

JADARA

Volume 4 | Number 1

Article 9

November 2019

Coordination: An Educator Views The Scene*

Donald G. Ferguson
None

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara>

Recommended Citation

Ferguson, D. G. (2019). Coordination: An Educator Views The Scene*. *JADARA*, 4(1). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara/vol4/iss1/9>

COORDINATION: AN EDUCATOR VIEWS THE SCENE*

DONALD G. FERGUSON

During this conference we have been viewing the scene which reminds me of a poster put out recently by VISTA. It includes the catch phrase in vogue among the pop generation—Make the Scene. To this is added at the bottom of the poster the word Better. Make the Scene Better! Making the scene better for the deaf is what we are about in this conference.

When this joint effort was launched on the national level at New Mexico State University a couple of years ago, I was pleased to serve as one of the coordinating reporters. In my report I noted the difficulty participants had in limiting their commentary at a given time to matters pertaining solely to rehabilitation and at another time solely to educational concerns. It seemed to me then and does yet, as I stated in the final report, that “two agencies which must cooperate in an endeavor of serving the very urgent needs of the same population cannot be dealt with simply on a compartmentalized basis even in the abstract.” In what I have to say here, I’ll not arbitrarily view the scene one agency at a time. Let me begin with a few general observations and then end with several, quick-shot recommendations specific to our future work in this region.

DR. FERGUSON is Assistant Dean, College of Education, New Mexico State University.

*Paper delivered at the Dallas Regional Conference on Coordinating Rehabilitation and Education Services for the Deaf, October 21-23, 1969.

I relish this opportunity to share some ideas with you as a person outside the field. But it also gives me pause, because at times I've had the same sensation which Dr. Homer Babbidge had when he began working with the Advisory Committee on Education of the Deaf. He described his feelings at a meeting in Colorado Springs, saying, "I felt as though I were intruding, as though I were peeking through the shuttered window of someone else's home. It was as though I had, without license, scaled the walls of a sanctuary—a place in which only those who realize the enormity of deafness were welcome." This feeling we on the outside occasionally have can be likened to the rejection of foreign tissue by bodies receiving organ transplants. In a sense, though, I do not qualify as an outsider and since I'm not a full-blooded insider, I guess I'll have to settle for contentment in the circumstance of being Mr. In-Between.

What I have alluded to is a sort of insularism by the whole world of the deaf and this leads me to my first observation—the need for improved communication. Reference here is not made to the matter of language handicapping which besets the hearing impaired. I see hazard in the professional isolation which workers in the fields dealing with deafness sometimes retreat into. By so doing, maybe the professionals form a sort of sub-culture much like the deaf themselves are occasionally castigated for. And it is understandable that those with common interests need to keep in constant touch. But the problems of the deaf are society's at large and all who can and will help, once they are informed, need exposure to people in the know. If people in the "work", as you say, restrict their interaction to fellow workers even unintentionally, important contacts with others prominent in their fields are not made. For instance, Samuel Block, Assistant Director of Research with the Railroad Retirement Board and himself deaf, has called the need for employer education a major area of improvement needed. In reports of conferences such as this one, I find lamentably low involvement of representatives from industry; their names are conspicuously absent from the roster of registered participants.

38 COORDINATION: AN EDUCATOR VIEWS THE SCENE*

So are union leaders. Dr. Doin Hicks at the Texas state-level coordinating conference in this series took another tack along this line. He said, "We have been extremely remiss in conveying to the general public an accurate picture of the problems involved in our work." He went on to say, "We have, in fact, even failed to do an adequate job of this with fellow professionals in related fields." I can vouch for this in my contacts in the field of public education which is inhabited by hordes of people who have not given the first thought to the matter of educating young or adult deaf people. At a social event a few years ago, this became vividly clear when I began chatting with an English professor about my interest in working with the deaf. He seemed genuinely interested but gave me the only hesitant response he could come up with—one I'm sure most of you have also had to correct with embarrassment. He asked me if I read braille. Then, too, I'm not at all satisfied that teachers of young deaf children have enough direct contact with adult deaf persons or vice versa, but that is another story.

I don't want to overdo this matter of improving communication with society at large about the problems of the deaf. I realize this is something more easily said than done. But it is essential and we need constant reminders about this obligation.

My second observation also deals with communication—of a different sort. Here I refer to the central problem in helping the hearing impaired attain fulfillment—the problem of overcoming language disability. It would be malpractice for me to say what is right or wrong with regard to comparative emphases that should be placed on language and speech training on the approaches to be taken. But I can observe that when I first entered what Dr. Babbidge likened to a sanctuary, I found a divergence of philosophic positions unparalleled in the world of education. That impression remains fresh in my mind, but I am gratified by the growing number of expressed attitudes such as Dr. Harriett Kopp's when she said at a recent conference, "Through direct confrontation and discussion of divisive issues, it may be possible even-

tually to eliminate the semantic confusions and to ameliorate through fact, those philosophic principles held emotionally which tend to keep us separated organizationally." Facts to support a defensible position derive, of course, through direct confrontation with data systematically gathered as well as with knowledgeable, open people. A spirit of scientified inquiry must prevail in the effort to resolve differences but more importantly to help the hearing impaired achieve communicative skills through the most feasible procedures possible.

The bitter matter of priorities, which has become a national obsession, also touches the related fields of the deaf. It is not difficult, however, to decide that the improvement of communication has the highest priority in these fields. Surely a responsive federal government, which will probably spend \$25 million in the next two years on rubella control programs, can be encouraged to invest additional large sums of money for research on communicative disorders found in those for whom the vaccine came too late and for others like them. When money is diverted away from wartime expenditures, let us hope that several longitudinal studies of the language problems of the deaf will be funded.

On the subject of priorities, I have this to add. The flood of money into education anticipated with the Vietnam solution, we are warned, may not be as massive as hoped. And whatever we receive will not be literally thrown at us as though this were all like a Polish wedding. The competition for funds will be just as lively in the future as is now the case. The yearly budget for the space program alone is \$2 billion more than the annual cost of the operations of all the colleges and universities in the United States. How can we enjoy the luxury of international prestige over our space age at the expense of this possibly being known as the inhuman age? Perhaps the philosopher Lewis Mumford overstates the case but his words should be deeply considered. He said: "The best hope space exploration offers is that this colossal perversion of energy, thought, and other precise human resources may awaken a spontaneous collective reaction sufficient to

40 COORDINATION: AN EDUCATOR VIEWS THE SCENE*

bring us down to earth again. Any square mile of inhabited earth has more significance for man's future than all the planets in our solar system. It is not the outermost reaches of space, but the innermost recesses of the human soul that now demand our most exploration and cultivation." Agencies which work with the deaf and rely on the federal government to some degree or another must never relent in making their needs known.

The other day President Nixon tried to calm down irritated oil men threatened with their depletion allowances being cut. Apparently, a few of the President's zealous staff were releasing startling prospects which displeased the oil companies. President Nixon said to them, "Oh, they have many good ideas but don't know anything about politics." I hope he couldn't make such a remark about you except for the fact about good ideas. The age of political naivete by professionals at the local, state, or federal levels had better be over.

One last general observation. You have all read statements by Dr. Boyce Williams and heard him over the years expound his wise contention that the industrial arts and home economics program should provide the medium for prevocational education. In other words, vocationalism is not the function of schools for the deaf where choices are set in concrete at graduation time. The creation in schools of adaptable, flexible young deaf men and women ready for employment training after graduation obviously requires that industrial training for them be available. Post-high school vocational education in various institutional settings must also be accessible to the deaf. These are all fundamentals with which you are certainly familiar and with which you probably agree at least in part.

Dr. Robert Hutchins, well-known scholar and former President of the University of Chicago, carries this line of thinking considerably further and it is worth pondering. He wonders if the long-held value and esteem placed on work might be displaced out of necessity by a value on learning.

He contends we are making the transition from a working to a learning society and that education should prepare people to go on learning, presumably for their own pleasurable activities and for the civic responsibilities that assure the health of our democracy. In truth, the unskilled worker like the farm worker is almost a quaint tradition. The skilled worker is also on the wane.

When Willard Wirtz was Secretary of Labor, he said that machines can do, on the average, whatever a high school graduate can do. What does the future hold for work and in what proportion will it be to leisure? How do we educate for the future when at best we can only be sure of one thing—it won't be like the present? How much will government-funded security and private economic safeguards displace the value placed on human productivity so fervently held until now? Indeed, the excess productive capacity of the United States already is between \$30 and \$60 billion a year. We have billions of bushels of food we cannot get rid of and could produce billions more if we wanted to. And most of that productivity, not tomorrow—but now—can be arrived at without manpower. All this in an atmosphere traditionally valuing work and production by people! Not long ago the *U.S. News and World Report* predicted that human productivity even in the home will be displaced by automation with computers that make up your grocery list, remind you of appointments and anniversaries, take care of your finances, pay your bills, write your checks, figure out your income tax, and answer your telephone. In remarking about this prophecy Hutchins said, "Reproduction will be the only function performed by human labor."

The point is made and it stretches the imagination. And it raises a whole host of questions, some of which have already been mentioned. But most basic is the question of educational purpose. Is Hutchins correct in saying that the object of education is not manpower but manhood? And if we are indeed moving toward the time when the processes of additional learning and productive leisure will supplant traditional work, what mistakes are we making right now in terms

42 COORDINATION: AN EDUCATOR VIEWS THE SCENE*

of the immediate future? It is enough of a jolt currently to realize how quickly vocational skills learned in school become obsolete and are, therefore, often wasteful efforts; consequently, we move more toward prevocational emphases on job adjustment, proprieties of the world of work, attitude development, and so on. But now what do we do to prepare students for the realization that full employment is an utter impossibility and that nearly full and acceptable unemployment is the greater likelihood? All I can say in response at this time is that problems should be seen for the possibilities they hold. If lifetime learning instead of productive work as we have known it will occupy proportionately the lion's share of our time, if in other words we come to a two or three day work week, then community and junior colleges, adult education programs, and civic participation in general absolutely must be more open and applicable to the deaf. And we shouldn't have to wait for the realities of tomorrow on that score.

So much for generalities.

When the national conference concluded in Las Cruces, the statement was made that the time was ripe for specifics right then and there. Nevertheless, additional state-level and now these regional sessions have been conducted and general recommendations still tend to flow. This is to be expected among agency workers who may not have coordinated efforts on a grand scale in the past. Patience while people get acquainted through general commentary will pay off. However, rapport presumably seems established at all levels and interrelationships are such that specific action can and must be taken. Prolonged additional general discussions which may lead only to more dialogue are not what is needed. The most important recommendation that can come out of this meeting is the action plan decided upon for getting this region on the move toward immediate implementation of recommendations for change. What are we going to do? Who's going to do what, when, and how? What machinery can we invent?

What would it be like if we had a Regional Coordinating Center or consortium, call it what you will, which would be a

voluntary service to both member agencies? Confederations of school districts on a regional basis have been quite common through the school study council movement over the past 25 years. Some have been highly successful. Why not something like that for us? I'll not go into detail about the organization or administration of such a prospective service center except to say that fees need not be high for any contributing member school or rehabilitation office because the staff need not be extensive. Then, too, government support could be sought. Primarily, an executive secretary would be needed and if he were housed on a university campus he would have access to graduate student assistance to get at the tasks of closing the gap between what is and what ought to be. A representative steering committee would be in order with a balance of educators and rehabilitation workers and with built-in assurances that the deaf be included on such a committee.

What could be expected from such a Center? I have listed several projects that could be moved forward collectively in this region by such a spearheading staff, with which the best laid plans of this meeting and its predecessors can be brought to fruition.

1. First of all, the Coordinating Center would need to comb all recent national and regional reports with recommendations about the deaf. I refer here to reports such as the so-called Babbidge report as well as others more specifically geared to the topic of this conference. What are the priorities? A position paper—a sort of report of reports—could be drawn up for the advice and consent of the steering committee after circulation among member agencies in the five states. The Center then could proceed with compliance about what constitutes “first things.”

2. If such a Center were created, the Executive Secretary should assess this region including an over-all descriptive analysis of Region VII along with a specific demographic study of the deaf population. What is our uniqueness? Who are our deaf? How many belong to minority groups other than the one to which their hearing handicap assigns them and

44 COORDINATION: AN EDUCATOR VIEWS THE SCENE*

what are their special needs? Ten years ago only 17 percent of the deaf nation wide were in white collar jobs as compared with 47 percent for the general working population. Does this disparity obtain today in our region? Two years ago, the most widespread job demands nation wide were for machinists, machine operators, toolmakers, aircraft mechanics, model and pattern makers, assemblers, electricians, and welders. Is this the case in our region currently? I doubt it. What are the premium needs here in our five-state area?

3. With vital statistics about Region VII at hand, a feasibility study could be conducted pertaining to the use of mobile services. The peculiarities of our geography are conducive to circuit-rider approaches to isolated areas which would not otherwise be served. These might be comprehensive diagnostic units for anything from the early identification of deafness to evaluations for job placement. It may or may not be the function of a regional coordinating center to start such a program or finance it. But at least, when mobile services are attempted in a given area within this region, the Coordinating Center should disseminate full descriptions of such a program to others.

4. The Center could publish regionally what was called for at the conference on New Vistas for Competitive Employment of Deaf Persons held at the University of Pittsburgh in 1968. That is a directory or registry which would include "an extensive review of careers, occupations, and vocational opportunities . . . in order to determine in what areas the deaf are not now but could be employed." Such a document would include statements about the training needed for entrance into these new areas. It might be thought of as a Dictionary of Occupational Titles for the Deaf.

5. Directly related to the preceding suggestion should be a follow-up study with which a Coordinating Center could assist in order to determine what happens to our deaf students and clients as a result of their having been with us. We're not like automotive companies which can readily call back products because of defective parts. But wherever we

can approximate this close tie in with our end-products, so much the better.

6. Might it not be worthwhile for the Center to conduct a study of the effects of case-load closures being used as the measures of counselor success in the effective rehabilitation of the deaf? Such a study should have regional and national implications. A scrutinizing look at this criterion of effectiveness should help give defense for differentiated case loads and other measures where the realities of deafness are being dealt with, assuming that the study would conclude with such results. (And it very probably would.)

7. It would hardly cost much for this proposed Center to orchestrate the chorus of requests that should emanate from this region for placing a vocational technical post high school or series of them for the deaf in these five states.

8. The Center could help organize seminars for the education of employers and union representatives. At the very least, a central staff could help this endeavor through the preparation of kits of materials and planning suggestions. How many employers know of the ability of the deaf person to concentrate on a job to the extent most do? Are they aware of the record of *very* low turnover rates among the deaf? What realistic defense is there for shutting the deaf out of many apprentice-training programs? What compensating value might accrue to an industry which invests in interpreters for the deaf to be on hand for assistance in training programs? Good seminar questions, in my view.

9. Would this Center not be worth its existence if it did nothing more than organize an effort to develop a regionally sound curriculum for the multiply-handicapped deaf?

10. Why not have the Center put out a periodical that amounts to a journal of best practices? For instance, someone in Louisiana has a sheltered workshop that deserves more publicity than it has ever received. The Texas School for the Deaf is doing something unique in a summer program for prevocational students which few know much about. Arkan-

46 COORDINATION: AN EDUCATOR VIEWS THE SCENE*

sas makes inroads into the building trades for deaf trainees. Oklahoma develops a work-study program worth of emulation. New Mexico comes up with an exemplary training program for involving house parents in this whole picture. If these examples are really stories that come true, let's have a Coordinating Center spread the good word about them—**instantly!**

11. Along this same line, why not have the Center press for a pilot program somewhere in the region that involves rehabilitation counselors and teachers in a full-scale, unique arrangement in the school setting. This might include contact of counselors with younger students, all manner of curricular planning, coordinated service in depth on the same site. Then issue a monograph that tells all about the experiment.

12. Wouldn't it be in order for such a Coordinating Center to collaborate with the Captioned Films media operations at the University of Tennessee and New Mexico State University in area demonstrations of the use of media in prevocational teaching? Along this line could not such a Center help arrange the development of curricular materials which would inculcate appropriate attitudes for the world of work without the teacher's intervening with a moralizing or telling stance?

These are just a few of the activities in which a Coordinating Center for Region VII could become involved. Of course there are many significant developments which are taking place and will continue at the state level of necessity because of divergent needs and program variations. And there are many improvements that only a federal effort will bring to fruition such as the creation of a National Rehabilitation Counselor Corps fashioned somewhat like the Teacher Corps to recruit additional people and interest more universities in programs for work in rehabilitation services. And I do recommend such a Corps. Nevertheless, there are many mountains to climb in our five-state area and those of us who know our own regional terrain need to get packed organiza-

tionally in some way for the trip that leads to the summit of many of our problems.

REFERENCES

- Babbidge, Homer D., Jr., "A View from the Outside." *Education of the Deaf, The Challenge and the Charge*, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1967, page 9.
- Block, Samuel A., "Economic Horizons of Deafness." *Accent on Unity, Horizons on Deafness*, Proceedings of National Forum I, Council of Organizations Serving the Deaf, Washington, D. C., April 24-27, 1968, page 72.
- Craig, William N. and James L. Collins, "New Vistas for Competitive Employment of Deaf Persons—A Summary." *New Vistas for Competitive Employment of Deaf Persons*, Washington, D. C.: Social and Rehabilitation Services, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1968, page 100.
- Ferguson, Donald G., "Rehabilitation Looks at the Education of the Deaf." *National Conference for Coordinating Rehabilitation Services for the Deaf*, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1967, page 33.
- Hicks, Doin, "Preschool Section Meetings." *A Report of the Texas Conference on the Education and Rehabilitation of the Hearing Impaired*, Denton, Texas: Texas Woman's University, April 25-26, 1968, page 15.
- Hutchins, Robert M., "Are We Educating Our Children for the Wrong Future?" *Saturday Review*, September 11, 1965.
- Kopp, Harriett Green, editor, "Summary of Discussions." *Accent on Unity, Horizons on Deafness*, Proceedings of National Forum I, Council of Organizations Serving the Deaf, Washington, D. C., April 24-27, 1968, page 72.
- Mumford, Lewis, "Prize or Lunacy." *Newsweek*, July 7, 1969, page 61.