

Using EFL to explore the booming business of mobility disability

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can be a powerful and important tool for raising awareness about social issues. The voluntary Disabled Access Friendly campaign aims to increase EFL students' awareness of the world in which we live and to persuade them that through their own actions they have the ability to make improvements. The campaign focuses on issues of mobility disability.

The campaign's website, www.disabled-accessfriendly.com, provides teachers with free online lesson plans and reading texts. These can be used as additional material, for project work and examination practice. At the same time they provide students with the information necessary to allow them to put themselves in the shoes of someone with a mobility disability and stimulate them to understand others and to think how others feel.

Students of Business English will be interested in research that shows that diversity in the workplace has a number of benefits, including improved understanding of the marketplace, enhanced creativity and problem-solving ability in teams. Companies are beginning to look at having a diverse workforce as a business issue, as opposed to a legal compliance issue, a moral issue or a social responsibility issue. People with disabilities increasingly view their disability as part of their unique selling point and consider it a weapon to be exploited and not a handicap. People with disabilities want to be employed not in spite of their disabilities but because of them.

You can stimulate your students to consider mobility disability issues in a business context by using some of the free material from the Disabled Access Friendly's site. For example, Claire Hart's lesson at intermediate level includes a role play, where board members of a company discuss how they could improve accessibility for people with disabilities. You can use this opportunity to recap useful phrases for taking part in meetings such as asking for opinions, giving opinions, agreeing, disagreeing and making a suggestion. Students are given different roles like Mr. / Ms Money (focused on the costs) and Mr. / Ms Sceptic (doubts whether better disabled access can become a reality), and they have to reach a decision by the end of the meeting. By this point, they should be able to tell you what changes they will make, over what timeframe these will be implemented and where they will get the money from.

An activity kindly supplied by Cambridge University Press from their website Professional English Online and written by Marjorie Rosenberg also aims to raise awareness for business and institutions regarding accessibility of their premises, special needs of people with disabilities in the workplace and the advantages to a business when they adapt barrier-free policies. The students discuss the issue, read an article about disabilities and form working parties to come up with a concept which they then present and then advertise in the local community.

You can also use one of the campaign's graded reading texts entitled "A fresh approach to disability employment" to encourage students to consider the idea that in order for companies to embrace the idea of employing people with disabilities, they should first recognise their potential as customers. This article is suitable for more advanced students, uses a lot of business language and comes complete with a glossary.

The Disabled Access Friendly campaign is run by a team of volunteers, who are supported by professionals from a variety of backgrounds. International EFL "ambassadors" help the campaign by promoting its work at professional events and through online networking. You can support our work in a number of ways, including using our material, contributing material of your own and spreading the word. Please visit our site www.disabled-accessfriendly.com for further information.

(608 words)

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Bio details (29 words)

Katie has a CELTA qualification, works as an oral examiner for EFL, is employed by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and works actively on the Disabled Access Friendly campaign.