

EDF5016

Assessment Task 1

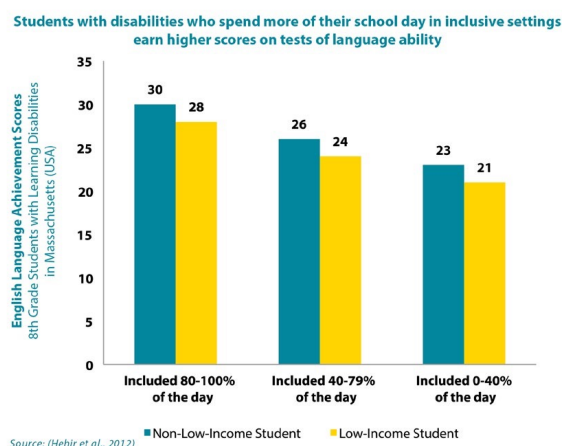
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PART A

Assessment Task 1a.i – Drawing on the full range of reading for this topic, discuss the role of inclusive schooling in creating a more caring, equitable and democratic society for all people.

There are longitudinal studies of students with disabilities that provide evidence that participating in inclusive education can positively benefit students' academic outcomes when compared to segregated students (Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, Burke, 2016). The graph below clearly shows us that the more time children with special needs spend in a classroom, the more likely they are to perform better at school.



Irrespective of this, people in education (including teachers, school leadership-resources, policymakers- exclusionary curriculums, etc.) vote against this idea. With respect to teachers, lack of confidence due to no prerequisite skills or knowledge affecting their motives is something I can relate to as a soon to-be Graduate teacher (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2011). However, we need to be willing to accept the challenge and build our practice through implementation of researched strategies while being a great problem-solver. This is not only a moral but also a professional obligation in Australia (Australian Professional Standards for Teachers) and it makes a lot of sense if people with disabilities make 20% of the population (Young, 2013, p. 247). Ignoring this large number that has probably increased in the last five years

would be dangerous for this country's overall state of human well-being as discrimination, ignorance and exclusion negatively affects their lives (Committee on the Right of Persons with Disabilities, (2016).

Assessment Task 1a.ii – Briefly describe a student with a disability that you have encountered during professional experience (use a pseudonym). Indicate the barriers they face in learning, participating or making progress at school. Identify the teaching and learning adjustments made to support them in overcoming these barriers. Identify the category of disability that the adjustments relate to, and the level of adjustment that would be reported under the NCCD. Justify your decisions regarding category and level of adjustment using the documents on Moodle and the set readings for this topic.

Austin is a Grade 2 student with selective mutism, which falls under the social/emotional type of disability – a disorder, illness or disease that affects the person's thought processes, perceptions of reality, emotions or judgement, or that results in disturbed behaviour (NCCD, 2014). His parents describe him as a talkative and fun-loving child but this is only restricted to home. He prefers to stay mute at school in a different social situation.

As there is no straightforward way of communication with him, it is hard for the teacher to understand his needs. Other barriers include inability or difficulty to collaborate or work in teams with peers, expression of ideas and opinions, assessment of learning. In addition, emotional issues related to low confidence, which is also related to shyness, anxiety affect his learning.

Teaching adjustments could include formulating 'Yes' or 'No' questions during whole-class instruction, written one-on-one communication with teacher, use of non-verbal/visual forms of communication such as pictures and gestures, avoid pressuring him to talk as it might make him anxious. In order to assess reading comprehension capability, the teacher could include or ask multiple choice questions in the end. With respect to emotional well-being, the teacher could build a strong relationship with the child to ensure he feels safe, secure, comfortable and accepted. The level of adjustment required is Supplementary adjustment because personalised adjustments are made to ensure access and participation in schooling on the same basis as

students without disability (NCCD, 2014).

Assessment Task 1a.iii – Describe a lesson that you have taught or observed where students’ social and/or behavioural learning was embedded in academic activities/assessments. Reflect on the strengths and areas for improvement in the design and implementation of this lesson by drawing on the set readings for this topic and considering the recommendations for effective and inclusive practice.

During my last placement, one child always chose not to work on his writing task. Upon close observation over a few days, I discovered that he chose not to engage because he was afraid of misspelling the words. My mentor teacher asked me to sit with him and ensure he completes the task.

I decided to develop a rapport with him. Thus, I knew exactly what he needed to be able to start working – all the distracting objects in his hand or surroundings needed to be put away, he needed to be seated away from children he would most likely talk with. He would frame words or sentences and I spelt the first half for him, I provided prompts (sound of letters) and he wrote the letters, if it is a sight word I reminded him and he tried to recollect. This allowed me to get the best work out of him and build his confidence in the process. I implemented the positive affirmation technique before he started with the task (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2011) by saying, “You did such a great job yesterday. Let’s try to put the same amount of effort today!”

