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ABSTRACT

(The paper reports on implications of classroom research for class management techniques especially in classes in which handicapped students are mainstreamed. Findings demonstrating a conflict between giving attention to individual children and keeping general engagement high are identified. Recommended room management (RM) procedures are reported to double average engagement levels and substantially increase time for individual teaching. Clear definition of the teaching roles of "individual helper," "activity manager" (who keeps children not being taught individually on task), and "mover" (who maintains flow by obtaining equipment, dealing with interruptions, etc.) are required. Application of the model to a New Zealand classroom of 10- to 11-year-olds using parents as helping activity managers and individual helpers is described. Comparison of amount of time children were on task when either using parents as general assistants or when using parents following the RM model found significant differences in favor of the RM model. (DB)

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Item 5

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Room Management in Mainstreamed/Integrated Classrooms

By Gary Thomas

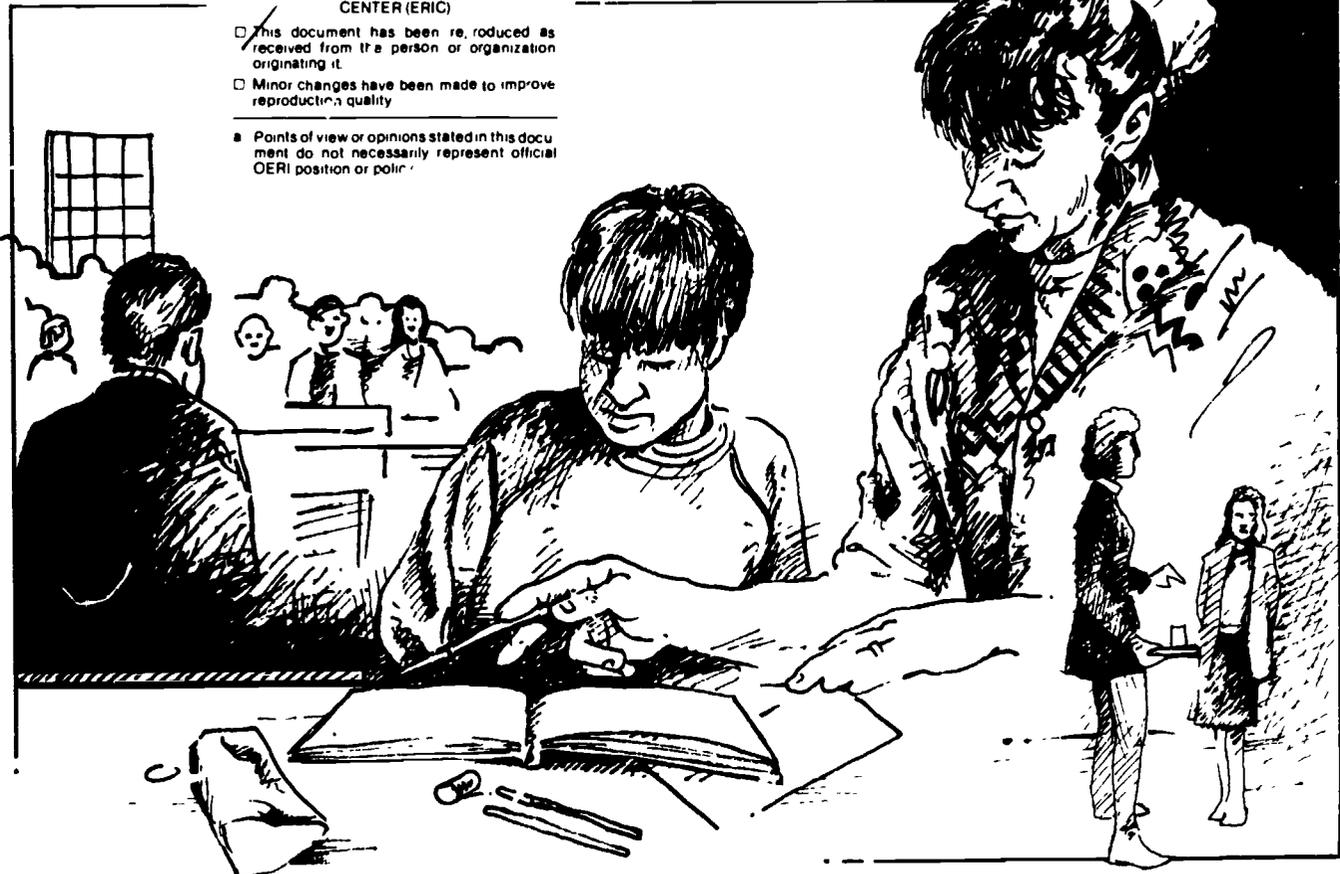
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Jeff Walesby

