

## Pat on the Back

Author and presenter Patrick Jackson looks at the altruistic side of ELT.



### Patrick Jackson

#### Hey, Teacher! What are YOU for?

*A friend of mine got a promotion and was being introduced to the team he would be managing at a well-known publisher. The person showing him around asked if anyone had any questions.*

*“What are you **for**?” came a voice from the back.*

*For good teachers, it’s an easy question to answer. They make the world a better place. Simple. Through their teaching, and the transformations they bring about in their students they have the power to initiate lasting and positive change. This month’s Pat on the Back goes to Katie Quartano, Paul Shaw and all who have volunteered their time and energy in support of the Disabled Access Friendly campaign.*



Katie Quartano and Paul Shaw

If you’re reading this there is a pretty good chance you’re an English language teacher. There is also a good chance that you have a disability. How so?

Well, according to the World Report on Disability as many as 15% of people, that's 1 billion people worldwide are living with a disability, making up the largest of all minorities. Even if you don't have a permanent disability or a disability right now, there is a good chance that at some time in your life that will change, perhaps when you get old, have an operation, or have an accident.

Listening to [Katie Quartano talking](#) about education and the work of the Disabled Access Friendly campaign will give you goose bumps. In my case, it has made me question my decision to leave day-to-day teaching five years ago. Learning about the Disabled Access Friendly campaign reminds us that education is not just about acquiring skills and knowledge but that it also embraces social improvement. Teachers are in a unique position to impact on the future through their teaching of well being, fairness, equality and truth. But you probably knew that.

“When we became teachers we all had a vision – the belief that making the world a better place lies at the heart of education”. Katie Quartano

The Disabled Access Friendly campaign goes back to an [article](#) written by Paul Shaw, an English teacher based in Greece. He wrote about his experiences as a wheelchair user. This article attracted attention and led to discussions and a decision to start a campaign that would harness the power of language teaching to bring about social change. The campaign meets a need. Issues about disability are often not addressed in the curriculum or in course books and students often know little or nothing about disability. They may or may not know someone who is disabled. It's impossible to care about something you know nothing about so teachers providing information about life as a person with a disability are building the pathways for caring and action.

The Disabled Access Friendly campaign is centred around a [website](#) from which teachers can download free lessons and graded readings about mobility disability for all ages and levels with teacher's notes. The [materials](#), which come with teacher's notes, are arranged according to topic, target language and the students' CEFR level and are easy to browse and download. There is no need to sign up, create a password, or any other barrier to entry. They are all completely, 100% free. There are approximately 60 lessons and 60 graded readings at the moment and the number is always growing. There are also guidelines about how to use the materials.

It's a lot of work to create materials of this sort from scratch. If, like most teachers, you are run ragged and never have a moment to spare but would like to do something to sensitize your students to and inform your students about mobility disability, then the campaign's supporters have done the hard work for you - and people doing your hard work for you is always a good thing! Judging by the great success of the website, which is getting 10,000 visits a month from 110 countries, this is a model that could be useful to all sorts of campaigns for all sorts of social issues.

There are also plenty of ideas and resources for ways to make real and immediate improvements in, for example, access to buildings or people's care and consideration when parking cars. There are lessons that challenge attitudes to disability. There are lessons that put us in the shoes of a person with a mobility disability. There are lessons that teach people without disabilities about the etiquette around disability. There are lessons about overcoming barriers. Those are often barriers of the mind that people without disabilities have to overcome. As Quartano says, it's about getting our students to question what they see and hear, and to give them the power to fill the gap between ideals and a real situation.

Has teaching the difference between the present simple and the present continuous become more important and more pressing than opening your students' eyes to the world?

Another thing to love about the Disabled Friendly Access campaign is that this is an on-going group effort. The lessons on the website have been written by teachers and authors from all over the world, including some [very well known names](#). They are always looking for contributions and this is a great opportunity to help by writing a lesson plan or a graded reading. It's not just about the lessons and readings though. There is also an army of volunteers and people contributing in other ways, from presenting at conferences to editing, to putting up posters in schools. The campaign welcomes being contacted by people who are able to help in any way.

Writing this article has been an education for me. I've found myself angered at the widespread apathy and broken promises when it comes to creating fair access to even the most basic aspects of society, and disappointed in myself for never caring. It's been interesting to learn about [wheelchair etiquette](#) but I embarrassed myself in pretty much my first email exchange with Katie by asking a question about Paul and how he had become a wheelchair user. There is a lot I would have been unaware of such as whether it is appropriate to offer to shake hands with someone with a prosthetic arm. Is it good manners to turn the conversation towards other people one knows who have a disability? There is also the discussion around how people with disabilities are portrayed in the media; heroes or victims, spongers or super-cripples, rarely just as ordinary people first, always with some sort of 'angle' that draws attention to how, well, disabled they are.

The Disabled Access Friendly campaign is fundamentally practical. They have some very specific calls to action. It's really easy to get on board. You'll be in good company and will have made the world a better place. It's what you're for, after all.

Things to do:

- [Write a lesson or graded reading.](#)
- [Teach a lesson and share the news with your colleagues.](#)
- Follow Disabled Access Friendly on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).
- [Share the campaign's leaflet.](#)

- [Have a good read about the work of the campaign.](#)
- [Watch this video](#) or [this one](#) and get angry.

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