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**Teaching Reading To Slow Learning Children In The Wilmer
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TEACHING READING TO SLOW LEARNING CHILDREN
IN THE WILMER HUTCHINS HIGH SCHOOL
HUTCHINS, TEXAS

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Dahl B. Storms
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THESIS

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APPROVED as to style and content by:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writers sincere gratitude is extended to
Mr. R. E. Carreathers for directing this research project.

DEDICATION

The writer wishes to dedicate this paper to her husband, William Sr. and sons, William Jr. and Walter for their special encouragement and patient understanding throughout her graduate program.

D. B. S.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Teachers find many books and articles written on teaching reading to slow learning children. No other educational skill has received so much emphasis or has been the subject of such a great variety of investigations. There is, however, a volume of books dealing with the reading of children but a scarcity of books dealing directly with the reading of children who are slow learners. Yet, in every classroom, there is a little group of "slow learners", that is, children who do not have the capacity to keep up with their classmates and whose problems must be met in some way by their teachers.

Slow reading may then have one or more of three main causes. It may be due to inefficient eye movements, excessive vocalizations, or word-for-word reading. These three causes are, of course, interrelated. A child who reads every word as a unit must have many fixations and has time to vocalize if he wishes. Excess vocalization leads to many fixations, and the pupil tends to read syllable-by-syllable which is even worse than the word-for-word. The child with too many fixations usually vocalizes, and the largest unit he sees at once is a word. In general, the three habits go together, and it is often impossible to tell for any given child which habit comes first, or if all three developed together.

The typical slow reader at Wilmer Hutchins High School

is not the victim of a single bad habit but the possessor of an unfortunate system of habits, each of which reinforces the other. The whole performance is inefficient because it is clumsy and time-consuming. Even if a child becomes familiar with the techniques, he never gets the degree of comprehension for which his efforts should be rewarded because his technique breaks up reading matter into tiny and meaningless units. Regardless of the method used in teaching slow learners, there are certain matters in which special care must be taken by teachers of slow learning children.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. This study has been concerned with (1) identifying slow learning children at Wilmer-Hutchins High School (2) discovering the causes of slow reading and (3) examples of methods of teaching reading to slow learning children.

Importance of the study. The purpose of this study was to determine how the slow learning children at Wilmer-Hutchins High School, Hutchins, Texas, may acquire the skill of reading. Reading aids them in protecting themselves, acquiring information, in securing enjoyment and thereby becoming more contented and useful members of society.

Limitations of this study. This study will be limited to the Wilmer Hutchins High School, Wilmer Hutchins Independent School District, Hutchins, Texas.

Methodology. The data were taken from periodicals and books obtained from the W. R. Banks Library, Prairie View, Texas and the Dallas Public Libraries.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Slow learning children. Refers to children who have low intelligence, who are incapable of keeping up with their classmates in the regular public schools, and who therefore require their maximum growth and development.

Curriculum. A body of prescribed educative experiences under school supervision designed to provide an individual with the best possible training and experiences to fit him for a trade or profession.

Dull normal. We say this is the designation of children or adults who are just below the average in general intelligence.

Personality. The dynamic character, self, or psyche that constitutes and animates the individual person and makes his experience of life unique. A person as the embodiment of distinctive traits of mind and behavior.

Remedial. A method of assisting pupils weak in a particular subject by organizing them into special groups for special instructions.

Environment. The general term designating all the objects, forces, and conditions that affects the individual through such stimuli as he is able to receive.

School. An organization group of pupils pursuing defined studies at defined levels and receiving instruction from one or more teachers, usually housed in a single building or group of buildings.

Reading readiness. A level in which child development is needed for learning to read, usually understood to imply a chronological age of six years and an I. Q. of 100 or more, and no special handicaps, such as severe personality, faculty vision or hearing, to interfere with progress.

Mental health. Wholesomeness of mind, analogous to the wholesomeness of body implicit in physical health, extended in modern usage to include all aspect of the adequacy of individual integration.

Grouping. May be defined as the act or process of classifying pupils for instructional purposes, usually in class groups.

Testing program. It is a broad term to designate any organized plan for systematically carrying out evaluative procedures in a school system or among different school systems.

