

COOPERATIVE LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN INCLUSIVE
CLASSROOM IN CHINA

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COOPERATIVE LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN
INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM IN CHINA

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Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Wonim Son

This paper describes the development of special education and inclusive education in China. China was a country which placed great emphasis on education, but special education did not receive sufficient attention until 1978. Beginning in 1978 Chinese authorities began to regard special education as a long-term top priority. From that point forward, every student with disabilities could receive compulsory education as a regular student through special education and inclusive education. This paper also describes the application of cooperative learning strategy in inclusive classrooms to improve the quality of teaching in special education and inclusive education in China. Students with special needs in China could get a lot of benefit from the application of cooperative learning strategy in special education and inclusive education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that China has the largest population of any country in the world. Similarly, there are a great number of people with disabilities in China. Since the late seventies of the last century, as China began to adopt the reform and opening policy, the Chinese economy had been developing at an amazing speed. Since that time, the Chinese government put much more attention to the education for the individuals with disabilities. In the middle of the eighties of the last century, an increasing number of special education schools had been emerging and students with special needs had opportunities to enter into regular schools to receive the equal education with regular students (Deng & Harris, 2008). Chinese educators promote education quality for exceptional students who receive compulsory education in general classrooms (McLoughlin, Zhou, Clark, 2005).

The paper will analyze the development of special education and inclusive education in China. What's more, it will focus on using cooperative learning strategy in an inclusive classroom for students with special needs in china; especially, exceptional students in primary and secondary schools. Cooperative learning is a useful learning strategy which is widely applied in inclusive classrooms to help exceptional students in learning in China (Ding et al., 2008).

Statement of the problem

The research questions are as follows: "How does special education and inclusive education develop in China?" "To what extent is cooperative learning useful in promoting learning quality for students with special needs in inclusive classrooms in China?" "Does cooperative learning in inclusive classrooms promote learning quality for students with disabilities in the Chinese context?" "If so, what are the differences between application of

cooperative learning and non-application of cooperative learning in inclusive classrooms for special needs students?”

Definition of Terms

Special education: Special education is offering the same learning opportunities for students with special needs as other students in an appropriate learning environment and helping students with disabilities to achieve academic and social success. Finkel Ed (2011) pointed out special education plays a significant role in the regular classroom, which not only provides a learning place, but also gives the help and support to students with disabilities.

Inclusive education: Inclusive education is educating students with disabilities in a regular environment with non-disabled students (McCabe, 2003) Mastropieri and Scruggs (2010) suggested that students with special needs have right to receive education as the same as regular students in the same classroom.

Cooperative learning: Students study in the small group for the same learning objective. Johnson and Johnson (1994) came up with five factors to promote cooperative learning, which are *positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills,* and *processing*.

Method of Approach

The review of literature was conducted over a period of 90 days using the Karrmann Library of the University of Wisconsin Platteville and the Library of South Central University for Nationalities. The primary search was conducted through EBSCOHOST with Eric, Google Scholar and National Knowledge Infrastructure.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of literature focuses on the development of Chinese special education and inclusive education; in the late of ninety century, foreign pastors established the first special educational school in China. For special needs students gaining better education, Chinese teachers adapted cooperative learning in special education and inclusive education. This review of literature also focuses on the application of cooperative learning in special education and inclusive education. At last, the review of the literature will analyze the influences of the cooperative learning strategy on students with special needs.

The development of special education in China

Along with the development of Chinese society, the special education also in China receives more and more attention from the government and the public; especially, during the recent thirty years, the development of special education in our country has been advanced by leaps and bounds. Meanwhile, the development of special education also continues to face with all kinds of difficulties and challenges (Zhao & Meng, 2008).

It is believed that Chinese traditional educational ideas are quite different from the west educational ideas. For thousands of years, Confucian ideas have affected Chinese educators and Chinese education profoundly (Mcloughlin, et al., 2005). In China, traditional Confucian education encourages students to pursue the fame and status (Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007). In the nineties, the west educational ideas have begun to influence on Chinese education. An English pastor established the first special school for Chinese blind students (Ding et al., 2008).

Compared with Chinese traditional ideas, the west education gives love and attention to every

student who can get equal right to study and live, so the west educators are concerned about the regular students as well as students with special needs (Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007).

