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An Improved program for the education of slow learning children in the Negro schools of Kansas City, Kansas

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Cleta B. Saunders

AN IMPROVED PROGRAM
FOR THE EDUCATION OF SLOW LEARNING CHILDREN
IN THE NEGRO SCHOOLS OF KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

A Problem Submitted to the Graduate Division in Partial
Fulfillment for Research Problems 390b

APPROVED:

By

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July, 1950

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child. A well known study is that of Lewis Terman, which shows that five per cent of the school population have intelligence quotients below 77.¹ We know further that the majority of this five per cent fall in the class of high

¹Samuel A. Kirk, Teaching Reading to Slow Learning Children, p. 10.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate aim of education in our democracy is to educate all children of all people, regardless of their intellectual level, to develop their fullest capabilities. To achieve this goal free public school facilities must be provided for every individual child in accordance with his needs. It is the duty of the public schools to make happy and useful citizens of all boys and girls. We have come to recognize that children entering the first grade differ widely in the ability to achieve. While the vast majority of children are similar, at either extreme are found those who vary to a marked degree. The first measurement of educational concern of individual differences in school is children's inherent powers, measured in terms of intelligence quotients. It has been found that children with intelligence quotients above 90 are regarded as normal or average, but children with I. Q's. as low as 85 can usually adjust to the regular program set up for the average child. A well known study is that of Lewis Terman, which shows that five per cent of the school population have intelligence quotients below 77.¹ We know further that the majority of this five per cent fall in the class of high

¹Samuel A. Kirk, Teaching Reading to Slow Learning Children, p. 10.

grade morons and are in the public schools. The White House Conference on Child Health and Protection reported that at least three per cent of the children in elementary schools are mentally defected to such an extent that special service is needed for their development.² According to Martin's study, between three and five per cent of the children of the school population need a special educational program because of mental retardation.³ Psychological examinations reveal that some children who have been retarded from birth or at an early age require, and may be expected to benefit from, chosen educational facilities designed to make them economically useful and socially well adjusted. For convenience we will define them as children of low intelligence who are unable to keep up the classes in the regular school; therefore, need a modified curriculum for their maximum growth. It is this small group of children with which this problem is concerned.

The Problem

The purpose of this problem had its origin in our school system September, 1949. The administration, after a study The problem is how to develop an improved program for the education of children of low intelligence in the Negro schools. The problem raises the following related questions:

²Vernon L. Nickell, The Educable Mentally Handicapped, p. 5.

³Kirk, op. cit., p. 34.

- (1) How can the slow learning child be determined?
- (2) What type of curriculum will best fit his needs?
- (3) How can a special curriculum be made acceptable to the child and his parents?
- (4) How can his training help to prepare him for industrial independence?
- (5) How can the child be taught the satisfaction of success?

The slow learning child had become unhappy, listless, and uninterested, resulting in his inability to make any educational progress.

Scope of the Problem

This problem will include children between the ages of ten and fourteen years with intelligence quotients ranging from 50-70 and who are mental deviates out of approximately nine hundred children of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade levels in three Negro schools in Kansas City, Kansas.

of the school on the basis of chronological age only. Through their years of school experience these children had become

Purpose

The purpose of this problem had its origin in our school system September, 1949. The administration, after a study of curriculum improvement provided for the children, took into consideration a small group of consistent failures from year to year. When an analysis was made it was soon detected that all children could not share equally in or profit from the general educational program offered. Causes of these failures, other than low mentality, were determined to be: program adaptable to the needs of this group.

(1) A varied difference in ability;

(2) A teacher's goal of accomplishment was set to meet the needs of the so-called average intelligence level of her group;

Teacher's Qualifications

(3) The teacher's school day did not provide enough time for the amount of extra time needed to help these immature children; and

(4) The slow learning child had become unhappy, listless, and uninterested, resulting in his inability to make any educational progress.

To relieve this condition a special room was furnished for all children with I. Q.'s. below 70. The writer was placed as teacher of thirty frustrated children far below the normal in intelligence. Most of the children were over age and had had biennial promotions, as was the policy of the school on the basis of chronological age only. Through their years of school experience these children had become automatically labeled as "the can't learners" and had formed a complex toward school in general. Some had reached their full academic saturation so far as school subjects were concerned, but all were lacking in desirable attitudes and habits of social living.

