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Supporting university students with ADHD with academic literacies.

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Abstract

This paper is a practitioner reflection written for EAP teachers working with students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The paper does three things: (1) it provides some insight into the nature of ADHD, considering both 'deficit' models which present the condition as a disorder, and neurodiversity models which see both challenges and strengths vis-à-vis neuronormativity; (2) it considers some of the difficulties ADHD students may face in their academic studies, specifically to do with reading, writing, time management and responding to feedback, and some of the strengths they may bring to their studies; and (3) it offers some practical suggestions for ways in which EAP teachers can help students with ADHD both meet these challenges and capitalise on their strengths. It provides links to some online resources.

Keywords

neurodiversity, neuronormativity, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), rejection sensitivity dysphoria

Introduction

My interest in students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) was sparked by an EAP class I taught in 2023. The class included one student who had a declared diagnosis of ADHD but also five others who exhibited what I would now see as possible indicators of ADHD. In a class of fifteen this was a sufficiently large sub-group to have a significant impact on classroom dynamics, and I found it a very challenging class to teach. The six students were frequently inattentive, struggled to stay on task and were sometimes disruptive in their interactions with me and other students. The student with declared ADHD could also be emotionally volatile and would get very upset by critical feedback of any kind. However, as I got to know the students better, I also found that when we hit on an activity or topic that actually engaged their interests, they could be very attentive indeed and work with a very high degree of focus and purpose. I also discovered that they could be unusually creative in solving problems and were eager to explain to others their 'out-of-the-box' approaches.

This experience prompted me to explore the literature on ADHD looking for insights and practical ways of supporting students with ADHD. Unfortunately, although there is an extensive literature on ADHD in the clinical and Special Educational Needs literatures (see below), very little attention has been paid to ADHD in the EAP and academic literacies literature. One notable exception, and to date the only paper I have found looking specifically at ADHD students from an EAP perspective, is Marshall (2025), which examines some of the difficulties ADHD students may have with listening to lectures as a result of neurodivergent perceptions of time. This valuable paper offers both insight into difficulties, suggestions for EAP responses, and thoughtful caveats.

In this paper, I would like to offer some practical guidance to EAP teachers working with ADHD students, based on my own experience. I shall try to do three things. The first is to provide some insight into the nature of ADHD, considering both 'deficit' models which present the condition as a

disorder, and neurodiversity models which see both challenges and strengths vis-à-vis neuronormativity. The second, drawing on both the medical literature and the EAP/academic literacies literature is to consider some of the difficulties ADHD students may face in their academic studies, specifically to do with reading, writing, time management and responding to feedback, and some of the strengths they may bring to their studies. Unfortunately, it must be stated here that to date very little attention has been paid by EAP writers to ADHD and the literature is overwhelmingly psychiatric/medical in focus. Finally, drawing on what there is in the EAP literature but chiefly on my own experience, I shall try to offer some practical suggestions for ways in which EAP teachers can help students with ADHD both meet these challenges and capitalise on their strengths, including links to relevant online resources.

1. What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is typically defined in the medical literature as a neurodevelopmental disorder that begins in childhood, frequently persisting into adulthood, and which typically manifests itself in inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity (see for example, Faraone et al., 2006, Peterson and Pennington, 2015).

Brown (2013) reports that difficulties with executive function and self-regulation seem to characterise most people with ADHD. Sedgwick (2017) describes three main types of ADHD presentation: predominantly inattentive presentation, predominantly hyperactive/impulsive presentation, and combined presentation. Magnus et al. (2023) report that the inattentive subtype is observed in approximately 18 % of adults with ADHD, while the hyperactive/impulsive and combined subtypes account for over 8 % and 70%, respectively. According to Sedgwick (2017), these represent particular configurations of specific characteristics. Inattentive presentation would be displayed through quickly losing focus on a task, shifting attention, absent-mindedness, easily getting distracted by low-priority activities, spontaneous mind-wandering, “zoning out” or daydreaming, overlooking details, disorganisation and forgetfulness, leading to poor time-management, forgetting commitments, or missing deadlines. Hyperactive/impulsive presentation would be shown through restlessness, being fidgety, feeling agitated, always being “on the go” as if driven by a motor, talking excessively, having trouble sitting still, interrupting others or talking over them, or saying things without thinking.

