

Special Education and Shadow Teaching: Practices and Experiences in the Philippines

Janine S. Buenrostro-Jocson, Far Eastern University, Philippines

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Abstract

Inclusive education mandates that learners with disabilities (LWD) attend regular schools instead of special education schools. In the Philippines, while schools started to accept more LWD to study alongside the typical students, support provisions are placed to ensure that educational goals are being met. One such provision is the employ of special education teachers as a “shadow teacher”, a one-on-one learning support provider to LWD inside the classroom. This study aimed to determine the teaching practices and priorities of shadow teachers in the regular classrooms. Through phenomenology, data were collected from the lived experiences of six special education teachers who are employed as shadow teachers for more than five years in inclusive schools in Metro Manila. Data were garnered through interviews, observations, and document analysis which were analyzed thematically. The results show that these shadow teachers make use of techniques in (1) curricular and instructional design, (2) behavior management and safety, (3) psychosocial development, and (4) collaboration with parents and school. These reflected that despite collaborating with other teachers in the regular classroom, the shadow teacher acts as the main teacher of the LWD, working beyond being a learning support provider.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Shadow Teaching, Special Education, Disability

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Introduction

The Philippine Education System has adopted various practices to address the needs of all its learners including Learners with Disabilities (LWD) in response to the global movement of Inclusive Education (Muega, 2016). It is supported mainly by the Philippine Constitution in Article XIV Sections 1 and 2 where all its citizens have the right to quality education at all levels, and by its various laws including the Republic Act. No. 10533, or The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, Republic Act No. 10157 or the Kindergarten Education Act, and the amendment of the Republic Act 7277 or the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, which is the Republic Act No.9442 in 2007, indicate the promotion of the right of every Filipino citizen to quality education including Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), the acceptance of these learners in all schools particularly public schools shall adhere to the inclusiveness and creating programs for all types of disabilities, the provision of the mandatory and compulsory kindergarten education for all, and the educational assistance for LWDs to pursue all levels of education both in public and private schools.

In 2022, The Philippines has passed a law on inclusive education which is the Republic Act 11650, entitled, “An Act Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education, Establishing Inclusive Learning Resource Centers of Learners with Disabilities in All School Districts, Municipalities and Cities, Providing for Standards, Appropriating Funds, Therefore, and Other Purposes”. This encompasses all the necessary details that would allow the necessary accommodations and support that should be given to LWD to achieve inclusive education.

With this enactment, schools mandatorily accept learners with disability (LWD) and place them in general education classrooms. To achieve inclusion in such, studies have shown that practices that foster inclusion must adapt inclusive practices and pedagogy, increased sensitivity to the day-to-day demand of students, effective response to diversity, as well as cooperation in the classroom (Ainscow, Dyson & Weiner, 2013). These demands on effectiveness in teaching show the depth of responsibilities and expectations from the teachers handling these learners however, these needs are oftentimes unmet due the lack of training and experience in portraying the responsibilities (Mader, 2017; Muega & Echavia, 2017; & NCSE, 2013) and the large number of students in classrooms with insufficient number of teachers (Mader, 2017 & NCSE, 2013).

Due to these challenges an instructional scheme called shadow teaching was conceptualized. The scheme involves a support person called a Shadow Teacher responsible for addressing the behavior and academic needs of a student with special needs inside the general education classroom (Bustos, 2008; Manansala & Dizon, 2008). The scheme has been explored by studies of Manansala and Dizon (2008) which have proven shadow teaching’s effectiveness in academics, socialization, and behavioral aspect of an LWD. However, the practice itself coming from the shadow teachers’ point of view were limited.

Through phenomenology, the study explored the shadow teaching practice as a phenomenon in special education through the experiences of six special education teachers functioning as shadow teachers. The study aimed to determine their practices and priorities in the general education classrooms. By determining these, the practice will be further promoted into achieving inclusive education in the Philippines.

