

Inclusive practice in the classroom

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Inclusive practice in the classroom involves many different aspects which all teaching practitioners need to be aware of, plan for, deliver and be able to reflect and evaluate upon in order to improve themselves and for the benefit of their pupils and school environment. Inclusive practice is vital as it ensures equality: all pupils are provided with the correct amount of support suitable for their needs to be able to gain the maximum benefits from their school experience, which will influence their entire lives.

Should a pupil not feel included in the most desirable manner, there can be many negative consequences resulting from their feeling of being excluded from their main peer group. University of Bristol Graduate School of Education (2008 p48) considers the following principles essential to developing an inclusive curriculum: * " Setting suitable learning challenges; * Responding to pupils' diverse learning needs; and * Overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils. "

Inclusive practice includes ensuring that pupils from ethnic minorities, different races and cultures, English as an additional language, gifted and talented, different social backgrounds, special education needs, pupils of various ability levels are all included in the class and received the required support in the classroom. This could be in the form of additional support staff, classroom grouping, differentiation sheets, plus many more strategies depending upon the nature of the inclusion.

Ainscow (1999, p218) comments, The agenda of inclusive education has to be concerned with overcoming barriers to participation that may be experienced by any pupils. ' This is an excellent summary of the fact that

any pupil may have some form of barrier to a fully inclusive education which needs to be overcome. The case study shows that the student teacher attempted to plan for inclusion in more than one aspect. Plans have been made for SEN pupils, possible gifted and talented pupils (higher ability), pupils from ethnic minorities and also differentiated tasks for the differing ability levels within the class.

The focus of this critical evaluation is to focus upon the aspect of English as a Foreign Language (EAL). The student teacher evaluated her lesson considering the lesson to have 'went well and was very inclusive.' As with all lessons and evaluations, there is room for improvement identified by reflecting upon your own practice and those around you. When planning for EAL pupils, the student teacher had assigned a teaching assistant (TA) to a group which contained both EAL and SEN pupils.

This could be argued that this grouping was not fully inclusive alongside the rest of the class. Having placed the two needs together, it may have put too much strain onto the TA who had to support both needs within the group. SEN and EAL pupils have differing needs so grouping could perhaps have been planned better. However, the teacher may have planned within the restraints of the classroom, such as a lack of additional support staff.

During my own practice, I have been extremely fortunate to have three support staff available to support pupils if needed in my lessons (twenty four pupils, mixed year group). This has enabled grouping to be arranged so that pupils requiring additional support work on a smaller ratio of pupils to support staff. An example of this is having a TA to support a SEN pupil, and

one to support an EAL pupil. Both pupils were placed in a group of five pupils of mixed ability. This allows for peer support and the TA can focus in on supporting the individuals who will gain the most from the support.

Ainscow (1999, p218) comments that inclusion is very frequently thought of as simply involving the movement of pupils from special context to mainstream, with the implied result of the movement being that the pupil is now included once in the new context. I agree that this is very often the case, and that many professionals and certainly student teachers may consider inclusion in such a way. For example, in the case study and in my own practice, very often, grouping of the ability levels is considered to be the inclusion required for certain pupils.

However, it could be argued that some individuals need additional intervention to be fully included. As a student teacher, it can be very demanding and difficult to ensure that every lesson planned is fully inclusive for all pupils. The teacher had placed the TA with the EAL pupils during the introduction to ensure that they were listening. This is a good plan in theory, however, the TA ensuring that they are listening may not ensure that the pupils understand the lesson, work asked to complete and the general atmosphere of the lesson.

Looking at it from a different perspective, should one EAL pupil understand, then they can share and inform their peers of the task. This can also be a positive grouping arrangement. Mittler (2000p123) supports this by stating that: 'Successful inclusion and participation in lessons and in the life of the school depends to a large extent on the other children. ' The use of closed

questions which were aimed at the more articulated pupils excluded opportunities for the EAL pupils to be actively involved.

The use of a powerpoint is inclusive towards the EAL pupils as it assists with visual learners as it contained many images and may assist with understanding of the topic. The use of ICT may act as a motivational tool to engage the pupils with their work. The teacher could have considered the possible use of interactive ICT resources for the EAL pupils. The powerpoint was planned to be revisited in the future which will assist the EAL pupils with recalling and recounting the previous lesson.

For the main activity, the EAL and SEN pupils were still grouped together with the assistance of the TA. The observer commented that this grouping may have limited opportunities for the Bengali speaker. The planned activity of 'cutting and sticking' is excellent activity as it assists kinaesthetic learners and will support EAL learners. The teacher has targeted to plan further activities for this group in the evaluation as the TA noted that they finished early. The TA used her initiative to ask the pupils to colour in the pictures.

It is an excellent aspect of classroom management and relations for the TA to feel able to use their initiative in such a way as it ensures the pupils stay engaged and focused on the work rather than going off task once completed if there wasn't an extension activity planned. It could appear that the group finished their work early as they had the additional support, however, it could be that the pupils did not understand the work and that the TA guided them too much hence they finished early.

Experiences from my own practice have been when TAs have lower expectations of pupils they support and as a result, they over support the pupils and do not allow them the space to flourish more independently. A perfect example of this from my own practice is when one pupil had a differentiated sheet for a numeracy activity. As a student teacher, I had consulted the class teacher as to the suitability of the differentiated task, and it was agreed it would be suitable.

When briefing the TA who was to support that individual child before the lesson, the TA crossed out certain numbers she felt the pupil wouldn't be able to tackle. As a result, the pupil was not given the opportunity to develop further. In the plenary for the lesson, I verbally asked the pupil in question one of the questions the TA had omitted, the pupil answered the question correctly, and could also explain his reasoning. This I feel is perfect evidence of how on occasions, TA support can hinder the learning of pupils.

