

are, moreover, even wider questions in connection with heredity which must be investigated. For instance, can we rest satisfied with the results of the mental examination of the American recruits, results which indicate that ten per cent. of that great nation are destined never to advance in natural intelligence beyond the 'mental age' of ten years?\* Here is a vast field for research. What is the relative fertility of these different mental age groups? To what extent is innate intelligence hereditary? Do the ascertained facts indicate that feeble-mindedness is an excessive form of a common defect, or is it a disease apart? What are the average 'mental ages' of normal members of neuropathic stocks of different types? If England is to do little to solve these vastly important problems, let us hope that America will continue to be more active.

Our existing knowledge is, however, amply sufficient to keep us busy for some time to come. No doubt those who wish to oppose all racial progress cannot do better than continually to emphasize the fact that there are exceptions to almost every rule, and that to follow any general plan must generally involve dealing erroneously with a minority of cases. To plead ignorance is a most effective method of obstruction!

## Classes for Dull and Backward Children.†

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To all who are dealing with the problem of the Dull and Backward Child the recently published Report of the Medical Officer of the Board of Education will afford some interesting reading.

In the December issue of the *Journal of Education* you may have noticed the following paragraph.

"Another problem dealt with by the Board's Medical Officer which we select for special comment is that of the dull and backward child, familiar to the organisation of an elementary school as the child who does not march stage by stage in normal progress through the school. Omitting cases of such slight retardation as fall within the range of 'standard deviation' for the particular age, we are still left with about 10 per cent. of the older children classed as definitely backward. About two-fifths of these cases are due to such non-mental factors as irregular attendance, inefficient teaching in earlier years, and physical defect. The remaining three-fifths are due to apparently inborn mental factors. In some cases special classes, with liberal substitutes of manual training in place of the ordinary subjects of the curriculum are provided. The report points out, however, that manual work is not a panacea for backwardness. There is great need for schooling under the best health conditions—open air work, adequate feeding, exercise and rest, and for the proper understanding of the mentally weak child. In connection with the latter requirements there is abundant room for expert research. In one way it seems absurd to spend money so freely on the backward child; but, until

\* Standing alone such statements as these may be very misleading, for it is only "intelligence" which is in question, and reference must be made to original works before the meaning intended to be conveyed can be fully understood. See, for example, *Human Efficiency and Levels of Intelligence*. Goddard, 1920, Oxford Univ. Press.

† Paper read at the Tenth Annual Conference of Educational Associations, 1922, University College, London.

social conditions make the production of such children less common, the problem will remain as a large and difficult one. At present it affects about half a million children of school age, and probably not less than four millions of the whole population."

The development of Special Classes for Dull and Backward Children has been very considerably retarded by the conditions which have obtained in England since 1914. This is better understood when it is realised that the formation of one of these classes in any school entails giving up a classroom the accommodation of which may be for from 40 to 60 children and using it for a class of which the number on roll does not exceed 30. It also means the full time service of a very capable teacher and some additional cost per head for materials as nearly every lesson involves Handwork of some kind. It may be hoped that with improved conditions the difficulties in the way of forming these classes will disappear.

My experience with these special classes has been gained entirely in the city in which my work lies at the present time and I shall therefore deal with the conditions under and for which we are working there.

These classes must not be confused in any way with the Special Schools for Defectives. The classes for Dull and Backward Children are as much a part of the school to which they belong as any other class in that school. Some of these classes are attached to Infants' Schools, some to Senior Mixed Depts., and others to Boys' and Girls' Depts. The classes which are attended by children between 7 and 10 years of age in the case of girls, and between 7 and 9 years of age in the case of boys, are attached to Infants' School or Junior Depts. Backward children of this age respond more successfully to the discipline and general atmosphere of an Infants' School than to that of a Senior Dept. The teacher also has been trained on the lines of Infant School methods.

It is advisable that the older boys and girls should attend a class which is part of a Senior Dept. In the playground they mix with others of their own age, and in school work they can, if necessary and desirable, be grouped with other classes for such subjects as Singing, Needlework and Drawing. The other children can be taught to look upon them as members of a small class, not in any sense as being members of a 'silly' class which is a term that is often attached to children who attend a Special School. The attitude of the rest of the school towards these children depends, as you will all realise, upon the attitude of the staff towards it.

The parents of the children who are recommended to attend these classes often object, on the ground that the class is for defectives. These objections are overcome by explaining that the class is in an ordinary elementary school, but that it is half the size of the other classes in order to give children who are backward in any way much more individual help. A visit by the parent to the class sets her mind (for it is usually the mother who calls about these matters) completely at rest.

