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## TEACHING ENGLISH TO SENIOR LEARNERS

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The concept of learning as a lifelong activity was submitted by Comenius in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the term “geragogy” achieved prominence after appearing in Lebel’s article in “lifelong learning: The adult years”. Lebel was the first writer who used this term in the meaning of educational theory for older learners. (Formosa, 2012)

For each specific social group are defined different knowledges. The experiences of students are not so rich. It can be defined as a reason of gaps, especially knowledge gaps. Adult learners have a huge number of experiences which are important for their education. Senior learners have significant and valuable life experiences and knowledges. It can be used as a resource of information for lector and inspiration for learning process.

Young learners are exposed to the English language at primary school. The goal of education which is defined in fundamental law regulating education in Slovakia Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education (the School Act) deals with the opportunity of mastering English language. The consensus is that young learners had to mastered English level at specific level. The expectations of adult learners are connected with their own motivation or their needs. The educational programmes for senior learners are related to the biographic history and their experiences. Special form of educational programmes for senior learners are the universities of the third age (UTA), which offer specific study branches. It is defined as a part of Centre for Continuing Education.

The important factor which influences and distinguished methods between pedagogy, andragogy and geragogy is the goal of learners. Young learners gain knowledges, skills and acquirement for their future. Adult learners focus on present situations or near future, for instance their work offer or social statuses. For senior learners is specific integration of their knowledges, skills or acquirement into new situation to gain steadiness. These learners focus on past in general, but also their own.

Geragogy, as a form of education, deals with specific group of elderly learners. Communication with senior learners is specific due to the involution. Factors which can influence learning process and teaching seniors are: *physical factors* – sensory disturbances, physical condition etc. *Psychological factors* – learners’ personalities, emotional stability and others. *Social factors* – ageism, cultural norms etc. (Špatenková, Smékalová, 2015)

The important factor which can influence communication is the approach. It is not easy to choose the best approach because learners are individual people. Senior learners have their own personalities, expectations. Respectable relationship between lector and learners is important factor which can influence mood. The concept of learner-centred model by Carl R. Rogers deals with the terms: *respect, authenticity, active listening, trust, confidentiality*. (Špatenková, Smékalová, 2015)

Respect can be defined as the ability to regard the others opinions or attitudes. This requirement is connected with learners’ personalities, attitudes. Senior learners are very sensitive. The lector should not deplore, evaluate or judge learners’ opinions. The positive attitude does not mean absolute agreement. It can be defined as an acceptance of learners’ opinions. (Casemore, in Špatenková, Smékalová, 2015)

The lector should engage authenticity into learning process. Some senior learners’ prefer to share their own experiences. It can be helpful for lector, who can prepare tasks which relate to learners’ interests and needs. Learners’ personalize the topic and learning

process will be more effective. The personalization and authenticity of courses is important for positive condition between learners' and the lector.

It is important for learners to know that they can share information. Positive relationships between learners and the lector are connected with the trust. It is useful if the lector spends some time on building the trust. Senior learners will be more motivated and rapt to studying English language.

The term trust relates to confidentiality. The lector is the person, who cooperate with learners. Learners are in the centre of attention. The lector should not use negative expressions or slander learners. Insults may reduce and degrade learners. The confidentiality influences position of learners and the lector.

Teaching classes with seniors or individual courses has many differences from teaching young learners. Many new teachers are nervous and do not know how to work and behave in front of older students. Teacher should follow some basic techniques, which can ensure positive teacher-student relations like: giving positive feedback and allow students to ask questions and make mistakes in a comfortable environment, treat senior learners as respected peers and avoid condescension at all costs, let the student to teach him/her, be sensitive to the background of students and creating positive and funny lessons. (Findsen, Farmosa, 2011)

There are many benefits for old learners such as increased self-confidence, increased feelings of health and well-being, reduced feelings of isolation, and increased engagement in the community. Senior students have a wealth of life experience and when they bring this to the classroom they enrich the learning experience of the whole class. In fact, senior learners are very often more highly motivated than younger learners. Their high level of motivation is a great advantage as this has been identified as one of the most important factors in determining successful language learning. They often attend class to mix with their peers, forming very strong friendships and socialising together after the class and even in their free time.

It is important to fire up the students' neurons with interactive activities that engage them physically as well as mentally. Teacher cannot underestimate the importance of fun in the classroom full of older people. Dialogues and role-plays are great ways to practice language patterns, simulate natural conversations and keep the class entertained. If there is an expert on a topic among the students, they can be asked to speak on their knowledge. This is a great speaking and listening practice for everyone.

However, there are cognitive, affective and physiological factors which can affect senior language learning.

**Problems with hearing:** Hearing loss may have a direct impact on learning and performance for senior learners. Teachers can speak clearly and ensure that the students can see their face and lips, adjust the volume for listening and videos, repeat listening texts and ensure that the classrooms have little background noise.

**Problems with mobility:** As people age the body tends to lose some strength, flexibility and mobility. Teacher should ensure that older learners have comfortable chairs and allow more time for students to do whole class activities where students have to move around the classroom.

**Problems with memory:** In order to overcome cognitive decline, which may make it more difficult to learn a new language, teachers can help seniors develop and maintain their cognitive ability in a number of way like: use visual and auditory mnemonic devices and examples, systematically repeat and recycle grammar, vocabulary and expressions and allow more time for students to produce language without being interrupted.

**Problems with stress** Older learners need to feel comfortable and trust the teacher and the other students before they participate fully in the language classroom. A key role of the

teacher is to reduce anxiety and build trust and self-confidence in the senior learner. Teacher should avoid timed tests which may make senior learners anxious. (Donaghy, 2016)

The teaching of seniors at universities of third age or at courses has many difficulties. However, there are a lot of resources these days, which can help teachers to improve the style of teaching class or how to build strong relationship between teacher and student. The first step of successful senior class results is to enjoy the teaching and lessons.

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