A MUSIC PROGRAM IN A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL FOR HIGHER GRADE MENTAL DEFECTIVES *

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THE music program of the Wayne County Training School is made available to all of the nearly seven hundred higher grade mentally defective boys and girls in residence. The program takes into consideration the facts that they spend an average of three years here, a relatively short period, and that they are admitted and leave at any time. Ages on admission range from seven to sixteen years. The average age of children in residence is fourteen and one-half years. About four hundred and forty-five attend day school, the remainder having vocational assignments.

A new child enters a music class which is made up of children of approvimately his own chronological age. If it is apparent that he cannot carry a tune, his class work continues but in addition he is allowed to be one of a group where special methods are used to help him learn to sing. In this group, emphasis is placed upon listening to music, beating, counting, stepping and using percussion instruments. In the class room groups, initiative on the children's part is encouraged by their contribution of songs which are combined into a loose leaf note book. Some of these songs are the ones learned in their homes. Their inclusion strengthens the significance of what the children are now doing by establishing continuity with their past.

The approaches used are flexible and are continually interchanged. This fact does not imply an absence of plan but rather one which embraces an understanding of the variations of rhythms to which the children might be expected to respond and a presentation of these in ever varying garb.

Basic simple rhythms are presented to children of all age groups. The younger child is first given rhythm work itself; then this work is combined with the use of percussion instruments. Later, clappers, bells and tambourines are added. The musical game group, taught by a number of older girls as part of the program to prepare them to care for small children in the community, gives these older girls opportunity to exercise basic rhythms. "Dance and Sing" groups, conducted in conjunction with the recreation teacher, likewise provide the means of emphasizing basic rhythms to older children. For all age groups, singing in the processional is emphasized. A high degree of perfection in it is sought by the children; their pride in this performance is marked.

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Physical movement is combined to advantage with singing whenever possible. Particularly in the older children, emphasis upon posture acts as the equivalent of actual movements. The values which result from the use of the standing position of the individual child with the group completing a circle with the teacher at the piano are increasingly evident.

Activities carried out to music [1] have particular value to the child. The procedure is a cumulative one. The children in the group, about 24 in number, select melodies to stand in place of their names and of a gradually increased list of activities which they suggest and which they carry out in pantomime. The form of this latter is also of their devising. At any given session, the teacher plays at random parts or all of 200 melodies without interruption. The children make together the corresponding response. It is found that they show no evidence of tiring or lack of attention at the end of 40 minutes.

Drawing under the motivation of music permits participation for some children who might otherwise be excluded. Those who are unusually skillful in drawing gain a corresponding sense of success in musical expression. It plays a prominent part in increasing receptivity to music by creating apperceptive readiness for it.

Listening to music becomes a separate and valuable aspect of the program. Victrola music is played. Each composition introduces a discussion on one or all of such subjects as the mood of the composer when writing it, the instruments heard, or the picture which forms in the child's mind as he hears it.

Increased opportunity for self-expression is given to the younger children through participation in impromptu groups.[2] Singly or in conjunction with other children, they dress in garb selected by them from their costume closet and sing to their own melody the thoughts which they wish to express. A glance into the phantasy world of many is thus made possible. The words are recorded by the teacher in a loose-leaf notebook and under the individual child's name, so that each can re-read what he has spoken or sung. In this way, increased evaluation is placed upon what has been produced.

Singing clubs have novelty names and perform lullaby, one, two and three part numbers, folk melodies of our own and of other countries. The pre-choir groups study special religious compositions preparatory to their later admission to the choir itself. A large whistling group accommodates those who like this form of expression.

In addition to the simple instruments referred to in connection with rhythmic expression, the tonette and harmonica are used. On them, large groups of children play marches and popular songs. The drum is taught to a few who have an aptitude for it.

The music program is a valuable medium for the basic training of the higher grade mentally defective child. While it is also a medium of self-expression, the contributions which it can

[1] Music as a Means of Increasing Responsiveness in Young Mental Defectives. *Jnl. of Exceptional Children*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1937), p. 45.

