Supporting Slow Learners and Students with MID: Building Academic and Meta-academic Resilience

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OECTA PD day Presentation April 4th, 2013

Presentation adapted from Steven R. Shaw
Assumptions

- All children can learn
- Low intelligence is not academic destiny
- Mental ability is a useful construct
- Low intelligence is another risk factor that can be overcome
- Good teaching is one key to creating resilient children
SEE IT
FEEL IT
HEAR IT
DO IT
Understanding the bell curve allows some insight into slow learners.
## Differences Among Three Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Ed</th>
<th>Joe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COGNITIVE</strong></td>
<td>66 (1%ile)</td>
<td>100 (50%ile)</td>
<td>74 (4%ile)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADAPTIVES</strong></td>
<td>70 (2%ile)</td>
<td>100 (50%ile)</td>
<td>75 (5%ile)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACADEMICS</strong></td>
<td>60 (&lt;1%ile)</td>
<td>60 (&lt;1%ile)</td>
<td>60 (&lt;1%ile)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(DD) (LD) (MID)
## The Slow Learner Whirlpool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Presenting Problem/Diagnosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-2</td>
<td>learning disorders-NOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>ADHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>ODD, CD, and motivation issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>Major depressive disorder, dysthymia, severe academic motivation deficits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>School drop out, legal system Involvement, early pregnancy, unemployment, underemployment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What are the life risks for slow learners?

- drug abuse
- alcohol abuse
- teen pregnancy
- incarceration
- spouse abuse
- violence
- mental health issues

- government assistance
- unemployed
- underemployed
- juvenile delinquency
- health issues
- disability claims
- susceptible to dogma
# Results – Grades

## Grades Changes as a Function of Grade Retention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GPA (4.0 Scale)</th>
<th>Non-Retained</th>
<th>Retained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre retention</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post retention</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year after</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Legend:**
- Blue: Pre retention
- Red: Post retention
- Yellow: 1 year after
Causes of Slow Learning

• Familial/Polygenetic inheritance
• Poverty/Deprivation
• Prematurity
• Congenital issues
• Acquired brain insult
Parent Involvement
Essential but Difficult

• Parents usually find school aversive
  – Personal experiences
  – Parent blaming
• Often have multiple jobs
• No news is good news mindset
• Won’t make a difference
Increasing Parent Involvement

• Change meeting location
• Establish rapport with parents by communicating positive behaviours, efforts etc. on the part of their child (good news stories)
• Respect real life situations (e.g., child care, work schedules)
Curriculum Issues

- Discontinuous curriculum
- Too rapid introduction of new concepts
- Insufficiently supported explanations and activities
- Insufficient practice
Basic Constructs for Teaching Slow Learners

Five themes

• Make all instruction concrete and relevant
• Preorganize presentation of new material
• Program skill transfer/generalization into every activity
• Appropriately paced classroom
• Prevention of disciplinary problems
Why these five?

• Can be applied to any curriculum at any level?
• Relevant to improved test scores
• Effective strategies for all children
• No specialized skills required
• Can easily be implemented and are consistent with the Learning for All document
Concrete Instruction

- See it, feel it, hear it, do it
- Make it relevant to life
- Students with low cognitive ability often do not see beyond their fingertips
- Lack delay of gratification
- ‘How to’ books are very useful (e.g., how to cook; how to use household products; how to maintain personal hygiene)
Preorganize

- Detailed information presented in context
- No requirement of inference
Transfer/Generalization

- Classroom without borders (all involved)
- Cross topic instruction
- Meta-cognitive reminders
- Associate new material to previously learned material
- Across setting instruction
Academic Engaged Time

• Most studies show academic engaged time to be 15-20% of the school day
• Academic engaged time is strongly related to test scores and other measures of academic success
• Slow learners are especially harmed by low rates of engaged time
• Work to increase academic engaged time to 40% of the day
Increasing engaged time

• Speed
• Little down time
• More repetitions
• Small group and computer assisted instruction
• Use of packed curricula as a supplement
• Educational games

(“now you teach me”)
Strategies to support slow learners

- Drill and repetition
- Time management and organization
- Break down information and tasks
- Use hands on activities
- Use computer assisted instruction to reinforce learning
Strategies to support slow learners

