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Title	Assessments for learning in inclusive classrooms
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# EDUCATION RESEARCH FUNDING PROGRAMME

Start-Up Grant

# FINAL REPORT



## Assessments for Learning in Inclusive Classrooms SUG 19/17 THY

By

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## **Part II**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

***In no more than 600 words, provide details of the following items:***

#### **Purpose / Research Question**

There is currently limited research on how Assessment for Learning (AfL) can support mainstream classrooms that have students with special needs. The present research sought to address this gap by asking the research question: What characterizes effective questioning and teacher feedback in an inclusive classroom with students with ASD?

#### **Background**

In Singapore, children with moderate to severe special education needs (SEN) attend specialised schools. Those with mild disabilities, deemed to be able to possess cognitive ability to benefit from national curriculum, are enrolled into mainstream schools. They total 18,000 in 2016 or about 4% of the total school population, an increase from 13,000 in 2013 (Lim, 2016). Teachers in inclusive classes have reported stress in attending to needs of SEN children as well as the grappling with the large class size, packed syllabus and high-stakes national examinations.

#### **Participants**

One teacher and student pair from 5 mainstream schools (primary and secondary), with the teacher either trained in special needs or recognised to be effective with SEN. The student participant has been diagnosed with autism.

#### **Research Methodology / Design**

This qualitative instrumental case study involved observing the teacher-student pair during lessons and separately interviewing the teacher and the student participants after the lessons. This was done after permission was sought with the students' parents/guardians and the teachers involved. The lesson observation and interview data was analysed, assigned codes to arrive at themes which were constantly reviewed and refined.

#### **Findings / Results**

The study found that these teachers used approaches that focused on three considerations: addressing

- the cognitive needs of students (referring to the way in which teachers designed their questions and feedback to suit the students' way of processing information. For example, the teachers made a conscious effort to be precise in their questions and feedback);
- their socio-emotional needs (to manage the child's emotions and classroom experience through the questioning and feedback dialogue. For example, they reported trying to allay anxiety through affirming feedback such as "Wow, well done!");
- supporting structures (non-auditory support to supplement the oral questioning and feedback dialogue. In particular, it was observed that classroom dialogue was often supported with visuals (e.g. diagrams on the board) to help students focus.

The findings validate that good AfL practice is consistent with good autism practice. The efficacy of these practices can be explained using AfL principles of being aware of where learners are (cognitively and affectively) and deciding how best to take them to where they need to be, using a safe environment that also plays to the child's strengths (e.g. visuals).

**Conclusion**

The three considerations of cognitive, socio-emotional and support needs provide a handy framework to guide practising teachers and teacher-educators. Rather than following a list of discrete “dos and don'ts”, teachers should deliberate on these three areas to design accommodations to facilitate effective participation by learners with ASD in their classrooms.

Apart from the implications for practice, these findings also have wider implications for the current AfL discourse. First, if AfL is premised on learner-centredness, surely it cannot be “one-size-fits-all” in an inclusive classroom where there is a diversity of learner needs, especially with differences as pronounced as those of ASD. In particular, with the increasing prominence of questioning and feedback dialogue in the current literature, it is important for researchers to consider if their generic models need to be modified for inclusive classrooms.

**Keywords**

Assessment for Learning, Autism, Teaching practice

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### **Part III**

Not applicable

Already published

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