YOU DON’T NEED EYES TO SEE, YOU NEED VISION
Introduction

“You don’t need eyes to see, you need vision” is a lyric taken from the Faithless song ‘Reverence’ (1996), which, as a teacher I use to suggest that having vision impairment should not prohibit creativity, learning development, and personal goals and ambitions.
As teachers, we are encouraged to make our teaching visual to engage students without realising that we may be alienating some students – teaching needs to use all the senses/ provide possibilities for kinaesthetic learning. Relying all senses, then, becomes an aspect of public pedagogy that is more inclusive.
Important Realisation
Jolting the unconscious conscious

...... *how visual* my teaching materials had been up to that point.
Ann Bostock (1988): ‘Children [and adults] with impaired vision need to be assessed as individuals with unique special needs. They are not a homogenous group with common learning characteristics’ (1988:4)
Monika Jamieson (1977): ‘Although some specific suggestions of assistance to the regular classroom teacher have been offered, some caution must be exercised, so that the child does not become so special that he becomes the ‘classroom pet’. If this occasion occurs because we have attempted to do too many special things for him, we have defeated the very purpose of an integrated program’ (1977: 70-1)
Bill Ray Gearheart; ‘The concepts of ‘learning by doing’ and ‘teaching by unifying experiences’ are certainly not new concepts to regular classroom teachers. The concepts, however, are particularly important to the student with impaired vision because he may not have the same experiential background as other students of the same age. Whenever possible allow the visually impaired child to experience ‘doing it’ rather than just verbally explaining the process’ (1976:63).
‘it is important that the child [and I would extend this term to ‘adult’] has the experience of carrying out the process involved in an art project whilst de-emphasizing the end-product. By completing the process, in whatever medium, the student can achieve the same objectives as his peers’ (ibid.)
My teaching philosophy emphasises experiential learning in the form of:

1) the usage of collaborative learning processes and co-learning
2) reproducing real life in the classroom by incorporating realia
‘Realia’

• Realia refers to objects from real life used to improve students' understanding of real life situations and is a term used within the discourse of foreign language teaching (British Council 2017; Harmer 2007; Platt et al.)

• Why is realia useful in teaching and learning? Bringing in real-life discussions/objects/situations into teaching sessions as primary source material facilitates kinaesthetic learning experiences. It not only stimulates the mind, it encourages creativity by inviting students to engage different senses in varying sensorial encounters.
Welcome to Bluetooth Cinema

Follow the instructions
Simulating blindness has been deployed ‘to educate people what blindness is like’ and that these ‘misrepresent what blindness is actually like [...] people are only thrust into a few minutes not the dynamics of experiencing blindness over a lifetime’ (Silverman, 2015)
Sue Blagden and John Everett (1992) also express concerns:

‘To become suddenly blind is emotionally very traumatic, and the process of adjustment can be lengthy. Individuals are vulnerable, confused, no longer able to recognize the facial expressions of close friends. They depend on others to get around, and often find themselves stuck in the ‘communication gap’, not able to read print, and not yet having learned Braille’ (1992:4)
Hans Jonas

‘tactility has been purposefully forgotten in our culture in favour of the nobility of sight’ (1954:507)
Drawing Forces by Rory Flynn at Sight (Un)Specific, Metal Southend, curated by Lee Campbell in November 2016
Useful Adaptations

Here are some useful adaptations that I have discovered to make teaching more accessible for students with vision impairment.
Before a teaching a session

- **Learning materials:** Make sure any resources are available for the student in their preferred reading format, for example large print, braille or an accessible digital version. You may need to replace images with written descriptions. Enlarge colour reproductions of paintings, drawings, 2D artworks to be discussed in class. Supply the student with (enlarged text) visual material (Waterfield and West, 2008:9).
• **Physical environment**: Make sure that the classroom does not present any physical obstacles (Equality Challenge Unit, 2009). Check that the classroom is safe and accessible – are walkways clear? Is the lighting suitable? If the student uses electronic devices, do they need to sit close to a power source?
• **Lesson plan:** Rehearse the running order of the session and its related content, paying attention to visual elements used in terms of teaching materials and the need for the student to “see” what’s going on to be able to learn. Put on a blindfold to mentally prepare and identify with VI students. When explaining visual artworks, it is important to use visual language (art and design terminology related to pictorial, sculptural, and graphic representation) – the vocabulary of shape, line, tone, colour, texture, volume, space, weight, balance, rhythm. I also discovered that it is important to express not only what you see in a piece of artwork, but how it makes you feel too.
During a teaching session

- **Verbal descriptions:** It’s important to announce verbally any visual elements that occur throughout the teaching session, for example saying that you are moving onto the next slide in your presentation, describing an image or referring to a student by their name rather than pointing. Verbal descriptions help build images in students’ minds, increase their observational skills and expand their critical thinking, vocabulary and visual awareness, for the benefit of sighted students too. They also force sighted people to spend that extra time necessary to ‘see’ things otherwise missed. Encourage blind students to teach the skill of verbal description to the sighted.
• **Inclusive activities**: Set up a supportive space by providing a stimulating environment, both visually and tactually, where learning can take place through students’ entire bodies and not just their eyes. This can be achieved by using a range of teaching activities that deploy sensory feedback for the benefit of both students with VI and their sighted peers. Generate teaching activities/materials that draw on all senses – touch, smell, sound etc. As Elisabeth Salzhauer Axel and Nina Sobol Levent (2003) suggest, ‘The more senses that are involved, the more accessible the art becomes, and the more the students will gain’ (2003:370).
Strike a pose!

 Invite students to re-enact an artwork by posing as figures, for example taking the pose of an Alberto Giacometti sculpture with their bodies. This will help them develop a stronger understanding of their own body language and emotions. To teach landscapes in terms of foreground and background (a tricky concept for students with no vision), encourage students to physically moving around in a space so they can get better understanding of spatial awareness/composition in real terms. Look at landscape paintings for inspiration on playing around with spatial composition in painting.
A kinetic art painting by John Levering

VI students enact the painting
Conclusion
Impact of practice:

‘I found the article really interesting and it’s good to know that teaching is being differentiated in this way. I have sat in lectures where no support was offered so it’s great to see the lengths that you went to to include the student so well.’

RP Fighting Blindness
Ann Bostock

- ‘provide as many opportunities as possible for concrete learning through direct experience’ (1988:17)
learning can take place through our bodies and not just our eyes. To reiterate a previous point, knowledge acquisition is not exclusively derived from what we see.
How can acts exploring visual negation be used to generate public pedagogy and what may it bring to the experience of removal of sight?
Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning

A pioneering cultural alliance between an arts centre and conservatoire transforming 21st century creative learning.
An edited version of this paper is in the April edition of RNIB’s *Insight Online* and extended version in November 2017 issue of *Journal for Pedagogic Development*. I am happy to email links to these publications/send bibliographic references.
Thank you for listening

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