

## The Problem of the Feeble-Minded in the LIBRARY

The feeble-minded child presents a particularly trying problem to the school due to the fact that academic requirements are those which touch his handicap most directly. As we recognize feeble-mindedness, or more specifically intellectual deficiency, today, it is characterized primarily by lack in judgment, reasoning, understanding of symbols, and abstractions. These are the very qualities which are an essential to school success. The many other characteristics such as dependency, delinquency, and the like are secondary elaborations frequently but not necessarily accompanying mental defect, and as such have a much greater modifiability. The school is charged specifically and primarily with providing certain knowledge and skills to children and it is in the acquiring of this knowledge and skill that the feeble-minded person is especially and most unmodifiably inferior. It is safe to say that a feeble-minded child is more seriously and noticeably handicapped in the school situation than he will be in any other life situation to which he has access. His deficiency is more clearly evidenced when he competes with an unselected group in academic work than when he, in his economic and social life, competes largely with the less intelligent portion of society and where the required performances does not touch his handicap so directly.

Because of this the public schools have gone farther than any other public or private agency in recognizing and dealing with the problem. It must not be left unsaid, however, in this connection that remarkably little progress has been made in the sixty-five years covered by this effort.

If Dr. Kuhlmann's figures for the State of Minnesota were applied to the City of Minneapolis without modification we might expect to find nearly 6% of the school children with an I.Q. under 73. This would mean that 5000 children in this school system could never reach the level of achievement which is required for passing out of the sixth grade. If they were kept in the regular classes during the ten years that they are required to remain in school and were not passed on because they were "too big for the seats" or because the teacher became annoyed at them, the brightest would have been failed 8 times and the dullest 14 times out of the 20 possible chances for promotion. Such a rate of failure not only would force the child to be associated with a group much younger than he but would humiliate him and tend to make him seek compensations for his poor showing. The compensations that the feeble-minded achieve are too often unsocial in nature. It is too easy for the feeble-minded boy, failing to compete successfully with his smaller classmates in school work, to give them a demonstration of his physical superiority in the playground fight. The bulk of feeble-minded children if left unprovided for in the regular grades will become maladjusted and problems either to the school and community or to themselves. This undesirable influence on the personality development of this group of children may in no small measure account for many of the characteristics which show up later in life as secondary or accompanying handicaps. If the feeble-minded were left in the regular grades without special provision, they would not only be disturbing and annoying there, develop habit patterns and attitudes which would increase their inferiority, but would be deprived of the instruction they need and can assimilate at the same time that they were being instructed in subject matter useless and beyond their grasp.

This being the problem that the feeble-minded present to the school it may be of value in contributing to this phase of the discussion to indicate briefly the various ways in which schools are attempting to meet it. There are essentially three ways in which this is being done. The first way, and the one best recognized throughout the State, is thru the use of special classes for the mentally retarded. The State Department of Education several years ago agreed to reimburse the school systems for a large portion of the salary of those teachers employed in instructing the intellectually handicapped exclusively. They laid down the requirement that the pupils in these classes be those having I.Q.'s between 50 and 80. They also set the size of these classes at not more than 15 pupils per teacher. Thus we find in the special classes small groups of children with wide ranges in chronological and mental age having in common deficient intelligence of varying degrees. They are instructed by a teacher specially qualified by training, personality, and experience for the work, and using a special curriculum involving theoretically, at least, the things which they as individuals can and need to know. The advantages and disadvantages of this system I shall not have time to go into here.

The second type of effort to meet the school problem of the feeble-minded may be called the modified curriculum class. In this type of class which is largely in the experimental stage we find generally 25 to 35 children who are more homogeneous as to age and ability than the special class itself. This greater homogeneity makes possible the larger size. The larger size usually makes it expedient to include children who are slightly less defective than those found in the special class. The curriculum in this set-up aims to fit the capacity and needs of the individual pupil just as the special class curriculum, but because of the group of children with I.Q.'s ranging from 80 to 90 it more closely approximates the regular school-wide curriculum and yet is far from being identical with it.

The third means of handling the school experience of the feeble-minded is by the Individual Project method. Here the defective child is left in his own chronological group but is given individual assignments in the fields in which he cannot participate with the class as a whole. Unless this type of set-up is most carefully organized it necessarily results in a reduction of the number of pupils each teacher may instruct.

These are the three methods of meeting the problem the mentally retarded child presents to the school. As a matter of fact the only one of these set-ups which is used to any great extent in Minnesota is the Special Class which has had the backing of the State Department of Education. Attempts at utilization of the Individual Project method and the modified curriculum class are just beginning and are very rare. The special class is utilized and utilizable only under circumstances where the school is large. Half of Minnesota's population is in rural areas and yet only .04% of the special classes of the State were found in rural schools. Of the 45 towns and cities who together supported 213 special classes in Minnesota in 1929-30 only 9 such classes were found in rural areas (those places with a population concentration of less than 2500 people).

In Minneapolis, where wide use has been made of the special class, one percent of the school population, or 850 pupils, were so enrolled during the last school year. Dr. Kuhlmann's figures would indicate that 12 to 15% of the school population might be eligible for these classes. Dr. Terman's figures would indicate that 6 to 7% might be eligible. Thus it may be seen that even where the special class is well established only from 8 to 16% of the eligibles are being instructed in it.

In summary it may be said that in spite of the fact that it is in the school situation that the mental-defective is most glaringly a problem very little use is being made even here of the well-recognized means that are available for his proper training and care.

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8-23-34