

## A REPORT ON THE ORGANIZATION OF A SCHOOL WITH A SEPARATE CAMPUS PREPARED TO GIVE TRAINING TO MENTALLY DEFICIENT BOYS AND GIRLS IN ANTICIPATION OF THEIR RETURN TO NORMAL COMMUNITY LIVING \*

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**I**N a congregate institution for the mentally deficient it is quite impossible to provide for a complete segregation of the high grade from the low grade feebleminded and older custodial cases. There is, therefore, considerable contact between the educable mentally deficient and all classes requiring custodial services. There is, as well, an awareness of the presence of infirmary and locked cottage cases being cared for on the same campus. It would not be unusual to find that this has had the effect of creating a feeling of hopelessness in the minds of some children who otherwise could be expected, with proper attitude and stimulation, to absorb enough of what is taught to render them eligible for consideration for return to normal community living. This presence of individuals, for whom there is no hope for return to society, can well develop in the minds of the higher grade individuals what may constitute a prognosis of their own future. Oddly enough, this situation may affect the attitudes of teachers and other employees as much as the children. At times, and in moments of confidence,

some teachers and employes have expressed the feeling that even the brighter children would remain in the institution permanently in spite of assurances that they were being prepared for return to society.

With the development of an institution with a separate campus, the educable children are released from many influences that tend to anchor them to an abnormal mode of existence. To give these high-grade mentally deficient children a school of their own provides assurances that they are being prepared for something better than long-time custodial care and makes them feel that the whole teaching program has been developed for the purpose of meeting their peculiar and specific needs. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to discuss the various factors of advantage to the child that are found to be present in a school for the educable mentally deficient, located on a campus of its own.

In 1945 it became known that the Minnesota legislature wished to use the campus, buildings and all facilities of the then existing State Public School as a training center for the educable mentally deficient. Many conferences were held on the problems known to be present in the development of this

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new program and consideration was given to reported experiences of other institutions and to such data as were available through reports and literature in the field.

The first question given consideration was the extent to which segregation of sexes should be provided for. With some apprehension it was decided that the school department should be co-educational. Under this plan boys and girls would be enrolled for academic work in the same class-room, even though it would be necessary to divide the sexes in their assignments to craft and vocational classes. Likewise, it was decided that both boys and girls could be assigned to certain work areas if the type of work to be performed could be done by either boys or girls. It was also decided that social functions would be co-educational and that visiting between boys and girls, while they were carrying out their assigned activities in the various areas in the institution would be permitted. Necessary safeguards and supervisory controls were provided for.

The progress of this program has been carefully watched and analyzed. At the onset we had a great deal of note-passing and the development of situations that needed immediate and intelligent handling. Most of the notes were smutty and of very low character. Individuals concerned were worked with and corrective procedures were set up. After about a year the number of notes diminished at a very rapid rate. Those apprehended were only silly mash notes. Girls in conference with their houseparents, teachers and social worker will now at times speak rather

freely without embarrassment or hesitation about their boy friends and boys will speak about their girl friends. In the school department boys and girls will discuss their lesson assignments and work together in their preparation with a very small amount of the silly type of reaction that was evident at the beginning. Whistling and wolf-calls on the part of the boys, when girls or women would be walking through the grounds, has been almost entirely eliminated. There has been a noticeable reduction in the reported number of homo-sexual episodes. Dancing has become a real social experience, normally operated with better decorum than is sometimes found in supervised high school dances. Smutty and suggestive conversation has seemed to disappear when normal association between sexes was provided for. It has been reported that when boys and girls have been removed from this wholesome relationship there has been an upsurge in the use of the same unclean language noted at the time of admission to the institution but which had all but disappeared from their conversation. A simple statement of fact seems to be that decent conduct and behavior seemed to be necessary for the enjoyment of accepted social relationships. It is now the feeling of our staff that a wholesome atmosphere has been developed which provides for a constructive program of training for future community living.

In further developing our program, much consideration was given to the necessity for making accurate predictions and recommendations. It was determined that this involved an intelligent approach to the whole question of

mental testing. We considered it necessary to make accurate measurements of academic progress, craft and vocational achievement, work responses and social development. To secure a staff trained and qualified to do this work became our first consideration. Our objectives have not been fully realized.

