**Thoughts on dyslexia**

*This year, first time in my twenty years of teaching experience, I had a student with dyslexia. It was the most challenging year for both of us. For me because I had never come across any person with this diagnosis, let alone teaching one. For him, let’s call him K., it was not any easy experience either. The main reason for that was that English was his second language. K. was from one of East Asia countries and for him learning another language full of sounds and letters different from his native one was quite stressful. On top of that, he was recently officially diagnosed with dyslexia. All of this could cause a plenty of stress for anyone, let alone a young boy. Kei was very sensitive child, could easily burst into tears over a misread word.*

*I was told that K. had spelling, reading, and writing issues but I did not realize how severe the gaps in his knowledge were. So, there was a sharp need for me to go through a pile of readings to be able at least understand what dyslexia was and what strategies I could use to support K.*

*However, there seemed to be only a little progress in K.’s literacy and writing even though I was assisting him even more than other students. For example, as my students had only one week to finish the writing, I kept helping Kei too much. I would check his first draft of the essay and instead of pointing to the weak spots and give him directions to independently improve the draft I would tell him what to write. Also, I corrected every word he spelled instead of asking him “How do you think you should spell it? Do you remember what two letters to use when you hear /∫/ sound?”. When I realized that Kei did not seem to be making any significant progress, I asked for advice.*

*Our school administration along with English Department supervisor and Learning Support specialist supported me in all the possible ways. They suggested K. was given extra time for his writing, so he would do it in his own pace and with as little help from me as possible. Another idea that helped to improve K’s reading fluency and comprehension was to use more audio materials.*

I decided to look up more information regarding dyslexia and especially how to deal with it in EFL classroom. Before I thought that dyslexia had to do with a person’s way to see the letters backwards and that is the reason why reading and spelling would be hard. However, recent studies done by different organizations show that dyslexia is a neurobiological learning disability that affects person’s ability to read and write. Also, it was proved that this condition does not affect one’s intelligence. According to National Health Service, one of every ten people in the United Kingdom can possibly show the signs of dyslexia. Another study done by International Dyslexia association states that “up to 15-20 % of the school population as a whole may have symptoms of dyslexia including slow reading, week spelling, poor writing.” As Dyslexia Centre of Utah states, one in five students of the U.S. population has a disability regarding language, most probably dyslexia. Studies suggest that the earlier parents detect the signs of dyslexia, the more effectively children can be helped.

General signs of dyslexia students show:

-confuse letters that look similar

-dislike reading

-poor spelling

-illegible handwriting

-ignore the punctuation

-poor phonological awareness

Undoubtedly, students with dyslexia need a lot of support from teachers and specialized trainers. It is especially difficult for ESL students due to the difference of sounds and graphemes. For example, research done in Malaysia (2018, Ahmad S., Ali, M. and Salehuddin, K.) demonstrate that teaching English to students with dyslexia has its challenges. One of them would big class sizes. Teachers think that one-to-one teaching would be more helpful. Also, it was rather demanding for teacher to not have any special dyslexia related training offered to ESL teachers. Most importantly, the study showed that teachers were worried about students’ emotional well-being as they showed low confidence and high sensitivity. Teachers shared strategies they use in class to assist dyslexic students: **drilling, differentiation and peer coaching**.

*All the challenges those teachers faced happened to match with what I experience with K. He was always distressed when he misread the word or misspelled it. By that point I was familiar with that fact and tried not to have him read out loud in class. However, he was eager to engage and kept saying: “Miss, can I read too?” Whenever he could not read something, he was seemingly upset and even cried. Fortunately, his classmates were very supportive and never made fun of him. I used* ***buddy reading strategy*** *in class. The point was to set K. with one of the strong readers. They pick the book to read. Each of them has two chapters to read at home. In class, a strong student reads one chapter out loud to K., and then K. reads same chapter on his own to his buddy. A strong student listens to K.’s reading and underlines the misread words so to later read the word again with K. Then they discuss the chapter. That strategy helped K. to raise his self-esteem and become better reader.*

Another study (Cimermanova, 2015) provides a variety of recommendations to teach dyslexic students. For instance, it would be better to give **extra time to finish the task**, provide **clear and step by step instructions, model the tasks, colors to support learning.**

International Dyslexia Association (2002) suggests **recording directions or stories** so students can listen again and follow the directions or read on their own. Also, they recommend **simplifying the written directions** and give a **smaller number of activities**. Additionally, they recommend providing students with **graphic organizers**.

*Using* ***graphic organizers*** *worked very well with my student K. too. In fact, when we were doing a procedural writing, I created a chart which he called “a map”. It was a great help for K. it allowed him to keep his focus on the order and structure of the project. Also, there was always other charts on the walls for how to write opinion essay or do the narrative writing. Graphic organizers helped him create a better outline and do more successful drafts.*

*Another great help for K was using* ***audio books****. It made reading so much easier and less stressful for him. When it was impossible to find a story supported by audio, I would read aloud the text, and he would repeat. If it was a big text, we read paragraph by paragraph. When we read smaller selections, I read the page, and he repeated the page. I was happy to see K. relaxed when he could read this text in class without any problems.*

*As it was mentioned before, my first experience with teaching dyslexic student was not easy. Far from it, it was nerve-racking and demanding, but at the same time rewarding. I learned that a student who struggles with reading is not just a lack of student’s effort but something deeper. It was rewarding because when you do the reading test by the end of the year and see a significant progress, it makes the student’s eyes bright and smile broad and happy. Of course, there is a lot to learn as K. and I are only in the beginning of our journey.*

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