

EDUCATION IS POWER

Identifying and Helping the Slow Learner

by Thomas E. Wilson

About one out of every six American children is a slow learner. There is general confusion surrounding this most common problem.

The literature on slow learners is indeed becoming more plentiful, and represents a significant advance in our knowledge of children.

Identifying the true slow learner may be a difficult task. This child usually progresses fairly normally in his early years, aside from learning to walk and talk a little later than most children. They may show little or no interest in books or other learning materials, never caring for the little "Golden Book" or a box of crayons, but otherwise give little or no impressions of being slow learners or of being mentally retarded.

Slow learners make up 15 to 18 percent of children in the total school population. Usually their general intelligence quotient (IQ) is from 75 to 90. (An IQ of 100 is considered average). They do learn in the regular classroom, but learn more slowly than the other children. Their progress and achievement level lags further and further behind that of the average child as they grow older.

Although the slow learner may be a difficult child to recognize, identify, and understand, he is not an impossible child in the classroom. So many children give the impression of being slow that teachers and parents become confused as to what the cause of their slowness really is. Any number of causes - whether physical or



psychological or social in origin - may affect such behavior. Then too, the slow learner is usually normal in appearance, and is able to function satisfactorily in most situations.

This is precisely why he is difficult to understand and identify. It is much easier for a teacher and a parent to recognize mental retardation in a child because its signs are more obvious. While the slow learner usually possesses common sense and adequate memory, is physically adept, and has normal dexterity, this does not mean that he has normal ability for school work. It is not unusual to hear the parents of a slow learner state that they are puzzled over their child's school difficulties since "he seems to understand so well at home."

Another element adding to the confusion is that often there is no effort made to separate the particular problems of the slow learners from those of school dropouts, underachievers, or juvenile delinquents. Studies do not seem to agree on the percentage of slow learners in these categories, but they do seem to indicate that the slow learner does comprise a substantial percentage of our school dropout population. It is generally accepted that a large number of children who are dropouts or potential dropouts are members of poor, disadvantaged families. Yet it is known that slow learners can come from any type of home. The point is that in our efforts to help the dropouts, the disadvantaged, and the mental retardates, the slow learners as a distinct group with their own unique characteristics are often not given the consideration and the attention they need.

What does all of this mean to the Black parent of the Black child who is considered a slow learner? It means

that many of our Black children who are placed in special education classes are, in fact, slow learners and not mental retardates. It means that we as parents and teachers of the Black child must be acutely aware of the distinct differences and see to it that the school authorities in our several school systems around the country are also aware of these differences.

For the next two weeks we will be discussing ways which we as teachers and parents may help the Black child who may be considered a slow learner move into the mainstream of the educational process.

HELP YOUR CHILD DISCOVER THE WORLD OF BOOKS



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