

THE REHABILITATION OF FEEBLE-MINDED ADOLESCENTS*¹

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True democracy draws no lines of discrimination among nationalities, religions, or races, nor among economic, social, or intellectual levels; and, consequently, group interaction must depend for its success upon the mentally feeble as well as upon the mentally gifted. The improvement of the personal and social behavior of those individuals who fall markedly below the normal must be accomplished if the social efficiency of the social group as a whole is to be raised. The needs of feeble-minded children are the same as the needs of all children, and, therefore, the aims of education of the feeble-minded are the same as the aims of all good general education: the development of social awareness, civic competence, critical thinking, and social usefulness.

In 1940, more than 98,000 children of school age were enrolled in special schools and classes for the mentally defective, and another 22,000 were in residential homes and institutions for the feeble-minded. The salvage of such mental defectives for personal and social competency is a distinct challenge to education in a democracy.

As one step in an effort to meet this challenge, a study² was made of 254 boys and girls, between the ages of 12 and 14 years, all of whom had been originally classified as feeble-minded on the basis of clinically administered intelligence tests. They ranged in IQ's from 27 to 69, with a mean IQ of 51.7. An analysis was made of their physical health, mental abilities, and academic achievement; their behavior patterns; and their family, educational, and community backgrounds.

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¹To be published under the title, "Changes in Personal, Social, and Intellectual Behavior of Children Originally Classified as Feeble-minded," in an early issue of "Psychological Monographs," edited by John R. Dashiell, the University of North Carolina.

²Reported in "A Description and Evaluation of an Experimental Curriculum for Adolescent Children Classified as Feeble-minded," a doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, to be published later.

From this study their predicated needs were found to be: (1) improvement in all tool subjects, as well as in informational subject-matter areas; (2) growth in emancipation and responsibility in personal behavior; (3) increased understanding of group relationships in the family, the school, and the community; (4) increased competency in the skills of social interaction; and (5) ability to use direct-response mechanisms in resolving conflict situations in the adjustment process. In addition, some of their important psycho-biological needs were found to be: (1) economic security; (2) social recognition; (3) belongingness, or acceptance by the group; (4) a feeling of personal worth as contributing members of a social group.

Upon the foundation of these basic needs an experimental educational program was planned with a twofold objective: to provide school experiences which would help meet the needs of these boys and girls while in school, and to prepare them for competent adjustment in the postschool period. To achieve this purpose, the instructional program was directed toward these specific goals: (1) development of desirable personal behavior; (2) improvement in the fundamental academic skills; (3) development of the manipulative arts; (4) improvement of work and study habits; (5) learning of occupational and related vocational information; and (6) pre-employment experience. The curriculum was selected from problems in the immediate experience of the children, which were then expanded to make possible more general application of the skills and information thus learned and the attitudes so developed. Instructional methods was characterized by: (1) group planning; (2) group experiences; (3) inschool reproduction of situational experiences; and (4) the use of the creative and manipulative arts. A variety of educational materials was used, including field trips, radio broadcasts, films and stereopticon slides, as well as books, magazines, and newspapers. Construction and art materials were used in correlative handwork and in the crafts.

The development of this experimental program and its evaluation was attempted in order to learn the extent to which children who had been classified as feeble-minded could attain personal and social adjustment after participation in a school

environment planned to develop emotional stability, to further social interaction, and to develop self-confidence and a sense of personal worth. It was also important to know the degree of academic success achieved by these children and the nature of change in mental and emotional growth patterns. In addition, the growth and adjustment of the children who had participated in the experimental program were compared with those of a control group equated on the basis of original IQ, amount of previous school experience, initial academic achievement, sex and socioeconomic background.

Each child in the study spent three years in the experimental special centers. The evaluation of the adequacy of the program in meeting the needs of the children in the inschool period was made on the basis of their academic achievement in the tool subjects, the level of social maturation which they attained, and adjustment patterns which they used at the time of special-center withdrawal. Data for this evaluation included periodic clinical intelligence retests, standardized achievement-test results, and records of such experiential activities as positions of service or leadership in school activities, part-time employment, assumption of responsibility in the home, and leisure-time interests.

In addition to the inschool period, the evaluation was extended over a five-year postschool period. During this follow-up after leaving the special centers, the academic, vocational, and social competency of the children was measured by their final educational attainments, by their ability to get and keep employment, and by their personal and social adjustment in the home and community. These competencies were determined by the record of their achievement and activities, by the results of objective measures of personal and social adjustment, and by retests of intelligence.

At the close of the inschool period, the group showed an average gain of three years and eight months in composite academic achievement, during the three-year instructional program; the range of gain was from 2.6 years to 4.7 years. The average gain in reading was 4.1 years, with a range of gain from 2.4 years to 4.7 years. The average rate of gain in composite achievement during the inschool period was 120, although the average IQ of the group (at entrance) was 51.7; the average achievement

level at special-center withdrawal was that of the second month of the fifth grade, although the average grade-expectancy calculated for the group according to their mental age at the close of the inschool period (on the basis of original entrance IQ) was the third month of third grade. Thus, the achievement of the group as a whole exceeded their expectancy by almost two years.