H HE NEEDS SO MUCH TIME – what do I do with the other 30? The question is not obstructive, not reactionary, not symptomatic of laziness and it revolves around a collection of seemingly insoluble problems.

Given that handicapped children need more individual attention to make progress; given that many need short regular doses of instruction; and given that the intellectually handicapped benefit from more prompting, more over-learning and a generally more rewarding teaching situation, how best can ordinary classroom organisation be modified to accommodate these needs?

There are some clear discoveries about what happens in classrooms which we need to take into account before making recommendations.

- (1) Ordinary low-achievers (not the mainstreamed handicapped) in primary school receive little or no more attention from the teacher, as individuals, than medium or high achievers;
- (2) little if any truly co-operative group work takes place in the ubiquitous groups found in primary schools, and

most of the interaction that does take place within groups is not task-related;

(3) teachers who give high attention to individual children generate high numbers of children who are 'intermittent workers', that is, spend much time 'off task';

(4) teachers who instruct whole groups or inquire of the whole class keep general engagement higher, but teach fewer children individually.

Additionally there seem to be a number of elements in teachers' behaviour which invoke or discourage work. 'With-it-ness' (the ability to deal with disruption whilst still teaching) is very helpful, as is the knack of maintaining the tempo and smoothness of activity, and keeping a group's attention through alerting and accountability cues. Successful teachers are those who have learnt how to occupy two positions at once.

Here, then, are the problems of classroom organization and structure: (i) How does the teacher tackle the balancing act between individual teaching (which results in less engagement amongst the rest of the class) and class and group teaching which may allow for only a little individual teach-

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ing time? (ii) How does she structure her attention in such a way that low achievers do not lose out? (iii) Can she structure her grouping (assuming that little if any constructive co-operative work takes place there) in such a way that children who are easily distracted are not especially disadvantaged by a social grouping which appears to hold particularly little for them? (iv) How can flow be maintained without disrupting individual teaching?

Often when the teacher changes her strategy and thereby ameliorates the effects of one of these problems, there is a deterioration in another area. It is almost as if she has to be three people at once: (i) to take individual children; (ii) to manage the engagement of the group; and (iii) to ensure that flow is maintained.

It is interesting to discover that in situations where, traditionally, more than one adult has been present in the classroom, for example, in schools for children with severe learning difficulties, a clearly perceived need to divide the role in the way just described has occurred. Indeed, where three people are present, as they are in some such classrooms, the organizing of those adults most effectively is as outlined. This suggests that there are essentially three elements to be fulfilled for efficient management of a classroom.

Room Management

ROOM MANAGEMENT (RM) procedures can more than double average engagement levels and substantially increase time for individual teaching. A particularly interesting finding is that RM appears to influence the behaviour of less handicapped subjects (that is, those who will be mainstreamed) more beneficially than that of profoundly handicapped subjects.

RM essentially involves the clear setting of roles. There is a need for the teacher to be a teacher of individual children, represented in the RM scheme by the 'individual helper'; there is a need for her to keep children who are not being taught individually on task, a role fulfilled in RM by an 'Activity Manager'; and there is a need for her to maintain flow, for which in RM the duties of a 'Mover' are suggested. Clear definition of these roles is essential for RM to operate effectively.

There is increased scope for the useful application of such procedures in mainstream classrooms. The move to integrate children with learning difficulties within ordinary classes should be accompanied by a shift of resources to help the child in that setting. Thus having peripatetic teachers or ancillary helpers working alongside class teachers is becoming increasingly common.

