

# The Helen Doron Method in Teaching Young Learners

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU  
UČITELJSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

**IDA ŠAGOVAC  
DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**THE HELEN DORON METHOD  
IN TEACHING YOUNG LEARNERS**

**Zagreb, rujan 2019.**

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**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

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Tema diplomskog rada: The Helen Doron Method in Teaching  
Young Learners

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Marija Andraka

Zagreb, rujan 2020.

## Contents

<b>SAŽETAK</b> .....	1
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	2
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	3
<b>2. HELEN DORON'S BIOGRAPHY</b> .....	4
<b>3. INSPIRATION FOR THE HELEN DORON METHOD</b> .....	4
<b>3.1. RUDOLPH STEINER</b> .....	4
3.2. MARIA MONTESSORI.....	5
<b>3.3. JEAN PIAGET</b> .....	7
3.4. SHINICHI SUZUKI .....	8
3.5. GEORGI LOZANOV .....	10
3.6. GLENN DOMAN.....	12
<b>4. INFLUENCES OF THEORIES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND METHODS OF TEACHING</b> .....	15
4.1. Theories and Methods.....	15
4.1. The HDEE Methodology .....	16
4.2. Description of HDEE programmes.....	21
4.3. THE CROATIAN CONTEXT OF EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING	23
4.4. SOME CONCLUSIONS .....	25
<b>5. HDEE LESSONS</b> .....	26
5.1. Observation of in-class lessons.....	26
5.1.1. Baby's Best Start (BBS) and Toddler's Best Start (TBS).....	26
5.1.2. Fun with Flupe (FWF) .....	28
5.1.3. Teen Choices (TC).....	29
5.2. Online lessons .....	30
5.2.1. Baby's Best Start and Toddler's Best Start.....	30
5.2.3. Fun with Flupe .....	32
5.2.4. Teen Choices.....	33
5. 3. Discussion.....	34
<b>6.CONCLUSION</b> .....	35
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	37

## SAŽETAK

Cilj ovoga diplomskog rada je predstaviti metodu *Helen Doron Early English* (HDEE) za poučavanje Engleskog jezika za djecu u dobi od tri i pol mjeseca do devetnaest godina. Rad je podijeljen u dva dijela. Prvi dio rada sadrži teorijski pregled metoda, metodičara, psihologa, učitelja te pedagoga poput S. Suzukija, M. Montessori, G. Lozanova ili pak G. Domana koji su uvelike utjecali na stvaranje metode Helen Doron Early English. Isto tako, u prvom dijelu detaljno je opisana sama HDEE metoda te sve njene karakteristike i specifičnosti koje ju razlikuju od drugih metoda. Objasnjen je razvoj mozga, kako samo usvajanje jezika funkcionira, korist dvojezičnosti te zašto tradicionalno usvajanje stranog jezika nije toliko uspješno. Navedene su sve vrste tečajeva (ovisno o dobi) koje HDEE metoda nudi. U radu je spomenut hrvatski kontekst ranog učenja stranih jezika te rezultati istraživanja hrvatskih metodičara i lingvista o ranom učenju jezika.

U drugom dijelu rada prikazani su i razmotreni rezultati promatranja te izvođenja nastave u Helen Doron Early English školama. Opisana su četiri sata nastave koji pokrivaju različite dobne skupine. Te skupine variraju od novorođenčadi pa sve do adolescenata. Uz tijek samoga sata objašnjena je i metodologija te su opisani učitelji i djeca tijekom izvođenja, sudjelovanja ili slušanja nastave. Također je zasebno opisana nastava održavana u HDEE školama i učionicama te online nastava – vrsta nastave koja je predstavljala potpuno novi aspekt pri poučavanju.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** metoda materinskog jezika, djeca, usvajanje stranog jezika, Helen Doron

## SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis is to present the Helen Doron Early English method of teaching English to children aged from three and a half months to nineteen years of age. The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part of the paper contains a theoretical overview of methods, methodologists, psychologists, teachers and educational experts such as S. Suzuki, M. Montessori, G. Lozanov or G. Doman, who greatly influenced the creation of the Helen Doron Early English method. Also, the first part describes in detail the HDEE method itself and all its characteristics and specifics that distinguish it from other methods. Brain development is explained, how language acquisition works, the benefits of bilingualism, and why traditional foreign language acquisition is not so successful. All types of courses (depending on age) that the HDEE method offers are listed. The thesis mentions the Croatian context of early foreign language learning and the results of research by Croatian methodologists and linguists on early language learning.

The second part of the thesis presents and discusses the results of observation and teaching in Helen Doron Early English schools. Four lessons covering different age groups are described. These groups range from new-borns to adolescents. Along with the course itself, the methodology is explained, and teachers and children are described during the performance, participation or listening to classes. Besides, the teaching held in HDEE schools and classrooms is described, including a completely new aspect of teaching – online teaching.

**KEY WORDS:** mother tongue approach, children, second language acquisition, Helen Doron

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there is a trend in the second language education. Parents enrol their children in learning English early in the childhood, because this way the high proficiency in the second language is ensured. English language learning and teaching is very popular due to media and popular culture.

The reason why I was so interested in writing the thesis about the Helen Doron Method is the fact that I am very interested in different kinds of methods used in early language learning, and this one specifically was one that was somewhat new to me. I felt I needed to research the method further and see if it is really different from all the existing methods and, if yes, then in what way.

Helen Doron is a British linguist and educator and is the founder of the Helen Doron Educational Group which offers English classes to young learners. The Helen Doron method teaches English, often using music, through listening, watching teacher's body language and gestures and student repetition. The Helen Doron Early English methodology is 35 years young but has 35 years of results of children returning year after year and parents enrolling their new children as their families grow. The HDEE methodology would be just an interesting academic theory if it were not successfully put into practice. Later in this thesis, the influences of well-known pedagogues, methodologists, teachers, and others, who inspired Helen Doron in creating her method will be explained, including the methodology of Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget, Shinichi Suzuki, Georgi Lozanov and Glenn Doman. How they are related to the Helen Doron Early English method and how and why Doron came up with the idea of creating a new method will be described in the following pages. In addition to the theory of the method and the effects of the other methods on Doron, the practical (actually the most important) part of the method will also be described. The aim of the thesis is to penetrate deeper into the HDEE method and explain how it differs from many other methods and why it is so successful and why it is unique. There will also be described classes with various age groups from infants, through kindergarten children all the way to teenagers. Each of these lessons has a separate approach and the lessons will be described from the teacher's point of view as well. An interesting situation of online teaching has befallen us in today's world at the time of writing this thesis, so in addition to classroom lessons online

classes will be described, where the method for the first time had to take online form of teaching, which was certainly challenging for parents and children and for teachers as well.

## **2. HELEN DORON'S BIOGRAPHY**

Helen Doron (born Helen Rachel Lowenthal on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1955) (Doron, 2010) is a British linguist and educator who lives in Israel. She is the founder of the Helen Doron Early English method, which offers English classes to young learners.

Doron grew up in north-west London, Hampstead/Finchley region. She attended a Montessori kindergarten. Then she attended Northbridge House, a private primary school. She started her secondary school studies at Queen's College, London, and due to her parents' divorce and economic compromise, she was forced to leave Queen's College. She transferred to the Henrietta Barnett grammar school. She entered Reading University in 1973, where she studied linguistics and the French language. Doron trained to be a Transcendental Meditation (TM) teacher (Doron, 2010). After earning her B.A. in 1977, she taught at the University of Poitiers in France before completing her MA in Linguistics.

## **3. INSPIRATION FOR THE HELEN DORON METHOD**

In the following chapter the methods that influenced the HD method will be briefly presented. Besides, the theoretical basis for her method, on the grounds of second and foreign language acquisition and learning will be explained.

### **3.1. RUDOLF STEINER**

Waldorf education is an approach in teaching children that was created by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). Steiner was an intellectual who published more than 50 books and gave numerous lectures on various topics, including philosophy, science, art, and education (Lange de Souza, 2015).

