The Vocational Rehabilitation Program of The American School for The Deaf

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Before speaking of the Regional Vocational Rehabilitation Center which the American School for the Deaf is now developing, I feel that it is well to give some perspective.

In any organized society there is no more basic need of the young adult than to be able to earn a living by the performance of some needed function. To be needed is almost as essential as air, water or food. And, a living connotes more than the bare essentials. It is the attaining of means to enjoy a home, a family, education and a reasonable sharing of the many good things that our modern society affords. Any program of education that does not equip the individual to attain these benefits is basically deficient.

The founders of the early schools for the deaf were keenly aware of these needs and were among the first to include vocational training as part of their instruction. Woodworking, shoemaking, and tailoring were the courses most generally offered and all led directly to specific, useful occupations. From that day to this, schools for the deaf have continued to give various types of vocational training but have been increasingly unable to give their students the type of training demanded by business and industry. It is quite possible that the students leaving our schools for the deaf a hundred or more years ago

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were better prepared for the occupations of their day than our students are today.

The inadequacy of the vocational training available to the deaf has been a matter of serious concern to many educators for a long time and proposals have been put forward to meet this pressing problem. For example in 1888, D. S. Rogers, a teacher in the South Carolina School, recommended a national polytechnic institute for the deaf.

More recent proposals were those put forward by Harvey Barnes in 1940 and by Roy Parks in 1947 at the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf in St. Augustine. I cannot find where the subject was brought forward again until the workshop held in September, 1961 at Stowe, Vermont. There a paper was given on the vocational aspects of the education of the deaf and regional vocational centers were recommended as the most practical way of bringing about vocational-technical education that would meet the needs of our deaf youth.

Dr. Boyce Williams, Chief of the Communication Disorders Branch, Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, took a very strong interest in this subject and through his efforts and encouragement and those of Dr. Mary Switzer, Commissioner of Social and Rehabilitation Services, of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, a grant was made to the American School for the Deaf in 1963 for the study of the occupational status of the young adult deaf of New England and the need and demand for a regional vocational-technical school for the deaf.

This led Dr. Marshall Hester to arrange a major workshop in Knoxville, Tennessee in October of 1964 and this workshop eventually led to legislation being introduced in Congress which authorized the establishment of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. This is now a part of Rochester Institute of Technology and during this past year has had its first students, about 65 in number.

The New England Survey showed that the parents of deaf students and young deaf adults were overwhelmingly in favor of the establishment of a vocational-technical school for the
deaf on a secondary level. It also showed that only one of the ten schools in New England had any vocational program worthy of the name.

Questionnaires were sent to the 92 vocational-technical schools in New England and 70 of these schools replied. These gave the total number of deaf persons who had been registered over a period of seven years as 22. Only eight of these had received any kind of certificates. The total number of students, sixteen years or over, who left the ten New England schools during that period was 561. So the fact emerged that, with one exception, none of the schools for the deaf in New England had any real vocational program and the leaving students were getting almost no help from the vocational-technical centers for hearing students. In fact, the great majority of the deaf were getting no real vocational training.

Early in 1964 there was an informal meeting in Washington of a small group of educators of the deaf with Mr. John Forsythe, who was the legal counsel to the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, chairmained at that time by Lister Hill. We had been hoping for legislation which would authorize at least four regional vocational-technical centers for the deaf in strategic parts of the United States for secondary age students, with the possibility that this might lead to a national institute for the deaf if the need was demonstrated. Mr. Forsythe, however, felt that it would be easier to get one center authorized by Congress than four centers. Therefore, the cart was put before the horse in this respect so that the National Technical Institute for the Deaf came into being, but there has been as yet no direct federal legislation for the establishment of regional vocational-technical schools on a secondary level for the deaf.

The American School for the Deaf has undertaken to develop such a center with what aid it could get from governmental agencies without the benefit of any specific legislation.

