

2 Small Class Teaching

Reference for teachers



To promote the teaching quality and nurture the new generation to adapt to the ever developing society, many advanced countries and regions have been implementing small class teaching since the nineties. Recently, our neighbouring regions in Asia are also taking positive actions to decrease the number of students in a class so as to improve the teaching condition and elevate the quality of education.

The government of the special administrative region, Macau, has been propagating creative teaching since 2003, emphasizing the cultivation of the students' capacity of creative thinking while encouraging more close interaction and communication between the teachers and the students. Therefore we have to take further actions to execution "small class teaching" and gradually lessen the number of students in a class to improve the quality of education, to realize the objective of creative teaching and to nourish an outstanding new generation.

Considering the difficulties, problems and doubts that the teachers may meet during the "small class teaching" practice, the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau had compiled some information offering to the teachers for reference.

What is "small class teaching" ?

- "small class teaching" ostensibly may mean decreasing the number of students in a class but the final objective is to improve the pedagogic quality.
- "small class teaching" lays emphasis on the experience acquired during the procedure of learning and learn the practical knowledge of our daily life.
- "small class teaching" is student-centred, stressing the importance of the interaction between the teacher and the students so as to enable them to profit each other.
- According to the research of Smith & Glass (1979) it is found that small class teaching offers a more advantageous environment for the students to learn. The teacher is able to blend harmoniously the most suitable teaching methods and the students may exert a better learning attitude arousing a greater interest for acquiring knowledge.
- A small number of students excites a better learning efficiency.
- A deeper affection between the teacher and the student instigates a closer interaction offering a better classroom discipline and more positive attitude of learning.

Should it be a big class or a small class?

The research of Blatchford & Martin (1998) from the Education Research Laboratory of London University of England points out that small classes are more beneficial than big classes by the following five aspects:

	Small Class Teaching	Big Class Teaching
Group division	Short grouping time, higher learning efficiency	Long grouping time, lower learning efficiency
Teacher's morale	Teacher possesses high morale with better teaching attitude and job satisfaction	Teacher under heavy pressure feels tired easily
Class interaction	High interaction quality	Low interaction quality
Concentration	Students exert full concentration, learn attentively, with frequent participation	Students quite distracted with less participation
Adaptation	Quick adaptation to school life	Take longer time to adapt to school life

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What is the objective of "small class teaching"?

The main objectives for "small class teaching" are:

- lessen the workload of the teachers, profitable for professional manifestation;
- respect the differences of the students offering relevant methods of teaching;
- improve the interactive relationship between the teacher and students.

What is the duty of the "small class teaching executive team"?

The establishment of the "small class teaching executive team" is for the purpose of the smooth execution of the plan of "transforming a big class into small classes". Normally, this team is convened by the principal of the school, with members including the class adviser, the coordinators of the different panels, the teachers, the specialists, the scholars, the parents and the representative of the personages of the society.

The duties of the "small class teaching executive team" include:

- mapping out the orientation of the development of the "small class teaching";
- holding meetings with the parents to introduce the content and meaning of the "small class teaching" so as to obtain their consensus;
- supervising the execution of the "small class teaching";
- reviewing the efficiency of the "small class teaching".

How should the school coordinate?

- to create a positive campus culture and learning environment;
- to take active measures to offer supporting services and pedagogic resources to the teachers;
- to help to elevate the teachers' professional knowledge and technique to improve the teaching method and grading procedure;
- to make continuous assessment and adjustment during the process of the implementation.

How should the teachers coordinate?

Attitude:

- be magnanimous and broad-minded to accept new concepts;
- be active to investigate professional knowledge of education and to acquire technical abilities;
- be child-centred and guide the students to learn efficiently and happily;
- respect the differences of the students and stimulate the potential of theirs;
- possessing the life-long learning spirit.

Capability:

- know how to assess the learning progression of the students;
- be familiar with the various learning resources;
- be familiar with the knowledge of guiding and technique of organizing;
- possessing the ability of curriculum designing;
- be able to exert the appropriate teaching methodology;
- know how to improve the interactive relationship between the teacher and the students.

How should the parents coordinate?

- be magnanimous, democratic and acceptant;
- participate activities promoting parent and child attachment;
- offer to your children a warm, loving and happy family life;
- participate the whole process of learning and growth of your children;
- give equal importance to both verbal teaching and personal example teaching;
- offer active assistance to the teachers and be fully cooperative.

How should a "small class teaching" teacher improve the teaching efficiency?

Curriculum

- follow the topics of the curriculum while blending in the practical problems of the students' daily life during the teaching process;
- pay great attention to the attached items therein and teach whole-heartedly according to the practical needs of the students;
- give heed to the connected targets, structure and logic when designing the general objectives of the curriculum.

Teaching materials

- see into the basic capability of the students and arrange flexible materials not limiting only to the present text books;
- select appropriate teaching materials according to the different needs of the students;
- design practical, multidimensional and active lessons considering the differences of the individual students allowing suitable and flexible performance according to the various situations.

