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J. J. Dow, School for the Blind: I am afraid my paper will not particularly interest anybody except Dr. Tate and myself. We are the ones I am talking about, particularly myself; but as citizens, if not as heads of institutions, the points that I shall present may have some interest.

The title that I have chosen for this brief paper is "Border Line Cases in Special Schools."

BORDER LINE CASES IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS.

By. Dr. Jas. J. Dow, School for Blind, Faribault.

In schools for special classes, such as those of lacking or defective sight or hearing, there will frequently appear cases of doubtful eligibility. The degree of deficiency of sight or hearing may be so slight as to raise the question of the propriety of admission; or where there is no question as to the physical deficiency there may be such a lack of mental capacity as to make it doubtful whether the school can be of any aid to the applicant, or of sufficient aid to warrant the necessary segregation and special adjustment of work and care required for such cases; or, finally, the same question may arise where there is no question of the physical deficiency, and where the mental condition is normal, but where the age of the applicant is such as to make his adaptation to the school life of youth a question

In short, there arise border-line cases as to degree of defect, as to mentality, and as to age, which are often puzzling, and an incorrect decision as to which may be unfortunate for the individual in question, or for the members of the school for whom it is primarily designed, or for both.

In considering these cases I shall confine myself exclusively to the blind, of whom only I have direct and first-hand knowledge, but I have little doubt that all that I shall say of this class is substantially applicable to similar cases in schools for the deaf.

The order in which I have mentioned these questionable cases is a logical one, and I shall take up the difficulties and possible solutions of the questions in the order of degree of sight, of mentality, and of age.

As a school for the blind is designed for the class named, it is evident that none except those who can be included under this term in whole or in part are entitled to admission to it. The most common test of eligibility in such schools is the practical one of such a deficiency in sight as makes education in the public schools an impossibility. Total blindness, or such deficiency of vision as causes inability to recognize the letters of ordinary school book print, presents no difficulty, as such cases are unquestionably eligible. But not infrequently there are cases where ordinary print can be read with more or less difficulty, by placing the book or paper near the eye or in favorable position as to light, but where reading, on account of such conditions of vision, must be slow and more or less uncertain. Again, there are cases where there is such sensitiveness of the eye that while ordinary reading is possible, it is attended with the danger of more or less serious injury to the eye if maintained for any length of time. In both these cases education in the public schools can only be carried on under special conditions, such as having assistance from others in reading, special adjustment of blackboard, map, and pencil work, etc. With some teachers and under certain conditions a given pupil might find it practicable to continue work in the public schools, while the same pupil under less considerate teachers, or under conditions which make it impossible for teachers to be considerate, might not get on at all.

From the standpoint of the welfare of the pupil there is no question that attendance at the public schools should be maintained as long as it is at all possible to do so. The special school for the blind is much less adapted to the conditions of such children than are the public schools. And on the whole they are not a desirable element in the special schools. But where as a matter of fact they are neglected, and do not make progress in the public schools, or where, in their efforts to keep up in their work, they persist in such an improper use of their eyes as to endanger the sight they have, the question of the propriety of their admission to the special school arises. As I have said, they are not generally desirable pupils in a school for the blind. It is very hard for them to put themselves down to the acquirement of the special means employed by the blind. They seldom learn to read well with their fingers, hence arrangements must be made for lessons to be read to them, or they insist upon using ink print, or even point books, to the possible endangerment of their sight. They often do not adapt themselves harmoniously to the conditions of the blind, and are restless under the conditions necessarily existing in schools for the blind. Hence, for their own sakes, for the sake of the school, and of course as an element of justice to the state, which should not be called upon to support them in a school for the blind unless imperatively necessary, the utmost care should be exercised in passing upon such cases.

Differences as to rigidity of admission of such cases occur in different states. In a neighboring state at one time great liberality in this matter prevailed. It was held that so-called "seeing pupils" were a help to the really blind ones. Many were taken in who could read ordinary print very well, and who could for most other practical purposes see as well as anyone. Near-sightedness, or some insignificant defect of vision, would be a sufficient warrant for their admission, and they were utilized as guides or helpers in various ways for the less fortunate ones. This course was for

many years pursued and publicly defended, and while it is less prevalent at the present time, the term "seeing pupils" still lingers there, and in a recent visit I observed that some of these pupils were serving as table waiters at the pupils' meals.