The program, though in its infancy, fell somewhat short of the aims which the writer hoped to achieve. It is the paramount aim of this study to contribute a usable worthwhile program adaptable to the needs of this group.

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vocational guidance, special instruction in arts and crafts, and teaching of diagnostic and remedial reading.

PROCEDURE

Experiences. The teacher should be experienced in

Teacher's Qualifications teaching normal children and should have had at least one

Health. First and foremost is good physical and mental health. She should have a flexible and open mind with a sense of humor and perspective which gives her the ability to evaluate properly the efforts of children. Also, she should be objective in her thinking with reference to the handicap of each child.

The teacher is often the sole source for the child's ideals, guidance, and understanding, as the majority of children in her care are from homes with little or no desirable standards of living. Above all, the teacher must be committed to the purpose of the acceptance of a responsibility of directing boys and girls with the severest educational maladjustments toward some achievement of normal adjustment, wholesome personality, and maximum educational growth.

Certification. In addition to the requirements as stated by the state board of education, the teacher should have had some courses in the field of exceptional education. Most important among these are: child development, psychology of exceptional children, education of exceptional children, speech correction, mental hygiene, educational and

vocational guidance, special courses in arts and crafts, and teaching of diagnostic and remedial reading.⁴

Experience. The teacher should be experienced in teaching normal children and should have had at least one year of in-service training for mentally retarded children.

The Children

The children in this study come from homes of the lowest economic bracket of the city. They live in the industrial area with its proximity to many of the packing houses and railroads, the surroundings of which make their homes anything but attractive. The children have had few satisfying school experiences due to the over shadowing achievements of their classmates in the regular class rooms. This feeling has also been aggravated by their failure each year according to grade classification.

Characteristics of Slow Learning Children

Comparison. The slow learning child fundamentally is like any other child. The fact that he deviates mentally does not change his physical being. He likes the same things. His needs are the same and he learns in the same way; that is, he learns by his experience. His "status" for belonging, affection, and likeness of other children is no

⁴Nickell, op. cit., p. 18.

different from those of a normal boy or girl.⁵ Inability to realize these needs through channels open to the average or brighter child often motivates much of his behavior problems. He requires contact and harmony with reality as stimulus for normal behavior. Yet, he needs to understand himself for what contribution he can make. To emphasize, the slow learner is very much like the rest of humanity; because of his limited horizon he must have many more experiences of the same kind to arrive at a given state of efficiency. He is a child of habit, not of reason; a child of doing, not of thinking.⁶ Hence, he must have the opportunity of meeting over and over the situation to which he is expected to make his adjustment in life. This is the only channel through which his learning becomes meaningful.

Physical Development. In the physical aspects there is little diversion according to the corresponding chronological age. Wallin, in his survey, shows the relationship of height and weight to intelligence. Results are that in motor development the slow learning child develops slower than a normal child. His mortality is slightly lower. Physical defects such as speech, hearing, and vision are slightly higher.⁷

⁵W. B. Featherstone, Teaching the Slow Learner, p. 7.

⁶Ibid., p. 37.

⁷Kirk, op. cit., p. 5.

It should be taken into consideration that some defects of low intellectual children are probably due to lack of care and medical treatment. Children, generally speaking, who are mentally deficient tend to come from homes in which parents are mentally unstable.

Mental Development. Perhaps the most significant factor in determining the difference between the two groups is mental ability. All studies agree that the child of low intelligence learns slower and retains less than does the normal child. Baker⁸ sums up the qualitative differences in ability in this manner:

First, the slow learner is capable of only the simpler forms of associate learning. Second, the desire to manipulate the concrete rather than to understand the abstract and general rules of any operation. Third, the slow learner is relatively weak in ability to reason. The fourth qualitative characteristic of the slow learner is his desire for short simple units of work.

