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Special Education in State Schools in and around Washington, D.C., New York and Boston

A Review of Schools visited by Mrs. L. LIPMAN,
Principal of "The Hamlet", School for Retarded Persons, Johannesburg

IT is significant and noteworthy that Special Education as applied to Retarded children is an old, accepted and integral part of education in the United States of America. A College or University training teachers for elementary and secondary schools, usually trains teachers in the field of Special Education. In many cases these teachers are expected to have worked for several years with normal children first, before being accepted as students for the retarded child.

This special training gives teachers of retarded and brain injured children insight into the problems which are associated with pupils in special schools. It allows for the maximum development of the child's potential. Extensive literature, curriculum guides, mechanical aids and resource centres are available to assist teachers in their techniques and teaching methods.

The State's responsibility in providing education for the retarded child is further demonstrated by its willingness to provide transport to and from school for the retarded child. In several cases which were brought to my notice, children were transported for many miles daily by taxis at the State's expense. The parents have the right to demand, by law, state schools for their retarded children.

The conditions have created not only a strong parent body, but schools and teachers of very high standard. The pupil-teacher ratio is low, never more than eight per teacher, or 10—12 with a teacher's aid. Schools are custom built, with facilities, furniture and equipment suited to the needs of retarded children. When parents have the support of the Community, school, teachers, press and the State Authority, the burden of having a retarded child diminishes. Parents become less anxious, more confident and can plan future vocational and occupation training for their offspring.

Children who are severely, moderately and mildly retarded attend special school from 6—16 years of age. Although every State in the U.S.A. has its own laws and regulations for Special Education, most follow a similar pattern.

At 16 years of age the child is transferred to a vocational or day occupation centre. Here children are taught skills and occupations which will integrate him/her either into a sheltered workshop or into some work in the community.

Large State residential units exist for residential care of the profoundly retarded. Severely, moderately and mildly retarded children are best catered for at home and are not usually separated from the family unless the parents are unable to care adequately for their offspring. However, should the retarded child threaten the stability of the home, or in cases where the social worker, psychologist or psycho-therapist recommend placement in a residential unit, a place is always found for the child. The State's involvement with its responsibility to its citizens places the parents in a strong position should placement be required. As old institutions become crowded, additions to buildings are made. In many cases new residential facilities are being planned to house the overflow from presently overcrowded centres.

With this general introduction to Special Education in the United States I will now describe the schools, centres and institutions which I visited during my three weeks stay.

MARYLAND:

The State of Maryland comprises several Counties and I was able to visit schools in Prince George County, Hyattsville, Washington D.C., and in Baltimore.

Each school has a large, well equipped gymnasium and the P.E. teacher is a very important member of the school staff. The daily programme is so organized that every class spends at least 30 minutes per day in the gymnasium, developing muscles for gross motor and fine motor co-ordination. The programme is geared to the child's need. His motivation is stimulated. Games of skill are introduced with the apparatus to develop mobility, balance and speed. Body image, spacial orientation, responding to verbal instructions and social relationships by group games are all aspects of the Physical Education programme. Every school is also equip-

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ped with a domestic unit which includes, lounge, bedroom and kitchen. The pupils are taught how to make beds and clean rooms with vacuum cleaners. The kitchen is a focal point for learning to use a washing machine. Ironing and cooking lessons are given to all pupils to encourage greater independence and better adjustment to normal community living. Many pupils graduating from these schools are employed in the community as laundry workers, assistants in road houses and domestic aids. This training is also very useful in the home, where outside domestic help is difficult to come by in most States.

Special features in schools visited

Gallaten Street Centre, Hyattsville.
Principal — Mrs. Henderson.

The school has over 60 pupils. There are 6 teachers, one workshop teacher, a P.E. Instructor and teachers' aids, a Principal and a secretary. The teachers' aids are women who have no special education or university training, but who have completed secondary schooling. They work under the guidance of teachers. The floating teacher acts as an assistant to the Principal, takes children individually for special training or replaces a teacher in her absence.

Teachers are given leave to visit other schools for new ideas and techniques, to attend courses or to visit a resource centre. I will deal with resource centres later.

Meetings are held weekly to discuss problems of the children and any new techniques or equipment available to the staff. Each classroom has its own equipment, but the school library houses a great many books of interest to teachers and children. Books of high level interest that control the vocabulary are available for reading to the children.