III. ORGANIZATION OF REMAINDER OF THE STUDY

Chapter II will give a review of the literature of authorities in teaching slow learners to read.

Chapter III will show how to identify the slow learner, causes of the slow learner, characteristics, testing and grouping for instruction.

Chapter IV will deal with the teaching process of slow learners, personality of the teacher, learning environment, curriculum, reading readiness, vocabulary development and teaching of word recognition, standards of expectancy, selection of reading material, and preparation of supplementary reading materials.

Chapter V gives the summary, conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Bucklin gives several factors about teaching the slow learning child. She states that:

It is essential to teach him to maintain a cheerful outlook and have confidence in himself and consideration for others; and concentrate on a task until it is completed. In addition the teacher should try to maintain a pleasant, orderly and friendly environment for freedom; make every effort to have the child feel he is wanted and accepted by showing personal concern and sympathetic understanding toward him. Finally in accordance with his capacity.¹

McCormick has some ideas on the difficulties of the slow learning child. McCormick states that:

The slow learning child's difficulties are often the result of emotional factors as well as mental or scholastic shortcomings. Remedial technique must be used to instill reading skills, but, unless much work is done in changing habits and in building confidence, the remedial work will go slowly.²

The exercises that are used in teaching reading to slow learning children are of all importance. Sometime it is the one big factor we overlook. Feldman expresses his views:

In working to improve the reading ability of slow learning children, it is of primary importance to achieve variety in the exercises which are given to them. The type of activity should not be changed too frequently as slow learning children like to develop familiarity with the work they do. On the other hand, one type of exercise can be repeated several times. However, there should be

¹ Cora Bucklin, "How to Help the Slow Learning Child," The Grade Teacher, LXVIII (September, 1964), 99-100.

² Alma Heflin McCormick, "Teaching Reading to a Problem Class," The Instructor, LX (April, 1965), 32.

a change to another exercise before the children become bored with the same procedures.³

The methods used in teaching slow learning children may vary. Some educators have different opinions on the methods that are to be used. Featherstone gives his views as:

There are no special methods for teaching slow-learning children to read. They learn to read in the same way other children learn to read. Any well tested method of teaching reading advocated by specialists in the field may be used with slow learners, and one need not rely exclusively on any particular method. One method may succeed with certain pupils where another fails. However, orderly, systematic development of reading techniques is of paramount importance; haphazard use of several methods will lead only to confusion. Regardless of the method, there are certain matters in which special care must be taken by teachers of slow learners.⁴

Most slow learning children have some handicaps that have to be defined. Their reading difficulties may arise from simple causes, according to Harris. Harris states that:

Most cases of reading disabilities are not caused by special types of deficient learning ability, but arise from relatively simple causes, such as; mental or social immaturity, sensory handicaps, poor motivation, frequent or prolonged absence from school, and exposure to teaching which is inefficient and ineffectual. The task of the teacher is to find out what difficulties are present in each case and then apply common sense to the problem of overcoming the pupil's handicaps and teaching what he has not learned.⁵

3

Carl Feldman, "The Slow Learning Child," The Instructor, LX (June, 1969), 16.

4

W. B. Featherstone, Teaching the Slow Learner (New York: The American Book Company, 1961), p. 71.

5

Albert J. Harris, How to Increase Reading Ability (New York: L. Green and Company, 1973), p. 19.

More's first major emphasis in the education of slow-learners is on good physical and mental health habits, a practical working knowledge of the tool subjects, and an understanding of group and community relationships. More states that:

These children learn by experiences which become bases for more complex learning. It is the teacher's responsibility to devise and present appropriate subject matter to meet each individual's personal needs. He states that many educators as well as teachers recognize the number of slow learners in every school to the extent that grouping is provided for the regular classroom.⁶

Cole states that slow readers may have one or more of three main causes. They are: "inefficient eye movement, excessive vocalization, and word-for-word reading."⁷

⁶
Harriet R. More, "The Slow-Learning Child," The Instructor, LIX (October, 1974), 23.

⁷
Luella Cole, The Improvement of Reading (New York: J. J. Ires Company, 1959), p. 66.