Social Development. It is common knowledge that a large per cent of slow learning children come from the socially and economically less fortunate families of the community. Furthermore, the general competence of parents in providing the needs for their children is usually low, either because of lack of financial resources or lack of knowledge of basic requirements for the children.

⁸Harry J. Baker, "Helping the Slow Learner," p. 178.

Christine P. Ingram, Education of the Slow Learning Child, p. 101.

presumptive evidence. Determining the Slow Learner Then, check the

Selection of Children. The selection of children for school, his attendance after entering, and an evaluation of special consideration should be made as comprehensive and as his progress at the same time. This much information will scientific as possible. Only those who need a modified educational program, planned for children who are mentally give a more statistical analysis of the grade, age, and progress rank of the child and is not sufficient conclusion retarded, should be included. It should not be just a misfit placement of children, but specifically designed to meet selection is the screening of all possibilities. First, the needs of the common group. One should not assume that investigate all probable cases against academic records, all educational backwardness is due to lack of intellectual health records, and social history to discover any origin of limitations. It has been the practice for teachers to retardation. Second, a psychological study should be made recommend all problems and children with deviations of any of each child by a qualified psychologist. Such an examination will furnish intelligence, achievement, and performance kind as most fitting special classroom material. To attribute maladjustment to mental retardation should be the last records. When no certified person is available in the factor, rather than the first step, in determining the school system, the school administration may assume the characteristics of the group.

Tests and Diagnosis. Ingram⁹ states that the most reliable method of identification of slow learners is giving individual intelligence tests to all the children of the entire school. Follow with a grade status of pupils. Insofar as failure to achieve standards for promotion is due to low intelligence capacity, the consequence of such weaknesses will show in the over age-ness of pupils. By and large, the over age-ness at any grade level may be taken as

⁹Christine P. Ingram, Education of the Slow Learning Child, p. 101.

presumptive evidence of slow learningness. Then, check the cumulative records to ascertain when the child entered school, his attendance after entering, and an evaluation of his progress at the same time. This much information will give a mere statistical analysis of the grade, age, and progress rank of the child and is not sufficient conclusion of his mentality. The next and most important step in the selection is the screening of all possibilities. First, investigate all probable cases against academic records, health records, and social history to discover any origin of retardation. Second, a psychological study should be made of each child by a qualified psychologist. Such an examination will furnish intelligence, achievement, and performance records.¹⁰ When no certified person is available in the school system, the school administration may assume the responsibility of this clinical study. possible.

Data for studying these individual cases are then obtained from four sources: the school record, the personal history record, the physical record, and the psychologist's record. In the school record the principal and teacher give the information which briefly describes the child, his work, his attitude, and his general behavior; social conditions by items concerning the neighborhood, nationality, and occupation of parents; social traits, including habits and

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

attitudes, that indicate the child's adjustment to his school environment.

The personal history record will give knowledge of the family background and home conditions. Facts for this record may be secured from the school nurse, the visiting teacher, or a social agency, and will reveal the kind of heredity, type of family, opportunity of family, environment, motor development (age of walking, age of talking), and illness or accidents in early life which could have been contributors to the present retardation.¹¹

The physical record should give a complete physical picture. A statement from the health department will give an index to the child's physical condition, and the examination should have been thorough enough to give the motor, sensory, and organic functioning of the pupil so that defects, if any, may be corrected where possible.

The psychologist presents a summary of all findings, and on the basis of these findings recommends a special educational program for the child. On these recommendations, the teachers and all others concerned with the problem, will proceed.

Another method more commonly used is the Case Study Method. Listed is an outline for this procedure.

¹¹Ibid., p. 194.

¹²Ibid., p. 72.

Outline for Case Study In the third grade he followed

1. Problem by staying two years, was sent to the

fourth 11. Psychological Data to the special room.

Psychological a. Stanford-Binet Intelligence showed I. Q. of
b. Educational
50. Records c. Performance could not be given because of

child 111. Progress read.

1V. Physical Condition in normal condition, with no

signs of V. Social and Environmental Traits

3VI. Supply for Information His home background

was very poor a. Family there was a mental case. A sister was
b. Development History
mentally retarded c. Home Environment father in the home.

