

CDIPS Final Project
2021-22 Cohort
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"Teaching Disability Awareness in the Russian Language Classroom"

Executive Summary

In Russian textbooks for Advanced learners, most of the topics present global issues, which are certainly important and necessary to discuss in the language classroom. However, there are whole groups of people and equally important issues that still do not find their reflection in educational materials at all levels. Disability is one of these topics.

Disability is universal, and as evidenced by global statistics, disability exists in every culture and all nations worldwide. It is also highly diverse and can suddenly become a part of our life at any moment. According to the World Health Organization, over 1 billion people (about 15% of the world's population) live with some form of disability, and the number of persons with disabilities are dramatically increasing (WHO, 2021). Such people belong to the most vulnerable groups of the population and often experience stigma and discrimination.

Preparing our students to communicate successfully with cultural understanding and real-world applications (World-Readiness standards for learning languages), educators can not ignore disability in our classrooms.

Redesigning materials for the Advanced course for the Fall semester, I decided to dedicate one of the modules to people with disabilities. The module also includes such topics for class discussions as the accessibility of our campus and city environment for our students, faculty, and staff with various forms of disability. Besides, students would need to evaluate the level of accessibility for some other groups that might need to receive special services, such as guardians with strollers and the elderly.

The main goal of lessons within that module is to provide engaging educational tools to increase knowledge about specific disabilities, address disability stereotypes, and empower students to use positive language in their daily communication. Materials about people with disabilities, including learning disabilities, and their stories can contribute to the development of critical analysis skills of students. They will work with the materials in Russian with a particular focus on the diversity of experience and perspectives among people with disabilities and within and between various disability communities in Russia. Authentic media content from different Russian-speaking regions will provide first-person perspectives, including stories from self-advocates, to introduce students to different voices and perspectives in disability and allied communities. Using interactive online tools, we will compare campus and nearby university areas in a few regions of Russia and apply the received information to conduct a deep analysis of the accessibility of our campus environment. As group projects, students will be offered to

- survey other students, faculty, and staff to reveal the issues they face or notice around the campus
- search and analyze different apps for people with disabilities that can be implemented on campus
- brainstorm possible solutions on how to improve our campus accessibility

The result of this work will be presented at the roundtable class meeting at the end of the module. Some ideas can be published on our college website and continue living on posters in our library hall.

References

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Analysis

The module is one of the components of the advanced course I'm teaching this fall. The current course is designed to build and sustain advanced-level Russian proficiency through the study of topics that learners find relevant and engaging. Each module includes an extensive selection of scaffolded activities and authentic models that challenge students to develop their skills in formal and informal narration, comprehending authentic texts, academic writing, and conducting research and project-based work. In this context, authentic texts are also meant to be inclusive. Thus, the materials are designed to present students with an inclusive and diverse picture of

Russian-speaking cultures. Each module includes in-depth work with a widely available film or TV series that serves as a springboard for discussing enduring social questions and highlighting cultural diversity. Students are encouraged to challenge assumptions and make connections across cultures, while developing ACTFL advanced-level skills such as argumentation, narration, and collaboration.

The course participants represent a wide variety of cultural and linguistic identities, with ~40% or higher who identify one or more languages other than English as the primary spoken language at home. Advanced classes are quite small, with 10 students across grade levels, so personalized attention and structured cooperative learning strategies are regularly part of our classroom routine. Students who take Advanced Russian are usually at the Intermediate High to Advanced Low level, and after the course, students have typically reached Advanced Low to Advanced Mid proficiency.

According to the CDC, one in four American adults has a disability, and the university aims to support all students who disclose disabilities to Access and Disability Services (ADS). It is essential to be aware of different types of accommodations (e.g. academic, housing, dietary) that people with disabilities might need. The four most frequent types of disabilities disclosed by university students include:

- learning disabilities (31%)
- attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (18%)
- psychiatric/ mental health disorders (15%)
- chronic health conditions (11%)

Additionally, it's important to note from the above disclosed groups that most students have so-called non-apparent disabilities. Disclosed disabilities which would be considered apparent such as wheelchair users comprise only 7% of the student population and about 4% of students with perceptible sensory disabilities such as deafness, hard of hearing, and low vision or blindness. The ADS team of the university strives to ensure that all programs, services, and facilities are accessible to all students on a non-discriminatory basis. ADS is committed to working with all eligible students with documented disabilities, and with faculty and staff, to provide reasonable accommodations in the academic and/or living environment.

Thus, based on the statistics given above, every person on campus has acquaintances with some kind of disability, and makes the discussion of this topic even more relevant.

The module dedicated to people with disabilities focuses specifically on issues of disability and inclusion in Russia. Integrating new terminology plays a vital role in the module, since this topic is entirely new for most students of the course. If such questions as environmental, family, and even some political issues are at least minimally represented in Intermediate, then the words describing the forms of disability, people with disabilities, and the difficulties they face have never been encountered by students.