If the class is attached to a Senior Dept. there is nothing derogatory to an older child in being put into it. It is advisable that the class should rank with the middle or Senior School standards IV. or Lower V., rather than the Junior Dept., as it will be composed of children of 10 years and upwards.

These classes may be formed in two ways. It may be composed entirely of children who are in attendance at the school at which the class is held, or they may be composed largely of children who have been in attendance at other schools in the neighbourhood. In order to effect a transfer from a normal to a Special Class the Head Teacher or Mistress is notified by the class teacher that the work of the child in question is markedly below the average of the class in which he is placed.

The child is examined by the Head Teacher, the case is reported to the local Inspector who supervises the work of the Dull and Backward Classes, and after another examination the child is recommended for transfer to a Special Class. In addition to this the Education Committee's Medical Officer is asked to examine the child who appears to be normally dull, not merely backward. In some cases the child is certified as being suitable for a Special School, in others a further mental examination may be made in 3, 6 or 12 months. A child who through extreme nervousness, backwardness or ill-health has failed to make any progress in a class of 60 children of approximately the same age as himself, in many cases becomes a new creature in a special class in which the children are taught individually or in groups.

There is no fixed time for transferring children to and from these classes, for at any date in the term a new admission may be found to be backward, or a child who has been excluded for illness may return in a nervous condition. If these children are put into a normal class of 60 (unfortunately classes of this size still exist) they may be utterly lost, the backward child loses ground and the nervous child is in danger of becoming neurotic. The work of the class is in no wise interfered with by these transfers in and out of the class as all the work is conducted on individual and group lines. The new entrant does not feel to be behindhand, for his work is not constantly compared with that of others, he is encouraged not to do better than others, but to do *his best*.

When a child is considered to be ready for transfer to a normal class, the Inspector is notified and the child is examined and transferred as soon as possible. It is found to be of little use to remove a child from the Dull and Backward Class until he can read a Standard I. or II. reading book fairly easily. Marked improvement may result in some cases in transferment from the Special Class to the class to which the child should belong by age, in other cases the child's mental age may be a year below the average and he is then transferred to the class for which he is best suited. From the Junior Dull and Backward Classes children are usually transferred to Standards I. or II. and occasionally to Standard III. One of the teachers finds that 10% of the backward, not dull, children are able after two years in this class, to work with children of their own age in every subject except Arithmetic.

If the class is composed of children who come from outside schools there are difficulties of transit to be met. Arrangements are made to place each child at the nearest school to his home, and if necessary car fares are paid by the Local Authority. At the present time the schools at which it is possible to form these Special Classes are those in which the number on roll is less than the accommodation of the school, as only in those buildings is it possible to give up a 60 room for 30 children. Under these circumstances some of the children have to come distances which can only be covered by car; this of course is a very undesirable state of affairs. I hope we shall not feel satisfied until every large department has its Special Class in its own building. Experimental work is proving that the number of 'Retarded' (I believe that is the term used by officials of the L.C.C. Education Departments) children is far in excess of the number for which any provision has been made, and until these children are taught as they should be, we are not only wasting their very limited mental power, but also the ability of the children who classified with, could if separated from them, progress at a greater rate.

These classes are composed of Dull and Backward Children; the difference between the two is very great. The backward child is not necessarily defective,—he is backward for many reasons, prolonged absence through illness or through

change of school consequent on change of the father's work, irregular attendance due to negligence at home, or it may be to the child's lack of interest in his school work, because on account of his backwardness he is always in difficulties over his lessons, often the butt of his fellows, and feels that he is seldom successful in pleasing his teachers, therefore there is no incentive to him to attend regularly.

The Dull child is often a borderline case, he may improve, very slowly it is true, and in some instances almost imperceptibly, on the other hand as he gets older his dullness declares itself to be due to some serious mental defect, and he is, if necessary, transferred to one of the Special Schools.

In one class in the city which is in a very poor neighbourhood 12 or 13 of the 30 children are classified as Dull, the rest being Backward owing to long absences from school.

A record of each child is kept when he is admitted to the class. Particulars are forwarded on a special Report Form drawn up for the purpose. This form gives as accurately as possible the number of attendances the child has made up to the time of his admission to the Special Class, the number of schools he has been in and his mental and physical characteristics. The detailed progress which the child makes in each subject, together with records of physical and moral developments are entered in a register kept for that purpose.

Marked ability in any direction is encouraged; at the present time a boy of 12 who will probably remain in the Special Class until he leaves school, is attending the School of Art two afternoons a week.

