

Classroom Management in Inclusive Education

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Inclusive education has become widespread in recent decades. It refers to the concept of considering the needs of a diverse range of students (including those with special educational needs) by making plans and changes to integrate these needs into the mainstream education system. Thus, how a teacher successfully manages their class so as to support and meet each student's learning experience is critical, especially for subject teachers in Taiwan, and more specially, for English teachers, who only have a small amount of teaching hours for each class per week. Therefore, how they organise the class in order to teach the target lesson in a rigid time frame is of great importance.

From the 6th of May to the 17th of May 2013, I had an opportunity to visit the USA (Illinois and Indiana) and observe teaching in a wide range of classrooms (from pre-school to high school), alongside ten other English teachers and five headmasters from New Taipei City. Not only an outside observer, I was also a learner who sat next to the students and learnt with the class; also interacted and had discussions with these students during these two weeks.

Having this opportunity to meet and observe the teaching and learning process highlighted the ways the complex integration of professional knowledge applies to practical situations. It also demonstrated how specialists, educational settings, and programmes address the learning needs of students. The main topic of this paper is 'Teachers' Strategies towards 'hard' Students in inclusive education settings'. Actually, little evidence of interference

patterns was seen during my observations. Therefore I believe that a well-developed education system, administrative support (e.g. withdrawing the pupil with special needs and giving extra support, having a special educational teacher within the class, magnet programmes for gifted pupils, and installing supportive classrooms for slow learners), and effective classroom management maximises the opportunity for students' learning and also reduces the chances of students' disturbing behaviours. As a result, I would like to showcase how 'classroom management' matters in regards to the action of inclusion. The following sections reflect my perception of the classroom teaching and learning through my visit, with a great focus on 'classroom settings' and 'attention skills', in primary schools, in particular.

Firstly, I was particularly interested in how classroom settings by the teachers could facilitate pupils' learning experiences. In Taiwan, in a typical classroom we commonly see students sitting in orderly rows. Although this might make the lesson easier and allow students to work individually, students miss a great opportunity to foster cooperative activities, such as group work or pair work. Jeremy Harmer (2008) has a relevant discussion in his book indicating the benefits and relative merits of different seating possibilities in the classroom (e.g. orderly rows, horseshoes, circle and separate tables) (p.45). Therefore, I would like to reflect on my observations of how American teachers enhance students' learning by seating arrangements.

During my visit, I noticed the various classroom layouts. In general, a primary school classroom was divided into sections, for example, functional corners (such as math corner, book corner etc.), a teaching area (always with a fairly big carpet), a semi-circular table (for

the teacher to do a small-group discussion) and various seating arrangements (groups of four to six). An example of how a teacher took advantage of the classroom settings was a reading lesson by Ms. Kearney, a 5th grade teacher (7th of May) (See Picture 1,2). Ms. Kearney did a story reading at the teaching area to the whole class for a period of time, approx. twenty minutes (See Picture 3). After that, the class was divided into homogeneous groups. Each group had to do different tasks called the 'Daily Five' which were 'read to self', 'Read to Someone', 'Listen to Reading', 'Word Work', 'Work on Writing', 'Work on iPad' and 'Guided Reading' (there were seven tasks, and students had to do five daily). What I saw was that a group was reading another book which matched their reading comprehension level with Ms. Kearney at the semi-round table, and other groups were doing word checks, peer reading, and self-learning with tablets in their areas of the classroom. When the time was over, the children rotated to another area. From the outset, I noticed that the entire class seemed to intuitively understand the class procedure well: where to go, what to do, what behaviours were acceptable and what were not. In regard to this, Margot T. Williams, the instructor from Ball State University Teachers College, mentioned in her lecture that the classroom layout could support the building of a positive climate and culture for learning; she provided us with three elements to consider: minimizing distractions; maximizing access; and matching layout with lesson purposes (M. Williams, personal communication, May 16, 2013). Meanwhile, research by Foreman (2008), and Lewis and Doorlag (1995) also assert that the classroom setting has a significant effect on the behaviour of teachers and students.



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3

Another intriguing discovery was the use of colour contrasts in the classroom. To illustrate, in the Burriss Kindergarten at Ball State University, I witnessed that different wall colours stand for different functions of the classroom area and different table colours stand for different activities or groupings. Bender (2002) concedes that apart from the teacher's audio input, this use of colour gives pupils an effective visual instruction. He also claims that "colour use also applies when carrying out daily tasks. Everyday tasks could be unnecessarily

difficult for some students with special education needs. If detail is difficult to see, colour contrast can make a great difference. This can be applied to a majority of areas of daily life, such as, class schedule, reading and writing' (2002).”