In Waldorf schools the teacher is a guide who helps a human being develop. While teaching, the educational materials and methods are based on human



understanding. The teacher observes the child from year to year, and from week to week. In other words, the teacher is the one that meets the requirements of the developing child. Steiner believed that every soul born has a purpose. He believed that children develop themselves into everything possible and that the teachers precisely are the ones who provide the children what they need through the warmest participation in human life. That is something that meets Doron's beliefs as well. Both Helen Doron Early English (HDEE) schools and Waldorf schools have a developmental curriculum. Although they have differences, both curricula are created to meet and support the phase of development of the individual child and the class.

Another similarity between the two schools is that they are both designed to optimize children's physical development. Movement, especially dancing, is a very important part of learning English for Doron and already in her beginnings as an English teacher she used a lot of movement (Doron, 2010). Another common part in education in both schools is a lot of acting and creativity for both teachers and children. The emphasis is on hands-on experiences, drawing, painting and music. One of the goals in Waldorf schools is to make children aware of the natural world and to create sympathetic human bonds. Helen Doron, as a devoted vegetarian, has cared for animals since a very early age and was determined to teach children to love and respect animals as well. According to her own words: "Initially, becoming vegetarian was a natural extension of my love for animals, but it then grew into a more complex philosophical issue" (Doron, 2010:19).

Furthermore, her love for nature is visible in the lessons (children learn about animals as friends and integral creatures, rather than food) which also includes a lot of encyclopaedic knowledge and, for example, learning about recycling. She believes that in order to see change in society, people (individually) have to change.

### 3.2. MARIA MONTESSORI

Maria Montessori was an Italian educator, scientist, physician and philosopher (August 31, 1870 – May 6, 1952). She wanted to educate mentally challenged children

and she managed to do it. Another thing she managed to do was to prove at the time, that even poor children could learn.<sup>1</sup>

An interesting fact is that Helen Doron herself attended Montessori kindergarten even though she says she has no memory of it. (Doron, 2010). Despite that, the influence of Maria Montessori can be seen in several aspects. One of those aspects is discipline. In Montessori schools discipline must come through liberty. This raises many questions like how a teacher can obtain discipline in a class of free children.

“If discipline is founded upon liberty, the discipline itself must necessarily be active. We do not consider an individual disciplined only when he has been rendered as artificially silent as a mute and as immovable as a paralytic.” (Montessori, 1912:86)

Many teachers know that that kind of active discipline is not easy to apply, but on the other hand, in this way, the teacher at least tries to lead children to be masters of themselves. But certainly not through punishment. In HDEE classes, children are free to walk, sit, lie down and the discipline is not aggressively pushed upon them. More about how the lessons look like will be described later in the thesis. One thing is obvious, in Helen Doron method, the teacher is also (as in Montessori Method) supposed to guide children towards the behaviour what is universally considered ‘good’. One of the most important things regarding discipline is leading children towards understanding that they should not annoy others and they should show respect towards other children. The teacher follows the child and tries to guide them to what is the most appropriate behaviour. There were mentioned few aspects of influence of Maria Montessori on Doron. Other aspects that can be seen in both Montessori and HDEE schools is that the teacher shows activities to children and after that, children repeat the activity on their own. If the children need help, they ask for help from a teacher, or in very young learners in HDEE, parents ask for help or explanation of something. It is interesting how both schools have carpets (and in HDEE also cushions) which provides children to work alone and have their own personal space. Environment is very important for Montessori because it can make a life of a child a lot better or a lot stiffer. There is a connection with HDEE schools and Montessori schools because of that positive, playful yet learning atmosphere which is very

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<sup>1</sup> <https://montessori.org.au/biography-dr-maria-montessori>

important. In addition, both schools use a lot of visual, tactile and natural materials, and they use all senses. The didactic material/props permit a methodical education of the senses.

### 3.3. JEAN PIAGET

Jean Piaget was born in Neuchâtel (Switzerland) on August 9, 1896 and he died in Geneva on September 16, 1980. Piaget was a Swiss psychologist known for his work on child development. His researches had one unique goal: to find how does knowledge grow. His answer was that:

“The growth of knowledge is a progressive construction of logically embedded structures superseding one another by a process of inclusion of lower less powerful logical means into higher and more powerful ones up to adulthood.”<sup>2</sup>

Jean Piaget explained how knowledge was acquired. There are four stages in cognitive development by Piaget<sup>3</sup>; sensorimotor stage (Infancy), pre-operational stage (toddler and Early childhood), concrete operational stage (elementary and early adolescence) and formal operational stage.

Infancy or sensorimotor stage is the period from birth up to two years of age. In this period children develop through their senses and that is very important in HDEE methodology. In HDEE, for such young learners, teachers use props which are good for developing all their senses (e.g.- tactile picture flash cards). With the help of parents, teachers encourage parents to touch and caress their babies because it also affects their senses and with that also the emotional bond with a parent. In this period crawling is important for brain development and it is very important to move as much as possible because it allows the child to begin developing new intellectual abilities. Some of those abilities in this period is also language abilities which are developed at the end of this stage (Piaget, CD).

The next stage of cognitive development is the pre-operational stage (Toddler and Early Childhood) in which egocentricity is strong and that kind of thinking

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.piaget.org/aboutPiaget.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://intranet.newriver.edu/images/stories/library/stennett\\_psychology\\_articles/Piagets%20The%20ory%20of%20Cognitive%20Development.pdf](https://intranet.newriver.edu/images/stories/library/stennett_psychology_articles/Piagets%20The%20ory%20of%20Cognitive%20Development.pdf)

predominates. That means that children can only see the world from their perspective. An important thing in HDEE while teaching learners of that stage (who are 2-7 years old) is to have enough props to give each child, because Doron is aware of the predominance of egocentric thinking. In this period language use matures, and memory and imagination are developed.<sup>4</sup>

In the concrete operational stage (Elementary and early adolescence) intelligence is demonstrated through logical thinking, and operational thinking develops which also means that egocentric thought diminishes.

The final stage in cognitive development is the formal operational stage (Adolescence and adulthood) in which intelligence is demonstrated through the logical use of symbols. Those symbols are related to abstract concepts.<sup>5</sup>In HDEE the type of lesson depends on the developmental stage of the child and the teacher prepares the lesson and props according to the learners' age.

### 3.4. SHINICHI SUZUKI

Shinichi Suzuki (17 October 1898 – 26 January 1998) was born in Nagoya, Japan, and he is remembered for his method of teaching young children so that all develop exceptional talent. He was a violinist, educator, philosopher and humanitarian.<sup>6</sup>

One of main philosophies that Suzuki had is that all children can learn anything, including music, if they are taught the right way (Richards, 2017). He also strongly believed that children should begin learning music from an early age. Suzuki had a great impact on Doron. When her daughter was four, Doron and her husband wanted their daughter to start music lessons and found a Suzuki violin classes. In the first lesson, Doron was exposed to the philosophy and methodology of Dr. Shinichi Suzuki which made her read and explore more about the method. Suzuki believed that very

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[https://intranet.newriver.edu/images/stories/library/stennett\\_psychology\\_articles/Piagets%20Theory%20of%20Cognitive%20Development.pdf](https://intranet.newriver.edu/images/stories/library/stennett_psychology_articles/Piagets%20Theory%20of%20Cognitive%20Development.pdf)

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[https://intranet.newriver.edu/images/stories/library/stennett\\_psychology\\_articles/Piagets%20Theory%20of%20Cognitive%20Development.pdf](https://intranet.newriver.edu/images/stories/library/stennett_psychology_articles/Piagets%20Theory%20of%20Cognitive%20Development.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://internationalsuzuki.org/shinichisuzuki>

young learners could be taught music if it was taught in a mother-tongue manner which is first hearing a sound, repeating it, getting positive feedback, and that is the way they learn to speak. Children usually do not start with writing. “In the Suzuki Method, the children learn to make music first, and worry about learning to read music later.” (Doron, 2010:27).

The Suzuki Method was eye-opening for Doron and she had a revelation.

*“I thought, if there is a mother-tongue way to teach music, why don’t we have a mother-tongue way to teach language? If Suzuki is teaching the language of music, why aren’t we teaching the music of language?”* (Doron, 2010:27).

