

30 Methods to Improve Learning Capability in Slow Learners

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Abstract

A very big problem that every school faces is the difficulty to deal with the slow learners. It is a challenging task for the teachers to tackle slow learners and to make them learn the academic subjects. Handling them in homework and class work, making them understand the topic, dealing with them patiently, understanding their psychology etc., are the areas concerned with the slow learners. Some of the teachers try to get the result by hook or crook through putting negative enforcement by punishing them. It is estimated that due to that problem many slow learners or dropout students are being termed as weak students and pushed out of the school. But this is not the solution. The result of the action of the throwing the student out of the school paves the way to create a dark spot in the life of the victim student. If the teachers find time to think about those students, definitely the solution comes into their hand. There are incidents and evidences in history that many slow learners became scientists, doctors, engineers, professors and writers in their life. The following article aims at

helping the teachers to handle the slow learners in an appropriate way thereby increasing the learning capability of the slow learners making teaching-learning more purposeful.

Key Words: academic, class, improve, knowledge, learn, method, slow learner, teacher

Introduction

The term "slow learner" is given to a student who has the ability to achieve scholastically, but, tends to work below the grade level average. This type of learner will typically score lower on IQ tests or national achievement tests, but not so low that a "special education" diagnosis is given. If your homeschooled student has not taken an IQ test or an assessment exam, you may be wondering what the common signs are in identifying a slow learner. If you're wondering whether or not you are homeschooling a slow learner the list below highlights characteristics that some researchers have found to be shared by many struggling learners. Contrary to common belief, slow learners in the regular classroom are neither rare nor unique. The student commonly called a slow learner is one who cannot learn at an average rate from the instructional resources, texts, workbooks and learning materials that are designed for the majority of students in the classroom. These students need special instructional pacing, frequent feedback, corrective instruction or modified materials-all administered under conditions sufficiently flexible for learning to occur.

Slow learners are usually taught in one of two possible instructional arrangements: (1) a class composed mostly of average students, in which case up to 20% may be slow learners, or (2) a class specially designed for slow learners.

Whether you meet slow learners in a regular class or special class, you will immediately feel the challenge of meeting their learning needs. Their most obvious characteristic is a limited attention span compared to more able students. To keep these students actively engaged in the learning process requires more than the usual variation in presentation methods (direct, indirect), classroom climate (co-operative, competitive) and instructional materials (films, workbooks, co-operative games, simulations). If this variation is not part of your lesson, these students may well create their own variety in ways that disrupt your teaching. Other immediately noticeable characteristics of slow learners are their deficiencies in basic skills (reading, writing and mathematics), their difficulty in comprehending abstract ideas and most disconcerting, sometimes their unsystematic and careless work habits.

The greatest challenge to an educator is a student who is a slow learner. These students do not fall into the category of special education, do well outside the classroom and show no evidence of having a medical problem. They simply do not do well in school or a particular subject. In the days before formal schooling these students would carry on productive lives working and doing tasks that did not require extensive reading, writing or math operations. However, today the emphasis is less on occupational learning and more on academic preparation. Thus there is a growing need for help to remediate these students to provide them the best possible opportunities in a changing world.

Two commonalities emerge when dealing with slow learners. The first is that they need extra time to complete tasks. This means that the parents must be willing to augment what happens at school regardless of how fruitless it might appear at times. Secondly, the student must be offered incentives that are appropriate. Depending on the student the best incentives are those where the family works together on a project such as building a model or attending a concert or game. The incentives should require delayed gratification so that the student learns patience and the importance of waiting to be rewarded. The next area is proper nutrition. A student needs to have a breakfast period. Every study done points out that a quality breakfast and proper sleep are the two best ways to improve student performance.

With those two factors in mind, the next step for a teacher or parent is to search for lessons and other resources that make it easier to differentiate the curriculum and make learning more vital and relevant. To this end the special education sites on the Internet have some great ideas. It must be noted that this column is not dealing with those students that qualify for special education classes. However, the concepts that teachers use when dealing with these students are ideal for helping a slow learner once the student's weaknesses have been diagnosed. There may not be a class without some slow learners especially in government schools and colleges.