As a student teacher, it is difficult to enforce your planning and methodology onto other members of support staff who are used to the main class teacher. However, when reflecting upon my experience, in the future I will ensure that TAs allows pupils to be challenged as it very well may be that the child is very capable yet being restricted by over support. The teacher planned for one EAL pupil to remind another regarding talking and loosing playtime if they continued. I strongly disagree with this method of behaviour management for the EAL pupil.

My reasoning is that how can the teacher be sure that the pupil translates the correct message and that is it not really the pupils' job to remind pupils

of different behavioural issues. One pupil having to remind another of a behavioural issue could result in friendship difficulties between the two concerned in the future. In many ways this may have been the teachers only option however, as the teacher planned to remind the pupil regarding talking as it was the target for the week, their may have been better methods.

One such way would be to have a written sign, in the pupils first language, this could have been displayed somewhere to remind the pupil of the weeks target. The sign could also have the target in English which would be encouraging all pupils in the class to learn some words of a different language, and also it would be helping the EAL pupils to engage with more English. Having never experienced the situation with an EAL pupil myself whereby very little English is known, I can only assume that the teacher planned for the most appropriate technique she felt achievable for that individual case.

The assessment for the lesson I feel was not the most effective. The teacher admitted that one EAL pupil very likely did not understand the question regarding if they had learnt something new, and just copied other pupils. In support for the student teacher, tidying up had taken longer than planned hence the plenary was left with less time than planned for. I can very much relate to this as in my own practice, this has very often been the case, especially when resources such as glue and scissors have been used.

As an inexperienced teacher, there is little appreciation as to how long it may take to find all of the glue lids that pupils seem to always lose under the table, and such things. Hence I believe it is with experience that the student

in the case study and myself could improve plenary planning with more realistic timing. Asking the TA to mark her groups work could be seen from two perspectives. The first is that the TA had worked with the pupils so may have understood exactly what the pupils had completed, and any changes they may have wanted to make.

Browne and Haylock (2004 p146) support the student teachers choice and consider TAs to 'have a valuable role in recording pupils' responses and achievements during the course of the lesson. ' When working with pupils myself, I have noted when they have answered incorrectly or been unclear yet verbally, they have answered correctly, hence when marking I have taken this into consideration. The TA would have been able to make an accurate assessment of their achievement however may not consider the true impact of her support.

As a teacher however, I would like to monitor all pupils work in order to be able to plan effectively in the future. Hence, it would be my personal preference to mark all pupils work myself. This is an opinion that as experience grows, and relationships are built with support staff, may change. From my placement experiences, when marking all work oneself, I have noted when TAs have perhaps over supported pupils and it is evident on the sheets. Marking of work completed by EAL pupils can be difficult as you may mark the content as correct, but there may still be little understanding.

Teachers need to modify approaches and how they see information in order to evaluate effectively. Gardner (2001) highlights the importance of this and that teachers need to monitor pupils' responses to learning tasks, and act

accordingly. In order to plan fully and effectively for inclusion, the teacher needs to have a full understanding of all pupils current abilities. It is commented by Pollard (2002, 195) that as a student teacher, the student often feels the 'piggy in the middle' as conflicting advice can be given by university tutors, class teachers and support staff with regards to class information and routines.

It is highlighted that communication is an important skill in classroom and lesson planning. Furthermore, it is vital for support staff to be fully aware of the lesson plans and aims before the lesson begins. The use of a clap signal to indicate when the teacher wants pupils to listen is very inclusive as it can be understood by pupils who speak all languages. In defence of the student teacher and that the clap rhythm signal took five cycles, it may be that the class were not familiar with this method before the students' placement, hence it would take time for pupils to adjust.

Similar signals can be used such as arm and hand movements. I found these ideas more beneficial for my placement as they also supported and developed pupils co-ordination and reinforced that pupils should face the front when I was teaching (problems had been experienced with one pupil repeatedly refusing to face the front). Teaching professionals in today's information technology environment are in an excellent position whereby the world wide web is a wealth of information and various support if available on all aspects of not only inclusion, but also the various methodologies of teaching.

The Department for children, schools and families introduced 'What works well' in November 2007. What works well is an online database of real case studies, uploaded by professionals which reflect and describe learning improvements. One such search for an 'inclusion' case study revealed 'Guidance for practitioners supporting children/families where English is an Additional Language' by Annette White. This is an excellent source for teachers to gain valuable information on what may or may not work to ensure their class is as inclusive for all pupils as possible.

The Research Informed Practice Site (part of the governments standards site) is currently in further development to assist with teachers and schools self evaluation as this is considered vital to improve practices for not only inclusion, but all of the issues surrounding effective teaching. In conclusion, to be able to plan and teach a fully inclusive lesson, the teacher has to have a lot of prior knowledge of the pupils, the thoughts and methods of support staff, the knowledge of the schools routines and policies (behaviour management etc).

From a student teachers perspective, there can be many limitations on the prior knowledge so self evaluation, and reflection are vital. The student in the case study has begun her journey of reflective teaching and may consider changes in the future to enable a more inclusive lesson. Jacques K and Hyland R (2007 p26) realise the one of the largest challenges in the classroom is to cater for the wide variety of children with their various learning needs and capabilities.

All pupils do not arrive with the same prior experiences, skills, knowledge, and attitudes yet the teacher must teach so that they all can learn, and so that all can 'enjoy and achieve' (ECM, 2004a). The student in the case study, and teaching students all over the country are at the beginning of their lifelong journey of learning, reflection, and personal and self improvement. As we become more experienced, more effective methods for inclusion can be used, practiced, modified and perfected. This is however a cycle of continuous self improvement.