

FOCUS ON MENTAL RETARDATION: THE HARC PROGRAM

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Moderately retarded children are those whose rate of learning is less than one half that of their normal peers and who experience serious difficulty in adapting to their environment. They are traditionally labeled trainable mentally retarded. Nearly all of the earliest efforts to educate the retarded were aimed at these TMR's. (Evans and Apffel, 1969)

The first public school classes for the moderately retarded in the United States were established in St. Louis in 1912 (Wallin, 1966). However there was no significant growth in such programs for more than thirty years. Parents were forced to bear the major burden of providing care and training for their retarded youngsters. In search of relief, they banded together to form community parent groups to work on their common problems. During the early 1950's these groups joined forces to form what is now the National Association for Retarded Citizens to promote the welfare of all retarded persons. Parent influence exerted from both within and outside of the N.A.R.C. structure has been the dominant force in obtaining legislative and community support for programs for the retarded. As a result, it is estimated that by 1973 more than half of the approximately 122,500 school-age moderately retarded pupils were enrolled in special education day schools and classes in the United States (Dunn, 1973); most of the remainder were accommodated in private or community supported schools or institutions.

As we move toward adequate educational opportunities for the TMR's, new demands are being created for services for the more severely retarded. Improvements in medical care contributing to a decline in infant mortality have led to a corollary increase in survivors with serious mental and physical defects. Life expectancy for the retarded, too, is lengthening. Although recent court decisions no longer permit school systems to exclude these children, it is a rare school system which provides comprehensive programs for severely retarded students (Sontag, Burke And York, 1973).

Nor can such programs be instantly established. Time is needed for the orderly expansion of existing programs and efficient preparation of new facilities, staff and curricula. This new challenge reaffirms the value of the long-standing cooperation in Hawaii between all public, community, and private agencies serving as resources for handicapped children. The Department of Education has looked to Island Associations for Retarded Children to meet the needs of lower-functioning retarded children for whom the Department lacked appropriate in-house accommodations.

Hawaii Association for Retarded Children

An exemplary model of this relationship is that between the Department of Education and the Hawaii Association for Retarded Children. Organized in 1954 to represent parents of retarded children on Oahu, HARC became fully functional in 1957. Following the pattern of similar groups throughout the country, the Association has steadily grown in membership, influence and accomplishment. From the original day care centers, established to provide little more than "baby sitting" relief to parents, HARC has expanded to a school system staffed with fully qualified special education teachers providing services for trainable and multiply handicapped children and adults for whom no other programs are available. It operates classes located in seven centers on Oahu serving 250 moderately retarded clients of whom approximately 100 are preschool and early school age children.

It is not, however, the goal nor the purpose of HARC to provide direct school services. The Association assumes that responsibility only on an interim basis while exerting its major influence towards expediting the acceptance of all children into school programs conducted under the auspices of the Department of Education. It provides its educational services to the Department of Education under an arrangement whereby each school district on Oahu contracts, on a per capita basis, to serve a stipulated number of children who cannot be placed

in district schools. The children are then entitled to the Department of Education services provided for similar children in district schools, and they are eligible to be transferred to district schools when a placement becomes available.

There are two major types of programs conducted by HARC: the vocational development programs at the Ft. Ruger and Wahiawa Centers, and the early school programs at Aiea, Honolulu, Kailua, Wahiawa and Waianae Centers.

The goal of the HARC school programs is to prepare retarded children for participation in the Department of Education Special Education programs. To achieve that goal, systematic stimulation and training are provided in an early school setting in the areas of sensory and perceptual-motor development, communication, self-help, and social and personal competence. An indispensable component of the total program is the promotion of strong home-school cooperation in each child's education.

Oahu's five school centers serve approximately 100 children between the ages of three and fourteen, though the majority are younger than eight years of age. The centers are dispersed throughout the Island, each located in or near communities with comparatively large populations. Whenever possible the school centers are organized into several classes of five to eight, young, moderately to severely or multiply handicapped, retarded children. The severity of the pupils' handicapping conditions and their levels of functioning are decisive factors in class organization. The number of pupils in a center, and hence the number of classes, is influenced by the size of the local population. Each class is staffed with a qualified special education teacher and an aide. There is also effective utilization of parent and volunteer help, and the Foster-Grandparent Program.

In centers having more than one class, the structure permits pupil assignments within a team teaching model. For each subject area children can be rotated to small peer groups functioning at the same level. Teachers and aides can maximize their efforts in the areas of their greatest competence and interest. Thus a child might participate in language training with one group, perceptual-motor training in another and self-help skills in a third, each with a different teacher. In this model each child is assigned to a particular homeroom teacher who designs his or her overall program, conducts parent conferences and maintains progress records. Where there are too few pupils to support multiple classes,

the more traditional self-contained classroom is used.