Classification

1. Students, whose capacity for education or training is limited by low intelligence, cover a fairly wide I.Q. range from approximately 40 to 80 or 90. However, students whose I.Q. ranges between 50/55 and 85/90 are capable of benefiting from the kind of education which is offered within the normal school system. These may be subdivided into two groups.

- (i) The Educable Mentally Retarded (I.Q. range 50 to 70)
- (ii) The Dull Normal (I.Q. range 70 to 85)

2. Trainable Mentally Retarded:

Students whose I.Q. range is between 35/40 and 50 and are usually termed as the Trainable Mentally Retarded. Provision for education of such students may be made outside the normal school system.

Characteristics

1. In physical appearance they are no different from normal students and therefore likely to get admission into schools for normal students where the curriculum is drawn up to meet the needs of average students. So they find it extremely difficult to cope with the education imparted in these schools, unless special provision is made for them and the curriculum is oriented towards practical and real life activities.
2. They are capable of being educated in ordinary schools and even achieving a moderate degree of success, if they are allowed to proceed at a slower pace and the syllabus is adapted to suit their abilities.
3. They will not be able to keep pace with the average students and never be able to learn all the things we expect normal students to master by the time they leave school.
4. They will not be able to go for higher studies despite all the guidance and educational facilities made available to them.
5. They have poor memory. Their attention span is short and they cannot concentrate on one topic for long time.

Sullivan has summarized the characteristics of slow learners as follows:

1. Short attention and concentration span is less
2. Slow reaction time.
3. Limited powers of self-direction.
4. Limited ability to work with abstractions and to generalize.
5. Slowness to form association between words and phrases.
6. Failure to recognize familiar elements in new information.
7. Habits of learning very slowly and forgetting very quickly.
8. Very local point of view.
9. Inability to set up and realize standard or workmanship.
10. Lack of originality and creativeness.
11. Inability to analyze, to do problem solving or think critically.
12. Lack of power to use the higher mental processes.

Identification of slow learner in the class

Early diagnosis of slow learner student is very necessary between the ages of 2 to 6 years. Teachers or parents can identify that the student is a 'slow learner' with a careful observation. They could easily identify some of the signs of a 'slow learner' as follows:

1. Speech defect
2. Language development problem (broken sentences)
3. Assessments the level of vocabulary (vocabulary limited)
4. Verbal abilities
5. Short sentences, grammatically incorrect
6. Student Behaviour
7. Spelling Mistake
8. Interaction with other students
9. Class room Discussion
10. Reading problem
11. Interest
12. Slow response/decision making

If it is identified that a student is 'slow learner', proper evaluation should be done to identify the weakness of the student and relevant strategies must be implemented to overcome it.

Two types of Teaching to aid a SL

A. Compensatory Teaching

Compensatory teaching is an instructional approach that alters the presentation of content to circumvent a student's fundamental weakness or deficiency. Compensatory teaching recognizes content, transmits through alternate modalities (pictures versus words) and supplements it with additional learning resources and activities (learning centers and simulations, group discussions and co-operative learning). This may involve modifying an instructional technique by including a visual representation of content, by using more flexible instructional presentations (films, pictures, illustrations) or by shifting to alternate instructional formats (self-paced texts, simulations, experience-oriented workbooks).

B. Remedial Teaching

This is an alternate approach for the regular classroom teacher in instructing the slow learner. Remedial teaching is the use of activities, techniques and practices to eliminate weaknesses or deficiencies that the slow learner is known to have. For example deficiencies in basic math skills are reduced or eliminated by re-teaching the content that was not learned

earlier. The instructional environment does not change as in the compensatory approach. Conventional instructional techniques such as drill and practice might be employed.

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1. Encourage even for a small achievement

The greatest factor for the success of the life of the student is the encouragement given to him or her. If we try to find out the factors resulting in slow learning, we can concentrate in those areas of the weak student. If we try to applaud him with encouraging words and give confidence, he or she definitely comes out in flying colours. Once the student has grown his confidence means he will definitely improve. The most important cause of his weakness are inferiority complex and stage fear. Some of the teachers always give importance to the good students and neglect the weaker ones in the class. Encouragement can change the whole personality of a student.