Other reported challenges may include emotional volatility, for example regularly feeling irritable and/or unable to cope, being short-tempered, being easily flustered and/or stressed, being hypersensitive to criticism, procrastination (a general tendency to put tasks off), experiencing burn-out and easily getting bored when the novelty of an activity has worn off. ADHD and dyslexia are also commonly diagnosed together (Peterson and Pennington, 2015), as are depression, anxiety or learning difficulties (DuPaul et al., 2013). On the positive side, Sedgwick (2017) lists having lots of energy and having hyper-focus – an unusual degree of attention – when a subject or task is genuinely absorbing.

The studies above all characterise people with ADHD as suffering from a (potentially treatable and remediable) *disorder*. The clue, of course, is in the name. Although I am in no way questioning the robustness of the research in these studies nor the potential benefits of medical treatment for people with ADHD, I do have to question the characterisation of people with ADHD as being purely in deficit; as lacking something that ‘normal people’ have. In doing so, I would draw attention to the concept of neurodiversity that has figured prominently in recent discussions of equity, diversity and

inclusion in higher education (Bertilsdotter et al., 2020). Put simply, this view, associated particularly with Walker (2014, 2021) argues that people think, process information and communicate in different ways. Although we can identify ways of thinking common to the majority of people (the 'neuronormative'), we can also identify people (the 'neurodivergent') who diverge from these norms and culturally constructed standards in various ways. Such people think, process information and communicate in atypical ways, and do so in ways that may give them cognitive *advantages* as well as presenting them with cognitive challenges.

Dodson (2024) has applied a concept of neurodivergence to ADHD and argues that the best characterisation of ADHD is as 'an interest-based nervous system'. This means that along with the inattention and fidgetiness when bored, students with ADHD may show unusual *hyperfocus*, related to heightened motivation during interesting, rewarding or novel activities. This hyperfocus provides an intense concentration on tasks which can result in both deeper learning and higher productivity. Students may acquire new skills very quickly, often producing work exceeding expectations, when channelling energy into projects or topics they are passionate about. This can flip ADHD from a deficit to strength.

2. ADHD students in the university

Quite how common ADHD is amongst university students in the UK is unclear. Worldwide estimates for incidence in academia are as high as 16% (Mak et al., 2022). I have been unable to locate figures for incidence in the UK, but I note that Sedgwick- Müller (2022) estimated that 27% of students at that time had declared a mental health disability of some kind, before or during their programme of studies in the UK.

Unsurprisingly, research suggests strongly that symptoms associated with ADHD lead to lower academic performance, particularly in students presenting with inattention (Barkley et al., 1997; Barkley et al., 2008; Sedgwick-Müller et al., 2022). MacCann et al. (2012) point to problems with time management, study skills and learning effectiveness. Wunsch et al. (2021) note problems managing academic stress and pressure. DuPaul et al. (2020) report lower use of study skills and lower levels of academic self-efficacy. Procrastination appears to be closely associated with adverse consequences and outcomes in university settings because of impaired capacity to meet deadlines (Howell and Watson, 2007; Niermann and Scheres, 2014) and maladaptive coping strategies, poor self-regulation, or avoidance (van Eerde and Klingsieck, 2018). Knouse et al. (2013) note it may be associated with negative self-schemata and low self-esteem. As many students with ADHD find it challenging to concentrate, manage, and organize their studies they may be more susceptible to the development of burnout syndrome. Porto, et al. (2024) report correlations between ADHD symptoms and burnout, emotional exhaustion, leading to negative academic outcomes at university. Additionally, Smith et al. (2020) argue that students with ADHD may show significantly lower levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic academic motivation, as compared to their peers. There also seems to be differences in performance between male and female students with ADHD. Morris et al. (2023) indicate that female students perform better than male. It is unclear why this might be, though possibly having better coping strategies and accessing support services more often than their male colleagues, might help female students.