In addition to the above, I should have included some strategies that would ensure he would work independently at the same level. If it continued for a longer period, he would gain enough confidence to work on tasks by himself, thereby, helping him learn and progress (Loreman et al., 2011).

Assessment Task 1a.iv – Describe and reflect on the design, implementation and inclusivity of a group activity that you have implemented in an inclusive classroom. For example, you could consider whether it was sufficiently structured to promote participation and engagement, whether the groups were heterogeneous, and whether sufficient scaffolds and challenges were provided for all students. Reflect on the strengths and areas for improvement in your group activity by drawing on the set readings for this topic, and indicate some changes you might make if you implemented it again.

Activity – Inquiry lesson in a Primary School Grade 2 classroom using the cooperative learning strategy. Students were asked to divide different objects provided into groups based on any criteria of their choice (use, shape, size). Six to seven children were grouped together heterogeneously. Each child could pick one type, making it an inclusive task, wherein, everyone could contribute. They were encouraged to think about their reasoning behind their motives and were challenged to have discussions to decide whether or why a particular object fits into one criteria but not the other.

I feel that because I was not sufficiently trained to implement cooperative learning, my efforts did not contribute to better learning outcomes for ‘every child’ (Gillies & Boyle, 2010). It was successful in a way when students shared ideas, their personal viewpoints and worked at considering other’s ideas. Nevertheless, some children were not able to contribute because the groups were too big (more than 6) and higher-ability children dominated the discussion, giving little chance for everyone to contribute. I should have firstly, allocated fewer children to one group, and secondly, given explicit guidance related to working collaboratively and its situational demands, especially when successful completion of the task relied on positive interdependence (Loreman et al., 2011). I could also have assigned the category for each child in the group.

PART B

Cooperative Learning (CL) in Practice

CL involves students working collaboratively in a group towards a common outcome (Loreman et al., 2011). My discussion centers around its relevant implementation in Australian Primary Schools as it is known to benefit children with varying readiness levels, diverse linguistic backgrounds, special behavioural needs as well as disabilities. However, it is only successful if and when groups and tasks are carefully structured with a purpose in a comprehensive manner (Gillies, 2003). The educator ensures every child is aware about his or her contributive expectations towards the final outcome (Gillies, 2003). In addition, the output cannot be cultivated individually but in co-ordination with peers through promoting and supporting each other’s cognitive and interpersonal efforts to achieve the group’s goals (Loreman et al., 2011).

The feeling of positive interdependence along with accountability resulting from mutual goals leads to committed and active participants (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Simultaneously, guaranteed involvement is only possible with skills training. As students are grouped heterogeneously, there is a high chance of conflict (Baines, Blatchford & Webster, 2015). Therefore, students' social emotional capabilities influenced by their backgrounds affect the outcome (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Teachers are required to demonstrate appropriate behavioural expectations in various contexts that could arise during the group activities (Blatchford, Baines, Davies, Bassett, & Chowne, 2006). Lastly, ongoing assessments are conducted during the activities in the form of observational checklists. These give teachers an idea about their students' developing cognitive, social and communication abilities (Gillies & Boyle, 2009).

Use of CL in Inclusive classrooms

Felder (2018) proposes an ethical model of inclusion based on capability promotion that views inclusion as social participation. CL provides a platform for students with special needs to engage with the subject matter in a naturalistic setting, wherein, they can direct the interaction (Sutherland, 2014). This sense of agency is necessary to build confidence in a social setting and interest for the subject area in a space where teachers' deficit approaches tend to dominate interactions with students, particularly students with additional needs (Lund & Light, 2007). Their intentions are to support learning but it does not encourage student participation in whole class activities.

In a CL environment, all students develop and practice oral language and communication skills through exposure to diverse backgrounds and an opportunity to communicate with others (Sutherland, 2014). As a result, cooperative experiences have been found to promote assimilation on the grounds of openness and understanding, irrespective of initial differences derived from unfamiliarity (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Studies conducted by Webb, Nemer, Chizhik, and Sugrue (1998) years ago provide insight into the positive effects of heterogeneous grouping on

medium-ability (also students with special needs) students. Active engagement in group discussions allowed them to comfortably express opinions in a non-threatening environment, which contributed to their progressing achievement scores (Gillies & Boyle, 2010). Years later, a research project carried out by Blatchford et al. (2006) named SPRinG (social pedagogic research into grouping) proved the importance of pupil-pupil interactions not only for benefitting learning but also as an educational outcome in its own right because every single child was involved in the outcome, hence, cognitive functions were used to engage with the content.

