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The Integration of a Blind Student into the Regular Classroom of the Oak Harbor Public Schools

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**THE INTEGRATION OF A BLIND STUDENT
INTO THE REGULAR CLASSROOM OF THE OAK HARBOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**A Research Paper
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education**

**by
Robert C. Hostetter
August 1963**

THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING
THE PLAN 2 REQUIREMENT FOR THE
COMPLETION OF A RESEARCH PAPER.

Loretta M. Miller
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

I. THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this paper was (1) to study the problem of integrating a blind student into the regular self-contained classroom of the Oak Harbor public school system and (2) to provide the writer with information on a program of learning for a blind person in a regular classroom.

III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Blind. A person is considered legally blind when vision is 20/200 or less in the better eye with corrective lens. In this study, reference is made to a congenital totally blind person.

Braille. Braille is a system of printing and transcribing for the blind invented in 1829 by Louis Braille. All words and numbers are represented by a cell of six dots punched and raised on paper.

Braille slate. The braille slate and stylus is the traditional device for writing braille by hand. The slate consists of a metal guide which may be mounted on a solid board.

Braille stylus. A braille stylus is a pointed steel punch with a handle used with a braille slate to punch the braille dots.

Braille writer. The braille writer is a machine that makes it possible for a blind person to punch braille letters in paper, thus eliminating the process of punching each cell with a stylus.

Specialized equipment. Reference is made to equipment that makes learning by the blind more meaningful. This equipment includes braille writer, contour relief maps for study with the fingers, talking books, and talking book machine.

Talking books. The talking books have been recorded through the efforts of the Library of Congress, American Printing House for the blind, and the American Foundation of the Blind. The books are recorded at low speed so a maximum of material can be presented on one record.

Talking book machine. This machine is a long playing record player on which talking book records are played.

CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHIES CONCERNING THE EDUCATION OF THE BLIND

Society has placed on the public schools the responsibility of educating its members. For years it was believed that persons with handicaps should not be educated in the public schools but in institutional schools or the home. In the past half-century the blind have been more readily accepted in public schools. However, there still is need for further understanding and acceptance.

I. INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATION FOR THE BLIND

A handicapped child, like any normal child, is entitled to the education which will allow him to become what he is capable of being. Every child should be given an opportunity to learn as much as possible.

At present, there are differing opinions as to the method of educating the blind child. Some educators believe blind children should be placed in residential educational institutions which treat only blind students. Here, trained specialists could devote much of their time to individual instruction. With all of the blind children attending a

single school, it is possible to purchase the specialized equipment, which is too expensive for schools where only a few blind students are enrolled.

Pelone believes the education of blind children in a segregated setting is justifiable only when enough blind children with similar problems can be brought together to warrant offering such services(9:7).

II. PUBLIC EDUCATION FOR THE BLIND

Another opinion is that the blind child should remain in his local community, attend the local schools, and participate in the activities open to other children. The American Foundation for the Blind's "Pine Brook Report" states:

No family or community should place upon a blind child the burden thus developed when his specialized needs are given greater consideration than is given to the basic and fundamental needs inherent in him as a child. Sending a child away from the home and community tends to magnify the overtones; keeping a child in the family tends to minimize them (1:13).

The report continues:

If it is possible to meet the individual needs of blind children sociologically and educationally in their local communities, it seems wise for them to remain in their homes and enjoy the rights and share the responsibilities of being members of a family group and of being citizens in their communities (1:25).

Before a blind child is placed into the regular classroom several factors must be studied. (1) Is the child able

to compete socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically in the regular classroom? (2) Is this the type of program the parents want for their youngster? Are they willing to help both the child and the school to provide the best kind of experiences for him? (3) Is an agency for the blind or a resource person available to work with the child and the school? (4) Can the necessary materials be provided to enable him to function adequately? (5) Is the school considering placement for the blind child willing to accept the challenge, at least on an experimental basis (5:157)?

With these factors in mind, the Oak Harbor Schools have agreed to accept a totally blind boy into their classrooms on a trial basis. By enrolling a blind child in a public school, educators are helping both child and the group to accept individual differences. Each child participating in such an experience will have greater respect for the limitations and potentials of others. The blind child, will be helped to take his place in a seeing world (5:160).