2. Fixing the goal and prescribing a Time table

The student should be persuaded to make a time table for the study purpose. Sometimes some students have no goal regarding study. The teacher should observe such students and must inspire them to fix the goal for the life and help him to make a time table for every day work so that the student will be captured through the time table to do the things at the right time.

3. Giving Memory tips

More often the student forgets whatever he learns. That's why he loses his confidence on him and differentiates between him and the good students. The teacher's role is to give the tips such as 'how to recall', 'in which way to write systematically', 'when to learn', 'how to learn' and 'what to learn'.

4. Giving importance in the class

It's always seen that the class room teaching goes on with the direction and understanding of the strong students. But if the average students do not understand what the teacher is teaching and are just running towards the completion of syllabus then the whole teaching is futile. Sometimes it is very urgent to go near the weak student and ask personally whether he has understood or not. Here the teacher's approach of enquiring should be very polite and sweet.

5. Self reading method

Most of the slow learners are found to be very slow in reading. They neglect self reading. They may have the problem of understanding the language and thereby do not take

interest to read. Reading is one the important skill. If the student is given some extra time for understanding the key words, then he or she will definitely improve.

6. Questions for practice

Some questions can be given time to time to engage the learner in the habit of study. That is a practice which can enable the student to come across the learning point at a regular basis.

7. Special guidance beyond school hour

The teachers should not hesitate to spend extra time after school hours with the students to clarify their doubts. The slow learners need special attention beyond school hours. If the teacher allot some extra time for the slow learners, then definitely they will improve.

8. Seating arrangement

More often we see that the strong students in the class room don't wish to sit with the slow learners. The slow ones always sit with the slow ones. This is another cause for the less improvement of the slow learners. If the class teacher makes the seating arrangement in such a way that the strong ones sit with the slow learners and assist the slow learners whenever necessary-then the slow learners will improve in their studies in less span of time.

9. Train them in improving their LSRW Skills

Now-a-days English is being used as an official language and now it occupied the whole world and became a *global language*. So it is very important to know the English language. The slow learners must be created awareness regarding the importance of English in their day to day life and they must be taught how to gain proficiency in the four aspects such as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing which are the four pillars of any language especially for English language. By following the instructions of the teacher, the overall communication skill of the slow learner can be enhanced and enriched.

10. Trace out the physical and mental problems if any

The teacher should find out regarding the physical and mental problems of the slow learners. If the student is not writing anything from the black board, it may be due to his or her poor eye sight or due to lack of proper concentration. If the student is not obeying the words of the teacher, it may not be due to negligence; it may be due to some mental disability. Some students are severely affected by the physical problems which make them lazy to read and write. First the teachers at school and the parents at home must find out the problems and then treat them accordingly.

11. Create confidence level in their interest areas

The teacher should observe the student and must try to understand the interest areas of the student without asking directly. Some of the slow learners might be interested in extracurricular activities. If the student plays, act, does some work the teacher or parent should find out his interest and specialty because every student is special. The encouragement can be started from the student's interest areas. When the student builds his confidence in his interest area then we can expand and inspire the same confidence in other areas also.

12. Psychological Analysis and Problem solution

The more and more we think about the student, the more we get the solution. Primarily we have to search the problem area of the student. The problem of the student may be his family or friends or his personal condition. If we go on asking some personal questions like a relative, then we can understand the problems and difficulties of the slow learner. The parents and teachers can get solution for the problems being encountered by the slow learners.

13. Guidance from his/her level

Student has a level of his own. Level of understanding is different from one student to another. The slow learner more often can't understand the studies because he has not understood the previous formula or concept in the previous classes. How can he understand the concept of class IX if he has not understood the simple concept of class VII and VIII? That's why such students should be personally taught from his understanding level.

14. Be a friend to the Slow Learner

Be a friend to the slow learner. Teacher should spend more time in interacting with them friendly with more patience. Unknowingly when the friendship is built with that student, then the student starts respecting the teacher. The learner will also feel grateful to the teacher because the student recognises that the teacher is taking more individual care in his studies and whatever the teacher says, the student obeys it. The mystery of all success is mutual understanding, team work, collective effort and friendship.