STATISTICS

Of paramount importance in planning and developing any kind of program for the deaf is the numbers who need to be served. Strangely enough this often seems to be overlooked
and often very loose estimates have been used. A survey by the Vocational Education Committee of the Conference of Executives of American Schools for the deaf was made in September, 1964. Eighty-eight schools replied to the questionnaire representing 93% of the total enrollment of all schools for the deaf in the United States. These showed that only 1277 students sixteen years or over left these schools for whatever reason, graduation, attendance certificates, vocational certificates or just dropouts. Projects arithmetically to cover the 7% enrolled in schools not replying gave a total of 1373.

These schools did not include day classes but it was found that hardly any day classes carried pupils to sixteen years of age. An unknown but undoubtedly sizeable number of children starting in day classes transfer into schools for the deaf. Some go to public school but from sampling this number was found to be far less than those entering schools for the deaf. Even if one added 500 to cover the students leaving day classes and not duplicated in those leaving schools for the deaf, the total would be only about 1900.

Figures would indicate that there has been an increase of about 12% in enrollment in schools for the deaf since 1964. However, a large part of this increase is due to the fact that many more pre-primary children are being included in the enrollment figures for schools for the deaf. On the whole it is doubtful that the number of leavers sixteen years or over, is more than 2,000 a year.

While rubella during 1963 to 1965 came prominently to attention because of the number of cases it caused during that period, it undoubtedly has been one of the major causes of deafness throughout the history of the human race. There are very strong indications, however, that a vaccine will soon be in use that will eliminate this as a source of deafness. Happily, it is unlikely that we can look for a significant increase to the incidence of deafness in the future.

These figures indicate that four or five regional secondary level vocational-technical schools for the deaf in strategic parts of the country would be well justified. Gallaudet
College does not provide any vocational-technical training on this level and the NTID is aiming to serve the deaf of higher ability who can benefit from college level technical courses. It plans to have a "vestibule" program but even if this program provides for secondary level students, it is unlikely that it can advantageously serve this type of student for the whole country.

Legislation has been passed authorizing the establishment of a high school in connection with Gallaudet College. From what I have been able to learn I judge it plans to have the main emphasis on academic work. I do not know whether it plans programs in vocational-technical courses or not. However, it is aiming for an enrollment of 600. This would require the recruitment of most of the high school age students from several of the nearby states. It also would mean a wide disparity in academic ability that would mitigate against achieving an academic stream high school up to prevailing standards for such students. Again, the overall numbers of possible students need to be carefully considered. This high school plus Gallaudet College and NTID envision considerable more than 2,500 students when they reach their expected levels of enrollment. There is a real possibility that such projected expansions may exceed the number of students who are both able and desirous of attending.

REGIONAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CENTERS NEEDED

It is my opinion, however, that there will always be a sizeable number of secondary and post secondary level students who desire the opportunity for vocational training near where they live. In addition there will always be adult deaf who are in need of training or retraining. It is on this basis that I feel that at least four regional vocational rehabilitation centers are needed to provide for those who will not be attending either the Gallaudet complex or NTID.

In 1968 as Chairman of the Vocational Education Committee of the Conference of Executives of American Schools for the Deaf, I sent questionnaires to all the schools for the deaf, asking the number of students who received vocational
diplomas or certificates as of June, 1968, the courses completed, any new vocational courses that had been initiated during the year and which courses they considered to be the most practical and effective. We received 81 replies. With a very few exceptions, these again demonstrated that a great majority of the schools for the deaf are providing no adequate vocational education for their students. In many cases, the vocational certificate is just one way of giving a poor academic student a piece of paper to take with him when he leaves. The majority of students do not acquire any specific skills for a definite job.

The establishment of an effective vocational-technical program that gives skills readily marketable in today's industry requires a minimal number of students, a very heavy outlay for equipment and most of all a highly competent instructional staff to give the courses. There is hardly a school in the country that could maintain such a program on its own. It would need to draw students from a sizeable region. In August, 1968, I made a survey of the vocational program of the Georgia School for the Deaf and from the statistics it emerged that the only way to have a really workable vocational-technical program would be on a regional basis for the southeastern states. This area would in fact be a very logical place for a regional center.

THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM AT THE AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

The clear demonstration of the need and demand for a regional vocational-technical school of a secondary level in the northeast region of the United States led to the decision in early 1965 for the American School for the Deaf to expand its existing vocational facilities in order to provide for all rehabilitative services as well as additional courses that seem to offer excellent opportunity to deaf students.

