

Isolated or Aligned? The Cooperative English Class for Fair Education in Inclusive Teaching Framework

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Abstract

Teaching fairness is very important for inclusive teaching, which requires teachers' creation of a fair classroom atmosphere and helps students construct their own meaning while learning. In the inclusive teaching framework, the present study descriptively explores the cooperative English class for fair education, especially providing impartial learning opportunities the students with anxiety disorders. The findings of the paper are as follows: teachers should realize the significance and importance of fair education and provide every child with the opportunity to return to problems solving and participate in classroom activities, the classroom atmosphere is the essential factor influencing the direction and validity of teaching processes and the implementation of inclusive education, and the teaching pedagogy should also be considered in the inclusive classroom. In general, it is well suited to inclusive teaching and evaluation although critical pedagogy has some drawbacks to use. The present study is expected to provide a reference for the improvement of fair education in classroom-based English teaching.

Keywords: cooperative English class, fair education, inclusive teaching

1. Introduction

1.1 *The Context, Issue, and Its Component Parts*

Teaching fairness is very important for inclusive teaching, which requires teachers' creation of a fair classroom atmosphere and helps students construct their own meaning while learning. Critical pedagogy is an important theoretical framework for teaching fairness, which is a system of pedagogy in which students are cheered to inquiry key or universal notions of meanings and to formulate their own understanding of what is being learned (Giroux, 2020). One of the main ideas of the teaching approach is that students can construct their own meanings while learning, and the teacher needs to simplify the teaching route instead of imposing the meaning on the students. In this way, critical pedagogy can be related to a series of teaching pedagogies in English classes. The theoretical framework emphasizes that inclusive education requires not only that the children attend school, but that they need to use a critical eye to look at the opportunity to attend classes and participate in classroom activities (Kellner, 2009).

In the inclusive teaching framework, the present study descriptively explores the cooperative English class for fair education, especially providing impartial learning opportunities the students with anxiety disorders. The school studied in this paper is a private primary school located in Guangzhou, China. Here a number of students have special mental needs and learning demands, so the school has hired some psychology teachers. Each psychology teacher is assigned to each grade to assist the teacher in class, and there is also a separate psychological tutorial. Due to the recent practice of inclusive education in the school, students with mental learning disabilities and ordinary students are placed in the same class for classroom teaching. In a fifth-grade English class explored here, there is a psychology teacher who will assist the teacher in the class to provide students with daily English learning, psychological aid, and school life assistance. Before the inclusive teaching practice in schools, the learning progress of mentally handicapped students and ordinary students was different.

For this article, the specific class to be assessed is the fifth-grade class, which has several students suffering from anxiety. All of the classes in this school adopt a free teaching mode, and students can discuss freely in class. The students are very active in participating in class activities because they all like this kind of free teaching mode.

After the start of inclusive teaching practice, teachers in class and psychology teachers have also found that students with anxiety disorders and mentally unhealthy students cannot carry out their teaching activities smoothly. Students with anxiety disorders rarely raise their hands to answer questions raised by the teacher in class, and sometimes the teacher asks them questions without saying a word. The adaptability of the class is impaired due to the addition of new students. If the teacher has been using the previous teaching method without inclusive teaching for all students, the students, who do not often answer questions in the class, will gradually be forgotten by the teacher. Thus, affecting the teaching progress of the class and the implementation of inclusive education.

1.2 Research Question and Supporting Questions

The main question that this article wants to discuss is how teachers in the fifth-grade English class provide inclusive education and fair practical learning opportunities for the students with anxiety disorders and all the other students. To achieve the research objective, the follow-up support questions will provide the basis for the investigation, i.e. “What are the factors that affect the active participation of students in class?”, and “How can teachers promote inclusive peer collaboration and interaction to sustain the whole classmates learning?” To answer the two sub-questions, the inclusive teaching theoretical framework has been employed to promote English teachers’ efforts for students’ cooperation and mutual learning in class, and to provide teachers with teaching suggestions and inspiration in the process of its application.

For the present study, we will first examine the underlying theoretical framework of inclusive education for a fifth-grade English class in Guangzhou. Secondly, relevant Legislation and Policy will be illustrated for the support of the teaching practice. And then, a discussion will be made on the inclusive English class on China’s mainland.