CHAPTER III

PLACING THE CHILD IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM

This chapter will be concerned with the process of placing a blind child into a regular classroom. It will mention the basic roles of the teacher and the principal. Some suggestions will be made for adapting the curriculum to include specialized training for the blind individual.

I. THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR'S ROLE

The most effective assistance administrative personnel can give is to make it known that the school welcomes the opportunity to serve the blind child as a student. The admission of a blind child to a school setting with sighted children is not frequent. An announcement by the school administration will help to eliminate prejudices which the staff may hold concerning the child's admission and acceptance (9:51).

The school principal may contribute the most to the success of educating a blind child. The principal who thinks of blind children as having the same needs and individual differences as all children will exert every effort to see that all of the regular program is available to the blind child (1:34).

The school principal should also explain to the staff members the limitations faced by the child. The staff should be willing to accept the blind student without feeling pity or sorrow. How effectively a public school program meets the developmental needs of blind children will depend upon the skill of the professional staff in meeting the needs of the sighted child.

II. GROUP ACCEPTANCE

Meyer states, "There is no greater socializing influence within the community than the public school. As part of the public school system the blind child is directly affected by all of its influences" (2:81). For the schools to have the responsibility of socializing the child, it is necessary that the blind child be understood and accepted by the other students.

Cruickshank's Psychology of Exceptional Children and Youth suggests factors which, according to the blind, sighted persons should be aware of in their relationships with the blind:

1. The blind would appreciate treatment like that of seeing persons.
2. The blind want persons to treat them without embarrassment.

3. If assistance and help is necessary, they want it without pity.

4. The blind feel a need for better understanding for feelings and problems (3:225).

The blind child should be accepted by his classmates on a non-sentimental basis. The basic methods of helping a blind child to become part of a group are similar to those used in presenting any new child to the class: (1) he needs the feeling of security and acceptance, (2) he needs to participate and enjoy new experiences. To achieve these goals the classroom teacher must keep in mind several principles. First, the teacher should help the blind pupil become familiar with his physical surroundings. The teacher should make sure the pupil is familiar with the location of items in the room, giving him the opportunity to "look" things over before the opening of school.

Second, the teacher and the other children should develop some techniques for clarifying situations for the blind pupil. If possible the group should know about the child's handicap beforehand. The teacher should point out how the child uses his other senses to help him in his daily routine. If the class asks questions about the handicapped, they should be answered honestly in a matter-of-fact, accepting way. When a teacher follows this approach,

the students will follow him. Rather than look for the blind pupil's shortcomings, the teacher should emphasize his positive traits.

Third, the teacher should help him participate in satisfying group experiences. Care must be taken to see that the youngsters do not give too much help to their handicapped friend. The class environment should offer plenty of opportunity to use his other senses. While doing this the teacher may encourage all of the students to use all of their senses more acutely (5:157-8).

III. LIMITATIONS OF THE BLIND

It is necessary for the entire school to understand the limitations that accompany the blind. Blindness restricts the individual in three basic ways: (1) in the range and variety of concepts, (2) in the ability to get about, and (3) in the control of the environment (9:49).

Sometimes there will be work going on in which the blind child cannot participate. He should be helped to find another type of activity. The teacher should not be disturbed by this; throughout the blind person's life there will be occasions when he is unable to participate in the same way as his peers. If he can be helped to accept this

fact gradually, in situations in which he feels secure, his real limitations will never come as a shock to him (5:60).

IV. EQUIPMENT NECESSARY FOR THE BLIND IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM

Each blind child should be provided with equipment to help him learn and also help him function effectively as an individual. Certain general supplies of a school can be used by both blind and sighted children. It is unnecessary for a school district to buy specialized equipment if general classroom equipment will suffice.

The most important material need of a blind child in a class with sighted pupils is braille and recorded books which match the ink print books of his sighted classmates. It is also suggested there be a sufficient number of braille or recorded books for his pleasure reading.

A list of specialized equipment desirable for a beginning program for a blind child would include braille slates and stylus, braille writer, contour map and globes, talking books, talking book machine, tape recorder, text-books in braille to match the regular class texts, and a typewriter to write daily lessons.

