

MAKING CITIZENS *of the* MENTALLY LIMITED

A CURRICULUM FOR THE
SPECIAL CLASS



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PREFACE

This book treats of the subject matter to be taught to subnormal pupils segregated in special classes of the public schools. Much has been written on the psychology and physiology and on certain aspects of the pedagogy of the subnormal, but almost nothing has been written to help the teacher of the subnormal in the all-important task of selecting, adapting, and arranging subject matter to meet the needs of her charges.

A situation of this sort is obviously anomalous. Time, money, intelligence, and energy are devoted to locating, examining, and segregating subnormal children; then, when the special class has been organized and recruited, the teacher is put in charge with little more for a program than the adjuration: "Keep them busy" or "Use your own judgment in planning what to do with them."

Several years of experience as director of special education in the city schools of Jackson, Michigan, and later as supervisor of special classes in the state of Wisconsin, have convinced me that this paucity of the materials of instruction in the literature on the subnormal has seriously handicapped the special-class teacher and has led to wide divergencies, not always to be commended, in the kind, amount, and suitability of the training given to subnormal children.

It was in the hope of meeting this obvious need that I set about the task of arranging a curriculum that should present a composite of the best prac-

tices of the best teachers I had observed and at the same time conform to the principles that psychologists agree should govern the training of the sub-normal. The result is a program that is at least definite and specific, and, I think, despite its eclectic origin, free from serious inconsistencies.

What has just been said makes it clear that I am materially indebted to many persons for constructive suggestions. I wish to acknowledge here my indebtedness to the special-class teachers of Jackson, Michigan, and of the state of Wisconsin, who gave freely of their ideas and enthusiasm; to Miss Florence Whittum, Instructor in Domestic Arts at the Cass Technical High School, Detroit, Michigan, who gave helpful criticism of the chapters on Cookery, Sewing, and Housekeeping; to Superintendent John Callahan of the State Department of Public Instruction, Madison, Wisconsin, who generously granted permission to use certain materials developed under the auspices of that department; and especially to Miss Stella V. Stillson, of the same department, who collaborated in the early planning of the undertaking and with whom discussion of the controversial issues involved served frequently as the agent for crystallizing my own ideas.

Other acknowledgments have been made throughout the course of the text.

H. D. W.

INTRODUCTION

Segregation of slow-learning children for instructional purposes has passed the experimental stage. Educators who have specialized in the field are agreed that the training of the subnormal child presents a pedagogical problem that cannot be met properly in the regular classroom. Furthermore, where segregation has been intelligently carried on, results show conclusively that children thus segregated are happier and learn to better advantage than when retained in the regular rooms.

Excellent as has been the work in various quarters where children have been put into special classes,* there is, nevertheless, a regrettable lack of unified purpose or definite program to be found in a great majority of the classes which are operated for the subnormal. When confronted with the questions: "Have you a special course of study for these children?" or "What do you teach these children?" administrators and teachers usually reply somewhat vaguely: "We follow the regular course of study, but we go more slowly."

Undoubtedly, the rate at which instruction is given to slow-learning children must mark one essential departure from the regular course of study. But it is by no means the only departure.

*Throughout this book the term "special class" should be understood to apply only to those classes in which the mentally deficient or subnormal are segregated. Similarly, the term "slow-learning" is used as synonymous with "mentally defective," "subnormal," or "borderline."

There is much in the regular course of study which is unsuited to the needs and capacities of the slow-learning child, and on the other hand, he must be definitely taught a long array of facts which the normal child may be trusted to acquire for himself. In addition to these, he must be taught that common core of information, the *sine qua non* of knowledge, which all independent members of society must possess. The course of study for the subnormal must have, then, as its fundamental basis that quantum of knowledge which it is essential for both normal and subnormal to possess, and to this must be added those other facts, skills, habits, and attitudes which are peculiarly suitable and useful to the subnormal. Efforts to put such a course of study into writing have been few. Indeed, the teacher of the special class is often left with the blanket instruction, "Use the general course of study and adapt it to the children's needs." There are even cases on record where the teacher is left merely with the adjuration, "Keep the children happy and occupied." Such a *laissez faire* policy of merely entertaining instead of educating the children is detrimental both to the children and to society. There are many valuable aspects of training which can be given profitably to subnormal children and which the school is obligated to impart. In order to help the teacher better to know what those aspects of training are, the materials of this book have been assembled.