[2] Impromptu Music in Young Mental Defectives. *Proc. Amer. Assn. on Mental Deficiency*, Vol. XLIII, No. 2 (1938).

make to group living and to the social growth of the children are, perhaps, even more unique.

The cottage parents request at intervals that their groups come in after the school session in order to practice for informal cottage singing. The cottage groups are also given assistance in preparing musical numbers for their more formal programs and for parties as they express a desire for it. Community singing with or without song slides takes place at irregular intervals.

Incentives to learning are kept before the children. They include at all times reasonable competition. The goal is kept for each child just a step above where he is at the time so that he does not feel lost or discouraged. Yet, in a general way, he is aware of the desirability of reaching what might be called the ultimates of the program—membership in the choir or participation in the special programs or operettas. Each child senses that there can be no skyrocketing to these positions, but that they are reached only after he passes through the intermediate stages.

Thus the child can obtain a reasonable degree of social recognition through participation in programs for special days, operettas and choirs. Groups prepare numbers in advance so that a program can often be given as the occasion arises with what appears to be short preparation. An air of expectancy, therefore, enlivens all routine aspects of preparation. Special days offer opportunity to inter-relate music with other aspects of the school program. Two operettas are given yearly, one at Children's Day and the other at Christmas. Between 100 and 150 children participate in each. Material used is of junior high school grade. Classroom teachers assist in teaching the words, costumes are designed and made in sewing classes, and stage settings are worked out by manual training classes, and a number of teachers are assigned to the various groups which constitute parts of the operetta.

The choirs, Protestant and Catholic, prepare numbers for each Sunday service. Robes are worn by the Protestant group. Membership in the choir is highly prized. A group of older boys and girls is interested in preparing solos for the Sunday services.

Through memorizing words of songs, the children increase the total body of their knowledge which in turn adds considerably to their feeling of personal worth. Memorizing of the words of songs is necessary for the group of older girls who teach younger children. Members of groups who perform before audiences from time to time also have a heavy responsibility. This is especially true of the choir, though it is equally true that entire groups must memorize those songs which are sung in unison in assemblies, gatherings and in the cottages themselves.

The music needs to be taught to the children by rote. The words are spoken, written on the blackboard or are given to them on mimeographed sheets. It is not that a certain number of the children cannot learn to read music directly, but there is only questionably any advantage in having them do so. On the other hand, there is an all-inclusiveness to the rote method.

Certain observations have been found

useful in presenting music to these children. The size of the group is important. Fairly large groups are desirable because they provide stimulation without eliminating individual responsibility and attention. Neither very small nor very large groups offer this distinction so they are used less frequently. Individual performance is regarded as desirable but not so much as to dim the significance of group performance.

It has been found imperative never to over-use musical activity. So far as it is possible, a pause follows each major production. This pause is filled by social activities of the group in which games without music are used for entertainment.

The children exhibit varying degrees of boldness and shyness as they enter upon the music program. Thus they reveal the manner in which they have reacted in the past to their problems and to their lack of position in life. Naturally, they also differ widely in ability. The music program offers the children a medium through which their abilities can be exercised and trained; it offers an avenue of expression and a chance to grow and progress at their own rate; it develops in most of them a sense of active and joyous participation. It has been a helpful medium for lifting the individual above himself and developing the cohesion of a large group through common reactions, purposes, results and satisfactions.

ABSTRACT

A description is offered of the setting and the program, the methods and the objectives. The paper discusses classroom work and special activities in the classroom; selected groups for clubs and school functions; and the general community program.

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CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FOR LEARNING DIFFICULTIES OF HIGH-GRADE MENTALLY DEFECTIVE CHILDREN WITH MENTAL AGES BELOW SIX YEARS *

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ATTENTION has been called in recent years to the education of young mentally retarded children, and to the problems they present when they enter public school. The concept of "readiness" for academic learning, with the introduction of activity programs, and the conviction that all children, whatever their abilities, have a right to successful, satisfying school experiences, has assigned to educators a challenging task. We are confronted with the need of determining suitable teaching procedures while we are still in the process of selecting curricula and testing their value in the light of later progress of the children.