A second important development is in the involvement of parents in school activity, and successful parental intervention projects are testimony to the benefits which can be gained through such involvement. The use of parents **within** the classroom, however, may sometimes present teachers with a dilemma, with uncertainty as to how parents should be asked to participate to the best possible effect. There may also be a dilemma over whether, and how, parents should 'teach'. RM offers a flexible system which might go some way toward helping to tackle these questions in whichever way is most appropriate for a given teacher, her class and her situation. Particularly where children with special needs are involved, RM offers a framework for maximizing the potential of parental involvement in the classroom.

It should be stressed that room management is concerned only with maximizing the use of resources; it is concerned only with management and organization. It says nothing about the content of what is being taught.

Room Management: the system

AT THE CORE OF THE RM lies the period of time known, (somewhat confusingly to New Zealand teachers) as an Activity Period. An Activity Period is a set period of time, say one hour a day, when staff and parents have very specific duties. Different tasks will be carried out by the people involved; the exact arrangement of those tasks will depend on the needs of the class and the number of people available to help. The 'job descriptions' are as follows:

Individual Helper: the Individual Helper concentrates on working with an individual on a teaching activity for 5 to 15 minutes. So, in one hour it should be possible to arrange between four and 12 individual teaching sessions.

Activity Manager: the Activity Manager(s) concentrates on the rest of the children in the class, who will normally be organized into groups of between four and eight. She will quickly move around keeping them busy and occupied.

Mover: the Mover may fetch or move equipment etc.; superv. emptying paintpots, sharpening of pencils etc.; deal with all interruptions to routine, e.g., spillages, visitors... in order to keep the Activity Manager and Individual Helper free from distraction.

It is a flexible system once the tasks are clear. During the hour staff may switch roles after, say, half-an-hour, or may be allocated in a number of different ways depending on the preferences of the people involved, the organization of the classroom, or the needs of the children. For example, in one class there may be one Individual Helper, one Activity Manager and one Mover, while in another there may be one Individual Helper and two Activity Managers.

Given the positive results which have been obtained using RM in settings for adults and children with severe learning difficulties, it was felt appropriate to test the system in a mainstream class for the limited period when an ancillary helper and parents were helping.

A Research Project

The school and children

AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN OXFORDSHIRE a class of 10-11-year-olds with twenty-one children was available for observation. The children are accustomed to working independently from books, workcards and other materials, making their own way to the teacher for clarification or marking. An ancillary helper is also sometimes available in the classroom. She normally devotes her time to one or two children who find great difficulty working independently. Parents too have also been involved in the classroom recently. They have worked almost exclusively with their own children who experience quite serious learning difficulties.

Procedure for room management

The question arose as to how to extract the relevant features of RM for the current setting. It was felt that the role of Mover would be under-used and that it would be more profitable for the third or fourth person to be an Individual Helper or Activity Manager. The Individual Helper, rather than taking a succession of children from a rota, limited her work to two children. The overall pattern was therefore: three Activity Managers (two parents and once ancillary helper) responsible between them for four groups of six children each, and one Individual Helper.

In preparation for the RM session the class teachers discussed their roles with the helpers. Each helper kept to the same role throughout the RM session.

Observation

Given the disparate nature of what the children and helpers were doing, simple on-task/off-task observations were made. Videotape recordings were made of the group under three conditions; A, with the classroom functioning normally with one teacher and one ancillary helper but without parents, B, with the same classroom functioning with two parents; C, with the classroom functioning under RM, with the same two parents as in B. An hour's recording was made under each condition, with each child in the class being observed for six minutes. Identical days and identical times (9.15 a.m. - 10.15 a.m.) were observed. As far as it was possible to control for this, the children were therefore doing the same sort of task on each recording.

Results

Analysis showed clear differences between baseline (no parents) and the two conditions where parents were helping - the children were on-task more. The greatest difference existed between the baseline (A) and the parents using RM (C). Significant differences were also found to exist between parents helping without RM (B) and where RM was used (C). RM, therefore was clearly helpful.