A child may be as short a time as three months in the Special Class or he may remain in it until he leaves school. The following are records of the time spent by different types of children in one of these classes:—

#### *SCHOOL A.*

#### *Record of last 24 promotions.*

#### *No. of Children.*

#### *Time in Class.*

|   |           |   |
|---|-----------|---|
| 1 | 5 years.  | Three years absent through ringworm on scalp. During the whole period made 365 attendances. |
| 1 | 3½ years. | A very dull boy.  |
| 1 | 3 years.  | do.   |
| 2 | 2½ years. | One a very intelligent boy, but found it most difficult to learn to read.                   |
| 8 | 2 years.  |   |
| 4 | 1½ years. |   |
| 4 | 1 year.   |   |
| 3 | 6 months. |   |

#### *SCHOOL B.*

There are three Special Classes in this school. Seventy-four children admitted during the year. August 1920—July 1921. Of these, eight returned to their own schools:—

|   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 3 | returned after 2 months. |
| 2 | „ „ 5 „                  |
| 1 | „ „ 6 „                  |
| 2 | „ „ 11 „                 |

The three cases of rapid improvement were two in Arithmetic and one in Reading.

Twenty other children who had been in the Class more than a year also returned to ordinary schools during the period 1920-21:—

|  |    |       |    |        |
|--|----|-------|----|--------|
|  | 2  | after | 4  | years. |
|  | 2  | „     | 3  | „      |
|  | 10 | „     | 2½ | „      |
|  | 3  | „     | 2  | „      |
|  | 3  | „     | 1½ | „      |

During the year three out of the 74 admitted were transferred to schools for the Mentally Defective.

*Methods of teaching.* Practically the whole of the work is taken on individual and sectional lines.

Appeal is made through interest in pictures, objects, educational games and handwork of every kind.

It has been found that the “Look and Say” and “Word and Sentence” method of teaching reading are more successful with these children in the first stages than any other. The teacher finds that the simple matching games—such as matching pictures with pictures, picture and word with picture and word, picture alone with separate word, etc., appeal in a way that phonetics never do. The motor activity involved in handling the apparatus is, as you know, a valuable means of stimulating mental activity, as also are cutting out, drawing and working clay. Work of this kind even the dullest can attempt with some measure of success, he is surprised into discovering what he *can* do, not what he cannot, and when once this type of child has realised that he can do something quite correctly by himself, his self-respect begins to assert itself and from that time he begins to make progress.

For Reading and Number Work apparatus of all kind is used. It is important that the apparatus should be progressive, and in the earlier stages self-corrective. The apparatus is planned to meet the needs of the child’s developing ability and is constantly being added to, improved upon and renewed.

Number Work is based on the use of the concrete. A good deal of time is given to shopping exercises as these are most familiar to the children and make excellent foundation for other work.

The apparatus used in teaching these subjects is similar to that which may be found in any good Infants’ Schools in which the work is planned on individual and sectional lines. Some of the apparatus is that which is issued by the Educational Publishing Firms, but the main part of it must be planned to meet the needs of the class, and in association with the interests of the moment, and must therefore be the outcome of the teacher’s observation of the developing mentality and of the interests of the individuals in her class. Besides the apparatus, there are books of all kinds ready at hand when the child is ready for them.

A very great deal of time is given to the teaching of Language which includes reading, writing, composition, poetry, stories, &c. Without the ability to read and the power to express himself intelligibly, the child can make little progress, he is quite helpless in a normal class until he has mastered these arts. A child who cannot learn to read should remain in a Special Class—he can be promoted from a Junior to a Senior Class as he grows older.

About half of the time given to secular instruction is occupied in some form of Handwork. The fact that the child can see some definite result of his labours is a powerful incentive to making further effort.

A backward child who has come from a normal class often has had little or no opportunity of seeing tangible results, for reading and arithmetic and other sub-

jects with which his time has been occupied, have yielded nothing of this kind for his labour.

The physique of many of these children is markedly below the average, careful attention is given to the physical work, the syllabus of the Board of Education is modified to meet the requirements of the class and the Education Committee's Inspectors of Physical Training have drawn up schemes which it is felt will be instrumental in aiding these cases of retarded mental and physical development.

As much work as possible is taken in the open air but more should and would be done in this direction were the conditions more favourable.

The teachers of the Special Class should be naturally attracted to this type of work. She should be an excellent teacher, possessing artistic and musical ability and a gift for hand work. Her manner should be quiet and effective and she should be of a cheerful disposition and enjoy life. She should be a student of mental development, keenly observant and very ready to sympathise. She must be patient and encouraging all the day long.