HARC Curriculum Areas

Moderately retarded children must have a specific sequentially-developed program. The design of the program must be flexible in order to meet the individual needs of the children. The curricula at each of the centers are adapted according to the physical, social, emotional and learning characteristics of the children enrolled.

A very important aspect of the curriculum for moderately retarded children is the area of sensory and perceptual-motor development. The HARC curriculum provides both structured and exploratory experiences to promote body awareness and management, gross motor development, physical fitness, fine motor control, eye-hand coordination and discrimination skills.

Self-help skills are acquired as the children develop perceptual-motor skills. To foster the development of self-help skills, the HARC curriculum emphasizes readiness activities and independence training. Readiness activities are designed to assess the beginning child's preparation for learning in a group environment and to stimulate his receptiveness to instruction in a classroom setting. A variety of activities are organized, aimed at decreasing the child's dependency in every day living. Areas of instruction include such basic self-help skills as toileting, eating, dressing and undressing, brushing teeth and washing.

Pre-academic activities are presented when the ability to progress successfully is indicated by individual student evaluation. Realistic academic aims for the moderately retarded include such skills as reading readiness or beginning reading, beginning number concepts, and functional writing which includes the child's name and address.

HARC Oral Language Program

A major area of emphasis in the HARC school program is the development of communication skills. The HARC Oral Language Development Program is designed to stimulate the expressive speech of a moderately retarded child with a language-age equivalent to that of a two- to three-year old child. Depending upon individual rates of progress, the program may extend for one school year or longer. Small groups of not more than five pupils are given two daily language sessions of approximately fifteen minutes duration.

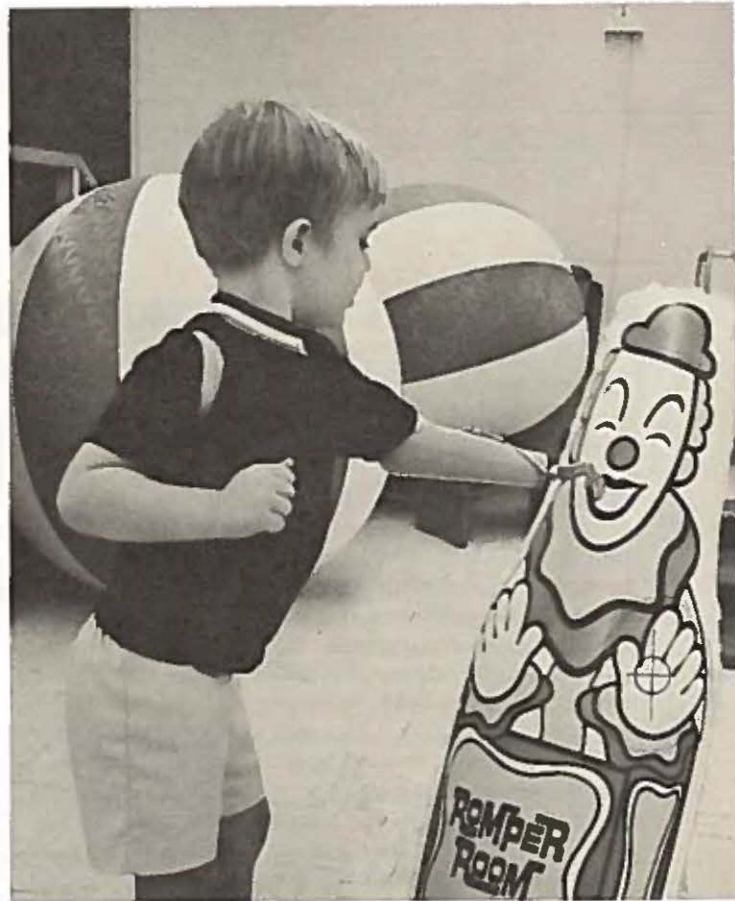
A restricted vocabulary is used as the vehicle for conducting the children through normal,

developmental language patterns leading to spontaneous, connected speech. The syntactical structures introduced are: 1) single words (boat, big, open), 2) two-word noun phrases (small ball, John's hand), 3) two-word verbals (roll ball, give car), 4) three-word noun phrases (big red block, Popo's small hand), 5) verb phrase construction (clap your hand, close the box). At the completion of this program the children should be ready to profit from a less structured and drill-like teaching approach. They should be capable of learning to use such higher syntactical forms as kernel sentences and transformations.

Lessons in the HARC program are structured so that pupil responses will occur at three language levels: 1) word imitation, as when the child says the same word that someone else says, 2) word understanding, which occurs when the child selects an object someone else has named and 3) word naming, the highest level, wherein the child names an object to which someone else points. At each level the teacher elicits responses first from the group and then from individual children. When the group or individual is unable to respond acceptably, the teacher presents the language task at progressively lower levels until an adequate response is made. When more complete responses are made the children are encouraged to use the new skill level. The program includes 335 sequential daily lessons, with accompanying teaching materials. Objective evaluations are based on tests designed to accompany each of the six units. Test items are keyed to individual specific lessons. Administered as pre-, interim or post-tests, they provide a basis for initial placement, review and regrouping.