This curriculum is intended for pupils whose mental ages range approximately from 4 years to 12 years, and whose I.Q.'s range approximately from 60 to 75. It has been designed pri-

marily with the needs in mind of special classes for subnormals as they are organized in the public schools, but much of it is just as applicable to the problems of the elementary-school teacher who finds herself unavoidably confronted with the task of teaching one or two subnormals in a room of normal pupils.

There has been little attempt in these pages to discuss the psychology of mental defectives, except as it is related to specific bits of subject matter. It is assumed that the teacher who uses this course is already equipped with a background of child study and psychology and has a thorough training in methods. Our concern in developing the course has been more with the facts which are to be presented than with how or when they should be taught. We have attempted to outline the skills and items of information and to describe the habits and attitudes which it is most desirable for the adult subnormal to possess for satisfactory living in our present social organization.

No attempt has been made to arrange the materials according to grade levels, and there is only an approximate arrangement within each subject outline according to difficulty. In a measure, problems of method and grade-placement are left to the judgment of the teacher for obvious reasons. The amount of individual instruction necessary in a special class makes grade-placement as conceived in the ordinary sense impossible. The needs of special-class children vary so widely and their previous training is so uneven that specific prescriptions as to what they should learn in each year are not only difficult, but also unwise. Furthermore,

an arrangement according to grade-level is at best an uncertainty, because slow-learning children must have lessons repeated so frequently that topics which may be properly assigned to one level must, as a general rule, be repeated at several different levels. In other words, the materials must be presented according to a spiral arrangement. Just when and at what intervals these repetitions should occur must depend upon the individual group. It is understood, however, that anything like a mastery of the principles, facts, and modes of behavior set forth in this curriculum will require all the child's attention and effort from the time he enters the special class at 7 or 8 years of age until he leaves at 14 or 15.

Although the materials have not been arranged according to the stock grade-divisions, nevertheless, they have been arranged in a more or less logical sequence. This does not mean, however, that the teacher should necessarily follow this sequence in presenting the materials; on the contrary, it will often be better for her not to do so, but rather to select the materials in an order that best meets the conditions obtaining in her classroom, *e.g.*, the previous training of the pupils, their previous experience, their maturity, the teacher's personal predilections, and various local conditions.

The materials may in places seem extremely obvious and simple. If the pupils are capable of doing more than is suggested in the subject outlines, they should by all means be permitted and encouraged to do so. It is questionable, however, whether pupils who are capable of more advanced work are properly classified in a special class.

Whatever may be the merits of a course of study organized around "projects," or "life experiences," we are convinced that under prevailing conditions, the teacher will find the material as here arranged around the traditional subjects more useful. There has been within recent years much controversy over the respective merits of the "made-in-advance" curriculum *versus* the "project" curriculum. Our position with respect to this issue is, briefly, that in the instruction of slow-learning children the teacher should be equipped with an outline that gives in a concrete and specific way the facts which it is desirable for the child ultimately to know, and by means of which she may clarify her objectives and maintain a proper perspective of the work. Once the teacher is possessed of this outline, her methods of presenting the facts which it contains should be those which utilize conditions similar to those likely to obtain when the needs for the facts are encountered in life. The nearer the presentation approaches conditions of daily life, the more effective the learning is likely to be.

The materials presented in this curriculum have been chosen in accordance with the following principles:

1. *The nature and the scope of the curriculum should be conditioned by the mental capacity of the child.*

As applied to the special class, this means that a considerable proportion of the materials which should properly be included in the course of study for the regular classes must be omitted or curtailed

and simplified. It also means that a body of facts especially useful to the subnormal and particularly suited to his needs and capacities must be introduced.

2. *The selection of subject matter must be determined by its usefulness.*

Since the time is short and the pace is slow, children in the special class should be taught only those things for which they are likely to experience a need or for which they will have a real use. It must be understood, however, that "usefulness" here is to be interpreted in its broadest sense. An item of the curriculum need not be merely utilitarian to be useful. If it answers a need of the individual for a more complete or satisfactory enjoyment of life, it may be deemed "useful" although it may not be essentially "practical." Thus, recreatory reading, music, and nature study may be justified in this sense as "useful" phases of the curriculum.

It is possible to teach slow-learning children a great many facts which will never be of use to them. For example, children in the special class can in some cases be taught to name the subordinate clauses in a sentence, but it is extremely doubtful whether the use they make of this information will ever justify the amount of time spent in acquiring it. Again, it might be possible to teach a mentally defective child to perform, after a fashion, such difficult operations as $15\frac{1}{21} - \frac{9}{35} = ?$, but no one conversant with the situation would seriously believe it worth while to attempt such teaching. A teacher of a special class would do well to ask

herself these questions before presenting any material to her pupils: "Does the child understand this?" "Can he be made to understand it?" "If he can understand it, is it worth his while to expend the time and effort necessary to acquire it?"

