

Broadening the View of Tiered Instruction: Tibet Students Cultivated in Inland Areas of China

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Abstract

This article reviews a research on Tiered Instruction of Tibet students in China. We use the sample of a higher vocational school located in the Northeast of China nearby the North Korea. Throughout the observation of 3 years program of Tiered Instruction including the students' stratification, teaching goal, teaching method, homework assignments and evaluation system of teaching results, we finally find the results of successful Tiered Instruction for Tibet students who are cultivated in inland areas in China.

Key words: Tibet students; Tiered instruction; Students diversity; Students' stratification; Tiered teaching goal; Tiered teaching Content; Tiered teaching evaluation

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INTRODUCTION

With the development of education, there is a trend of integration under the influence of inclusive education all over the world. Tiered instruction is used to meet students' different educational needs during the process of implementing inclusive education. This kind of approach requires schools and teachers to provide suitable education support for their students according to the students' actual level in order to fully help students with learning difficulties, and finally improve the quality of education. At the same time, there are a variety of forms

of tiered instruction applicable to different teaching environment. In order to do the better work, it requires school administrators and teachers at frontline to choose and improve based on actual situation.

In our case study, we are mainly focusing on a sample of Tibet students cultivated in inland China. Due to the new policy on supporting the education of western minority, the government of People's Republic of China carried out this item through two directions. On one hand, they have already increased large amount of input to improve the educational environment of the western region especially the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). On the other hand, the Tibet students need to see the whole state and the world outside, so there comes out to be a chance for them to visit and study in the eastern region.

However, various problems comes out from this policy although it indeed helps the country and the local government to improve the quality of education and the unity of the country. One of the urgent needs is to enhance the adaptability of those kind of students, so the instruction reform and the innovation should be highlighted. We took the sample of a higher vocational school located in the northeast of China nearby the North Korea. The city is the author's hometown, and her mother has been working in that school for almost 30 years. Throughout the observation of this program for 3 years, we finally find the results of Tiered Instruction for Tibet students who are cultivated in inland areas in China.

1. WHAT IS TIERED INSTRUCTION?

To cope with diversity, schools must reform there teaching management and adapt their teaching strategies. One of the most important problems in discussing "Tiered instruction" is that the term has been defined by many meanings, because several quite different programs or policies running under this heading. In general, the core

of To mention about the quantity of students Tiered Instruction (TI) is roughly the same with grouping instruction (GI) which including our familiar ability group (AG), but TI has a little bit difference at the quantity of students. Tiered definitely is much bigger than grouping, which implies some means of grouping students for instruction by ability or achievement so as to reduce their heterogeneity. However, various TI plans differ in ways likely to have a considerable impact on the outcomes of grouping. Differentiated instruction (DI) is a concept that is closely related to TI, but more detailed and focusing on different aspects, which is an approach that enables teachers to plan strategically to meet the needs of every single student (Figure 1).

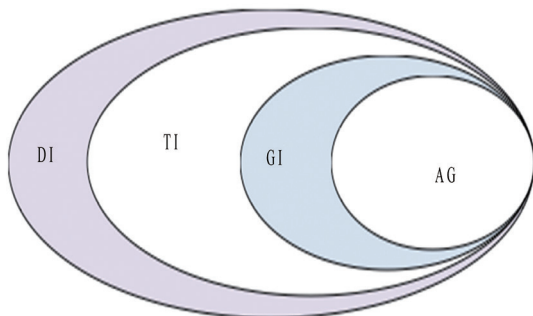


Figure 1
Relationship of DI, TI, GI and AG

2. WHY DO WE USE TIERED INSTRUCTION?

As long as the instruction has been delivered in the teaching environment, the administrators, the researchers, the teachers, and even the students themselves have concerned about the question of what is a real suitable instruction. We used to believe in an unchangeable instruction for all kinds of students in China due to several reasons, but the results of this kind of teaching seem to be unsatisfied. Especially when the heterogeneity of the students is enlarging, the unchangeable instruction cannot work well anymore.

It is easy to be understood that Tibet students in our inland classrooms may vary greatly in the background, the cultures, the language proficiency, the educational skills, the interests and etc., which cause the problems of their learning process, and sometimes destroy their confidence of learning and living. In order to meet the students' diverse needs and take the Tibet and Majority students into consideration together, the school must recreate a new instruction system for those kinds. Here we use Tiered Instruction to beat the target.

3. WHAT DO WE DO IN REALITY?

Our school was founded in 1977, but we accepted Tibet students and started to implement this program since 2000. We have a very full experience of Tibet students'

cultivation during these years, and we also enroll normal students simultaneously. To face the new diversity of the students, we have recreated the teaching system, and also improved the instruction by grouping the students in tiers according to their previous foundation and many other elements, for example, the language proficiency, educational skills, the interests and so on. The new Tiered Instruction System contains several programs including: Students' stratification, Tiered teaching goal, Tiered teaching content, Tiered teaching method, and Tiered evaluation.