15. Alternatives to traditional home work tasks

Homework is an endless source of problems to the students and their parents. We must not forget that the slow learners has probably worked twice in the classroom as hard as every other student did to keep up remembering all the lessons that he or she learnt in the school or college and so probably do not need more couple of high stress hours when he or she reaches home. Modify tasks, or if this is too time-consuming, cut back the amount of homework that the student has to do. Minimise the written work in

particular. Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan implements the system in all its schools situated in India that the number of books a student carries on his shoulders must be bearable by the student as per his age and class. Study hours will not be conducted in late evenings and less home work would be given by the teacher. The student will never be punished. He or she will be counseled from time to time as per the requirement.

16. Intensive Sessions

Create an opportunity for intensive sessions with the student, using individual or small group sessions. Do not feel frustrated that teaching them is a burden. Recall that teaching profession is a Noble profession. Use interesting, challenging, self-correcting extension work for the rest of the class while you spend time over teaching.

17. Supply of necessary books

A good supply of reference books, news papers, magazines, story books, journals and supplementary readers that are appropriate in terms of interest level and competency level to the slow learners is essential. Many of the students may not afford to buy books. It would be better if books are provided from the school library or from any library.

18. Reading Techniques

Teach the student specific reading techniques e.g. pre-reading routine, word attack technique, self-correcting skills and give very specific instructions to the slow learner without discouraging. The inferiority complex and the stage fear in the student must overcome by mere practice. Simple paragraphs must be given to him/her to read aloud standing on dais. A collar mike must be provided if possible so that it would be audible for all the students.

19. Audio-visual Aids

Using of audio-visual aids and other electronic gadgets may generate more interest in the student to learn. The classroom atmosphere will not be boring, the learning process will not be monotony and the teaching will not be mechanical. Now-a-days most of the schools are furnished with e-class rooms.

20. Interact with parents

Let the parents be intimated about the progress of their child. Arrange a parents-meet if possible and see if they have any extra information that will help you. Seek the assistance and involvement of parents in providing a quiet, well organized place--a homely school in which the student can work whole-heartedly and efficiently. Parent Associations and Parent committees assist for the smooth running of the school or college. Find plenty of positives to

talk to them about the same time as the problems. Do not hesitate to give some reasonable suggestions to the parents.

21. Adjust your expectations

Slow learners will always be behind their chronological peers which don't mean that they can't be expected to improve. It just means that they will be slow. These students will certainly learn and flourish though at a slow pace. With the right help of the teacher, facilitator and mentor they will certainly attain chronologically appropriate academic levels in time.

22. Analyse the students' performance

Learning takes place from simple to complex. If for some reason the student has not learnt the basics, it is futile to teach him the advanced topics. Remedial teaching is not revising the topics taught repeatedly. Careful analysis of the students' performance in the examination and diagnosing the areas of difficulty are key aspects in remedial teaching. Once the difficult areas are identified, the next task is to plan the learning experiences to teach the basics to understand the given topic.

23. Conduct Group Discussions

Students learn a lot from the peer group. Unconscious learning does not take place if students are segregated. Keeping the slow learners in the peer group of bright students and paying individual attention to them by the teacher will enable them to overcome their difficulties. Student is central in the learning process. The learning experiences should be activity-oriented and the teaching should motivate and create interest in the student to learn on his own. When group discussions are conducted in the classroom giving a topic to the students, the slow learners are benefited much.

24. Suitable Curriculum

Suitably tailored lesson plan by the teacher and careful monitoring by the school administration will help slow learners have a better grasp of all lessons in schools. The panel must keep the slow learners also in mind and must frame the syllabus. The lessons thus framed must be beneficial to the slow learners in their day to day life and must improve their knowledge to a vast extent.

25. Create safe Environment

It is vitally important to make your classroom area safe and non-threatening environment for all the students in your class. Everybody needs to understand that you do not under any circumstances put people down and that you will not tolerate anybody else doing

so. Encourage students to help each other with daily tasks but be prepared for a little more class noise. It will be worthy to see how nurturing and supportive even the most hard-boiled student can be. You can easily bring positive change in the attitude of a student not by punishing or scolding but through proper guidance and counselling.