CHAPTER III

IDENTIFICATION OF SLOW LEARNERS

Ordinarily, slow-learningness or slow-learner refers to the capacity of an individual to learn intellectual things, the kind of capacity that is measured by verbal intelligence test.¹ Even though children and youth of less than average capacity are in fact slow in many of their mental and physical responses and in their rate of growth and development, it is easy to fall into the error of false assumption. There is no fixed standard or level of ability below which a pupil must be called a slow learner, but in common practice pupils with an IQ below ninety-one and above seventy-four are so labeled. In the interest of clearness in thinking about and identifying slow learners, the term, "slow learner" should be interpreted consistently to mean slow in learning intellectual things. Slow learners are not equally slow in all kinds of activities or abnormal in all their characteristics. They may be rather bright in such matters as social adaptability, mechanical ability, or artistic sense, and able to get along quite well in these respects. It is a great injustice to assume that because a pupil is slow in reading, he is necessarily slow in all other things.²

¹ W. B. Featherstone, Teaching the Slow Learner (New York: The American Book Company, 1961, p. 23.

² Ibid., p. 24.

Methods of determining slow learningness. Several methods may be followed in determining slow learning children. Examples: (1) Examinations of the age-grade progress record of the school and locating pupils who are average by more than a year and at the same time retarded in progress by more than one year; (2) examination of the past school achievement record of all such pupils for consistently mediocre attainments; (3) administration of two group intelligence tests or alternative forms of one test to all pupils if possible.

Causes of slow learningness. One educator has said that most cases of reading disabilities are not caused by special types of deficient learning ability, but arise from relatively simple causes such as: mental or social immaturity, sensory handicaps, poor motivation, frequent or prolonged absence from school, physical handicaps, emotional disturbances, and exposure to teaching which is ineffective and ineffectual.

He further states that other causes of slow learningness may be due to use of inappropriate reading material, too early introduction of reading, uncorrected physical defects, insufficient rest, physical deficiencies, poor diet or wrong eating habits, emotional difficulties, poor home environment, gaps in the child's schooling, inferior language equipment, extreme nervousness, undue amount of work outside school, and lack of effort.³

3

A. J. Harris, How to Increase Reading Ability (New York: L. Green and Company, 1973), p. 195.

Characteristics of slow learners. Teachers must familiarize themselves with the characteristics of slow learners before they can teach them. These children have the same needs, desires, and emotions as their so-called classmates. However, it will be found that these needs, desires and emotions are greatly intensified in the slow learner. These children are often given to emotional outbursts of fear and anger. As a rule these children talk more, walk more, cry more, laugh more, and fight more than the normal child. They learn more slowly and forget much more quickly than the average child.

In physical development slowlearning children are about as variable and heterogeneous a lot as average children. But age for age, they are a little less well developed on the average than normal children. They are a little less tall and heavy and a little well proportioned.⁴

The slow learning child does not learn to manage abstractions and symbols as well as the average child. In most other respects, however, it is very difficult to tell the difference between an average child and slow learner. Very few of the important differences can be discerned by the eye.⁵

⁴ Agnes Mahoney, "The Slow Learner," Journal of National Education Association, 48: (December, 1968), 618.

⁵ W. B. Featherstone, Teaching the Slow Learner (New York: The American Book Company, 1961) pp. 4, 5, 11.

The testing program. As contrasted with individual tests, group intelligence tests are cheap, plentiful, and easy to administer. They should be used if at all obtainable. Group tests should be used for at least all those who show up as presumably slow learners.

In using group intelligence test with slower pupils it is advisable to choose tests in which the tasks to be performed are very similar to the ordinary school exercises to which the pupils are accustomed, and for which the directions are very simple. It is always advisable to give two different tests or alternate forms of the same tests before reaching any conclusions about a pupil's capacity.

If competent and adequate psychological service is available, individual tests should be administered. Ordinarily, however, for most schools there is much less of such service than is desirable. Therefore, individual tests may be reserved for those about whom one cannot be reasonably certain on the basis of any of the data gathered by means already outlined.