Suzuki believed that music is a universal language and he was suggesting that music is also a language and by studying the way a child learns their first language, their mother tongue, principles and methods from that learning process could be applied to the learning of music. Doron, on the other hand, was inspired by that to find a way to teach a second language just like Suzuki was teaching music. Doron was obviously inspired by the Suzuki Method and surrounded by Israeli children, struggling to learn English, she started her search for a mother-tongue methodology for teaching English. Doron (2010) states there were not any ready-packaged programmes that would teach English language in that way, but she started to explore other early-learning methodologies and the same imperatives were present in those methodologies:

Suzuki’s music education was based on instilling into students a love for music and to give them a chance to creatively express themselves as they develop as both musicians and human beings. Doron’s approach to learning (a language) is also based on children having fun, creatively expressing themselves, or, if we are talking about younger learners, nurturing that special parent-child bond which develops children into members of society and raises awareness about self and others.

### 3.5. GEORGI LOZANOV

Georgi Lozanov (July 22, 1926 – May 6, 2012) was a Bulgarian psychiatrist, psychotherapist, brain physiologist and educator. He is the creator of Suggestopedia.<sup>7</sup> Lozanov's methodology was observed by expert commission from UNESCO, evaluated as a superior teaching method and it was also recommended for application all over the world. Lozanov believes that motivation for learning is unconscious, spontaneous and most importantly – natural.

“That is why one of the most important tasks of the teacher-suggestopaedist is not to allow the build-up of limiting and inhibiting social suggestive norms and to ensure a natural transition from the world of play to the world of creative learning, characterised by a spirit of independence, consciousness and high motivation. “(Lozanov, 2005:103).

Lozanov believed that learning is a matter of attitude. Some of Doron's beliefs can be also seen in Lozanov's work, such as the belief that children are allowed to make mistakes or that the children like to learn new things on their own. As written in the previous quote, the teacher gives information and believes that the student can learn it. This is something that is seen in HDEE classes, too, the teacher is sure that children can learn everything prepared and the teacher has no doubts about it. Suggestopedia is built upon the seven laws of Suggestopedia.

The first Law of Suggestopedia is: Love. Love creates trust, reduces fear and softens the mood just as it brings some positive emotion in the classroom. Also love, together with the other laws, creates the cheerful, genuine and highly stimulating concentrative relaxation and atmosphere. Under these conditions, like love and positive emotions, creative mental activity is characterized by an absence of fatigue.<sup>8</sup>

The second Law of Suggestopedia is: Freedom. Children are free to express themselves, listen to their inner voice, and (as mentioned above) children are allowed to make a mistake. Freedom allows the students to choose whether to take part in some activities or not, such as a game, a song, etc. Just like in HDEE, children are not forced

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[http://www.lozanov.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=73&lang=bg](http://www.lozanov.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=73&lang=bg)

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[http://www.lozanov.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=67&lang=en](http://www.lozanov.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=67&lang=en)

to participate and are absolutely free at any moment to go out of the classroom without, of course, disturbing the other children. In the Teacher Training Course (TTC) for becoming a Helen Doron teacher, teachers are taught that in HDEE with very young learners (infants, toddlers), parents can leave the class if they feel their child needs it, if the baby gets upset, but are also advised while taking a little break to keep the child close to the classroom so they are exposed to hearing the language and hearing what is happening in general so that they get interested to participate, again, if they are ready and when they want to.

The Third Law of Suggestopedia is: Conviction of the Teacher that Something Unusual is Taking Place. The third law explains the state of conviction that something extraordinary, exciting or one could even say magical might happen. Something different from the social suggestive norm is taking place, leading to the state of inspiration of the teacher. The teacher achieves that by sending unconscious signals arising from the teacher`s voice, facial expression and their overall non-verbal behaviour.<sup>9</sup> With that kind of attitude, children feel like they had learned everything on their own. In HDEE the teacher also enters the classroom believing that something exciting is going to happen and believes in a positive suggestion.

The Fourth Law of Suggestopedia is: Manifold Increase of Input Volume. To be more precise, the study material presented to children in a specific time frame, must be at least 2 to 3 times larger in volume than the existing established norm by the other methodologies. In Suggestopedia, if the study material is kept within the traditional boundaries, it will only confirm the suggestive social form about the limited capacity of human beings and Lozanov believes that in that way evolution will be delayed.<sup>10</sup> Similar, if not the same thing is happening in HDEE lessons. The teacher gives more information to the child, believing that they can learn in. This is one of the reasons why in HDEE schools students that are toddlers learn encyclopaedic knowledge, because the teacher believes they can.

The Fifth Law of Suggestopedia is: Global-Partial, Partial-Global; Partial through Global. Lozanov believes that in all subjects, not just language, when the new

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[http://www.lozanov.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=67&lang=en](http://www.lozanov.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=67&lang=en)

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[http://www.lozanov.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=67&lang=en](http://www.lozanov.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=67&lang=en)

study material is taught, there should not be a separation between the element and its whole. The children should never be taught anything and learn anything in an isolated mode. For example, the words and grammar, do not exist separately from the language. The words and the grammar are both part of the discourse.<sup>11</sup>

The Sixth Law of Suggestopedia is: The Golden Proportion which reveals a law of harmony in the universe. Harmony inspires harmony and Lozanov<sup>12</sup> believes that it overcomes the psychic chaos provoked by traditional pedagogy.

“Harmony is essential in the process of teaching and learning such a big volume of study material in a short period of time.”<sup>13</sup>

We can find The Golden Proportion Law everywhere around in nature as well as in classical art. Lozanov believes that when applied in teaching, it can help children learn without fatigue.

The Seventh Law of Suggestopedia is: Use of Classical Art and Aesthetics. Classical art is introduced through selected works in classical music, through songs, literature and reproductions of masterpieces. Lozanov<sup>14</sup> says that using many paintings, flowers and beautiful environment and art in environment in general, creates pleasant, calm and harmonious aesthetic. Doron also believes that art inspires the learners and helps with their acquisition of new knowledge including language.

### 3.6. GLENN DOMAN

Glenn Doman, born in 1919 in America (died in 2013), is the founder of The Doman Method. He is best known for his ground-breaking work in child development. Doman is the founder of the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential. He is also known for teaching parents around the world about how to help their children with special needs. The Doman Method is a holistic system of treatments that incorporates

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[http://www.lozanov.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=67&lang=en](http://www.lozanov.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=67&lang=en)

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physiological, nutritional, physical, sensory and cognitive treatments.<sup>15</sup> Doman worked on methodologies for teaching specific knowledge to babies and he strongly believed all babies were born with a hunger for learning. Doman's original work dealt with working with brain-damaged children and attempting to repair neurological function without the use of medication. He later developed a series of programmes including early reading, early mathematics and encyclopaedic knowledge. (Doron, 2010)

In HDEE lessons, children including the youngest learners (infants) learn early reading, early mathematics and encyclopaedic knowledge. Doman (1994) emphasizes that all children are born geniuses. He states that we inherit the genes that provide us with the unique human cortex and that intelligence is a result of thinking. He strongly believes that all children are linguistic geniuses who deal with learning English without the slightest effort. Doman suggests that babies are born with a rage to learn, and success brings out motivation. Doman believes that babies have an incredible ability to learn a language in the first three years. He states an example of how a child learns the meaning of a word:

"Nobody ever said to a two-year-old, "Look Johnny, these are called glasses." Instead we say, "Where are my glasses?"" "Give me my glasses."" Don't pull off my glasses. ""My glasses need cleaning." And Johnny, being a linguistic genius, says to himself, "Those things are called glasses" (Doman, 1994: 82).

Many parents are surprised that HDEE offers learning English for such young children, but as Doman states, the brain grows until the age of six and new neuron pathways are created. Just as Dorman, Doron believes that it is easier to teach a one-year-old child a foreign language than it is a seven-year old child. Doman's methodology was a significant influence for Doron because she applied it with her own children and saw the amazing results. (Doron, 2010). Her children learnt to read at the age of two. They could see the difference between 98 and 94 dots, and they learnt encyclopaedic knowledge and loved it. This influenced her decisions regarding the HDEE methodology. Doman (1994) talks about the best duration and frequency while teaching your baby something (which Doron incorporated into teaching English). He tells parents to make sure that the length of time you play for example a game, is very

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.domaninternational.org/glenndoman>

short. You should always stop before the child wants to stop, show less material than the child would like to see. There is never enough, and the child always wants more. This is how Doman puts it: “This is why you get cries of "More!" and "Again!" This is a sure sign of success. You will maintain your success by not giving in to these demands (at least not immediately)”. (1994:207).