However, although students with ADHD cope with the challenges of an interest-based nervous system, and exhibit the behaviours noted above, they may also bring an unusual creativity, hyperfocus, curiosity and flexibility, *when their interest is engaged* (Panagiotidi et al., 2020; Dawson et al., 2022). Margot and Rinn (2016), for example, report on the 'intellectual overexcitability' of students with ADHD which can be seen in a deep need for knowledge and may be shown by

persistently asking questions or offering critical observation. Other research has focused on the value of divergent, as opposed to convergent thinking (Torrance, 1987; White and Shah, 2006). While convergent thinking, for example, the narrowing down of solutions and ideas by discarding inappropriate ones is necessary, divergent thinking is critical for solving novel problems. As many university students with ADHD exhibit higher levels of creative and divergent thinking, e.g. alternative uses and unique ideas, or strategies (White and Shah, 2006; Verheul et al, 2015), they may be better at thinking 'out of the box' and finding novel solutions to problems.

3. Academic literacy challenges for ADHD students and strategies for support

The term academic literacy has developed over the last thirty years from a narrow concern with reading and writing at university (see e.g. Spack, 1997) to a conception that sees literacy practices as multi-modal and interwoven. Green (2023) describes academic literacies as 'situated, multimodal communicative practices that students must master in order to construct and share disciplinary knowledge and to participate as legitimate members of their academic communities' (2023, p.168). This view of academic literacy interweaves traditionally conceived communicative practices such as writing with 'soft skills' such as time-management and the ability to take and make use of feedback.

Working within this framework, in what follows in the rest of this section, I am going to focus on a limited number of academic literacy practices to identify problems ADHD students may have and to suggest some solutions.

3.1 ADHD students and potential difficulties with reading

Reading efficiently and fluently, among other factors, is linked to processing speed (Rucklidge and Tannock, 2002; Willcutt et al., 2005, Wolf and Katzir-Cohen, 2001). Decoding text needs to be effortless so attention can be easily given to comprehension of the reading material. When reading becomes more automatized, less mental effort is needed for ongoing decoding and the reader can focus on meaning. Unfortunately, according to Gregg et al. (2002) and others, many adults with ADHD demonstrate problems with processing and motor speed. Gregg et al. (2002) argue further that the reading performance of university students with ADHD appears to be influenced significantly by cognitive factors such as attention and executive functioning. Many students with ADHD report that they struggle with comprehension of long passages in academic texts because of a lack of sustained attention (Kofler et al., 2020). This could be because their reduced attentional resources may impair forming text connections so that central information may not emerge in their text representation to the same degree that it does in other students. Other challenges may be related to skipping some parts of the text. For example, Zentall (1993) reports that some students with ADHD skipped a fourth of the reading material when they read silently to themselves in a quiet environment. Other, often self-reported problems students may experience are having difficulties with scanning and skimming information rapidly, struggling with sustaining focus while reading and potentially reading slower. Having problems with retaining information that was read earlier and being easily 'derailed' by external distractions were commonly reported, too.

There are many techniques which can help students with ADHD overcome reading challenges. To improve focus and prevent skipping parts of the text, students should be encouraged to read printed materials whenever possible. Using pens or highlighters to annotate or track words on paper can aid in organizing information and enhancing recall. Some of my students who tried to utilise paper materials reported that it helped them with concentration and engagement. However, since most academic material is online and students often read from screens, they could be advised to follow the text with their finger or computer mouse. Many students in my class who seemed initially reluctant to try this out reported that it was beneficial with regard to focus and engagement.

Students should also be taught active reading strategies, which involve engaging with and interrogating the text regularly. Reading aloud, quizzing themselves on sections before moving forward, and working with a partner, if possible, can make the material more engaging and memorable. Re-reading specific parts to encode information in greater detail may further aid retention. From my experience, when neurodivergent students with ADHD find texts particularly interesting they are highly motivated to research the topic extensively and they can approach texts from different perspectives and quiz other students on texts showing them potential issues they might have missed.

One particularly useful technique is the Pomodoro method (Cirillo, 2025) as it is usually beneficial for improving reading and writing focus. The method uses focused bursts of work combined with regular breaks every 25 minutes to keep the brain fresh and motivated. It allows for rest and helps to reset focus. Both students with ADHD and neuronormative learners reported that they had used this technique for self-study successfully.