V. CURRICULUM

The young blind child forms his own concept of his environment as he grows into it. In forming his concept of the world about him, the child must rely to a great extent upon his tactual, auditory, and kinesthetic experiences. These concepts, incomplete and distorted as they may be, suffice for his purposes and satisfy the child's restricted curiosity. A desire to know more about things and to know them in reality must often be awakened and encouraged in blind children (3:233).

The difference between teaching general subject matter to a blind child and any other student is found in the presentation of subject matter, the special equipment needed, and the objective evaluations of results in order to make sure the learning experiences are beneficial and real to the blind child. The teacher should use care to provide experiences to the blind child which sighted children readily gain by observation.

Mastery of any subject requires the blind student to use his ability to listen, analyze, and remember what he hears during his years of study. He must learn to operate his equipment with sufficient skill to conserve his energy and to work rapidly enough to solve the daily assignments. A certain amount of finesse and self-control is gained

through actual living in a school environment where the climate is good for all children. This type of climate is productive for the blind child when he can gain skill in judging the amount of help he needs from the teacher and his classmates. When he can experience the feeling of strength and confidence, he can refuse help he does not need. The teacher should recognize and help the pupil grow in his responsibility for the efficient use of his equipment and care of his books in the classroom.

In adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of the blind student, Able suggests that the teacher (1) allow sufficient time for orientation, (2) provide help from those who see to interpret experiences which may not be clear for the blind child, and (3) be skilled in evaluating the experience in order to determine that which may not have been learned by the blind child (2:319).

Arithmetic. In subjects where arithmetic is involved, the blind child should be given time to become familiar with the manipulation of numbers. The use of such tangible items as triangles, squares, and cubes is suggested to develop concepts of shapes and sizes. The use of pints, quarts, and gallons to develop liquid measure concepts and of rulers to gain concepts of linear measure is helpful. Because the blind must rely so heavily upon the kinesthetic sense, it

behooves the teacher to constantly provide activities which are kinesthetic in nature. The classroom teacher may obtain satisfactory results by using a unit organization in arithmetic. The blind child should be expected to live up to class standards, but he may need more individual instruction.

Reading. Teaching reading to a blind person can be done best by a specialist. If one is not available, the classroom teacher will need to keep in mind the general objectives for teaching reading to sighted students. All causes of tension and nervousness must be removed. Because the blind must read with their fingers, they must have good posture and have their books parallel to the edge of the desk. The teacher should have the blind child interrupt his reading occasionally to exercise. The tension which builds up when a child begins to read needs to be minimized. The blind child should not read sentences aloud word by word. He should be trained to use complete thoughts when reading orally. The teacher should provide numerous opportunities to hear the blind read. Like the sighted child, the blind child advances by experiencing success (4:35).

Spelling. In providing an adequate spelling program for a blind youngster, the teacher should keep in mind three objectives in the teaching of spelling. The blind need to

gain the ability to spell four or five thousand words commonly used in writing, (2) learn to spell words in school and to recognize them throughout life as he meets them in reading, and (3) correlate spelling knowledge with all other reading and writing experiences (8:65).

While carrying out a spelling program designed to satisfy the above objectives, the teacher should maintain a clear speech pattern because a great deal of the blind pupil's language learning is based on auditory training. The teacher must continuously work toward establishing good speech habits. The blind should be encouraged to spell orally whenever possible. Another helpful aid is to communicate with the sighted on the typewriter. Typing should be taught as soon as possible to the blind, not later than the fourth grade (6:265).

Speech. Often the blind person's speech pattern will not be developed properly. The resulting disorders in the speech of the blind are due to the fact that congenitally blind persons must learn speech without being able to learn the formation of speech sounds and accompanying bodily movements and gestures by visual imitation. The blind usually have less vocal variety in their speech and they also lack modulation. The blind tend to speak at a slower rate and somewhat louder than the sighted. A blind person depends

solely on the accoustic imitation and production of speech; therefore, he may use less lip movement in the articulation of sounds. It is suspected that observers become unduly sensitive to small defects in the blind, tending to judge them more unfavorably than they would seeing persons (3:237-9).

Social studies and science. In providing programs of social studies and science, the teacher must use all of the methods he uses with sighted students plus a great many more models. The objectives of the teacher should not be different just because the child is handicapped. However, he will need to offer more kinesthetic and auditory experiences (8:71). He must constantly keep in mind that the blind student may need individual instruction. When such assistance is given, care must be taken not to contribute to the dependency of the blind child.