Doman also emphasizes the importance of the manner of teaching. No matter what the lesson is, enthusiasm is the key and children react to that. Using a clear, loud voice with enthusiasm should be easy for a child to hear you and feel your enthusiasm. Doman summarizes that the basics of good teaching are:

- “1. Begin as young as possible.
2. Be Joyous at all times.
3. Respect and trust your child.
4. Teach only when you and your child are happy.
5. Create a good learning environment.
6. Stop before your child wants to stop.
7. Introduce new materials often.
8. Be organized and consistent.
9. Do not test your child.
10. Prepare your materials carefully and stay ahead.
11. Remember the Fail-Safe Law: If you aren’t having a wonderful time and your child isn’t having a wonderful time – stop “. (Doman, 1994:219-220).

Many of these basics of good teaching are very important for HDEE teachers and the HDEE method in general.

## 4. INFLUENCES OF THEORIES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND METHODS OF TEACHING

### 4.1. Theories and Methods

Something which is thought to be innovative in the Helen Doron method is the attempt to build a methodology around the observation of child language learning. It was Gouin who was one of the first of the nineteenth-century reformers (out of many) to turn attention to naturalistic principles of language learning, and for that reason they are sometimes referred to as advocates of the "natural" method. One of the reformers was L. Sauveur, who used intensive oral interaction in the target language, employing questions as a way of presenting and eliciting language which is something the Doron Method consists of as well (Richards & Rodgers, 2014: 9). Sauveur opened a language school in the late 1860s, and his method soon became referred to as the Natural Method also known as the Direct Method<sup>16</sup>. Throughout the history of language acquisition, attempts have been made to make second language learning more like first language learning which is one of the most important principles in the Helen Doron method.

Unlike the Direct Method's emphasis on teacher monologues, repetition, and formal questions and answers, the Natural Approach<sup>17</sup> places emphasis on exposure and input, rather than practice. Krashen and Terrell (1983) do not believe that acquisition of a language is affected by conscious learning and teachers are not supposed to conduct exercises such as drills or other controlled practices because, in their opinion, they are not necessary for developing communication skills. To conclude, way before Doron's method, Krashen and Terrell had scientifically proved that teachers should abandon traditional techniques and concentrate on exercises which provide more input.

Communicative Language Teaching is best considered an approach rather than a method but there is another feature that is important for the Helen Doron method was already recognised by linguists before. British applied linguists in the 1950s emphasized the functional and communicative potential of language. They saw that the need to focus on language teaching and acquiring is on communicative proficiency

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<sup>16</sup> (Richards, Rodgers, 2014: 129)

<sup>17</sup> (Richards, Rodgers, 2014: 129)

rather than mastery of structures. (Richards & Rodgers, 2014: 64). „Wilkins's contribution was an analysis of the communicative meanings that a language learner needs to understand and express. Rather than describe the core of language through traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary “(ibid.: 65).

Another important method in which Doron method probably has roots as well is Total Physical Response (TPR)<sup>18</sup>. TPR is a language teaching method built around the coordination of speech and action. It attempts to teach language through physical activity. The lessons in HDEE (especially with the youngest learners) is full of TPR. A perfect example are the songs used in lessons which include singing and movements that are connected to the vocabulary that is being learned.

Lightbown and Spada (2013) write about Noam Chomsky (one of the most influential figures in linguistics) and his hypothesis that all human languages are based on innate universal principles. The innatism theory emphasizes the fact that children successfully acquire their native language or more than one language if they live in a multilingual community which is something Doron is trying to imitate with daily hearing. The innatism theory is often linked to the “Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) – the hypothesis that animals, including humans, are genetically programmed to acquire certain kinds of knowledge and skill at specific times in life” (ibid.: 22) It is believed by Innatists that it is difficult, and often impossible to acquire those abilities and that children who are not given access to language in infancy, never acquire language. This is especially important in HDEE methodology, and Doron stresses that children should acquire English as soon as they acquire their mother tongue and it is something that can be connected to the CPH.

#### 4.1. The HDEE Methodology

Speaking, writing and reading are integral to everyday life. Language is the primary tool for expression and communication and even academic performance was linked to the ability to read, write and speak at a high level of proficiency. Doron (2010) mentions the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which is also known as the linguistic relativity principle, and it shows that sociologists and psychologists agree that

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<sup>18</sup> (Richards,Rodgers,2014:87)

language development is linked to the actualisation of human potential. Doron is aware of the power of language and it is an important part in understanding the HDEE methodology. Another very important thing is brain development and Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Before Piaget's cognitive development theory, it was believed that infants were passive and that they take very little from their environment. Today, the data shows that person's intellectual capability is shaped from the early brain stimulation that leads to the creation of new neural pathways. (Doron, 2010).

“To put this in some perspective, most brain growth occurs during infancy; by age one, the brain has doubled its birth volume and attained 60% of its ultimate adult size” (Doron, 2010: 36).

This information shows us that brain development determines many things like how a child will succeed later in school, how an adult will adapt to a job or in general how an individual will be able to absorb new information. HDEE method takes advantage of these perspectives on early brain stimulation and Doron incorporates that as an important part of the method. As mentioned before (Doman), early stimulation allows the brain to develop more neural pathways. One of the ways HDEE methodology teaches infants the English language is through teaching preverbal children rudimentary sign language. It allows the child to communicate its basic needs and it reduces frustration that can occur. It also prepares the child for later communication and research indicates that children who learnt sign language perform better at language tests in school (Doron, 2010)

To understand the HDEE method, one must understand how language acquisition works. Doron (2010) mentions two specific areas of the brain that are of big importance to language acquisition. One of those areas is Wernicke's area in the left temporal lobe, and Broca's area in the left frontal lobe. There is a difference in mother tongue language and later-acquired language when it comes to language storage in Wernicke's and Broca's area. When someone is bilingual, (which would mean that both languages were learned in early childhood) both languages inhabit the same space within Broca's area. An infant's brain is analysing the language they are hearing and preparing for future speech development. There is significant research that claims that language acquisition starts already in utero. While teaching the infant a language (mother tongue), it is not expected from the child to study grammar, understand linguistic structure, master pronunciation, learn to read and write or any of

the skills associated with formal language training. Another important aspect of language acquisition with infants is *motherese*. (Fernald & Kuhl, 1987). Motherese is speech directed toward infants and young children, which displays special characteristics, such as heightened pitch, exaggerated intonation, and increased repetition of words and clauses. The speech is slowed, emotional content is amplified, and sing-song cadence is adopted. As mentioned before, when teaching infants a language (mother tongue), it is not expected from the child to study grammar, linguistic structure, or to read and write or any of the skills associated with formal language training so why would we expect young children to teach other languages in that way which may be unnatural to them. Doron emphasizes teaching English as close as possible to the way children are acquiring their mother tongue. The goal with starting learning English at such young age is to be bilingual. There are many benefits to bilingualism. Individuals who are bilingual switch between two different language systems which makes their brains very active and flexible. Bilingual adults have more job opportunities than monolingual adults. When comparing bilingual and monolingual children, Doron (2010) states that bilingual children outperform the monolingual children in surprising ways such as, they exhibit more creativity, excel at problem solving, their oral and written communication is richer, they are better at grammar and they often score higher on certain intelligence tests. They also learn faster and adapt more quickly to new situations. Doron mentions an important part of the HDEE methodology is exposure to a second language which appears to be stimulating neural pathways and enhances cognitive capabilities at that age. More about background hearing will be mentioned later.

There are many reasons why the HDEE method is effective, attractive and successful. One of the reasons is the simple attraction of the English language. English has become the dominant language in the world (mostly for business and science). It is dominant in technology, business, international diplomacy, and conflict resolution, etc. Furthermore, English is used a lot in the entertainment media, movies, TV shows (subtitles are useless for young children) and TV personalities mostly use English. People, and children especially, are exposed to English a lot and it makes English a desirable language to know.