For the past eight years the Prolonged Pre-Academic Program at Wayne County Training School has demonstrated its success by the subsequent school records and social adjustment of its graduates. We are now considering a new issue in curriculum analysis, namely the location of those activities that presumably contribute to future academic success, particularly in reading. By this approach we hope to discover which children show evidence of special learning difficulties, and to plan remedial measures for them before they are transferred to the regular academic department.

In an earlier paper by Patterson and Curtis it was stated:

> "Actual classroom performance in pre-reading activities, such as matching words and phrases, incidental recognition of words and phrases which had occurred frequently in activities, and concentration for considerable periods of time on work involving symbolical material, appeared to be a better indicator of future progress than was the Monroe or most other reading readiness tests." [1]

Obviously there existed a need for some means of observing and recording the classroom performance of the children, and of preserving the records for future use. In their work with the highest division in the Pre-Academic Unit, Miss Curtis and Dr. Patterson developed a tentative sampling inventory which is now being used to check the achievements of that group. It was considered desirable to extend this to

* From the Wayne County Training School, Northville, Michigan, Robert H. Haskell, M.D., Medical Superintendent; Thorleif G. Hegge, Ph.D., Director of Research and Education.

[1] Patterson, R. Melcher, and Curtis, Ethel Louise. "Observing for Learning Difficulties in a Pre-Reading Situation for Higher Grade Mental Defectives." *Am. J. Ment. Def.*, 1944, 49, 165–170.

include all the children in the unit, and to that end we have been working with the lowest division.

Registration in the Pre-Academic Unit averages 45 boys who are divided into three teaching groups chiefly upon the basis of mental age. In Group I, the highest division, are those children with mental ages between 7 and 8 years. In Group II, the middle division, are those children with mental ages between 6 and 7 years, and in Group III, the lowest division, are those children with mental ages below 6 years. Usually there is some overlapping between groups because of social or physical development. The activities mentioned here were developed with eleven boys classified as endogenous. At the beginning of the systematic observation, their chronological ages ranged from 7 years, 6 months, to 11 years, 5 months. Their mental ages ranged from 3 years, 10 months, to 5 years, 11 months. The observation and checking occupied a period of eight weeks. Since Group III spends only the morning session in school, and but one hour daily in our "Activities Room," an extended period of time was necessary to cover all the items. Toward the end of this checking period, items checked earlier were reviewed in order to allow credit for them if it were earned. Additional credit was negligible, and in one instance credit was subtracted when it was evident that the earlier success had been accidental.

The question that we set before us was "What can the little boys in this group do?" Our schoolroom is equipped for the pursuit of many interesting activities, and our first step was to watch what the children elected to do when they were given free choice of available materials, and to note how they succeeded in doing the activities of their choice. The next step was to determine which items in the program for the youngest division were comparable to those used on the checking chart for the oldest boys. In setting up our inventory, we used the same categories that had been formulated by Patterson and Curtis. Since the construction of the chart was intended as an aid to, rather than an aim of, classroom teaching, checking situations were found or devised that were an actual part of the day's work, rather than unrelated testing procedures. The questions were phrased so that they could be answered by "yes" or "no," although it was evident that some spread in the quality of productions must be expected.

I. *Matching activities.* These included the matching of colors, geometric forms, animal pictures, animal silhouettes, single numbers, number groups, capital letters, and double numbers.

II. *Sight recognition and naming.* Each child was checked for visual recognition of common objects found in pictures, his locker number, his group number, his own name and initials, and the naming of numbers from 1 through 5.