Recommendations for implementation

In my understanding, cooperative learning is inclusion in its truest sense because physical placement alone (in the general classroom) is not sufficient for improving the social status or social competence of students with disabilities (Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). They need to become part of the classroom in more than the physical sense.

Historically as well as in contemporary times, government policy has directed teachers to operate on a 'withdrawal' model of support for students through individual student funding grants, however, negative effects of this move on social development of children is not realised by researchers who suggest these ideas (Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013). I believe the key issue in relation to inclusive classrooms is built on an assumption that inclusion is in fact, exclusion. It is commonly mistaken because of its ability to acknowledge individual needs and that it is difficult to address those needs without viewing the child as a separate entity (Baines et al., 2015). However, over time, the use of learning support assistants to help children on a one-on-one basis with personalised learning plans has proven to hinder student achievement (Florian, Black-Hawkins & Rouse, 2017). Use of education support staff in more flexible ways, for instance, in CL strategies could act as a catalyst to student learning.

The SPRinG strategy recommends educators to set up and structure lessons involving group work, with particular stress on briefing and debriefing and also to interact minimally but strategically with groups (Blatchford et al., 2006). This ensures certain students do not feel overburdened and the whole group is not directionless. In relation,

Felder (2018) and Huber (2011) ask us to consider our 'attitudes' as teachers towards including students with varying abilities as an 'environment' for students in the classroom. As role models, explicit teaching of expected behaviour helps students in the way they interact with and view peers inclusively. Through CL, teachers create an accepting and inclusive atmosphere in which diversity is valued and most importantly, students are aware about their role as individuals (Loreman et al., 2011).

PART C

Topic 1 –

Response 1: It is interesting to see that parents are involved in the decision-making process of their child's learning as well as provision of options by the school. More importantly, they are aware about their rights as parents of a child with disability. This can really help parents ensure the school adheres to legal obligations and the necessary adjustments are made.

Response 2: The thinking corner sounds like such a great idea. I have worked with some children having Autism before and this could have been a great idea to provide a space for them to disconnect and calm down. Having a set routine also helped one of them.

Also, encouraging him to make friends seems like pushing it but I remember one of the children I worked with actually developed a very strong bond with another child without ASD. They would spend the whole day playing together, interacting with each other.

Topic 2 –

Response 1: With respect to teachers' biases towards students, I have observed that some children misbehave or behave differently only in front of certain teachers/people. There are no complaints when the same person is not present. This should be considered when gathering data. Experiences of numerous spectators need to be taken into account before any decision is made.

Response 2: Having low expectations in a way justifies teachers' intentions. My mentor teacher during placement did set lower-level challenges for a child with special needs.

Her reasons were to ensure he remains confident by giving him easily achievable tasks, which is arguably okay I guess (?). In this case, it is hard for us to judge whether it is appropriate for the teacher to do that as this attitude cannot be considered to be negative because it is in the best interest of the child. If he gets overwhelmed by the at-level tasks, he might never want to do them again. However, it is unacceptable that the child is working on Prep level tasks when in Grade 2. I feel like having a positive attitude is important but what is more important is to ensure the child's educational needs are met by means of extra support as you have rightly mentioned.

I would like to add that Hehir's (2016) concept of ableism makes us follow a prescriptive approach to his learning and move away from looking at what is more important for the child. In this controversial case, teacher's low expectations make sense, nevertheless, extra support might help the child academically move forward.

Topic 3 –

Response 1: I can relate to your experience. There is always a reason behind children's misbehaviour. This type of attention-seeking behaviour is misunderstood at first but once we dig in, it makes so much sense and therefore, we are able to support the child so much more. Strategies implemented will be efficient in the sense that they will cater to the students' individual situations as anything else might not work otherwise (without knowing the whole story).

One child in my class was constantly disruptive and kept on targeting my authority in the classroom. The child was seeking attention by challenging my power in the room. As a preservice teacher, I assumed he does not respect me because I am new to the class but later I discovered from my mentor teacher that he comes from a family of seven children and is the youngest, hence, is usually ignored at home. Knowing this explained his behaviour on so many levels.

Topic 4 –

Response 1: I like that you have mentioned that children feel confident to share in a competitive learning environment. One child at my placement never shared during whole-class time but when it came to small group discussions, she would be the one leading discussions, actively engaging and sharing ideas. It was interesting to see her flourish in this setting.

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