Many countries have recognised the importance of a second language and have supported learning English through the public school curriculum. As mentioned above,

English is a desirable language to know, and nowadays, any student wishing to continue their studies in science, technology, medicine or business is required to do well in English. Doron names some reasons why the traditional second-language training is failing:

- “1. Students are expected to master all aspects of a language (reading, writing, speaking, understanding, grammar and phonics) simultaneously.
2. Students do not get enough individual speaking time.
3. Students do not receive enough direct feedback.
4. Pronunciation suffers.
5. Inhibition leads to failure.
6. Traditional education models focus on correction” (Doron, 2010:41).

Rather than to focus on the mother tongue language learning method which includes first absorbing the sounds of a language, a young, school-aged child is expected to hear sounds, look at letters that are most probably from a different alphabet, learn abstract rules of grammar which can be confusing, and juggle all those brain activities at once is not a way to teach a language according to Doron (2010). She suggests that it is important for children to first get used to the language by hearing it, then learn to speak it and only after that learn to read it and, lastly, write it. Doron (2010) claims that HDEE was the first method in teaching English as a foreign language promoting spoken language as a pre-requisite for reading and writing. Another problem mentioned above is that students do not get enough individual speaking time in most classroom situations due to the fact that they are asked to repeat or recite in groups. Very often the shy and unsure students fade into the background and the teachers do not have time to work one-on-one. Doron (2010) emphasizes that students do not receive enough direct feedback and she compares it to the amount of direct feedback and interaction that a young child gets from parents almost constantly. The HDEE method is focused on starting learning English from the early age because of the fundamental linguistic elements that many children (who have not learned English from an early age) have difficulties with later in school: One of those is mouth shape or the exact placement of the tongue on the palate which is set at a very early age. Some proponents of the Critical Period Hypothesis (including Helen Doron) claim that after the age of six, the brain's aptitude for language acquisition is reduced a lot. An

additional problem with traditional education models is focus on correction. The feedback is usually limited to correction, with the emphasis on finding mistakes. It usually results with students suffering from performance anxiety and fear of correction every time they speak.

Doron developed the HDEE method in response to that failure. It is built on four fundamental principles: repeated background home hearing, positive reinforcement, making learning fun and building on success. Repeated background home hearing replicates natural mother tongue language acquisition. Being peripheral, the language goes straight to long term memory. The child is exposed to the sound, rhythms and patterns of the language. In addition, it is not important for the child to understand the meaning of the words because the same songs are repeated in the lessons with the teacher who helps the child to make those connections by using games, props, etc. In order for that to work, the child should be exposed to the sounds every day because with greater exposure the more permanent the language skill becomes (Doron, 2010). The reason why many children enjoy the HDEE method is because they need and get positive feedback to let them know they are doing well, which makes them feel successful and motivated. Rather than using traditional methods, HDEE lessons are full of games, songs and activities which makes children feel they are playing rather than formal learning.

Teachers and parents are an extremely important part of the method. When it comes to teachers, they must be willing to let go of their preconceived ideas of classroom. Many of them come from a culture where the teacher is viewed as an authority figure and that can be difficult to put aside and act like a child and sit on the floor as teachers do in HDEE method. Every HDEE teacher goes to a teacher training which includes active workshops in which participants play games, perform skits, role play as children and crawl on the floor. By doing that and other exercises they are supposed to lower their inhibitions and get out of the mindset of the authoritarian teacher. Teachers are obliged by a contract to attend at least one seminar a year. Training parents is also an interesting part of the HDEE method because parent participation is an important element of the method. It is important for parents to understand that, for example, background home hearing is an essential part of the HDEE method and that their child will not make progress as much as it could without it. Parent participation is extremely important in the case of infants, where the parent



is expected to accompany their child to the lesson, sit on the floor and be part of the lesson (whether it is singing, dancing or speaking English). For that reason, the parents have to be educated and coached so that they can be as supportive and encouraging as possible.

## 4.2. Description of HDEE programmes

HDEE courses are designed to support each other. When a child reaches a level of competence at one level, he/she can move into the next level. There are courses for Babies/Toddlers (0-4), Kids (4-9), Tweens (9-12) and Teens (12-19). There are also Holiday Courses.<sup>19</sup> Courses for babies start with *Baby's Best Start* (3 months to 2 years), which teaches babies English as a mother tongue and it promotes parent/child bonding. Except English, babies also learn social development, pre-reading skills, music and rhythm, brain development, baby signs and physical development.<sup>20</sup> What is specific about this course is that parents also learn practical early child education facts to enhance their parenting skills. *Baby's Best Start* is followed by *Toddler's Best Start* (15 months to 3 years) which teaches toddlers encyclopaedic knowledge, develops fine and gross motor skills and encourages early mathematical thinking. After *Toddler's Best Start*, *It's a Baby Dragon* (2 to 4 years) introduces basic English through repeated hearing, positive reinforcement and lively interaction. It is used as a beginner's course for new toddlers or as a follow-up course to children who have completed *Baby's Best Start* or *Toddler's Best Start*.<sup>21</sup> Kids courses all involve repeated hearing of adventures, positive reinforcement and playful interaction through which students learn vocabulary, correct pronunciation and English sentence structure. In the next chapters, what is specific for each course will be shortly described.

Kids start with *Fun with Flupe* course which has a lot of rhymes that develop the children's phonemic awareness and pre-reading skills. After that, children continue learning English in *More Fun with Flupe* course (4 to 6 years). *More Fun with Flupe* is followed by *Nat and Friends* (4 to 7 years) and *More Nat and Friends* (5 to 7 years) in which students learn concepts like friendship, honesty and helping others amongst

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.helendoron.com/courses/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.helendoron.com/courses/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.helendoron.com/courses/>

all other things. They can continue to the *Alphaboat* (5 to 8 years) course in which they learn correct pronunciation, and the fundamentals of reading, writing and spoken English. Alphaboat can also be a course for new learners. *Jump with Joey* (5 to 9 years) and *More Jump with Joey* (6 to 9 years) courses are first Helen Doron English courses to use augmented reality technology. This feature complements the important daily hearing of audio tracks and offers the students more opportunities for interaction with the language at home.<sup>22</sup> *Polly Reads and Writes* (5 to 9 years) teaches both spoken English and reading and writing as well as it introduces English phonics. *A Tale of Two Tails* (5 to 10 years) teaches children to speak English with confidence and it improves their reading and writing skills. Children also learn acting and self-expression skills as they practise a play and prepare for a final performance at the end of the year.<sup>23</sup> *Botty the Robot* (7 to 10 years) is taught as a beginning course and it teaches basic skills of reading and writing, as well as English phonics as a foundation for solid reading and writing skills.

Tweens courses start with *Paul Ward Explores* (8 to 14 years) which is for beginning students or continuing students who are at the pre-A1 Common European Framework of Reference examination level. In *Paul Ward's Adventures* (9 to 15 years) students follow the adventures of Paul Ward and learn to speak, read and write advanced English. *World of Wonders* (11 to 14 years) is a course for students who are beginners and need to learn the basics in English. Nature and the environment are the main theme in which teens explore Jungle, Ocean, Desert and Arctic.