Yongxin, Piao is the first vice-chairman in China's special education seminar who specializes in studying on special education, particularly for students who are deaf and students with mental disabilities. Piao (2008) thought that in China, the development of special education can be divided roughly into three periods. The first period is before 1949; in that time, students with special needs could only receive the education from charity organizations. The Chinese government doesn't offer special education for students with special needs. The second period is from the founding of the PRC (The People's Republic of China) to 1978, the Chinese educator has begun to realize the necessity of the development of special education, so that in 1951, the Chinese government announced that the Chinese education development includes special education. However, special education had been developing slowly, because of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) which is a disaster for ten years. During the Cultural Revolution, "Chinese education and Chinese special education had been badly damaged" (Zhao & Meng, 2008, P. 35). McLoughlin, Zhou and Clark (2005) also pointed out that it cannot be denied that the Chinese government didn't pay enough attention to education causing a large number of Chinese students to lose study opportunities during the Cultural Revolution. "Special education, like much of the educational system, was shut down during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976.)" (McCabe, 2003, P. 16)

As for Chinese people, 1978 is a very important year because Chinese policy makers carried out the reform and opening up policy. Before 1978, due to the 8 years of civil war, the War of Resistance against Japan and the Cultural Revolution, China didn't establish its own

special education system; in addition to that, the overall quality of Chinese education and special education dropped behind the west (Ding et al., 2008).

The development of special education in the third period is after the reform and opening up policy (Piao, 2008). Ellsworth and Zhang (2007) proposed that it is clear that Chinese special education had been advancing rapidly, which let an increasing number of students with special needs obtain the chance to study. More importantly, students with special needs also could get nine years of compulsory education and the Chinese government promulgated the relevant laws to protect the study rights of special needs students. In order to reflect the great change of Chinese special education from 1978 to 2008, Piao (2008) listed the following table about Hang Zhou Deaf School, which includes preschool education, compulsory education (primary school and middle school) and high school.

Table on Hangzhou Deaf School for 30 years

Time Title	1978	2008
School Occupies (m ²)	4251	66769
School Construction Area (m ²)	2358	34074
Campus Greening Area (m ²)	103	23396
Sports Venus Area (m ²)	740	24114
Number of the Faculty	36	85
Highest Level of Education	Technical School Student	Postgraduate Student
Teacher' Highest Honor	District Level	National 1 st Level
Scale of School (class)	16	32
Length of Schooling	8 years	12 years

Cumulative Number of College Students	0	123
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Zhao and Meng, (2008) believed that after reform and opening up policy, the development of Chinese special education is one of modern civilization's examples of progress performance, after the government began to support the development of special education in all aspects. First and foremost, the government increased the input in building up new special schools in order to improve the learning environment for students with special needs; in the next place, more and more normal schools began to train teachers how to teach students with special needs; finally, the government established the law of special education.

The development of inclusive education in China

Since 1978, Chinese educators didn't only put great efforts toward prompting the development of special education, they also began to focus on inclusive education (McCabe, 2003). When increasing numbers of Chinese educators learned about foreign educational conditions, they found that inclusive education had been a hot issue around the world (Deng et al., 2001). During this time, Chinese educators, in order to encourage inclusive education, adapted a new educational model called "Sui ban jiu du" in China, which means the students with disabilities can study in regular classrooms (Yuan, 2002). "Recent efforts toward inclusive service delivery have promoted integration (yi ti hua jiao yu) or inclusion (quan na xing jiao yu) as an appropriate educational model for students with disabilities in general education classrooms (sui ban jiu du)" (McCabe, 2003, p. 16). When Chinese educators adapt the "Sui ban jin du," enrolment rate for children with disabilities of school age has risen dramatically, which illustrates that the public accepts the pattern of "Sui ban jiu du" (Zhao & Meng, 2008).

Lei and Deng (2007) also expressed that it is obvious that the west education had paid

attention to inclusive education and considered it as a goal of education. Since the nineties, an increasing number of Chinese educational experts have focused on this issue. Chinese experts apply the theory of inclusive education into practice, designing the “Learning in a Regular Classroom” (LRC) model, which means students with special needs could study in the regular classroom with other students. In 1989, the Chinese education department began to develop LRC model in some provinces, and then expanded the movement across the country (Yuan, 2002). In China, “the LRC is the main strategy to promote compulsory education for youngsters with disabilities” (Deng Harris, 2008, p.195). In 1998, the Chinese education department emphasized again the importance of inclusive education in China. In China, LRC model supplied many more learning opportunities for students with disabilities, especially, the students with disabilities in rural areas (Piao, 2008). In this day and age, it is a standard practice for students with disabilities to attend regular classes with other students (Lei & Deng, 2007).

The rapid development of inclusive education in China has also brought out many serious problems. As follows, compared with the coastal regions, the development of inclusive education in the inland regions is relatively slow (Yang & Wang, 1994) Furthermore, there is no denying that some teachers cannot comprehend correctly the concept of inclusive education, particularly primary school teachers, which leads to a substantial decline in the quality of inclusive education (Yuan, 2002).