VII. Summary¹² was placed in the room for further

study. Even the special room was not the solution for his

Illustrations of Actual Case Studies

problem. He became adjusted very well and was happy in

doing Elijah Page. Age twelve years and three months; He

attended fourth grade. assignment of taking care of the black-

board Problem--Elijah was referred to special room because of

inability to read. his last name, another great accomplishment

for Progress--He had attended school regularly since begin-

ning kindergarten at the age of five. He was promoted to

the first grade not because of ability but because of lack

John Jones. Age ten years and four months; attended

of sufficient placement for him. He remained in the first

fourth grade.

grade two years and was passed to the second grade. He

Frequently a child who is failing in school work is

received a regular promotion from second to third grade as

thought by his teacher to be in need of special class place-

ment,¹² Ibid., p. 72. If diagnosis is made he proves dull,

is compulsory by the school. In the third grade he followed his regular pattern by staying two years, was sent to the fourth grade on trial, and then to the special room. study, 11111 Psychologist Data--Binet Intelligence showed I. Q. of 50. Records of other tests could not be given because of child's inability to read.

Physical Condition--He was in normal condition, with no signs of physical defects.

Social and Environmental Traits--His home background was very poor. The mother was a mental case. A sister was mentally retarded. There was no father in the home. was at

case Summary--Elijah was placed in the room for further study. Even the special room was not the solution for his problem. He became adjusted very well and was happy in doing anything to help keep the room clean and orderly. He was given a special assignment of taking care of the blackboards and erasers, in which he took great delight. He learned to write his last name, another great accomplishment for him. At the end of the year he had made two what-not shelves for his mother. lity Traits--John was described by

his teacher as being restless, inattentive, disobedient, John Jones. Age ten years and four months; attended uncooperative, and lazy. He was afflicted with seizures fourth grade. occasionally; had a speech defect; and spoke in a husky

monotone Frequently a child who is failing in school work is thought by his teacher to be in need of special class placement. Summary and Recommendations--John was evidently not a candidate for special class for the mentally retarded. A

normal, or even superior, with one or more factors from an entirely different source as the cause of his difficulty. In contrast, here is another boy who was referred for study, illustrative of a child proposed for the special class but found to be in need of a different type of educational program.

Problem--John was referred for study because of his emotional disturbances.

Psychological Data--The boy had an I. Q. of 90. An arithmetic test score of grade placement of 10-9. A reading rating of third grade and spelling still lower. He was at ease during the arithmetic test, but very nervous and restless while attempting the reading and spelling tests. His inability to interpret directions was demonstrated by crying.

School Progress--He had attended school regularly since beginning kindergarten at the age of five. Had spent two years in the kindergarten and because of his size had been promoted each year until he reached the fourth grade.

Social and Personality Traits--John was described by his teacher as being restless, inattentive, disobedient, uncooperative, and lazy. He was afflicted with seizures occasionally; had a speech defect; and spoke in a husky monotone.

Summary and Recommendations--John was evidently not a candidate for special class for the mentally retarded. A

continued study was made. His home was investigated. Special remedial work in reading and spelling was recommended. With the mother's cooperation, emphasis was placed on the development of self-confidence in his own ability. Other than health, mental ability, achievement, and his personality described in the study, the report gives the nature of the problems that teachers meet in special classroom teaching. Analysis of the data revealed in such study may serve the teacher in any attempt to understand and plan for individual needs of children. The analysis can be recorded in forms describing each factor of the data.

The School

Classroom. Since the children in special classes occupy the same room for a number of years, it is quite significant that the room be a very pleasant and cheerful place. It should be well heated, well lighted, well ventilated, and located in the main part of the school. In some schools it has been the practice to make the special room the only classroom in the basement or some other remote place in the building, which further adds to the children's frustration and lowering of morale. The classroom should be as attractive as any room in the school.

The size of the room will vary according to the size of the children, but should be large enough to accommodate the various necessary activities for the group. The special

classroom with a comparatively small number of children provides an educational laboratory for observing, studying, and guiding the development, behavior, and physical well-being of the class. The teacher can get the mental scope of each child in his own classroom environment. She can observe his reaction to her and to the rest of the children. For, as she understands the causes that lie back of his unnatural behavior, she will be able to remove the obstruction that interferes with his development.

