

not the preserve of teachers and educational theorists. They are a policy area in their own right, for which co-operation and consultation between member states are essential. For 60 years – since the Council of Europe began work on language-related projects – they have evolved as European societies have evolved. And they call continually for new responses in line with the common *acquis* developed within the Council of Europe.

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AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) AND ASPERGER'S SYNDROME (AS) – STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS DURING ENGLISH LESSONS IN POLISH MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

In the first part of the article, the author presents brief description of the most important Regulations of the Polish Minister of National Education in the context of SEN students. Children with special needs, characteristics of selected disorders (Autism and Asperger's syndrome) and selected guidelines for teachers constitute the next matter under consideration of second part of the article.

It is essential to point out that English language teachers have to be aware of their responsibilities they have to students with special educational needs. Even if English language teachers are very good at English grammar, they have a large range of vocabulary, highly developed listening and speaking skills, and are excellent at lesson planning and know a lot of teaching methods; they still can discourage students with special educational needs from learning English language. If they do not acquire specialized knowledge and training related to different kinds of children's development impairments and disorders, they are not able to understand these children needs and identify students' problems in their development and learning process. If they are not able to do so, they will not be ready to organize favorable school circumstances for children with special educational needs at their English lessons.

Key words: children with special educational needs, English language teachers, Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Asperger's syndrome.

Introduction. Teaching English as a foreign language to children with special educational needs constitutes a difficult challenge for many teachers. English is the most frequently chosen foreign language in Polish schools. It has the opinion of easy, useful in life, popular and widely available in all multimedia sources, used by students. However, children with special educational needs may have difficulties learning English because it

requires good auditory- visual perception and phonological awareness. Therefore, English language teacher in the face of the inclusive education has to be well prepared for teaching students with special needs. He has to be prepared not only from didactic and linguistic point of view but also in the special pedagogy sense. He should be well acquainted with different regulations, procedures and methods in order to be as close as it is possible to the disabled learners' needs, their individualities and predispositions.

1. Students with special educational needs – the most important regulation and guidelines

When there is a student in an English class who has been diagnosed with ASD or Asperger's syndrome, teachers need to answer some key questions:

- how should they cooperate with the student himself and his parents?
- how to organize the classroom?
- which method of teaching are the most appropriate for the student?
- what are the best teaching aids for the student?
- how to organize cooperation between all students during the lesson?
- how to make a good use of the help of a supportive teacher?
- how to cooperate with teaching staff at school and with other specialists eg. speech therapist, psychologist, neurologist?

Furthermore, teachers have to be thoroughly acquainted with the student diagnosis, with his individual intellectual, emotional and social development and educational needs. It should be also noted here that one of the most important task facing a teacher working with students with special needs is to read the regulations of the Minister of National Education.

In Poland, the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of August 9th 2017, on the conditions for the organization of education, upbringing and care for children and teenagers with disabilities, socially maladjusted and threatened by social maladjustment, constitutes the most important ministerial directives related to the education for learners with special needs¹.

Article 6 of the above-mentioned regulation contains strict guidelines for the Individualized Program of Education and Therapy (IPET). It seems to be really important and well-founded, to point out another Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 7 th September 2017². It is the regulation on making adjudication and opinions issued by adjudication panels operating in public psychological and pedagogical counseling centers. Whenever in the discussed regulation the adjudication is mentioned, it should be understood as decision about the need for a special education, decision about the need for the individual yearly compulsory preparing for the preschool, decision about the need for individual teaching or decision about the need of remedial classes.

