

Programs that Help Students in Need

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I have been teaching English at the elementary school for more than ten years. These years I have had the feelings that students nowadays are quite different from students before. All the time there have been talented kids, average learners, and special students who need extra help; however, it seems the number of special students has increased these years. As a result, it is quite common now to see a couple of special students in one single class. These kids can be ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorders), ADD (Attention Deficit Disorders), or LD (Learning Disorders). Besides, more children of new inhabitants show up in the class. Some of them are a little below the average in Mandarin learning, which may have an impact on English learning. Take one of my students as an example; this kid got top marks in math and science, but this kid did very poorly in Mandarin and English, especially in English. This student was frustrated, and so was the teacher. As a teacher, what am I supposed to do? How can I help him? With more and more special students coming, it is really a big challenge to teachers.

During our two-week stay in the United States, we visited several schools in New York and New Jersey. The staff and faculty of Fidelity Chinese School shared their Chinese programs, and some of them are valuable. At Freehold Learning Center, we observed push-in instruction mode, and one teacher showed us their phonics materials for pull-out programs and demonstrated how to use them. At Asher Holmes Elementary School, we are told about class allocation in reading and math for high graders. At Teacher College of Columbia University, differentiated teaching was inspiring. At PS173 Fresh Meadows, we observed a special class with two classroom teachers, from which we probably can learn a lesson. This report is concerned about programs that can help students in need, including effective teaching approaches and academic intervention programs I observed that help students to be successful in their classrooms. In New Jersey schools, BSI (basic skills instruction) program is supplemental instruction to help students to succeed according to grade level expectation in language arts and math. In New York schools, they provide ICT (integrated co-teaching), AIS (academic intervention service) and so on. This report will focus on what they provide and how they assist students in the language art.

Culture Programs at Fidelity Chinese School

Some parents from Taiwan told stories about how their kids had learned Chinese at Fidelity Chinese School. Since these kids were born in the United States, Chinese is a very difficult foreign language for them. They don't give up because they are hooked to the culture programs Fidelity offers. According to the school schedule, these kids learn Chinese for two hours per week, and one hour for culture lessons, which includes Chinese Yo-Yo, Kung-Fu, Chinese painting and calligraphy, erhu fiddles, arts and crafts and so on. For students here in Taiwan, English is nothing but a school subject. They study English just in order to pass the exam. How can teachers improve their motivation? Maybe we can include more culture lessons. For example, in October we focus on Halloween, and we can arrange relevant arts and crafts for low graders, costume parades for middle graders, and scary stories about haunted houses for high graders. Teachers can brainstorm what culture programs might be included. A lady shared how she had learned English when immigrating to the United States. She recommended short articles in magazines or newspaper instead of books, because books are so long that you are likely to give up. I can pick up some appropriate interesting articles online, brochures, and pamphlets for students, and it is all right if they could only read headwords. For instance, a board marked "STOP EBOLA...call FREE 117..." can be used as reading materials even the students reading only five words, because reading outside textbooks must be exciting. Hope such activities can motivate them to be curious readers about English slogans around them.

What is involved in BSI (Basic Skills Instruction) in New Jersey?

What student needs BSI? Multiple measures are employed to identify students who need BSI, such as teacher recommendations, report cards, classroom performance, and district tests and so on. Once a student is identified to be a possible candidate for this program, a specific assessment will be conducted, including evaluating sight word vocabulary, oral reading proficiency, and reading comprehension and so on.

BSI service can be carried out through push-in model or pull-out model, three times a week for thirty minutes in a small group type. I wonder if there are programs for individuals. BSI lasts for the entire school year. If the BSI instructor and the classroom teacher decide a student no longer needs BSI, he or she can be exited from the program.

In order to make sure the student won't be missing the regular class work, the BSI instructor and the classroom teacher will work together to set up a schedule best for the student, and the classroom teacher will be the person in charge, that means he or she will be the key decision-maker on the best ways to help the student.

Which is better, the push-in model or the pull-out model?

The push-in model and the pull-out model

Both the push-in and the pull-out intervention programs are for students who need extra help. In the push-in model, the instructor who is going to help the student will come into the classroom to work with the individual or work in a small group. According to Stephanie from Tennessee, this model will work well if the student is not far behind the other students, and the student won't distract his attention to other things happening in the classroom.

However, the pull-out model would be a better way for a student who is easily distracted in the regular classroom. If a student feels embarrassed to be seen by his classmates reading easier books, or he is far behind his classmates, and thus a pull-out model would be highly recommended.