In the field of mental testing it was felt that for prediction we could place a greater confidence in the Percent of Average or "Personal Constant" rather than in the more variable I.Q. It was our definite feeling that accuracy of prediction would depend on the validity of the test used, no matter in what way the degree of brightness would be expressed. In conference with our consulting psychologist, it was agreed that the Point Scale of Performance Tests would give us a considerable amount of material on which to base an opinion and formulate a prediction. In using Form I of this scale it was found that we learn of the child's potential ability and his present ability to accomplish certain tasks that are clearly within the area of his comprehension. It reflects the skills possessed by the examinee and in a measure demonstrates the area in which he will be most capable and in which he will be able to earn a living. It was understood that Revised Form II of the scale (without form boards other than the Seguin) will show a closer correlation with other tests of abstract thinking. With the use of Arthur Performance scales, the Binet scales and tests of school achievement, we would secure a dependable measurement of the child's capacity to make an independent adjustment in society. In craft, vocational and work

situations and social development the judgment of the individual with whom the child is doing his work is the basis on which progress is determined.

It was recognized that many factors would be present which would interfere with an accurate determination of the child's ability and that these factors would have to be taken into consideration when recommendations for future programming is made. The interferences to be looked for were essentially the following:

1. Emotional disturbances which might either be of long standing or for only the time of the examination.

2. A hearing loss which might interfere with the child's responses during the examination and which might previously have interfered with the learning of the material that was involved in the test. This might more especially affect the giving of Binet examinations and achievement tests but would not be noticeable in the giving of the Point Scale of Performance Tests, as both Form I and Revised Form II are independent of language.

3. A visual loss of sufficient intensity to make it difficult for the child to respond up to the limit of his capacity and which might previously have interfered with the learning of the material that was involved in the test. This could also interfere with success on the Point Scale of Performance Tests through inability to see the material.

4. Impaired muscular control, that has come as a result of brain injuries and which would interfere with the response of the child in all situations, both verbal and non verbal.

5. Speech defects that may have come as a result of impaired muscular control, poor teaching, delayed speech development, or may be just imitative.

6. Glandular imbalances, some of which might be remediable and which might upset both the program of diagnosis and education.

7. Marked nutritional deficiencies.
8. Intellectual idiosyncrasies such as dyslexia and dyscalcula.

It might be well at this point to record some of the developments that have been noted in these areas of deficiencies. When it was recognized that a child was suffering from a severe emotional disturbance, attempts were immediately made to discover the reason for this emotional upheaval, and to set up such corrective procedures as would be needed to give the child relief. The techniques followed were that of personal interviews with the child and interviews with suggestions to houseparents, teachers and supervisors. Some cases responded very quickly while others required a longer period of treatment and consideration. As could be expected, partial or complete failure was noted with some of the children who were admitted at an older age.

In order that we might know what children needed special services because of a hearing loss, it was decided that an audiometer test be given to all. Those with a noticeable hearing loss were examined by a specialist to determine if medical or surgical procedure would bring about an improvement. Teachers were advised so that special provision in the school room could be set up for those needing this attention. One case was transferred to the State School for the Deaf, where he was welcomed because of his good ability and fine personality. Recent reports indicate that he is doing very acceptable work in that institution.

All of the children showing any degree of visual loss were referred to our ophthalmologist. Properly fitted glasses

in all cases requiring them were provided. Frequently it became necessary to change the prescription worn by a child at the time of his admission. Teachers were advised of all cases that needed special attention in the school room. One child who was nearly blind, was referred to the State School for the Blind and was accepted there on a trial basis. He did not make a success of his work there so that other plans had to be developed for him.

A few of the children have had impaired muscular control as a result of brain injuries. Special consideration was given to these in all areas of their activities. There has been a noticeable improvement in school progress as well as in the capacity of these children to move around and to do things for themselves. In one case the impairment was so great that other plans had to be developed.