Moreover, whenever in the regulation the opinion is mentioned, it should be understood as opinion concerning the need of early supporting development. In the regulation mentioned above, we can also find more detailed information about the procedures that have to be taken in order to receive special adjudication. Furthermore, in Poland students with special educational needs can also receive psychological and pedagogical support at schools, preschools and other institutions, on the basis of the next Regulation of the Minister of National Education of August 9 th 2017, on the conditions for rules of organization and providing psychological and pedagogical support at public schools, preschools and other institutions³. The discussed regulation clearly describes available activities for students with special educational needs eg.: developing skills activities; special activities such as: corrective and compensatory, speech-therapy,

developing social and emotional competences. It is impossible to present and meticulously described all of this activities, but it is recommended to future foreign language teachers to be acquainted with them. However, it is really important to briefly describe the differences between the meanings of two terms: individualized path of education and individual teaching. In the Polish school reality these terms are very often misunderstood by the pupils' parents but also by the wide range of teachers. The individualized path of education is presented in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of August 9th 2017, on the conditions for rules of organization and providing psychological and pedagogical support at public schools, preschools and other institutions. It is organized for the students who are able to attend preschools or school but because of their difficulties in functioning caused by their health problems they are not able to participate in all school activities together with school or preschool division and therefore the process of teaching has to be adjusted to their special needs. Covering the pupil by the individualized path of education requires the public opinion of the public psychological and pedagogical counseling centers. Moreover, this kind of education can be leaded together with the school or preschool division and in the individual way only with the pupil. The case of the individual teaching is widely presented and described in the other regulation. The Regulation of the Minister of National Education of August 9th 2017, on the individual compulsory annual preschool preparation of children and individual teaching of children and teenagers, clearly specifies the manner and mode of organizing the individual teaching⁴. According to the regulation covering the pupil by the individual teaching requires the special adjudication: decision about the need for individual teaching. Individual teaching is organized in a manner that ensures implementation of recommendations specified in the adjudication. The time of this specific manner of teaching is specified in the adjudication. Individual teaching is conducted by teachers in individual and direct contact with a student in the place where the student lives.

2. Work with a student with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Asperger's syndrome - students characterization and useful instructions for English language teachers

As Agnieszka Sozańska (2018:10)says the most common mistakes made by language teachers are:

- failure to act ("the child will not be able to do it anyway", "why should we torment him"),
- not properly selected methods, techniques and teaching aids,
- comparing effects of work and assessment criteria for students with SEN with students without special educational needs
- reluctance to expand and improve knowledge and experience,
- lack of well adjusted systems of assessment and testing system for students with SEN
- consistent intra-class sorting of students, creating divisions due to deficits

According to Sozańska (2018 : 10-11) teachers should learn how special educational needs are manifested in the perception of a foreign language and its learning. They should also gain knowledge about diffrent ways of overcoming difficulties in the process of learning languages by students with SPE. As Sozińska says (2018; 11) the most important thing is closer acquaintance with the student and his observation. Teacher should know student's style of work, school documentation (opinions, diagnosis, IPET). It is also advisable to gain information about the student behaviors during other lessons.

Taking into account the above issues, it seems reasonable to discuss the issues of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Asperger's syndrome thoroughly. Before giving the definition of Autism and describing its main distinctive features, it is important to point out that it is not illness or disease and it cannot be cure. Fintan (2007: 113) gives a brief description of this kind of syndrome: "Autism is a complex disorder and the needs of children in this group can differ greatly, ranging from mild to severe. Children with autism generally have three main areas of difficulty:

- Communication. Language impairment across all modes of communication: speech,
- intonation, gesture, facial expression and other body language.
- Imagination. Rigidity and inflexibility of thought process; resistance to change,
- obsessional and ritualistic behavior.
- Socialization: Difficulties with social relationships, poor social timing, lack of empathy rejection of normal body contact, inappropriate eye contact".

There are a lot of social organizations and charities which main idea is to support children with Autism's syndrome and their parents. One of them is the National Autistic Society in the United Kingdom. On its online pages we can find a lot of valuable information about this syndrome and useful advices on where and how to support children with Autism (http://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/asd.aspx?sc_lang=en-GB#). We can also find there a brief outline of Autism: "Autism is a spectrum condition. All autistic people share certain difficulties, but being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some autistic people also have learning disabilities, mental health issues or other conditions, meaning people need different levels of support. All people on the autism spectrum learn and develop. With the right sort of support, all can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing" ⁵.