These books are aimed to interest the older retarded pupil who has outgrown the simple stories available for the normal young child. These are called "Experience Books". (Bank St. College of Education Publication.) A great many tactile puzzles are available to assist children in their development, e.g. dominoes with grooves so that the child can feel and count the numbers on the dominoes. A whole series of developmental learning materials is available for use by the teacher — e.g. coloured cubes in three dimensions are used to teach shape and colour. Tapes are used for children to hear their own voices and to follow instructions.

The gymnasium has a variety of interesting items —

(a) Small trampoline for individual training of spatial orientation.
(b) Large Dunlop rectangular cushions for balancing and jumping over. The cushions are piled on top of each other according to the ability of pupils, to teach better balance. These are also used in obstacle games.
(c) Balls are tossed into tyres.
(d) Large balls are used for jumping on and for climbing over.
(e) Individual rectangular scooters are used for balancing. The child balances himself on the scooter and uses his hands and feet for moving through obstacles such as traffic regulators or between two ropes placed parallel along the length of the gymnasium.
(f) Large barrels are used for crawling through.

The importance of a gymnasium in a school for retarded children cannot be over emphasized. It creates a centre where the pupil is able to experiment and develop skills necessary for everyday survival.

The workshop is situated in the centre of the school and every child over the age of ten has a daily period in the workshop. The workshop is more a craft centre where the teacher encourages some art form or handwork activity. The class teacher accompanies her class to the workshop so that there are always two teachers working with the children in the workshop. Some of the articles produced are saleable, some have artistic merit and are made to be taken home.

Hillcrest Heights Special Centre.

Principal — Mr. John Hart.

This school has 102 children, 14 teachers, 5 aids, 1 speech therapist, 1 P.E. teacher, one floating teacher and a secretary. This floating teacher acts as assistant to the Principal and takes over a class for a teacher who is on study leave, sick leave or on a visit to the Resource Centre. The Hillcrest School is a modern, well equipped school with mechanical aids in each classroom. Every classroom is supplied with a tape-recorder, a gramophone, a T.V. set. There is a strip-film projector for every two rooms. An overhead opaque projector for showing educational films is also provided for use in the classroom when necessary.

The equipment is specially chosen by the teachers to suit the needs of the individual child. Some classrooms have a pet which is looked after by the children in their classroom. The rooms are large and airy and the furniture is designed to assist the children in learning.

Teachers who prefer individual desks for their pupils, placed them in three rows alongside each other. Most classrooms have, however, a semi-circular or two semi-circular desks joined together, where the children work in a group

with the teachers attending the children from the middle — this appears to be one way of encouraging interaction between children and between pupil and teacher.

In most rooms, a quiet corner is furnished for the child who prefers some isolated play or for dollhouse play in the younger groups.

The domestic science unit in the kitchen is fully equipped with all that is necessary for training the young pupil to assist in the home and to further independent living.

The older pupils are encouraged to bath or shower the younger children during a period of hygiene. Clothes of children are washed on the premises, and ironed, by the senior pupils. (These pupils are aged 12—16).

The pupils in the senior classes are taken on regular shopping expeditions where they buy the ingredients for mid-day lunch, which they prepare under guidance.

A secondhand clothes store is attached to the school and is run by the pupils, who are the sales assistants and buyers.

Capitol Heights Diagnostic Centre.

This school is an assessment centre where children who have not been able to adjust to normal schools are sent for periods varying from one to two years.

The children are closely observed and studied whilst attending the school and then, after a full assessment, transferred to a suitable school or training centre.

The school has 53 pupils, 7 classroom teachers, 1 full-time physical education teacher, 1 full-time speech therapist, 1 full-time reading or perceptual specialist, 3 aides and a part-time occupational therapist, physiotherapist and a music therapist. The school programme is geared to serve the needs of the child. Every class has a daily period of Physical Education in a very well equipped gymnasium. Individual pupils who are handicapped get specialized therapy by the Physiotherapist.

On the top floor of the school is the Resource Centre. This is a large, spacious room, housing literature, equipment and audio-visual aids. The Resource teacher controls and equips the centre with all the latest materials available in special education. Teachers from the entire county use the centre to keep in touch with the latest techniques and training methods.

Teachers select the required material and are able, through their school principal to order whatever is necessary to assist their pupils in mastering new skills.

Refresher courses and lectures by specialists are also held at the centre and attended by teachers in the County.

Military Road School.

