

Evaluation of the Experimental Study Groups in Sacred Heart Canossian College

(English Section)



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In the scholastic year 2006~2007, two groups of students were selected to study in two experimental study groups (ESG). 47 students from Primary Six who are weak in Mathematics have been put together in one Form One class. The other class, that is Form Two, is made up of two groups of students (23 were supposed to be repeaters of Form One and 22 were marginal admitters to Form Two). Although they are poor in their academic performance, we believe that all students have the ability to learn.

Some students may have difficulties in learning and their slow learning progress may be the result of their adverse family background, negative influences from their peers and lack of learning initiatives. In view of that, we started these two experimental groups in Form One and Form Two, hoping that students' individual difference in learning can be narrowed. Each of these two classes are split into two small learning groups which are taught by two English teachers and two Mathematics teachers. Nevertheless, they join together again and attend ordinary classroom

learning in other subjects. Through ESG teaching in Mathematics and English, students are expected to have more interactions with the teachers in their learning process.

After implementing ESG teaching in English and Mathematics for eight months in our school, we, teachers have discovered there are both advantages and defects in ESG teaching.

The following are some advantages of the ESG teaching in our school.

1 Learning- friendly Environment

In the classroom of a small class, there is more space for students and teachers to move about, enhancing teacher-student communications and student interactions. Psychologically, a spacious room gives a more comfortable and relaxing environment which facilitates effective learning as well as quality teaching.

2 Positive Learning Atmosphere

ESG teaching benefits the teaching and learning process. Teachers can manage the class discipline more easily and more effectively. The number of students dozing off, daydreaming, being distracted and chatting are reduced to almost zero for the teachers can draw their attention promptly. Therefore, the atmosphere in an ESG classroom is always positive and lively.



3 High Level of Participation

Teachers always encourage students to participate in the class actively. For some teachers, it is a classroom rule that everyone must get involved in some kinds of activities. In addition to raising the level of participation, students' interests are aroused and they are easily motivated by the new pedagogies.

their knowledge. It also saves the time of managing the discipline of the class especially during class activities.

Despite all the advantages that ESG teaching has brought, there are some chained defects.

4 Quality Teaching and Effective Learning

Teachers abandon the spoon-feeding teaching method. With fewer students in a class, methodologies such as communicative approach, student-centered approach, task-based activities, discussions and group presentations are applicable. These strategies can make teaching more interesting and authentic to the students. Since the lessons are carefully planned for the students, they can learn at ease and they enjoy the lessons very much. In addition, teachers can understand the students more in terms of their strengths and thus increase their self-efficacy. As a result, the students learn better as the lessons are more interesting and the objectives are achievable.

1. Stereotype

Although it is not announced to the whole school that these classes are for low-capable students in Mathematics and English, they acknowledge that they are different from the other classes. They are ashamed of being a member of the class. They label each other as slow learners who need teachers' special attention. That is definitely not good for their psychological growth. They feel that they are stereotyped.

2. Low Morale

Students in the small classes are either passive or slow learners, peer communication does not really help each other in the class. Also, they have no opportunities to see how the industrious students acquire knowledge through hard work, perseverance and determination. Consequently, they have less initiative to improve as they find they may not be the weakest in class. As a result, students lack self-confidence, self-esteem and learning motivation.

5 Time Saving

ESG teaching saves teachers' time since they have fewer homework books and test papers to check. Consequently, they can spend more time on lesson planning and individual consultation with the students. Besides, ESG teaching lessens the teachers' workload and allows them to have time to prepare extra materials for the students in order to consolidate

3. Lack of Professional Support

The implementation of ESG teaching is a new challenge to the teachers, therefore, they would like to have professional support in the form of workshops, seminars, networking or on-site visits to help them develop appropriate teaching pedagogies to maximize the benefits of ESG teaching.

4. Disappointment and Depression

Although teachers use different teaching methodologies and successfully attract students' learning interests during lessons, students' test and examination results are still unsatisfactory for they do not revise at home. Their constant poor and disappointing academic results depress teachers who have an increase pressure on teaching.

As this is the first year we attempt ESG teaching, students did not like this system at the beginning. They detested being allocated in the small classes because they thought they had been labelled as slow learners by peer schoolmates and teachers. This resulted in a negative impact on their learning attitude. Most of them have lost confidence.

In the 1st Term, their results were extremely terrible. For example, in the 1st Aural Comprehension Test, only 5 out of 22 passed. However, after intensive drilling, only 4 failed in the 1st Aural Comprehension Test in the Second Term.

After six months, students' performance in Mathematics shows rather obvious improvement. Their reasoning power is strengthened. Although their ability is still low, the gap between them and the other classes is narrowing. Their interest in Mathematics has comparatively increased.

After having been placed in the small classes for a longer time, students now start to enjoy their lessons. They realize that there is more capacity for them to ask and answer questions. They even have time to ask questions on areas which they did not learn well in the past years. Moreover, they are more easily

spotted when they get distracted. Students' relationship with the teachers has improved. Teachers can understand them better and know their weakness and strengths so that their potential capabilities can be developed.

We, teachers, believe that students can benefit from this system. Yet, some students are reluctant to co-operate with us and we have to struggle hard to motivate them to learn.

As a conclusion, ESG teaching brings benefit to both teachers and students; yet more strategies should be studied before implementing it in a more effective way. The suggested strategies are as follow:

- A curriculum should be planned by school authorities and teachers concerned.
- There should be clear and guided instructions on running ESG teaching.
- Students must be carefully oriented to lessons.
- Learning progress must be monitored closely, and when students do not understand, they should be re-taught.
- Evaluation of its effectiveness with the school authorities and the students should be done every semester. 🌱

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References:

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