

Teaching English to Visually Impaired Learners

Session 3. The Learner in the Classroom: Organisation, Materials and Activities

Classroom Layout and Environment

As teachers of blind students we need to anticipate the necessities our students might encounter at the classroom.

Some aspects to take into account prior to and during the teaching process are the following:

Artificial and natural light

Depending on the students, their needs will include:

- Being close to a window or under a source of light to get as much brightness as possible.
- Being opposite the source of light so as not to be affected by its brightness. This is a typical need for students with photophobia.
- The use of some gadgets to help them see properly. These might be flexible gooseneck lamps or accessories such as caps or glasses adapted with filters for interior spaces.
- Establishing with students which source of light is the most suitable for them when there are different sources of light available. We should also bear in mind which one affects the rest of the group least.

Seating plan

The seating plan will depend on several aspects:

- Light
- If there is some other impairment such as deafness, in which case, they will probably need to be seated at the front of the classroom.

- Students who work with Perkins and Braille will probably need an extra table or some space where they can leave their material, as it generally takes up a lot of space.
- If students come to class with a guide dog, they will also need enough space for the dog to be comfortable.
- School desks are not recommended as students have very little space for their material.

Organisation of the classroom

The furniture and day-to-day materials should be always in the same place, in order to facilitate accessibility and the autonomy of our students.

During the first few days, it is important to show and let the VI students wander around the class in order to establish a visual image of it.

It is important for students to explore and discover the physical space for themselves. This means that during the first few days, teachers or other students might describe the classroom from the door to their seats and from their seats to different positions (shelves, whiteboard, toilet etc.). However, the most important part is for VI students to have the chance to practise finding their own way around so that they can internalize the classroom layout. Bearing this in mind, we should be very conscious of the effect of clutter and unnecessary obstacles in the classroom as this can lead to the students feeling disoriented or lost.

Some aspects to take into account are the following:

- Open windows. They are just at head height and can cause accidents if students are not aware that they are open.
- Open doors and chairs around the classroom that don't follow a specific order.
- Cables and wires on the floor.

**** These considerations must be revised throughout the whole year as the situation and our students' needs might change. Furthermore, the student is the one who best knows what their needs are and what measures taken work for them. It is very important to always listen to them.**