This school is situated in Washington D.C., and caters for children from deprived homes. The problem of retardation amongst these children is often associated with economic, cultural and social deprivation.

With extensive stimulation some of these children can be rehabilitated into special classes within the normal school. The programme in the classrooms is similar to what has already been described, but there is greater emphasis on visual and perceptual training.

All classrooms display the child's name and address. An interesting way of teaching this is by a simple drawing of a house with the child's name, phone number and address inside it. The child thereby associates his name with his home address.

The outdoor equipment, as in all schools I visited, is supplied by the Playground Corporation of America. New concepts for the scientific planning of playgrounds have been developed by this organization.

The playgrounds, called "Playscapes", are designed for constructive play with maximum safety. In effect, a Playscape is an outdoor classroom, where play becomes a confidence building, learning experience. Each Playform supplied by P.C.A. is a small "possibility minded" stage set that can be used in many ways and can represent many things or play situations, depending on the child's individual level of skill and momentary interest. The P.C.A. Playscapes are planned playgrounds for Handicapped children. The steel and concrete structures in the playground are so arranged to provide the children with a step by step programme for improved physical co-ordination. These Playscapes challenge children's imagination, and channel their energies into self-directed, safe play through climbing, stretching, skipping, grasping, hoppin, sliding, bending, crawling, balancing, walking and pushing. It serves as an outdoor gymnasium and because of its unique structure, requires little supervision.

The indoor gymnasium at the Military Road School has several interesting items of equipment. A self-propelling scooter is used for developing spatial orientation. Flying saucers are in use instead of balls to develop throwing and catching skills. Shapes painted on the floor are used for games, and alternate patterned feet serve to assist the training of laterality. Balancing exercises are encouraged by the Kangaroo ball, and bicycle tyres are used for training many skills, such as hopping, walking and jumping.

The Laurel Children's Centre.

This is a large Residential Village for Retarded children and adults. This Centre is situated in the District of Columbia, just outside Baltimore and houses 2,000 people. It has several sections, including a hospital unit for the profoundly retarded. These children spend their day in a limited play and school situation. Teachers and nursing staff who care for the children live with them in cottages in the Centre.

The Mary Ziegler School is a large and modern school, catering for 250 retarded persons who are residents in the centre. 65% of the pupils are boys.

The school has a well fitted domestic unit which is used to train pupils in domestic work. All classes have two 30 minutes sessions per week in training to cook, wash, iron, etc. The domestic unit includes a bedroom, living room, bathroom and a kitchen with numerous mechanical aids.

The Occupational Training room is a workshop where pupils do handwork under a trained mistress. I watched children cutting squares for a large quilt which was being made up for an order. Other items in process of completion were pyjama bags, cross-stitch cloths and simple dresses. A large room in the school is fitted with mirrors and hair dryers and is the Cosmetic Room — used to train pupils in self-care, grooming, handcare and beauty. Talks on appearance and clothes are included in the day's programme. The boys have woodwork and craft periods, while the girls have beauty culture. The children attending the school return to their cottages in the late afternoon.

The dormitories in the cottages have 4-6 beds, depending on the age of the child. The older pupils share with one or two other residents.

Communal meals are served in large recreational halls attached to the cottages. The meals are prepared by the residents under supervision of staff members. Some older residents are sent out to work in the community and are employed as laundry workers, assembly workers in factories and assistants in roadhouses. Others assist in cleaning the centre, setting tables for meals and washing up when feeding time is over.

In some few cases the older women residents work in the Shop, sewing and knitting. The men help in carpentry and maintenance work.

To conclude my survey of schools in this area, I will include some extracts from the SPECIAL EDUCATION HANDBOOK — issued to teachers in Maryland and Prince George's County.

"Creating for the child a feeling of being in a safe place will be the teacher's first task for a new child. Plan activities with built-in success.

"Each child is a teacher — each child has a unique teaching problem and if observed carefully will teach you how he must be taught if he is to learn.

"When working with a group of distractable children, many teachers have found it useful to have a round table or several trapezoidal tables or to arrange some desks in a semi-circle with the teacher seated in the middle. This way, the teacher can reach out and touch each child to re-direct his attention. Keep in mind that Involvement and creative process is more important than the end product.

"*Guidelines To Teaching the Multiple Handicapped Child.*

Goals are important.