In most states the conditions of admission are more stringent, yet probably in all schools for the blind there are some pupils who under very favorable conditions might get on successfully in the public schools. It becomes then a question not only of the physical condition of the pupil as to vision, but of the existing school conditions at his home, whether or not he should be admitted to the school for the blind. In all doubtful cases, therefore, certificates of the visual condition of the applicant should be obtained of a reputable oculist, and also of his practical school work from the teacher under whom he has last been. Where satisfactory certificates from these sources are furnished, the school is justified in admitting the applicant, but this should be tentative, as it may speedily appear that he is not a proper subject for the school.

While, as has been said, these border-line pupils are often not very successful in their work, as conditions exactly adapted to them do not exist, either in the public schools or in schools for the blind, yet in many cases very satisfactory work has been done through the hearty and conscientious efforts of the pupil to get the most possible out of the opportunities presented. I have in mind two cases where boys could see to read ink print, though with some effort, who set themselves to the work of touch reading so faithfully that they became the best and most rapid readers in the school, and by this means continued their school work successfully. They outgrew their defects of vision as they became older, and became successful business men, not distinguishable from their fellows who had had similar training in the public schools. If they had been denied the advantages of the special school at their critical time of need they would doubtless have fallen far short of the success they attained. In another case a young lady had completed the work of the grades in the public schools, but had been compelled to stop there, because of eye strain which the necessary reading and study caused. She was admitted to the school for the blind and successfully completed the high school course, which would otherwise have been impossible for her.

These illustrations indicate the value of such opportunities in certain cases, but in my opinion the number of such cases is small, and all applications of this kind should be most carefully scrutinized. As has been said, no hard and fast line can be drawn, and each case must be judged upon its own merits.

Even more trying, and more difficult of determination, are the cases of deficient mentality. The question of what shall be done with the backward and mentally deficient blind child is at the present time attracting much attention from educators of the blind throughout the country. Question schemes have been circulated to obtain the opinions of the heads of institutions on various points connected with this class, and they have received consideration at recent meetings of educators of the blind.

And there is great need of such discussion, both because of their very considerable number and because of the peculiar problems which they present. As in the case of children with varying degrees of sight, these

blind children of deficient mentality shade off in all degrees from the rather dull child to the markedly backward, through the grade of the decidedly mentally defective down to the low grade imbecile. The classification of the feeble-minded with normal vision is now calling forth much careful and studious effort, and the same need of proper classification exists with those who are lacking vision. The not uncommon case of the blind epileptic also presents additional and peculiar problems.

The initial difficulty is in convincing the parents of the mental infirmity of the child. As a rule, they have never seen any blind children but their own, the lack of vision is the conspicuously notable condition, and they consider that any mental peculiarity which they observe is but a part of their blindness. I have had application papers returned to me in which the question, "Is the applicant of sound mind?" is answered in the affirmative, but upon the arrival of the child it appeared that he had never talked, could not feed himself, was entirely helpless in all his natural functions, and in short was an absolute idiot. The mother was astonished at my protest against receiving the child. He was certainly blind, and hence must belong with the blind. When she looked about the school, saw what other blind children did, and compared them with her boy, she at last reluctantly admitted that there was a difference, although she very strenuously resented the classification of her boy with the feeble-minded.