Equipment. The equipment will vary depending upon the curriculum provided. Blackboards and bulletin boards are essential. The room should have running water, a deep sink, and electrical outlets conveniently located. Bins for pupils' work, a supply closet, and a tool closet should be provided.

The major broad objectives of education such as the attainment of self-realization, development of acceptable human relationships, attainment of economic efficiency, and development of an understanding of civic responsibility, give a basis for the construction of a suitable curriculum for the mentally retarded child.

Before planning a definite educational program the teacher should have a general knowledge of what the child may reasonably be expected to achieve at the various stages

¹³Francis W. Doyle, Questions on the Education of Mentally Retarded Minors in California, p. 24.

CHAPTER III

TYPE OF CURRICULUM THAT WILL BEST FIT HIS NEEDS

Curriculum. If the curriculum for the mentally retarded is to be meaningful in preparing the child for the world in which he lives, it must be developed in terms of his needs. The suitable curriculum must take into consideration the innate peculiarities of the child. These peculiarities may be summarized in the following statements:

(1) The mentally retarded child lacks an adequate drive, adaptive powers, associative powers, organization powers, and evaluative powers;

(2) The mentally retarded is limited in physical prowess, social adaptations, and vocational potentiality.¹³

These characteristics of mental retardation, coupled with the major broad objectives of education such as the attainment of self-realization, development of acceptable human relationships, attainment of economic efficiency, and development of an understanding of civic responsibility, give a basis for the construction of a suitable curriculum for the mentally retarded child.

Before planning a definite educational program the teacher should have a general knowledge of what the child may reasonably be expected to achieve at the various stages

¹³Francis W. Doyle, Questions on the Education of Mentally Retarded Minors in California, p. 24.

of his school experience. Only when she has this understanding can she plan curricular activities which will develop desirable habits, attitudes, and skills of the child--the final goal of any educational program.

Recent curriculum practices indicate that when the subject matter is centered and integrated around real interests the learning increases in effectiveness. The slow child transfers and applies his learning to new situations less readily than does the normal child and will profit to a greater degree from this type of instructional program. The more nearly the learning approaches real life situations, the more effective the learning for the slow learning child. His training must stem from concrete experiences with numerous specific instances for application.¹⁴ Each child presents his own educational challenge according to his level of intelligence.

Unit of Work. The question is how are these goals to be attained? It is certain they cannot be reached until they become a part of the child's acting, feeling, and thinking. The method must be functional in its implication and must set forth situations that call for repetition. In contrast with subject-matter organization, which limits the purposing and participation on the child's part, the unit of work affords an excellent opportunity for life-like

¹⁴ Featherstone, op. cit., p. 45.

activities for growth in learning situations. Through the unit the child feels the need to inquire, to make observations, to secure information, to solve problems, and, thereby, to enjoy and to learn from the procedure.

Criteria for Selecting Unit

- The unit should grow out of real life situations.
- The unit should be suited to the child's mental and social development.
- The unit should further both individual and group learning.
- The unit should provide for the development of desirable habits and attitudes of conduct as well as the acquisition of knowledge and skills.
- The unit should be so developed that interest, skills, habits, attitudes fostered by it carry over into life outside of school.
- The unit should provide for practical use of the tool subjects.
- The unit should call for many kinds of experiences.¹⁵

It is to be assumed that the unit will meet with wishes of the class, that it is interesting and something that the class, through the guidance of the teacher, has found a need for studying. When the unit has been chosen the teacher must, of course, analyze its possibilities, plan for its development, and guide the children to its completion. The teacher's role from now on is a helper, not a leader, working with the class.

Tool Subjects. Other than the learning received from the unit, there must be some place in the daily program for additional mastery of tool subjects. It is to be appreci-

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 258.

ated that the unit clarifies the need for mastering tool subjects. Reading is important as it is applied in gaining information. English is needed in order to discuss and keep records of progress. Spelling is essential to write the stories. Each unit calls for some problem solving. This brings about the need of arithmetic. Remedial reading and short snappy drills can be very effective in teaching tool subjects. An ideal program will provide short periods for actual subject matter teaching.

