What is inclusive teaching? - Introduction

" *Special needs education incorporates proven methods of teaching from which all children can benefit."*
Salamanca Statement, 1994

The quotation at the head of this page is from the Salamanca Statement (link), published in June 1994 following a conference attended by representatives of 92 countries and 25 international organisations. It came out strongly in favour of mainstream education for all children, but unfortunately omitted to spell out what the 'proven methods' it referred to were.

The consultative document "Schools for the 21st Century" (link) published by the Commission of the European Communities in July 2007 goes into more detail. It has much to say about equity and opportunity for all in the context of schooling. In respect of learning and teaching, one papagraph in section 2.5 (page 8) reads:

"The types of classroom practice that support inclusion of pupils with 'special' needs include: co-operative teaching, co-operative learning, collaborative problem solving, heterogenous grouping and systematic monitoring, assessment, planning and evaluation of each pupil's work. Such approaches are likely to benefit all pupils, including children who are gifted and talented."

Baldly stated this seems a bit overwhelming, and some authorities will disagree with items in the list, or want to add more, but the last point is the important one: that teaching 'inclusively' does not mean concentrating on teaching 'the bottom set' to the detriment of other pupils in the class; it means adopting approaches which can accommodate a broad spectrum of abilities.

This section of the website looks at some approaches that have the potential to be inclusive, and at how they can be managed in the context of foreign language learning.

Reactive v. proactive approaches

In the Why aren't they learning and the Additional Support Needs sections of this website, the focus was on barriers to learning and on the need for teachers to respond effectively to individual learning needs. The associated workshops advised avoiding, where possible, responses which could be thought of as 'special', or work intensive; such as re-writing lessons for some members of a class, or arranging for them to be taught separately – and differently. Nevertheless, the strategies adopted are developed in response to the identified needs of a learner or group pf learners who had been struggling and at risk of failing. The same is true of approaches which are adopted in reponse to learners who manifestly require additional support.

This section of the website represents and attempt to help teachers move into proactive mode; to anticipate where problems might arise and to plan teaching in ways that reduce as far as possible the need to take special measure for 'special'

learners – how can we plan teaching and organise language learning so that more learners can be successful?

Of course, some of the answers to that question will have been suggested in the course of responding to individual needs. Time and again teachers report that measures they have devised to help a particular learner or small group of learners end up being used by the whole class, or even by the whole department, or by the whole school. Where successful approaches are incorporated into normal practice, they become inclusive.

This is not to say that a responsive approach will no longer be needed if the teacher adopts more proactive approaches. No matter how well teachers understand the concept of barriers to learning, there will always be unanticipated hurdles to learners to tackle. The ideal: to plan inclusive approaches, while remaining alert for difficulties and ready to respond to further needs as they arise.

Managing inclusive learning

Just as no two learners have exactly the same learning needs, so no two classes respond in exactly the same way to what appears to the teacher to be similar input. And no two teachers teach exactly the same way. So there is no guarantee that any of the approaches advocated in the pages of this section of the website will work in every case. The aim has been to suggest a range of ideas from which teachers can draw those which appear to them to have merit and to have a chance of working with the classes they teach.

The range is not exhaustive, teachers will know of, and may already be using, many more approaches which fit the 'inclusive' description – the techniques advocated within the assessment for learning programme, for example – but there are whole websites dedicated to major programmes.

In these pages, we are attempting to suggest small things that can make a big difference. We hope to encourage teachers who don't want to risk 'throwing out the baby with the bath water' to retain what they know works well and to introduce new ideas one at a time. If it works, fine; do more of it. If it doesn't work, discard it and try something else.

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