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SPECIAL FEATURES IN THE EDUCATION  
OF THE BLIND DURING THE  
BIENNIUM 1918-1920

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in the United States, 1918-1920]



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## SPECIAL FEATURES IN THE EDUCATION OF THE BLIND DURING THE BIENNIUM 1918-1920.)

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town, Mass.*

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The most notable events affecting the status of the blind within this biennium are: The arousing of the attention of society to the existence and needs of the handicapped; the labor shortage, which created many and new openings for their employment; and the Federal law providing, under certain conditions, for the rehabilitation of people injured in industry or otherwise. Other arresting events in the special field of the blind are: The final adoption of Braille as the uniform type to be used in their schools, and along with this the fivefold increase in the Government subsidy to the American Printing House for the Blind; the successful growth of the new movement for teaching certain partially seeing children by themselves, which is one of the outcomes of continued labors for preventing blindness; the widening interest in psychologic research among school pupils, destined to lead to their reclassification and a modification of curricula; and finally the successful beginning of a college course of lectures and demonstrations for teachers and workers among the blind and the semisighted.

### NEW INTEREST IN THE BLIND,

Within the academic year 1917-18 unusual numbers of the older pupils, who would ordinarily have finished their courses, left school or failed to return to it because they had obtained work and preferred what is called gainful occupation to more schooling. Indeed, the recent labor shortage has given the blind the most encouraging push they have ever known, viz: The feeling that they were actually

needed in the workaday world. Where there were placement workers these have been so busy filling positions that the number of fit candidates was exhausted; in other words, there were more places open to the blind than trained blind people to fill them. Many secured jobs for themselves, chiefly at various sorts of handwork in factories. One factory in particular, that of the great Crocker-Wheeler Electric Co., at Ampere, N. J., gave preferential employment to blind men and women at "taping" or insulating parts of motors, etc., thus creating a sort of department for them. This department was handled in a businesslike manner, actual earnings were paid on the basis of piecework, and such satisfactory results were reported that the company proposes to continue employing these hands so long as conditions permit. It was not so long ago that most blind girls, on graduating from a high-school course, could look forward only to being useful at home. Latterly numbers of such girls, after taking a little intensive training at a business school, have been placed as typists in offices using the dictaphone. These girls have a better background in English than most candidate typists, and, being anxious to make good, have usually done so. There are very many processes which blind or other handicapped people can master, and they naturally become quite dependable.

The feeling that careers of independence are opening for the trained blind has reacted upon their schools and infused a new spirit into the classroom. Typewriting, for example, is now taught from a different viewpoint. And the school curricula as a whole are destined to be overhauled and modified under the advice and scrutiny of efficiency committees. At least one school has now added to its staff a vocational guide. Obviously only the less capable and the less energetic of the blind should have recourse for a living to such humble handicrafts as chair caning; and, similarly, only the no longer youthful or resourceful should go to the working home or the special workshop. A veteran educator of the blind has written: "The ability of the blind man to get on successfully in the world will depend even more upon his head than his hand, and he is far less handicapped in the development of the one than in the other." When the general employing public finds this out the blind will rise to the occasion, as many have recently done, and their whole social status will be lifted, to their great happiness and the benefit of society at large.

Already, indeed, the public discovery and recognition of the handicapped as a consequence of the war has been wonderful. The publicity efforts of the Federal Board for Vocational Education and the American Red Cross have been potent aids. The blind have been specially benefited. Knowing that many of our soldier boys would return blinded, a large number of women learned Braille,

the tangible reading and writing of the blind, and otherwise prepared themselves for understanding and relieving the condition of blindness. Their laboratory was at hand among the civil blind, and they were astonished to discover how many of these there were in adulthood and how neglectful society had been in their behalf. The schools and libraries, the public commissions, and the private associations for the blind pointed the way. They held classes, gave practical demonstrations, and taught by correspondence. Young women became volunteer social workers, some offering the use of their cars and of themselves as chauffeurs, driving throughout a whole season or until the work set for them was done. College girls read regularly to blind students and persisted as they had never been known to do before. But most have been continuously helpful in Brailleing out stories for the blind to read. Not a few hitherto idle people have found their vocation among the blind. In these and other ways a new and improved mutual understanding exists to-day between the blind and the public, which it is hoped can be measurably maintained.

