can assess the pronunciation, ability to converse, knowledge about given country and other activities.“ (in Zelinková, 1994)*

The task of assessing pupils with LDs is to find out and judge their level over a certain period, and give them feedback to see their progress. It should be focused on the whole personality, especially on the positive aspects.

According to Zelinkova, if the right way of assessment is selected, this can influence not only the pupil's general development but also his/her later choice of profession.

### 3. PRACTICAL PART

MOTTO:

“Every man is both capable of and good at something. We all have potential.. It is just that we do not always recognise what it is.”

Jiří Pokorný

In this part I am going to focus on an alternative approach, because I must confess with some regret that my teaching children with LDs using a general one has had little effect.

#### 3.1 THE CONCEPT *CAT*

I have here constructed a teaching concept of my own based on the acronym *CAT*, consisting of three elements: *Colours, Animals, Transfer*.

*Animals* - I use symbols of animals instead of sentence elements, because these are most readily appreciated and understood by children. For example, I choose a lion to stand for the *subject*, as the lion is a king of the jungle, and his importance is intended to mirror the importance of the grammatical subject in a sentence.

A monkey stands for the *verb*, as this agile and energetic creature represents action *per se* very well.

A cat stands for the *object*, and although it is not as big or strong as a lion they are both beasts of prey, and both belong to the same family of animals. Their relationship is intended to mirror that of subject and object. And just as the cat sometimes wanders far from home and is not there, so simple sentences in English can be constructed that contain no object.

An owl stands for an *adverb*, it being clever and wise; it knows the answers to questions like *how, where, when*.

A dog stands for an *adjective* - I have chosen only an adjective instead of a complement here because the adjective is more readily understood by children – and as the dog stays with its master so does as an adjective with its noun. However, a dog

sometimes loses its master, and then stands alone as an adjective.

A chameleon stands for the auxiliary verb *do*; just as the chameleon changes its hues so does the the auxiliary verb change not only its form in the third person singular – *does* - but also the intentionality of the whole sentence: interrogative or negative.

I use a small ladybird for ‘-s’ in the third person singular in declaratives. It is a small animal that flies to sit on the monkey’s tail or the chameleon’s tongue.

My focus is on quality rather than quantity, because every child is individual, and each person's cognitive perception and experience varies from one to the other. That is why I deliberately enhance that perception with the use of colours.

*Colours* - I assume that children with LDs may have problems in recognising and remembering these letters, so I highlight them in colours. Colours are used because they too are like animals, in that they are immediately familiar to children. The colours chosen represent merely a personal choice, but I think that it would be interesting and useful to ask children what colour they would choose for themselves.

An orange colour is used for the subject. This colour represents ‘I’ as the centre, full of energy.

A blue colour, traditionally that associated with the sea, is used to represent the verb and thus action; the flowing motion of water mirrors this.

A yellow colour is used for the object, the intention here being that the relationship between orange and yellow mirrors that of subject and object.

A purple colour is used for the adverb. It is a mixture of colours - red and blue - as adverbs themselves consist of more elements (*viz.* manner, place, time).

An adjective is brown. This colour has some orange in it, so they can be said to belong to each other as adjectives do to nouns.

I have selected a red colour for auxiliary *do* (and thus *does*, *don’t*, *doesn’t*) because the red colour is very conspicuous and is conventionally the colour of warning. It says, *do not forget me!*

*Transfer* - derives from Bernau transactional theory. Transaction represents interactions between people. Transactional utterances carry not only information in themselves, but specific emotional affects. This implies someone reacting to someone else.

Transactional analysis is built on the assumption that *personality* has three basic constituents: *parent / adult / child*, where parent represents Will, adult Rationality, and child Feelings.

J.Pokorný describes a child thus: „*a child feels, rejoices, imagines and plays. He/she is a) natural, spontaneous, b) well-mannered, c) rebellious,undisciplined, d) powerless, injured. A child is relaxed, without rationality and barriers, reacts without rational control and is creative.*“

If social interaction in childhood is impaired, frustrated or sabotaged, then negative feelings and a poor self-image can result, leaving its mark that the child carries through on into the future. Many things in adult life can resonate and act as reminders of that deprivation once experienced.