Many of the children received have had speech defects in varying degrees of intensity. A speech pathologist examined each case and recommended treatment. As a result of this survey we are expecting that a full-time speech pathologist will be added to our staff.

In cases where a glandular imbalance was suspected, the children were referred to our physician for special consideration.

Children with nutritional deficiencies at the time of admission have shown marked improvement when placed on a special diet under the supervision of our health department.

Frequently children who have had a previous school experience have shown a marked deficiency in either reading or arithmetic as compared with their other

achievements. These cases are known to the teachers and special helps are provided in the field of the deficiency so that the child will be given an opportunity to progress up to the limit of his capacity. In the spring of each year a study is made of all of the children and those found to have a special deficiency in any academic subject are chosen to participate in a three-week tutoring program. Special techniques are employed. It has been found that most of these children respond to special teaching methods suited to their respective idiosyncrasies.

In organizing our school department it was recognized that the memory of the mentally deficient individual is likely to be less impaired than many of his other capacities. For this reason special consideration was given to this factor in the development of our academic program. At the various grade school levels, therefore, we attempted to supply an abundance of informational material. A great increase in effort on the part of our children to learn this material and to make use of it in situations that arose from time to time was noted. A good example of this occurred in a class recently when the teacher asked the class some questions that had been failed on a "Double or Nothing" radio program. Several of the children knew the answers and upon further questioning it was demonstrated that they knew the related information so that their answers were not merely lucky guesses. An example of the capacity of our children to plan and to carry out the plan was an Armistice Day program developed entirely by the children. It was an excellent ex-

ample of the results of the principle agreed upon at the time of organization that our children must be encouraged to live normally according to their mental age and capacity. Their ideas incorporated in this program gave evidence of the validity of their thinking and experiences at their own mental level.

In supplementing these self-made experiences we have been securing assembly programs from the University of Minnesota. The numbers used are chosen from those made available to the high schools in the State. Five numbers are usually chosen each year.

In the field of social studies many surprisingly high scores have been secured on standardized tests. Their slow progress in the areas of their greatest disability, problem solving and independent thinking, is not used as an excuse to deprive them of the teaching of the informational subjects in which their rate of learning more nearly approaches normal pupils.

Music is taught as you would expect it to be taught in a good public school. They are required to learn to read notes and they have become proud of the fact that they can learn songs not from rote but from the printed page. Advanced classes do three-part singing and do it well. Operettas are learned and presented for the enjoyment of the public. Glee clubs of boys and girls and of mixed groups are always prepared to sing on special occasions. Those capable are taught solos and duets, and quartettes are used from time to time.

In the school department it was decided that each child would be permitted to progress up to the limit of his

capacity without being subjected to the realization that he has failed to live up to the requirements that would be set up for normal children. A comprehensive achievement testing program was developed for the purpose of measuring the advance made in each of the subject fields. The teaching process was individualized to as great a degree as possible and work assignments at the beginning of each school year would be at the level of the child's known capacity to respond. Teachers were encouraged to both require and to expect results. Noticeable effects have been a marked revival of interest on the part of some children who had dropped out of school as soon as they had reached a chronological age of 16 years, and a realization that they can learn and that they will advance in a school program geared to their special needs.

The development of a sound craft and vocational program required a great deal of attention. We had inadequate facilities as far as rooms, equipment and teaching staff were concerned. The teaching of wood work and related subjects for boys and the teaching of sewing, cooking, weaving and hand-work for girls was immediately decided upon. However, it was recognized that even though these classes were very valuable in the teaching of specific skills, they hardly could be considered as vocational. In order that we might supplement this service, we developed many areas of work on a teaching basis so as to more adequately prepare the children in rather well defined vocational fields. The farm, the dairy, the garden, greenhouse, the bakery and the laundry were used for the boys. The

kitchens, dining rooms, laundry, hospital and the household requirements of the institution were used for the girls. At this time we do not feel that we have been able to organize our vocational training program as effectively as we know to be necessary. Additional facilities in our school department will be set up and a more effective organization of work assignments will be carried out.

