

techniques into the language classroom does not require much time or expenditure and ultimately will benefit all the learners in the class.

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Reference

Kormos, J. and A. M. Smith. 2012. *Teaching Languages to Students with Specific Learning Differences*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

5.9 Apps for learning independence and inclusion

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Have you ever considered the possibility of a mobile phone being an effective tool for the inclusion of a visually impaired student within a group of sighted students?

Case study background

When I was told that 'Fabricio', one of the students in my A1 group, was visually impaired, I was unsure about how to guarantee his inclusion within the group of sighted students and worried about providing him with egalitarian opportunities. At the time, Fabricio was 29 years old and had a job as a trainee in a company in São Paulo. He had lost his eyesight at the age of six. He was eager to learn, and I was determined to find a way to make this process smoother.

Challenges and concerns

To quote Helen Keller on the empowerment of being treated equal, 'A person who is severely impaired never knows his hidden sources of strength until he is treated like a normal human being and encouraged to shape his own life' (1955). Considering the EFL universe where the use of visual support such as slides or flipcharts with pictures to contextualise the tasks is common practice, I was worried about how he would be able to cope with that in an independent way while interacting with his classmates. Another concern was related to his self-study when away from the school.

In the talk I referred to the following challenges:

- how to help Fabricio to adapt to the usually visually rich course;
- how to encourage his participation; and
- how to use mobile technology as a learning tool.

Apps and strategies to bridge the gap

I used two apps, both of which are simple and available for free on all major operating systems.

QR code scanner

Having researched and worked with Quick Response (QR) codes for a while, I shared this with Fabricio, who was keen to give it a try. For a teacher to be able to create QR codes, a QR code generator app or website is needed; for a student, any QR code reader will suffice. During the talk I gave the audience some options to choose

from: App Droid (Android), Scan Life (iOS), and the website Kaywa (<https://qrcode.kaywa.com/>). Fabricio downloaded the app on his iPhone at home, and the next day he scanned his first QR code and listened to the message I had written. He told me what he had listened to, and at that moment, we both realised that the app was full of possibilities! It is important to highlight here the fact that Fabricio's phone had the accessibility mode on; this is crucial so that the phone can be voice-enabled in the case of a visually impaired user.

The message can have up to 160 characters and can make use of text or plain text. Summarising sentences and being straight to the point is a must. The transcription of conversational tasks to a code enabled Fabricio to scan, listen to the content and interview his colleagues independently in both warm-up interactions and pair-work moments of the class.

This empowered him within the social context of the classroom as he could manage to understand the conversational prompts with his own means.

Voice recorder

I realised that a summary of the class or an exercise for homework could be recorded with a voice recording app (built-into most current mobile devices). I recommend a five- to seven-minute-long recording. These recordings were used to follow up the highlights of the lesson, to remind Fabricio of homework and to keep him informed about what had happened in class when he missed it. A piece of advice on naming the recordings: use a name that is straight to the point, together with a number, for example 'English1' or 'Class2'. As you send the recordings, over time, they will be easy to access.

Conclusion

As Gierach says, 'When it comes to visual impairment, it is important to remember that high-tech is not always the best solution for a student' (2009: 3). In this case, however, it was very rewarding to see that Fabricio belonged to the group and had friends there. It is also important to praise the commitment and involvement from the school academic department, the branch manager and his classmates. I will end with Fabricio's testimonial on the use of his mobile phone to study English:

My mobile phone is a super tool, I make use of everything it offers. Thanks to mobile technology I can learn more.

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References

- Gierach, J. (ed.). 2009. *Assessing Students' Needs for Assistive Technology (ASNAT): A Resource Manual for School District Teams* (fifth edition).
- Keller, H. 1955. *Teacher*. <http://www.afb.org/info/about-us/helen-keller/quotes/125>.