

Strategies to support inclusive classroom practice

Inclusion is ensuring all pupils regardless of their individual needs/backgrounds have equal access to the same opportunities in education and are taught the skills to allow them to progress through their learning appropriate to their personal potential. I believe that inclusive settings (as opposed to ability segregated classes) not only benefit children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) but teaches all learners how to understand cultural diversity. Furthermore, that we can benefit from these differences resulting in a society that embraces differences and sees the benefit of diversity on the community.

My current setting has a strong ethos for integrating all pupils. As well as two Special Teaching Facilities (STF), there is a high percentage of additional needs. Over 50% of pupils are on the SEN register, over 80% have a reading age two years below their chronological age and 11% are English as Additional Language (EAL). In mainstream, pupils are in mixed ability classes with a More Able and Talented class and a nurture class in KS3. Pupils from STF facilities attend mainstream lessons where appropriate, and all pupils mix during lunch and break times. Furthermore, our TIDE facility supports pupils rather than exclusion or managed moves. Due to the high level of poverty pupils can require the support of our dedicated pastoral team including Councillors, LAC Coordinator, and pastoral support officers.

The policies in the setting promote the ethos of inclusion, aim to be fair and equitable and encourage and support diversity, reflecting the requirement of the mission statement which ensures equity and excellence for all learners raising standards for children who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or have ALN (Williams 2020). One way this is achieved is by providing technology to socio-economically disadvantaged pupils to ensure they can access learning. Moreover, staff receive regular training and support from the ALNCO to keep up to date with current legislations and practices around inclusion, but staff absences can cause gaps in knowledge.

The ALNET Act aims to improve the provision for children and young people from 0-25 with ALN and provide more inclusive practice, to create a less adversarial system with more flexible approaches and improved multi working partnerships. It has given a better person-centred-approach where parent and pupil voice are included in decision-making processes. Key staff at the setting are highly knowledgeable on the ALNET act, reflected in the setting's own ALN policy and practice around ALN. Arguably, this knowledge is not reflected by the rest of the staff and further training should be provided to ensure consistency. The school creates good links with individual parents, especially those with ALN, however, whole school engagement needs improvement. The setting is working to bridge this gap through social media and a new school app where Parental voice is encouraged. The setting promotes pupil voice and has a well-represented school council who choose which enrichment clubs are run termly. Pupils from all year groups and STF facilities mix within these clubs and lunch time provisions are fully inclusive giving pupils a strong sense of community.

Within the school there is evidence of integration and inclusion. Pupils from the STFs are given opportunities to be integrated into mainstream after thoughtful discussions with the parents and child. Many lessons are inclusive as the teacher has adapted the environment to ensure that the pupil is given the same opportunities as the rest of the class. I have seen this done effectively in an ICT lesson where an EAL pupil accessed computer software that translated and read technical words

for him. This was discrete and did not highlight the child's individual needs to the rest of the class as he was able to work independently amongst his peers. Many teachers believe that teaching pupils who are statemented is not their responsibility (Florian and Rouse 2010), disregarding students even when they are educated within the mainstream classroom. For example, during a science lesson, the teacher put a group of ALN pupils at the back of the room with the teaching assistant and gave them differentiated work while he taught the 'normal' pupils. The teacher believed he was meeting the pupils' needs, but not only did this create more work for him but also segregated those pupils. This could not only affect their confidence but did not encourage the rest of the class to be diverse members of society that celebrate difference.

This led me to question if the setting is inclusive or integrative and if this is due to staff attitudes or their knowledge of inclusion. Although there are pockets of good practice reflecting the social model there are still teachers within the setting whose ethos to teaching and learning reflect that of the medical model (Shakespeare 2006). This is where the attitudes of staff act as a barrier to inclusion within the setting. Coffield (2013, p2) states that "most practicing teachers and senior leaders become more remote from research literature as they get further away from initial teacher education."

The strategy I decided to introduce to my own classroom to promote inclusion is self-led learning. To reflect on the strategy, I am going to use Gibbs' reflective theory.

Description

The strategy was carried out on Year 8 textiles pupils who were learning basic hand sewing and sewing machine skills. I believed this to be the best year group to carry out this experiment on as due to online learning over the past 2 years, this year group has greatly missed out on practical lessons and as a result have no sewing skills. I felt that rushing them through the skills that are needed was not beneficial, so I wanted to take an approach that allowed them to develop good skills in areas they felt they could excel, and learn the basics in those they are less interested in.

The strategy supports inclusion as it provides scaffolding to support all abilities and is accessible to all pupils.

Many recent studies on inclusion have focused on the theory that strategies that benefit a person with ALN will benefit all pupils Tomlinson (2014) with this in mind, and the results of a questionnaire carried out by pupils, I created recourses that could be accessed by all. I produced these recourses in multifaceted ways to create a strategy to self-led learning, for example videos, images and written text.