Teaching English is very important and one assumes that it will continue indefinitely, so feedback matters. In Transference my underlying assumption is that feedback functions in a positive way; I realize how important motivation is, because as J.Pokorný says, it is *motivation* that functions as the engine of change, and is an influential factor affecting behaviour and actions, as well as future decisions.

The concept *CAT* I would like to use for teaching and explaining English grammar but for the other teaching I am going to combine *CAT* with classical methods that I here use the acronym *DOG* for (deriving from *dogma*), though of course no pejorative meaning should be ascribed to this. It is a mixture of tried approaches such as multi-sensory, communicative, and TPR.

### **3.2 LESSON PLANS**

These lesson plans are created for pupils who have been learning English for two years and are in the fifth class.

There are twelve pupils in the class. There are four girls and eight boys. All these children have specific learning difficulties - dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysortographia, three pupils have dyscalculia plus five pupils have been diagnosed with LMD syndrome, and two pupils found with specific logopedics. There are also two boys with ADD.

Knowing the problems children with LDs, I have made special lesson plans for them where I have combined *DOG* and *CAT*.

All these lesson plans are focused on the grammatical area of the simple present tense. They are designed specially for this class: even though the teacher has previously gone through this topic the pupils have still had problems with its use. Therefore I intend to try the concept of the *CAT*.

### **3.2.1 Lesson plan 1**

AIM: present simple tense – declarative sentences and using verbs of daily routines

#### PREPARATION:

copy handouts 1.1. ( days of the week ) for each pupil

copy handouts 1.2. ( pictures from the text ) for pairs

copy the pictures with animals for each pupil

copy handouts 1.3. ( Is it right? Correct. ) for each pupil

#### IN CLASS:

1. warm up: focus on repetition the days of the week (the days are connected with present simple and daily activities)

- give pupils handouts 1.1. and explain them what to do
- pupils complete the words and then match them to Czech words
- this exercise is focused on support of visual perception
- check the exercise together.

2. pupils listen and follow the article on page 31 ( New English For You – pupil's book ); while pupils listen to the player, write jumbled verbs from the text on the board

3. pupils read and translate verbs on the board; if they do not know the meaning show unknown verb out and pupils guess.

4. make pairs and give them handouts 1.2; pairs put pictures in the correct order and say verbs, check it together.

5. write on the board the sentence : **I PLAY FOOTBALL ON MONDAY.**, put each animal under the appropriate sentence element and explain according to the concept CAT.

6. give each pupil pictures with animals and let them put animals into the correct order, explaining when the present simple tense is used.

7. pupils choose one verb and make up their own sentence; if they are not sure the ranked animals on the board can help them.

8. homework: give pupils handout 1.3. and explain to them what to do.

### **3.2.2 Lesson plan 2**

#### **Introducion to lesson plan 2**

Assuming a positive experience working with symbols and colours, I have decided here to aim for a more relaxed approach in order to aid concentration, sensory co-ordination and a reduction of hyperactivity.

For most of the day the human brain functions at a level of consciousness we may term *beta*, whose emotional characteristics are tension, restlessness and stress, all factors that inhibit concentration rather than promote it. Ironically, in an *alpha* level of consciousness - whose hallmark is one predominantly of relaxation rather than of cognitive application - processing of conscious and sub-conscious mental events is actually *improved*. The inference then is that *stress* is the enemy in working with children with LDs.

Discussions with a child psychologist (together with an English music teacher who works with children of all levels of ability in the largest school in the UK) have reinforced the conclusion drawn by multiple researches in the USA and Europe that playing certain types of non-dominant music in the background whilst children work has a subliminal pacifying affect, converting beta levels to alpha levels of response.

