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A STUDY OF THE VOCATIONAL PREPARATION OF MENTALLY
RETARDED CHILDREN

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

The preparation of the mentally retarded for employment in a complex modern society is one of the basic goals of vocational training programs. Within recent years, this goal has received increased emphasis by the federal government through assistance to state divisions of vocational rehabilitation and the corresponding expansion of work experience or work study programs. Many times mentally retarded children grow up to become welfare recipients. This cycle can be broken by effective vocational programs which train the students to be self-supporting rather than being totally economically dependent upon public subsistence projects. With all the present demands on the state and federal funds, there is a definite need for special education personnel to be utilized more effectively to train mentally retarded students in vocational skills to enhance their employability.

Statement of the Problem

To determine if mentally retarded children can be trained for semi-skilled occupations.

To determine if vocational training programs enhanced the employability rate of mentally retarded children.

To identify the methods of vocational training and the types of occupations for which retarded students at the Grambling Evaluation and Training Center in Grambling, Louisiana were being prepared.

Definition of Terms Used

Educable Mentally Retarded -- Those capable of some achievement in traditional academic subjects such as reading and arithmetic; those who may be expected to maintain themselves independently as adults; and those with IQ scores between 50 and 80 (Wrightstone, 1959).

Trainable Mentally Retarded -- Those who are ineligible for classes for the educable mentally retarded, but who possess potentialities for training in self care, social adjustment in home or school, and economic usefulness in the home or in a sheltered environment and those in IQ range of 30-50 (Robinson, 1965).

Vocational Preparation -- Education designed to develop skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, work habits and appreciations encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis. It is an integral part of the vocational training program and contributes toward the development of good citizens by developing their physical, social, civic, cultural and economic competencies.

Procedures

A survey of research materials, abstracts, studies, and professional literature related to methods employed by various training programs for the preparation of mentally retarded children was made.

At Grambling Evaluation and Training Center in Grambling, Louisiana, an investigation was made of methods of vocational training employed by interviewing the personnel and observing the training program.

Findings of professional literature and the methods employed by the training program at Grambling Evaluation and Training Center for vocational preparedness were summarized.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literature on Objectives and Pre-Vocational Competencies

The ability of a retarded person to get and hold a job is one measure of a successful training program. In order to achieve the training objective, the training program and its personnel must help the student acquire skills that are common to a variety of vocational areas. It can also increase the student's knowledge and techniques of getting and holding jobs which are open to him. A training program's objectives must be flexible enough to serve all needs of the clients. This element of flexibility is shown in the eleven objectives of a training program as devised by the Worcester Area Occupational Training Center. Hastbacka (1966:61) listed the objectives as:

1. To determine work ability.
2. To develop work tolerance.
3. To teach work processes and skills.
4. To give vocational training with a practical application.
5. To effect adjustment to work.
6. To enable retarded individuals to work.
7. To provide guided opportunities for prevocational exploration and try outs in a simulated work situation.
8. To develop employability.

9. To place retarded individuals in a selected job.
10. To provide follow-up services.
11. To provide employment in a realistic work setting permitting individualized work programs.

The importance of early vocational training cannot be taken lightly. Many students with retarded mental development are not equipped with the necessary skills or personal qualifications needed for participation in a training program. The development of any sequential training program should have as its basis early teacher or trainer/pupil contact. It is at this stage that positive patterns of behavior can be most firmly established. The formation of these patterns is of greater consequence when the child is mentally retarded. With his learning difficulties it is vital that he forms positive habits at the earliest age possible. It is at this early age that he will develop his initial concepts of human relationships, responsibilities, attitudes, and associated skills which will help him become self-sufficient. Walden (1970:8) stated: "Not only does the retarded child have greater difficulty learning, he also has greater difficulty unlearning." Thus, poor patterns of behavior, once established, become more difficult to modify. To keep within the guidelines of a training program, Walden (1970:8) presented a list of prevocational competencies that should be achieved by all students. This list also serves as a basis for determining vocational readiness. The list include such skills as:

1. Can communicate personal data.
2. Is aware of his ability to contribute to training or home activities.
3. Is aware of personal limitations.
4. Can take care of personal sanitation: bathroom, etc.
5. Uses speech to make personal needs known.
6. Knows the names of common household objects used in training.
7. Dresses self and keeps reasonably neat.
8. Takes care of his own belongings.
9. Takes care of others' belongings.
10. Knows difference between his and others' belongings.
11. Takes care of training materials and equipment.
12. Shares and takes turns.
13. Follows directions.
14. Participates in group activities.
15. Obeys training and center rules.
16. Practices common courtesies as everyday habits.
17. Is responsible for simple tasks.
18. Has pride in good workmanship.
19. Realizes the importance of work and why people work.