Heretofore the towns, cities, and States alone have provided such public aid as was given at all to their citizens whose producing capacity had been reduced in any way. Handicapped children have been given school training, and certain of the adult, as the blind, have had employment provided in subsidized shops. Though the public recognized a duty in this, it was a charitable duty. It was a kindness to the individual. But now that the Federal Government, by reason of the Fess-Kenyon Act, which recently became law, will lend aid as an economic duty to the several States which themselves undertake rehabilitation of persons injured in processes of industry or otherwise, and that this makes it possible to provide training and placement after training for those who are blind as a result of disease, one can be hopeful "that this is but the beginning of a vast and far-reaching work of reclaiming and making independent citizens of those who are blinded in the years of manhood and womanhood."

#### THE WAR BLINDED.

Many workers among the blind optimistically believed that the Government rehabilitation of the war blinded and their placement in industry would so swell the ranks of efficient blind men seen daily going about their work that this fact alone was destined to raise not a little the social status of all the blind. The plans for their rehabilitation were acknowledged to be the wisest and best the world had ever conceived. A generous pension and insurance was to place the men beyond all financial worry; every conceivable means for their encouragement and training was to be offered them, and they were to be urged to fit themselves to become again and remain eco-

nomically useful citizens, not only because so to do was for the good of society, but even more because the feeling of being useful would make them happier and better. And, indeed, the Government showed rare wisdom in this. It had accepted the dictum of Helen Keller that "the heaviest burden on the blind is not blindness, but idleness." Who can say that the statement of this remarkable woman, so widely read as it has been since 1907, when it was published, did not so popularize the idea as to help bring about the national policy for reclaiming all its war broken, including the blinded?

Educators of the blind, then, foresaw great good as likely to come to their people out of the vast evil of the war. And they, like society in general, were eager and anxious to aid the soldier boys who should return so grievously changed. Many of them would have thrown their schools open to them, had this been deemed best. But they themselves did not so deem it. They agreed rather with the authorities at Washington that it would be wisest to bring these young fellows together under inspirational environment until they should find themselves again or be led through occupational activities into the state of mind without which attempts at training would be useless. They advised that the period of mental convalescence would be soonest over if these invalids were kept away from their homes and grouped by themselves for a period where no one would feel himself an exception needing special coddling and where every influence both of occupational therapeutics and preliminary training should be brought to bear until each individual could be sent forth for definite vocational training where this could best be found. And they advised that, after training, placement and follow-up should be provided these wards of the Nation.

This plan, which was for the most part the one being successfully followed in England for the Government by the National Institute for the Blind, our Government made every preparation to carry out for itself. It accepted the use of a private estate at Baltimore, added temporary school and recreational buildings, arranged for ample leadership, and in April, 1918, when the first "cases" arrived, started up its splendid machinery. Indeed, the intentions of the Federal Board for Vocational Education, assisted by the Red Cross, were generous in the extreme.

These bodies could not do enough. The expenditure of money for the rehabilitation of these men who had given their sight for their country was to be more than ample—even lavish. Great Britain was to be surpassed. Naturally and instinctively everybody tried to help. But the project began in disharmony, and it was not until May, 1919, when the men were discharged from the Army and the American Red Cross undertook the full conduct of it for the Federal Board, that harmony began to appear, and so general expectations, which

were oversanguine, have hardly been realized. Perhaps this was inevitable under the circumstances. However this may be, the whole new task, in which there was so much heart, proved complicated and difficult of execution. The plan was there but no single executive head having the background of experience and the support of public confidence and of the blinded men themselves. Then, the consciousness which these men had of having ample incomes for life in itself militated against personal effort; also the lack of previous education of most of the men and their harmful coddling by the sentimental public—these and other things, in a measure, have thwarted fond expectations. At least, this is the conviction of educators of the civilian blind, some of whom feel that, were the undertaking to be begun anew, they would be justified in offering to sacrifice for a time the interests of their own schools in order to help the Government start its delicate task. Possibly the result would have proved no more successful, and it might have been far less so. But could they have known how few men there would be for any one institution, if distributed among the 45 of the country, they could doubtless have arranged somehow to receive them.