The most famous example of this is the so-called *Mozart Effect* which, though extensively studied and reported on for over seventeen years by scientists and academics, has not yet been fully explained. Basically, Mozart's string music – the chamber music, violin concerti, etc – has a direct and observable effect upon children's concentration and behaviour when played quietly in the background during lessons; piano music less so, and vocal music not at all. Other composers – even those whose music uses a similar vocabulary and is in the same Viennese classical style such as Haydn and early Beethoven – does not produce a comparable effect, and all scientific research to date has failed to explain why.

The use of music in this way is self-explanatory to aid the study and retention of grammar and vocab, etc.

AIM: focus on speaking : asking questions and giving information (repetition of present simple tense statements and questions)

#### PREPARATION:

- copy handouts 2.1. ( the chart with words that pupils should use to make questions ) for each pupil
- copy handouts 2.2. ( the chart to fill in ) for each pupil

#### IN CLASS:

##### 1. *The lull:*

- play the chill-out music/ or use quietly in the background throughout;
- explain on the board revision of the grammar of present simple –statements and questions according to the concept CAT, putting animals and the colours on the board – they can have visual support for following work;
- pupils just look at the board whilst absorbing the music and the teacher's voice – the children's minds start to function at alpha level, and the curriculum is absorbed better.

##### 2. *warm up:*

- tell pupils to imagine they are at a party and they meet someone new;



- ask what information they want to know about the person and write their ideas on the board;

- help them to make some questions about some of the information they wanted to know and write that on the board;

3. *put them in pairs* and give out copies 2.1. + 2.2. for each child;

- tell them to look at the words and ask if there are any words that they are still do not know - ask to other pupils to explain them or act out yourself before giving the meaning orally

- they make and answer questions;

- help pairs

4. *game – (I am the other)*: gather up charts, mix them out and each pupil chooses and introduces him/herself.

### **3.2.3 Lesson plan 3**

The teacher of this class asked me to practise the forms of the third person singular because pupils have had problems with it. So I have focused on this topic.

AIM: to practise 3rd person singular forms – present simple

PREPARATION:

Copy handout 3.1. (lost ladybirds) for each child

Copy handout 3.2. (broken sentences) - cut the sentences up and put them in the envelope for pairs

## IN CLASS:

### 1. *warm up*:

a snake: write a word on the board, pupils continue – explain to them that they have to think of another word whose first letter is the same one at the end of the previous one

### -2 *tell pupils that they can use only nouns and verbs*

- when the board is full, pupils work out the words working backwards, then circle them in the colour code used in *CAT* ( orange for nouns, blue for verbs); this activity is used to practise vocabulary, as well as and to train the pupils' ability to recognize words among various letters, and distinguish individual words according to their grammatical classification;

### 3. *the lull*:

- tell pupils that the ladybird has got lost, and ask them whether they remember where and when to use it;

- play the chill-out music (if not already continuously in the background);

- explain on the board revision of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular forms according to the concept *CAT*: talk about naughty chameleon that sometimes changes its place, and about the ladybird which flies to the monkey's tail or chameleon's tongue; then explain that the ladybirds on the monkey's tail is *-s*, and on the chameleon's tongue becomes *-es*.

- put together animals on the board – they can have visual support for following work;

- pupils just look at the board and listen to music and the teacher;

4. *the exercise: Where do lost ladybirds belong?* Explain to pupils they have to find the lost ladybirds - give them handout 3.1. and do the 1<sup>st</sup> sentence together to show them what to do

- give them time to work independently; act as a prompter;

- give pupils handout where the text is filled in correctly and without ladybirds to have a visual control;

- check the exercise together very carefully;

5. broken sentences: write Czech sentences on the board, show and explain to pupils what to do with broken sentences;

- make pairs, give them an envelope with broken sentences, make sure that pupils know what to do;

- pairs put broken sentences together according to the Czech sentences written on the board, help and encourage pairs;

- check together , each pair reads one sentence;

It is good to use the colours for word classes all the time if it is possible.