Even when the tests are given by competent persons, there is still room for error in the results, and for misinterpretation or for failure to ascertain all the factors that contribute to a pupil's welfare in school.⁶

⁶ Ibid., pp. 17-19

Here are a few suggested outstanding Intelligence and Reading Tests that may be administered:

Detroit Advanced Intelligence Test (2)

Gates Reading Readiness Test

Stanford Reading Test, Revised

Terman Group Intelligence Test

Van Wagenen Reading Readiness Test

Grouping for instruction. Some authors say that the slow learner should be grouped separately. There is much to be said both for and against separate grouping, but the significance of what might be said varies from school to school. There is no possibility of organizing a separate group of slow learners that will be homogeneous in more than a few respects.

Mere separation without rather far-reaching reconstruction of the curriculum will accomplish little for the slow pupils. It may ease the teacher's work somewhat and possibly improve the situation for the remaining pupils in the school, but it will not in and of itself make the slow pupil's lives any easier. On the other hand, leaving the slow learners in mixed groups will not ease their burdens either or prevent experiences of inadequacy, feelings of inferiority, and the development of possible anti-social attitudes unless the program in the mixed group is very flexible and adaptable to a wide range of needs and abilities.

Separate grouping of slow learners involves many disadvantages and the practice should be adopted only if existing conditions make it impossible to meet the needs of slow pupils in mixed classes. Regardless of whether or not separate grouping is used, special consideration should be given to the progress of slow learners. They should not be forced continually to seek higher achievement than their ability makes reasonably possible nor should they be non-promoted when they achieve up to the levels which may be expected of them.⁷

⁷Featherstone, op. cit., pp. 23-24

CHAPTER IV

TEACHING SLOW LEARNERS TO READ

One of the major task of the teacher of slow learners on the high school level of instruction is to train pupils to become independent readers. There is a difference in the slow learning pupils reading when under the direct supervision of the teacher and when they read freely or on their own. It has been found that failure or partial failure to develop the basic skills of reading to the extent that the pupil can handle such skills independently and apply them to a wide variety of reading materials on their own level, handicaps them for the remainder of their school life. Teaching the slow learners to read is often regarded as one of the most troublesome problems in the whole curriculum. Certainly it is one of the most important.

In teaching the slow learners at Wilmer Hutchins, part of the problem stems from the false notion that they should, or can be expected to read as well as the average child. If the right methods are used, they can usually be taught to read much better than they customarily do. The real problem in teaching slow learners to read arises from the necessity of keeping reading a highly functional experience closely tied into other features of the curriculum. At the same time, a system should be provided for the development of basic skills and techniques.

Personality of the teacher. This is the key in most cases in what degree the slow-learner achieves. The personality of the teacher plays a major role. The teacher should try to maintain a pleasant, orderly, and friendly environment necessary for freedom, happiness, and growth. There are seven recommendations that the writer would like to issue as stated by Bucklin. They are:

(1) Make it possible for him to achieve success in accord with his capacities. Open every possible avenue to create self-expression; (2) He must make every child feel he is wanted and accepted by showing kindness, personal concern, judicious praise and dealing with him in a calm friendly manner; (3) In dealing with each child, he must try to find a clue to the cause for behavior disturbance; (4) Have many conferences with school nurse, school nurse, school counselor, and parents; (5) Gather all information possible and keep up to date; (6) Utilize all information possible in the cumulative record folder; (7) To truly study the child, the teacher must observe each child objectively without prejudice. Note his particular assets and his liabilities so as to plan accordingly and help each child make choices that will lead to further development.¹

It is the sincere belief of the writer after doing this study at Wilmer Hutchins, the teacher of slow-learning readers should possess the above traits in his personality. As stated, the key to the success of the student in most cases is the personality of the teacher.

Learning environment. The school is the place where most of the child's learning takes place. The school life of the child at Wilmer-Hutchins is organized on a home-room basis.

¹Cora Bucklin "How to Help the Slow Learner, Child," The Grade Teacher, LXVIII (September, 1964)- 32.

In the homeroom the child feels free to do his work, to live and to carry on his activities. He participates in the reading program during a regular class period. The slow-learning children when placed in a separate homeroom unit, are as much a part of the whole school as any other group. They participate on the level of their interests and abilities in all the school-wide enterprises, as the assemblies, the newspaper, hall partols, intramural games, sports and student council.

