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- f. Carrera: Profesorado de Inglés
- g. Fecha y año de aprobación del trabajo final: 22 de noviembre del 2021
- h. Un resumen en español y en el idioma de la carrera en que se inscribe la instancia curricular (alemán, francés, inglés, portugués)

Los beneficios de la literatura para estudiantes con dislexia en la clase de ILE

Ser disléxico es una condición de por vida y, aunque los niños pueden progresar enormemente en la lectura, pueden continuar luchando con sus síntomas a lo largo de sus vidas. Es fundamental que la sociedad, en particular toda la comunidad escolar, tome conciencia de la existencia de dificultades de aprendizaje como la dislexia para apoyar, integrar y en consecuencia empoderar a quienes luchan con ellas. Al informar y capacitar a los educadores y padres, los estudiantes disléxicos o con otras NEE (Necesidades Educativas Especiales) pueden recibir equidad en las oportunidades educativas, lo que les permite participar productivamente en la sociedad.

El objetivo de este trabajo es demostrar los numerosos beneficios de la Literatura para alumnos disléxicos en base a mi experiencia con alumnos de primaria superior a partir de 2004. Además, mi propósito es concientizar sobre las necesidades que pueden tener los alumnos disléxicos en la clase de inglés

como segunda lengua. Aunque me centraré principalmente en los desafíos que surgen con los niños disléxicos, mi intención es mostrar cómo, al final, todos los alumnos de una clase con habilidades diversas se benefician de la enseñanza de la literatura y de una metodología de enseñanza adaptada a los alumnos con necesidades educativas especiales.

The Benefits of Literature for Students with Dyslexia in the EFL Class

Being dyslexic is a lifelong condition and even though children can make enormous progress in reading, they may continue to struggle with its symptoms throughout their lives. It is crucial for society, particularly the whole school community, to become aware of the existence of learning difficulties such as dyslexia in order to support, integrate and as a result, empower those who strive with them. By informing and training educators and parents, dyslexic or other SEN (Special Educational Needs) students can receive equity in educational opportunities, thus allowing them to participate productively in society.

The passing of the national law 27306 in Argentina in 2016 has brought learning difficulties to the forefront and entitled SEN students to claim for their long-deserved rights. The law guarantees that SEN children, adolescents and adults will receive the suitable accommodations and assistance at any educational institution to help them overcome their hurdles and receive comprehensive healthcare. Before this law, middle class and affluent families were the only ones who were able to afford the time and money to identify and treat dyslexia or any other learning difficulty. The law aims at ensuring equality for all SEN students who would otherwise be likely to fail at school if they did

not compensate for their shortcomings. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education still needs to take effective action to ensure law enforcement.

Sarah Sayko, literacy-related disabilities expert, explains in The Literacy for All Conference 2020 that reading is an unnatural, complex process that involves various skills and that exposure to books is not sufficient.

Learning to read requires explicit and systematic instruction. SEN students, particularly dyslexic ones, struggle with all the mechanisms involved in reading: phonological awareness, fluency, understanding and recalling vocabulary, phonics (letter-sound relationships/decoding) in order to reach comprehension.

If teaching literacy (the ability to read and write) in EFL to SEN students may already seem an overwhelming challenge, teaching literature and what it entails (grasping figurative language, interpreting long texts, developing critical thinking) could be considered an unattainable endeavour. Early identification of students' specific literacy difficulties is essential to the successful teaching of written literature. Adequate intervention to improve striving students' literacy skills will allow them at the same time to understand and take pleasure in the reading of literary texts. The teaching of literacy skills and of literature must be integrated in lower primary. Students can only become truly literate when they have gained critical literacy, i.e., being able to uncover the implications of a text. This can only be attained by exploiting its full potential in class, going beyond its literal meaning, questioning and transforming it in order to understand it thoroughly. These techniques, among many others, will be discussed later on in this paper.

It goes without saying that the teaching of literature both in the mother tongue and in a second language starts well before the acquisition of literacy in

kindergarten. However, once having achieved relative literacy in the first years of primary school, teachers should not confuse the development of literacy skills with the teaching of literature even at its most basic level. It is common practice among teachers to call their literacy activities “literary” ones, when actually what is being done in class is more akin to reading comprehension activities which have little to do with creativity.

But in order to succeed in the pleasurable teaching of literary texts to SEN students and specifically to dyslexic students we should first delve into how the brain of a child with dyslexia functions from a neurological perspective. We should also explore other realms of knowledge regarding learning difficulties. Are children born dyslexic? Is the teaching of a second language an obstacle or an advantage? Does limited comprehension of a second language hinder a dyslexic student from enjoying and appreciating a literary text? Are we EFL teachers qualified to provide SEN students with the necessary tools to overcome their obstacles? Do we plan our lessons bearing in mind that about 10% of our students may have learning difficulties? Can SEN students benefit from doing Literature in the EFL class without falling behind? Do they disturb the regular pace of the lesson? The aim of this paper is to answer these questions and prove the numerous benefits of Literature for dyslexic students based on my experience with upper primary students as from 2004. In addition, I intend to raise awareness of the needs dyslexic students may have in the EFL class. Though I will be mainly focusing on the challenges that arise with dyslexic children, I intend to show how, in the end, all students in a mixed- ability class profit from the teaching of Literature and a teaching methodology accommodated to SEN students.

- i. Cinco palabras claves (en ambas lenguas)

DISLEXIA – DIFICULTADES DE APRENDIZAJE- ILE-
LITERATURA INFANTIL – NEURODIVERSIDAD

DYSLEXIA- LEARNING DIFFICULTIES- EFL- CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE- NEURODIVERSITY