



Opening and closing doors in secondary education.
By Katie Quartano, Disabled Access Friendly Campaign

Although the criteria my daughter used when choosing the optional courses in senior high school (lykeio) were not those advocated by her teachers, they were generally the same as those applied by her friends, namely:

- What is my best friend going to choose?
- Will I have to sit an exam in this subject?
- Is this subject easy?
- Will I get much homework?
- Do I like the teacher?

Issues such as what doors these choices would open for her in the future, and what doors would close, she considered to be of secondary importance, and the seriousness of the consequences of these choices didn't really hit home until the time came to fill out her university application forms. Suddenly she realised that whole categories in tertiary education were inaccessible to her, because, for example, she hadn't chosen to follow a course of lessons in "Economic theory", a decision taken on the grounds that her friend's sister had said that the teacher had a really irritating voice.

However at least she was left knowing that she had closed the door herself. Nobody closed it for her or on her, so it didn't feel unjust, and probably she learned an important lesson in the *school of life*. But how would she feel if doors in education were figuratively open to her but in real terms were closed, and not closed because she closed them, but because there were three steps up to the front door, or because the lift doors were too narrow for her to fit through, or because there was no toilet she could use? This might well be the case if she used a wheelchair.

Do you teach at, or own a Foreign Language Centre? Is the door to your premises open to people who use wheelchairs, or only open in theory but closed in practice? Speaking English as a foreign language might well be top of the list of good skills for someone who uses a wheelchair to have, as the kind of jobs that people with physical disabilities can do are most likely to be ones that use their intellect.

If your door is closed in practical terms to people who use wheelchairs, don't wait for someone to come and bang on it, and don't opt out of action today by saying that when the time comes you will make the necessary adjustments. Before that happens, show your community that your door is wide open. Check out the suggestions on the Disabled Access Friendly campaign's website (www.disabled-accessfriendly.com, Useful Information, Improve your school's access) about the tiny, inexpensive changes you could make to your premises that would not just open the door, but whole new horizons to wheelchair users.