The four most important prevocational competencies for determining vocational readiness were considered by Walden to be self awareness; relationships with other people; acceptance of responsibility; and development of positive behavior patterns. Further reference to these prevocational

competencies or objectives of special education will be made under the literature on "Programming for Mentally Retarded."

Literature on a More Realistic Classification of Mentally Retarded Children

Nearly all research materials reviewed related to the efficacy of special classes for the mentally retarded during the past decade have raised serious questions as to the desirability of continuing classes for the retarded in their present form. Two ideas were presented which attempted to take advantage of two of the more likely possibilities for change:

1. to allow the more seriously retarded to be together in a special class since programs have been more effective at this lower level.
2. to place the emphasis for grouping in school on its applicability to the future through work study programs leading to a vocation.

A classification of an individual often becomes a label which may become harmful, serving as a stigma or even an emotional barrier to learning. However, there seems to be no workable system, other than complete individualization, that allows special instruction without some kind of groupings that might be expected to be more logical and effective than others. According to Wrightstone (1959) the present I.Q. range 50-79 has so long been accepted for classes called "educable mentally retarded" that few people seem to seriously question it. It is time that careful scrutiny be given to the school classification standards, attempting to

reflect what may be expected to happen to a person later in the world of work. The students whose intelligence quotients are in the 70's are likely the best prospects for employment, with those who have intelligence quotients in the upper 60's close behind. At this point (mid 60's) in IQ an area of diminishing returns seems reached and it often becomes obvious, almost from the beginning, that many retarded persons below this point have limited potentials which should be planned for as realistically as the others. This group, (below the mid 60's) not without exception, but in large numbers, could be expected to find satisfaction and productive activity mostly in sheltered environments.

Porter (1965) expressed the idea that an IQ range of 65-80 for the better group and below 65 for the lower group would appear to be a great improvement. Most of the more capable students will become literate at a practical level. Most can adapt to and profit from work study programs. A core curriculum as well as appropriate social skills and motivational goals can be achieved. A classification involving labeling should be avoided wherever possible; however, because of the enormous size of the problem, grouping often is essential. To be more effective and realistic in handling the mentally retarded, more emphasis should be placed on future programming and the world of work.

Literature on The Efficacy of Special Class Placement for
The Mentally Retarded in Proper Perspective

Whether educable mentally retarded children should receive their basic education in regular classroom settings or in special classes designed to meet their needs has been a long contested question. A review was made of related studies, issues, and considerations concerning the most effective placement of educable mentally retarded children. One of the largest controversies in special education has concerned the most effective school placement of educable mentally retarded children. Since the early days of Itard's efforts to teach Victor, the "Wild Boy of Aveyron", physicians, psychologists, and educators alike have been concerned about the prevention, management, and education of those labeled mentally retarded. Although there is general agreement on the long-range objectives for the retarded, many divergent opinions appear when specific procedures, techniques, and particular administrative organizations are advocated.

As generally conceptualized by Mackie (1965), one primary issue centered around whether the retarded are better placed in a regular class to compete with normal peers or whether they should be segregated in special classes, schools, or some other nonintegrative arrangement. The arguments both pro and con lined up rather quickly with some evidence conceded to both viewpoints. This issue and subsequent attempts at resolving the problem not only served an academic interest but pragmatic and economic

ones as well. The increased numbers of children being referred to special education, the mushrooming teacher training programs, and the influx of federal and state monies made the comparison of regular and special classes an important issue. Additionally, the determination of the most advantageous placement, organization, and learning situations is necessary for the benefit of the children themselves. The controversy is at present more or less dormant. For the educable child, at least, the issue seemed to focus on either special classes in the public schools or placement in regular classes. To some extent, this issue has been partly settled with the influx of federal monies for special classes during the 1960's and the concomitant push of parent groups for additional classes and programs. Should future research show a consistent need for other types of administrative arrangements, this trend may be all but impossible to reverse. For example, Mackie (1965) reported that the past decade has seen most states double and in some cases triple the number of teachers and related personnel in special education. Mackie (1965:7) further stated that "approximately 4,000 local school systems initiated special education programs during the period 1948-1963, making a total of 5,600 special programs." Although classes for the mentally retarded made the greatest gains of all the exceptionalities, still only about one-third of the nation's six million retardates were being reached by special schools and programs.