III. *Verbal production.* Group conversation, social play, choral speaking, and simple dramatization provided many occasions for checking verbal production. The children were observed for accuracy of speech sounds. They were checked for the ability to tell what they were doing when asked by an adult, for voluntary participation in

group conversation, for the ability to learn short poems, and for participation in choral speaking, as well as for participation in social play, responses to questions asked by the teacher, and the ability to re-tell a familiar story. It was necessary to qualify some of the items because of the variation in the quality of the responses. In checking for participation in group conversation it was noted whether the child usually responded with a single word, a phrase, a complete sentence, or more than one sentence. In considering the performances in dramatization it was necessary to check both for individual responses and for participation in group dramatization. Most of the children could learn short parts in a little play, and two of them were able to give a performance of "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" with stick puppets. However, for several children, dramatization was much more elementary, and consisted of individual responses to such requests as "Pretend you are a duck," or "Pretend you are an airplane."

IV. *Responses to music and literature.* The children were checked for attention to music, poems, and stories; for participation in group singing; and for comprehension of selections as shown by requests for favorites, questions, comments, and interpretation through re-telling and impromptu dramatization.

V. *Non-verbal production.* Here we listed many activities requiring eye and hand co-ordination and manipulative skill. It was possible to use these situations not only to check concrete productions, but also for observing, for following directions, self-criticism, self-checking, and work habits. All the items were standard school activities: block building, clay modeling, finger-painting, coloring with crayons, cutting paper, drawing, tracing, outlining, pasting, and doing simple panel and jig-saw type puzzles. In some instances acceptable standards of achievement were difficult to formulate, but recognizability and utility seemed fair criteria. We were particularly careful that each child have an opportunity to experiment with new materials and techniques before checking.

VI. *Thinking processes.* Although "thinking" is involved in all the activities, there were certain observations made that were deserving of separate consideration. Rational counting, estimating size and quantity in terms of "enough," planning, self-criticism, self-checking, and classification were evident to some degree in several simple situations. The children counted the number of boys present and absent; they were required to bring "enough" scissors, pencils or crayons for the group; they made comments upon their own work and in some cases compared it with a neighbor's; they sorted pictures of plants, animals, birds, and people; and they were required to take care of their unfinished work so that they might resume it without interruption "next time."

VII. *Following verbal directions.* The children were required to find objects when told where to look, to put things away as directed, to carry notes to adults in other parts of the building, to cut, color, paste, and fold paper according to verbal instructions, and to follow spoken rules in such simple traditional

games as Tag, Puss-in-the-Corner, Dog and Bone, and Ring-Toss.

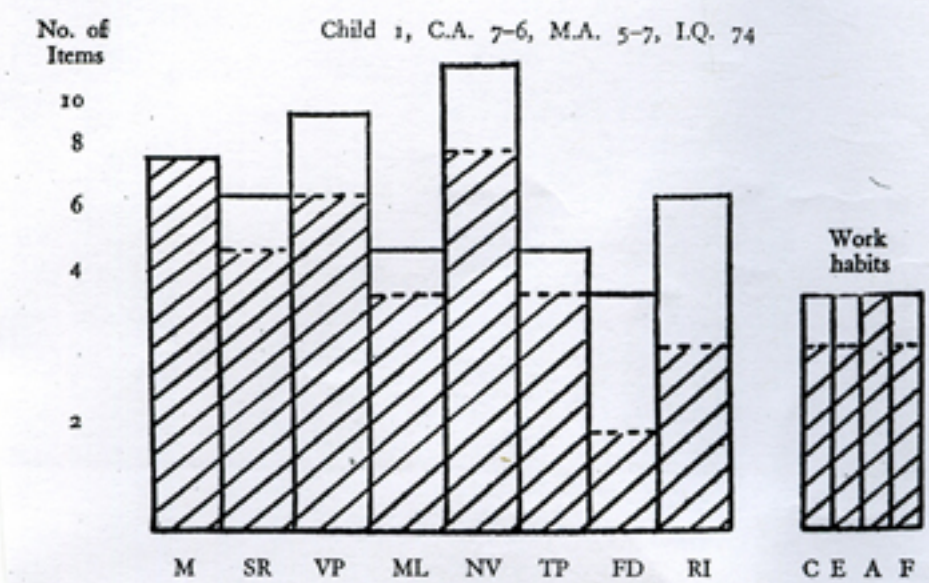
VIII. *Range of information.* Here we listed items of immediate interest and use to the children. The choice was based on common home, community, and Training School experiences. The checking was done during group discussion and social play situations.