Feelings

After reading Paulo Freire's (2017) theory on liberation, I started to question inclusion in my own classroom. "The idea of liberationism is a pedagogy within education that puts the pupil at the center of their education, giving them more say in what and how they learn" (Paul Freire 2017 p12). Liberationism makes learning accessible to all students and tailored to their needs. Paul Freire (2017) saw pupils not as empty vessels that needed to be filled with knowledge but creators of knowledge.

Textiles as a subject naturally creates barriers to inclusion due its busy nature. Unlike a math's class where pupils are seated for the lesson, facing the same way and following a similar pattern and pace, I felt that my classroom was busy, unpredictable, and challenging for pupils with sensory processing issues.

Textiles practical lessons had previously proven challenging for several reasons. There were several pupils from the four areas of need (Tutt, 2005), there was a lot of noise during the lessons due to the nature of the subject, lack of resources and minimal TA support. This made me feel I was not meeting the needs of all pupils and giving them the individual support that they needed. As a result, their progress in the subject was slow and limited. Pupils also felt overwhelmed in practical lessons and there were two pupils, both with ASD and mental health issues that struggled in the classroom environment and were taken out of the lesson. Behavioral problems were also heightened during practical lessons as some pupils felt over-stimulated.

During lessons where the strategy was implemented, both pupils and staff members felt more relaxed, and pupils that were previously removed from the class were happy to return. One pupil had never spoken to me and always seemed distressed and disengaged began speaking to me and other adults in the class, seemed happy in the classroom environment and engaged in the tasks through self-led learning. This pupil seemed to thrive on the fact that she could set her own targets and went on to developing excellent hand embroidery skills which resulted in her feeling proud of her achievements. This reflects what Hooks (2014) believed about engaged pedagogy in which teachers' engagement is not limited to students' minds, but also their emotional needs. This pupil needed her own space at the back of the class and this strategy allowed for her to do this while still being included in the teaching and learning of the classroom.

Evaluation

Using the theory of liberationism I put more effort into the preparation of my lessons and took a step back during. Bonstingl (2001, p.10) believed teachers should be a guide on the side rather than a sage on the stage. This is argued by Lev Vygotsky (1978) with his theory of the more knowledgeable other. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was a belief that children learn through social interaction especially with someone who is more skilled in tasks they are trying to learn. My strategy reflects both these arguments as I am providing my knowledge and experience through the resources that I have made but taking a step back during the lesson allowing the pupils to set their own targets and how they will achieve them. Rosenshein's (Sherrington 2019) research suggests that even when students are working independently, effective teachers continue to monitor practice. He believed that the best lessons always have an explicit model of instruction (modelling). This is refer to by cognitive scientists as 'dual coding'. I demonstrated this with my resources, by providing instructive models in multifaceted ways.

I carried out a questionnaire following a discussion on multifaceted approaches to learning. My initial idea was to carry out an assessment on learning styles such as Dunn and Dunn's (2019) learning-styles model, and Honey and Mumford's (1992) Learning Styles Questionnaire. But according to Pasher (2009, p.105) there is "no adequate evidence base to justify incorporating learning style assessment into general education practice." I took this on board but still decided to carry out a questionnaire but with an aim to look at student perceptions on how they learn which is a focus of Burden (2000) with his concept of myself as a learner scale (MALS) which focuses on how

children learn. It was clear from some of my observations that pupils already have perceptions of how they learn. When first implementing the strategy, I explained the resources that were available, and pupils seemed very set in their idea of how they would like to learn. One pupil stressed how picture instructions were out of the question for her as she felt they would just confuse her. I was happy to witness her change in attitude when she was shown a picture tutorial of a back stitch and she admitted to feeling differently about the range of resources and felt that they might be more appropriate to use depending on the task.

Before conducting the questionnaire, I assumed most pupils would favor video tutorial as that is what we had been using this year already. The results showed that 93% of pupils from the more able and talented (MAT) class wanted to see instructions delivered in written step by step, 71% of pupils from mixed ability classes wanted video tutorials and teacher demonstration and 100% of pupils from the nurture group wanted video tutorials and teacher demonstrations. It was noted that a barrier to teacher demonstration was that if any information was missed, there was no resources to look back over, so the success of the lesson weighed heavily upon what you remember from the demonstration.

I was pleased with this result as it emphasized that my multifaceted strategy would have an impact on learners as they were asking for different delivery methods. It could be argued that these results are not a reliable method to seeing how best a pupil learns. A great deal of research has shown that matching how you learn to a specific style is not useful and does not improve learning. Clark (1982) found when using learner preference for selecting instructional methods, learner preference was uncorrelated or had a negative impact to learning. However, rather than focusing on a preferred learning style, a good lesson should provide modelling in many ways for the pupils to choose (Sherrington 2019). As was seen in the MAT class, there will be pupils that are able to access the content of the lesson in a simple written instruction form. There are other students, who need a lot more scaffolding such as picture, videos, and demonstrations.