Since many students with ADHD struggle with summarizing academic papers, they should be guided to read the title and abstract first, referring to the introduction or conclusion if further detail is needed. Additionally, checking papers that cite the original work and summarizing them can be helpful. Encouraging students to identify the specific question a study addresses often makes the content more engaging and fosters a clearer understanding of its purpose. Although these techniques are commonly taught to mainstream students in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, they are particularly beneficial for students with ADHD.

Using 'bionic reading' (introduced by Casutt, 2026) has shown promising results in improving reading speed and comprehension among students with ADHD, especially those with short attention span (Ghelani et al., 2004). Bionic reading is a type of reading technology which utilises bold font for parts of each word, so the term above would be written as **bionic reading**. This use of bold font guides the eyes of the reader through artificial fixation points making the brain 'skip' parts of each word, ensuring that the brain fills in the rest of the text. This can be explained by the fact that the brain processes words faster than the eyes can read individual letters. Focusing on fewer letters at a time allows the reader to process text faster while still grasping the full meaning. Some of my students reported that using bionic reading had changed their attitude to reading and they felt much more positive about reading and understanding longer texts. My students commented that this helped them read faster, understand more and remember more. However, this technique may only be applicable to reading online. My classroom observation also showed that it may not be beneficial for all text types, for example more complex or nuanced text which require deeper analyses. It is possible to access the [bionic reading software online](#) for free.

There are a number of other apps that can be used for increasing reading speed in ADHD students. Hecker et al. (2002) reports four main benefits that using apps may bring students with ADHD. Using apps may help with comprehension of texts, increase students' engagement, improve their focus and hence concentration and help increase reading speed. Technologies like text-to-speech (TTS) software can help readers better understand complex material by allowing them to hear the text read aloud. TTS converts the text into audio with a click of a button or the touch of a finger. This tool especially benefits auditory learners or those with specific reading difficulties like dyslexia which is common in some ADHD students. With regard to increasing engagement, interactive e-books and reading apps often incorporate multimedia elements such as sound effects, animations, and video clips, which can capture readers' attention and make reading more immersive.

For some, assistive technology can help increase reading speed. For instance, individuals who use text-to-speech software often report that, over time, they can understand content at faster speech

rates. Such assistive technologies may support working memory, reduce cognitive load and motor demand, isolate thought generation from transcription, reduce orthographic integration demands, reduce demand on encoding (e.g. unnecessary focus on spelling). Further, they can support slow processing speed which lowers cognitive demand placed on working memory in students with ADHD. Some examples of such apps would be speech-to-text software like VoiceNote II or ClaroRead, Read&Write, which supports both reading and writing, Speeder, which helps to increase reading speed and Spreed which is similar to Speeder (see the links to apps in the appendix).

3.2 ADHD students and potential difficulties with writing

Written expression has been identified as a particular challenge for students with ADHD (Gregg et al., 2002) due to impairments in working memory and attention (Wagner and Smith, 2003). However, there is very little research on writing difficulties among university students with ADHD.

Research on writing indicates that working memory plays a crucial role as writers must retrieve information from memory while maintaining multiple ideas simultaneously (Berninger, 1999). Working memory also supports planning, executing the writing process, and evaluating the final product (Zimmerman and Risenberg, 1997). These processes are closely linked to self-regulation and attention control (Graham and Perrin, 2007). Since students with ADHD often experience difficulties with working memory and attention (Wagner and Smith, 2003), academic writing can be particularly cognitively demanding.

Even beginning to write has been reported as challenging by students with ADHD. This may be due to difficulties with executive functioning, which can lead to problems with initiating tasks. Additionally, limitations in working memory may contribute to difficulties with holding onto main ideas and supporting details, making it challenging to start writing. Further, some students report feeling pressured to write 'perfectly' which may lead to avoidance of writing altogether. Maintaining focus is also a frequent challenge; many students report thinking of multiple ideas or 'jump' from idea to idea' at the same time which is confusing when trying to begin writing in an organised way.

Regarding the writing itself, both the quality of writing and the processes involved (e.g., planning and editing) have been identified as particular challenges for students with ADHD. These aspects appear more difficult than writing productivity or meta-cognitive knowledge of writing. Research indicates that students with ADHD consistently allocate significantly less time to planning their writing and significantly less time to planning, re-reading and correcting their work compared to control groups (Rodriguez et al., 2017).