IX. *Work habits.* To conclude our observations we used the five point scale already devised for the older group. The children were rated on *concentration, efficiency, attitude,* and *reactions* to *frustration.* The ratings were: very good, good, fair, poor, and very poor.

When the checking was completed, graphs were drawn for each child to show the number of items he passed under the separate headings and his ratings on work habits. The graphs were chosen to illustrate the pattern variations found in the group.

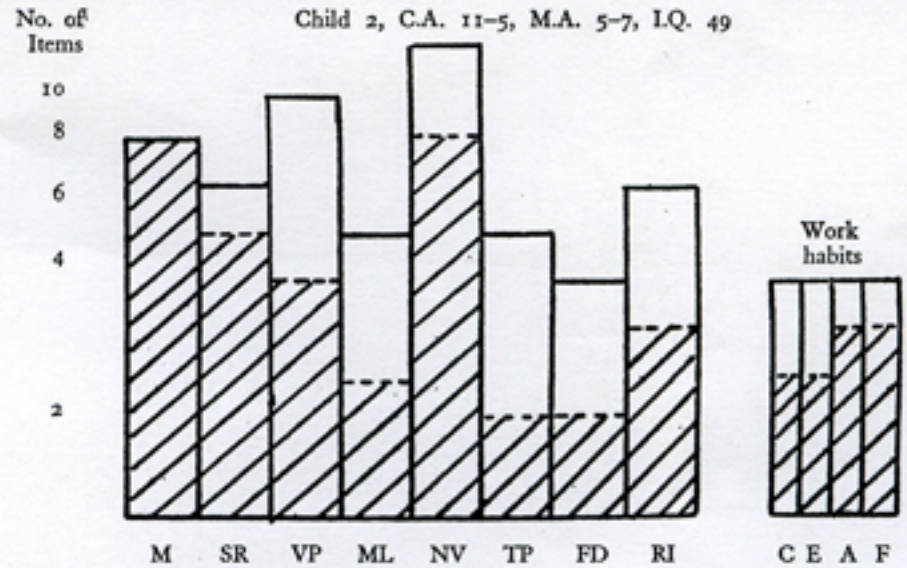
Child 1, the youngest child in the group, had the highest I.Q. His graph shows success in 45 of the 58 items. He lost most credit on responses that required following verbal directions and range of information. This may be due, in part, to his very limited life experiences, although these items presented difficulties to the group as a whole.

Child 2, the oldest boy in the group, is paired with Child 1 in order to compare the achievement of two children with the same mental ages at the onset of the checking period and different chronological ages. Child 2 succeeded in only 38 items. Both boys had the same scores in matching activities, sight recognition and naming, non-verbal production, following verbal directions, and range of information. The younger child showed superiority in the areas of verbal production and responses to music and literature, and thinking-processes.



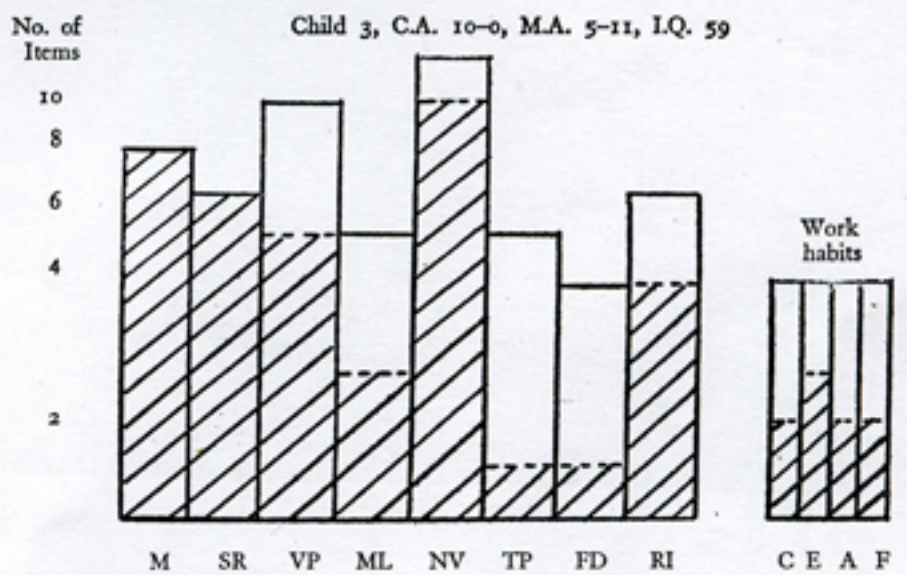
Child 3 was chosen as an illustration of very irregular achievement. Succeeding in 40 items, this boy showed low success in responses to music and literature, following verbal directions, presence of other children and has very decidedly preferred to work and play by himself.

