

EDUCATION IN THE TRAINING CENTRE

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The views contained in this paper are personal to the author and are not necessarily those of the Essex County Council.

Most normal children going to school can be certain that during their school career they will be taught by trained teachers and in many cases be given additional help in certain subjects by teachers with specialised training in those subjects. The mentally handicapped child, however, is offered no such guarantee. His future progress will depend on the devotion of staff who are under-trained and under-paid and whose selection does not necessarily imply an educational standard even to G.C.E. or School Certificate level.

In one Junior Centre I visited recently, I was told that the Local Authority's view was that as long as the supervisor had attended the course for teachers of the mentally handicapped, this was sufficient, as she could then train her colleagues on the staff. While this particular view may not be widely held it is perhaps indicative of the attitude which exists in many areas towards the staffing of Junior Centres and the function of such units—namely a failure to recognise the fact that the mentally handicapped child needs more than kindly supervision, he needs remedial education of the highest possible order. While we are building well-designed Centres they will remain underexploited unless we put teachers into the classrooms who are more adequately prepared for the task in hand.

The following Table I shows the type of applicant applying for posts in one employing Authority. It must be remembered, however, that this Authority adopted an attitude towards the education of its mentally handicapped children which, by comparison to other Authorities, was particularly dynamic. It had, moreover, an international reputation and a long tradition of research in this field. In spite of these factors two thirds of the successful candidates did not possess any academic qualifications; the most suitable candidates withdrew on learning the picturesque salary scales involved. It would be reasonable to suppose that the situation in other parts of the county would be even less fortunate.

In considering the question of the mentally handicapped child in the Junior Training Centre it is interesting to see the way in which many of them spend their schooldays. Some time ago I studied a number of timetables which were being used for one hundred and fifty young children with a chronological age of five to nine years. An analysis of activities showed that the child was occupied in the following manner:—

Time allotted	Activity in Hand
14%	Sleeping and resting.
24%	Administrative business—assembly, register and dismissal.
40%	Lessons and play.
22%	Eating and going to the toilet.

While it is not suggested that any of these activities are inessential one might suggest that some reappraisal of priorities would be helpful. Of the actual lessons the time available was disposed of in the following manner:—

Percentage of Lesson Time	Type of Activity
17%	Free play.
33%	Group activity lessons.
50%	Sedentary group activities.

TABLE I

Analysis of Applications for 18 full-time teaching posts in Training Centres

	1958			1959			1960			TOTALS		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Number of posts advertised	—	—	4	—	—	10	—	—	4	—	—	18
Number of Applicants	12	12	24	25	38	63	14	46	60	51	96	147
Average age of Applicants	39	36	—	33	36	—	33	33	—	35	31	—
QUALIFICATIONS												
Teaching certificate	1	3	4	6	12	18	4	15	19	11	30	41
Educational standard of Matric or above	1	4	5	7	9	16	3	6	9	11	19	36
Below Matric standard with no other qualifications	3	—	3	5	7	12	5	10	15	13	17	30
Degrees or University Diplomas	1	2	3	5	5	10	2	7	9	8	14	22
Nursing qualifications	2	—	2	1	4	5	—	5	5	3	9	12
N.A.M.H. Diploma	2	3	5	1	1	2	—	1	1	3	5	8
Trade and Professional qualifications	2	—	2	—	—	—	1	1	2	3	1	4
PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE												
Teaching normal children	2	5	7	8	22	30	5	21	26	15	48	63
Teaching normal and E.S.N. or S.S.N. children	2	6	8	3	2	5	—	6	6	5	14	19
Admin. clerical or business	—	—	—	5	5	10	2	5	7	7	10	17
Child care workers in L.A. children's homes	2	—	2	2	6	8	1	3	4	5	9	14
Nursing in M.D. Hospitals	5	—	5	—	2	2	1	3	4	6	5	11
Housewives	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	4	7	3	4	7
Students	—	—	—	—	2	2	1	1	2	1	3	4
Armed services	—	—	—	3	—	3	—	—	—	3	—	3
Unemployed	—	—	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	—	2	2
Theatre	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	2	2
Journalism	—	1	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	1	2
Psychologists	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	1	1	1	2
Ministers of Religion	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
SOURCE OF INFORMATION												
Independent Enquiry	5	3	8	9	14	23	7	15	22	21	32	53
Times Educational Supplement	6	7	13	8	5	13	4	17	21	18	29	47
"The Lady"	—	—	—	—	13	13	—	8	8	—	21	21
New Statesman	—	—	—	4	3	7	1	4	5	5	7	12
Hospital and Social Services Journal	2	—	2	1	3	4	1	—	1	4	3	7
N.A.M.H. Vacancies Circular	1	—	1	—	1	1	—	2	2	1	3	4
Daily Telegraph	—	—	—	2	—	2	—	1	1	2	1	3
PLACE OF ORIGIN												
London	4	2	6	14	14	28	4	21	25	22	37	59
Home Counties	5	3	8	10	11	21	7	11	18	22	25	47
More than 60 miles away	6	4	10	5	8	13	3	11	14	14	23	37
Overseas	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	3	3	1	3	4
NUMBER OF STAFF ENGAGED												
Staff engaged with higher qualifications	2	2	4	3	7	10	1	3	4	6	12	18
Staff engaged without higher qualifications	—	—	—	3	5	8	1	3	4	4	8	12
Number withdrawn due to low salary	6	2	8	6	8	14	3	9	12	15	19	34
Number of such withdrawals with higher qualification	5	1	6	6	7	13	2	8	10	13	16	29

