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SLOW LEARNERS - SENSITIZING STUDENT TEACHERS

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Introduction

In the present scenario, dropouts and stagnation is creating a grave concern in the minds of educationists. It is commonly accepted that poor performance in academic subjects is one of the reasons that leads to such a situation. Poor school performance may be caused by physical causes, poor intelligence, learning disorders, neurological disorders or emotional disorders. These aspects fall under the scope of educational psychology. In the field of educational psychology many theories and practices have developed. The one involved in such a kind of education would find it is difficult to find answers or there may be no easy answers as there is lack of consensus in many basic issues. We must develop a perspective on psychological aspect of education. We need to empower children with varying needs. No child left behind is the refrain that the policy makers and educationists keep making.

Teaching of growth and development of learners is a part of educational psychology. The programme of B.Ed will be incomplete without including the topic of individual differences in terms of children with special needs in it. The syllabus includes the topic of catering to students having low intellectual abilities also. Though this topic can be transacted theoretically there is need to make students of teacher education program sensitized in the area of education of mentally exceptional students .As the student teachers are involved in practice teaching in schools they are exposed to the real classroom situation for a long period of time. The teaching of the topic has to be done in such a way that the direct experiences of the student teachers in the classrooms are maximum utilized. In order to make the students of Teacher education programme be

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sensitized of the presence of slow learners in every classroom the author of this paper outlined a study to be made in schools to which the students went for practice teaching.

As one of the objective of the subject module was to help students to apply the knowledge of student characteristics in planning their lessons, this kind of field study will give the students information regarding the characteristics of the backward children who are going to be there in every classroom

The findings will help them to cater to differentiated learning and chose enrichment or remedial according to the types of children

Our education policies also want teachers to spot, encourage and assist children with special needs so that they develop their potential to the maximum.

The activities (discussion, presentations, field work etc) chosen follow processes that, reflective, constructive, integrative, collaborative, developmental, and standards (course objective) based.

Who are slow learners?

There are changes in the terminology when talking about children with learning disabilities. There is a difference between Slow Learners and Under Achievers, Mental retardation and Children with Learning Disabilities. Mental retardation is the general term applied to children who have slow rate of maturation ,inadequate social adjustment and reduced learning capability. Mentally retarded children are also called mentally handicapped, slow learners, feeble minded and educationally backward. In terms of IQ the retarded children have IQ below 75, namely morons, imbeciles, idiots

Slow Learners are students who are generally unable to do the work normally expected of their age group. They are students who find it very difficult to keep pace with their age/class mate. They are unable to do the work of the class in which they are placed or even the class below that.

Schonell (1948):

“Backward pupil is one who, compared with other students of the same chronological age, shows marked educational deficiency.”

Burt (1950):

“The term Backward Children refers to those children who are unable to cope with the work normally expected of their age group.”

Backward children are slow learners whose educational attainment falls below their natural abilities. He is termed backward only if his progress falls short of what he is supposed to achieve according to his abilities.

Students showing poor performance in schools are often characterized as “Inactive learners” or “Slow learners” or “Backward children”

An inactive learner 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.

Although the child has these qualities he/she does not necessarily have the ability to do school work. Their measured intelligence may be 75% - 90% of the average child.

Table : Estimated proportion of various grades of mentally subnormal children in the school population

Degree of mental sub normality	Terms in current use	Approximate IQ level	Approximate % in population of school age
1. Severe subnormality	Idiot	0 --- 19	0.06%
2. Moderate subnormality	Imbecile	20 --- 49	0.24%
3. Mild subnormality	Feeble minded	50 --- 69	2.26%
4. Dull normal	Dull and backward	70 --- 85/90	10.00%

Source: *Education and Mental Health* (1955), a UNESCO publication

Methodology followed

In order to gather relevant information about the presence of slow learners in school population the following steps were taken.

***Details of method and procedures**

The students prepared a checklist based on the structured format (a sample is to be attached as additional evidence in the later part of the paper) to be filled when they go to schools. In the tool they will mention the class / school, number of students in the class, the number of slow learners according to the class teacher, why they are considered so, what type of characteristics they have like reading difficulty, writing difficulty and so on. The students will have interaction with the respective class teachers and fill the forms. There are 8 groups going to 8 schools during practice teaching phase, each group will get data from 2 or 3 classes with 30 students in each class. So approximately there will be data of between 480 to 720 students in the age group 13-14. The group leader takes the initiative to prepare a presentation on their findings

The collected data from the different schools they went to, will be collated and presented by the students themselves that is the 8 groups. This will be in the form of showcasing (a sample part of the presentation is also to be attached)

They will listen and observe my presentation based on their findings and the findings of scientific research works done in this area of slow learners. There will be discussion on methods and activities suitable for teaching such slow learners

They will incorporate the activities in the ensuing lesson plans. (Sample lessons plans of 2-3 student teachers where they would have incorporated differentiated activities for slow learners, is also to be attached)

***Contents of methodology section**

Description of study area.

The study area was mainly confined to the schools to which the student teachers went for practice teaching. That is the schools within the limits of Baroda city. And the study dealt with students who were observed by the class teacher all year round

Demographic details of study population

The students belonged to varying socio economic strata, both boys and girls of secondary schools were included in it. The age range was from 13 to 17 years old

Description of procedure for obtaining data

A check list with a number of common characteristics of slow learners was prepared and the students ticked the characteristics found in one particular child as observed by the class teacher.