The purpose of the strategy was to ensure that during the lesson everyone was able to access the same tools they need to develop their skills according to their own ability/ needs without the need for constant teacher reassurance. I wanted pupils to feel empowered with the challenge of the same high expectations as their peers but with the tools to ensure they can reach their full potential. "It is a well-established aspect of the growth mindset research that, to succeed, students need to approach challenge with a positive attitude, understanding how to learn from mistakes and not be afraid to make them". (Sherrington 2019, p.44).

Analysis

The idea of learning styles has been around and used by educators for over forty years and is a concept that believes individuals have different preferences to the way they learn (Sims & Sims 2006). It has been widely debated among researchers such as Dunn (1990), and Coffield (2012), the effectiveness of learning styles and the three main weaknesses that have been discussed are their definition is confusing, they are weak in reliability of how they are measured and the identification of traits in learners(Coffield 2012). Togo and Baldwin (1990) also found no significant difference in student performance but believe learning styles to be somewhat relevant.

Coffield (2013) also believes it is unprofessional to administer a questionnaire on learning styles at the start of term, analyze the results for the pupils to be aware of their preferred learning style and

then not address learning styles again for the rest of the year. By doing this the pupil would expect to learn through this learning style for the rest of the year and believe that they cannot learn any other way. This could hinder the success of the individual as they may perform better with different learning styles for different tasks. This was evident in my lesson when I observed three boys that wanted to perfect their blanket stitch. The group switched from video to pictorial instructions, following a discussion. They found this method of instruction easier despite not being their first choice in learning. This observation demonstrated that although they began the lesson with a preferred learning style in mind, because they were not limited to one and were encouraged to try others, they realized that different learning styles fit better with different tasks. Had they been told that they would learn better by following video instruction, they may not have tried a different resource and may not have performed as well in the lesson. However, the pupils spent too long during the lesson exploring the different resources to see which they preferred.

Deci and Ryan (1985) believe that giving pupils choice and opportunities for self-directed learning, enhances motivation and gives pupils a greater feeling of autonomy. I was reluctant at first to give the pupils too much choice in their individual targets as it meant up to 30 pupils performing different practical tasks. Research shown by Lyengar and Lepper (2000) argues that choice can have a negative effect on pupils as it can be overwhelming. Greifender (2010) also states that if a pupil is seeing these choices for the first time it can negatively affect their learning, but as I have already modeled all these skills for the pupils to learn and the purpose of these lessons was to develop these skills, the choice would have been less overwhelming as they are familiar with the skills and could make an informed decision.

A negative to allowing them to set their own targets was that some pupils would set a target based on what their friend was doing or a task they enjoyed doing so that they could do it again. Grey and Rio's (2012) address the fact that social influences can alter a pupil's decisions when making choices due to the need to fit in or stand out. Bjork (1994) states that what a pupil might find easy is necessarily what is best for their learning. This led me to think that they were not progressing, not working towards a skill that they may have previously struggled with or not yet tried. This can be looked at from another angle: if the pupil enjoys a specific skill, then they are more likely to work hard and develop it. This allowed me to explore my beliefs as a teacher and take a step back from dictating what I feel the pupils should be learning and allowing them to take control and create their own path to progression. My contributions here could have been negative. If I was to challenge the pupils on their target and told them to carry out a different task, this may have caused them to become disengaged and discouraged from making their own decisions in the future, feeling their ideas and opinions are invalid. Richard (2000, p.3) backs this theory when he said "imposing goals on pupils diminishes motivation." For other pupils they still craved the teacher reassurance and guidance to what would be an appropriate target. This was evident in a mixed ability year 8 class that had STF pupils integrated into it. The pupils were given the same lesson objective as the rest of the class, to choose a target to 'close the gap' on the skills that we had learnt to date. In previous lessons where the lesson objective was to perform a specific skill, e.g. learn to go around corners on the sewing machine, or learn to thread the sewing machine, these pupils have not met their lesson objective. By allowing the pupils to choose their own target and monitor their own progression, the STF pupils left with a feeling of accomplishment knowing they had met the target they had set themselves and therefore meeting their lesson objective.

To find out if this strategy was effective and that pupils are carrying out tasks that aid their progression, I monitored outcomes with our whole school 'close the gap' strategy at the end of each practical lesson. Through reflection, students will "become accomplished at recognizing that they are learning and building skills continuously" (Helyer 2015, p.23). I witnessed this with the same three boys that I previously discussed. When working on their target to create a blanket stitch they soon encountered a problem, they could not thread their sewing needle. The boys scanned another QR code which led them to a video explaining how to thread a needle. At the end of the lesson, I called the class back to the desks and asked them how they had 'closed the gap' during the lesson. The three boys appeared disappointed and explained that they had not closed the gap because they had only just managed to work out how to thread their needle. I questioned whether they had learnt anything that lesson and if they had worked independently to achieve this. The boys were pleased to respond that they had learnt to thread the needle and how this would greatly benefit them in future lessons as they would be able to get straight onto the sewing task.

