

AN APPROACH TO A GROUP
of
MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN

AN ABSTRACT OF
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Everywhere today there is a growing awareness of the problems of mental retardation. Interest is increasing especially in the early discovery and prevention of these conditions.

Mental retardation is a condition, in most cases present at birth, which impairs the intellectual function of the individual in varying degrees. This condition is not a disease, although it may be the result of some disease; nor is it curable at the present time. This condition prevails for approximately three percent of the total population. In specific terms, three out of every one hundred children and adults are mentally retarded to some degree.

In the education of the mentally retarded, one must take cognizance of the characteristics of this group. Much has been written about these features concerning the mentally deficient but present day trends indicate many factors introduced into the child's world in the form of cultural, dietetic, and educational measures that can register a change in the intellectual and physical growth of the mentally retarded child. But basically the mentally retarded child has a tendency to be physically less healthy than the so-called normal child. Intellectually there is a marked difference between the two groups. The mentally retarded cannot reason with any great degree of success and all learning must be of a tangible nature--in terms of things that can be touched, seen or heard. And because of his failure to think in the abstract and his failure to be able to compete with other children he

therefore becomes frustrated and emotionally unstable. This results in failure in school and eventually becoming a "misfit" in the community.

For educational purposes we classify mentally retarded children in three groups. (1) Educable mentally retarded children are those, in general who have an I.Q. between fifty and seventy-five as measured in an individual psychological test. (2) The trainable mentally retarded child is one whose I.Q. ranges from twenty-five to fifty. (3) The custodial mentally retarded child has an I.Q. generally below twenty-five.

The modern concept of education has done much to improve the condition of the mentally retarded. Whereas in the past the mentally retarded child was treated as an individual to be scorned, despised, and made fun of, today through the efforts of dedicated teachers, educators, and the like the mentally deficient are given equal opportunity with normal children. We have in this country today, a philosophy of education that calls for equal educational opportunity for all children. This does not mean that all children should have the same education. What is meant, however, is that all children should be provided an educational program designed in terms of their abilities.

Why is it necessary to have a specialized curriculum for the mentally retarded? Because of limited mental capacity these children cannot benefit from the present educational program. Martens states this very clearly when she says,

"It is the pupil--his capacity, his physical and social development, his interest, his achievement, his specific abilities and disabilities--that determines the curriculum."¹

A proposed curriculum for the mentally retarded should include training in the home, physical and health development, social and moral development, mastery of practical and useful tool skills, vocational training and experience in the areas of human relations.

¹Elise H. Martens, Curriculum Adjustments for the Mentally Retarded, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare Bulletin No. 2 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office 1957).