In view of the fact that the children being offered these timetables were young mentally handicapped children having a developmental level of their normal pre-school fellows it is not encouraging to note that only 17% of their lesson time was given to independent activities while the remaining 83% was devoted to group instruction.

In looking at the mentally handicapped child at school we find that too often his needs are subordinate to the demands of the timetable which is frequently inflexible and offers activities which are, many of them, inappropriate to his developmental level from which he gains little satisfaction and only minimal benefit. We find him spending a long part of his day sitting with various pieces of educational machinery and we are told that this will help his hand and eye co-ordination—perhaps this is so but the need for gross motor activities is too readily ignored and while he is learning to thread beads to help his finer movements the robust activities of a child at play are too often neglected. We ask him to acquire the skills of fine manipulation when in many cases he lacks the experience of building, climbing, balancing and all those other activities which are both satisfying and essential to a young child.

Too frequently he spends his time repeating activities which have frequently been learned and the repetition is often such that the activity loses any meaning it ever had for the child. We are often reminded that young children like repetition, that it sedates the aggressive and comforts the disturbed. I think this may be true but one must distinguish between the peace of the predictable and the inertia of the inevitable.

Perhaps the major defect in our training centres, therefore, might be said to be their non-educational orientation which shows itself in a lack of dynamism in our attitude to children and a cosy lack of realism in our attitude to adults. Many of the activities offered to the children while not harmful in themselves, have a deleterious effect on their progress as so many of them are unrelated to the developmental level of the children undertaking them. In the belief that the child is being 'worked to capacity' we frequently see children being asked to perform tasks beyond their present level while others are under-stimulated due to a kindly anxiety on the part of the teacher lest the child be forced to work beyond his capacity.

The structure of the training schedules in many Training Centres is frequently too redolent of pre-war primary schools with the academic content siphoned off and its place taken by sense training, handicrafts and other activities. Many of the activities undertaken by adolescents and adults are curiously similar to those pursued by their younger fellows in the Junior groups. Too frequently one finds little evidence of any real gradation in the nature of the stimulus given to older as opposed to younger children while the question of maturation is too often ignored.

On discussing the question of educational equipment with teachers in Training Centres recently, many of them rightly pointed out that much of the equipment given to the young child was little different from that given to the older child. An analysis of equipment (Table II) was interesting mainly because it showed the lack of prominence given to gross motor activities and indicated that an undue stress was being placed on sedentary sessions of sense training. Table II refers to all apparatus other than art and musical equipment and was being used by one hundred and fifty boys and girls ranging in chronological age from five to nine years with a mental age of approximately two to four and a half years.

TABLE II
Analysis of educational equipment being used by 150 children

Purpose of Equipment	Amount Supplied
Assembly toys which fit together	39.8%
Fine motor. Threading, etc.	21.0%
Small building	18.0%
Shape and size	7.8%
Imaginative play. Dolls, etc.	4.9%
Gross Motor	3.4%
Colour	2.4%
Numbers	2.2%
Letters	0.5%

Unless our Training Centres are to be merely receptacles for the entertainment and supervision of the handicapped, we must ask ourselves what function they should fulfil and how best they might attain it. We should expect to find in them an educational climate in which the child was encouraged to explore his environment, in which he was offered stimuli appropriate to his developmental needs together with the opportunity for experiment.