The slow-learning individual should be given in so far as his ability will allow, an understanding of group and community relationship and his part in the development of social concepts. The slow-learners must be very carefully directed to an understanding of how people live together and of how activities are carried out in his community. He does not understand the meaning of the significance of democratic government as an institution. He however, can build up concepts of community living, beginning with the understanding of life and relationship in his family group and his school group. Through first hand experiences, he learns how people live together in a neighborhood and in a city, and how the neighborhood and the city are made safe and kept clean. He learns about the many opportunities offered for worthwhile activities by the school, the church, library, the parks, and other public institutions. We use the newspaper very extensively in trying to achieve these goals. By using the tool, he is brought to realize that he shares with others a certain responsibility for keeping the

community safe, clean and comfortable. He learns of the many kinds of occupations in which men and women engage.

If possible, he should be enabled to transfer his conception of the community from his own to other. Nearby and far away communities. Through study of his needs for food, shelter, and clothing, the child may be helped to acquire the idea of interdependence of individuals within the group, and of different groups to one another.

In discussing the family life of the slow learner at Wilmer-Hutchins, it was found that it is of great importance to see that the child is helped to become a worthy member of his family, contributing his share toward the home a wholesome satisfying center for his own life and for the lives of the members of the group. The child particularly needs to develop concepts, skills, and attitudes that will aid him in becoming a better member of his group. In the social setting of home, classroom and school, he learns to live, play and work with others. The teacher's knowledge of the home conditions and the possibilities for carrying out in a particular child's home projects that have been launched in school, should make possible the necessary adjustments of his school learning to his situation.

The curriculum. Any curriculum should be adjusted to meet the needs of the students. There should be a place in the curriculum for the slow-learner as in that of the most intellectually gifted, for a certain amount of information that everybody

knows will facilitate social relations and give one a sense of status and belonging.

The curriculum experiences of slow-learning pupils and average pupils at Wilmer-Hutchins are examined for similarities and differences in general quality and meaningfulness. The school activities of all children are, of course, vital and meaningful. They center around dominant purpose of interest which is understood and accepted by the pupils themselves. The content of these experiences, that is, the subject matter possess characteristics which enable the pupil to tie it into past experiences readily, otherwise, he will be unable to respond to meaning of ideas he encounters in books, or to life situations he confronts for the first time.

Reading readiness. Because of marked differences in the pupil's specific abilities, it is of primary importance that the teacher appraise strengths and weaknesses and determine each pupil's readiness for the high school level. By the time they reach high school, they are usually three or four years behind their classmates. It takes the greater part of the year to build up a useful sight vocabulary and to acquire enough background of first hand experience to make reading meaningful.

To help determine the pupil's readiness for reading at the high school level, the following points of general nature serve as a helpful guide at Wilmer-Hutchins: (1) Does the pupil like to read and does he enjoy doing his lesson? (2) Does he

have sufficient mastery of the vocabulary introduced at the preceding level to warrant reasonable success? (3) When reading silently, does he habitually do so without lip movement, vocalization, and finger pointing? (4) Is he able to work silently and do independent seat work assignments in reading within a reasonable time limit and with average success? (5) Does he show any desire to do independent reading from library books? (6) Does he interpret properly in oral reading and is manifested through habit of correct phrasing, tone of voice, distinct enunciation, and expression? If the teachers use this guide and interpret it correctly, they can easily determine whether or not the child has reached the point of readiness.

Vocabulary development and teaching of word recognition.

Making use of the oral language of the children in reporting or discussing their everyday experiences and the projects and activities they carry on as the major part of their school life, is the best way, and at the beginning, the only effective way to build a vocabulary. While they are talking about their trips and experiences, or their plans for a project, the teacher must be alert to see that the meanings of words commonly used are adequately developed without interfering unduly with the spontaneous and expression of the children.

As systematic instruction progresses, the pupil must develop methods of word recognition, refine his eye sweep and fixations, and develop accuracy in moving from line to line.