3. *Other things being equal, that material is to be preferred for the curriculum which meets a present need of the pupil and appeals strongly to his interests.*

It is a commonplace of psychology that children attend better, work more zealously, and persist for a longer time when pursuing some activity which coincides with their interests. It is especially important when coping with the intellectual handicap of pupils in the special class to utilize wisely the immediate needs and interests of the pupils, always provided they be real, worthy, and fairly persistent, and further, always provided it be kept in mind that the spontaneous interests of children may often be supplemented or augmented by the addition of other interests intentionally developed by the teacher.*

As examples of how the current needs and interests of the children may often be utilized for teaching purposes, a number of chapters contain sections embodying "Illustrative Situations for Teaching." The situations thus described are intended, not as models, but as illustrations that

*A clear and valuable discussion of the qualifications that ought to be kept in mind in observing this third principle of curricular organization is presented by Professor Ernest Horn in the Twenty-Sixth Yearbook, Part II, of the National Society for the Study of Education, pp. 100-107. We find ourselves in substantial agreement with Professor Horn on this point.

are typical of the many situations that may arise in connection with classroom activities which the teacher may turn to pedagogical advantage.

4. *The materials of the curriculum should be closely related to the environment and experiences of the child.*

Materials for the curriculum should be drawn freely from such sources as the home, the school, and the city or town in which the child lives. It is more important that the child in the special class know the principal thoroughfares and resources of his own city than that he know that London is the largest city in Europe or that the climate of India is warm and humid. The teacher should see that every child is acquainted with such facts as the location of his home, its immediate surroundings; the neighborhood; the location of the school, its library and classrooms; the equipment of his room and its uses; the location of his city, its places of employment, its parks, transportation systems, public buildings, etc. Not only should these items of his immediate surroundings be made known to the child, but from them and in them will be found the source of, or the means of approach to, a considerable part of the materials of instruction.

One must bear in mind, however, when utilizing local situations for curricular content, that subnormals are often rovers, so that many of the pupils in the class are likely to spend their adulthood in communities other than those in which the instruction is given. Training for purely local conditions may, therefore, be overemphasized. Whatever the local conditions and the immediate en-

vironment of the child, it is essential that he surely acquire those facts which will be most useful to him wherever he may later choose to be. In other words, training should not be restricted to local conditions; rather, the latter should be employed as the logical approach to wider fields of interest.

5. *The materials of the curriculum should, in so far as possible, be presented as a closely integrated whole, not as isolated blocks of information.*

It is an accepted principle of all education that the various subjects of the curriculum should be taught, not as formal, separate units, but in their relationship to each other and to the situations in which they occur in life. Since the mentally defective child is slow to make generalizations and to apply what he has learned, it is especially important that the information which he acquires shall be learned in connection with situations approximating those he is likely to encounter in life. Thus, arithmetic should be taught in connection with its relation to certain types of practical activities, more especially buying and selling, and these activities, in turn, should reveal relations to other fields, like sewing, cookery, carpentry, or any occupation for which supplies must be purchased in quantities and for which costs must be figured.

There has been an attempt throughout the course to indicate, by means of cross references and the arrangement of the material itself, some of the ways in which this interrelationship of the subjects may be worked out in the classroom presentation. In the chapter on "Projects" (p. 323), also, will be found some examples of classroom activities in

which related subjects have been presented as a single unit of instruction.

6. *The curriculum should not be limited to a series of texts, topics, or divisions of instruction, but should be thought of as embracing a large body of habits and attitudes, which, though they cannot be taught formally, are of the utmost importance in the education of the child.*

Fortunately, while there is a distinct limitation to the possibilities of augmenting the native stock of intellectual ability, even by means of skillful teaching, there is far less limitation to the possibility of inculcating desirable habits. In short, good behavior can be taught to children of limited intelligence. To a considerable degree, success in life is as much dependent upon certain attitudes and habits as it is upon stock of ideas and information. Thus, for instance, experience shows that it may easily be more important that a mentally defective child learn to be punctual in reporting for work than that he learn to read fluently. A worker who is honest and faithful may hold his job when another, more intelligent than he, but less reliable, loses his. Or again, the simple-minded fellow with an easy-going disposition may get into less trouble than the more intelligent, but crotchety man who cannot live in peace with his neighbors.

In order to emphasize further the importance of this principle, a brief chapter has been devoted to a description of some of the more desirable habits and attitudes which the teacher in the classroom has the obligation of inculcating at every opportunity.