Rodriguez et al. (2017) compared the percentage of time students reported spent on engagement in specific writing activities. The results show that students with ADHD spent only 10% of time reading and unpacking the title of the assignment in comparison to 18% of time reported by students without ADHD. Further, students with ADHD were shown to spend only 23% of time rereading their assignment in comparison to 46% students without ADHD who report spending 46% time on the same activity. Finally, making changes to text after rereading it took students with ADHD 26% of allotted time while their peers spent 40% of allotted time. These results seem significant so it is vital to address these potential problems with writing in the classroom.

There are a number of techniques that can benefit students with ADHD overcome writing challenges. To produce more complex text and ensure that all parts of the assignment question are addressed, students should spend more time reading and unpacking the assignment brief. I observed a huge difference in students' confidence when a substantial part of the lesson was devoted to analysing the assignment brief. Students would ask questions more often and appeared less self-conscious asking these questions. At the same time, I observed that monitoring students' closely when they discussed

their understandings of the topic of the assessment later on in groups was essential to ensure that all learners fully understand the task at hand. One helpful strategy is prioritising the outlining of key points, as this may reduce working memory demands. By freeing up cognitive resources in this way, students will be able to write in greater depth and, as a result, more effectively (Dehn, 2008; Meltzer, 2018).

Encouraging students to allow their ideas to flow while writing is also very beneficial. This may be useful as many students with ADHD delay starting writing because they are not sure how to start and organise it. They should be advised to set aside time for revising their ideas and editing their work later as writers with ADHD tend to find themselves caught in a cycle of trying to perfect a single sentence before moving on, which can be debilitating. To overcome this challenge, students should be encouraged to draft their ideas with the understanding that many sentences will be rewritten later in the process. Additionally, students should be asked to annotate and underline problematic sentences or paragraphs in their drafts. This practice ensures that they have clear samples for redrafting, helping them to refine their work more effectively. Finally, sufficient time should be allowed for editing and fine-tuning the text, ensuring that their final piece is well-structured and polished.

Writing apps can offer numerous benefits for students with ADHD as they can help them navigate challenges related to focus and organisation of text. Additionally, these apps can enhance organisation by providing tools for notetaking, outlining, and task management, allowing students to structure their ideas and track their assignments more efficiently. Furthermore, they may facilitate the revision process by allowing students to annotate, edit, and refine their drafts with ease, ensuring that they produce well-structured and polished final pieces.

To help students to begin to write and further develop their writing skills, word completion tools can be very useful. One example is Dicom Portable 1.1.1., which helps users type words with fewer keystrokes. Another valuable tool for students who struggle to organize their thoughts into written words is Inspiration, a graphic organizer. It supports mind mapping, concept mapping and outlining. It can be especially beneficial not only for students with ADHD but also for those with autism, dyslexia, or aphasia. Additionally, MindNode offers a visual approach to brainstorming. Writers begin by placing their initial idea at the centre, then expand on it by adding new ideas, color-coding them, and drawing connecting lines. The tool also allows conversion of mind maps into Microsoft Word documents or image files (see the links to apps in the appendix).

Another useful technique is 'body doubling'. This technique entails completing a task in the company of someone else who is also completing the task. Having a body double may help with anxiety, provides accountability and may improve focus (Yean, 2023). There is very little research on how it helps combat ADHD and improve motivation but there are some scientific explanations. For example social facilitation theory, mirror neurons theory, polyvagal theory, and the Hawthorne effect (Krach et al., 2010, Heyes and Catmur, 2021; Porges, 2022). Social facilitation theory posits that the presence of others enhances performance of well-learned or simple tasks. Mirror neuron theory suggests that seeing somebody else who is focused and productive triggers the same state in our brain and facilitates 'observational learning'. So, when we observe 'a body double' writing or reading for example, mirror neurons stimulate that state of concentration. Neurodivergent students who may struggle with internal regulation may 'borrow' the executive function and 'calm energy' of their partner. According to polyvagal theory, when students with ADHD engage in body doubling, they experience calming effect. This is due to a change from a state of hyperarousal to a state of calm engagement and this shift facilitates enhanced focus and productivity. The Hawthorne effect refers to the phenomenon in which people modify their behaviour when they know they are being observed, often resulting in increased productivity. However, it is important to note that no power

dynamic should be introduced when neurodivergent students engage in body doubling as some students experience rejection sensitivity dysphoria (see section 3.3 below). Therefore, working only with peers may help create a supportive, non-judgmental environment which in turn, fosters a sense of 'we are in this together' and encourage collaboration without fear of criticism.