First, at the terminology level, students learn about social injustice and discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday life, official documents, media, and other spheres. As a next step, students will try to look at the world through the prism of a person with a disability. They will read authentic stories, watch short films, and listen to first-person interviews. Then students will apply their knowledge to analyze their surroundings, the campus, and the urban environment around the campus. They will survey other students, teachers, and university staff to find out what disadvantages of this environment other people notice. At the end of the

module, students will compile a list of problems and potential solutions applicable on campus. They will be able to present the results of their work in two languages, in the form of an article, a poster, or a presentation. A general discussion of problems and solutions will take place at a roundtable at the last lesson of this module.

The goals for students in completion of this module are:

- Deepen their understanding of people with disabilities
- Discuss issues related to the topic of disability in the target language
- Explore ways to communicate sensitively with people with disabilities in Russian and English
- Complete a hands-on experience with accessibility exercises
- Take action to raise awareness on campus

Planning the module lessons, I relied on the questions given on the website learningforjustice.org (Lesson “Understanding Disabilities”). They guided me and helped formulate the course objectives. Among those essential questions are:

- What are some disabilities?
- What are the specific conditions of these disabilities?
- What are appropriate ways to communicate sensitively with people with disabilities?
- What are some ways to support and encourage others to sensitively communicate?

Design

Performance objectives

- Students will speak about and discuss disability in Russian
- Students will critically examine various strategies for interaction with people with disabilities based on authentic first-person resources of information in Russian
- Students will be able to use the learned information to write an article or prepare a presentation about an accessible educational environment comparing information about Russian-speaking regions with the situation on their campus and nearby campus areas
- Students will conduct a survey on campus among students, faculty, and staff to reveal difficulties that people with disabilities face
- Students will apply principles of critical analysis to suggest possible solutions for issues on campus and in society to improve the state of people with disabilities. This part of their work will be done partly in English.

Learning assessments

1. Each student reads the materials in the textbook about the culture of interaction with people with disabilities and watches a Russian movie about the culture of interaction with people with disabilities. Each student then participates in follow-up class

- discussions demonstrating reading and listening comprehension. The instructor prepares quizzes that include the essential terminology and grammar models.
2. Working in smaller groups, students analyze different authentic first-person resources and present the main takeaways to the rest of the group. Each student has to ask 2-3 questions and express their opinion at least once. As a possible alternative form of class work, the instructor is going to invite a guest speaker from one of the communities of people with disabilities.
 3. Each student will create and deliver to the class an article, slideshow, or video presentation that richly describes specific issues that people with disabilities face or the accessibility of urban/ educational environments for people with disabilities (Individual Project). All individual projects will be presented in Russian. When working on individual projects, students must use at least 3 authentic Russian resources (the instructor provides a list of essential recommended resources).
 4. Class Project with pre-assigned individual roles and outcomes (Campus Survey and Roundtable). Students work in small groups on different aspects of the class project to present gathered information at the roundtable at the last lesson of the module. Following the roundtable results, students prepare either a poster, an article for the university's website, or a podcast release. All class projects will be given in Russian.

Strategies, Activities, Methods

1. The instructor provides pre-selected materials that include texts, a movie, questions for follow-up class discussions, and vocabulary quizzes. The materials were selected based on inclusion voices from various communities of people with disabilities and a vital disability justice perspective.
2. Students will work cooperatively in small groups analyzing different authentic first-person resources and presenting the main takeaways to the rest of the group. They prepare 2-3 questions for other groups/ a guest speaker and express their opinions. Such activity helps students better understand how people with disabilities have to self-advocate in society.
3. Students work on individual projects that reflect the issues discussed in class. They have a choice to prepare an article, slideshow, or video presentation that richly describes specific issues that people with disabilities face or the accessibility of urban/ educational environments for people with disabilities. It is important to emphasize that students can choose the form of an individual project that makes this form of learning activity more accessible.
4. Students conduct a campus survey by dividing roles and working cooperatively in small groups and the instructor. They also prepare short speeches for the final roundtable (Class Project with pre-assigned individual roles and outcomes). Following the roundtable results, students prepare a poster, an article for the university's website, or a podcast release.

