PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM:
German for Beginners at the Tertiary Level

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  - Medical view (characteristics and symptoms)
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NEW ROLE FOR TERTIARY-LEVEL TEACHERS

- Increasing number of students with special needs (FELU: 30 per academic year)

- Challenge for the faculty

- The new role for university foreign language instructors:
  - not commonly accepted
  - lack of proficiency in dealing with these students
  - highly demanding: extra work / time / energy
    ↓
    interdisciplinary approach
TARGET GROUPS: Dyslexia and TBI / ABI

- Experiences in the classroom (2010–2014): Business German for Beginners

- Significant number of students with
  - DYSLEXIA (1–4 per group)
  - TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) or ABI (Acquired Brain Injury) (at least 1 per group)

- Major problem: LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
**DYSLEXIA**

**In numbers** (BDA, British Dyslexia Association):
- 5–10% of population (EU)
- over 1 million in higher education
- 30% diagnosed during the study (!)

**No single definition:**
- a phonological deficit; difficulty with phonemic awareness
- a lifelong condition
- independent of:
  - intelligence
  - effort
  - support
  - socioeconomic status

"… a difference in acquiring reading, spelling and writing skills, that is neurologic in origin…" (BDA)
**DYSLEXIA: SYMPTOMS**

- **Impairment of working memory**
- Problems with sound processing and interpretation
- Difficulty in language acquisition
- Difficulties with:
  - symbols (Roman numerals, spelling, etc.)
  - relationships
  - sequences
  - layouts
- Problems with:
  - spatial coordination (left, right, up, down)
  - visual processing
  - maintenance of visual image (a letter / word / sequence)
- Planning and organization (time / materials / processes)
- Irregular energy levels (rapid fatigue, slowness)
TBI / ABI

- **TBI: Traumatic Brain Injury**
  - open head injury,
  - penetrating trauma,
  - brain concussion, etc.

Secondary:
  - bleeding inside the skull, brain swelling, etc.

- **ABI: Acquired Brain Injury:** Anoxia
  Hypoxia

Mechanical problems with breathing:
  - respiratory failure (at delivery!),
  - cardiac arrest, stroke,
  - rapid drops in blood pressure,
  - effect of drugs / poisoning-CO)
TBI /ABI: SYMPTOMS

- Memory problems
- Problems with language acquisition (reading, writing)
- Visual disturbances
- Poor concentration
- Attention deficits
- Mood swings, depression, frustration

Symptoms: SUBTLE
DELAYED → late diagnosis or lack of it
Recovery: uncertain
TARGET GROUPS: SIMILARITIES IN GENERAL

- **Medical aspect:**
  - symptoms
  - late diagnosis / lack of it

- **Educational aspect:**
  COMMON PROBLEM AREAS in:
  
  - Lectures: participating, taking notes
  - Studying: reading / understanding of longer texts
    - writing essays
    - learning a foreign language
  - Examinations:
    - retrieving the learned information
    - reproducing it in writing
PROBLEM AREAS IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

- Metalinguistic competence (instructions)
- Metacognitive competence (grammar)
- Lexical level: technical vocabulary
- Syntax and Pragmatics: reading comprehension
- Evaluation
MODEL

- Diagnosis
- Program
- Support:
  - psychological
  - sensory
  - cognitive
A diagnostic interview
(private, informal, before the start of the course):

- good teacher-student relationship
- reducing psychological barriers → 50% of success
- student‘s profile:

  ✓ strengths and weaknesses (in daily life, during previous education)
  ✓ linguistic problem areas
  ✓ self-esteem
  ✓ perceptual preference
An individual work plan:

- Clear goals (WHAT?)
- The given time periods (BY WHEN?)
- The learning paths and adaptation strategies (HOW?)

Students will build on their disability in such a way that their difficulty becomes their asset.
SUPPORT AND ACCOMODATIONS

- Psychological
- Sensory
- Cognitive
PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

- An optimistic and positive attitude
- Immediate, ongoing feedback
- Continuous contact
- Flexibility
SENSORY SUPPORT

MULTI-SENSORY LEARNING

- **Graphic organizers:**
  - optically adjusted materials
  - highlighted keywords

- **Auditory measures:**
  - recording of lessons
  - speech-to-text software
  - speaking: slowly, clearly, loudly

- **Spatial anchoring**
  - Position in the classroom
  - Language-level-specific areas at home: a room for grammar rules etc.

- **Minimization of external stimuli**
COGNITIVE SUPPORT

- Teaching material in **simplified form**:  
  - in brief and direct terms (instructions!)  
  - omit: non-essential details  
    double negatives, etc.
- Small steps
- Extra time
- Constant repetition in short intervals

Problematic areas in learning a foreign language (German):

- Metalinguistic competence (instructions)
- Metacognitive competence (grammar)
- Lexical level: specialized vocabulary
- Syntax and pragmatics: reading comprehension
- Evaluation
LANGUAGE LEVEL-ORIENTED SUPPORT

- **Metalinguistic competence (Problems with instructions)**
  Use the student's native language.
  Offer blocks of similar exercises.
  Stress the visual appearance of the instructive text.

- **Grammar**
  Keep rules on ONE sheet.
  Avoid sequences.
  Provide as many example sentences as possible.
  Avoid metalinguistic categories.
  Use visual patterns.
LANGUAGE LEVEL-ORIENTED SUPPORT

- Specialized vocabulary and reading comprehension

Use separate steps (teach pronunciation and writing separately)

Provide:
- Key vocabulary (glossaries)
- Study guides
- Authentic texts

Teach:
- Using Keywords (W-Questions)
- Skipping the not-understandable words
- Guessing the meaning
- Considering the text as a whole

Motivate: Not to give up 😊!
Testing and evaluation

Adjustments: visual
time flexibility

Types of measuring:
- ✓ written exam
- ✓ written with assistance
- ✓ oral answering test questions
- ✓ portfolio
- ✓ Informal: continuous observation / notes
CONCLUSIONS

Framework for a model:

- Self-diagnostics
- Objective introspection
- Adopting learning strategies and accommodations

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optimal combination of learning styles working method
insight into systems as such

↓

enable students to cope with demands (not only linguistic) in their future professional lives