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A WORK-STUDY PROGRAM FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING YOUTH

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Division of Vocational Rehabilitation counselors serving deaf clients are becoming increasingly involved with school programs. This major step forward is for the most part an outgrowth of efforts by the Rehabilitation Services Administration which implemented the change through the 1967 National Conference Coordinating Educational Services for the Deaf headed by Dr. Marshall Hester (1967). Along with this increased involvement with academic facilities goes a primary responsibility to improve the vocational-technical education offered to deaf youth. The program described below is one suggested way in which rehabilitation counselors working with educators can bring about this improvement.

Under the provisions of the Vocational Education Act of 1963, and more recent legislation, monies are available through State Boards of Vocational Education that would enable day and residential schools for deaf youth to provide work-study programs for their students (Venn, 1968-1969). In view of this financial support and the tremendous need to provide improved vocational education for deaf young people, it is felt that school programs having ten or more deaf students of high school age should seriously consider instituting into their curricula a work-study program. A basic description of this type of program, a rationale for its establishment as well as a plan for its implementation are as follows:

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A Description of the Work-Study Type Programs and Reasons for Its Use with Deaf Youth

A work-study program is one in which the student gets his basic level of vocational skills in school shop classes. When approximately sixteen, or else in his junior or senior year, the student goes out into the community in an industry or business, and, under the supervision of a work-study coordinator, he works part-time in the vocational area in which he plans to major. At school through the help of the coordinator he receives related training and through academic teachers the student is given the English and mathematics and other general education subjects. Generally these academic courses take on much greater meaning to the deaf student when given within the framework of a concrete work situation in contrast to the more abstract environment of a formal classroom. The essential reasons work-study programs are needed with deaf youth are:

1. Many educational programs for deaf high school aged students are too small to provide any suitable vocational courses and even the largest schools cannot keep their vocational machinery, shops, and instructors up to date. This means that the vocational education of deaf students, if it is dependent on existing facilities, tends to be deficient (Kalb, 1968; Vernon & Fischler, 1966). As work-study programs utilize the actual personnel and physical plants of industry and business, they can offer a more extensive and more modern vocational background for deaf youth than is now being given.
2. Deaf youth need interaction with hearing people. Vocational planning should be structured to counteract the dependent attitudes and protective backgrounds many of these young people have when they leave school for employment and adult responsibilities. Work-study programs would gradually introduce deaf youth into the kind of competitiveness and standards required by business and industry while through the work-study coordinator they would get

the counsel needed for successfully making this transition.

3. The deaf person placed on a part-time job through the work-study program has an opportunity to establish himself with a company and within the business community. This gives much greater assurance to the student that at graduation he will be able to find employment and that it will be in the field for which he has studied.

Outline for the Structure of a Work-Study Program

In establishing a work-study program for deaf youth, certain factors should be incorporated into the basic structure.

1. *Student-Coordinator Ratio*—In work-study programs for hearing students one coordinator generally serves about 35 pupils which is a ratio comparable to the load of the public school classroom teacher. Just as academic classes for the deaf must be smaller, it is also necessary that a work-study coordinator with the deaf have more time available per student. A recommended ratio in a work-study program with children who are deaf would be one coordinator to every 8 to 15 students.

It is the coordinator's responsibility to locate or evaluate suitable employment placements for the students, correlate their related and academic subject matter with their job experiences, and, in general, help them get from their employment the knowledge and attitudes necessary for successful functioning in the world of work when they leave school.

2. *Rate of Pay*—Employers pay the students at a student learners rate. The law is structured so that this can be less than minimum wage laws require when cleared with the U. S. Department of Labor, this acts as an inducement to the employers to become involved and to take a deaf trainee.

3. *Ages of Students*—Laws regarding work permits, safety, and insurance usually preclude taking in youngsters below the age of 16 years into a work study program. Fortunately, it is also the minimum age at which a deaf student would generally be ready and in many cases 17 or 18 might be better, depending on the age at which the school involved customarily terminates the youth's education. Another consideration is that certain high risk industries require 18 as the minimum age of entry.
4. *Financing a Coordinator's Salary*—Under present laws federal funds are made available through State Boards of Vocational Education which may be used to pay a coordinator's salary.
5. *Qualifications of a Coordinator*—A person filling a coordinator's position should, in general, have had recent experience in industry, should have had first hand knowledge of deaf people, preferably as a teacher or counselor, and should hopefully meet the basic requirements of a vocational or academic teacher.

The Illinois School for the Deaf has instituted a work study program this year under the direction of Farrell Mitchell, a former rehabilitation counselor and state consultant. Hopefully, other state schools will make similar improvements. Day schools, in particular, need to add this type program if they are to better meet the needs of deaf students.

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