Understanding the Social Classroom

The Foundation of Effective Pedagogy?

Matthew Jukes & Yasmin Sitabkhan, RTI International
1. Literacy programs in LMICs have large room for improvement

2. Because many teaching activities (group work, gradual release) have little evidence in LMICs and are patchily adopted by teachers

3. Because teaching involves social interactions which are culturally conditioned

4. In ways that are predictable

5. And which limit the effectiveness of some pedagogical strategies

6. Stop changing how teachers fundamentally interact with other humans

7. Co-create teaching activities that are (i) culturally appropriate (ii) adhere to principles of effective learning

8. Where possible, build SE skills of students and teachers
Outline

The problem

The social classroom: students

The social classroom: teaching activities
Limited Gains in Reading Fluency

“[new teaching activities] need to be congruent with the values and past experiences of those who are expected to adopt them or else tissue rejection (Hoyle, 1970) will occur”
Social Change and Human Development

Social Change

Rural          | Urban
---            | ---
Agriculture subsistence | Commerce
Less formal education | More formal education
Many children | Fewer children
Living with others | Living alone

Values

Collectivism | Individualism
---          | ---
More obedience | Less obedience
Age-graded authority | Child-centeredness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental/Behavioral Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect, obedience</td>
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<td>Shyness</td>
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<td>Gender roles ascribed</td>
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<td>Focus on others</td>
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<td>Empathy for others</td>
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<td>Less self-esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fitting in</td>
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<td>Cooperation</td>
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The Social Classroom

Part 1 – The Students
USAID Tusome Pamoja

- Grades 1–4 Reading and Mathematics
- Pre-Primary
- $68 million
- 1.4 million children
- 26,000 teachers
- 3,025 schools, 5 regions
What qualities do your children/students need in order to learn in school?

4 randomly selected schools in rural Mtwara, Tanzania

9 focus groups with 95 parents
27 interviews with teachers
80 interviews with students

What qualities do your children/students need in order to learn in school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Parents Value</th>
<th>What Teachers Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
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<td>Disciplined</td>
<td>Self-directed</td>
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<td>Being polite and calm</td>
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What social-emotional competencies should children develop?

What Parents Value
- Respect
- Obedience
- Disciplined
- Being polite and calm

What Teachers Value
- Curiosity
- Confidence
- Self-directed

Curiosity Prevalent Among More Educated and Wealthy

![Graph showing SEL vs Parent SES]

- **SEL Vs Parent SES**
  - Y-axis: Standardized SEL score
  - X-axis: SES Tertile (Low, Mid, High)
  - Blue line: Other SEL
  - Orange line: Curious
The Social Classroom

Part 2 – Teaching Activities

Picture
Credit: GPE
2018
The Social and Cultural Basis of Pedagogical Choices

Study 1 – Observed classes of 36 teachers in Iringa, Mtwara and Zanzibar + Interview

- Reading activities almost all choral
- Little “you do”
- Little group work
- Children were asked the same questions repeatedly
The Social and Cultural Basis of Pedagogical Choices

Study 2 – Presented 5 scenarios to 17 teachers in Morogoro

Example Scenario

In one classroom, teacher Musa asks the students to read together as a whole class.

In another classroom, teacher Sultan sometimes asks students to read in pairs.
Study 2 – Presented 5 scenarios to 17 teachers in Morogoro

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Togetherness (Umoja)</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
<th>Making students happy</th>
<th>Avoiding Embarrassing Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asking repeated questions</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paired reading</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
“[If students are asked questions they do not know the answer to] they will be laughed at by their fellow students and develop bad feelings about themselves and can result in teachers being seen as incompetent and unfit for the teaching profession.”

“The children were happy because it gave them the easy to answer the question, students naturally do not like to be in tension when in class, so they were happy with repeating same answers.”
**Togetherness (Umoja)**

“When you [teach as a whole class rather than differentiate], **you bring unity among them**; they help one another in learning.”

“[differentiated instruction] is very bad because it perpetuates the gap between weak and strong students. The weak students will **feel isolated and disregarded** in the class.”

“When you ask different questions students can sometime feel divided.”
“this is a fair approach because all students are treated equally. It brings cooperation among them. All will be happy and will understand the lesson. It makes them be one and feel they are together and united. They will love one another.”

“[the students] felt happy because the learned together and were equally treated by their teacher. They were not treated differently.”
“It is a waste of time to ask [students] things they do not know.”

“You know when you do something together with your pupils, you get connected to them.”

“...[independent group learning] is very bad because the weak students will feel bad and isolated. The teacher should treat all students equally by teaching them addition first and not to leave it for them to do on their own”
“Pupils learn best when they share a book together. **Distributing a book to each hinders cooperation** among them.”

“Independent learning is not effective because pupils **always cooperate with others in life**, even with normal things, so it will take time for pupils to understand when taught alone compared to being in a group.”
Conclusion: Effective Pedagogy =

- Compatible with Cultural and Social Norms of the Classroom
  - But student SE skills built where possible
- Follows Key Cognitive Learning Principles
  - Students participate in their own learning
  - Children learn at different paces and in different ways
  - Teachers need to gauge student understanding to provide instruction at the right level
  - Students practice skills independently

- Co-designed by Teachers?
Combining Learning and Social Goals

- Thumbs up/thumbs down
  - checking for understanding
  - without embarrassment

- Teacher-directed group work –
  - individual practice
  - students feel free to speak up

BUT co-design with teachers to ensure that:
  - teacher retains sense of control
  - retain sense of togetherness
  - easier to manage
Research Partners

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