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WHAT THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE DOING FOR SUBNORMAL CHILDREN.

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The establishment of special classes for mentally subnormal children in the public schools of this state dates back to 1915. The legislature of that year enacted a law which made provision for not only classes for subnormal children, but also for children with speech defects, as well as blind and deaf children. As the number of subnormal children is very much in excess of those with other handicaps, it is but natural that these classes should show the greatest growth.

The first classes for subnormals were opened in the autumn of 1915, in the three large cities of the state and in Anoka, Faribault, Hibbing, South St. Paul, and Worthington. The summary of statistics for the year shows an enrollment of 286 children and 25 teachers. Two more cities undertook the work in 1916, and their classes, together with new classes in cities which had already undertaken the work, brought the enrollment to 444, and the number of teachers to 34.

During the last three years the growth has been as follows:

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| 1917-1918 | 16 cities | 757 pupils | 55 teachers |
| 1918-1919 | 22 " | 1,031 " | 73 " |
| 1919-1920 | 31 " | 1,396 " | 86 " |

It is quite evident to every one who has made any study of the situation that the moron is the only class for which the public schools can possibly hope to provide. The lower classes are naturally institutional cases. But it must not be supposed on this account that all morons may properly be admitted to the special classes in the public schools. Some have developed immoral and vicious tendencies, and others are so unresponsive to training that it would be a manifest injustice to place them with other children of the docile and partially educable type. Those who have been admitted to these classes have been children with intelligence quotients between 85 and 50. Children with a mental development below 50 per cent are clearly too defective for proper care and training in the public schools. Children above 85 per cent have been classed as normal in intellectual capacity, regardless of the amount of retardation in school or the peculiarities by which they may be characterized.

For statistical purposes the children have been grouped in three divisions, according to their grades of mentality, the lowest being 50 to 59 per cent; the next, 60 to 69 per cent; and the third, 70 to 85 per cent. During the five years these classes have been in operation, the number in the lowest group has varied from 14 to 16 per cent of the total enrollment; the number in the middle group, from 30 to 36 per cent; and the number in the highest group, from 50 to 55 per cent. It will thus be seen that, taking 70 per cent as our median, we have about one-half of the pupils above and below this grade of mentality.

It may be well to state in this connection how the pupils for these classes are selected, and in what manner they are tested. From the beginning the utmost care has been used in the establishment of these classes. In each of the three cities mental examiners have been employed by the local school board, who have devoted their time to the examination of pupils and the supervision of classes. In the other cities of the state the examinations have been made by Dr. F. Kuhlmann or his assistants in the Department of Research of the Minnesota School for Feeble-Minded.

Prior to the mental examination, each pupil has been given a physical examination by a licensed physician. In cases where remediable physical defects have been found, it has been made the duty of the school board to require or provide such treatment as may be deemed necessary. Subnormal children with physical defects for which no treatment has been given, do not entitle the school to state aid for their attendance.

A report is made of the mental examination to the Department of Education, and a card is made out for each pupil found eligible to the special class. This card is kept on file in the department of Education and a copy of it in the local school. This card serves as a permanent record of the child as long as it remains in school, and each year, before the state aid is distributed, such revision as may be required is made in order to keep the record up-to-date.

The Department of Education recognizes the very valuable cooperation of the State Board of Control, and desires to take this opportunity to express its cordial appreciation of the services of its psychological experts who have given generously of their time to the work of testing pupils for these classes. The demands for their services have been rather heavy, especially during the past year, in some instances requiring a continuous absence of several weeks from their regular work. Their findings have met with unexceptionable approval, and the establishment of classes as a result of their work has been of vast benefit to the school systems in the various cities where these tests have been given.

The general character of the instruction given in these classes is of necessity largely individual, and must be made dependent upon the mental age of the pupil, his interests, habits, peculiarities, previous history, home conditions, and other personal characteristics. The chief end to be sought is to prepare the child so as to become an asset to society instead of a liability. For this reason the aptitude of each child has to be studied and opportunities for development given along the lines for which there seems to be some hope for improvement. The daily program becomes, therefore, a flexible arrangement, by means of which children are engaged in academic tasks or industrial pursuits, according to the interests that can be most easily awakened. The traditional ideal of a school must give way to a sensible recognition of what can be accomplished with the material at hand. While in general it may be said that academic and industrial work should be given an equal amount of time in a day's program, the more important consideration is that individual progress be given a stimulus by a sufficient variation of intellectual, industrial, health, and play activities, so that the child develops an interest in his work.

In most of our classes these conceptions of their education appear dominant. In some places intellectual work is over-emphasized, and as a

result there is an air of listlessness and a tiresome dialogue, with long questions and monosyllabic answers. Attendance is poor, and complaint is rife that the class is not a success. Occasionally industrial work receives too prolonged attention, so that the child tires of his task and loses interest in school. It is a gratifying fact, however, that these mistaken ideas with regard to the education of the subnormal are rare and exist only because the degree of educability of the subnormal is not properly comprehended.