Discussion

THAT THESE RESULTS WERE OBTAINED is surprising given the shortcomings of the current study as an assessment of RM.

- (i) It is clear in retrospect that there was a need for more structured training in the procedure. It would have been valuable to give feedback to staff/parents on the way in which they were fulfilling their various roles. It was apparent in viewing the tapes that quite idiosyncratic interpretations were being made of role definitions. That being stated, it was nevertheless clear that between conditions B and C parents responded positively to having such definition explicitly spelt out, however interpreted.
- (ii) It was not possible to make a long-term assessment of the effects of RM on the group. Such an assessment might indicate how far the excitement and novelty of the experiment was responsible for the results obtained.
- (iii) No account was taken of staff/parent behaviour over the sessions. The ability of Activity Managers to attend to those who are working while ignoring and prompting those children who are not would prove an interesting area for further study.
- (iv) Quality of learning would, of course, be extremely difficult to assess. It would, however, be interesting to note on what sort of activities the increase in on-task behaviour noted under RM had the most beneficial effects.
- (v) It would be useful to assess the effects of RM on the rest of the class.

The results seem to be directly attributable to the advantages of RM, especially the way in which the separate roles are clearly specified. Greater gains in on-task behaviour and in the number and quality of individual teaching sessions might be found if attention is paid to more than just the organisational features of RM. But this research, and other projects recently completed suggest that doing no more than clarifying the roles helps immensely in mainstreamed classrooms.

Description of roles

1. What an Activity Manager does before the Activity period:

- (a) organizes a variety of tasks/activities for each group;
- (b) informs the Individual Helper when she is ready to begin.

during the Activity Period:

- (a) ensures that each group member has appropriate materials/books/equipment;
- (b) quickly prompts members to start working if necessary;
- (c) supervises the use of shared materials;
- (d) moves around the group to praise and reward group members who are busy;

(The ability to do this well is central to the Activity Manager's success. It has been clearly shown that the ability to stimulate children's engagement in a group depends upon the ability to focus on and praise children who are working appropriately.)

- (e) gives minimum attention to group members who are not busy. So the Activity Manager moves from one busy group member to the next, commenting on his/her activities, giving help and praising those who are busy. The Activity Manager also very briefly prompts group members who are not busy. These prompts should as far as possible be gestural or physical (e.g., pointing or placing the child's hand onto the materials) rather than verbal prompts. This means that in

normal circumstances a group member will only be spoken to when he/she is busy. Apart from a brief gestural or physical prompt, group members should be given attention only when they are busy.

2. What an Individual Helper does before the Activity Period:

- (a) has available a list or rota of children for individual help and the activities and materials required for each;
- (b) helps the Activity Manager to organize the classroom for the Activity Period;
- (c) assembles materials for each child's work in the area to be used for individual work. For example, if it is to be a one-hour session with 15 minutes for each child, four children will be seen in the hour and four sets of activities should have been prepared ready for each child to start straightaway when s/he is called.

during the Activity Period:

- (a) asks the first child on the list to come and work. Fifteen minutes should be the maximum for an intensive individual activity. In order to minimize the possibility of the session becoming frustrating and failure laden it should be stressed to Individual Helpers that the emphasis should be on praise and gentle encouragement;
- (b) asks subsequent children on the list to come and work at the end of each session.

Notes

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He acknowledges, with thanks, Mrs Chris White for her help and co-operation in the use of her classroom for the study

A fuller account of the research described here can be found

Thomas, G. 'Room Management in Mainstream Education' in *Educational Research*, Vol 27, No. 3, November 1985

That handicapped children need more attention, regular short instruction, more prompting, more overlearning and a generally rewarding situation can be found discussed in

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and

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and have been assessed in settings with the severely handicapped by Porterfield, J., Blunden, R. and Blewitt, E (1977) *Improving Environments for Profoundly Handicapped Adults Establishing Staff Routines for High Client Engagement*. Mental Handicap in Wales Applied Research Unit University of South Wales, Cardiff

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