Of course such cases present no difficulty. They are hopeless custodial cases, and unquestionably belong in that department of an institution for the feeble-minded. But if in such cases there is an inability on the part of parents to recognize the mental infirmity of the child, how much greater is the difficulty when there is some considerable degree of mental capacity, and the child is yet one who, if possessed of sight, would unquestionably be classed as feeble-minded? Such children should be received and, so far as possible, trained somewhere; for they may be susceptible of some degree of improvement, but the question is where shall they go. Shall they be received at all in regular schools for the blind, or, rather, where shall the line of rejection from such schools be drawn? Shall we say that a child of such defective mentality that if he were possessed of sight would be a proper subject for some of the higher or lower grades of a school for the feeble-minded should be refused admission to a school for the blind? This is the position taken by some. But entirely apart from the very practical difficulty of such rejection, when the parents are entirely unconvinced of any mental infirmity, and insist upon at least a trial for their child, it is a grave question whether such rejection is fair to the child. If *he* had sight, he might go to a school for the feeble-minded and receive such training as he was capable of; but such training mainly appeals to the sight, and the blind child would get little or no benefit from it. Would it not be better to accept in schools for the blind such children of deficient mentality as can presumably be helped, and do for them all that can be done? Such is the position of a considerable number of the educators of the blind.

Probably from 10 to 20 per cent of the blind youth of the country are more or less defective mentally. They cannot be wholly disregarded. Such of them as are susceptible of improvement are, according to our modern views, entitled to an opportunity. But their numbers are not suffi-

cient to warrant separate institutions for them, and, if provided for at all, they must go to some institution primarily designed for those with normal mentality but lacking vision, or for those of normal vision but of deficient mentality. If they are to be received into schools for the blind, shall they be allowed to mingle with the other children; who are normal children, with the exception of the lack of sight? Or, if they "are not to be allowed to ming]e with them, where shall the line of separation be drawn? These questions are very practical and very difficult ones. That it is not well for such mentally defective children to mingle freely with normal sightless children is undoubtedly true; not well for the defective child, and not well for the normal child. But in small schools, like those for the blind in most of our states, the practical difficulty of separation is great, even it were possible to tell just where to draw the line; and with that difficulty it becomes almost or quite impracticable.

Attempts have frequently been made to roughly group the mentally incapable together, and to a large extent this is regularly done, so far as school and class work is concerned, but outside of the schoolroom, where the real danger of such association is greatest, the difficulty is much greater. And in such grouping the parent difficulty again comes in. It is often nor. difficult for parents to readily recognize the mental infirmity of the child of another, and at the same time be entirely unconscious of an equal or greater deficiency in their own. One mother of a rather low grade feeble-minded child came out from the kindergarten where her child was with indignation flashing in her eyes, because her boy was sitting by the side "of that feeble-minded boy," referring to another child fully equal if not superior in mentality to hers.

Theoretically one would say that if such children are to be received at all in schools for the blind, they should form separate groups and be kept and trained entirely by themselves. Practically, thus far in this country such separation has seemed possible to only a limited degree. And because of such difficulty, it has been found necessary to exclude some from school? for the blind who could have been helped to some extent if such separation had been practicable.

I should say that the tendency in schools for the blind is towards a loser restriction of the admission of children of deficient mentality. And probably under present conditions this restriction is wise, if not absolutely necessary for the protection and progress of the school. Yet, practically, it is a difficult thing to do, and doubtless all superintendents receive children who are deriving little benefit from the school, and whose presence is not a good thing for the more normal children. The problem of border-line cases in respect to mentality is the most difficult, and the least worked out, of any in connection with the blind.

The third class of doubtful cases of admission to schools for the blind is of those who have passed the ordinary educable age, and who, having failed to get an education earlier, or having become blind after reaching adult years and, feeling the need of special training, desire to enter such schools. In the earlier history of educational institutions for the blind the age question received little consideration. But with the passing of time, and the accumulation of experience, pedagogical principles began to be applied to such institutions, and they tended not only to be called, but

actually to become schools for the blind, with the limitations of age which ordinarily apply to schools. In a very few institutions the old traditions to some extent linger, as they do to a large extent among the public at large, but the number of such institutions is becoming less, and with the present tendencies the time must soon arrive when no adult blind will be found in our schools for the youthful blind.