4. HOW DO WE USE TIERED INSTRUCTION?

4.1 Students' Stratification

Whether can we undertake the student stratification reasonably? The students' stratification plays a key role to the success of the Tiered Instruction. Many researchers agree that student stratification should take account into the student's basic ability and cognitive level, also plus cognitive style, personality, learning motivation, emotion will, interest amount of non-intelligence factors such as reference standard, but in the specific operations, some parameters are really hard to be quantified.

Basically, our students have been assigned into heterogeneous classes by random. However, they will be regrouped into different level of classes for the selected subjects in order to ensure the quality of teaching and satisfy the different needs of learning. For example, three two-grade classes used to attend the major classes of the full schedule at the same time. But they must leave their heterogeneous classrooms and go for different classes organized by the reading levels.

It is must be highlighted that there are three major advantages of regrouping in some selected subjects instead of traditional ability grouped class assignment. Firstly, the students could normally remain in a heterogeneous setting during most of the time in daytime. In this way, they will be likely to get familiar with the group and identify their classmates, which will reduce the labeling effect of all-day grouping. This will also help the Tibet students to communicate with other classmates and get used to the new life and learning environment. Secondly, the students are grouped solely on the basis of their achievement in reading or mathematics and other selected courses instead of traditional method, which prefer the general achievement or the ability level. Thirdly, it is obviously that regrouping into tiered plans tends to be more flexible than the traditional ability group class assignment. Because it is less disruptive for changing students between reading or mathematics or other selected subjects, therefore, any errors in the students assignment can be easily remedied, and also we can accommodated with a change in grouping when the students make any changes.

4.2 Tiered Teaching Goal

Our teaching goal is formulated on the basis of the students of A, B, C three Tiers respectively. They are creative goals, developmental goals, and the basic goals. All these goals are suitable for the development of the teaching goals. After making their efforts in a phase of study, the students are likely to reach the different goals. The basic goal is a part of which every student should master, and relatively simple with an emphasis on memorization and induction, taking students of Tiered C as the main body. Just going through some simple thinking, the students can get the right answer. Developmental goal is a part of which the majority of the students can get and master, and which include more complex knowledge, letting the students who have a certain ability to analyze and solve the problems by themselves, taking students of Tiered B as the main body. Just going through exploration, the students of Tiered B will jump to the more harvest steps by steps during their learning process. In the end, creative target is based on those high level students who can master more complex knowledge. This target is also the development and extension of content of teaching materials, with emphasis on the analysis, the synthesis, the utilization and the innovation, which take students of Tiered A as the main body. The tiered teaching goals may vary in different aspects of the same subject due to the real situation. For instance, English course usually has different goals of listening, speaking, reading, and writing at the same target according to the New Standard of high school in China.

4.3 Tiered Teaching Content

Basically different levels of students take corresponding of teaching materials and the teaching contents, and our school allows teachers to teach their students with different teaching materials in personal according to the different circumstances and meanwhile this will develop the ability of their differential instruction ability during the teaching process. For instance, our teachers is getting used to teach different levels of students with different levels of English learning resources in their the same class (grade), and which helps them to make more progress in English learning, and of course the management is also fully embodies in the home assignments after classroom teaching. Such as: the students should preview the text in Tiered C assignment, getting preliminary understanding of the text content, knowing the focus of the text before reading class; Tiered B students should preview the text not only to get the target of mainly understanding the whole text content, knowing the focusing points of the text, but also they should try to divide the article into sections, and to find out the center words simultaneously; Tiered A students should understand the text content, pick out the words of the article and to segment the article, draw some new words in advance, and try to guess the meaning themselves. All these will be included in the plan at the beginning of each semester, as the students are

making progress through the teaching stage and adjusting it at any time while needed. In this way, our teaching can meet the real need of the students and active their motivation and enthusiastic of learning. In inland China, the exam-oriented education is still in dominant status, so probably we have to follow the unified syllabus, the unified teaching goal, the unified teaching content, and finally take the unified standardized tests, which is also the most important part. Teachers have to use the adjustment of recessive tiered method and find an appropriate way to get their aptitude, which undoubtedly also increases a lot of work for the teachers personally. Luckily, our school satisfies this need for both our teachers and students by giving enough comfortable environments by the new policy of Chinese government, which intends to give more flexibility to the local government and school to create a new system with embodying more humanized features.