The reasons they advised grouping them for a while in one place, as was done, are, in short, these: The existing schools and their discipline are adapted in every way, both in equipment and in staff, for the use and needs of children, not men. Now, men and children can not profitably be schooled together; hence either the schools would have to be divided in plan or be overturned to suit men. Either way would have been at a sacrifice of the children, who numbered in the school year 1918-19, 4,616, whereas all the serious eye cases resulting from the war—gunshot and gassing, weakness and disease—known to the Federal Board in December, 1920, are 308, hardly one-fifteenth as many. Doubtless the officials responsible for the proposed rehabilitation of the war blinded had other plans than to subject these men to the old-time blind-school methods; and in this matter they were doubtless justified enough. For, were they called upon to do their task over again, they would undoubtedly plan much as they did, but endeavor to carry the project out more happily. And educators of the civilian blind, some of whom gave leave of absence to members of their staff to further the cause, would now try to be even more helpful than they were able to be before; and they tried to be cooperative all along. The above remarks, made by one of them, are made in the kindest spirit, and are not to be taken so much as a criticism of the Government as an explanation of their own attitude in the matter and of their disappointment at the general results so far. As for the old-time methods of existing schools, it should be borne in mind, in the first place, that no school can be much superior to the public opinion of people supporting it, and that if the general

social and industrial status of the blind be lower than it might be, this is due in large part to public prejudice or a reluctance of employers to give the blind man a chance to prove his value as a producer. And it should be borne in mind, in the second place, that it is a fact that almost every new worker among the blind, who has vision and initiative, feels the call to discount what has hitherto been done in this field and to propose for immediate application fundamental changes which seem to him to promise better results.

#### UNIFORM TYPE AND THE INCREASED SUBSIDY FOR PRINTING IN IT.

The signal achievement of Valentin Haüy, the first teacher of the blind, was the devising of a means of reading with the finger. The education of the blind, then, was founded upon embossed books. With the opening of the pioneer schools for them in this country, in 1830-1833, embossed printing was begun and continued, as funds were available, until 1879, when Congress granted the American Printing House for the Blind, at Louisville, Ky., an annual subsidy of \$10,000. This house became at once the greatest producer of its kind in the world and continued to be such into the present century, when the numbers of pupils in our schools drawing upon this source of books had more than doubled; which fact, coupled with the increased cost of production, made the yearly output entirely inadequate. In this emergency several of the schools set up small printing presses of their own and assisted one another and the rest to a better supply. The State of New York and certain Bible societies have also splendidly supplemented book production. One endowed enterprise set about manufacturing writing appliances and table games for the blind and selling them at less than cost.

In 1919, Congress increased its grant to the American Printing House from \$10,000 to \$50,000, which sum has made possible the enlargement and improvement of the plant and the immediate increase in the number of books to each school. This fact is an achievement, indeed, and is one of the signs of recent progress in the education of the blind.

Dozens of embossed types for reading by the finger have been devised at one time and another within the past 136 years since the first practical one was hit upon in France. And much ingenuity, effort, and money have been put into them. All may be grouped into one of two classes—those composed of lines and those composed of points. In general, the line types, which came first, were imitations of characters that had survived as best adapted to reading by the eye. The point types, the characters of which are merely different arrangements and numbers of similar points or dots, represent arbitrary systems justified both as being more generally tangible

than the lines and particularly as being alone writable as well as readable by the blind themselves. And so the point systems have gradually driven out the line types with the exception of one of them, Moon's type, which is so large and coarse that anybody having the least patience can learn to read it with the finger. Its bulkiness is seen in this: A single copy of the Moon Bible fills 63 quarto volumes, costing in England, where the press for producing it is endowed, £8 13s. 10d. Nevertheless, great numbers of the old and infirm want this type, and most libraries for the blind among English-speaking people circulate more books in it than in any other. A single line type, then, has survived and is destined to stay. But Moon's type is not needed by the young blind at school or by the more courageous of the adult. The point system known as Braille, from the name of its maker, is now the survivor among three which have competed for supremacy. And it has won out for no other reason than that of uniformity; but this is ample reason. Hitherto the plates from which editions were reproduced might be in one or another of three systems—a highly wasteful business and one which compelled the would-be reader of everything embossed to learn them all.

People who promoted either one of the other two systems did so conscientiously, believing it a better tool than any other and therefore adding less to the handicap of blindness. However, the agreement upon original Braille has been practically unanimous, and since 1919 no new book in another system has been embossed here. It is called "Revised Braille Grade 1½" for this reason: Revised Braille as used among the British is printed, some in grade 1, which is full spelling, but chiefly in grade 2, which is highly contracted—that is, it employs so very many characters for arbitrary abbreviations, like *alc* for always, *bl* for blind, and arbitrary combinations of letters, like *to*, *for*, *ation*, *com*, *ed*, etc., some of which are not justified by their frequency; uses these without regard to syllabication, as *for-um*, or "correct usage," such as individuality of word, like "toeat," "togo" (which latter may stand either for the verb or the Japanese admiral), "intothe," all run together; avoids the use of all capital letters, as "john"; and, moreover, is so encumbered with arbitrary rules and regulations to prevent ambiguity and preserve some degree of uniformity that American blind schoolmen would not inflict it upon their pupils. As textbooks and printed literature should always be models of good use, they were unwilling to lay these before them or to allow them to disregard usages in their Braille writing that are intolerable in pencil or typewriting. So a grade between 1 and 2 was agreed on and termed grade 1½. It will be seen that the American grade 1½ is merely a simplified or

purified grade 2 and can be read, of course, by anyone who knows grade 2. Moreover, the many books already existing in grade 2 are not closed to any who wish to take the trouble to read them, and our circulating libraries have already imported considerable numbers from England.