Research in this area takes the view that the effective use of colours and images could assist students to improve their comprehension (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, as cited in Robinson & Dally, 2008, p.319). Students with additional needs may not be able to develop consequent images in their minds especially when they are reading or listening (Hibbing et al., 2009, p. 319). Therefore using task visual supports (colours and images) to assist students, especially those with special education needs, should be promoted in current classrooms.

Another area of interest drawn from the observation visits was the tactics used to foster attention skills, following the push toward inclusion of students in schools. Without doubt, pupils' (especially lower graders) attention span is short. Many teachers quote “a person's attention span is ten plus the pupil's age in minutes, and that anything taught after that is not taken in (“Attention Span”, 2013).” According to this theory, in the current education situation in Taiwan, there are forty minutes in a lesson - so this means that at least half of the lesson is not taken in by pupils. As shown, how we extend and develop the attention span in children will be the key to help them learn thoroughly. The points below were the strategies I observed in my school visits:

- **Creating a positive learning experience for students:** teachers created a positive relationship with students; students were actively participating and productively engaging in class, such as paying attention and listening to the teacher and each other, understanding the

instructions from teachers intuitively, and being respectful to each other and teachers.

- **Demonstrating a well-structured class and giving a clear direction:** in reading class, teachers clearly differentiated the ‘floor group-work area’ and ‘the study area’. This helped students understand the types of work to be done in each area, and higher structure would assist pupils in their work overall.

- **Solid rules and routines:** on the board, teachers presented a daily class schedule and a posted schedule of the daily lessons. This could greatly assist students in understanding and preparing what they were meant to be doing, especially for students with special needs.

School staff from Triton Central Elementary School gave me some advice about this issue: ‘Teachers should develop a good ‘teacher-talk’. Teachers are to have well-trying scripts and phrases that they trot out in different situations. This teacher-talk is a specific way of phrasing instructions and directions.’ (Personal communication, 2013)

- **Student talk versus teacher talk:** the teachers took the lead in the topic and provided quality questions in a limited time. After that, a great deal of ‘Student Talking Time (STT)’ was noticed and students’ critical thinking skills and abilities were facilitated and built by the STT.

- **Displaying class cues:** students were well-trained to recognise class cues to pay attention in class, such as ‘call and response’ and ‘gestures’ cues. For instance, when the teacher needed students’ attention, they might do hand gestures to draw the pupils’ attention and ask them to do the same. In addition, in the professional training course ‘Quantum Learning’ in District 54 in Chicago, the instructor, Ming, demonstrated many techniques, such as making sounds and moves, to keep pupils’ attention and also make the lesson fun. Some benefits from this were getting attention easily, giving instruction effectively, and maintaining pupils’ attention and motivation.

- **Aids, such as tablets and desk tops:** many classrooms provided computer-based

technologies and programmes, such as desk-top computers, iPads and game programmes. I was impressed by the kindergarteners from Burris Kindergarten in Ball State University; they worked with iPads in pairs and solved maths questions effectively (See Picture4, 5). Different sorts of learning platforms and equipment diversified students’ learning experiences and made learning fun.

- **Pairing up and group work:** students were set in a peer buddy system so as to check each other’s readiness and comprehension (See Pictue6). Also, the theoretical evidence from Turney, C. (et.al) (1985) is that “...classroom grouping as a form of social organization for teaching and for giving more attention to pupils, has long been prominent. Special emphasis has been given to the patterns, quality and purposes of teacher influence (p.60)”.



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6

Consequently, Marzano (2003) has a clear point of view concerning pupils' attention problems. He defines these as "Behaviour that demonstrates either motor or attentional difficulties resulting from a neurological disorder. The child's symptoms may be exacerbated by family or social stressors or biochemical conditions, such as anxiety, depression, or bipolar disorders (pp105)." He also classifies them into 'hyperactive (such as interrupts and fidgets)' and 'inattentive (such as having problems with listening and remembering)' (p.105). Finally, he proposes a teacher should "contract with the students to manage behaviours. Teach basic concentration, study, and thinking skills. Separate student in a quiet work area. Help the student list each step of a task. Reward successes; assign a peer tutor (p.105)".

Having this placement opportunity gave me an insight into how a highly functional classroom works; how the education programme addresses the learning needs and support of all kinds of students; how the benefits of instruction for students are pivotal and unquestionable through an investigation of theory and examples in studies, and about the obligations of the teachers and the needs of learners. Many areas of enquiry arose, including: how the classroom environment is pivotal in affecting pupils' learning experience; how staff implemented tactics to enforce students' attention; and how staff played an important role in

building a positive relationship between teacher and students. Finally, to reiterate, through consideration of the needs of the students and by developing and implementing modifications and affirmative strategies in the classroom, a teacher can facilitate a holistic and enhanced learning experience for the students.

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