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Parent-Child Home Training Project: Taking a Closer Look

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TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

by

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Out of the maze of concern for the education and well-being of the retarded child, there emerges several new concepts, if a closer look is taken. One such concept is that the retarded child, like other children, has in a democratic society an inalienable right to be developed to the fullest extent of his potential capacity in all of the aspects of his nature. The older concept of the child included planning an educational program to meet the needs of physical, social, emotional and intellectual aspects of his nature. A closer look at the child reveals the need for adding educational planning to meet the spiritual aspect of his nature, his "self" which marks him as a unique individual and his "will" which controls the choices he makes. The educational implication here is that if the total child is to be educated, all of the aspects of his nature, as well as the interlacing effects of each with the others, will need to be taken into account and planned for in his curriculum.

Looking closer a second concept emerges. An intellectually retarded child learns slowly. It borders on the trite to mention that if he needs more time in which to learn, none of his time should be wasted. Teaching, which means providing developmental experiences, should begin at birth, which is the point in a child's life at which learning begins. The acceptance of this concept makes it apparent that the child's parents are his first teachers. As such, they need to know more than how to provide food, clothing and shelter for the child. They need to know specifically what the child needs to learn, when he needs to learn these things, and how to go about teaching them.

A still closer look reveals that parents are at a loss to know how to proceed to fulfill this role of teacher. They need training, which takes the form of acquiring knowledge about how a special child learns and, in most cases, need demonstrations to develop skill in adapting this information to the development of such a child. The educational need indicated here is that parents need teacher training.

As one takes a real close look, it becomes apparent that the concept that education hastens maturation is applicable to retarded children. Retarded children, when they are left to grow like Topsy, usually do so, only more "Topsy-Turveyish." If left to their own resources, they are hardly more ready for school at 7 years or 9 years than they were at 3 years. In fact, they may be less ready because of their having developed undesirable traits which militate against smooth school adjustment and school learning. Early training would not only be developmental in its nature but also preventive.

The Parent-Child Training Program, sponsored and supported by the United Association for Retarded Children, is a project which has demonstrated the feasibility of training parents of very young retarded children residing in their homes.

A few of the highlights of the program are listed. For a more detailed account, write to Dr. Albright directly or to the United Association for Retarded Children, 207 East Buffalo Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53202.

Purposes: To teach parents of very young retarded children how to train their children. The child is used for demonstration during the lesson period. The parents continue the teaching. This process differs from the one in which the teacher works with the child directly and is his sole teacher.

Curriculum: Family acceptance of the child is first on the list. This is done by helping the parents to face in a realistic manner the situation of having a retarded child. Facts are the most important tools to achieve this. They dispel family accusations, old wives tales, guilt feelings, and the like.

What parents are taught to train their children depends on the needs of the child. Needs may include toilet training, feeding habits, speech development, visualization training, depth perception, identifications, self-management, and others. Sometimes the teaching is developmental; sometimes it is preventive; sometimes corrective in its objective. To illustrate--if the only communication a child has is crying, this crying is used as a basis to teach him to make babbling sounds. This would be developmental since it prods him on to the next step in the speech development sequence. If the child's tongue is hanging out, as a habit, he must learn to keep it in his mouth and to shut his teeth and lips before he can be taught speech articulation. This is a corrective teaching situation. Some children are inclined to inhale in order to talk. When this tendency is evidenced, the child should be taught to control exhalation. This is a preventive situation since it deters faulty speech habits from developing.

Each child's needs are carefully studied by comparing his stage of growth with the developmental stages of growth of non-damaged children. When the diagnosis is completed, the needs made apparent, a program of training is arranged. Since the children in the project range from birth to five years of age and each has a "self," each program is individually tailored to fit each child. Parents are encouraged to extend the range of the child's experience despite the fact that it often seems that "more goes in than comes out." All the training is done in the home. There is no training in groups. Visits are made on an around-the-clock basis by the director.

Finally: The Parent-Child Home Training Project is based on a conviction that education is a life-long process for the retarded child;

it should be started at birth, if possible, and carried on systematically for as long a time as the child is capable of developing in any of the aspects of his nature. It recognizes the need for teaching parents how to deal with the growth and development of their retarded children so that their learning time is not wasted; that their learning is purposefully directed toward realistically achievable goals; one of which is readiness for regular or special school experiences. To date, many of the retarded children have been so placed.

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