Standards of expectancy. In working with slow-learners some use may be made of phonetics. The teachers at Wilmer-Hutchins remember above all else that the phonetic device is usable only after the sight vocabulary has become large enough for the child to read with some facility. Furthermore, the sounds must be derived from reading and only after the sound has occurred frequently. Words illustrating the sounds, should be drawn from the reading materials. Rules for phonics should be avoided and the symbols of phonograms should be introduced one at a time and not too frequently.

The child's own particular pattern and rate of growth and development is, of course, the most defensible standard for judging his progress in learning to read. Applying such a standard is extremely difficult because it is not easy to obtain adequate or reliable knowledge of the child's own developmental pattern.

Selection of reading materials. The pupil's mental age, as obtained from time to time on intelligence tests, is a practical all round guide of what to expect in the way of reading ability. If the pupil's reading age, obtained by means of standardized reading tests, is within six months of his known mental age, obtained by two or more group intelligence tests, or by means of an individual Binet test, he is up to grade.

In applying this general rule, two points should be kept in mind. First, a difference of at least six months between reading age and mental age should be allowed before

concluding that a pupil is below grade. Second, all kinds of reading should not be lumped together; that is a pupil may be up to grade in general survey reading and below grade in or above in comprehension of words, or in speed, or in skill in following directions. Each of the kinds of reading abilities measured by good up-to-date reading tests should be considered separately in assessing a pupil's status and progress. In selecting reading materials for slow-learners the teacher may use to some extent the same resources as when selecting books for other children. He must also take into consideration the kind of material the pupil wants to read. The newspaper and some magazines provide very good reading material. Using these as tools, the pupil will obtain useful information while he is improving his reading skills.

Preparation of supplementary reading materials. There are two main points to keep in mind in selecting books for slow-learners. First, the reading interests of slow learning children are about the same as wide and varied as those of the general run of children. Second, books for slow-learners must deal with subjects appropriate for a given chronological age and still be simple in style, idea, and vocabulary.

At Wilmer-Hutchins High School, the teacher prepares a great deal of supplementary reading material. This is rather difficult and time consuming. It is necessary to decide what kind of material is needed, whether a story, an information article, or perhaps direction for making or doing something.

Material must be written in the best natural style. This will help to avoid a stereotyped or artificial style and obvious writing down. A level of difficulty and comprehension about a grade or a year below the level at which material is expected to be read with reasonable ease is to be considered.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

Teaching slow-learning children in the regular classroom is rather difficult, yet challenging. It is necessary to be sympathetic and tolerant toward children who are slow learners. These children will someday occupy an independent place in society. Therefore, if schools fail to modify the curriculum to meet the needs of all children, then it has failed in the education of all youth.

Some characteristics of the slow-learners are: (1) He usually has an IQ between seventy and eighty; (2) He is usually older than his classmates; (3) He reacts slowly; (4) He often finds it hard to generalize and transfer learning from one situation to another ; (5) He does not walk or talk at an early age; (6) He displays poor personal and social adjustments, and (7) He is usually better mechanically than in any other way.

The conception of education has eliminated the belief that all children should be expected to master the same type of school work. Education is not limited to book learning. The slow-learning child must, therefore, be trained to do well such tasks he is capable of doing.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the information contained in the preceding pages has been of sufficient interest and value as to offer itself as points of orientation for those without teaching experience. To those who have experience, it is hoped that it will serve to stimulate action toward teaching slow-learning children with sympathetic understanding and patience.

In teaching slow-learners, it is not the specific character of the job that makes the child learn or not learn, happy or unhappy, the thing that counts is the inward sense of success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the belief of the writer that teachers of slow learning children should use the following steps: (1) Eliminate the feeling of inferiority and superiority which are difficult to eradicate entirely from ability grouping plans; (2) Create a pleasant classroom atmosphere; (3) Discover the learning difficulty; (4) Study intensively and observe the nature of difficulty; (5) Provide for individual examinations, personal interviews, selected standardized and informal tests with a view of revealing fundamental causes of difficulty; (6) Formulate specific remedial measures which attack the cause; and (7) adjust school work to meet the needs and abilities of slow-learning children.

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