The children who successfully complete the HARC Oral Language Development Program are selected by the teacher to progress to Level P of the Peabody Language Development Kit or Level I of the Distar Language Program, which are utilized within the various centers.

Pupil progress in the various curriculum areas are evaluated through systematic observation by the teachers. A number of forms are used for a systematic recording of objective data. These forms include the individual progress record sheets, the HARC activity checklist and various developmental scales. This data serves as a support and guide to help parents accept their children and understand their needs. In addition to written progress reports to the parents, individual parent-



teacher conferences are held to discuss the child's progress.

Each child in the HARC program is issued a take-home book which is utilized both by teachers and parents to record significant anecdotes regarding the child. This provides for an ongoing daily parent-teacher communication. Scheduled parental-classroom visitations and joint family-school functions are also held in order to foster a close home-school relationship.

Ft. Ruger Program

The guiding philosophy of the HARC vocational training programs at the Ft. Ruger Center is to aid moderately and severely retarded adults to adjust to living in the community:

The curriculum is designed to help the individual achieve his fullest potential—personal, social, intellectual, cultural and vocational skills—so that the individual can function as independently as possible in our society. The program contains activities which also enable the staff to combine a philosophy of humanism with an emphasis on individual human worth together with the science of learning. (Cheung, 1974, p. 7)

The 150 men and women at Ft. Ruger range in age from adolescence to middle age. Their functional abilities are too low for placement in supervised employment or sheltered workshops, or to enable them to profit further from existing public school programs. Yet, all of them have a right to be taught vocational skills without regard to their degree of retardation. The program at Ft.

Ruger is designed to accommodate each individual's level of development and functioning.

There are three program levels: junior, activity and senior. Each level is organized for the progressive development of the individual toward a goal of independent work appropriate for that level. The junior level focuses on such pre-vocational fundamentals as fine motor and perceptual skills. The emphasis for the activity level is on increasing attention span and developing good work habits and self discipline. It includes daily periods of vocational training. The senior level stresses vocational work and skill training. It emphasizes extending time on tasks, task completion, quality judgment and relationships with co-workers. In addition to its primary emphasis, the curriculum at each level provides appropriate content for functional academics, daily independent living skills, language-communication skills, and physical fitness-mental health. These three levels prepare an individual for productive and satisfying participation in a sheltered workshop environment. Some individuals, however, display a still greater potential. For these a transitional class has been designed to increase their vocational adequacy through advanced programs in habilitation and training leading to placement in competitive employment.

The key to success in the program in individualization: focusing on the individual learner and devising a program from his or her point of entry. All persons must be placed in training settings appropriate to their abilities but which challenge them to succeed. When adequate mastery has been demonstrated at a task level the learner must be advanced to a more demanding situation. If success is not attainable, then the learner must be returned to a simpler placement for retraining. A systems approach has been adopted to facilitate matching individual skill constellations with program elements. The program at each level is made up of a number of component skills. The individual must possess each of these in order to be part of the system of human management. There is no one set time sequence for each individual. However, upon evaluation the individual can move forward according to his skills and performance. (Cheung, 1974, p. 11)

The critical elements in vocation training for the retarded individual who has limited functional abilities are to match task and ability, eliminate

unnecessary actions and minimize the chance of error. This is achieved at the Ft. Ruger Center through the use of task analysis in which the basic steps involved in accomplishing an overall function are identified. The characteristics, requirements and context of the task are then determined and put into a time-ordered sequence. Next, work simplification principles are applied to eliminate unnecessary actions and waste of time, energy and material resources. Through the use of flow charts the task can be studied in detail, component parts identified, combined, rearranged, simplified or eliminated, and a standard "best" method established. Finally, to compensate for judgmental deficiencies or lack of dexterity, "jigs" are devised to guide the worker at decision points and promote precision in execution.

The long struggle by parents to gain the public responsibility for the education and training of retarded persons is proceeding swiftly toward a satisfactory resolution. The increasing momentum of the movement during the past few years reflects the growing acceptance of the concept of equal rights for all persons and the impetus of litigation to secure those rights for all retarded and handicapped persons. The role of the Hawaii Association for Retarded Children has been adversary, advocate and friend to the Department of Education, demanding equal educational opportunity and supporting program development while accepting the interim responsibility to serve children not yet eligible for public school placement. This dynamic relationship between the private and public sectors, between parents and officials, has been the moving force in achieving a solution which best serves the needs and responsibilities of each.

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