Child 4 succeeded in 54 of the 58 items, with complete success in five

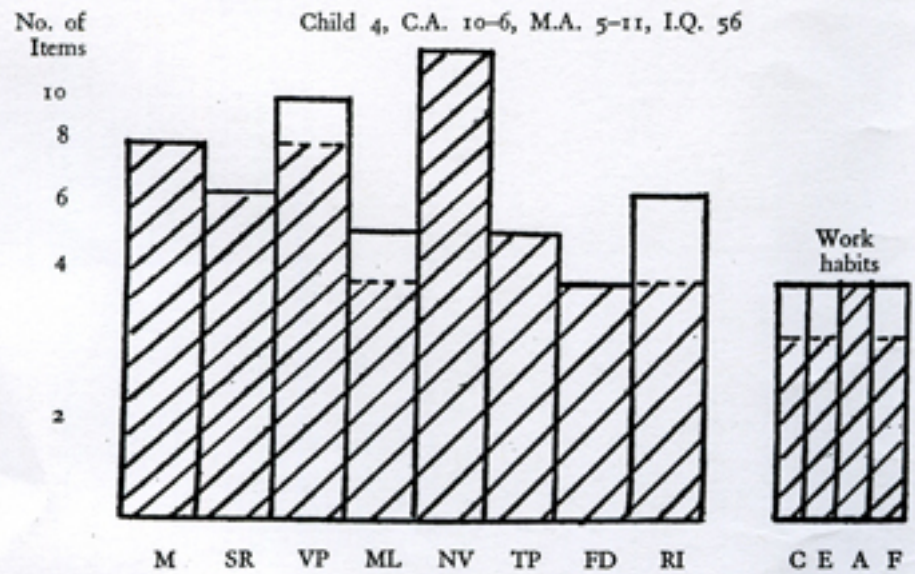


and thinking processes. His comprehension of language was inferior to that of the group as a whole and his work habits were very poor. This boy has always been rather indifferent to the areas. He showed excellent work habits and was active in all group enterprises.

Child 5 is one of the youngest and newest boys in the group. His graph was selected as an example of low gen-