Asperger's syndrome is a form of Autism. According Fintan (2007; 113) Asperger's syndrome is often called a higher form of Autism. Although this is a little misleading, it essentially means that people with Asperger's may be better able to identify aspects of the world in which we all live. Aspergers individuals tend to be of average intelligence and often have better communication skills than autistic children. Some common features are:

- literal thinking
- obsession with certain topics that leads to exceptional knowledge in one area
- talking at or lecturing another child rather than engaging in a two-way conversation
- excellent memory
- difficulties with social interaction
- monotonous speech tone
- poor motor coordination
- difficulty in understanding and appreciating other people's feelings and perspectives
- difficulties in reading social cues
- little empathy for others.

English language teachers who have to work with students with Asperger's syndrome have to be aware that these kinds of children see, hear and feel world differently to other people. As it is stated on the National Autistic Society web page (<http://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/asperger.aspx>) "people with Asperger syndrome

are of average or above average intelligence. They do not usually have the learning disabilities that many autistic people have, but they may have specific learning difficulties. They have fewer problems with speech but may still have difficulties with understanding and processing language". There is a lot of interesting specialized literature about this spectrum of Autism. The book titled *Zrozumieć Świat ucznia z zespołem Aspergera* written by Polish author Agnieszka Borkowska should be recommended for English language teachers who do not feel confident enough in the face of work with students with Asperger's syndrome. The author of this book, based on her own experience as a mother of a child with Asperger's syndrome and a therapist of children with development disorders, describes symptoms related to Asperger, presents different therapeutic methods and gives some practical advice on how to work with these kinds of children in the school reality.

Students with ASD and Asperger's syndrome are very different and teachers need to know them well in order to effectively plan the teaching process. Therefore teachers should prepare different work cards and activities which, apart from their substantive didactic values, have also therapeutic advantages. Moreover, they should know students' interests and hobbies as they can use this information to motivate students in their process of learning. It should be emphasized here, that structured, well-planned and conducted lesson constitutes the basis of effective work with a SEN student. Furthermore, the vast majority of students with Asperger's syndrome think with images, therefore the language that the teacher uses must be concrete and without digression. Short sentences with only one verb are the most preferable. Children with ASD should be supported by pictures or photos in the process of teaching. According Sozańska (2018: 34), visualization is one of the primary teaching methods for students with Asperger's syndrome. Another method is categorization, i.e. selecting exercises so that they organize vocabulary, grammar rules and create topics sets. Mnemonics, picture and words games are also very useful teaching forms. In the case of students with SEN, it is important to support their communication skills and operating memory. Therefore, teaching methods used during language lessons should involve many senses. Visual, auditory and tactile stimulants, kinesthetic activities and other activities which involve all senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste) are crucial in SEN students' process of language learning. Teachers should always remember that tests and examinations should be adjusted to the student's abilities.

¹Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Warszawa, dnia 24 sierpnia 2017 r. Poz. 1578, Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 9 sierpnia 2017 r. w sprawie warunków organizowania kształcenia, wychowania i opieki dla dzieci i młodzieży niepełnosprawnych, niedostosowanych społecznie i zagrożonych niedostosowaniem społecznym

²Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Warszawa, dnia 14 września 2017 r. Poz. 1743, Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 7 września 2017 r., w sprawie orzeczeń i opinii wydawanych przez zespoły orzekające działające w publicznych poradniach psychologiczno-pedagogicznych

³Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 9 sierpnia 2017r. w sprawie zasad organizacji i udzielania pomocy psychologiczno-pedagogicznej w przedszkolach, szkołach i placówkach.

⁴Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Warszawa, dnia 29 sierpień 2017r., Poz.1616, Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 9 sierpień 2017, w sprawie indywidualnego obowiązkowego rocznego przygotowania przedszkolnego dzieci

i indywidualnego nauczania dzieci i młodzieży

⁵You can also extend your knowledge of different information about children with Autism reading: Maurice C., Green G., Luce S.C. (eds.). 1996. *Intervention for Young Children With Autism: A Manual for Parents and Professionals*. Austin: TX: PRO-ED.

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