The critical question still remained, however, "where should the educable mentally retarded child be placed in order that he might receive the most effective education and training?" Writers in recent years still bring up many of the old arguments and point to the consistent lack of evidence needed for decision making. Dunn (1963:80) stated that the retarded are "socially segregated even when they are physically integrated into the regular class." Kirk (1962:126) offered a concurring view when he stated that "the sociometric studies of the retarded children in the regular grades have shown quite definitely that these children are isolated and rejected by their peer group." Goldstein (1962) advanced a similar idea by pointing out that rarely is the retarded child in the regular class a popular figure and that he "can be present physically but absent socially and psychologically." Writing with the administrator in mind, Brabner (1964:109) stated.

In other words, the administrator could not conclude that the mere physical juxtaposition of special classes and regular classes, or of retarded children and normal children in the cafeteria, the gymnasium, or on the playground would eventuate, through some curious osmotic process, in a merging of the special class program with the general programs.

Some educators maintained that labeling a child retarded is tantamount to membership in an ascribed minority. The specialness surrounding a particular class seemed to give it an aura of academic and behavioral backwardness. In discussing the problem of behavioral backwardness, Blackman

and Goldberg (1965:30) concluded that, "True integration must be more than a physical arrangement; more importantly, it should be an attitude or 'state of mind' shared by both the 'integrator' and 'integratee'." Too often programs for the retarded have been placed in a back room or basement resulting in stigma and negative connotations. As a result, the authors laid much of the responsibility for acceptance in the regular school upon teachers and administrators who could do much to foster positive attitudes. Brabner (1964) stated that integration should be viewed from a three-fold perspective as a belief, a policy, and a process.

A number of writers made thorough reviews of educational research with the mentally retarded. The efficacy of special class placement was given cursory recognition by one or more of the above mentioned authors. However, few have exhausted their effort to explore the depth of the question of special class placement in its total context.

Historically, administrators and special education personnel have contended that the special class has a definite advantage over the regular class in that it provided a less frustrating environment and a chance to compete with intellectually comparable peers. Some of the most widely quoted studies (Johnson, 1950; and Johnson and Kirk, 1950) indicated that rejection and isolation of the retarded child in regular classes was the rule rather than the exception.

Stanton and Cassidy (1964:12) expressed the following idea:

It may eventuate that the reasons for various types of placement of the mentally retarded must be based on other than educative arguments and that the ends to be served are only incidentally of educational import. It may be that if education is to be an important goal, the best type of setting for these children is yet to be imagined and realized in our culture.

Kennedy (1972:3b) in the July 23, 1972, Wichita Eagle and the Beacon, wrote an editorial feature on "Guidance and Vocational Counselors Vie for Money" by J. R. Holdridge which stated that,

Many school counselors do not seem to have ever heard of the high percentage of college dropouts--caused partly by the myth that a college degree is the best and surest route to occupational success.

The point of the article was that school counselors are all too involved with the idea that a college education is the primary basis for occupational success. Therefore, many students who are not academically prepared for such a venture, do not have success as college students. Also, because of the failure of the school counselor to place stress on vocational choices, many students are caught in a web of confusion. If vocational education was stressed with the same import as a college degree, many students would experience occupational success by attaining it on an academic level which would best fit their potentials and abilities.

Literature on Programming for Educable Mentally RetardedChildren

An approach was outlined to improve programming for educable mentally retarded children. Taylor (1970) presented several goals which were formulated by the Education Policies Commission for all children. These goals appeared to be applicable for the educable mentally retarded as well. To meet these goals administrators should have certain guidelines in mind as they plan for retarded children. Guidelines appear to be one approach to enable educable retarded children to reach their optimum growth.

There is some confusion in distinguishing between the trainable and educable mentally retarded, particularly at the upper end of the IQ range. The trainable mentally retarded are those who are ineligible for classes for the educable mentally retarded, but who possess potentialities for training in self-care, social adjustment in home or school, and economic usefulness in the home or in a sheltered environment. On an individual psychometric examination Robinson (1965) observed that such children usually fall in a 30 to 50 IQ range. This research literature did not include this group of mentally retarded children, but was concerned primarily with educable mentally retarded children.

Taylor (1965) expressed the idea that programming for the educable mentally retarded involved several critical components. The first being to develop special provisions

for them since they could not benefit sufficiently from the instruction provided in the regular class. Another equally important component was the development or stating of realistic goals and aims.

According to Taylor (1970) the aims of the Education Policies Commission was accepted as the goals for special education. These goals as listed by Taylor (1970:184) were:

1. Self-realization or self awareness.
2. Human relationships or relationships with other people.
3. Economic efficiency or acceptance of responsibility.
4. Civic responsibility or development of positive behavior patterns.