### **3.3 HYPOTHESES OF LESSONS**

#### **3.3.1 Lesson 1 (according to lesson plan 1)**

The main purpose of this lesson is to act as a reminder of present simple declarative sentences and to practise them, introduce pupils to the concept of *CAT* and practise using the verbs of daily routines. I do not anticipate vocabulary problems with days of the week as this is merely repetition, or with verbs of daily routines in the text because the text with the verbs was pre-taught. I anticipate that pupils will like the idea of *CAT* because they will not be aware of learning “known” grammar that has already been taught and that this new concept will be more motivating and helpful with grammar learning – a task often unpopular with children.

It is hoped that pupils will be motivated and interested in the activities because of the known text, vocabulary and imaginative interpretative grammar using colours and pictures of animals that are more immediately comprehensible to children as opposed to just “mere words”. The intention is to fix colours and animals in pupils’ minds by the use of animals and colours (*CAT*) stuck on the board.

Teacher should anticipate some problems with setting up the word order. Especially weak learners are expected to have some problems. I hope that visual support of the pictures and colours (*CAT*) will be helpful for them.

### **3.3.2 Lesson 2 (according to lesson plan 2)**

I assume that it will be desirable to explain to pupils a new way of teaching that presents music during teaching. I anticipate that by way of chill-out music a calm atmosphere will be created. Pupils are thus in a more receptive frame of mind for work.

In the activity warm up, pupils are expected to have many ideas and new expressions of their own, but will not be able to translate them into English or make questions themselves. I anticipate that simple questions such as *What is your name?* or *How old are you?* will not make problems, but the co-operation of schoolmates and help from the teacher will be required for the more complicated ones.

Pupils will be able to make questions according to the written questions on the board with support provided by the colours and animals there. Pupils will be allowed to ask the questions that they want. I assume that teacher will work with them in pairs, listen and gently correct mistakes, and generally act as a promoter.

The last activity is not expected to produce problems with making statements because pupils use the 1st person singular.

### **3.3.3 Lesson 3 (according to lesson plan 3)**

The activity snake seems to be a useful way of practising vocabulary, especially spelling and recognition of word classes such as nouns and verbs. I assume that children will have no problems with vocabulary, but spelling will be difficult for them as well as the determination of word classes.

The main aim of this lesson is to practise the third person singular. I am assuming that pupils will remember the story about the naughty chameleon and flying ladybird and that this will help them absorb and understand this problematic 3rd person singular more easily. The music is expected to calm pupils so they can concentrate and remember without stress, restlessness or even anxiety.

The exercise – *Where do lost ladybirds belong?* is assumed not to cause difficulty because the grammar of the 3rd person singular is revision, and the pictures with colours will be stuck on the board so pupils will have a visual support. I expect that pupils will place the lost ladybirds in the right place because this activity will happen immediately after the explanation and repetition of grammar using according to *CAT*.

According to my experience the exercise - *broken sentences* pupils like very much; they work in pairs so pupils can help each other, that is why though I expect that they will struggle they will enjoy it. There is likely to be a problem with the use of auxiliary *DO*, but I made different shapes (but each word class has its own form) for each sentence to be simpler for pupils. In addition too, the shapes are coloured according to the *CAT* to help. To piece the puzzle together is good for visual perception, perception *per se* and analytic thinking.

### **3.4 EXPERIENCE AND EVALUATION**

#### **3.4.1 Lesson plan 1**

The first activity – warm-up worked without any big problems . Just a few pupils had small problems with spelling when they confused some letters, but the pupils enjoyed the lesson overall.

During the listening section some pupils did not concentrate fully because they had read it in previous lesson so it was already known for them. Next time it may be better to assign the task beforehand e.g. count the verbs to improve motivation. That is why some pairs were not able to arrange pictures into the right order. On the other hand, pupils did not have problems with the meaning of the verbs thanks to the visual support in the textbook and afterwards in the illustration of the pictures.

The concept *CAT* was received very well. Pupils were enthusiastic about the colours and especially, as anticipated, the animals. Just unusual colours for the animals caused surprise and amusement.

