

Feeble-Mindedness in the Public Schools.

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"Education," says Seguin, "is the right of every child, the duty of every parent, the bond of the community."

In ideal conditions natural talent is allowed to form the basis for training for social usefulness; to each child is given the bent of his natural genius or trade.

For many years our public schools were organized to fill the needs of the mediocre or average pupils. Educational plans that include children at opposite ends of the intelligence scale belong to very recent history. Elastic grading now permits brilliant pupils to skip grades; while an increasing number of slow-witted and even defective minds have special schools adjusted to their needs.

Imagine one hundred ordinary first or second grade pupils. Here investigators find: one stutterer; two or three who lisp; one seriously anaemic; several badly spoiled children; one immature, a year or two retarded in mental and moral growth; one morally weak; two imbecile or feeble-minded. Then, there is one passive, inactive child; several over-sensitive, nervous children; one superficially precocious child, and several superior—eager, ardent, imaginative, social. Four suffer from defective hearing; twenty-six now, or will very soon, show eye strain or have defective vision; about a dozen have asymmetries or deformities; about thirty have nasal obstruction or diseased throats; and several others possess serious peculiarities of temperament. Only twenty-five of the hundred are physically and mentally without blemish.

All these children represent an actual, positive asset in human society. If they are not saved for constructive activity, many of them will become a destructive force later on.

The question arises: How are the powers of individual pupils to be definitely known, so that schools may measure to their greatest efficiency?

Some of these peculiarities are related to the size and shape, observable defects; some are alterations of internal structure, not apparent to

the untrained observer. Many pupils, who have observable peculiarities, are very capable mentally and give normal response to training; while many, who baffle the most conscientious teaching, present no outward signs of disordered organizations at all.

To remedy all cases of mental and physical deviation, there must be definite localization of the defects, which only thorough medical, psychological and pedagogical examination will reveal.

The earlier suspected abnormalities are discovered, and proper corrective treatment and training are given, the greater chance these children have to become more nearly like normal beings. Brain energies are broken by physical irritations and other strains. This is why certain conditions produce retardation and an arrest or paralysis of the inhibitory or moral sense, and explains why removal of disturbances is often closely related to moral and mental regeneration.

For years psychologists have been endeavoring to formulate some intelligence measuring scale that could be applied to the age and grade of the average pupil. The great benefit that would accrue to both pupils and teachers from an accurate intelligence standardization can hardly be estimated. Then, only, can training be given each child that will insure full individual development.

The Binet-Simon Measuring Scale of Intelligence is a series of questions "arranged in groups according to their difficulty as determined by age difference in performance". The questions relate to general intelligence, to information that the average normal child should absorb from every day associations and not to what he is taught at school. The insufficiency or retardation of backward children is later estimated by comparison of their results with those of normal children. The series is merely a sorting test; but, in the hands of experts, it has been amply demonstrated that it is very valuable, and gives a surprisingly close estimate of a child's mentality.

A child who has for no adequately known reason fallen behind two years in his school work, should be carefully tested and watched. He may be ill; his mind may be "slowing down". When children are found three or four years behind children of their age, the intelligence tests will undoubtedly disclose more serious conditions. It is well recognized that minds of most educated persons reach the limit of intellectual development between the ages of twenty and forty. Minds of the great mass of

mankind reach the limit of development between fourteen and twenty-one. A mind that never gets beyond thirteen is just able to make a living. Above eight and below thirteen comes the moron, a person between normal and imbecile. He can be taught routine tasks, lay bricks, make parts of shoes, do tailoring, farm work, etc., as well as any one, provided some one else does the directing and planning; he never gets beyond twelve years old. True imbeciles never develop beyond seven. The mind of an idiot closes before three.

When the brain stops developing—and it may occur as early as the third year—the time is practically past when it is possible to give a training that will help the child to earn a living.

Any one who deals with a large number of persons realizes how intelligence varies from those with practically none to the very gifted, and that responsibility varies according to the intelligence. Some of these persons, under simple environment, seem to function normally; but when placed where the environment becomes too complex normal functioning becomes impossible.

Among a number of misfit pupils observed in grade classes and recently tested, were two, thirteen years old, who had made no real progress for five years; two, eleven years old who had lost four years; a girl of thirteen who had made no real progress for six years; but all had been promoted, though the work accomplished had been, at best, mere rote work, with no more real intelligence than that of a parrot taught to say a rhyme. Two girls of seven years were mentally less than three.

To attend a class where normal children are receiving instruction does not help the undeveloped child. "Learning can not penetrate like a cold storage chill." "Mind building is like house building; there must be a foundation on which it rests."