Apart from physical body doubling, there are virtual sessions for body doubling. The following apps can facilitate body doubling online: Caveday, Flown and Focusmate. Some of my students found these apps very beneficial as they allow flexibility with finding a partner and some anonymity.

3.3 Potential problems with receiving feedback

As reported above, ADHD is associated with a lack of self-regulation (Shiels and Hawk, 2010) hence students with ADHD may find processing critical feedback particularly difficult due to rejection sensitivity dysphoria (Bedrossian, 2021). 'Dysphoria' is the Greek word meaning *unbearable* and emphasizes the severe physical and emotional pain. Rejection sensitivity dysphoria makes a person expect, perceive, and react intensely to rejection which can be real or perceived (Reimherr et al., 2020).

Providing timely and frequent feedback on students' academic performance is essential and feedback should be specific, constructive, and focused on students' efforts rather than solely on the outcome (Braude and Dwarika, 2020). To enhance its effectiveness, it is advisable to use inclusive language when addressing areas for improvement. For instance, saying "we have to work on..." instead of "you have to work on..." has been found to be beneficial when supporting students with ADHD. Research suggests that the use of "you" can correlate with distress and self-focus (Rude et al., 2004), making an inclusive approach more effective.

Additionally, it is important to ask students how they feel about the feedback they receive. Encouraging open discussions allows them to express their emotions, consider potential solutions, and explore outcomes. According to Rude et al. (2011), this process can facilitate the resolution of negative feelings and enhance sensitivity, fostering a more productive and supportive learning environment.

3.4 Potential problems with time perception

The challenges regarding differences in the perception of time in children with ADHD have been widely researched. In recent years, these difficulties have also been studied in adults (Coghlan, 2009; Antshel et al., 2014 and Mette, 2023, Marshall, 2025) who report problems with time perception and time management. Recent research in students with ADHD confirmed these findings (Ptacek et al., 2019). Time management can be defined as behaviour that uses time effectively and economically in specific activities and hence is closely related to academic success. Conversely, time managed ineffectively can lead to stress in university students with ADHD (Claessens et al., 2007).

'Time blindness' or 'temporal myopia', terms coined by Barkley (1997) manifest itself in inability to perceive and track time. This may often result in underestimating or overestimating the amount of time needed for specific tasks, experiencing trouble focusing on long-term goals or procrastinating (as mentioned earlier). Understanding time blindness can help students with ADHD develop strategies to navigate their academic and daily lives more effectively.

To help students with ADHD manage their time effectively, several strategies can be beneficial. Since repetitive and boring tasks tend to feel much slower for individuals with ADHD, offering specific rewards or encouraging students to reward themselves upon completion can help maintain motivation.

Frequent reminders about deadlines are also essential, as breaking assignments into manageable chunks and providing regular prompts can prevent students from feeling overwhelmed. Additionally, registering with disability services at university and accessing accommodations, such as additional time for coursework or examinations, can support students' academic success. Using timers is another practical strategy which can help track their work sessions and maintain focus. Furthermore, relying on a friend for support can be useful, as they can provide timely prompts when a student needs to transition between tasks, enhancing overall time awareness and productivity. Effective time management is crucial for students, especially those who struggle with maintaining focus and prioritizing tasks.

Utilizing time management apps can significantly enhance productivity and organization. One useful tool is Microsoft To-Do, which allows students to create task lists, set reminders, and track their progress. Another valuable tool is Priority Matrix, a task management system designed to help users identify and prioritize tasks efficiently. It categorizes tasks into four quadrants: those to complete first, those to delegate, those to delay, and those to delete, making decision-making much more structured. Additionally, Time Boxing is a technique that helps students divide their day into dedicated time blocks, ensuring that each period is assigned to a specific task or activity. This method minimizes distractions and encourages focused work.