Enthusiasm, originality and a sense of humour will make her work possible when otherwise she might succumb to the apparently insurmountable difficulties that are presented on all sides during every hour of the day. That such teachers are to be found is my very happy experience.

The value of these classes is admitted by the teachers who deal with them directly, and by those who having done their utmost with little success to help these children in a normal class, find after they have been in a Special Class for 6, 12, or 18 months that they are without exaggeration 'new creatures.' May I refer here to some special cases of improvement.

- A. *Boy* who had had meningitis. When admitted to the class he knew very few words and those only by 'Look and Say' method; word building was poor. He seemed to be sullen; with individual attention he was able to be transferred to a normal class in six months time and was altogether a much brighter boy.
- B. *Girl*. A bad case. Admitted from another school when eight years old. Head Teacher reported M.D. Child stuttered badly and was very nervous. In two years' time her speech was fluent, nerves apparently better, and she was able to read and to work Std. I. sums well.
- C. *Boy*. Remarkably dull, unable to copy in correct order either letters or figures. No idea of sounds of letters. It took three years for this boy to make sufficient progress, but when he left his work was very good.

It is only possible to touch on a very few of the many reasons why these classes are so valuable. First and foremost these children need all the individual attention they can get, and in a class of 30 they get twice as much as in a class of 60 children. They need this individual attention not only to enable them to learn to read, to do arithmetic and so forth, but in order to help them to develop normally in other directions, for these children are all subnormal in some way, they may be neurotic, highly nervous, victims of neglect at home, defective in hearing or speech, or suffering from some other physical disability. Unlike the imbecile, they are conscious of their inferiority and are in consequence often dull and apathetic, resentful and suspicious, they lack self-respect and they have little or no joy in life. In these classes the children re-gain their self-respect, for by the teachers' notice of such things as clean hands, tidy hair and quiet movements, etc., a boy or girl may win words of praise which arouse in them feelings which have never been touched before. Again these unhappy children have a chance of com-

ing into close contact with a happy healthy being, the nervous child is coaxed and chaffed out of his nervousness, he is not required to stand up before a class of which he is the dullest member and expose his ignorance and nervousness, he is expected to go on quietly with his own work in his own way. The neurotic child is trained to be sensible and exercise self-control for she has little public notice taken of her eccentricities, and consequently they disappear. The neglected child may be lawless or timorous, but there is little excitement in being lawless without a following, and when all the other children in the class are engaged in their own individual pursuits the following is hard to secure.

It has been found that the children are much happier in these classes than in those which are composed of children of their own physical age but whose mental attainments are normal. In these classes children from 7 to 10 years of age work together thus avoiding the necessity of placing them with children of their mental age who may have reached their 6th or 7th year only. In a slum school this is an important factor as these backward children are often developed in advance of their years in undesirable ways.

By organising classes of this type the children associate with others of their own age in a way in which it would be impossible for them to do had they remained in a normal class. With skilful teaching they are also able to get a longer time among senior scholars than they would otherwise have done.

Previous to the formation of these classes it was not an unknown occurrence for children in the slum districts to leave school having reached the 3rd Standard and being quite unable to read or write with any facility. The work of these classes is in an experimental stage. Specially trained teachers are required for them as much as for work in the recognised schools for defectives.

The classes are helping to deal more satisfactorily with these retarded children but the problem will remain a large and difficult one until it has been brought to bear upon the half million children of this type to which the Medical Officer of the Board of Education refers in his report.

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## A New Graded Scheme of Needlecraft for M.D. Institutions.

THE Course of Lessons in Needlecraft for M.D. children, given to Special School Teachers who attended the C.A.M.W. Short Course held recently in London, forms the basis of a very interesting and practical sewing scheme just issued by the Education Association, and E.N.A. School of Needlecraft of London.

The Scheme is worthy the study of all Special School Teachers. It aims in its earliest stages at developing in the M.D. child the ability to sew *correctly*. The lessons start at the very bottom of the scale and proceed, by easy and attractive stages aided by some very simple apparatus, to develop not only the facility in clumsy fingers to make the right kind of stitches, but also to impart that degree of love and understanding of the task which must precede any permanent educational results.

The lessons are primarily concerned however in bringing the M.D. child to the point where the normal seven year old child starts, that is to say to the point where the making of simple, attractive household articles with ordinary needles, threads, and fabrics is possible. The lessons then proceed along ordinary lines to the making of more advanced articles, garments, etc., always of course by carefully graded steps.