Description of methods and procedures of data analysis

The students mainly calculated the percentage of slow learners across the data collected from schools by the members of their group E.g red house found 25 slow learners in the total of 292 students belonging to the age group of 13 to 16.that is nearly 10% of students were slow learners.

Check list

NAME OF THE SCHOOL:
STANDARD
AGE RANGE OF CHILDREN:
TOTAL NO. OF CHILDREN:
NO. OF SLOW LEARNERS:

DESCRIPTION OF SLOW LEARNERS:	S.L. 1	S. L. 2	S. L. 3	S. L. 4	S. L. 5
They usually never complete their classwork or homework.					
They can't read properly.					
They can't write properly.					
They make mistakes in mathematical calculations.					
How many years he has been in the same class?					
He has some special abilities? (drawing,dramatics,dancing,atheletics or any other)					
Does he fail in one subject/two?					
Does he fail in two or more subjects?					
Do they suffer from poor health? Gets easily tired?					
Do they have bodily defects? (defective speech, poor eyesight,faulty hearing)					

Do they get proper nourishment?					
They have very short attention span.					
They make careless mistakes.					
They do not seem to listen when spoken to directly.					
Do they have problem of grasping of meaning?					
They are easily distracted by extraneous stimuli					
Do they have problem in remembering things?					
Do they belong to poor socio-economic status?					
Are the parents uneducated/illiterate?					
Do they belong to broken homes?					
They are irregular in attendance?					
Are they influenced by neighbourhood or other social agencies?					
NAME OF THE STUDENT					
TEACHER:					

Results

Group 1

They made a summary statement of main findings

NAME OF THE SCHOOL:-

X SCHOOL, Y SCHOOL, Z SCHOOL, W SCHOOL, V SCHOOL

STANDARD:-

STD- VIII , STD- IX.

AGE RANGE OF CHILDREN:-

13-14 YEARS.

TOTAL NO CHILDREN:-292.

NO OF SLOW LEARNERS:-25.

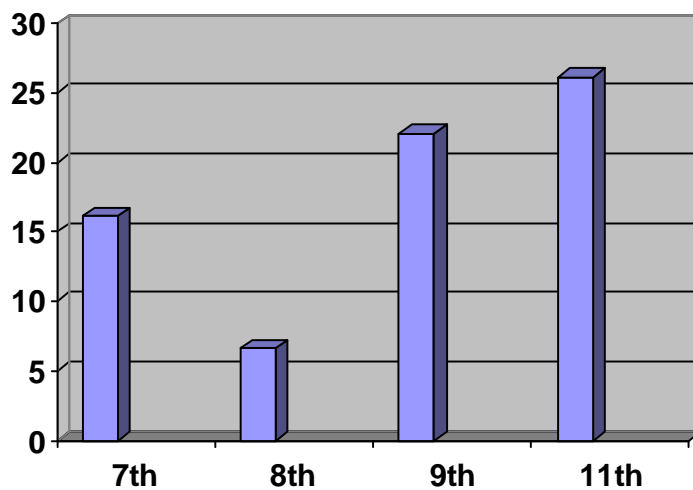
Group 2

Presented it in the form of graph, gave description of slow learners and what a good teacher should do

X axis -- std to which slow learners belonged to
Y axis-- percentage of slow learners

Description of slow learners.

- They have very short attention span
- They make careless mistakes.
- They usually never complete their class work or home work.
- They fail in one or more subjects.



- They have problem of grasping of meaning.
- They have problem in remembering things.
- They are irregular in attendance.
- They can not write and read properly.

Characteristics Of A Good Teacher For Slow learners

- "A good teacher gives individual attention to slow learners. It is now an admitted fact that all children do not learn quickly. It is the gifted children who learn quickly and quite a large number of children coming to schools learn slowly. Slow learners lack in understanding, comprehension and expression.

- Slow learners work more effectively when they know the functional objectives for a lesson. Discuss the relevance of the functional objective and obtain the students' commitment to learn. It is also advisable to break down the objective into component parts.
- Try to consider activities that involve the use of different sensory channels: auditory, visual, tactile, or kinesthetic. Some slow learners have a single sensory preference, so they acquire language primarily through that channel. Widen their sensory learning styles with activities like blindfolded pair or group work, guessing, etc.
- There are many motivational resources at hand to enhance active participation, i.e. bulletin boards, reward tokens, bonus points, etc.
- Providing slow learners with a feeling of success is a hard job, but the following activities are useful:
 - Give daily evaluations.
 - Use simple vocabulary in directions and instructions.
 - Use standard formats and limited types of responses for each assignment.
 - Provide multi-sensory prompts to elicit correct responses.
 - Analyze and break down difficult tasks.
 - Increase time-on-task rates (more teacher questions, group participation, effective use of signals, gestures, etc.).

Group 4

The sample suggestions were given by this group under various headings .For e.g Environmental -- Change seating,reduce distractions, use parent volunteers, crossage tutors, peers involvement

Materials use-- Use a variety of technological aids like calculators,typewriters

Impact on the student teachers

The field work they did have a profound effect on the student teachers. They were surprised by the varying number of slow learners in each of the classrooms they went to. They deliberated about the reasons for such behaviour and enumerated a number of suggestions too.

Conclusion

The children who are slow learners require extra effort to optimize their performance. This support need to be both educational & emotional. It is only the teacher who can facilitate this emotional component to make the environment encouraging and friendly. Children who are backward will flourish in the warmth of that environment instead of feeling repelled, self esteem is crucial for their survival against odd.

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