Conferences were held with local Pastors regarding the development of an effective religious education program. On their recommendation we now have a Catholic Mass at 9 A. M. every Saturday and four classes of Catholic instruction in the fundamentals of the Catholic faith. Confirmation and First Communion are arranged for by the Priest in charge. A Lutheran service is held every Monday evening at 7 o'clock. A special class of instruction meets every Monday and prepares the children for Confirmation and First Communion. Likewise, the local Pastors have special classes for Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist and Baptist children. These prepare the children for membership in their respective churches. A Protestant chapel service is held every Sunday morning at 9 o'clock.

A great deal of consideration has been given to the question of vacations. It was felt by a number of our staff members that in all cases where the children have a suitable home, we should do everything possible to maintain a relationship and to develop in the mind of the child a realization that the State is not attempting to separate him from his home or to deprive him of the emotional

satisfaction of having a place to go. Because of this, in the early stages of the development of our institution, we encouraged the County Welfare Boards to carefully examine the home situation and to let us know if a summer vacation could be considered. We in turn advised them of any situation known to us that might interfere with a normal adjustment. In all cases where children either had no home or an unsuitable one to which to go, we have encouraged the Counties to provide boarding homes so that as many children as possible might have a period of release from institutional routine, and the opportunity to associate with others on a family basis. We could see many values coming from this type of program. Some children are having an opportunity to earn money and, under supervision, learning its use and good practice in the handling of it. There is an opportunity for participation in the normal and accepted community activities, such as church, social functions, recreational activities, the use of libraries and the like. Likewise, they are receiving practice in such commonplace activities as shopping, the use of busses, street cars and trains and how to use the telephone. An unexpected result has been an expression on the part of a number of our children, that they are going to Owatonna to attend school and are not sent there for the purpose of punishment or even because of their special deficiencies. The development of this vacation program has been slow and gradual. Groups of social workers, who have recently visited the institution, have advised us that they consider the approach essentially

sound and that in all cases possible they will make provision for removal during part or all of the vacation period of the children who are under their supervision.

Early in the development of this new program, it seemed necessary to agree upon a strict separation from the local community. This was a new venture and local residents were apprehensive and concerned. Little by little the restrictions were modified and reports of tolerance and acceptance were received. Permission to attend the local theater under the supervision of a worker was announced. Going down town for shopping or just for recreation was allowed. Groups appeared in churches on Sunday programs and children were taken in as associate members in two churches. Boy Scouts participated on an equal basis with the boys about town and were accepted without question. Attendance at high school athletic events became a rather common practice. The community acceptance of our children has produced values that cannot be discounted.

The placement program under the supervision of the State department is now beginning to function. Up to this date 13 girls and 6 boys have been placed. Five girls and six boys are now being prepared for leaving and several others are being studied with the expectancy they will be recommended for placement. In the future we are looking forward to the successful placement of an ever increasing number of children.

Just a word about the development of the Owatonna State School. Its history dates back to 1886. In October of that

Year the State of Minnesota opened the State Public School for dependent and neglected children. The institution was purchased after the then existing State Public School at Coldwater, Michigan. Until July of 1945 the normal dependent and neglected children were served according to the original intention of the founders. The capacity of the institution grew so that 450 children could be provided for and an intensive placement program, providing for nearly 700 cases, was in operation. Improvement in economic conditions and change in emphasis materially reduced the case load during the period of the war years. The legislature recognized that it was necessary to provide additional facilities for the mentally deficient and to reduce the number of children who were on the waiting list. By legislative act the then existing State Public School for dependent and neglected children was changed to be the Owatonna State

School for the high-grade mentally deficient. The legislature provided that this institution should set up a complete educational program for all of the educable mentally deficient and that it should be its major responsibility to train these handicapped wards for eventual return to society. The first children were received in July of 1945 so that a separate institution, unrelated to the larger congregate institution, has been in operation for less than three years. Our present capacity is 425. We accept children with IQ's as low as 50. The lower chronological age is determined by the mental age at the time of referral. Four to 4½ years mental age is considered the lower limit. We are expected to complete our program of training by the time the child has reached the age of 21.

This paper is a report on the development of this program in the State of Minnesota.