Teen courses start with either *World of Wonders* or *Teen Talent* (11 to 15 years). In *Teen Talent* students learn to open their minds, think, discuss, and develop in English. Teens learn techniques in reading comprehension that correspond to the Common European Framework of Reference for A2 level for vocabulary and grammar.<sup>24</sup> *Teen Choices* (12 to 16 years) B1 level course introduces students to language used by other teens all around the world including idioms, jokes and some tongue twisters. The Teen Choices course is followed up by *Teen Express* (13 to 17 years) B1+ level course which teaches students stories with important life lessons like the rewards of taking responsibility for your actions, etc. And the last course in HDEE

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.helendoron.com/courses/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.helendoron.com/courses/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.helendoron.com/courses/>

method is *Teen Success* (14 to 19 years). It is a level B2 course that teaches students to open their minds, think and learn to express themselves in English. This course is both for students who have completed Teen Express as well as for new students who pass the corresponding level in the Helen Doron Teen English Placement Test.<sup>25</sup>

### 4.3. THE CROATIAN CONTEXT OF EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Helen Doron was certainly not aware of the Croatian situation in teaching young learners. The key persons are Mirjana Vilke and Yvonne Vrhovac, and they will be mentioned in this chapter. Vilke (1991: 21) mentions Lenneberg and his belief that children from eighteen months until puberty are in a critical period for the acquisition of language and she says that learning a foreign language after puberty is more difficult and the way of learning the language is different rather than learning it as a child. She also mentions Michael Long (English linguist), who researched the language acquisition of first and second language, and who concluded that there are sensitive periods for language learning during which the learning is successful, and after the sensitive period the learning becomes incomplete and more difficult. Vilke (1991: 38) talks about Carol Chomsky, who questioned Noam Chomsky and his assumption that children learn the mother tongue until the age of five. That opened the doors for many researchers and eventually they concluded that children do not in fact complete learning the mother tongue until the age of five but rather at the age of ten or even later.

Vilke (1991: 46) discusses “baby-talk”, which is the equivalent of motherese, and has certain specific qualities that differ from every-day language. It is a language that babies use because that is how adults are talking to them, and it is a language that adults use when talking to a baby in order to make themselves clear. Its characteristics are the higher pitch of the voice, excessive intonation, short and less complicated sentences.

Vilke (1991: 66) believes that children learn how to talk, because we talk with them, and expect from children from the earliest days to understand what we are

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.helendoron.com/courses/>

talking to them. Children in general, according to Vilke (1991: 75), acquire second language with less effort than adults. Some research showed that children who learned a second language before the age of six, did not have a foreign accent at all, and after the year of twelve or thirteen, the accent from mother tongue would appear. For the child to be as close to a native speaker as possible, language learning should start before the age of five. She believes that learning a second language can result with bilingualism.

There are many definitions of bilingualism, but one that most of the linguists could agree on is that bilingualism is knowledge and use of two languages by the same person. (ibid.: 89) Some people imply that a bilingual individual understands and uses both languages similarly, while others are satisfied with the fact that a bilingual individual has a dominant language, while the other language is used for either reading, speaking, writing or listening.

Vilke's conclusion is quite simple and direct. Children should start learning a language as soon as possible, but, after the child has somewhat acquired the mother tongue. Continuity for language learning is something she finds particularly important. To enrol a child with another language early is useful, but it needs to be emphasized that a child quickly adopts language elements of a foreign language, and the child forgets it soon if there is no continuity. Vilke (ibid.: 186) says that every age is good for starting to learn a new language, if there is motivation both from the child and the parents at the beginning, and the teacher during learning.

In Croatia, considerable research about language learning has been carried out. Scientific researchers have found that the age of six or seven is the age at which a child learns language with ease. Likewise, they emphasize the importance of small groups of up to a maximum of fifteen students so that each child can be approached individually and so that each child has time to express themselves. Vilke (as cited in Vrhovac, 2019: 23) emphasizes the approach to the process of learning a foreign language in the natural environment, and this requires one hour of teaching every day of the week. As already mentioned, continuity is extremely important because the process of forgetting in children is amazingly fast. It is extremely important to insist on correct pronunciation, which is very easily adopted at that age, certainly easier than later. Lütze-Miculinić (Vrhovac, 2019; 178) states that pronunciation is most easily

adopted in early childhood and that children who grow up bilingual from day one, have the best chance of good pronunciation competence. She also mentions that younger students should be burdened as little as possible with metalanguage and theory, and that the best method of imitation is through play and repetition, imitating the pronunciation of native speakers. Croatian linguists try to bring foreign language learning closer to the acquisition of the mother tongue in such a way that the emphasis is not on grammar and complex sentences. In the natural development of language, whether native or foreign language, children use simple sentences. Emphasis is also placed on a rapid change of activity, every five to ten minutes, due to the child's ability to concentrate. Another extremely important thing that Vilke (Vrhovac, 2019; 24) mentions is the love of teachers for their work and children, and children's love for teachers and what they do.

Vrhovac (2019: 206) says that the acquisition of a foreign language at the earliest age contributes to the child's development (linguistic, cognitive, and affective). The approach advocated by Croatian linguists, including Vrhovac and her associates, leads to the child's socialization, openness to other children, and the world at large.

#### 4.4. SOME CONCLUSIONS

There have been many theories of language learning and methods of teaching that influenced Helen Doron on developing the HDEE method. There were obviously many educators that had a great influence on Doron as well. Croatian methodologists were among the few great researchers that talked about early language acquisition and actively research and write about a natural way of learning a language. This idea has been present with Croatian educators, linguists, and methodologists for a long time, even before the global trend of early learning. Today, this field is very popular in the world, and various research can be found. Doron appears to be the only famous one that had successfully combined and tested (on many children, including her own) which methods are best suited for the best possible outcomes of early language learning. She created a brand, and it has spread worldwide, and it seems to be very effective according to the satisfied parents and happy children. With all that said, there is an obvious difference between HDEE method and other various methods and approaches. As mentioned above in the thesis, Doron mentions many pedagogists,

scientists, psychologists, and educators in general, whose methods had been scientifically tested and have scientific results. This is an important thing that should be discussed and researched. There is a question that is being raised. There is not enough scientific proof that the method is working, and further research is necessary to back Doron's claim that children who attend her courses become bilingual.

## 5. HDEE LESSONS

### 5.1. Observation of in-class lessons

The following part of the thesis contains examples of lessons taught in the HDEE classrooms. The lessons were taught by licenced HDEE teachers and I observed all of the following lessons that will be described.

#### 5.1.1. Baby's Best Start (BBS) and Toddler's Best Start (TBS)

BBS and TBS are somewhat similar courses, yet they have a completely different atmosphere. BBS and TBS lesson's duration is 45 minutes. BBS is a unique course in which babies tune into English in a natural way, just as they learn their mother tongue. Parents get ideas how to play with their babies in a more developmental way in which they activate all the baby's senses. BBS strengthens the parent-child bond and the whole lesson is very gentle, relaxing, but also very smiley and fun. In the BBS lesson, parents are models for their baby and are expected to speak, sing, chant, repeat after the teacher and be the perfect students for the teacher.

The mascot for BBS and TBS is Sunny the cat, and at the beginning of the lesson, the teacher took out the hand puppet of Sunny the cat and said "hello" to each child, and the children could not wait for the cat and were very happy when Sunny said hello to them. Some of them were shy, some of them gave Sunny a high-five. Then it was time to introduce themselves. The teacher took a ball and said "I am...(name). Who are you?" and the teacher rolled the ball to the baby. Parents encouraged their children to say "I am" but even if they only said their name, they would get a round of applause and bravo! Then preparing for the Waving song, the teacher asked parents and babies to wave hello to stuffed toys (dog, frog, kangaroo)

and they sang the song with movements. Most of them just danced and the parents did the movements, nevertheless. Most of the babies focused on the teacher singing and dancing and some of them on parents. Afterwards, the teacher started shaking a smaller box with Legos, and elicited the word “shake”. All the babies were extremely excited and interested and started shaking the boxes they got. The teacher asked parents to help their children to open their boxes and started counting the Legos (to five). Since all the children were doing it in their own time, the teacher would go to each child and encourage them to count, and even if they only listened and put the Legos out, their action was followed by “bravo”! The next prop were plastic sticks with colourful ribbons, and both parents and babies got one. The teacher used the simple prop to show up and down and to prepare them to sing the Uppity up song. It was time to move a little, so the teacher encouraged all to clap, stomp, tap and jump. The babies got excited when the teacher brought out small drums and chairs. The teacher showed them how to bang on the drum, on the door and on the chair. All parents and children joined in and later they sang the Drum song while banging on their drums. The next activity was incredibly special because the children got mirrors and the parents were touching the baby’s body parts that the teacher was naming. Each mother or father were very gentle, and the babies really enjoyed the activity. The song Action face was the following activity. The teacher threw a lot of colourful plastic balls on the floor and children got immediately excited and started rolling the balls which was the point of the balls in the first place. Parents were telling their children to “roll the ball”. When they sang the Roll the ball song, the teacher said clean up and all the children knew what to do. They have had an activity with the blocks where they were building blocks and at the same time counting (to 5) and the parents repeated after the teacher “knock it down” and babies loved it because they could make a mess. An interesting thing was that even though some of the babies did not count out loud they were shaping the words with their mouth. The teacher played the Stacking song in the background when they were playing. That activity was followed by “clean up” time. Later the teacher blew bubbles so the children were poking the bubbles and they tried to blow the bubbles on their own which helps develop fine motor skills and strengthening muscles in their mouth which is very important for later development of speech. In the end of the lesson, Sunny said bye-bye to all of the children and when the teacher said bye-bye, some of the children immediately started walking to their parents or the door which showed they understood the meaning of bye-bye.