In test intelligence, as measured by periodic clinical retests, individual over-all change over the entire eight-year period ranged from a drop of four IQ points to a gain of 71 points; three individuals showed a drop in IQ (ranging from one to four points); eight showed a gain of less than 10 points; the mean over-all change for the entire group at the close of the study was 40.7 IQ points. Eighty and seven tenths per cent of the group exceeded a gain of 30 IQ points; 59.3 per cent reached or exceeded a gain of 50 points. By the end of the study, 59.7 per cent of the total group were classifiable as low or high normals; only 7.2 per cent were still feeble-minded.

In addition to these gains in academic achievement and in mental growth, the group showed improved personal adjustment by an increase in range and quality of leisure-time interests, improved personal appearance, and increased responsibility for personal activities. An analysis of the methods used in meeting conflict situations showed a tendency toward more frequent practice of direct response rather than substitute mechanisms. They showed increased freedom from family pressure and dictation, greater ability and willingness to serve in positions of usefulness to others, and growing ability to get and keep part-time employment. Their group behavior showed increasing social maturation and competency in activities similar to those participated in by normal children of their age. On objective measures, 79 per cent were shown to have attained a level of personal and social adjustment equal to or better than the highest one fifth of well-adjusted adults. A high statistical correlation ($.923 \pm .029$) was found between change in test intelligence and change in objective measures of emotional stability, when computed as from the close

of the study over the original status eight years before.

By the close of the study (at the end of the five-year postschool period), slightly more than 27 per cent had completed a four-year high-school course, and 5.1 per cent had continued post-high-school training. Twenty and one tenth per cent were still in school attendance, most of them in night-school classes, at the close of the study. Eighty-three and four tenths per cent were regularly employed, and of this group, almost one third were in skilled occupations, and another third in clerical positions. Approximately 6.5 per cent were in managerial or supervisory positions in industry, where they had responsibility for other workers. An additional 5.1 per cent were in inspection positions, where precision of final products was their responsibility.

The recorded mean duration for all jobs held in the postschool period was 3.5 years, although the true duration was in excess of that time, because 83.8 per cent of the group were still employed at the close of the study. By the terminal date of the investigation, the salaries of the boys ranged from \$13 to \$84 a week, with a mean of \$28; the girls' ranged from \$10 to \$60, with a mean of \$27 a week. The median salary for the total group was \$32.07.

At the close of the study, 83.4 per cent were regularly employed; 5.4 per cent were in military service (this number included two WACs); 3.5 per cent were girls who had married and gave their full time to homemaking; 3.1 per cent were temporarily idle; and 2.4 per cent were in full-time school attendance. Only one person could be classified as "permanently idle," having never been employed, nor in any voluntary school attendance. Two had died during the course of the study.

Fifteen of the girls and three of the boys were married by the end of the study. None of the family units so developed was financially dependent, nor were there records of family maladjustment, as evidenced by the lack of contacts of these families with the courts or behavioral clinics. Four families had one child each; six had two children; and one had three. The ages of the children ranged from four

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months to four years. Although no formal study was made of these infants, medical and clinical records available indicated apparent physical and mental normalcy. There was only one intermarriage within the group in the study.

According to objective measures, those gains in adjustment which were noted in the inschool period continued in the postschool period. Improvement continued to be made after special-center withdrawal, but gains were not as great as those made immediately after special-center enrollments. By the end of the study, the average adjustment of the total group was equal to that of the average adult, both according to standardized measures and to their academic, vocational, and social activities.

In the control group, however, little change was found in any of the areas of behavior investigated, although IQ change ranged from a gain of four points to a loss of 22 points. The mean IQ change for the control group was a drop of 3.6 points.

Because the experimental and control groups were equated on the basis of chronological age, initial intelligence, number of years' school experience, initial academic achievement, and socioeconomic status, any of these five factors or their combinations cannot be interpreted as causal factors in effecting the found difference in change in intelligence and general adjustment. However, while the school environment was a controlled variable in the study, the presence of such uncontrolled factors as change in sibling relationships, in relationships of parents to the community, in parent-teacher or parent-child relationships, or any combination of these factors must of necessity have influenced the resultant changes in behavior.

In the consideration of human behavior, the operation of a multiplicity of variables, unknowable and immeasurable, makes difficult any interpretation of causal relationship in the development of mental and social competencies. However, evidence here reported has shown the children in this study to have reached a degree of personal and social adjustment and a level of mental, academic, and vocational competency equivalent to that of the average normal adult of years comparable to their age at the close of the investigation, despite the fact that originally these children had been classified as feeble-minded.

Quite in contrast to their originally predicated roles as necessarily potential social liabilities, these youth fought in the world's wars, nursed the battle's wounded, made weapons that won a victory, and are now producing the goods and performing the services that are leading a reconversion route to peace. They have made for themselves a role as social assets and have repudiated that of incompetence and dependence to which they were first doomed by a fatalistic educational psychology.