Pupils managed to arrange the animals into the correct order with the help of the visual support of the pictures on the board and of the teacher.

They were able to make up sentences because pupils chose ones familiar to them, but the problem was that they often used the same ones or very similar, such as, *I play, I like...* as well as small faults in using prepositions and definite/indefinite articles. Next time it would be better to set certain verbs for each pupil e.g., the teacher could match up pictures with the particular activity. To make this easier, the verb would be written on the other side of the picture – and in blue, for ease of recognition.

On the whole, pupils liked the lesson.

### 3.4.2 Lesson plan 2

The use of music was something new for pupils so they were very curious as to what would happen. Firstly a few boys made noises but afterwards listened. It was evident that pupils liked the use of colour and animals (the concept *CAT*).

The warm-up activity went as expected. Pupils had a lot of ideas but they were not able to say everything in English. The teacher helped them to translate some useful and undemanding expressions. The biggest problem was to make questions where auxiliary *DO* was required. However, pupils were able to make them with the teacher using animals stuck on the board.

The speaking activity itself was difficult for some pupils. They had a tendency to use their mother tongue and some of them (especially the weaker) ones made a lot of mistakes, in spite of written sentences on the board. So the teacher with me helped these pupils paying particular attention to accuracy in speaking. On the other hand, some of them were bright, choosing sentences that they had learned such (as, *what is your job?* instead of, *what do you do in your free time?*) and used the help on the board without requiring teacher assistance. A good idea would be if the teacher linked a weaker pupil with a more able one when working in pairs. The pupils can thus help not only themselves but also the teacher. This activity was a great experience for them, and were very natural in their role play.

The exchanging of questionnaires was funny and generally amusing because some pupils had to ‘change sex’ (by pretending that they are either a girl or boy when they weren’t) Unfortunately, not all the pupils had a go at this because time ran out.

### 3.4.3 Lesson 3

The snake activity was successful. They sometimes had problems recognizing the verb or the noun, and used other word classes; spelling ‘s mistakes also occurred. They met some words whose meaning is lodged in both word classes and pupils had the opportunity to realize that. At the beginning of the activity, it was helpful to tell pupils that proper names are not allowed because they had tendency to use them.

It was surprising that the pupils concentrated and were quiet during the lull. They listened to the teacher carefully, sometimes had tendency to interact with the teacher. The story about the naughty chameleon was very successful. The pupils' interest was very evident. I think that it would be both interesting and motivating to let pupils make up their own story.

Although it was repetition it was shown that pupils had problems with the placement of ladybirds (-es, -s) especially in the negative sentences and sibilants. And one other problem occurred but this was my fault. Pupils were instructed that when the ladybird sits on the chameleon's tongue it has got a form -es and when it sits on the monkey's tail it has got form -s which is not actually true. Pupils found out that I had not taken account of the rule of sibilant consonant in the third person singular. So we had to alter the story.

Pupils also practised word order in exercise with broken sentences. They appreciated pieces that were coloured which made their task easier. A few pairs needed the teacher's help but finally all the pairs completed their work successfully.

The lesson took place in a calm atmosphere; pupils were motivated and felt pleasure from their work that used colours and animals.

### **3.5. SUMMARY**

These lesson plans were prepared for pupils who have already learned the present simple. However, even with the topic explained, it demonstrated how difficult it was for pupils with LDs is to learn a foreign language. This is entirely understandable because not only is the grammar in itself hard to grasp, but they have other difficulties as well.

I tried to facilitate teaching and learning for both the children and the teacher. It was clear that pupils were interested and liked the lessons. They worked without any discipline problems all the time and their feedback was very positive, as was the teacher's, who has appreciated the prepared materials and the help during the lessons.

After every lesson, I gave out evaluation sheets ( inspired by Nixon, C., Tomlinson, M. : *Primary Activity Box p.19* ) where the pupils could express their opinion. These were anonymous as I wanted pupils to be sincere and honest, and allow me to see the lessons from the pupils' point of view.