The general conception with regard to many of these children in a number of places is that their backwardness and immaturity are confined to the academic work of the school. In industrial work, where their ability to do things is brought into play, it is asserted that they are superior to many children in the regular grades. In some isolated cases it is conceivable that a subnormal child, with good motor control and imitative ability, might outdo a normal child who is physically awkward and without any interest in handwork, but as a general condition the work done in our classes establishes beyond a doubt that a subnormal child cannot successfully compete with a normal child any more in industrial work than in academic.

The industrial work has naturally been given careful attention in all of our classes. Usually each boy or girl is taught each step in a process in regular order, and is kept at the work until a satisfactory article is produced. The chief aim is always to make an article of some commercial value, as these pupils are thereby imbued with the idea that diligence and usefulness bring immediate returns.

The fundamental presumption of the training of the subnormal is to make them useful to society, helpful to those with whom their lot is cast, docile in their relation to others, and diligent in the particular line in which they show aptitude. To this end their courses should be worked out, so as to emphasize the concrete in every presentation. Abstract problems, theories or situations which are beyond their experience merely bewilder them. For this reason it is essential that courses should be definite and within the mental range of those who are to be instructed.

The proper training of a class of subnormal children is almost wholly dependent upon the teacher. The State Board of Education, recognizing this fact, has made the requirement that teachers of these classes must be normal school graduates, with at least two years' successful experience as teachers of normal children, and with training for work with subnormal children of not less than a summer school course. In making these requirements the State Board of Education has rather stressed the fact that teachers must be well prepared, and, in lieu of such preparation as a definite course might give, it has established a means by which teachers may qualify under the conditions which now exist.

The special classes for subnormals need superior teachers if the work is to result in permanent benefits to the pupils under their charge. A study of the training of the subnormal in the public schools, both in this state and in other states where the work with this class of pupils has been carried on for a longer period of time, indicates clearly that, without superior teachers, these pupils readily fall into habits of idleness and waywardness, which seriously menace their future conduct and usefulness. With good teachers, personally interested not only in the cause but in the pupils themselves, the general disposition on the part of these children shows

marked improvement both in their interest and in the efficiency with which they seek to accomplish their tasks. To the thoughtful it is quite apparent that work with this class of children requires superior ability on the part of teachers:

1. Because of the varied accomplishments along the lines of physical, industrial and social training which these teachers must possess;
2. Because of the methods of instruction which must be used with pupils of low mental capacity in order to secure any permanent results;
3. Because of the psychological problems constantly arising which must be met, not in an experimental manner, but with a knowledge of the mental reactions which they produce;
4. Because of the patience which these teachers must possess as an inherent quality, and the love for the work which they must have by virtue of the service they can render.

With available psychological laboratories and clinics there is no reason for making the training of teachers purely empiric, and still this is the quality of training which too many teachers are looking for and too often get. Science may err, but so may experience. On the whole, however, science has certain well defined data from which conclusions are drawn. Experience must hark back largely to incidents and impressions. The data of science may be given the acid test, while experience is merely subject to confirmation, doubt or denial. To understand the work in its various phases, a teacher of subnormal pupils should have attended a sufficient number of clinics so as to have become familiar with the most common physical, as well as mental, symptoms of the various grades of defectives which she may have in her school. She should likewise become familiar with the treatment best adapted to the individual case. It stands to reason that no amount of discussion or reading will give a training equal to that of a clinic. "Forewarned is forearmed," says the proverb, and the teacher with the proper quality of training has a decided advantage over the teacher who has to fall back on observation and experiment.

Love of work is essential to any important undertaking, but there is work which it is easier to love than the work of training mentally defective children. The great factor that makes it possible to love this work, I believe, is the service that such a teacher can render. The real meaning of life is neither pleasure nor drudgery, but service. To render the proper kind of service inspires one with love for his work. This implies that the teacher is thoroughly familiar with the elementary principles underlying the work.

For the maintenance of these classes, the law provides that each school district shall receive aid from the current school fund to the amount of \$100 per child each year, or a pro rata amount for a shorter period.

The amount of aid distributed for the past five years, and the average per capita cost for the state, are as follows:

| Year | Amount of Aid | Average Per Capita Cost |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| 1915-1916..... | \$20,315.49 | \$79.41 |
| 1916-1917..... | 28,155.01 | 79.64 |
| 1917-1918..... | 49,296.00 | 81.51 |
| 1918-1919..... | 66,716.33 | 73.74 |
| 1919-1920..... | 115,261.90 | 83.90 |

Recognizing the importance of this work, and the increased amount of money that will be paid out by the state for this work, the Department of Education cordially welcomes your suggestions, to the end that it may direct this work in the interest of the state and its citizenship. It realizes that the problem of the subnormal is a serious one, and that education alone cannot accomplish any momentous results. We invite your cooperation, and shall be glad to make use of any advice which will make more efficient the training now offered the subnormals in our public schools.

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