Yet the pressure for the admission of such cases is constant and very strong. Only a very small per cent of the blind are of school age, probably considerably under 10 per cent. Of the rest a very considerable number have lost their sight after reaching adult years, and, plunged hopelessly into the dark while yet in the full strength of manhood, they know not what to do or where to turn for help. The school for the blind seems to offer a double provision for them. They will be cared for and supported while attending it, and they hope to learn while there something by means of which they can support themselves when they can no longer stay in it. It often comes to them as a terrible shock and most grievous disappointment when they learn that such schools are only for blind youth, and they clamor insistently against such restriction, and seek by influence from senators and governors down to break through the regulations and secure admission.

Whatever may be said for institutions exclusively for the adult blind, and the evidence in regard to them is greatly divided, it is certain that the mingling of blind youth and adults in the same institution is not well for either, and is particularly unfortunate for the youth. The reasons for this lie on the surface. The language, habits and ways of the average blind man are not likely to be helpful to the blind boy, and while with the other sex the same objections may not so strongly lie, even their association is often not well for the young. Again, the man finds it difficult to adapt himself to restrictions and training necessary for the boy, while the boy resents any exemption of the man from the regulations which apply to him. So in any case friction is likely to arise and trouble to be engendered. Because of these harmful tendencies, as they have shown themselves in practice, the gradual elimination of adults from schools for the blind, of which I have spoken, has come about.

The only question in such schools now is, what shall be the limit of the age of admission? The general answer is, the legal age of manhood, twenty-one years. But where pupils are pursuing regular courses of study when they arrive at the age of twenty-one, permission is usually given, often under some restrictions, to remain for the completion of the course. But with few exceptions, schools for the blind do not regularly admit as pupils those who are over the age of twenty-one years.

That some provision ought to be made for the help and training of those who have lost sight after reaching adult years seems to be generally admitted, and the question has received much and often not too intelligent attention in recent years. Many strident claims have been made of the wonderful things that we are to see, but any real solution of the difficult problems involved in the help of the adult blind is yet in the future.

These problems are, however, being studied more widely now than ever before, and while lack of information and of the knowledge of experience already acquired will no doubt lead to the vain repetition of effort already

found to be futile, and will doubtless result in much sad disappointment, yet the widespread interest in these most difficult problems is a most hopeful sign. The experiments now being tried by various states and associations will gradually eliminate the impracticable methods, and we may hope will yet bring forth something which will open the door of hope more widely to this unfortunate class.

The State of Minnesota is providing a ten weeks' summer school for blind men, as a partial and tentative answer to the question, what shall be done, but this is recognized as only a partial answer. This can be said for it, that it works and is a help so far as it goes. How to go farther without becoming involved in the serious difficulties of as yet unworked out experiments does not yet appear.

The policy of somewhat closer restriction than heretofore, both as to age and mental capacity, has recently been adopted in the regular school for blind youth in this state, because of the practical difficulties and friction arising from the presence of such pupils in close relations with those of normal school age and mental capacity, but it is recognized that this is a solution by avoidance, and that the problem still remains.

The study of these three classes of border-line cases must and will be steadily pursued, and such light as experience and earnest experiment can shed upon the condition of these unfortunate ones will be utilized in their behalf. Meanwhile we must avoid the two unfortunate extremes of excessive optimism and excessive pessimism. That so many thoughtful students of the problems presented are, after many years of patient and painstaking effort, still unable to see clearly the way to satisfactory and hopeful results, would preclude the former; and the great wave of eager and enthusiastic effort now in progress, moving toward the amelioration of the condition of even the most hopeless and helpless, would justly forbid us to despair of any.

Dr. H. A. Tomlinson, St. Peter State Hospital: I shall have to apologize for inflicting a paper upon you, but the committee was not able to get papers for this meeting, as expected, and the other members of the committee were more fortunate than myself—they succeeded in getting somebody else.

The body of this paper was read before the Federation of Women's Clubs at their recent meeting, and the reason for the paper was the inquiries I receive from people interested with regard to causes of insanity, and the utter absence of any comprehension of the real significance of the question or its answer. I thought possibly I might do some good by formulating these answers in a paper. The title of this paper is, "The Conditions Out of Which Insanity Grows," and I would say here that I use the term "insanity" in its broad sense.