TABLE I

SUGGESTED TIME ALLOTMENT FOR TOOL SUBJECTS

Subject	Minutes Per Week	Percentage
Reading	250	15.8
English	350	20.6
Arithmetic	200	12.7
Spelling	100	6.3

Making this Curriculum Acceptable to the Child and His Parents. It is the desire of most schools to profit from the school program. In the slow learner it is hidden because of unpleasant experiences connected with learning in the regular class room. The teacher must convince the child of his possibilities. She should help him to locate his

aptitudes and lead him through pleasant situations to achievement to the limit of his capacity. Once he is able to gain approval for something well done he will be stimulated to put forth effort for greater gains. As progress is pointed out to him for even the slightest accomplishment, he will be happy in his classroom situation. A slow learner should be encouraged for the things he does well. He should be taught to work independently, trying to compete only against his own record. Point out the aptitudes for efficiency and guide him in that direction. Teach him that no matter how small the task, it is worth doing well and that when done well it is an accomplishment. The teacher should always plan at least one satisfying experience for each child in the daily program.

Parents should not be kept in total darkness as to their child's ability. Much of the harm that has happened to all mentally retarded children has resulted from parents' failure to understand the limitations of their children. So often parents set a standard in terms of the ability of some child in the neighborhood and constantly make comparisons unfavorable to their own child. This is a hindrance to the mentally retarded. He is an individual and his progress must be measured by his own previous record. Once the mentally retarded child can see evidence of his growth it will help him to gain the emotional balance which must be a part of his normal reaction before he can adjust to the society

in which he lives.

Training to Prepare for Industrial Independence. The

curriculum designed to meet the needs of the group has a terminal function from the outset. It is recognized that the slow learning child, by nature of his limitations, will find his place in the industrial world. From his experiences of working together in units that instilled cooperation, rights of others, respect of authority, respect for leadership, and self-confidence, he should be able to make adjustments in the world outside of school.

The school experiences should include vocational adjustment of the individual pupil. With this feeling of security he can be self-supporting in the industrial world. Because of his environment he will be familiar with the employment factor in industrial plants. No doubt he will make his choice fairly early as to what he wishes to do after he leaves school. The teacher can help by teaching him to do routine work well. Once he becomes responsible and efficient in some one thing and willing to take orders, he should have no trouble in the world outside of school.

It provides for a happy relationship between the teacher and pupils. Its aims are to develop desirable characteristics for adult life.

No child likes to feel that he cannot share in the activities of his class. The special classroom is the most

logical place in the school. CHAPTER IV normal adjustment of the slow learning child.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

Conclusions

I offer the following recommendations to this problem:

It is of vital importance that the teacher of the mentally handicapped specialize on the strength instead of the weakness of her group. It must be recognized that too much time should not be spent on the school subjects for which it has no aptitude. Denied satisfaction of success is discouraged by repeated failure. When the pupil leaves school he will find society interested only in the things he can do, not in what he cannot do. The mentally retarded child is a challenge to the teacher, who should take pride in his development.

The proposed program should provide a happy school situation for the participation of the slow learner. It should help him to find interest and satisfaction in his school life. The program should lead to new discoveries in the ambitions of the children. It sets forth ideals for the development of good citizenship through a purposeful technique. It provides for a happy relationship between the teacher and pupils. Its aims are to develop desirable characteristics for adult life.

No child likes to feel that he cannot share in the activities of his class. The special classroom is the most

logical place in the school for the normal adjustment of the slow learning child.

Recommendations

I offer the following recommendations to this problem:

- (1) That the children be selected early in their school life, before suffering the stigma of failures;
- (2) That the children be selected by a scientific method;
- (3) That the number of children in each class not exceed twenty;
- (4) That the classroom be equipped with new suitable material for carrying on a modified curricular program;
- (5) That the parents cooperate with the school's program;
- (6) That the room be represented in the various club activities of the school;
- (7) That the class be an integral part of the school community and take part in school activities.

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