Music and art. One area of the curriculum where the blind child can have success is in creative activities. The blind can enjoy music as well as anyone, perhaps more so due to his more highly trained hearing. Blind persons have been encouraged in the past to participate in musical endeavors as a means of support. The child in the classroom should participate in the regular basic instruction, with extra assistance if reading musical notes is necessary.

Art is another area where the blind can experience success. The instructor may develop insights into the ways a blind child sees his environment through art projects. In the modeling activities of the blind, objects receive their proportion by the value they have for the individual in a given situation. Thus, the perspective of the blind in modeling is a perspective of value. A danger persists when the teacher tries to impose visual characteristics. "The most primitive creative work born in the mind of a blind person and produced with his own hands is of greater value than the most effective imitation" (3:237). By arranging for creative experiences, the teacher may observe (1) heightened curiosity in the art area as well as in educational skills and performances, (2) strengthened abilities to perceive with all sensory organs, and (3) increased tactual skill (7:21).

Physical education. It is difficult to provide physical education for the blind with sighted pupils. Good orientation and the selection of appropriate activities will make the teacher feel more secure. Again, the objectives should be the same for the blind as those for the sighted. Particular training towards independence, initiative, and intelligent following of directions are important. Because blind children cannot easily imitate action, they must learn

to follow directions accurately and intelligently. Quiet order is a necessity in the teaching of physical education skills to the blind since so much depends upon careful listening. A developmental program is desirable in teaching the physical skills. One of the first activities a teacher would use is developing independence and coordination through running, skipping, and galloping. Some other physical education activities that might be included in a program are rhythms and dancing, story plays, individual and group stunts, tumbling, self-testing activities, and the use of various apparatus: rings, trapeze, vertical ropes, side horse, trampoline, and mats.

Extra-curricular. It is important that the blind child have every opportunity to be an integral part of his group of sighted friends at school. Some children need extra help in moving into social and recreational group experiences. The teacher must be on the alert to encourage this activity through groups such as the Y.M.C.A., Scouts, or other youth organizations.

Home-school relations. The American Foundation of the Blind makes some worthwhile statements concerning the responsibilities of the home and the school to each other. When the child enters school, a close relationship between the home and the school will help foster his optimum

development. The following suggestions are made by the American Foundation for the Blind as a means of developing a good relationship:

1. Parents and child should be encouraged to visit the school prior to his enrollment. Such a visit affords an opportunity for the parents, teacher and child to become acquainted, for the blind child to meet some of the other children and to learn about some of the physical aspects of the school.

2. Parents should be encouraged to visit the school for individual conferences initiated by either the parent or the teacher as the need may arise.

3. Teachers should be encouraged to visit the homes of their pupils in order to become better acquainted with the child's whole family, his home and his neighborhood.

4. Frequent informal contacts with the parents tend to build a sense of security in the child as he sees his parents and his teacher cooperating in his behalf.

5. Parents should be encouraged to learn braille in order to assist the child with his work. A knowledge of braille can give parents a keener understanding of the learning the child is experiencing (1:45-7).

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

In this study the writer attempted (1) to study the problems of integrating a blind person into the regular classroom and (2) to provide information on setting up a program of learning for a blind person.

First, a study of the philosophies pertaining to the education of blind individuals was reviewed. Two main philosophies were discussed: (1) the residential school approach and (2) the public school approach. The residential school can supply specialized teachers and equipment, the public school can supply the environment with sighted students.

Second, there was a study of the ways of integrating the blind child into the classroom. In educating the blind in the public schools, the school should provide the specialized equipment necessary. The objectives in teaching subjects to the blind are the same as those for teaching of sighted students; however, the methods used may be limited. They may need more individual help than their sighted classmates, but care must be taken not to give help to the point where they become dependent. The teacher should not always expect the same work from the blind as from the sighted pupils. There will be occasions when it will be impossible

for the blind to participate in class activity. This is a fact the blind need to realize, and the public school is one of the best environments available for such understanding.

Many good teachers have found that after teaching blind children they were able to do a much better job with sighted students. They were organizing their material more carefully, were more specific in explanations, and were speaking or reading aloud what they were previously writing on the chalkboard. These teachers learned that such techniques not only helped their classes to learn with greater ease but also helped to gain the attention of children who lacked motivation to learn.

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