2. Examination of Underlying Theoretical Framework

In education, pedagogy is a school of thought or philosophy about how people learn and how teachers should help them learn. And critical pedagogy support students to agree or disagree with the teachers’ teaching modes. Rouse (2009) argues that inclusive education lies in teachers’ knowledge (about theory, policy, and law), behaviors (transforming knowledge from action), and beliefs (to support the ability of all children). The classroom atmosphere is an important factor affecting the development of teaching activities in inclusive classes (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Students in a whole class need to use the critical thinking tool to look at the atmosphere teacher create for the class. The foundation of an inclusive education approach is that teachers must be aware that the choices and actions they make in the learning organization convey messages and values that go far beyond the formal focus of the curriculum (Alexander, 2001), students can give some advice to teachers sometimes. Inclusive pedagogy holds the headteacher accountable to all beginners, excluding those who are suffering difficulties (Florian & Spratt, 2013). The principle of inclusive teaching should encourage cooperation and interaction between different students, encourage students to actively participate in-class activities, and create a relaxed and harmonious classroom atmosphere (Trent, Artiles, & Ernst, 1998). For the fifth-grade English class, I have got a lot of inspiration from the principles and theories of inclusive teaching through the framework.

Firstly, in an inclusive classroom, English teachers in fifth-grade class should pay attention to the students’ motivation (including students with anxiety disorders) in their English learning, highlight the students’ learning emphasis, and focus on the guidance of students’ learning methods and cultivating abilities, so that all students can develop in each class (Lotulung et al., 2018).

Secondly, English teachers should cultivate a relaxed and harmonious classroom atmosphere (Flutter, 2006). In the students’ learning process, the psychological state should be completely relaxed, thereby generating active learning and a desire to participate. If the students in the class have special psychological learning needs, teachers should pay more attention to cultivating students’ learning initiative and enthusiasm. For example, some English games can be added, or students can be evenly distributed in groups to discuss English animation plots. What’s more, English teachers in this class should add more self-introduction and role-play sections to let students know each other and help everyone understand each other. This can improve the familiarity and adaptability of the class, which is conducive to the smooth progress of teaching activities, and it can also promote class harmony and enhance classroom activity.

Thirdly, English teachers should also abide by the principle of full feeling when teaching in the classroom. The design of classroom teaching can enable students of different levels to get participation, performance, and improvement opportunities. The design of teaching activities should be hierarchical, and the activities should be targeted. Last but not least, English teachers should realize that human development needs motivation, and the

same is true for elementary school students. Inspiration makes people happy and makes people's desire for development stronger (Tokan & Imakulata, 2019). Classroom teaching should give students more opportunities to show themselves, while teachers should be good at discovering students' development and changes. On this basis, there should be more English teachers than psychology ones in the class. It is always easier to understand the real psychological requirements of the students in the class.

3. Legislation and Policy Relating to the Issue

In order to examine the rationality and relevance of the questions raised, it is essential to study relevant legislation and policy standards. This article has studied the "People with Disabilities Education Ordinance", which was issued in February 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2017). This regulation is China's first special regulation on education for persons with disabilities. Due to the educational framework and teaching adjustments, the regulation guarantees the equal rights of persons with disabilities to accept education and promotes educational development for the people with disabilities (Wang, 2019). Child education represents an international commitment to confirm that every child and adult can receive high-quality basic pedagogy (Miles & Singal, 2010). This means that school teachers should involve all students in classroom activities when developing inclusive teaching. This commitment is based on the perspective of human rights, and it is also based on the universal belief that education is essential to personal well-being and national development (Doney & Wroe, 2006). Allan (2007) also points out that we need to realize that sharing education is the basic right of all children if we want to come true inclusive education. Anxiety disorder is one of the most common mental disorders in children and adolescents (Walter et al., 2020). For students with anxiety disorders in the class, the teacher should make the classroom atmosphere relaxed and not put too much pressure on the students (Gibson, 2015). Thus, adjusting the classroom atmosphere so that the whole class, including those with anxiety symptoms, can carry out classroom activities in a relaxed and pleasant environment, and reduce students' tension. It is not only conducive to the cooperation and mutual learning among classmates but also to the opportunities provided for all students to participate in the classroom.

But the regulations of this research only explain in detail how students with disabilities in Chinese classrooms conduct classroom activities, but do not expound on how students with mental illnesses deal with classroom activities. This shows that these policies do not fully comply with all relevant actual conditions. Meanwhile, more English activities can be carried out for the students who are interested in English and to increase the interest of those students with anxiety disorders in English classrooms. However, there are no relevant viewpoints to prove this idea in the "English Curriculum Standards" of China, (Zhao, 2012). But if teachers have the opportunity to provide students with opportunities in outdoor classrooms, letting students embrace nature is a good teaching method (Wang, 2003). In this way, students can be surrounded by the beautiful natural scenery to alleviate the tension in their studies and in the meantime enable united classmates and love each other and improve the quality of mutual help so that the whole class has more cohesion. In short, such activities of different relaxation forms can not only improve students' abilities in many aspects but also relieve their anxiety and even gradually overcome it.