26. Don't forget to teach the Basics

While no single technique or set of techniques are sufficient teaching the slow learner, the suggestions that follow are a starting point for developing instructional strategies that specifically address the learning needs of the slow learner. Teachers often feel that what has not been learnt at the primary level cannot be taught simultaneously with the prescribed topics at the secondary level as they are busy completing the syllabus. Experience shows that once the basics are taught, the learning process is accelerated and the slow learners comprehend and grasp the given topics of the class, since they have already attained the mental age.

27. Conduct Bridge Courses if necessary

In government run residential schools in Andhra Pradesh and JawaharNavodayaVidyalayasnationwide, the students are admitted in class VI based on a selection test consisting of a variety of questions to test intelligence and aptitude of the students. It has been observed that many students thus selected do not possess the basics which they are supposed to learn at the primary level. But these schools have produced excellent results over the years by introducing bridge courses in their academic planning.

28. Don't separate

The new words used in questions could confuse students and elicit wrong answers from them. Students should be exposed to a variety of questions with antonyms and synonyms - all the words used to frame a question to test the topic taught. Merely tagging the slow learners with bright students or segregating them into separate sections will not help the slow learners. Slow learners harbour themselves unobtrusively in the group of bright students.

29. Treat with Empathy

Learning is more encompassing; it includes not only factual content but the pupil's positive feelings about what is learned. It seems, moreover, that the affective element, such as the learner's delight with what he is doing; actually establish the basis for meaningful and autonomous learning. The emotional impact of teachers' behaviour can influence learning because it helps to instill in students a love for the subject they teach. When the teacher

provides warmth, acceptance and empathy, the learners feel free to regard their emotions and personal meanings as legitimate content in learning. But when language is used in an alienated way, without any emotional and personal significance, students lose their motivation to learn because it is dissociated from their lives.

30. Enhance Curiosity in students

An easy way to make learning more affective is to foster curiosity in class. It makes learning more interesting and funny. Curiosity can be enhanced by introducing novelty and variety in instructional techniques. Involving students in decision making or sharing power in the classroom is also a way of fostering affective teaching and learning. When the teacher makes decisions with the students about the content, assignments, deadlines, class tests, and future learning, they feel empowered and it makes the whole process more democratic. It helps in making their attitude towards their teacher and learning more positive. It dispels the wrong notion that a teacher is just an authoritarian, whose job is to make students do things, allow or prevent actions, and make judgments in class. On the other hand, they begin to feel that the teacher is a facilitator, who is receptive to their problems and who takes great interest in their learning.

Conclusion

Learning is an essential but complicated process that we follow life-long, from the moment we utter our first syllable to the time when we proudly hold high our college diplomas and beyond. The problem, however, is that not all children can adapt to a rigid style of learning. Some children just cannot cope with the fast-paced and rigid approach that is characteristic of conventional teaching. Due to this, a gap forms between their true ability and their performance level and such children are then dubbed 'Slow Learners'. By expanding the teaching styles, instructors can support opportunities for students with different learning styles to increase their learning (Friedman & Alley, 1984). Gregorc and Ward (1977) recommended that instructors identify the learning styles of the students, identify their teaching styles and then vary their teaching methods to meet the range of learner preferences. Hyman and Rosoff (1985) contended that matching learning style with teaching style will augment achievement. According to Henson and Borthwick (1984) learners have their own preferred learning styles, and instructors have a responsibility for gearing up their teaching styles to fit the learning style of the learners. Various researchers have suggested that matching instructors' preferred teaching style to students' preferred learning styles will produce higher academic success as measured by final exam scores (Van Vuren, 1992;

Zippert, 1985) and course grades (Matthews, 1995; Raines, 1976; Hunter, 1979; Carthey, 1993; Miglietti, 1994). However, other researchers have contended that there is no significant relationship between style match and academic success (Hunter, 1979; Charkins, O'Toole, Wetzel, 1985; Campbell, 1989; Battle, 1982; Lyon, 1991; Scerba, 1979). Most researchers agree that further study is needed in the area of identifying learning styles, teaching styles, and the significance of a match between the two and student academic success. By following the above mentioned 30 methods, any teacher, facilitator, instructor, mentor, lecturer, professor etc., who are teaching for slow learners not-only can improve the learning capability of the slow learners but-also can make them successful students in academics at-par with other students of their class/peer group.

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