

Author urges more study in personality of the retarded

By WALTER COLEMAN

Essentially, there has been no comprehensive work on the personality and social development of the mentally retarded," Dr. Manny Sternlicht, chief psychologist and assistant director of



Dr. Manny Sternlicht

Willowbrook State School, stated with regard to a new book which he co-authored.

The book, "Personality Development and Social Behavior in the Mentally Retarded," was the work of Dr. Sternlicht and Martin R. Deutsch, a psychologist at Willowbrook school.

In the book, the authors call for a more intensive effort to study the personality development of the retarded child.

"Just as the mental retardate is the stepchild of psychological treatment, so, too, is he relatively deserted in personality studies," Dr. Sternlicht said.

"It is an unfortunate thing, even after we have done this book, to see how many questions lack an answer."

The book is divided into two parts, a "theoretical" section treating questions of personality development, personality dynamics, environmental influences, the self-concept, personality traits and deviant behavior, and an "applied" section dealing with problems of classroom adjustment, social

behavior, vocational adjustment and leisure-time pursuits.

The more seriously retarded a child is, the more distorted is his view of reality. The non-retarded person sees this and reacts to the retardate as if he were psychotic or severely maladjusted. The result is that one feeds the other," he stated.

According to Dr. Sternlicht, "A basic theme in the motivational life of the retardate is his idea with the idea of being good, with an accompanying fear of his own

hostility and aggression. His moral life is guided basically by two underlying principles — being good in and of itself, and avoiding one's own strong hostility and aggression. His views of life in general are predominantly positive views, and his thoughts about the future are happy thoughts."

"What we are trying to do in this book," he continued, "is to illustrate many of the things we have been talking about in case histories."

Dr. Sternlicht stated that he thought the finest chapter in the book was the last one, which deals with the adult retardate and how he gets along.

"One of the biggest problems," Dr. Sternlicht explained, "is that people either overestimate or underestimate his (the retardate's) abilities. The only way you can know for sure what he can do is to let him try it."

"Another problem which exists is that we are teaching the retardate skills which are in use now, but might be gone

in five or ten years," he continued. "We must take a more forward looking view on training them."

The book, Dr. Sternlicht explained, is basically a reference book, but has been written so that it can be used as a text book.

"It is somewhat disconcerting to say that our knowledge of the development of the personality of the retarded child consists of little more than educated guesses," Dr. Sternlicht said. "This is so in part

because of the limited verbal ability of retarded children, as well as their tendency to alter their perceptions of themselves."

"For many years we just assumed that the retardate was like any other child, except slower," he explained. "Now we have found that he has unique needs."

Dr. Sternlicht and Mr. Deutsch conclude their study by urging that "every attempt should be made to assist the retardate, to nurture his talents, to cultivate his skills, to enable him to realize his own inner core of being so that he might ultimately establish himself a comfortable niche in life and find his own special place in the sun."

Dr. Sternlicht, who lives at 263 Martin Ave., Willowbrook, has been at Willowbrook State School since 1960 and is a professor at Yeshiva University. He has written over 100 published works in the area of personality development and psychotherapy.