



Teaching strategies for learners with special educational needs

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Abstract

There are a number of teaching strategies for learners with special educational needs (SEN). But, the focus of this study is co-teaching between special education teachers and general teachers. Co-teaching is seen as a way to promote inclusive education. The overall aim of the study is to contribute to a deeper understanding how co-operation between teachers can promote learning of all pupils in a general education context. The specific aim of the study is to describe and analyze the strategies the teachers use during co-teaching. Co-teaching has been suggested as a way to offer education for all pupils in the general education classroom. Co-teaching can be defined as a form of co-operation where at least two teachers teach in the same classroom at the same time. The teachers collaborate with each other in order to teach pupils with and without disabilities in the same classroom, focusing on the use of collaborative and differentiated instructional strategies that can promote and increase the accessibility of curriculum content for all learners. Such a research programme should examine teaching and learning in real settings as it will need to take account of the ways in which teachers do their work in relation to the wide variety of situations they face.

Keywords: teaching strategies, co-teaching, pupils, special educational needs (SEN)

Introduction

Every learner is unique and has own learning style that is affected by his/her personality factors. Learning style or individual preferences in child's learning result from his/her dominant intelligence: visual learners prefer using pictures and reading; auditory learners like listening to explanations and reading aloud; kinesthetic learners need physical activity to help them learn; interpersonal learners are sociable and eager to use language for communication; intrapersonal learners are quiet and reflective and learn by listening and observing. Teacher's task is to provide a variety in the activities as carefully structured input and practice opportunities, catering for different learning styles.

However, when teaching a child with SEN, knowing his/her learning style is not enough to secure his/her successful learning in classroom. Teacher should also consider child's abilities and his learning difficulties, like short concentration span and slower learning pace that may easily demotivate the child in learning a foreign language. Teacher can help the child by letting him/her practice a particular language structure by repeating it as many times as needed (in well-structured exercise), being very patient and not interrupting the child, but encouraging him/her, praising his/her effort and building the child's confidence. Instead of correcting the child, teacher should 'model' the correct form, or allow the child to 'shadow' the recorded text.

Mapping the effectiveness of different approaches and strategies employed to respond to the full range of children's special educational needs is a complex task because the field is broad, covering a range of educational needs across all phases of education. This scoping study drew upon national and international publications, including reviews of research findings, individual research reports and professional guidance

for teachers. One of the key factors we considered was the extent to which the review should be led by literature that refers to categories of impairment in the field of SEN. It was decided to adopt the 'areas of need' as defined in the SEN Code of Practice as a feasible means of grouping the literature under a manageable number of headings. This strategy would include all pupils having some form of SEN as well as being generally understood by parents, practitioners and policy-makers.

The areas of needs are

- Communication and Interaction
- Cognition and Learning
- Behavioral, Emotional and Social Development
- Sensory and/or Physical

Successful inclusive practice also depends on the following factors

- Applying appropriate teaching methodology
- Using appropriate teaching material
- Having extra time for individual work with the child
- Acquiring specific knowledge, skills and experience in dealing with diversity in class
- Adapting the curriculum
- Drawing up individual learning plan for each child with SEN (Inclusive Education and Classroom Practices, Summary Report, 2003) [6].

Teachers should try to apply strategies that will help meet the needs of children with SEN and reduce learning difficulties as well as behaviour, social or emotional problems. Demotivated pupils with behaviour problems are the biggest challenge of primary classes. Research shows that there are effective practices that can be used in inclusive settings. They can also

be regarded as effective teaching practices in inclusive classes. These involve:

Co-operative teaching: involves cooperation of teacher with colleagues, like class teacher, school principal, inclusion specialist, health therapist, and with parents, all belonging to a team responsible for the child's development. They collaborate in solving particular problems related to the child's development. In some countries (like Finland) there is a teaching assistant who helps children with SEN and supports teachers in the classroom.

Co-operative learning: all children benefit from cooperative learning, teamwork and peer tutoring, both cognitively and affectively (socially and emotionally). Positive interdependence in cooperative learning allows each group member to contribute with own strength to the final outcome of the learning activity. Child with SEN can learn from his peers and follow their performance as a model.

Heterogeneous grouping: it is very effective in classes with big diversity of children's abilities and supports cooperative learning. Children with SEN develop cognitive and social skills, while other members of the group learn to accept and respect the child with SEN. However, in language teaching, it is sometimes more useful to make homogeneous groups, some of them consisting of children who experience similar learning difficulties, so that teacher can give them extra help. In such cases, teachers should give differentiated tasks to particular groups, making them challenging enough for particular abilities.