TBS is remarkably similar to BBS but is considerably more active, loud and filled with excitement. The structure of the lesson is similar to the BBS lesson but when they were counting, they counted to 10, the teacher used more flashcards, for example - daily habits (eat, drink, stroke your hair, stretch, yawn) and the teacher was mimicking those actions and the parents and the toddlers were mimicking as well. They played with puzzles which had animals (e.g. five dogs and five dots) and they had to connect them. In TBS toddlers are introduced to early reading and the teacher read a Bedtime Book with rhyme in it. The toddlers reacted different to similar activities that the babies had as well. When the teacher threw colourful balls on the floor, they all started to scream and jump with excitement. Also, they knew colours, so when it was time to clean up, the teacher said which colour to bring. In TBS toddlers strived independence and they liked to do counting on their own. Toddlers also had an encyclopaedic knowledge activity where the teacher used picture flashcards to show them and name some types of birds.

Many people are surprised by the fact that such young children attend classes and learn a foreign language. This concept was at first very strange to me, but at the same time fascinating. After observing the lessons, I can say that babies and toddlers react wonderfully to the method and appear to understand what is being said to them. Toddlers were obviously having fun and were happy to say a few words in English. This highly active and engaging approach to teaching English to such young children worked very well.

#### 5.1.2. Fun with Flupe (FWF)

The FWF lesson was interesting because the 4-year olds were without their parents. The lesson lasted 45 minutes as well and was very dynamic and children absolutely loved acting out and mimicking. The teacher started the lesson in Croatian, telling the children that they are travelling to England where they can speak only English. The teacher asked them how they would like to travel there (by bus, car, plane, etc.) and they pretended they were riding their motorcycles to England. Then it was time to say hello to the FWF mascots – Granny Fix, Paul and Flupe. Children still enjoyed saying hello to the mascots and giving them high five. They introduced themselves in the ball activity and they all said the full sentence (I am ...), and some



of them even asked “Who are you?” while passing the ball. They sang the 1,2,3 song. Children in the FWF lesson knew all the words and movements to the Five little monkeys song and really enjoyed doing it. After that, it was time for picture flashcards (truck, bicycle, driver, car, bus, tractor, plane, wagon) and children memorised the flashcards very well very quickly. They each got a flashcard and when the teacher asked, “Who’s got a ...?” they answered. They practiced the new vocabulary by colouring vehicles that teacher said in the activity book. It was time to move around a little, so the teacher asked them to stand up, reach up high, touch the floor, turn around, jump, run and hop.

In the FWF class, children could perfectly understand the teacher and play games in English. It was obvious that they could understand what they are supposed to do (especially due to the teacher’s mimicking the actions or targeted vocabulary). One thing I noticed is that some children did not react to the teacher, the picture flashcards and songs as well as the others. After talking to the teacher, I was informed that those children mostly did not listen to the recordings daily or watch the episodes and/or parents did not read to them. It was obvious when a group of children recognized a song, character, or a new animal, etc.

### 5.1.3. Teen Choices (TC)

TC is a completely different course than the previous ones. The lesson lasts 120 minutes with a short break. The lesson is based on a lot of talking, discussing, sharing experience, etc. Firstly, all the students (with the ball activity) introduced themselves and then the teacher asked the question which they would answer and ask the same question another student. They discussed their favourite singer, actor, movie, book, subject, colour, and food. Secondly, they watched a video “Which side of your brain is more dominant?” which had some exercises, which in the end showed them which side of their brain is more dominant. Students were very concentrated, and they understood without a problem a video that consisted of quite complicated vocabulary for 12-year-olds and 13-year-olds. Later they watched another video about 9 types of intelligences. The teacher discussed with the students what they learned, if they had heard about it before and asked them what they think, which intelligence is more dominant when it comes to them. Lastly, they solved the types of intelligence test and

made an individual presentation about themselves and their intelligence. They presented to everyone their strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics. Lastly, they played a game of Happy Family where they practiced phonics.

The lesson was fun, filled with games, a lot of talking (students speaking) and remarkably interesting to me as well. The one thing that struck me was that there were 8 teenagers in a school full of babies and little children. The environment was, in my opinion, not suited for teenagers. The lessons were more dynamic and creative in comparison to “regular” school lessons, but that could just be due to my bad experience with high school teachers. There was nothing revolutionary in the lesson.

## 5.2. Online lessons

Online lessons were something completely new for both children, parents and HDEE teachers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, children and parents were not allowed to attend classes in school and the HDEE school, just like all public schools in Croatia, organized online lessons. The next part of the thesis will describe how the classes were successful and if they even were successful.

### 5.2.1. Baby's Best Start and Toddler's Best Start

BBS online lessons were vastly different than the ones in class. In online lessons, a lesson depended on parents as much as it did on the teacher. Such young children could not focus on the laptop/computer/ TV screen as much, and the parents repeated everything the teacher said. The lesson started with waving (one by one child) and greeting parents and babies. There was a lot of positive reinforcement. The teacher used screen sharing when singing songs so that parents could see the movements from the teacher but also so that they could read the lyrics and sing. All the babies were waving and dancing and it was definitely a successful activity. Then it was time for early reading. The teacher flashed a list of words and the parents repeated and mimed the words. After early reading, the teacher did the “I am...” activity, and some babies said their name, some did not, so the parents said it instead of them and they got a round of applause and bravo. The big difference with online classes was that the teacher had to use props the parents could find at home, so in the following activity those were pots and pans. Children had to bang on the pots and pans, quietly, loudly

and it was successful because the parents showed them what to do. With pots and pans around them, they could not really focus on the screen and the teacher as well, so that was the parent's job, to be the model. The teacher used banging on the pots and pans for counting as well, and then they sang the Pots and pans song. For touching body parts, the teacher recommended a clean makeup brush or a ball (or, of course, parents hand/finger). She showed everything on a doll so the parents could do it on their children. They used the sentence "This is your... nose/ear/eye". Some babies showed the body parts on their parent. The teacher was speaking a lot throughout the lesson and the parents were showing a lot what to do, to the babies and animated them. The thing that was quite different in online lessons is the environment. In schools the environment is very well prepared for such young children, while in their home, they had many distractions and they would run off and grab their toy or any object they find fascinating at the moment. Then it was time for arts and crafts (building a house - the concept of building a house is very difficult to explain so it was easier to do it through arts and crafts), and it was mostly an activity for parents, because the babies were too young to do it, but they coloured the windows, door, etc. Again, the activity depended on parents repeating the parts of the house, shapes they were cutting out and making the activity work. Some mothers with lively babies had fathers or their younger siblings to help them with the baby in the lesson. At the end of the activity, babies and parents showed their houses and opened the windows and doors. Most of the babies reacted best at the parts of the lesson that involved singing, dancing and music in general. They would dance with their parents, or dance and run around, but they were definitely excited when the music started. At the end of the lesson the teacher repeated early reading with mimicking every word (funny, sad, angry, yawn). Some children tried to give kisses through the screen when it was time to say bye-bye.