Undoubtedly all intelligent persons agree that, no matter what a child's lack of mentality, the hopelessly idiotic and imbecile types should be trained in the schools the States maintain for their segregation and care. These most deficient children comprise only a very small per cent. of the school membership ($\frac{1}{2}$ of 1%). Often the most troublesome public school cases are pupils of the borderland types; those just between normal and subnormal.

Since the compulsory education law exempts children, mentally and physically disabled from its operation, these pupils, and those of lower

mentality, having become annoying, in the past had been habitually excluded from school. These excluded, subnormal children, untrained and undisciplined, have often become the men and women scourges of society. Many teachers, principals and physicians consider such pupils as merely slow, and earlier in their school life, fondly expect them to brighten up; but, the incapacity once recognized, the problem is an altogether different one; for, when we measure the intelligence, we have measured the degree of the irresponsibility. Their right to a training is the same as is that of their better endowed brother, and their need is greater. To attempt to lead a feeble-minded child along the school way of the normal child can result only in failure.

How would you feel if you were fourteen years old, with a mental capacity of a child of seven, obliged to sit in a 5A grade class, absolutely incapable of understanding the work? Can you blame a child for rebelling against such an overburdening "education"?

Misfit children are naturally affectionate, kind, and tractable. Maliciousness and carelessness are not their inherent traits but are acquired from lack of capacity to understand required conditions. Continued misunderstanding and rejections make them hopeless and rebellious.

A desire for greater school efficiency is demanding that classification must be made on a basis of native ability. For hundreds of our public school pupils, the hope of escape from a life of utter inefficiency lies in the ungraded schools of our public schools. For here only can they *now* be given training and treatment adapted to their subnormal, individual capacities. Destroyed brain tissue can never be renewed. We know our limitations. It is not possible to make good out of a poor thing; but wonderful things can be done.

The widespread need of such schools can be estimated when you consider that reliable investigators compute the number of feeble-minded pupils to be from two to four per cent. of all children of public school age. All cities, in our country, of 100,000 population and over, and many small towns, now maintain separate schools for feeble-minded and defective children, in care of more or less specially trained teachers. Indianapolis now has two such schools, in which thirty-one pupils are enrolled. According to the lowest expert estimate, this is $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the feeble-minded and defective children now in the grade classes that need to be given special opportunities.

Perhaps it is well nigh impossible for most persons to become as little children who live under the crushing conviction that they have no brains. Failures and rejections burn deep gloom into sensitive child minds. Their errors should be corrected by putting in their place more practical, simple truths.

Since books spell discouragement to the dull, inapt mind, it is generally wise to excite an interest in things unrelated to failure; for expected failure creates a hopeless habit of thought. For these pupils there should be an abundance of stimulating devices to excite an interest. These minds have lain dormant for years, or have *never* been awakened to natural child curiosity. This varied stimulation should be thought provoking, not nervously exciting.

Frequent change in manner of presenting old forms, and gradual introduction of new material arouses confidence. Successes create assurance; and, even if the progress be slow, it surely follows. Success is a relative term; but it carries the highest valuation in mental and character development.

Manual work offers great variety and simplicity in subjects and employs and trains more faculties than any other school work—observation, attention, concentration, comparison, coördination, decision, judgment, all are involved in its simplest problems. So, it is admirably adapted to the needs of the undeveloped child.

Almost every child's best is good in something; and it is only by our honest trying that we shall be able to draw a finer and better efficiency from the unused and often ill-directed capacities of children who possess limited possibilities.

Having discovered an underlying trait, something for which the child has liking and ability, the worst struggle is over. Then, thru the newly discovered aptitude, it is comparatively easy to bring the pupil into natural association with other school duties. Tasks and lessons coördinate. He reads to learn, and even numbers have a new meaning. He enters with zest into games, songs and all school exercises. In the natural life of the schoolroom the child is socialized.

The training requires the hand of iron in the glove of velvet—thoroughness, patience, resourcefulness, open-mindedness, sympathy, hope. The wisdom of Solomon, perhaps, could not always solve the problems these children present. That is why failure now so frequently attends our ef-

forts. But we know that everything that makes these children—who never can become men and women in intelligence—more capable with their hands, more reasonable, better self-controlled, more helpful to themselves and to others, will assure them a more certain degree of success as individuals and in their relation to society.

I summarize under six headings:

1. The State should demand and provide careful medical and psychological examination of all children in the grade schools, who are two or more years retarded in school work.
2. The State should provide for correction of all physical defects in children diagnosed as having *remediable* defects.
3. School systems should be obliged to organize and maintain separate schools for all feeble-minded and mentally defective children now in grade classes.
4. Schools for feeble-minded and mentally defective children should be in charge of specially trained teachers and supervisors.
5. The Compulsory Education Law should be amended so as to include in its operation children *not* in good mental condition.
6. The State Institution for Feeble-minded should organize and maintain a department where teachers for feeble-minded and mentally defective pupils can receive practical and theoretical training.

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