4.4 Tiered Teaching Method

The application of Tiered teaching method is based on the real situation taking English courses as an example, the teachers may often divide one class into several groups to discuss or encourage the students to present their work, or assign different home works to the different students. By this way, the teacher guide the student take the initiative to discover and explore their knowledge in the limited time, or emerge as a mentor, and finally help the students to solve problems. The major point is to use a variety of teaching methods to teach the students of different class (grade). For Tiered A students, the application of specific teaching methods is to give larger study space, and develop both of their creativity and independent learning ability. Then we can see the teachers actually play a role as a guide, and a peer. In our school, we have autonomous learning platform, which provides a large number of fresh corpus and learning resources. Studies have shown that the effect of autonomous learning platform application for the top student is fully be satisfied. For Tiered B, teachers provide more scientific and use some practical methods, encouraging students continuously to compensate for themselves in learning. For Tiered C, the school administrators and the teachers have a duty to give more attention to those amounts, and try to full develop their abilities by any means in order to rebuild their confidence of learning and living. Our school has no significance entrance of standardized tests, because of this, teachers pay more attention to its basic knowledge accumulation in their teaching, adopting more conservative way of teaching for Tiered C students. The application of this method can enhance the accuracy of teaching, improve the quality of teaching, and motivate the autonomy of the students.

4.5 Tiered Evaluation

By any means, evaluation is one of the most important parts in the education system especially in recent China. “GAO KAO” and “ZHONG KAO” were added into

English dictionary because they were so popular used and well known by the researchers and common people all over the world. The final target and motivation of the schools and the students are the scores of the “GAO KAO” and “ZHONG KAO”. It sounds ridiculous but truly the reality of the current situation of Chinese education. It is a complex work to design our assessment system and tiered evaluation. Our Tiered evaluation measures roughly can be divided into testing and assessment.

4.5.1 Tiered Testing

Tiered Testing includes real-time testing and periodic testing. Normally we take regularly check on the students’ learning outcomes, not only periodic midterm and final exams, but also monthly exam, and a variety of temporary test for a period of time learning. The content of the test has also been stratified by the characteristics of gradation. One of the commonly used method is Tiered and Volume Classification test. According to the phase of test content, test questions can be divided into three parts: the basic topic, the comprehension, the comprehensive topic, respectively called C, B, and A volume.

One examination questions on the basis of C volume accounted for 60% of the whole test paper, and comprehension questions account for 20% of the whole test, questions of comprehensive also accounted for 20%. All the students have to take examination of A, B, C. Students of Tiered A choose A + B + C volume testing, while students of Tiered B choose B + C, and students of Tiered C just taking C type questions.

At the same time, we eventually get final test scores after the test result being divided by 0.6 and 0.8, then we eventually get final test scores. Although for the students of Tiered A, the test scores may be lower than B or C, which may have some influence on their motivation, but it also puts forward to a higher requirements on students of Tiered A. We certainly can see the gap between the students after comparing scores in different levels of the students’ test scores.

4.5.2 Tiered Assessment

In our school Tiered Assessment is divided into two parts including student self-assessment and teacher assessment. Through the objective self-assessment, students deepen the understanding of their learning situation, and they will remedy the shortfall in the later study. The practice of teachers in Tiered Assessment can be shown as follows:

4.5.2.1 Different Emphasis

For high-level students, the evaluation should focus on the mistakes, lateral comparing with other good students; For a few low-level students, we may focus on the win, comparing with its past transcripts, so they will see the progress steps by steps; In the evaluation of middle level, we prefer to combine the method of horizontal and vertical, encourage their morale, and finally select the direction of later endeavor.

4.5.2.2 Classroom Assessment

Our teachers’ classroom assessment will also be managed into hierarchical model. In the process of teaching, teachers will pay attention to the different levels of students, especially classroom performance of the low-level students’. For the high-level students, we generally use the way such as eyes contact, stance, questions remind in class discipline during class time; in addition to these suggestions, lower level students will also be named, kindly encouraged them to listen to the teacher carefully.

4.5.2.3 Homework Assessment

Assessment of homework should also be incorporated into Tiered Instruction system. Our teachers use different forms of evaluation measure to evaluate students’ work. Explanations in details are declared as follow.

Firstly, the incentive evaluation is mainly applied for the students of Tiered C group, due to the low starting point of them. Through that way, we give priority of teachers’ guidance, so the students will obtain more chance of success. During the process of evaluation, we would like to prefer encouraging language to encourage the active participation of students and active their development.

Secondly, participatory evaluation is about mainly to enhance the participation of students of Tiered A and B in the assessment. We encourage the students to participate in homework assessment, making the students to master the metrology and skills of learn participation, deepening their understanding of knowledge, and finally creating their confidence. Arousing the enthusiasm of the students to feel the sense of teachers’ confidential, the proper assessment may put the students into the right process of learning. The application of this system can ensure the justice of the assessment, meet the different need of the students and finally guide a clear way of the students’ development in the future.

CONCLUSION

Through the term explanation and analysis of the students’ stratification, teaching goal, teaching method, homework assignments and evaluation system of teaching results, we finally see the effect of the whole Tiered system and the progress of our Tibet students. However, Tiered Instruction, as a kind of new teaching ideas, which still needs to experience the test of time and practice of repeated test. Although in the practice of Tiered methodology in teaching has made some achievements, but also inevitably brings about many negative impacts. We still need to concern about the effectiveness of the Tiered Instruction and how to balance the teachers’ workload in further research.

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