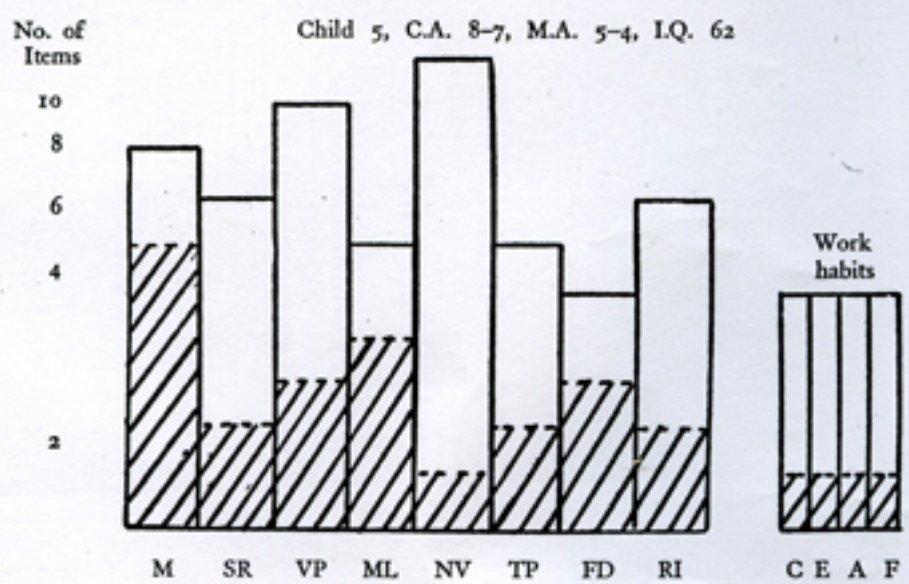


eral achievement, with distinct lack of success in non-verbal production. His only achievement in that category was in finger-painting, although he nearly succeeded in copying his initials, C H.



His best ratings were in matching activities, in which most of the children succeeded, and in responses to music and literature. Child 5 may be described as "verbal." This is verified by the results of tests administered in the Psychological Department. Observations will be continued to see whether his performance pattern changes with time and teaching.

Although this inventory is only a beginning step in a long-range study of the classroom performance of children enrolled in the Pre-Academic Unit, the method of approach and the techniques



of observation have proved their immediate value.

The graphs, by showing the number of successes and failures in each category, have indicated *group* as well as *individual* weaknesses. The matching activities were the easiest items for this group, while those listed under thinking processes were the most difficult. With arbitrary selection of curricula and informal checking procedures, we have no statistically reliable basis for drawing general conclusions as to the types of activities that are hardest for all mentally retarded children. However, on the basis of the classroom experience recorded on our achievement chart, we can state what we found to be the most difficult for this group of children. Table I shows the order of difficulty, from the easiest to the hardest, of the first eight categories. Column 1 shows the possible number of successful responses, column 2 shows the actual number of successful responses, and column 3 shows the per cent of successful responses.

The development of the items on the achievement chart, most of which have been briefly enumerated, has helped us to find activities that are appropriate for the lower mental age levels in our unit. When new boys are admitted to Group III we can more effectively establish the base on which they succeed in various enterprises, and whenever necessary, revise our curriculum and our chart by adding simpler or more difficult achievements.

By examining Table I we have found several useful suggestions for future curriculum building, as well as objective data for evaluating the performance of individual children. Because the range of information was very limited, the systematic provision for more, carefully selected experiences and visual aids seems essential. Further opportunities in situations involving following verbal directions and thinking processes should be created. Increased attention should be given to usable poems, stories, and pictures. The enthusiasm shown when suitable materials were presented has suggested that further thought be directed toward the types of selections that appeal to these boys and elicit desired responses.

SUMMARY

We have suggested that a teacher of young mentally retarded children can make and record valuable observations

TABLE I

ORDER OF DIFFICULTY OF THE FIRST EIGHT CATEGORIES ON THE PRE-ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT CHART FOR GROUP III

Classification	Possible Successes	Actual Successes	Per Cent of Successes
Matching activities	88	76	86.3
Sight recognition and naming	77	59	76.6
Non-verbal production	110	73	66.3
Response to music and literature	66	43	65.1
Verbal production	99	62	62.6
Following verbal directions	55	34	61.8
Range of information	77	44	57.1
Thinking processes	66	30	45.4

in her classroom. It is not uncommon to find in the case histories of these children such remarks as "This child has been in school three years and hasn't learned a thing" or "He has not yet mastered the work of the kindergarten." By means of the techniques we have mentioned, a teacher can take advantage of her prolonged personal contact with the children and make a definite contribution toward supplementing information gained by standardized psychometric tests.

We have purposely limited ourselves in this presentation to a discussion of those activities by which we intend to prepare the child for academic work. Whether or not they actually do so will be the subject of later investigation. The same technique, however, and possibly many of the same items, may be used in a further study of more general success in adjustment to the many demands of growing up in a school community. Such an approach does not aim at the exclusion of the retarded child from experiences, nor at the restriction of his experiences. It attempts to promote his development in many directions, and to provide an orderly, varied, adaptable program for him.

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