Individual Educational Plan (IEP): It is a pedagogical and development plan drawn up for each child with SEN by adapting the curriculum in conformity with the child's abilities and needs. New learning objectives are identified on the basis of child's performance in classes. These objectives should not be too difficult to discourage the child, but they should not be too easy, either, as the child needs to be challenged to learn new skills. The plan comprises all information necessary to follow the child's progress, and teacher draws it up in cooperation with other members of the team responsible for the child's inclusion. Parents play a very important role in supporting the child's development in many ways, one of them being active participation in the team preparing individual educational plan for the child.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Class Teacher

The class teacher liaises with the parents regarding the decision to initiate the Classroom Support process. Good practice would suggest that the class teacher will generally act as co-ordinator throughout the problem solving process in consultation with the pupil and his/her parents. The class teacher may also seek advice from the learning support / resource teacher in the school and will keep the principal informed. He or she should maintain a record of relevant information which will be used should more detailed problem solving be required at School Support level.

Supporting Teachers

The role of the learning support/resource teacher (and/or other supporting teachers, where available) is to provide advice and resources to the class teacher which will assist him/her in the assessment process and in the development of classroom and, where appropriate, home based interventions for the pupil.

The Principal

The principal's role is to note, in line with the schools SEN policy, the fact that a Classroom support process is being put in place.

Other Professionals

Other professionals such as Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Visiting Teachers etc may be involved indirectly, offering consultation or advice in relation to appropriate approaches for pupils presenting with early difficulties. In addition, work on the development of whole school policies, practices and initiatives to support all pupils with special educational needs in partnership with NEPS, DES staff and other outside agencies can support interventions at this stage.

Effective Teaching Strategies for Special Education

Children with Special educational needs pose a vast range of challenges to educators looking for effective teaching strategies for the special education classroom. These suggestions should come in handy for teachers working with special educational needs students.

Working with Short Attention Spans

- Set clear expectations for all students.
- Break assignments into smaller pieces to work on in short time periods.
- Space breaks between assignments; so, students can refocus on their tasks.
- Share ideas with parents so they can help with homework.
- Carry out every day routines consistently.
- Develop a reward system for good behavior, completing work on time and participating in class.
- Use visual and auditory reminders to change from one activity to the next. This may need to be done several times before the change is made. An egg timer is a good auditory tool that indicates a signal to begin or end an activity.

Managing Constant Change

The science behind teaching special education students is not cut-and-dried. The strategies that teachers develop for their classrooms are not permanent, and must be scalable and flexible so that they can evolve. This strategy enables teachers to teach every student.

- Design teaching aids and lessons that are flexible.
- Add creativity to lessons and homework.
- Develop easy-to-use monitoring tools that are needs-based.
- Design lesson plans that can be modified to fit each student.
- Develop a set of resources and interventions that work.

Effective Teaching

Being an effective teacher requires many tools, most of which are chosen through trial and error. Many resources are available to help teachers planning lessons, manage classroom environments, and develop high-quality instruction for students with special needs. Effective teaching strategies include:

- Use a multiple-scenario approach to developing lesson plans.
- Monitor and verify student responses to lessons.
- Evaluate and adapt lessons as necessary.
- Use peers to review lesson plans and to develop ideas that might be applicable.
- Develop and maintain a pool of mentors.
- Keep a list of resources for teaching, lesson plans and professional development
- Set a professional development plan for yourself and track your goals
- Develop or implement a system that allows for easy and comprehensive data collection to help monitor and adapt lessons
- Gather some tricks of the trade from fellow teachers, including those who do not teach special education.

Conclusion

The overall conclusion is that questions about whether there is separate special education pedagogy are unhelpful given the current policy context, and that the more important agenda is about how to develop a pedagogy that is inclusive of all learners. This considers how the strategies identified from the review as having the potential to raise achievement might be usefully organized in a typology that could be used to create a multi-method response to teaching pupils with special educational needs. A second phase of this research programme should involve systematic, long-term development work across a range of sites and settings, which also allows for the examination of the impact of the innovations upon achievement. Such research is necessary to advance knowledge about teaching and learning, and to understand how combinations of teaching approaches might be used in different contexts and for different purposes.

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