I was very surprised how much they enjoyed working on evaluation sheets, and even though they did this during their break time they still did it very responsibly.

On the whole they were satisfied, despite the fact that these lessons centred on grammar which is not naturally appealing to children.

It was very good experience for me as well, not least because as a teacher I found out how best to tailor future lessons, emphasising the most popular activities and avoiding or redesigning the least popular ones in accordance with their views.

I would say only that the *ad hoc* evaluation sheets I used should in future lessons be given a *pro forma* design and incorporated into the lesson proper, to ensure that the children had adequate enough time to fill them in (which unfortunately was not the case with these lessons) and also see them as an integral part of the learning process.



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

I have focused on children with specific learning difficulties in my thesis. In the theoretical part, I have outlined some problems of children with specific learning difficulties and some recommended approaches for these children in elementary school.

In the practical part I focused especially on teaching of grammar because I had a group of pupils with LDs and their teacher needed to practise the present simple tense. So I made up my own concept *CAT* where I use my experience with using colours during private lessons where it is obvious that colours greatly help pupils, as well as playing chill-out music for the lull to promote better concentration, remembering how this has helped my own learning in the past.

This concept is focused on the grammatical topic of the present simple tense, something new for them and untested. That is why accurate assessment of its efficacy is not yet possible. I can say, however, that pupils who tried working with this concept liked it and did their tasks with pleasure.

The question arises whether it would be suitable for other pupils with LDs and whether they would enjoy it as well. My experience so far suggests yes. Another question is this: how should the interaction between the teacher and the Learning Support be best handled? .

I have adapted known methods that I have named - *DOG* to produce my alternative method – *CAT*. I have tried to facilitate and vary English lessons for children with specific learning difficulties. This concept should help to improve children's concentration and perception, as well as create a calm atmosphere conducive to work, which view would seem to be justified, judging from the children's and the teacher's responses to them.

To conclude, I am fully aware that this topic is not complete and I would like to leave it open to further discussion.

## 5. RESUMÉ

Ve své práci se zabývám problematikou výuky anglického jazyka u dětí se specifickými poruchami učení.

V teoretické práci jsem se snažila nastínit problematiku těchto dětí a popsat různé přístupy k jejich výuce.

V praktické části jsem na základě vlastních znalostí a zkušeností, nejen jako pedagoga, ale i studenta s SVPU, nakombinovala dosavadní osvědčené metody, jimž jsem dala pracovní název – *DOG*, se svoji vlastní koncepcí - *CAT*.

V této práci jsem se věnovala zejména výuce gramatiky a to na žádost paní učitelky, která učila angličtinu ve třídě kde byl experiment prováděn. Pokusila jsem se dětem usnadnit a zpestřit výuku přítomného času prostého - pro ně “nezáživnou” a bohužel i často velmi nepochopitelnou. Koncept *CAT* měl pomoci žákům zlepšit koncentraci, zvýšit jejich vnímání a chápání. Alespoň z části odbourat neklid a napětí, které je u těchto dětí evidentní a vytvořit klidnou a motivující atmosféru, což se podle vyjádření dětí a učitele v těchto 3 hodinách povedlo.

I have dealt with problems in teaching English to children with specific learning difficulties.

In the theoretical part, I have tried to outline the difficulties these children experience and I have described various approaches to their teaching.

In the practical part, I have concentrated particularly upon teaching grammar, because the English teacher asked me to do this. I have tried to make easier and more enjoyable the topic of the present simple tense, something which children often find tedious and difficult to understand.

The concept *CAT* is intended to help pupils improve attention, increase their perception and understanding, as well as reduce restlessness and tension in order to promote a calm well-motivated atmosphere for learning; and from the feedback from both the teacher and the children, these objectives were achieved in the course of these three lessons.