Alignment

Performance Objectives	Learning Assessments	Strategies/Activities/Methods
Students will learn how to speak about and discuss disability in Russian	Students will participate in follow-up class discussions demonstrating reading and listening comprehension. Students will take vocabulary and grammar quizzes demonstrating their knowledge of the essential terms	Pre-selected materials that include texts, a movie, questions for follow-up class discussions, and vocabulary quizzes
Students will critically examine various strategies for interaction with people with disabilities based on authentic first-person resources of information in Russian	Small group work. Application of learned terminology and communication strategies in a class discussion. Each student has to ask 2-3 questions and express their opinion at least once	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group class work with authentic resources in Russian - Zoom meeting or a pre-recorded interview with representatives of the communities
Students will be able to use the learned information to write an article or prepare a presentation about an accessible educational environment comparing information about Russian-speaking regions with the situation on their campus and nearby campus areas	Individual projects	Students have a choice to prepare an article, slideshow, or video presentation that richly describes specific issues that people with disabilities face or the accessibility of urban/ educational environments for people with disabilities
Students will conduct a survey on campus among students, faculty, and staff to reveal difficulties that people with disabilities face and apply principles of critical analysis to suggest possible solutions for issues on	Class Project	Campus Survey and Roundtable (Class Project with pre-assigned individual roles and outcomes). Students work in small groups on different aspects of the class project to present gathered information at the roundtable at the last

campus and in society to improve the state of people with disabilities		lesson of the module. Following the roundtable results, students prepare a poster, an article for the university's website, or a podcast release
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Grading

I will use rubrics for the Individual Projects. Here, I'm providing an example of the rubric I'm using for presentations.

Before the rubric: With you present, I will be listening, watching, and will provide feedback on the following components. Before you begin the presentation, please introduce yourself and give a brief introduction about the main points and goals of your presentation.

Student: _____	Score: _____ out of 6 (1 pt. for each "Yes")	Feedback
1. The student started with a short introduction (a name, goals, the main ideas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Mostly • Not quite 	
2. The student could convey their ideas according to the plan announced at the beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Mostly • Not quite 	
3. The student was able to express their ideas clearly reading/ speaking without hesitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Mostly • Not quite 	
4. The student applied different modes of visualization and illustration from their findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Mostly • Not quite 	
5. The student included the materials learned in class (vocabulary,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Mostly • Not quite 	

grammar, or a class experience)		
6. The student was able to answer questions after giving the presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Mostly • Not quite 	

Development

Resources, materials, technologies

- A. The core teaching material for this Advanced course is DeBlasio, Alyssa, and Izolda Savenkova. *Pro-Dvizhenie: Advanced Russian through Film and Media*. Bilingual, Georgetown University Press, 2022.
- B. We'll have LMS (e.g. Canvas) where readings and resources (such as presentation applications, research how-to's, research starting points, etc.) can be found. Students can communicate with one another, and see the results of their assessments and evaluations in real time (so they always know where they stand in the class).
- C. To introduce students to important resources and guides for talking about disability in the Russian language, I will use "[мы так не говорим](#)" (we don't use such words) at Takie Dela, and the [language and etiquette guidelines](#) provided by the Disability NGO "Perspektiva" in Moscow.
- D. To learn more about the state of people with disabilities from representatives of the communities, I'm planning to invite guest speakers who belong to the communities and can share their experiences with students and answer their questions. Our brilliant colleagues from the University of Indiana were willing to help me with that. One of RSW's [Disability Studies Working Group](#) members can meet with the students via Zoom.
- E. To teach about disability issues through film, I will use a short movie "[Голос моря](#)" (Иван Соснин, 2018).

Implementation

- A. I will expect students to adhere to the university's code of conduct as laid out in the student handbook. Other policies I'll implement on my own, informed by my experience in the CDIPS program.
- B. I will call office hours "Consultation hours" - to let all students know that these are hours during which they can come to receive additional help or ask any questions. Consultation hours will be conducted once per week in person, once per week remotely, and I will also have an option to schedule a meeting if it is needed in emergency cases. I'm using Google Calendar to help students plan a meeting if they want.

- C. Only three forms of module activities will be graded. I'll read and provide feedback for all other papers so students can make corrections and better prepare for individual or group projects. It helps students focus more on the quality of their work than on a grade.
- D. The creative assignment tries to mobilize and sustain student's own cultural identities and practices by allowing them opportunities to engage with the material in ways that align with their own values, identities, and modes of knowing (Paris & Alim). At the beginning of the module, I will say that everyone can share a story of an experience with a disability if they want. Their projects can include and rely on their personal experience.
- E. Research project admits that I am not the expert, gives power and authority to the students, and invites them to become active collaborators in their own education.
- F. I'll allow technology in the classroom to facilitate learners who may need accommodations and provide various project options (a poster/ a presentation/ an article/ a podcast episode etc.).

Evaluation

Feedback from Students

- A. Occasional formative surveys/polls about the material/class experience to monitor the needs and experience of students as we go, so that I can make adjustments if necessary.
- B. At the end of each module, we take time for reflection. Students fill out a short form where they write about their findings and challenges. If they want, they can share it with the group or give it to the instructor anonymously.
- C. A larger survey at the end of the course to assess what worked, what didn't, and gather students' ideas about how to improve the experience.

Reflective practices

- A. I carefully and regularly read students' feedback and consider their opinions about what happened or did not work out, finalizing each next module during the semester.
- B. I try to pay more attention to students' reactions to certain forms of work in the classroom and monitor the dynamics. This helps me in choosing more appropriate activities for a particular group.