Slow Learners

As the shades of colour Black & white the children of yester years were termed as normal & mentally retarded. But here we forget that there is a shade of grey in between the two. The same way there is a group of children who are neither normal nor retarded. They are slow learners.

Slow learners are students who learn more slowly than their peers. A slow learner is said to be someone learning at a rate slower than 85% of their age-master.

Definitions

1) Greek Dictionary - A child who is doing poorly in school, and having their IQ between 70 and 90 and whose social behaviour is less than age level standards.

2) By Shree Flannigan & Kelly Groth - A slow learners is difficult to identify because he/she is no different in appearance and can function normally in most situations. He/She usually has normal physical dexterity, has adequate memory and possesses common sense. The fact that a slow learner possess these qualities sometimes is why parents find it difficult to understand how their child can be a slow learner. What they need to realize is that, although the child has these qualities he/she does not necessarily have the ability to do school work.

3) From glossary of Education - A slow learner is one who does not learn successfully due to general socio-cultural problem, language problems, inadequate use of strategies, lack of interest, due to family background, illiterate parents, avoided by parents in early childhood or due to mental weakness.

www.education.com/definition/sls
Identifying slow learner

Common characteristics of a slow learner are their measured intelligence is 75% - 90% of the average child, the ability to read comes about a year later than most, and the rate at which they learn 4/5 to 9/10 that of normal rate. Abstract thinking is difficult for slow learner and their attention span is short. A slow learner reacts slower than average, self expression is awkward and self esteem is low. It is hard to figure things out themselves, especially if given multiple step instructions. Most slow learners function below grade level in all subject areas & generally score consistently low on achievement tests. It may appear that slow learners are not capable of learning however, Servio Carroll wrote Slow learners are handicapped in the regular classroom to approximately the same degree as students with average abilities when competing with gifted students. These children are able to learn although the mastery of skills comes much slower.

A website called `Helping Slow Learners` (www.foundationosa.org/slow.htm) lists 10 characteristics of a slow learner.

1. Functions at ability but significantly below grade level.
2. Is prone to immature interpersonal relationships.
3. Has difficulty following multi-step directions
4. Lives in the present & does not have long range goals.
5. Has few internal strategies (ie. organizational skills, difficulty transferring and generalizing information)
6. Scores consistently low on achievement tests.
7. Works well with “hands on” material (ie. Labs, manipulative, activities)
8. Has a poor self image.
9. Works on all tasks slowly.
10. Masters skills slowly, some skills may not be mastered at all.
Working with slow learners

Being a special educator at the Learning Disability Clinic KEM Hospital and in regular schools, I had the privilege of testing the children in their educational fields. After evaluating them I found that teachers find it difficult and face challenges in dealing with these children. The reason for this is that these teachers do not receive any particular training on how to support these children. On a national level not much is done to accommodate the slow learners. No special services are provided nationwide, nor are there services provided at a state or district level. It is up to the teachers and parents to provide the help needed for slow learners to progress. It doesn`t seem right that a child who is low in one area gets the help they need, but a child who struggles in all areas receives no special services. It is the school counselors and special educators who give advice & inform teachers and parents of strategies to use to assist slow learners.

Today a teacher is likely to have 3-5 students who are slow learners. So it is very important that we take the time to learn how to accommodate these students in our classrooms. The goal of helping a slow learner is not to get them performing at grade level, but to get them performing at their highest level possible. Harmer (2001) suggests that students learn more quickly if the teaching methods used match their preferred learning styles. As learning improves so does self esteem. Someone needs to reach out to these students and there are numerous strategies & interventions we could try.

Lescano (1995) have suggested the following.

1. Give daily evaluations.
2. Use simple vocabulary in directions & instructions.
3. Use standard formats and limited types of responses for each assignment.
4. Provide multi-sensory prompts to elicit correct responses.
5. Analyze & break down difficult tasks.
6. Increase time-on-task rates (more teacher questions, group participation, effective case of signals, gestures etc)
7. Reduce distractions.
8 Emphasize on strengths.
9 Make lessons short.
10 Add variety to the academic routine.
11 Make learning fun & comfortable. Your positive attitude is very important.
12 Communicate with your students.
13 Provide meaningful, concrete activities rather than abstract.
14 Encourage your child to explore areas of interest to him/her.

A few things that I have tried in my clinic is the use of volunteers, peer tutoring & reducing the amount of work. Sometimes by simply placing the right students together in pairs or group situations you can utilize peer tutoring without drawing attention of the slow learners. In schools, teachers can reduce the work pressure by reducing the number of spelling words, or maths problem, no home-work as all this reduces the level of stress.

It is high time that parents and well wishers of these slow learners should come forward in large numbers and ask for the rights of these children. Let the people be aware of this group of children, accept them as they are and ask not for pity, not sympathy but just a little bit of understanding, a bit of patience and lots of love & help.

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