1. Self care and self help, i.e. washing face, hands, dressing oneself and undressing, development of self-care skills may do much to help his sense of personal worth and responsibility.
2. Communication skills—includes both speech and language. This includes the ability to understand spoken language and ability to use it understandably for work in school and for social adjustment.
3. Social Adjustment — social experience and reacting in a socially acceptable way.
4. Physical development — it is most important to develop large and fine motor coordination. Always keep explanations simple, direct and try and proceed to participation in the activity as soon as possible.
5. Economic usefulness, learning to do simple household tasks well, such as setting a table, making own bed, cleaning, picking up and putting away, performing simple errands or acting as a helper.

"Careful planning on the part of the teacher is all important. Planning must be organized to provide security and continuity for the children and yet it must be flexible to adjust to the needs and interest of the child.

"*Music and Rhythm.*

Children want to move.

The sequence of gross muscle movements must be considered in selecting rhythmic activities within each child's ability. An organized sequence beginning with the simpler activities and progressing to the more difficult would be — clapping, stamping, swaying, walking, running, marching, jumping, hopping, sliding, galloping, skipping.

Children learn by moving.

Let's Pretend. Tune — "Here we go round the Mulberry Bush — *High* — This is the way we walk up high, walk up high, walk up high.

This is the way we *walk up* high, so early in the morning.
This is the way we *Walk down* low, so early in the morning.
This is the way we jump along, so early in the morning.
This is the way we skip and hop, so early in the morning.

NEW YORK:

In New York my schedule was somewhat different to Maryland and covered other aspects of Special Education. Here I visited a school for Mentally Disturbed Children, a vocational training centre, an occupation day centre, a sheltered workshop and a residential hostel for adult retardees.

The League School for Seriously Disturbed Children — in Brooklyn.
Director: Dr. Carl Fenichel.

Children are considered for admission to the League School, after having had psychiatric, neurological, psychological or pediatric examinations with the diagnosis of childhood schizophrenia, mental illness, psychosis, infantile autism, minimal brain dysfunction, atypical behaviour and/or emotional disorders.

The school has won worldwide professional recognition and receives the financial support of the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene, The New York State Department of Education, The New York City Community Mental Health Board and The New York City Board. The League School is unique in its training programme for the severely disturbed child. The school's clinical staff includes a pediatric neurologist, two psychiatric consultants, three psychologists, two psychiatric social workers, two speech therapists, specially trained teachers, educational supervisors and curriculum specialists.

The school has a properly planned and highly individualized programme of special education — structured to the needs of every child, which the Director, Dr. Fenichel, believes results in emotional and social growth as well as in educational achievements for mentally sick children, who in the past were considered uneducable and untreatable. The current theory of childhood autism as the result of deep psychic wounds and traumatic experiences that could only be treated by psychoanalytic insights and intervention is completely rejected.

Past theories of autistic children emphasized the role of early traumatic incidents as the cause of withdrawal. The punitive father or refrigerated mother was often cited as the reason for the child's condition.

The evidence collected at the League School was that parents were no more disturbed or deviant than most other parents, nor were their childrearing practices any different from those of parents of normal children. Parent rejection and parental deprivation was not found to be the cause of the autistic child's problems. It was found by day to day observations and ongoing psychoeducational assessments that these children had evidence of central nervous system dysfunctioning and neuromotor, sensory, perceptual or language disorders and learning disabilities that could better explain their confused thinking and disorganized behaviour. With this in view, the school devised a programme specially tailored for the disturbed child — a programme which can reduce and sometimes eliminate the disturbed behaviour and disorganized thinking of the mentally ill child, without separation from home into a State hospital.

Several of the classrooms are for the children with extremely low levels of functioning. Their behaviour is often so primitive and chaotic that what they need most is a highly organised programme that aims to bring order, stability and meaning to minds that are disorganized, unstable and unpredictable.

With these low-functioning children, a one-to-one relationship between teacher and pupil is required before the child can begin to function meaningfully within a group setting.

Included among these children are the extremely sluggish and lethargic, the tense, impulse-ridden and restless, and many who are without receptive or expressive language. These children may first have to learn the simple task of sitting in a chair, of making eye contact, listening and attending to a simple task or responding to a simple direction.

Many of these children have the vacant stare, the rhythmical obsessional movements, hand flapping and are usually non-communicative. There is frequently a poor concept of time, of words such as, before, after, now, soon, later — all add to the child's confusion, which may show in his unpredictable behaviour associated with frequent tantrums.

Many of the children have little or no awareness of their own bodies. Their perception of the world is disorientated, vague and confused. They are unable to cope successfully with the symbols and concepts of language and learning.

