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Patrice M. Costello, Ed.D

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TRENDS IN EDUCATION OF DEAF CHILDREN WITH OTHER HANDICAPS

PATRICE M. COSTELLO, Ed.D.

Trends are almost never clear cut except at the moment when a large majority or a smaller, very articulate group jumps on the bandwagon that was going that way anyway.

Who serve the deaf who have other handicaps? Almost everybody. In fact, it would be most difficult to find a group of deaf children, assembled for purposes of special education, which did not contain children with a simple or a combination of physical, mental, or emotional variations which could be construed as handicapping conditions. The same could be said of hearing children in almost any education program.

What degree of defect or variation from what is considered normal can be called a handicap? It is not important to pursue this, as it has been done many times. What is important is to note that we continually change our minds about what condition or conditions are handicapping. And the whole purpose of special education is to so help the child in his choice of sets of behavior that those which he uses are appropriate. We may also have to change the environment, which changes anyway in response to the needs of the majority and by their efforts. Additional changes we special educators keep to a minimum after decreasing uses of various methods, equipment — crutches, if you will.

Let us examine three very broad groups. The first two: educable and trainable retarded deaf children and youth comprise the largest number of multiply handicapped in the ranks of the deaf. At the moment, there is great official interest in an even larger group: the hearing-impaired retarded. Obviously, if you are going to consider those with lesser hearing losses you open a lot of interesting doors, and attract the attention of some professionals who might otherwise feel inadequate to meet the needs of the *deaf* retarded. Let us, however, focus on the deaf who have some degree of retardation (acknowledging that, as with almost all programs for the deaf, here and there will be a child with rather more hearing than the other children, but for whom there is no other help, or no other program in which he can achieve). In this paper we will consider retarded deaf children, who comprise a large proportion of the number of multiply handicapped deaf children and youth.

Provided we believed they were deaf, how have we handled the retarded deaf? Many forces have worked against their inclusion in educational programs provided for the deaf of normal mental development. Hearing parents have difficulty coping with the special needs of a deaf child. Add a handicapping degree of mental

Dr. Costello is associated with the Research & Training Center in Mental Retardation, Texas Tech University, Lubbock.

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retardation to the picture and parents with little or no counseling can be expected to crumble under the resulting frustrations. We know that deafness alone is educationally retarding, because language and easy communication are parents' and a teacher's basic tools. Little wonder, then, that we continue to find normal deaf children in programs for the retarded. Screening tests by skilled audiometrists and by certified audiologists are not universally available, although services are spreading and improving.

If parents are puzzled by the dual handicap, how do teachers react? Exactly the same way. However, after a period in which the teacher makes every effort to reach the child and help him become a member of a small group, she can turn to the supervisor and such special personnel as the psychologist for knowledge of the child's level and potential. Then, with the help of special materials, techniques and recent developments such as team teaching, open class concepts, the use of aides for more individualized instruction, the child may be accommodated provided the administration sees the child as a deaf child with special problems, and *provided that the staff has the same picture, is understanding, skilled, and cooperative*. Every word in the above sentence except "skilled" means attitudes and beliefs. If you will think about it a bit, you will see that a person without a knowledge of skills and techniques for aiding the child with the dual handicap is the one who says, "This school is not equipped for that kind of child." Yet the school has most of the things such a child needs, including that precious person, the teacher who understands the implications of a hearing loss and, having some special methods of working around the lack of hearing is not overwhelmed by it. Since most of what is needed to provide for the retarded deaf child is in an established program for the deaf, how is it that so often we try, fail, draw back and never try again? Because, as with people who can not work with the deaf because they see, not the child, but a ghost-child. This child, a hearing-child-who-should-have-been (to their way of thinking) continually blinds them to the very human able deaf child who is. So, a teacher of the deaf, used to deaf children, all different but with no grave blockages to reasonably orderly, reasonably swift educational achievement knows about what to expect. The retarded child happens along, all too often with certain undesirable behaviors which are most difficult to alter, and requires a disproportionate amount of the teacher's time. And for what? For very slow, maybe quite imperceptible gains, no matter how hard the teacher and child work. The distance between the other children and this child widens in many ways and teacher, supervisor, special personnel and superintendent are almost as frustrated as the child. If there are house parents and dormitory routines as well, the problems are compounded. What does the teacher see? The ghost child. The normal deaf child-who-should-have-been. Let us ignore the emotional implications and zero in on one thing: should-have-been. Should have been what? Should have been able to achieve. The teacher's expectations then, for a normal deaf child have never been revised to fit the retarded deaf child. This, then, is the crux of the problem.

The teacher, her supervisor and advisor do not know the potential of the child; how many years at what pace must be used to reach it; how to measure gain, if any; and what to teach and how to teach it. Does that sound overwhelming? It is not. We borrow every day from other disciplines for solutions to similar problems with the children with normal mental development. Why not with these children? For example, the potential. We can judge this on the measured level of intelligence, family background, level of hearing and child's use of that hearing, age, personality, and careful study of the child from the framework of a number of disciplines. Be prepared to change this judgement as the child grows, responds, learns.

How many years, at what pace, must be used to help the child reach his potential? Since we keep changing our minds about what is adequate for the deaf child, and how we shall prepare for it and pay for it, expect changes of opinion here,

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too. Above all, know that there will be forces to disrupt the best plans, so be prepared to revise goals quite often. Think less of total years than of pace. There is no point in presenting too many points for a child to grasp. A child may learn one fact, skill, characteristic or what have you and be unable to advance to the next step. What does a teacher do? Many ways of coping are open to the teacher but usually she invents an intermediate step or two between what the student has been able to learn and what seems to be a logical next item. The teacher of retarded children becomes quite skilled in simplicity of presentation and invention of intermediate steps so that she can use materials devised for the regular classroom. There are differences in every classroom, and teachers have been doing these things for years. The more academically gifted do not need many intermediate steps, may grasp many points with one or a few presentations, may not be confused by multiple examples, wide varieties, etc. Many seem to skip over what other children must discover more slowly. So children with minimal academic skills require slower, more careful simple presentation and greater opportunity to practice (to overlearn) basic information and skills.

Can a teacher of the deaf do these things? She is now doing them. If she can banish the ghost child, she can see the deaf retarded child as he is. If she can revise her expectations she will have a realistic future goal and can accept different day-to-day performance and much slower achievement. Best of all, she can be proud of assisting in the steps the child is able to take, at the pace he is able to take them. She then will have learned that this, too, is God's child, and worthy of her efforts.