Methods

Research Design and Instruments

A qualitative research method of phenomenology was employed to answer the research question: What are the practices and priorities of shadow teachers in the general education classrooms?

Data were collected through a series of interviews who have firsthand experiences in shadow teaching in Metro Manila. They were also observed with their students while in school to further determine their practice. The study used interview guide with twenty items and an observation guide.

Participants and Locale of the Study

The participants of the study are six special education teachers functioning as shadow teachers for at least three years in various schools with exemplar and professional competencies as determined by their center administrators and school heads. These set criteria allowed the researcher to ensure that the participants have had sufficient experiences in the practice. The study was conducted in five institutions in Metro Manila, four of which were in Quezon City while one is in Mandaluyong. All institutions mentioned were private and inclusive schools.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

A series of interviews were conducted before and after the class observations. This allowed the researcher to determine the ideas of the shadow teachers regarding their practice. The observations were conducted to gather the actual practice, which were transcribed and coded accordingly. Using thematic analysis, recurring themes of the data were coded and analyzed.

Results and Discussion

The participants of the study were interviewed to determine their perceived practices, which were confirmed through a series of observations while they were in practice. The data showed that shadow teachers were involved in the (1) curricular and instructional design, (2) behavior management and safety, and (3) psychosocial development, and (4) collaboration with parents and school.

The shadow teachers, being involved in the curricular and instructional practices design, were included in the process of drafting, and creating the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) of their students who are LWD. While the developmental assessment is being done by other professionals, some shadow teachers are interviewed by the developmental doctors or the educational assessor to determine the skills of their students and current programs that are being implemented. They also receive the assessment reports which they use as a basis of the goals in the IEP. Shadow teachers were also involved in the modification of the lessons should the curriculum or the lessons in the general education classrooms are too difficult or too easy for the LWD by adjusting the lessons, lessening, or giving additional activities. They also give additional instructions for LWD in pull-out or resource room.

The shadow teachers were also practicing behavior management to eliminate the LWD's inappropriate behavior, such as stimulatory behaviors. They employ strategies to develop coping skills for the difficulties of their students. They also ensure the safety of their students from getting hurt from accidents and from various circumstances such as tantrums and meltdowns. They also ensure that the students would not experience getting bullied by his classmates.

Practices in the psychosocial development of their students were also prioritized by the shadow teachers. They develop socialization skills of their students by training them to speak polite terms and proper conversation with their peers. They also create activities such role-playing which would allow their students to practice responses in various situations and play activities that open avenues for their students and peers to spend time together. They also make sure that they can be trusted and be friends with their students for them to feel comfortable with each other. This practice is specifically prioritized by shadow teachers with students who are in the adolescent stages where their development requires the sense of belongingness.

Lastly, the shadow teachers practice collaboration with their students' parents and school. They regularly report to the parents about the activities of their students which include the lessons, peer interactions, and behavior. Aside from reporting, they also give suggestions, and activities that the parents may do at home to continue the intervention given to the student in school. Aside from parents, it was also observed that the shadow teachers establish and maintain good working relationships and even friendships with the general education teachers and other school personnel. They also aid in planning and implementing school activities including Christmas programs, graduation, and presentations where they handle not just their students but also the students from the general education classes.

Conclusion

From the results of the study, it was shown that the shadow teachers practice and prioritize the holistic development of their students in terms of curriculum, instruction, behavior management, and socialization. They also collaborate with the parents, and other personnel involved in the students' lives to ensure the continuation of the programs given. This data showed the range of involvement of shadow teachers in the academic lives of their students. These expectations showed that special education teachers functioning as shadow teachers must possess these skills making them not just support and assistance providers for the LWD in the general education classroom but are the game changers in achieving their inclusion. And in order to achieve this, it must be ensured that shadow teachers have a streamline of skills making their depth of training crucial in the practice.

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Contact email: jbuenrostrojocson@feu.edu.ph