The music notation for the blind is now the same everywhere, as are the mathematical and the chemical notations, wherever English is used; thus duplication of scores and tables may be avoided through international exchange. All this represents a signal achievement and advance and is what is meant when the adoption of a uniform type for the blind is heralded. Already, with the close of the year 1920, 208 different books have been published in the uniform type, and the schools have begun their introduction with their younger pupils. The older pupils will continue to utilize the other books until these are worn out and supplanted.

#### LIBRARIES FOR THE BLIND.

Most schools are glad to circulate their embossed books beyond their own pupils and do so in so far as they can. But the reading hunger of the outside blind who read is chiefly satisfied by circulating libraries located here and there throughout the country. The splendid "Books for Everybody" movement which arose during the war has persisted and now includes books for the blind. A drive has been made in their behalf, which has further attracted public attention to the needs of these people. Indeed, librarians have helped nobly. Some have induced authors to meet the cost of publishing in Braille a book or two. Others have organized clubs for writing out in Braille by hand short stories primarily for the blinded soldiers—the special librarian of the Library of Congress announcing that 24,287 pages have been thus contributed and fastened into books through her. A no less important duty of the librarians is bringing to the attention of their public the titles of all the new books that may be borrowed for the asking, and this publicity the librarians have also carried out as best they could. Truly the cause of the reading blind has marched.

#### BOOKS ABOUT THE BLIND.

Libraries and schools interested to do so have collected much literature on blindness and the blind, especially the war blinded, which has lately appeared in quantity, and also on the prevention of blindness, an enterprise that will always need generous support and should have it. Though there is considerable literature on the general subject, there has appeared no single comprehensive book on it in any language until 1919, when Macmillan issued "The

Blind," by Harry Best, Ph. D.—a work which may be truly called a labor of love and which every library that includes books on special education and sociology should have. An excellent Manual on Conservation of Vision Classes has been issued by the National Committee for the Prevention of Blindness, and a bulletin, explaining and describing these classes, by the Harvard University Press.

#### STATISTICS OF ATTENDANCE.

By far the largest number of blind and partly blind pupils receiving education in the United States, as elsewhere, attend the residential schools, commonly called institutions. We have 45 such schools, whose attendance in 1918-19 was 4,616. In the same academic year 989 attended day-school centers, of which there are now 71 in the public schools of 36 cities. The day-school movement, which began in Chicago in 1900, everywhere considered all its pupils as blind and taught them as such for over a decade, when in a few cities certain of the semiblind among them were segregated and taught as semisighted pupils; that is, chiefly through the eye instead of the finger. There being many more defective eyesight children who have usable eyesight than who have not but must depend upon touch, it follows naturally that the classes for the former have grown apace, so that the above-given figures of attendance of blind children at day schools are misleading. There are really fewer blind children in such classes than were reported two years ago, but more semisighted. The movement for such segregation is scientifically correct and represents a great educational advance in the proper methods of reaching children suffering not from blindness but from seriously defective eyesight.

#### DAY SCHOOLS FOR BLIND AND FOR SEMISIGHTED CHILDREN.

The movement for "semisighted classes," brought from England in 1909, was unable to organize its first class in Boston until 1913, since when it has extended, especially in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Ohio, and in New York City. But it is to the wise and enthusiastic supervisor of the department for the blind of the Cleveland public schools that its recent spread is mainly due. He cleverly caused the State's responsibility for the education of its eye defectives, the blind and the semisighted alike, to be extended to the public-school system of given cities, and in this way he was able to elaborate a project which most city-supported systems have not yet been able to match. He obtained from friends the money with which to print his "clear type" books for the semisighted. His early providing of the books, which are in a 24-point heavy black type on unglazed buff paper, and which are on sale, has been an invaluable service to the whole cause. This supervisor, who is him-

self blind and a product both of an institution and a university, has been able through his State subsidy to elaborate according to his need his provision for both classes, the blind and those with defective eyesight, and to approach in thoroughness much that is done for their blind pupils by the residential schools and more than is done for their partially blind: and he has been able to avoid doing some things for both kinds which these institutions can not avoid doing. For both kinds he has lengthened his school day, added a Saturday morning session, introduced physical, musical, and manual training, some boy scout, girl campfire, and summer camp experience, and he has taught a little household economy every day at the noon lunch hour. He has also recently found it advisable to collect in two small families certain of the blind children in his public-school classes. Here he holds parents' meetings periodically. He also employs a special home-visiting teacher.