As mentioned before, the TBS lesson was somewhat similar to the BBS lesson but there were already some differences. Toddlers looked at the screen and understood that their teacher was there. They also had early reading in their lesson but it included encyclopaedic knowledge (Poodle, Great Dane, Boxer, Siberian Husky, Golden Retriever, Labrador, Maltese, Pug, Cocker Spaniel and Beagle) which was written but then followed by pictures of real dogs. The parents would ask the children to repeat the words, but one child said "No" in English every time when their mom asked him to say, for example, Boxer. In that situation, the teacher asked; "Mummy can you say

boxer?” and the parent said it and that was good enough and important for the child to see and hear. Toddlers had books and they had sticker-time and they really enjoyed it. They were sticking monkeys, tigers, lions and elephants. Then the teacher used the book to practice counting (the animals). At the end of the activity each child showed their page with stickers and the teacher used a lot of positive reinforcement. The teacher used the section of vocabulary revision (stomp, stop, shake, shout, hop) to make the toddlers move a little. The teacher did not speak any mother tongue from the beginning until the end of the lesson and parents really were perfect students because they understood everything and motivated their children to participate.

The lesson I observed was highly successful. Talking to the other teachers I found out that many teachers had problems with BBS lessons because such young children often could not concentrate on the screen and the lesson in general. My impression was that it worked well but I could see how over a longer period of time it would be not even near as effective as it was in school. Besides, at such an early age, using screens for communication with toddlers can be questioned.

### 5.2.3. Fun with Flupe

Even though FWF lessons are usually without the parents, in online lessons the parents were there. Children said their name and asked another child what their name is. The teacher used Granny Fix, Paul and Flupe to say hello. Flashcards were all online and the teacher would just go quickly through them. The minus of the online lesson was that some parents had a tendency to translate the tasks into their mother tongue because they probably thought the children would not understand it, but children answered the teacher’s questions in English and in full sentences. Four-year-olds could follow what the teacher was doing on the screen without a problem. The teacher used their books and stickers more than usual because the children enjoyed it and he could not really use a lot of props if it was not something that children did not have at home. He asked every child if they were still colouring and one little girl responded with “No way! I’m stickering them!”. The teacher used the book activities in a way that he would include all children. He asked one child to choose a colour for the cake, and everybody coloured the cake in that colour, then another child chose the colour of balloons, etc. The online presentations had interesting animations with candles appearing so that

children could count how old Paul was. Then they made a table, each child got a plate, fork and spoon from their parents and followed the teacher's directions.

In my opinion, for the COVID-19 situation, the lesson was successful, very engaging and the teacher did the best that could be done in that situation. With all that in mind, I have to admit that I missed all the wonderful props that lessons in school provide, including the interaction between children which was drastically different (I am not sure how aware of each other they even were).

#### 5.2.4. Teen Choices

The TC lesson was the most similar to regular school lessons. The teacher talked with the children and asked them about school, what was new and how they were. They used complex language without a problem. They talked about their future and what they would like to do. The teacher asked a lot of questions and gave them plenty of time to think and no answer was wrong. Then they read a song about Ella Doron (Helen Doron's daughter) and about her dreams and visions when she was a teen. They had several tasks with explaining the terms *born to do it*, *from the start*, *came naturally*, *getting by and deep in my heart* in their own words. They also had to write some homophones and antonyms for some words from the song and they always checked their answers at the end of the task. Another task was to find an antonym in the song for the word *different*, 4 words that rhyme with *sight*, a homophone of new, two popular stories/plays, part of the human body, and a set of adjectives, verbs and nouns. By the end of the lesson they had an activity with creative writing. The teacher asked them to first come up with a name, then (one by one) to read the name and others to give adjectives by the impression they had of the character. After that, they wrote down what characteristics they would give to their character. Teens asked a lot of questions about the meanings of some words, how to say certain words in English (but they would describe it in English instead of using their mother tongue, and everyone else would try to help them find the perfect word). Then the teacher told them they could choose two words/adjectives to change them into opposites if they did not like them. The teacher read the beginning of the story and the students needed to finish it. Each student read their story out loud and the teacher gave them feedback and encouraged them a lot.

As I mentioned, the lessons were not much different from something you could see in any online English lesson for teenagers. The biggest asset was the teacher's enthusiasm and creativity, and, most importantly, the ability for the students to speak and express themselves.

### 5. 3. Discussion

As someone who has both observed several lessons and has been a Helen Doron teacher, I can say that in my experience, parents, teachers, and, most importantly, children enjoy learning English in a mother-tongue way. Besides, they are very successful, and they learn how to speak a second language very early, but they also learn early mathematics, encyclopaedic knowledge which they really enjoy, and, most importantly, can master. Many people are surprised by the fact that the HDEE method teaches English to babies, but those who have experienced it and seen how they first understand, are excited and happy, then how they say their first words in English., usually change their minds. In brief, it is the most rewarding feeling for the teacher and the proud parents as well.

An important and relevant element of the method is the positive reinforcement that teachers give the children. Until I started to teach and had my Teacher Training Course (TTC) I had not realised how fragile a child's self-esteem is. That being said, I believe positive reinforcement motivates children and the attitude that they know and can learn so much more than we usually expect benefits children a lot, and they start believing in themselves.

The HDEE method could be one of the most modern and successful methods in early language acquisition. Starting acquiring language at such young age appears to be remarkably successful, but then again it also raises some questions. Are the children, taught by the HDEE method bilingual? And can they be bilingual due to a method that only imitates the English-speaking environment? As it has been mentioned before, children that start acquiring language at three months of age could become bilingual, but what about the children that enrol in the lessons at the age of twelve or thirteen? The first question is: Is the school and the method truly for teenagers? It seems to work with babies and young children, and the lessons are highly

creative and fun. What is so different about the method that teenagers do not do at their schools? Due to the classes I had observed, I noticed there is a lot of talking, conversations, and creative games that make the student vocabulary rich and it guides them toward being fluent in English. But is that not what every school does (or at least is trying to do)? It is interesting how Doron claims that infants store the language in the specific area in the brain if they learn it parallel with their mother tongue, and that there is a significant difference whether the child will start learning a language at three months of age or thirteen years of age. So, if there is a student that enrolls in the school and the method at fourteen, does the method even work? Does it make sense? Can the method be successful at that age? There are many things that have not been researched about the method and its efficiency needs to be researched as well. So again, I raise the question: Is there a scientific support for the HDEE method?

This research was based principally on my own experience as a Helen Doron teacher and on peer observation. I also used my own experience in the training sessions and seminars, as well as the TTC. That is why the study has some limitations. To increase objectivity some other features should be included in future research are questionnaires for teachers and parents, focus group discussions and action research that will test the quality of certain classroom interventions.

## 6.CONCLUSION

According to the information available, the HDEE method is a well thought-out, successful method that provides a unique way for the achievement of high proficiency in English. Helen Doron studied many theories and methods, and her own children were exposed to some of them as well, so she eventually realised that there are some disadvantages to the traditional way of teaching a second or foreign language. Inspired by the results of Glenn Doman's method and Shinichi Suzuki's method (the language of music) she decided to develop her own method. The HDEE method advocates that English learning should start as early as possible (HDEE schools are for 3 month-olds up to 19 year-olds) because it is the best way in which native-like proficiency can be achieved. The HDEE method successfully imitates the natural process of first language acquisition. It also takes into consideration the cognitive

development of older children and adjusts to it. On the other hand, it provides an excellent way for learning English in a fun, child-centred way. Even online lessons, which had been a great challenge for teachers all around the world due to the new pandemic, were very successful and with the great support and help from parents, this completely new aspect to the method succeeded.

HDEE makes learning English easy for children but it also offers much more, such as warm, welcoming and nurturing environment for children and parents. The teachers are dedicated to helping children explore their creativity and expand their imagination. HDEE lessons are full of joy, games, creative props and singing and dancing. The method is different from formal education and working as a HDEE teacher is a position that requires a high level of creativity, great deal of enthusiasm and lots of flexibility.

Questions like, whether the children taught by the HDEE method become bilingual, and can they be bilingual due to a method that only imitates the English-speaking environment should and could be answered. As it has been mentioned before, children that start acquiring language at a young age could become bilingual, but what about the children that enrol in the lessons at the age of twelve or thirteen? If there is a student that enrolls in the school and the method at fourteen, does the method even work? Can the method be successful at that age? Is there a scientific support for the HDEE method? There are many things that have not been researched about the method and its efficiency needs to be researched as well. The features that should be included in future research are questionnaires for teachers and parents, focus group discussions and action research that will test the quality of certain classroom interventions.



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