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## 7. APPENDICES

### HANDOUT 1.1.

The days of the week

Fill in and match:

- - I - A -

STŘEDA

T U - - - - Y

ČTVRTEK

M - - D - Y

SOBOTA

W - D - - S D - - -

PONDĚLÍ

S - - D - Y

PÁTEK

- H - R - D A Y

ÚTERÝ

S - T - - - A Y

NEDELE

### HANDOUT 1.3.

Is it right? Correct.

I wash my ~~friends~~. I wash my hands.

They make their bread. \_\_\_\_\_

We read breakfast. \_\_\_\_\_

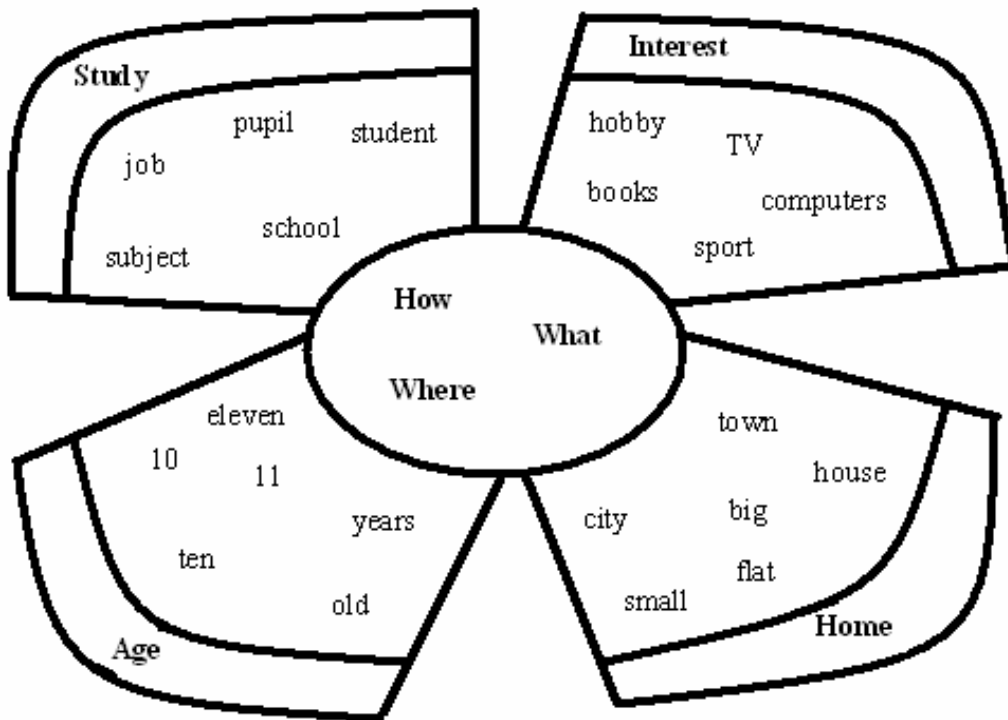
They play books. \_\_\_\_\_

I take my bed. \_\_\_\_\_

Children go to shoes. \_\_\_\_\_

The lessons clean at eight o'clock. \_\_\_\_\_

HANDOUT 2.1.



HANDOUT 2.2.

Questionnaire:

First name : \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of living: \_\_\_\_\_

Job: \_\_\_\_\_

Hobby: \_\_\_\_\_

HANDOUT 3.1.

Find 4 lost ladybirds :



Do your mum wash up?

I get up at seven o'clock.



My brother play football.

The lessons don't start at ten o'clock.

She watch TV every day.



The right version for pupils:

Does your mum wash up?

I get up at seven o'clock.

My brother plays football.

The lessons doesn't start at ten o'clock.

She watches TV every day.

HANDOUT 3.2.

Broken sentences

DOES ANN LISTEN TO THE RADIO ?

DOES YOUR FATHER PLAY TENNIS ?

MY MUM DOESN'T LIKE BANANAS.

PETER DOESN'T GO TO SCHOOL.

TOM READS BOOKS.

MY SISTER WATCHES TV.



Pictures of animals:

