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VOCATIONAL EVALUATION, TRAINING, AND PLACEMENT OF HEARING IMPAIRED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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“Vocational education should not be regarded as a substitute for a sound academic background but rather as an integrated part of a well-rounded education” (Craig and Collins, 1970). With this in mind, the Milwaukee Public Schools initiated a Work-Study Program for its hearing impaired students in January, 1967. This was possible because of the financial assistance of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the cooperation of the Wisconsin Division for Handicapped Children.

The first step was to establish a plan of student-job evaluation. The Curative Workshop located near downtown Milwaukee was utilized for the initial job evaluations. This agency was selected not only because of its central location but also because of the short-term, comprehensive evaluation which includes medical, psychological, and social work-ups and willingness to accept hearing impaired students. After an initial orientation and adjustment of the staff to the communication problems of these students, they found them willing workers and rewarding to work with.

The Wisconsin Rehabilitation Center for the Deaf located at Delavan, Wisconsin, offers an evaluation program during a four-week summer session. Those Milwaukee Public Schools' students able to attend this session are programmed for either work adjustment or job training immediately upon the opening of school in September. During the 1969-70 school year, the Goodwill Industries

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also became involved in the initial evaluation of some students. The evaluation and training expenses of these students, whether in private or public agencies or institutions, are paid for by the local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

During the evaluation period, the evaluators look for eye-hand-foot coordination, manual dexterity, accuracy and speed, using available tests to determine vocational interest and aptitude. If one observed students in this area, he would see a variety of tests. Students who work on the power-sewing machine are given sheets of paper with dots on them. Their task is to follow the dots with the sewing machine needle. These sheets begin with the simple tasks of following straight lines and progress to more difficult patterns. In the area of assembly, the students are asked to perform a variety of manual tasks including electrical wiring, water-meter assembly, and small motor assembly. In wiring, the students put wires together while following diagrams and written or oral instructions. The students are allowed a specific number of opportunities to perform this task correctly. In the water-meter assembly task, the instructor demonstrates by taking the meter apart and putting it back together. The client has a number of opportunities to practice this and is then evaluated as to speed and accuracy. Small motors are also taken apart and re-assembled. Some students are evaluated in the welding area. In this evaluation, the student must weld two pieces of metal together. Before performing the actual operation with the torch and soldering rod, the welding procedure is simulated with pencils and lines. Then the actual trial is evaluated.

Following the evaluation period, the instructor's records regarding the student's abilities and interests are used to determine appropriate placement. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation counselor from the Milwaukee District Office, the agency personnel, the teacher-counselor from the high school program, and the program administrator from the Milwaukee Public Schools determine whether the student should be started in the work adjustment area or in a skill training area. The decision is based on not only the vocational evaluation results but also the medical, academic achievement, psychological, and social information available. Students are placed in a work adjustment area if, during the evaluation, they exhibited no particular interest, aptitude, or readiness for a specific skill training. During this period, the students have counseling sessions with their instructors regarding emotional stability, maturity, work tolerance, attention span, and

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working in groups. Problems discussed may be related to the setting of realistic goals and objectives, possible re-assignment to another training area, and discussing expectations for the future.

The students in these areas work on sub-contracted jobs for industry and perform such tasks as assembling small items; stuffing brochures; sorting items for number, color, and size; collating pages; and packaging and sealing. These work assignments are set up beginning with the most simple tasks and progressing to the more complex. Many of these assignments are set up in assembly-line style.

Students may progress from the work adjustment area to a specific skill training area or they may enter a skill training area immediately upon the completion of the evaluation. In the office training section, students must learn filing, which includes sorting, alphabetizing, and the methodology of various filing systems; typing; and the use of adding machines, comptometers, and copy machines.

Some students have proven very effective in the area of kitchen training. Here, although the students may not be able to communicate well orally, much of the work is routine or a matter of reading recipes and directions. In this training, all aspects of kitchen work are covered: cleaning pots and pans, dishwashing, salad making, and actual food preparation. These students train in the kitchens of the agencies and prepare the meals for clients who are in full-time training. In addition to kitchen experience, the students must work in the serving lines. Practice in using the cash register is required of everyone and provides a meaningful opportunity to make change.

Other vocational training areas are graphic arts, printing, upholstery, horticulture, small appliance repair, carpentry, machine shop drafting, and varityping. Each student learns the various skills required of the area involved and has actual experience in doing the work.

Other facilities offering specialized training outside the agencies are available for those students who express specific desires and aptitudes. Schools which have been used beneficially by our program offered key punch courses, IBM machine operation, beauty operator training, and wig styling and setting.

As in work adjustment, regularly scheduled counseling sessions are held with the prime objective being job placement. The counselor at the agency, agency placement personnel, and the teacher-

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counselor investigate jobs, assist students with applications, and maintain contact with them as long as they are enrolled in the school program.

The student's afternoon is scheduled back in the classroom. The curriculum for these students includes practical mathematics, practical English, remedial reading, and language and spelling related to vocational areas. One period is spent with the teacher-counselor. Individual or group sessions are held to discuss particular problems. Assistance with vocabulary and language difficulties encountered in work experience is given individually.

The Work-Study Program in the Milwaukee Public Schools has proven extremely beneficial for most of the students. In 1967 there were three graduates who began full-time employment prior to leaving the school program. In 1968 there were nine graduates. Four of these were accepted at Gallaudet College and one in a college preparatory class at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf. The four other students were placed in full-time jobs prior to or shortly after graduation. There were four graduates in the 1968-69 class, all of whom also were employed before school ended. This year, 1970, there were fourteen students who either graduated or terminated from the program. Ten of these have job placements which continued when they completed the school year. The four that have not been placed will continue in their training program through the summer. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation counselor continues the financial assistance and follow-up of the client while the training is completed and placement is effected.

Students who have successfully completed the program can be found in such positions as: power-sewing machine operator, pressman at a printing company (2), machine operator in a machine shop (3), domestic helper in a motel, clerk at Goodwill Industries, beauty operator, factory worker, welder, varitypist (2), Post Office zip code sorting machine operator, bindery worker (2), Milwaukee Asphalt Plant Worker, City of Milwaukee Electric Power Plant Laborer, restaurant worker, linen supply company worker, and sheltered workshop worker. Although all of the students may not have reached their maximum vocational potential, they are, through this opportunity to begin exploration in the work world, ahead of their predecessors who most often began vocational evaluation and skill training after leaving the school program.

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As the deaf child enters the high school, career counseling is extremely important. Aptitude tests are valuable, but only in relation to the individual's preferred interests and enthusiasm. There is no point in training a person for a job that he does not like. The result will no doubt be seen in the bored, unhappy face of the employee. As each person has a variety of interests and attitudes, one should not be selected exclusively for intensive development, but rather, several areas should be thoroughly explored. Vocational survival today depends primarily on flexibility and the capacity to be re-trained in other positions. Since the average worker holds many jobs in a lifetime, the deaf person should not be channeled into only one area, especially with the rapid technological advancements which cause the opening of new fields while closing others.

For the deaf person to function as a contributing member of today's society, he must develop a self-concept apart from the stereotype that overshadows all deaf persons. The teacher who works with hearing impaired children must provide the kind of environment which leads the children in her class to be aware of realistic goals for their futures and master those skills which enable these goals to be reached. If these goals and skills are a part of the educational program beginning in the primary grades, the immaturity and lack of vocational awareness which is prevalent in hearing impaired students would be minimized by the time they reach their late teens and enter vocational training programs.

Craig, W. N. and Collins, J. L., "New Vistas for Competitive Employment for Deaf Persons", *Journal of Rehabilitation of the Deaf*, February, 1970.

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