In the individualized programme the teacher will discover whether the child is ready for learning anything more complex than a conditioned response. Major emphasis is on simple tasks that will help to bring the child's behaviour under some control.

Getting a helpless child to work at daily tasks

of self-care, learning to put on and take off his clothes, tie his shoe laces, wash his hands, toilet himself, use a spoon, has many educational and therapeutic implications beyond self-care alone. By involving the child in the realities of daily living, he is being taken out of his own preoccupation with self. He is developing skills that may facilitate other, more advanced skills and activities. Mastery of these simple skills will often increase his feelings of adequacy and self-control.

Through well-planned daily programming and procedures with consistency of purpose and direction, many of these children begin to have some understanding of what is expected of them. Increased demands and expectations are made upon each child as he progresses. Gradually most of them are able to acquire all the self-managing skills and to perform other tasks and activities that bring their behaviour under some stimulus control by the teacher.

Once the child begins to recognize and accept some teacher control, he can benefit more from a group than an individual setting.

The individual and group learning experiences of the child and his relationship with his teacher are the basic instruments of the school programme. Social relationships are lived — not taught. The classroom curriculum atmosphere, grouping, scheduling, regulations and routines and how they are handled by the teacher, all have implications and potentials for positive learning and socializing experiences that can induce change, adjustment and growth.

Through programmes of dance, body-image, games, play and exercises, arts and crafts, shop-work as well as academic activities within the classroom these children learn how to co-ordinate eyes and hands, how to synchronize many different parts of their sensory-motor systems for more effective functioning.

Puppets are extensively used for autistic children in assisting verbalization and to clarify confused feelings.

A workshop assists the children who are inept and poorly co-ordinated in manipulative skills. They learn to use tools and their bodies safely, properly and efficiently.

All academic work is highly personalized and timed to fit the interests and life experiences of each child. Such a programme requires a very small teacher-pupil ratio. Each classroom contains 6 children and two master teachers. One teacher conducts the lesson while the other works individually with the children as needed. Often they strive to keep the children's attention focused upon the lesson, an important and time-consuming task in classes where attention spans are short and frustration tolerances very low. Although some children are on drugs, which help to reduce distractability and hyperactivity, a teacher must always be available to assist the child to concentrate on the work being done.

I watched classes of low-functioning children playing with blocks, puzzles, dolls, and other nursery school equipment. Other groups were doing body-image exercises in front of a mirror, hopping, skipping and jumping as a group, following the teacher's instructions.

I sat in on a class learning to read and write their names and addresses, the days of the week, the date and month of the year. Elementary reading was being taught in one classroom.

The children, all diagnosed autistic or severely disturbed, rarely displayed the usual features associated with this disturbance. It was an inspiring experience speaking to Dr. Fenichel and my guide, Mrs. Breslow. The speech therapist, Mrs. G. Bradley, also provided some useful information and suggestions for our own problems.

I enquired about the adolescent programme and was given further information. These young boys and girls work in the dining room and kitchen, help to take inventory of supplies and equipment and take care of the lawn and playground. Most of the older pupils travel to school by bus and subway and receive a small pay-cheque for their work. The daily programme also includes functional reading, language and arithmetic, all skills required for community living.

A final and relatively new service which the school provides is an out-patient programme for pre-school children. Parents are assisted in training their children at home, prior to school enrolment.

A neurological, psychological, language and psycho-educational assessment of each child is made at the school to determine his developmental deficits, strength and needs and the appropriate remediation techniques that may help overcome his specific learning, language and behavioural disabilities. Most of these children are extremely disorganized and withdrawn.

The mother brings the child for weekly individual sessions and remains in the room to observe the teacher's educational and training procedures and interactions with the child. Through her observations and her discussions with the child's teacher and later with the programme director the mother gains confidence and competence in ways and means of handling her child and in adapting the school's approaches and activities for home use. Parent discussion groups with the social worker and the programme director, further helps each mother to cope with her many difficulties.

To quote one parent's evaluation of the project, "Coming into this programme, you gradually come out of the dark."

I have dealt at great length with this school because of its unique service and its extraordinary success with a group of children formerly regarded as hopeless and helpless. I have taken most of the description of the school and its programme from the excellent annual report and other literature given to me by Dr. Fenichel.

Vocational Workshop and Training Centre, New York.