Learning environment

- construct a child-centred learning environment;
- decorate the classroom with items following the stream of the topics to be imparted;
- establish a learning corner, offering rich and various learning resources;
- establish learning corners, learning centres, specialty rooms, etc. at the corridors or in the unused classrooms.

Teaching method

At present, the teaching methods generally adopted by the schools are either conventional or experimental type. However, in "small class teaching", the teacher may take up more other methods of teaching. The following are four often practised methods. They are:

- creative thinking teaching
- individualized impartation
- group teaching
- project teaching

What is "creative thinking teaching"?

"creative thinking teaching" is a teaching strategy, allowing the students to exert their capability of critical thinking, being aided by the set curriculum to nourish the students' perception, readiness, flexibility, creativity and initiative.

The often practised creative thinking teaching strategies are:

- break the ice or warm up
- encouragement and praises
- seven Ws of reviewing methods (who, what, why, when, where, which, how)
- discussion
- brain storm



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What is "individualized impartation"?

"individualized impartation" does not mean that the teacher has to teach each single student one by one. It means at imparting any knowledge, the teacher has to see into the difference of the students and adjust the curriculum, the materials, the method of teaching and assessment to meet the individual needs and ability.

What is "group teaching"?

There are four commonly practised methods:

- pedagogic group
In the group, the teacher may ask the students questions and the students may question their teacher also to accomplish the objective of interaction
- research group
Following the objective of the lesson, set a theme for research so that, while working out the assignment, the students discover new facts and seek the truth of the matter
- discussion group
At the discussion, the teacher brings up questions for the students to discuss
- operation group
For the different requirements of the lesson, arrange the students into different groups, distributing to them different items of assignment. Each group will perform its job and cooperate so as to accomplish the set goal

What is "project teaching"?

"Project teaching" emphasizes student-orientation. It stresses the students' initiative to learn, laying great importance to the students' inherent motivation without neglecting the guiding role of the teacher.

Project means a profound research into a theme or an argument stressing the interaction of teaching and learning, enabling both the teacher and the students to learn from each other.

The strategy of "project teaching" includes:

- great stress is laid on the interaction of teaching and learning during the small group activities or general discussion. The students are free to pick up partners to enhance inherent motivation and responsibility.
- treating the classroom as a community to help the students to learn social value.
- decorating the classroom into a learning environment.
- making the best use of the various resources, e.g. people, place, articles, incidents and their procedure.

What are the appropriate methods of assessment for "small class teaching"?

According to the features of the "small class teaching", it is not wise to make academic assessment through the traditional written tests but by multidimensional methods including items of objectives, content, methods, situations, frequency, participants, answers, etc.

Some schools consider that "performance assessment" and "learning archives assessment" should be adopted to grade the students from the "small class teaching" group.

Performance Assessment

"Performance Assessment" means to employ various means to grade the different capacities and skills showing the students' application of the knowledge acquired and not just the students' display of the learned materials (Long & Stansbury, 1994).

"Performance Assessment" enables the teacher to give a direct evaluation of the students' performance, understanding his/her ability for certain learning activities, to compensate the capability of reasoning and working skills, the merit of which the traditional assessment fails to detect.

Gronlund (1998) classified the "performance assessment" into two categories:

Restricted performance assessment

Holding great structural tendency but within a certain restriction, for example:

- A report on a scientific journey
- A one-minute speech about a given topic
- Read aloud a selected poem
- Draw a chart according to the given information
- Demonstrate how to arrange some apparatus for an experiment

Since the range is restricted it is easier to assess the performance following the requirement of the objective.

Extended performance assessment

Holding less structural requirement but embraces a wide range giving the information of a student's ability, for example:

- Design and perform an experiment on a given topic
- Write a fictional story and give an appraisal and then re-write the corrected script
- Read a novel and write a comment on it
- Design and make a bookstand, then write an estimation reporting whether it does meet the set requirement

Learning Archives Assessment

"Learning archives assessment" is a multiangular and multidimensional method of assessment. It is the student's learning record, reflecting the student's learning process and result.

Implementation process:

- Ask the students to bring along their learning archives every time when they go for lessons at the beginning of the scholastic year, for the recording of the learning situation
- Direct the students to record three important points:
Knowledge: after today's lesson, what have I learned?
Action: after today's lesson, what can I do?
Contemplation: after today's lesson, what do I feel?

The learning archives can be an important reference and basis for part of the scholastic result of the term or the daily academic result of the student.

Assessment process:

- self evaluation
to be assessed by the student himself/herself offering a chance to the student to understand his/her real self
- peer's assessment
arrange the students into groups inviting the members of the same group to evaluate each other and share the marks scored. Then ask them to assess together and make a mutual decision offering the students an opportunity to learn from each other
- teacher's assessment
the teacher is to make the final assessment and verification to avoid unfair evaluation or omission

In conclusion, the teacher of "small class teaching" should employ different flexible teaching methods taking into practice the multidimensional academic assessment to enhance the holistic development of the students, while nurturing a creative new generation being keen on critical thinking.