Under self-realization goals were such objectives as health habits, skills of everyday living, i.e. dressing, feeding, personal cleanliness, language development, perceptual training, safety, independent travel and simple number concepts. Under goals of human relationships were communication skills, manners, and group activities. Economic efficiency included simple tasks of following directions through performing simple chores and prevocational participation to working in a sheltered workshop or in the community.

Civic responsibility included the rights, duties, and privileges enjoyed as a member of the community.

In Taylor (1970:185) six guidelines were listed that should be followed in attempting to realize the goals

set by the Education Policies Commission that administrators might find beneficial in planning programs for this group.

1. The mentally retarded should be identified as early as possible by qualified experts.
2. The educable mentally retarded child should be assigned to special classes in accordance with his needs.
3. The curriculum for the educable retarded should be based upon their needs, interest and capacities, and should as much as possible promote their personal and social growth.
4. Facilities, equipment and supplies should permit and foster the development of a functional curriculum for the mentally retarded.
5. Teachers of the educable mentally retarded should have special training and have qualifications related to the education of these children.
6. There should be a well defined guidance program for the mentally retarded child.

These guidelines were not exhaustive and should be considered only as one approach in providing quality education for retarded children.

Other ideas were advanced by several authors that gave support to the guidelines presented by Taylor. The mentally retarded should be identified as early as possible by qualified experts. Many retarded children are not identified until after they have entered school. Provision should be made for locating these children through referrals by parents, pediatricians, health organizations, and social agencies. A working relationship with psychological clinics

should be established for diagnostic purposes. According to Dunn (1965) provisions should be made for a complete examination which would involve a variety of specialists including psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, physicians, and nurses. The complete screening process should include a medical, intellectual, social-emotional and educational evaluation. The importance of conducting a complete evaluation of the child cannot be over-emphasized. Unless extreme caution and thoroughness are used there exists the danger of misplacing the child and thereby diluting an effective, organized program for the mentally retarded. Finally, provisions should be made for periodic re-evaluation of the children placed in the special education program (Erdman, 1961).

The educable mentally retarded child should be assigned to special classes in accordance with his needs. Knowledge of each child's strengths and weaknesses is needed in order to develop a meaningful program. Care must be taken not to assign children to special classes based on physical handicaps, emotional disturbances, behavior problems, and the like. It is very important that only those children for whom the special classes are organized be admitted. Definite standards of eligibility should be established such as chronological age, social maturity, IQ mental age, and educational achievement. Willey (1964) stated that the parent's cooperation should be obtained preceding an assignment to a special class. The parents'

acceptance and understanding of their child's need for special facilities can determine in large measure the success of the program.

A large number of mentally retarded children in a single school usually require the organization of more than one special class. When this occurs, it is advisable to group pre-adolescents together and place adolescents in a separate group. If further subdivisions are necessary mental age may be used as a criterion.

Placing the children in special classes, according to Kern (1962) again called for teamwork: the teacher, the psychologist, responsible for assessing the child's potentialities, the social-worker, representing the liaison between the home and the school, the vocational counselor - responsible for helping the teacher organized and planned his curriculum and located material and the physician responsible for providing information about the child's health.

The curriculum for the educable retarded should be based upon their needs, interests and capacities, and should as much as possible promote their personal and social growth.

The curriculum should be extremely practical. A generous amount of time should be devoted to teaching hygiene, physical training, health care and habits, nutrition, and safety. Adequate physical training is also desirable. Some activities for training small muscles are crayon coloring within boundaries, cutting along prescribed lines, poster painting, clay work, et cetera. Physical exercise

is very, very important. These may include games and folk dancing. According to Wallin (1955) many of these exercises may be introduced by films and pictures. The educable mentally retarded can be taught simple reading and figuring. This requires considerably more drill and practice than is required by normal children.

Facilities, equipment, and supplies should permit and foster the development of a functional curriculum for the mentally retarded. Kirk (1951) stated that the teacher of the mentally retarded must of necessity improvise, adopt, and adjust books and materials to the rate of learning of the mentally retarded child. A classroom to be used for general non-manual and quieter manual activities require suitable equipment, individual movable silenced desks and shelf space for the materials and objects used in the classroom. The size of the classroom for the mentally retarded should be at least one and one half times as large as the regular classroom. This will allow for the many manual activities required. The size of the class should under no circumstances exceed fifteen children. The location of the classroom, according to McCormick (1959) should be in an area not isolated or remote from the rest of the school. Finally, visual aid equipment should be available.

Teachers of the educable mentally retarded should receive special training and have qualifications related to the education of these children. Special class teachers in general should have instructional skills not normally required