

A Developmental Study of Feeble-mindedness from Adolescence to Early Adulthood

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The socio-psychological concepts of feeble-mindedness have gripped man in varying emotions of disgust, revulsion, and sympathy since mediaeval times. In early days the dullard was considered to have been bewitched by devils, and in mistaken attempts to help him he was tortured and often killed, for only by such treatment could he be fully exhorted from his affliction. A later age considered its treatment more enlightened when it gave to the fool that place of questionable prestige accorded "the royal jester". In this latter capacity the dunce was sheltered from his more able fellows, and was provided with somewhat more than the essentials of food and clothing and dwelling.

Years of understanding and study have preceded the various roles which have been assigned to the feeble-minded in society. Each has raised his status, and each in turn has been based upon a fuller interpretation of the place of the dullard in a world of competency.

Various types of governments accord differing responsibilities to individuals and groups within their structure; and, conversely, varying governments accord differing status to such individuals and groups. A democracy relies for its success on the participation of each of its members to his greatest capacity. Like the proverbial chain, the democratic social order is only as strong as its weakest link.

With this general principle of social philosophy as a guiding concept, attention was given to the role of the feeble-minded in democratic living. Only to the degree that non-competents can become socially aware and vocationally adequate, can a society function which accords to the feeble-minded as well as the gifted equal responsibility for the choice of leaders, the selection and enforcement of necessary law, and the intelligent co-operative action which is the true spirit of democracy.

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, at a total cost of governmental funds—either State or Federal—in excess of 39 million dollars. The size of the problem is not small.

In an attempt to study some of the possibilities for good personal and social adjustment of children who were competently classified as feeble-minded, a study was begun of 254 children, between the age of 12 and 14, all of whom were within an IQ range of 27 to 69, according to clinically administered individual intelligence tests; the mean IQ of the group was 51.7.

Before the referral to the special centers, at least two, and as many as four, testings had been made, covering the age span from 5 years to

age at enrollment time. Careful analysis of results of each of these testings, indicated a condition of psychological feeble-mindedness, a classification determined by test results, and corroborated by case history information of out-of-test behavior.

Three experimental centers were established in the public schools of Chicago, to provide special programs of instruction and therapy for these children. The centers were regular day schools, in operation five hours per day, five days a week, and ten months of the year. They were housed in regular elementary schools, where they occupied sections of the building, while the remainder was in use by the children in regular classes in kindergarten and the first eight grades.

An analysis was made of the physical health, mental abilities and academic achievement of these children; their behavior patterns; and their family, educational and community backgrounds. Their predicated needs were found to be: (1) improvement in all school subjects, and 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. Their important psycho-biological needs were: (1) economic security; (2) social recognition; (3) belongingness, or acceptance by the group, and (4) a feeling of personal worth as a contributing member of a social group.

With this study of basic needs as a foundation, an educational program was planned to meet individual and group needs, and which was directed toward these 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. Extensive visual and audial aids were used, with emphasis on pupil participation. The development of self-confidence through service to others was the key-note of method.

The experimental instructional program lasted for three years, after which the study was continued for an additional five years, in order to provide for an adequate evaluation of the post school careers of the children who had therein participated.

The evaluation procedure included clinical batteries of individual measures of intelligence, emotional stability, social maturity, and social adjustment, taken at entrance to the special center, and at every eighteen months thereafter, during the eight year period. One of the measures of the value of the program was the absolute individual change in intelligence and emotional maturity, as measured by changes in test results as well as in anecdotal records of the post-center activities of these boys and girls in voluntary advanced schooling, in vocational adjustment and efficiency, and in social adjustment in their families and communities. A second evaluative measure was obtained from a comparison of careers and test results of a selected group of pupils from the experimental centers with the case histories of a non-experimental group individually

paired on the basis of original IQ, amount of previous school experience, initial academic achievement, sex, and socio-economic background. Further comparative data were obtained from the study of seven pairs of identical twins included in the study, wherein one of each pair had been in the experimental program, while the other had been in regular classes, in the case of four pairs; or in non-experimental special rooms, in the case of three pairs.

At the close of the three year in-school period, the group showed an average gain of three years and eight months in composite academic achievement; the range in gain was from 2.6 to 4.7 years. The average gain in reading was 4.1 years, with a range in gain from 2.4 to 4.7 years.

The average rate of gain in composite achievement during the in-school 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 in-school period (on the basis of original entrance IQ) was the third month of third grade. The achievement of the group as a whole exceeded their expectancy by almost two years.

In test intelligence, individual over-all change for the eight year period ranged from a drop of 4 IQ points to a gain of 71 points. The mean over-all change 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.

On measures of emotional stability and maturity, 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 correlation of $.923 \pm .029$ was found between test intelligence and change in emotional stability over the full eight years of the study.

By the end of the study, more than 27 per cent had completed a four year high school course, and over 5 per cent had continued post high school training. Eighty-three and four-tenths per cent were regularly employed, and of this group one-third were in skilled occupations, and another third were in clerical positions. An additional 5.1 per cent were in inspection positions, where precision of final products was their responsibility.

Their salaries ranged to \$84 per week with a median salary for the total group of \$32. Almost 84 per cent of the group were still employed at the close of the study. The mean duration for all jobs held in the five year post school period was 3.5 years.

At the close of the study 83.4 per cent were regularly employed, 5.4 per cent were in military service (including two WAC's); 3.5 per cent were girls who had married and gave their full time to home-making; 3.1 per cent were temporarily idle; and 2.4 per cent were in full-time 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. There were no records of personal maladjustment or economic

dependency within these units, as evidenced by the lack of contacts of these families with social agencies. Eleven families had children, ranging in ages from four months to four years. Although no study was made of these nineteen children, medical and clinical records available indicated apparent physical and mental normalcy. There was only one inter-marriage within the study.

In the control group 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.

While human behavior involves so great a multiplicity of variables, unknowable and immeasurable, that casual relationships are difficult to establish, the data have 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 feebleminded.