Inclusive education still remains in the early stages, so it is necessary to Chinese educators and teachers to learn more from experience from developed countries (Yan & Fan, 2008).

Application of Cooperative Learning in Inclusive Classrooms in China

Cooperative learning is a mainstreaming strategy in recent educational research. Johnson

and Johnson (1994) came up with five factors to promote cooperative learning, which are “positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills, and processing.”

In the current situation in China, adapting cooperative learning in special education is an effective way to enhance the quality of teaching. Having a big population of students with special needs is common in China, but, the educational resources are limited. Thus, in each special education classroom of a large number of students, Chinese teachers cannot provide a high quality of teaching in the classroom, because they cannot take care of every student in the class (Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007).

To solve this above problem, Chinese teachers apply cooperative learning in special education. Cooperative learning divides students into different groups, which makes every student in the class take part in studying. After a period of observation, the teachers will discover that there are two key points to apply in cooperative learning in special education. They are as follows: firstly, the students are disabled, so some of their abilities are limited. The teachers should give students with special needs clear instruction, before the lesson. Secondly, if some students are not willing to join in the cooperative learning, the teachers should design a reward system such as stickers and small gifts to encourage students (Chen, 2003).

Hang and Leng (2006) mentioned that under normal circumstances, the application of cooperative learning in inclusive classrooms can be divided into three parts. The first part is before class, teachers usually understand students’ learning situation, and then design the goal of learning based on students’ cognitive level. The second part is establishing different groups and keeping each group with four to five students. The teacher will assign different role to different students in each group. What calls for special attention is that in each group, with the regular

students helping, the special needs student participates in group activities. The third part is during the class, changing the teacher-centered into student-centered.

Influence of Cooperative Learning on Students with Special Needs

Yuan (2002) argued that the aim of inclusive education is creating learning opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities. In inclusive education, the key concept is “cooperation.” The application of cooperative learning in inclusive education is both beneficial for students with special needs and regular students. As for students with special needs, only in this way could they adapt themselves to society quickly after they leave school; for regular students, only in this way could they study how to be respectful and concerned about students with special needs (Shi, 2007).

Hang and Leng (2006) mentioned that when a growing number of students with special needs become a member of “learning in regular classrooms,” Chinese teachers found that traditional teaching methods are not appropriate for inclusive education, so that Chinese teachers bring cooperative learning strategy into Chinese classrooms. So far, in the Chinese classroom, many teachers still adopt a “force-feed type” teaching methods, not encouraging students to study cooperatively. Students with or without disabilities should not be treated as passive learners of predigested ideas, which are not good for students’ all-round development. So Chinese teachers should realize that it is necessary to offer students a free learning atmosphere in the classroom, and cultivate students’ ability of cooperative learning (Shen, 2007).

Jiang and Tan (2007) did the experiment on application of cooperative learning in primary schools, which proved that cooperative learning is an effective learning method to improve the students' interest in studying and the effect of teaching. Cooperative learning can enhance the student's confidence and sense of responsibility. Because students with or without

disabilities both have their duty in cooperative learning (Shi, 2007) one of educational reform's goals is the application of cooperative learning in inclusive education in China. As education schools and classes put a great effort on applying cooperative learning into practice, cultivating students' awareness of cooperation is important (Qin & Pang, 2006).

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, though special education has only a short history in China, its development is still satisfactory, especially its results in inclusive education are beyond our expectations. Nowadays, more and more students with disability get benefits from special education. Society is more concerned about these students with special needs. It is friendly believed that the special education has made significant contribution to the students with special needs and helps them live a better life.

For further development of the special education, the Chinese government and Chinese educators still have a long way to go. Here are some suggestions that may help. Firstly, the Chinese government should invest more money in the whole special education system, so that more special needs students can benefit from it. Secondly, the government should provide funding to train more teachers and make sure they are competent for teaching students with special needs (Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007). Thirdly, the government should advocate for Chinese society to pay more attention to the students with special needs and help them as much as possible. Fourthly, Chinese government and educator should work together to decrease the gap of special education and inclusive education between developed areas and less developed areas (Zhao & Meng, 2008). Fifthly, Chinese government and educators should encourage for special education teachers apply cooperative learning in special education and inclusive education (Lei

& Deng, 2007). Last but not the least, Chinese educators should learn from the experiences of the developed countries in special education, so that Chinese special education and inclusive education can catch up with them sooner (Yan & Fan, 2008).

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