• Provide a variety of ways to demonstrate competence
• Pair students with peer mentors
• Link academic learning to real-world
• Encourage students’ involvement in school based activities that they enjoy and where they can succeed
• Teacher student relationship is critical
META-ACADEMIC MODEL
School Success

Cognitive/Academic Skills
- Reading Abilities
- Writing Abilities
- Math Abilities
- General Intelligence
- Attention

Meta Academic Skills
- Executive Function Skills
- School Adaptation Skills
- Social Skills
- Coping with Medical Issues
- Coping with Mental Health Issues
Academic skills (traditional approach)

- reading
- writing
- math

school success
Meta-academic training

- **assumption** that all students have **equal ability** to acquire academic skills
- students **are not taught how to learn**
- not knowing how to learn makes school success extremely difficult
- less effective coping skills in order to simply "survive"
Adaptive Functioning

- Daily living skills
- Communication skills
- School living & rule following
- Self care
- Self direction
- Functional Academics
Executive Functions

- Emotional Control
- Impulse Control
- Mental Flexibility
- Initiation
- Working Memory
- Planning

- Organization
- Organization of Materials
- Self-monitoring
- Creativity
- Social affect
- Social interpretation
How does EF affect learning?

- Recording plans and assignments
- Staying focused in class
- Keeping materials organized
- Showing up to class on time
- Multi-tasking (writing and listening at the same time)
- Turning in assignments
- Reflecting on work
- Finishing work on time
- Pursuing help
- Estimating time to complete tasks
- Waiting to speak until called on
- Thinking through problems
Working Memory

- One step at a time
- Don’t write homework on the blackboard
- Encourage self-talk (model for them)
- Mnemonic devices
- Comprehension checks
Initiate

• Not laziness or lack of motivation
• Need for jump start
• Don’t ask children to raise their hands when they have a question
• Cooperative projects
Mental Health Issues

- Slow learners are usually thought of as an academic issue, but the mental health issues may be even more salient (and more ignored)
- Slow learners have far more mental health problems than persons with average intelligence or higher
- Prevention, promotion of social skills, and support are critical activities in the mental health of slow learners
Mental Health

Susceptibility
Psychopathology
Stress/anxiety management
Access to care
Medication management
Physical health concerns
In the classroom...

- Punitive systems reduce motivation, increase avoidance, harm teacher-student relationships, and increase emotional reactions.
- They only help if the problem is a *won’t* do. Punitive systems do nothing if the problems is a *can’t* do.
- With slow learners the problems are nearly always *can’t* do. No matter how basic the skill appears.
Motivation requires the basics

- Sleep
- Food
- Health
- Safety
- Peer support
- Family support
- Family stability
- Free from drugs
- Free from major mental illness
Classroom threats to motivation

- Can’t force motivation
- Inconsistency
- Unfairness
- Humiliation
- Battle of egos
- Saving face
- Avoiding anger
Research Findings

Two predictors of success:

- If the student felt the teacher liked him or her
- If the teacher involved the parent
Research Findings

• After academic skill training, children with MID developed academic skills near grade level, but they still failed in school (due to meta-academic difficulties)

• Community and family supports were more predictive of success than any other school variables

• School policies (especially grade retention) are more often risk factors than resilience factor
Teacher-student relationship

Relationship between teacher and student are critically important for academics and behavior.

– Over 95% of slow learners described as “unmotivated”

– Teachers report that they would much rather work with “average or above average ability students”

– Teachers report feeling that working with slow learners is “unrewarding.”

– Teachers ignore slow learners and do not develop a bond with them
Relationship strategies

• List the five children who are least rewarding to work with
• 15 minute banking system (motivation)
• Focus on quality and uniqueness of relationship
• Developing hope
• Overcoming history
• Reducing alienation
Advocacy for Slow Learners

• Without advocacy slow learners will continue to be ignored
• There are no politically powerful natural advocates
• The biggest advocates are advocates of ignoring the slow learners (e.g., the LD, ADHD and ASD lobbies)
• This is the peptalk portion of the day--someone has to support these children
• Failure is not an option.
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