Analysis of the Dilemma of Implementing Inclusive Education in One Mainstream School

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Abstract. Based on the case of implementing inclusive education in a mainstream secondary school in the Hong Kong context on English subject, the author discussed the situation, challenges met and provided suggestions to resolve the difficulties. The school neglects SEN students' academic performance whereas stresses solely on the other aspects including social development, affective development and attitude. To address the dilemma, the author provided suggestions for improvement on government level, school level, teacher level home-school level, community level and cooperation and support from the various levels.

1. Introduction

It is a Band 3A school with over 100 SEN students out of 450 students. The school struggles and successfully survives from insufficient intake of school-aged Form 1 students. It is known for its care for SEN students in the district even in the whole territory through diversified workshops and social groups on enhancing SEN students' social skills. Simultaneously, the school focuses on academic performance through conducting elite tutoring to potential students to be promoted to universities.

In the school, each Form has an SEN class, which includes both abled and less abled SEN students. The three SEN classes in Form 1, Form 2 and Form 3 are taught by a novice English teacher with the same curriculum as other classes'. For the new teacher, normally, insufficient support is provided. Most novice teacher will stay for only one year in the school.

Under this circumstance, SEN students, no matter more abled or less abled, overall gave up on academic achievement due to limited expectation, improper instructional methods and a curriculum which is too demanding for them to follow.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies mainly focuses on teacher education and attitude. Studies about influence of school culture and the principles' mentality were rare.

Professor Chris Forlin (2013), Adjunct Professor of the Department of Special Education and Counselling was concerned that a holistic approach is needed to make inclusive education work. The positive impact of the inclusive teaching to teachers is minimised when the teachers return to schools that are unresponsive or resistant to inclusive education, or with leadership that does not support their work. "If the education system and schools are set up in such a way as to make inclusive teaching difficult for teachers, the positive impact of the courses will be reduced," she said.

3. Rationale

Inclusive Education has been interpreted variably. However, the common aspect is that academic performance is a significant part of it.

According to Room214 (A Blog by Concordia University-Portland), inclusive education is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighborhood schools to receive high quality instruction,

interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum (Bui, Quirk, Almazan, & Valenti, 2010; Alquraini & Gut, 2012).
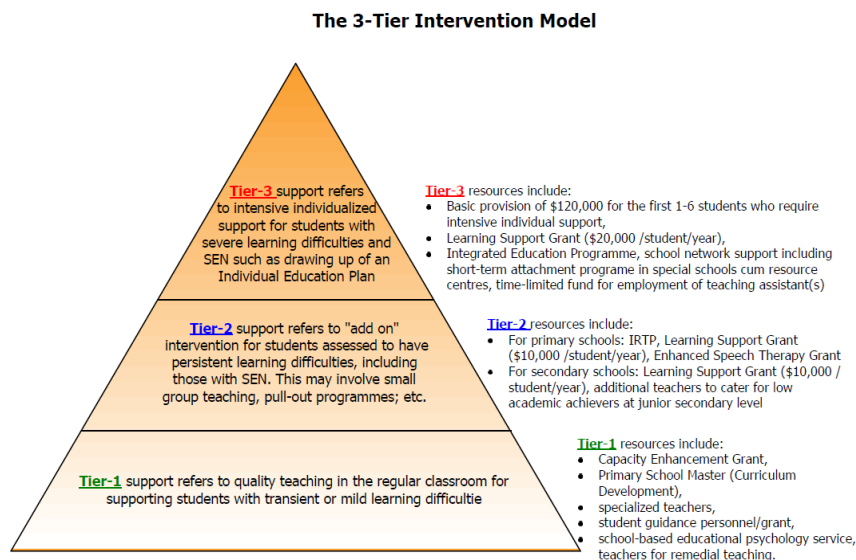
Similarly, from The Inclusive Schools Network (ISN), a web-based educational resource that promotes inclusive educational practices, the author holds that academic supports help each student access the full curriculum.

Therefore, academic achievement one of the major aims of inclusive education, which should never be watered down.

4. Discussion on the problematic situation

The reason lies behind is related to the decision and mentality of school Incorporated Management Committee and the school authority.

Because of the number of SEN students and the government's policies, the school received abundant amount of financial support for SEN students. There are 13 students receive Tier-3 support with the basic provision of $120,000/student/year. Over 30 students receive Tier-2 support with the basic provision of $10,000/student/year. According to the SEN coordinator, the resources suffice. Please refer to the 3-Tier Intervention Model from Education Bureau.