4. Discussion for the Inclusive English Class

Firstly, teaching fairness is very important for inclusive teaching. For teachers, the significance of building an inclusive education classroom is for all students. In a class with students with anxiety disorders, teachers should be aware that tension and fear will affect learning energy and concentration, the energy used for thinking and memory is relatively reduced, and the effect of language storage and output is reduced (Arnold, 1999). This is extremely detrimental to the teaching of English classrooms. Through the understanding of the concept of critical pedagogy, it can be found that children with anxiety disorders have been proving to the teacher that they are equal to other children in the classroom. Teachers can use critical eyes to re-examine all students in the entire class. And teachers should always remember that inclusiveness is not something done for specific groups of children and young people. Slee (2011) points out that it is something that a teacher must do: From a critical point of view, inclusive education allows people to think about the nature of life, a world that people like, and where people are shaping their image in the world.

Secondly, from the critical pedagogy framework, in classes with anxiety disorders students, the smooth progress of inclusive education comes from the classroom atmosphere created by teachers and students. In the fifth-grade English class, teachers can group the whole class equally so that students with anxiety disorders feel that they have not been ignored by their classmates and teachers, which can promote cooperative learning in inclusive classrooms and create a harmonious classroom atmosphere for a relaxed and pleasant experience. In this way, inclusive teaching practice can be promoted. Once the teacher does not have a good grasp of the classroom

atmosphere, the phenomenon of anxiety about English learning exists in both the students with anxiety disorders and those mentally healthy ones. Those students are likely to have fear of English learning because it is not a normal inclusive classroom. Anxiety in language learning mainly refers to the fear or anxiety of learners when they need to express themselves in a foreign language or a second language (Oxford, 1999). Studies have shown that if foreign language learning repeatedly brings anxiety to learners, anxiety may become a quality or psychological quality (Oxford, 1999). Therefore, English teachers in fifth grade should pay attention to the psychological and behavioral changes of the whole class. Students' significant self-perception, belief, and emotional complex produced in the course of language learning are related to classroom activities (Horwitz et al., 1986). The classroom is a place for foreign language learning participants (teachers and students) to conduct activities, and it is also a social environment for their interpersonal communication. As one of the sub-questions mentioned earlier, the atmosphere of the class is the main factor that affects students' participation in-class activities. The classroom atmosphere is also called the classroom psychological atmosphere. It mainly refers to the comprehensive performance of certain dominant attitudes and emotions in the classroom. It is a conceptual form and a teaching situation that gives people a real feeling (Pi, 2000). Dörnyei and Malderez (1997) believe that the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students is the basic element that determines whether the best learning atmosphere can be formed. A harmonious classroom atmosphere is an important psychological environment for students to express their creativity and freedom. A good classroom atmosphere can create a sense of depression and insecurity for students.

Thirdly, it is also important for teachers to encourage students to establish their own meanings in the classroom based on their suggestions and opinions. In the older form of education, students would usually read a literary work, and then the teacher would tell them the meaning of an English story or poem and expect them to absorb and recall the accurate explanation of the work, and then echo the answer on a quiz to reveal the knowledge (Kincheloe, 2008). A critical education, motivated by the longing to prove that there is no single right interpretation of English literature, students are encouraged to form their own senses based on their own experience and opinions, and this personal way of reading tends to forge a stronger bond between readers and literature (Kincheloe, 2008). The student must demonstrate that he or she can use the words from the story or poem to sustain his or her review of the works, rather than to demonstrate his or her knowledge of the correct answer. In this way, the student demonstrates the ability to read the works critically as evidence of learning and understanding. It is a good use of critical pedagogy in inclusive English teaching.

5. Recommendations for the Context

For the fifth-grade English class in elementary school, several suggestions should be made for the implementation of inclusive teaching. Above all, when teachers realize that there are students with anxiety disorders in the class, they should help students build up their confidence in learning English, and help students enhance the happiness of "belonging to the class". Some reward links can be set in the design of classroom activities to promote students to integrate into teaching activities. Secondly, a single traditional evaluation method will consume students' motivation and sense of accomplishment. In elementary school English classrooms, teachers should not take the traditional final exam results too seriously, and should also include the performance in the usual classroom in the assessment focus, which is conducive to promoting classroom participation of class students.

Since it is the first time that inclusive teaching has been promoted and practiced in a school, it may not be perfect in many aspects. However, the analysis of the shortcomings after practice can improve teaching methods and make inclusive education better.

6. Conclusion

All in all, to achieve the research objective that teachers' application of inclusive English teaching and fair practical learning opportunities for the students with anxiety disorders and all the other students in the fifth-grade English class, the literature on inclusive education has been reviewed and the analysis of the phenomenon in the fifth-grade English class has been made. Several conclusions can be drawn as follows. First of all, teachers should realize the significance and importance of fair education. The teacher should provide every child with an equal opportunity to solve English learning problems and participate in classroom activities. Secondly, a good classroom atmosphere is an essential factor to influence the direction and validity of teaching processes and the implementation of inclusive education. Thirdly, the teaching pedagogy also should be considered in inclusive classrooms. Although critical pedagogy has some drawbacks to use, it is generally well suited to inclusive teaching and evaluation.

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