Conclusion

After reflecting on my current teaching, I decided to implement a strategy of self-led learning into my textiles practical lessons to facilitate all areas of need in my classroom and allow pupils to progress in their own way reflective of their own ability.

As previously mentioned, the setting has a very diverse population that consists of pupils with many challenges and needs. The pupils in the setting responded well to the strategy with several success stories. As with all teaching strategies there were still exceptions and this has affirmed my belief that although we need to strive for inclusion in all settings, pupils will always bring new challenges with them so there will always be a place in the education system for special teaching facilities.

For those pupils who still struggled to access the curriculum during these sessions of self-led learning, the problem was predominantly because of the over stimulation of the classroom environment. The resources that I produced are all electronically stored or accessed via QR codes so a way to overcome this problem in the future would be for those pupils to carry out the lesson in a facility that better suits their needs but using the same resources as the rest of the class. This also benefits pupils with social emotional and mental health difficulties. Within the class there were many pupils that do not like to share their views out loud or ask questions when they are stuck, when taking a linear approach to teaching and only having one method of delivery, a barrier for those pupils would have been not understanding or maybe missing a part of the demonstration and not feeling like they could ask for help. With the strategy in place and the pupils being able to access the lesson material at any time and in a style, they would prefer, this lifted the barrier as they were able to take control of their own learning and find the answer to their question without asking me. This built the pupils confidence in the classroom environment and after a few lessons they were far more comfortable in coming to me with any questions. Another benefit to these resources being so easily accessible, because of technology such as Google classroom, with our current global situation, if we were to go back to remote learning, these resources could be accessed from home.

Before implementing the strategy, I had always been interested in learning styles, having my own preferred learning style, and understanding that not everyone learns in the same way as me. The strategy has affirmed this belief but has taught me that it is not about providing a pupil with their preferred learning style but giving the options of different learning styles and to encouraging them to try different ones.

The strategy has also challenged my opinions on giving pupils choice. Being a practical heavy subject, when planning projects, I have always chosen what the outcome would be and had everyone making the same product. This was because I felt that having everyone making different products, I would not be able to give them the attention that they need, and it would be easier to teach them one process from the front of the class. The strategy has taught me that giving the pupils choice empowers them and gives them motivation to succeed. Choice also celebrates diversity recognizing that pupils have their own, cultures, beliefs and needs.

As a school we have firmly implemented the 'close the gap' monthly review which is teacher feedback of 'what went well', 'even better if' and then a pupil comment to show they have read this. The pupil then performs a task that 'closes the gap' on their learning. I have always believed this to be of high importance but on reflection I agree with Williams (2016) that the best strategy is to develop the pupil ability to provide the feedback for themselves. The close the gap strategy that the pupils carried out at the end of the lesson was successful in affirming to the pupils where they are in their progress.

Action plan

Going forward the strategy of self-led learning will be embedded in all practical lessons and I'm going to implement it in all year groups. I am also going to investigate ways to implement it into theory lessons so that I can then share my knowledge with non-practical subjects to develop the strategy whole school.

I believe that the setting that I work within has good inclusive ethos and strives to create a person-centered climate that embraces differences and treats each child as an individual although there are members of staff whose practice still reflects that of the medical model. I would like to challenge this practice and influence change within my setting by broadening this strategy to other areas of the school.

Firstly, I would like to address staff taking responsibility for every child in the class, not deferring to a TA or ALENCO. I believe that if the staff use the idea of pupil led learning with multifaceted resources this can be achieved, with the TA acting as a support alongside the pupil. During my self-led learning lessons, the only support I witnessed the TA giving to the ALN child was to discuss with them their personal target and technical support such as helping to scan QR codes – showing the pupils' independence and competency.

A barrier to rolling out this strategy whole school is staff competency in ICT. For this to work some staff will need training in skills such as QR code creating and creating videos with subtitles so that they are able to create multifaceted resources for their subjects.

I would like to use pupil voice to strengthen this strategy and find out how pupils feel, possibly developing Burden (2000) concept of myself as a learner scale. By bringing this concept into the

strategy, it will bring more emphasis to the pupil on how and why they learn and may influence their choices and encourage them to challenge themselves.

This reflection has taught me to take a step back during the lesson as self-led learning has proven successful within practical lessons when more effort has been put into creating multifaceted recourses. It has enhanced pupils' growth mindset facilitated progress and created an inclusive classroom climate where pupils can feel proud of and share their personal achievements within the subject.

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