If the child is to gain a fuller understanding of his little universe he cannot reach this if we compel him to explore it from behind a desk. It is widely held that a teacher's main function is to bring about a change in his pupil and so it is with the child himself—for one of the sources of his satisfaction is the extent to which he can modify his environment. Any school for the young retarded child which fails to recognise this need will to a large extent be a failure. The type of environment in which these conditions can best operate would, therefore, preclude any extensive formal group teaching. The idea of Play as being a recreation from work is an entirely adult concept which has so long bedevilled our attitude towards the young child and his pursuit of insight and experience.

One tends to feel a certain anxiety in discussing Play because it seems to be a subject which is capable of giving rise to somewhat heated feelings. On the one hand some of its more enthusiastic advocates grow too readily rhapsodic about "absolute freedom" whilst its opponents treat with a certain reserve what they believe to be the prospect of a class of young children intent on self-expression. Thus the belief has grown up in many people's minds that teaching and a free play situation are incompatible. For the young retarded child at school a free play situation is heavily biased in favour of both good teaching and true learning. In such a situation the role of the teacher would be largely to foster the child-initiated activities that arise in the Group, to widen his horizon of experiences and so enlarge upon any situation which might be exploited to the advantage of the child.

Due to the poverty of the language from which mentally handicapped children suffer they should find on going to school an environment which is geared towards language promotion. This situation would offer them meaningful and purposeful activities and should have in it abundant opportunity for contact with their fellows. Wherever we restrict movement within a group of young mentally handicapped children so do we limit the opportunity for the use of language. We cannot expect our children to co-operate with each other at play if this activity has only a minor role in the child's school life. In a play situation he is gradually building in the primitive social skills that are essential for his future development and his personality cannot be brought out and put away at the behest of a timetable.

Tizard (1960) in his study of the care of mentally handicapped children describes the beneficial effects on the language of those living in smaller and more stimulating environments as opposed to those living in the less stimulating environ-

ment of a large hospital. In connection with the same study Lyle (1959, 1960) notes that those children living at home have a higher language level than their counterparts in institutions. Bearing in mind the marked differences described, and in view of the present somewhat unstimulating nature of activities to be met with in many Training Centres, it would be reasonable to suppose that an improvement in these activities would show itself in the language level of the children.

In the school life of the young retarded child, one notices that Speech Training sessions play a prominent part and whilst I should not like to minimise this aspect of the teacher's work, I have often wondered if the child could not better be served by being offered activities with a high "language encouragement content" rather than corrective exercises designed to remedy specific defects. Although it would probably be wrong to under-value much of the poetry in use for the more responsive child, I cannot help believing that group speech training exercises for the very young or more retarded child are in themselves very much over-rated in their value and it may not be unreasonable to suspect that any benefit derived is largely the operation of a Hawthorne effect rather than a real advance in language proficiency.

Over a period of four years I took a phonetic analysis of some 160 children and adults entering residential and day schools. During this time some of them were given frequent and regular sessions of fairly intensive Speech Training. It was interesting to see that at the end of this period those who had received this instruction were not markedly different from those who had not.

In watching groups of very young retarded children at play it is interesting to note the extent to which they do **not** co-operate with each other. Although they may be in close proximity to others most of their play is parallel play, but in this way they learn to tolerate the presence of their fellows and will soon discover that there is nothing quite like another child for enriching one's own life. In such a situation where a child moves freely from one activity to another he will be stimulated to make demands upon his fellows, and once this stage has been reached the value of the regime increases, for by contact and frequent interplay within a group will he be made aware of the **mores** which govern the society in which he lives.

If we are to offer Social Training in its proper sense it should permeate the whole of a child's school life by the provision of a rich pattern of meaningful experiences and the opportunity for cultivating the sort of relationship with other people which will later prove a source of comfort and satisfaction to those concerned. One must remember that many handicapped people who fail in employment do so not only because of their inability to perform the tasks involved in their work but also because of an inability to make the necessary social adjustments which will render them acceptable to those around them—and the time to start this process of adjustment is in the nursery.

SUMMARY

1. The training of staff is in need of the considerable revision which it is anticipated will be recommended by the Ministry of Health Committee of Enquiry into this question.

2. The activities conducted in many Training Centres indicate a lack of insight into the educational needs of mentally handicapped children.

References

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2. Tizard, J. (1960). British Medical Journal No. 5178.