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A child with physical impairment (PI) who integrates into a mainstream school is bound to face multi-faceted challenges arisen from physical and social barriers. How well the school helps the child manage the social barriers is a particularly major determinant of the real success of inclusive education. In accordance with the principle of Conductive Education, the success of inclusive education is not only measured by a child's academic or functional achievement, but also reflected in the formation of a positive personality which enables the child to lead a fully adaptive life in his or her living and learning environment. Working towards these easier-said-than-done goals, the integrator with PI face social-emotional challenges that are unfortunately not well-recognized and therefore not dealt with in a proactive manner by the school. This is in stark contrast to how similar challenges faced by children with emotional or behavioral impairment are dealt with by the school, most probably since the former is not as apparent as the latter.

In response to a request made by a mainstream school to help some of their children with PI improve their social-emotional development, the staff from the Conductive Learning Centre had the opportunity to explore the effectiveness of the Cooperative Learning approach (CL) on these children. CL and Conductive Education (CE) have several similarities. First, both believe that a facilitative social environment with positive group dynamics is the key to successfully building up a positive personality of an under-privileged child. Second, both develop a systematic method of instruction or facilitation to achieve the aforementioned goal of personality development. CL is a pedagogical practice that involves students' working together in small groups to accomplish shared goals. It is this sense of interdependence that motivates group members to help and support each other's endeavors^[1]. Five key components are essential for structuring cooperative learning groups: positive interdependence, primitive interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small-group skills, and group review processing. The teacher plays a very significant role in giving explicit explanations of the social skills that need to be used in the group, and carefully designing and monitoring the cooperative learning tasks. Extensive research on CL over the past thirty years has unequivocally demonstrated the success of this approach to learning. CL has been used successfully to promote learning achievement across diverse curriculum areas, from kindergarten to college. In the presentation, the running of the experimental group in the mainstream school and the effect of CL on the group were shown. Most importantly, the reasons for the limited use of this highly regarded teaching-learning approach in mainstream and in special schools in Hong Kong were investigated. Finally, common drawbacks observed in teachers using CL were discussed.

References

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