Some teachers prefer the push-in model, because the student won't be worried about the stigmatism of being pulled out for a "special class." Besides, transitions can be emotionally difficult for some students, and what's more, the instructor aware of the learning targets in the regular classroom, can coordinate the intervention programs with regular learning targets.

Other teachers recommend the pull-out model, since the special student can have real focus issues. He won't feel embarrassed to ask questions, to ask for extra help or to take part in discussion about what he is reading. Some instructors have a vast treasure of books and materials in their own rooms, and they can quickly pull out what they need and show the resources to the students. Moreover, some students enjoy the cozy privacy there.

In my school, special education students are pull out to resource class for Mandarin and math lessons, but they are not offered English lessons there. As for regular students who are slow learners, we don't have any intervention programs.

What is involved in ICT (integrated co-teaching)?

In addition to the push-in and the pull-out models, I observed another model at PS173Q Fresh Meadows. I observed an ICT class with two teachers. Miss Pei-Yu Chang, a teacher there, explained "it is a special class where 60% students are general



students and up to 40% students are students with IEP (Individualized Education Program). IEP students' program recommendation is based on their annual IEP meeting." ICT is to help special education students with ADHD, ADD, or other learning disabilities. ICT can be a relief for the classroom teacher and the general students if there are considerably special students in the class. However, ICT never exists in Taiwan. Can you imagine that three ADHD kids are in the same class? It did happen at my school several years ago. It must have been a torture for that classroom teacher and other students as well.

What is involved in AIS (Academic Intervention Service)?

At PS173 Fresh Meadows, the school offers AIS to general students who need extra help. There are two reading teachers who either push in to that class to help the students by their sides or to pull the students out to give them extra instruction. In addition to the push-in and the pull-out models, the school also provides reading recovery programs for the students with reading problems.

PS173 Fresh Meadows uses TC (Teacher College) reading curriculum. TC provides materials for running records. According to Miss Pei-Yu Chang, when a teacher assess a J-leveled student, he or she will have the student to read aloud the text for level J. If the student gets 90 percent accuracy of reading, the teacher will proceed with comprehension questions about the text.

Reading has been promoted here in Taiwan. Do we have precise and concise teaching steps? Do we have concrete approaches to evaluate students, and provide extra help to the students who have trouble in reading? Since we have neither the push-in model nor the pull-out model, and we have neither ICT nor AIS, are there alternatives to help students in need? Something comes up my mind, that is differentiated instruction we learned at Teacher College, Columbia University.

Differentiated Instruction

I used to group students according to their English proficiency, but Dr. Heather Nedo-Burns say that differentiated instruction depends on a student's learning profiles, personality, skill level, interests and so on. An instructor has to know learners. Some kids enjoy working alone, while others prefer working in a group. We have to connect a student's interest and what we want to teach. For example, a teacher can ask students to write down their favorites, and then group them. This reminds me of Dr. Susi's lecture: every kid comes with knowledge and expertise, and builds from the kid's spirit instead of some stuff that is nothing to do with the

kid. Dr. Susi’s “Me Box” is also a good way to understand your students. In “Me Box” activities, a student is supposed to draw or write something that is important to him, and it can be a human, an event, or an object, and then every student takes turns sharing his stories. Dr. Nedo-Burns showed another example of clock drawings. The clock images kids drew reflect their ideas of time. Some kids had no idea about time. Other kids already had the idea of “hours”, but they did not know about “minutes.” The third group understood the idea of “time” very well. These activities help the teacher to understand his students better, and thus assigns groups accordingly, not at random. Then the teacher assigns various assignments to each group. In Bloom’s taxonomy, there are six-leveled assignments: memorizing, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluation, and creating. Following the direction, I would divide my students into three groups-basic, intermediate, and advanced groups. I would give them different homework-copying the vocabulary for the basic group, read the article for the intermediate group, and make sentences for the advanced groups.

At Asher Holmes Elementary School, we watched a reading instruction at a fifth grade classroom. All the students read the same content, but groups had different worksheets. This is kind of differentiated instruction. At PS173 Fresh Meadows, we observed a second grade class. Every kid has a reading bag with about four books inside. Each bag has a tag with a letter on, such as I, J, K, L and so on. These letters showed the kids’ reading levels. Kids picked books according to their own levels. They had different reading materials. This is another kind of differentiated instruction. Since at the present we have neither the push-in model nor the pull-out model, and we don’t have any academic intervention services, maybe it is a good way to try differentiated instruction in our classroom. We use one textbook but assign different assignments to groups; or we use various materials for each group.



Phonics materials for the pull-out instruction at Freehold Learning Center.