This centre caters for pupils over the age of fourteen, training them in domestic skills, handwork and general academic studies. The classes are larger and a more formal school atmosphere is maintained. Perceptual training in Frostig sheets is part of the daily programme, but emphasis is on practical skills. Pupils are taught about purchasing items in drug-stores or supermarkets, about money value, about what food is required for growth and health; cooking and preparing the day's food is also part of the daily routine.

Pupils are taken on shopping expeditions and taught how to buy items. Pupils are taught to use public transport. This aspect of training is extremely important, as when the pupil is transferred to an occupation day centre, use of public transport is a necessary aid to independent living.

The vocational training centre caters for over fifty pupils who remain at the centre until such time as independence is assured and they can be transferred either to a sheltered workshop or an occupation day centre. The vocation guidance centre is also a Diagnostic Centre where pupils are given supportive services and assessed as to their abilities and disabilities. It is a temporary place for the pupil — an assessment unit where he is observed and diagnosed as to which placement would be best suited for him. The Centre operates from 9—4 daily, five days a week, and the staff includes a psychologist, a social worker, teachers and workshop personnel. The pupils are free to discuss their problems with the social worker or psychologist, and group counselling is a regular feature at the centre.

Group counselling gives staff insight into problems which the young retardees have to cope with and directs the staff into ways and means of assisting pupils in adjusting to their conditions. The social worker also has frequent consultations with parents, assisting and reassuring them with their anxieties and fears for the future of their offspring.

An Occupation Day Training Centre for Young Adults

This day training centre caters for young adults over seventeen years of age, who are unable to work in the community or in a sheltered workshop. Young adults are referred to the centre from various agencies, such as schools, vocational centres and by parents of other pupils.

On application for admittance to the centre, the trainee must undergo a series of tests by a psychiatric social worker, a psychologist. a medical doctor and the instructors. Finally, the Director of the Centre confers with the entire group to discuss and assess the results of the tests. If the tests show that the applicant can benefit by attending the centre, he is admitted.

The day's programme emphasizes living skills. Young men and women are taught to plan and prepare meals, set the table and clean up the kitchen. They are taught to light matches and turn on the gas stove, to use tin-openers, pour milk and hot liquids, to cut and prepare and wrap sandwiches. They take turns washing dishes and silverware, scrubbing tables, sinks and stoves, sweeping floors and emptying garbage bins, making beds, washing and ironing clothes. Young men are taught to shave and young women are given lessons in grooming and hygiene.

An important part of the programme is to make the trainee as independent as possible. Learning to travel by public transport is one of the first skills which is taught the pupil. An instructor has often to take a pupil to and from the Centre for many weeks before confidence is established so that the trainee is free to make his own way. The pupil is taught what to do if he catches the wrong bus or train, if he gets off at the wrong stop or if there is a breakdown.

During lunch break, recreation activities are provided. Ping-pong and dancing lessons are provided for interested trainees. Checkers and other games which encourage social relationships are also available.

By working in groups the trainees supply moral support for one another. Together they perform tasks in a short period of time that would appear far too difficult if a single trainee were given more time to do the same job.

The construction of equipment, maintenance and renovation of the centre, including painting of the entire building is done by trainees under staff supervision, and with staff assistance. A workshop at the centre trains young men to use woodwork tools, while another section makes candles for sale to departmental stores. Sorting folding and stamping mail for a business firm and other simple contracts are undertaken to occupy the trainees during the day.

Many trainees at the centre are indistinguishable from their normal neighbours. They are able to avail themselves of the community resources. Many eat in public restaurants, participate in social activities, enjoy entertainment and live happy and useful lives. The social workers counsel parents regularly and problems uncovered are discussed and guidance is given.

Sheltered Workshop run by the Association for the Help of Retarded Children. Brooklyn, New York.

The workshop caters for young adults over 17 years of age, who come to work daily and who are paid on a weekly basis for the amount of work completed. The young employees at the workshop are graded and placed at tables where various contracts for business firms are executed. E.g. Sandpaper is graded and packed into plastic bags, butter dishes are assembled and packed into cartons, electric plugs are screwed together, etc.

The instructor informed me that the workshop regulations required that 100 sq. ft. is allotted as working space and 100 sq. ft. is used for storing contracts.

The workshop caters for over fifty adults, with a staff of two. At each work table is a senior worker who is able to supervise the work of his colleagues and check that the assembly line is running smoothly. This key worker as he/she is called, gets a higher weekly wage and is usually a high grade retardee.