This so-called Cleveland plan is setting the pace for other communities to follow. The rock on which it is founded is State support rather than city or local support, which latter is hard to get in sufficiency and to keep getting, or than private enterprise, whose function is rather to initiate and justify public movements than to maintain them. The plan now also supplies vocational guidance, sends to high school those who should go there, offers vocational instruction, places the fit in employment and follows them up for two years after placement. This is more than most institutions do or can do for their pupils and ex-pupils. The advantages claimed for the day school over the residential are, first, that the former subjects the handicapped child from the beginning to direct competition with the unhandicapped and while doing so gives him the extra help needed, and, second, that it tends to preserve the integrity of the home. In general, however, the day-school movement ignores the other fact that, for the child who is blind, very many if not most of these homes furnish a poor and unstimulating environment, which fact even Cleveland has recognized, as is stated above. In theory the day school has much the most to support it, but so far it has been impracticable to attain all these fine things of the Cleveland plan except in Cleveland (even Cleveland has not the special equipment and study resources of a residential school): and these can not and will not be approached anywhere except in cities or large communities where there are enough such children to warrant it and where the machinery to carry on is set on a firm foundation alike of support and of intelligent and progressive enthusiasm.

The following quotation from the *Harvard Bulletin in Education*, above mentioned, is significant and will interest critics of public school curricula in general:

A study of the promotion records of 100 sight-saving class pupils in Cleveland shows a reduction of 85 per cent in the proportion of failures after the

work in the sight-saving classes is well begun, as compared with the proportion of failures of these pupils prior to entrance in the sight-saving classes. The proportion of failures among the sight-saving class pupils is 60 per cent less than the proportion of failures in the entire public-school system.

The classes for the partially sighted pupils are variously called myopic, optical, semisighted, sight-saving, and conservation of vision. The children, most of whom would injure their eyesight if required to attend the ordinary school, have here this precious tool guarded and conserved, while at the same time they require an education—both being blessings to them and to the communities in which they live.

#### MENTAL MEASUREMENT AND RESEARCH.

The movement for a better understanding of blind pupil material through psychological testing was started at the Perkins Institution in May, 1916, and was taken up in September, 1916, by the Pennsylvania Institution even more vigorously. Each of these schools now employs one or two trained psychologists, both of whom work under the direction of Dr. Samuel P. Hayes, professor of psychology at Mount Holyoke College, who is paid to give up one-fifth of his time to this special undertaking and who gives more than that. These testing psychologists have been sent around to six other schools, remaining away weeks at a time, and up to the present have tested 1,500 different pupils. The tests are both individual and group. They reveal mental capacity, make possible a comparison between the blind and the seeing in this, that, and the other subject, and show up methods of teaching. The committee on efficiency of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, appointed in 1918, will continue to rely on Prof. Hayes for very material aid and suggestion.

#### THE HARVARD COURSE IN THE EDUCATION OF THE BLIND.

In the fall of 1920 the Graduate School of Education of Harvard University announced a half-year course in the education of the blind and the semisighted, and began its lectures and demonstrations on October 22 with a registration of 73 students, mostly teachers and social workers. The lecturers, who volunteered their services, are experts in their special fields in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, and Ontario. The scope of the course is general, treating of the history of the subject, the teaching of children and of adults, the prevention of blindness, the conduct of private and public agencies, the psychology of blindness, relief, etc. Greater Boston furnishes unusual resources for demonstrating and reading up in the subjects treated in the lectures.

The course, being the first of its kind anywhere, is an experimental one. It represents the kind of extension work this new school of education would be glad to do. A nominal charge was made to the students in order to help meet expenses, the chief of which were covered by the Massachusetts Association for Promoting the Interests of the Blind, which organization, and the division of the blind of the Massachusetts Board of Education, and the Perkins Institution are responsible to Harvard for the initiation and conduct of the course. The project is significant, tending as it does to give the work for the blind the standing and importance that it should have.

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