Beyond time management, students can benefit from apps designed to assist with managing assignments. The ASK Assignment Calculator helps students create a personalized schedule based on their start and submission dates, making assignment planning more systematic. For those struggling with online distractions, StayFocusd allows users to block or limit access to distracting websites, ensuring better concentration during study sessions. Similarly, Strict Workflow employs the Pomodoro technique, which encourages students to work in 25-minute bursts while restricting access to distractions (see the links to apps in the appendix).

4. Capitalising on strengths students with ADHD demonstrate

As mentioned in Section 1, ADHD students may show an unusual creativity, hyperfocus, curiosity and flexibility, *when fully engaged*. So one way of capitalising on this is to design lessons, materials and tasks that offer students the possibility of pursuing the things they find interesting, while minimising the time they have to spend on activities that do not engage them. There is actually nothing very new in this idea. Learner-centred curricula in education have been advocated for decades (e.g. Nunan, 1988); it is simply that the needs of neurodivergent students have made their importance clearer than ever.

Practical examples of this approach would include giving students greater control over lesson topics either through offering choices or by seeking nominations, and giving students greater control over the tasks they carry out and how they do them, again by offering options or by ceding control over aspects of tasks to the students. Learner-directed reading or listening activities, where students are prompted to decide what they want to find out by reading or listening to a text and then scaffolded to find the information, are a relatively easy alternative to textbook-prescribed comprehension questions. One such activity that I have done involves texts with accompanying (and interesting) pictures. I start off by giving the students the pictures and getting them to speculate about them and to pose questions they think might be answered by the accompanying text. These questions then become the focus of the students' reading. Some years ago, White (2006) speculated about the EFL listening class and the possibility of handing over a lot of the control to the students (including control over the playback equipment) and these are also options for giving students a greater sense

of control and choice. I would argue that this might benefit many neuro-normative students but I am sure it would encourage engagement from ADHD students.

Assessments can also be designed with such learner choice in mind. Flexible assessments methods such as projects or portfolios, which offer learners choices and the chance to follow their interests may help students with ADHD to sustain their engagement.

As also mentioned earlier, many students with ADHD show high levels of creative and divergent thinking, for example developing alternative or unique ideas, thinking 'outside of the box' and so often arriving at novel solutions to problems. Therefore, one way of capitalising on this is to build lessons around problems to be solved and to give students the chance to think 'out of the box'.

Finally, I have mentioned above the hyper-sensitivity to criticism students with ADHD may have so one thing that I have found that really helps such students capitalise on their strengths is to acknowledge and celebrate their achievements and to be fulsome in my praise.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have tried to offer some insight into the nature of ADHD, to indicate some of the academic literacy challenges students with ADHD may face and finally, drawing largely on my own practical experience, to suggest practical ways in which EAP teachers can both help students meet the challenges they face and capitalise on the advantages of an interest-based nervous system. I have tried to show that although students with ADHD may both face and pose challenges for their teachers, their interest-based nervous system may enable them to turn a deficit into a plus, and if scaffolded in the right way, to produce very high-calibre work. The suggestions I have made concerning activities and tools for supporting students with ADHD have worked for me and the students with whom I have worked, but they may not suit everybody or every EAP classroom. I would hope though that the suggestions might be a starting point for teachers to work from and to build their own repertoires of techniques.

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Appendix: Links to apps.

Apps that can be used for enhancing reading in ADHD students:

[VoiceNote II](#)
[ClaroRead](#)
[Read&Write](#)
[Free App | Spreeder](#)
[Spreed](#) (see instructions at <https://youtu.be/oAU7ki0PYrs>)

Apps that can be utilised for enhancing writing in ADHD students:

[Dicom Portable 1.1.1](#)
[Inspiration](#)
[MindNote](#)

Apps that can be used to help with time perception in ADHD students:

[Microsoft To-Do](#)
[Priority Matrix](#)

Apps that can assist with managing assignments:

[ASK Assignment Calculator](#)
[StayFocused](#)
[Strict Workflow](#)

Apps that facilitate body doubling online:

[Caveday](#)
[Flown](#)
[Focusmate](#)