The workshop maintains an atmosphere of work, and no talking is permitted until teabreak or lunch time. Tea and lunch are prepared by workshop assistants under staff guidance.

An air of activity and concentration pervades this sheltered workshop and one is struck by the efficiency and competence of the staff in charge.

A Residential Hostel for Adult Retardees is shortly to be opened near Park Avenue South in New York, which is the headquarters for the Association for Help of Retarded Children. This hostel will house 12—14 adult retardees who will be employed in the community or in a sheltered workshop. The house is a three storey building and the bedrooms will occupy the two top floors. On the ground floor is a large communal dining room and lounge, with a T.V. set. A large recreation room is to be made available for group games, ping-pong and communal parties and dances.

A house-father will act as director of the hostel. He will be assisted by a house-mother who will act as cook and housekeeper. Counselling and assistance will be available to the residents, should they require this. The applicants are to be chosen according to the need of the family.

BOSTON:

In Boston I visited the Peabody School, the League School for Autistic Children and The Harvard Experiment for Behaviour Modification at Fernald School.

Peabody School — Principal Mr. Petersen.

This school is a modern, custom built school and has all the facilities and equipment necessary for the training of retarded children.

The classes are small and the children are graded according to their ability. The younger groups have a nursery school routine, structured to their needs. Two teachers share an aid who works with the group while the teacher is able to take children individually for training. Older children with a higher functioning level are taught to write their names and addresses and to read critical words which are necessary for communal living. Peabody Language Kits, useful for concept development, vocabulary and language expansion are used by teachers in the classrooms. The older pupils learn cooking and domestic skills and prepare the daily meal for the pupils. They also set the tables, clean the rooms after mealtime and wash up utensils.

A large gymnasium is in use constantly with classes having regular P.E. periods.

Sorting and folding letters for business firms is frequently included as training for future outside employment.

At the Peabody School, as in most State Schools for children aged 6—16, every classroom for the younger group has an adjoining toilet which is within easy reach of the child not fully toilet trained.

The League School for autistic children situated in close proximity to the Peabody school is run on similar lines to the New York School and serves the Boston area.

Harvard Experiment for Behaviour Modification: Supervised by Dr. William H. Redd — Director, Psychology Department.

The experimental unit is conducted as part of a general programme for students wishing to work in institutional settings for retarded people. The various programmes reflect the needs of the patient populations and give the student experience in behaviour modification which will of necessity benefit the children in the experiment.

Fernald State School.

This is a large State School (residential) for mildly, moderately, and severely retarded children and adults under the auspices of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health. Some of the programmes currently operating at Fernald State School include the following —

1. Research. Extensive biochemical, genetic, psychological and anatomical programmes are now functioning.
2. Community Services. The Community Evaluation Rehabilitation Centre.
3. Farrel Hill Projects. Children in this unit are placed in small groups and intensively programmed.
4. Lavers Hall. Behaviour modification programme for moderately and severely retarded adolescent boys.
5. Wheatly Self-help Skills — a programme developing self-help skills.
6. Mobility Training for the Blind / this programme utilizes the latest electronic advances in developing programmes for the blind, retarded pupils.
7. Sheltered Workshop seeks to develop work experiences and training for residents in cooperation with greater Boston industrial concerns.
8. Summer camp — a camp for retarded children from both the community and the State Institution, held at New Hampshire during the summer months.
9. Rehabilitation Units. This Unit seeks to utilize the experience of occupational and physical therapists in dealing with problems of physically handicapped retarded persons.

The programme I watched for a day involved behaviour modification for severely retarded children.

Behaviour modification refers briefly to treatment and training procedures which employ principles of learning, with particular intent of establishing and strengthening adaptive behaviours, while eliminating maladaptive behaviour.

1. Behaviour modification is based on the principal that —

   (a) Most behaviour is learned, and maintained by its effects on the environment.

   (b) Behaviours whose consequences do not "pay off" are weakened and extinguished (Disappear).

It is the teacher's task to arrange the child's environment so that desirable behaviours will be rewarded and undesirable behaviours ignored or punished.

Thus adaptive behaviours are established and maladaptive behaviours eliminated by systematic and consistent application of rewards and punishments — with primary emphasis on rewards. Some of the behaviours which were to be established in the experiment I witnessed were feeding, toileting, differentiation of colours, puzzle completion and other basic learning skills.

ERIKSENS

"THE HOME OF FORDS"

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