The 3-Tier Intervention Model

Tier-3 support refers to intensive individualized support for students with severe learning difficulties and SEN such as drawing up of an Individual Education Plan

Tier-3 resources include:
- Basic provision of $120,000 for the first 1-6 students who require intensive individual support,
- Learning Support Grant ($20,000 /student/year),
- Integrated Education Programme, school network support including short-term attachment programe in special schools cum resource centres, time-limited fund for employment of teaching assistant(s)

Tier-2 support refers to "add on" intervention for students assessed to have persistent learning difficulties, including those with SEN. This may involve small group teaching, pull-out programmes; etc.

Tier-2 resources include:
- For primary schools: IRTP, Learning Support Grant ($10,000 /student/year), Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant
- For secondary schools: Learning Support Grant ($10,000 / student/year), additional teachers to cater for low academic achievers at junior secondary level

Tier-1 support refers to quality teaching in the regular classroom for supporting students with transient or mild learning difficultie

Tier-1 resources include:
- Capacity Enhancement Grant,
- Primary School Master (Curriculum Development),
- specialized teachers,
- student guidance personnel/grant,
- school-based educational psychology service, teachers for remedial teaching.

http://www.edb.gov.hk/sen_support

Under this circumstance, the IMC and school authority still do not tend to promote the quality education for SEN students. According to Pekeberg (2012), there is little to IE (Inclusive Education) if the aspect of quality is ignored. Without the quality aspect, IE becomes integration in a different suit.

The reason lying behind the reluctance is that there are more urgent issues to handle from their perspective. The urgency goes to adopting the more effective and efficient way to increase the intake to avoid closure and attempt to add one more class in each Form.

4.1 A Caring School to all Students

On the one hand, a positive and caring school ethos is established through the efforts from each staff, which is the known in the district. The school also actively participated in community services. For one thing, both the students and school authorities are actively involved in community work. All the Senior Form students join voluntary activities on school level each semester, including visiting the elderly homes in the district and cleanup activities. For another, the Principle himself played a significant role in building the image of school. He was dedicated to the community services and was received Certificate of Accommodation for promoting community building and youth development. Meanwhile, promotion activities were frequently conducted. The school regularly organized game stalls during Easter, Christmas, Chinese New Year, post-exam period, etc., which attracts the

neighbours and parents of the students. Because of long-standing close relationship between the school authority and committee members of the Parent-Teacher Association, many committee members help to promote the activities as well.

Admittedly, SEN students enjoyed a happy school life in social and behaviourally, however, when it comes to academic performance, the real situation is that only the 'potential' students are well nurtured.

4.2 Boosting Academic Achievement, Start from Non-SEN students

On the other hand, academically, Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) performance each year is also emphasized by the school authority. The passing rate and the number of students promoted to university are the major criteria in the judgment. Therefore, the academic pressures directly goes to the panel chairpersons, who are inclined to improve the results strategically. The strategy can be simply interpreted changing as more as possible. Teachers tend to pay more efforts in two groups of students, who are marginal cases to pass HKDSE and who are weak in English but probably be promoted to universities. The first category can help to increase the passing rate whereas the second category are more important as if these potential students fails to be admitted to universities because of low marks in English, the school tends to think that his English teacher does not do a good job.

SEN students are normally out of the list of potential students because of weak foundation or/and low motivation. Generally more abled SEN students tend to be immersed in their world, free of academic pressure, and are reluctant to learn more. It takes more effort in helping them to pass the public exam.

4.3 Who is going to fix the dilemma?

The dilemma is the benefits and hidden issues of participating inclusive education. The benefits are clear. According Kim Fong Poon-Mc Brayer (2017), a fall in student enrolment could result in decreased government funding and the number of teachers, causing some teachers to become redundant. Taking more special needs students did not only bring in more income per student and keep staff positions but also, in some cases, prevented schools from closure. However, the issues are also significant, that are the widening gap of students' abilities and shrinking teaching efficiency. Therefore, the school resort to helping the potential first and subconsciously ignoring the academic achievements of the SEN students.

The author believes that the root of the problematic situation is the values of inclusive and mainstream values of elite education. Elites are revered by the society other than the weaker group. As long as we cannot change the mainstream values, the issue still exists.

Which party is going to solve the problem? The author believes that the government may take the initiative in monitoring the implementing of incisive education, stressing the enhancement of course development and instruction methods to SEN students. Furthermore, the public should also be better educated to be more tolerate to people of SEN. It will be a long process of transformation, but it is worthwhile to make efforts.

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