

Teaching English to Visually Impaired Learners

Session 1. Understanding your Learners

Deafblind Learners

Deafblindness combines difficulties in seeing and hearing. Depending on the level of difficulty, deafblind people can find everyday activities seriously challenging. When you can't hear or see, you don't show interest in things because you don't know they exist. Moreover, the learning process is difficult as interest in learning about the world doesn't exist.

Learners suffering from deafblindness constitute a heterogeneous group with different needs, abilities and characteristics. When teaching students with this condition, it is important to focus on the following aspects:

- If there is any existence of vision and hearing or none at all.
- The moment when all the sensorial limitations appear. Our students are likely to have acquired the impairment during childhood or adolescence in which case, they are likely to have already acquired language. This language or communicative system can be oral or sign language.

Teaching Deafblind learners

Learners with this impairment use different alternative systems to express and understand in order to achieve communication.

- They can use visual and technological resources.
- Assistant teachers or mediators are sometimes needed when these learners work with sign language.

One important point that we, as teachers, should never forget is that deafblind/blind learners that work with sign language have different grammar and lexical structures. Then, we need to understand first that the communicative goal of teaching in these cases is more relevant than the

correctness of their grammatical structures. Once they develop their language with more complex signs and sign structures, they will be able to reproduce them in different languages.

Objectives with these learners need to be evaluated from time to time to analyse whether their difficulties or mistakes are related to their lack of structures in the communicative system or if they are related to other aspects such as misunderstanding.