

The Curriculum

CURRICULUM . . . New York State's Department of Education regulates by law at what age a retarded child is to enter school and is to leave.

However, there is a paucity of information available on what the education department in Albany provides for the state schools as a curriculum guide.

Mrs. Glasser was asked what in-put does the state make in designing the curriculum: "We are told what IQ level is considered eligible for educable and trainable and we design the curriculum based on our needs."

Willowbrook's administration claims that at best they can provide only custodial care for the 77% of their profoundly and severely retarded residents.

"Fuller (1949), Rice and McDaniel (1966), and Brownfield and Keehan (1966) have reported success in the operant conditioning of children who passively and unresponsively lay in their cribs. The point to be made is that a defect, even the most severe, does not rule out response to the environment and alteration of behavior through training." - (A Psychological Approach to Abnormal Behavior, Ullmann and Krasner)

It is alleged by critics of the educational effort at Willowbrook that every child who could learn is not being reached . . . nor is there a genuine effort in changing the disruptive behavioral attitudes of the lower IQ resident.

A teacher states, "You can not bring a child up to his level of functionality if he is made to sit in a bare ward and beaten when he leaves his chair."

Mrs. Glasser on curriculum states: "Now the curriculum is different for the educable and trainable classes. The children in the educable classes, we feel, have potential for community living, therefore our whole training is along that view. We teach them math and everything we teach them is a realistic approach. By that I mean we show the relationships of numbers and words as they relate to everyday situations."

Miss Hallohran continues on the trainable child - "When we teach just words it frustrates the child because he does not understand the relationships, a result of institutionalization. We teach word recognition through the use of signs, i.e. "Keep Off The Grass." This will enable the child to keep words in their true relationship to every day situations."

It has been stated that it becomes difficult at times to maintain order in the classroom. A teacher tells of how a classroom can be "calm one minute and chaotic the next."

"Students who have physical problems become frustrated when they can not perform a task . . . resulting in a minute or at times chaotic reaction which may disrupt the entire class."

Mrs. Glasser was asked whether a teacher had to stick to a rigid curriculum or was it flexible:

"Well, we do have a curriculum that should be followed. If you let every teacher do what they wanted they would not follow a curriculum. If they have ideas they try them. If they work, fine. I'll tell you what we have done, we have put sample lessons on tape which were created by a teacher, and we show it to the entire staff."

In response to this statement two teachers claim, "We are told to make up a daily lesson plan which consists of strictly academics, not self-help or habit training, as has been claimed."

"You speak of flexibility . . . when a child is flipping out or having a seizure all they want to know is if your bulletin board and lesson plan are up to date. We are told what to do - or else."

Subject matter . . . Mrs. Glasser and Miss Hallohran agree on

why subjects like Science, Math and English are important, not just in the classroom, but as a method of motivation.

Miss Hallohran sums up the purposes for sewing classes, shops, home-economics. "In each class we try to motivate the child. So many of them are withdrawn and are hungry for a positive response from anyone."

In sewing we can get the student to read more and understand the relationships of numbers because they must read patterns and figure out the measurements. You can see that this will build their interest and hopefully the next step will be picking up a book."

"In the shops and in sewing the student will make things for their parents, or, if they have none, for someone in the school. This is important because they learn to share and the positive response they get from giving is good for their motivation."

A point of controversy at Willowbrook is the use of 'Operant-Conditioning' as a training device. Briefly this is a technique used to obtain a positive response from the student by rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior.

Mrs. Glasser believes that the punishing could get out of hand. "We are not allowed to use the strict form of 'Operant-Conditioning' by the state. However, here at Willowbrook every one gets a lollipop!"

Mrs. Glasser sums up the purpose of the classroom with, "the main purpose is to increase the positive behavioral traits of every student."

We use a wide range of teaching techniques and subjects to help the severely retarded. The Electric Company of the educational programs on television are used to illustrate behavior traits for the child."

"Academics are a reinforcement to this. As pointed out, our subject matter is used to increase intelligent behavior rather than on finding a defect."

Work Study . . . Some students are in an On-the-Job Training program. They number 69, 50 males and 19 girls. These students spend a half day at work and a half day in school.

They work as messengers, clerks, porters, dishwashers, etc. Mrs. Glasser explains that this is to prepare them for community living. In the classroom, they are taught vocabulary, basic math, social responsibility.

In the vocational training classes students are taught on electric and manual typewriters. The room is set up like a typical office, down to a time clock. Every basic office machine is available.

The students have their time added at the end of the week and are allowed to see how much money they would have made if they really had worked.

Mrs. Glasser adds that the workshop situation "induces a positive response by building models of monetary rewards, and by creating the interpersonal atmospheres." She added that some 269 students attend the vocational training classes.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES . . . Willowbrook speaks proudly of the band and glee clubs. The glee club is composed of many blind students, and touches the high and low level IQs.

Mrs. Glasser points out the importance of the band and glee club. To her it proves that "our children can accomplish many things. But no one reports the good that is done by these children."

A library has been opened through the use of a Title I grant. The students have library periods where the librarian reads books and explains the importance and use of them.

Each student can take a book back to the classroom - but not back to their living quarters - the wards.

Audio-Visuals play an extensive roll in the learning experience. Training films and human interest films are shown to the students in the classroom.

Also, Mrs. Glasser explains, films are made at the school to train the teaching staff. There are two closed circuit units in which she

points out the children's delight in seeing themselves on the screen, or seeing friends in another room.

Edison Responsive Environment Learning System, better known as the E.R.E. room: "This is where reading is taught by the talking typewriter. The talking typewriter teaches students to read, by supplying them with phonetic sounds, basic sight words and comprehension stories which are illustrated on a picture screen."

The E.R.E. room has been in operation at Willowbrook since 1967 and consists of 3 machines.

Mrs. Glasser states that the students picked by the teacher to use the 'talking-typewriter' are the ones who need extra help in word structure and usage. She noted that at present 24 students use the 3 machines. Presumably, there are few who need extra help.

SUMMARY . . . An important fact which is vividly illustrated, with a closer look at the education program, is that there are only two formally organized and coordinated programs in existence.

First, is the evening adult program which is mandated by the state and has a planned and organized curriculum with a proposed end result.

By this, it is meant that after the student completes this course he or she will be capable of accomplishing a set goal or can develop certain talents. The subjects offered are typing, woodworking, craft, Home Economics; sewing, cooking and a built-in remedial study.

There are 180 adults out of the 2,000 eligible residents in the institution over 21.

There are 30 teachers involved and according to Tom Delaney, payroll clerk, "They receive from \$8 to \$9 a session. These are teachers who are involved in the day program."

Infant Therapy is the second formal program. The goal is to take the child at age 5 and prepare him for formal training. Academics, as well as socialization techniques, are used.

The summer component which draws its funds from Title I is a strengthening of the winter effort. In this program the students ready to go into school at building 3 are given an orientation.

At this point, evaluation is made and decision to place him in educable or trainable classes is determined.

It was reported on N.Y. Illustrated this past week that "The state schools were not constructed with education in mind."

There is some question as to whether the "school" programs are developed with intellectual education in mind. The hypothesis that academics should take a back seat to vocational training is widely evident.

Mrs. Glasser verifies the problem in speaking of curriculum criteria: "We have children here that could take 5 numbers and multiply them by 5 and get them correct. But when it is ever going to use this? We teach them when you go out to work you get \$50 a week, but you aren't going to take home \$50."