In 1965 the Connecticut General Assembly provided for $120,000 towards a vocational rehabilitation center and after several months of effort we secured $200,000 matching funds through the then Vocational Rehabilitation Administration.
Again Dr. Boyce Williams and Dr. Mary Switzer were of great help to us in securing these funds.

In the request to the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration we indicated that we expected to staff the Center under existing legislation that would provide for four years and three months matching funds. The first fifteen months to be at the rate of 25% on our part and 75% from government funds and on a declining scale thereafter until the last year when we would be putting up 75% with only 25% being taken care of by federal funds. Unfortunately the freeze on government funds that was instituted before the building was completed left us with a fine new building only partially equipped and partially staffed. We hope that this situation will be remedied in the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1969. We now are anticipating some 540,000 through the Connecticut Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for the year ending June 30, 1969.

ADVANTAGEOUS LOCATION

The American School for the Deaf is the logical place for a vocational-technical center for the northeast region. None of the other schools are large enough to maintain vocational programs of any significance and none are located as strategically as is the American School. With its present enrollment of 470 in addition to students coming from other nearby states, it is in a position to maintain a real vocational rehabilitation program which offers a good selection of courses suitable to the industry of the area.

TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

Before embarking on the addition of the Center, we had been able to bring our machine shop up to first class standards. We secured tools through the General Service Administration which had cost at least $200,000 and with this equipment we were able to put our graduates in this course into industrial plants with experience and ability in operating the type of major machine tools that are in common use on the production lines.
In 1967 we secured $93,000 through the Vocational Administration Division of the Connecticut Department of Education for additional tooling. Much of this was used in adding modern offset equipment to our print shop as well as other equipment which was essential to bringing it up to first class standards.

MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

It was during this period that under the Manpower Development Program we trained four groups of adults, two in machine shop and two in data processing. These courses were highly successful and all who finished the courses were ready able to get employment. One man in his forties came from California. He had never held a real job in his life although he had good intelligence and no other handicaps. He simply had no skills. Another gratifying achievement was the rehabilitating of a deaf man who had been selling alphabet cards for several years after he had left his school. Another case which points up what such a center can do was a woman in her fifties born totally deaf whose husband had recently died. She was without any skills whatever and it was a great satisfaction to see her placed in such a well-paying job.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CENTER

The new Vocational Rehabilitation Center, named after the late Graham H. Anthony, adds 14,000 square feet on two levels to our existing vocational shop making a total of approximately 30,000 square feet.

The evaluation center, located on the upper level near the main entrance will provide complete medical, audiological, psychological, social and vocational diagnosis and evaluation for rehabilitation clients. Besides administrative offices, four classrooms, and an individual learning center utilizing closed circuit television and other educational media, a control room housing the television equipment and studio, is located on this level. The classrooms will provide basic education with personal adjustment training, and pre-vocational training through academic subjects oriented to the needs of the clients. The in-
individual study center will enable students and clients alike to utilize educational media in reinforcement of learning situations. This area is in constant use. Students are making particular use of single concept loop films in learning terminology and certain operations which cannot be repeated over and over on machines.

Of particular interest, which may have profound implications, is the fact that low-verbal deaf students who could not read a common ruler can now read micrometers! Through use of closed circuit television and programmed instruction utilizing education media, great strides can be expected in the development of language and cultural development.

Prevocational and vocational training in specific areas is already provided in general shop, machine shop practice, drafting, offset printing, letterpress printing, body and fender work, welding, and industrial spray painting. Training is also given in typing, data processing, accounting, and filing; also office machine operation such as duplicators, addressographs, graphotypes, flexowriters (type punching) and preparation of copy for offset duplication.

Because of the nature of industry in this area, and the broad cluster of occupations which these fields enclose, equipment is being set up to train the deaf in fields covering electronics, quality control, sheet metal and tube bending, tool and die making, and numerical control (process planning, tool setting, machining, and type preparation).

To a greater or less degree, these areas are technical in nature, so therefore, academic work will need to be vocationally oriented. To this extent, junior and senior vocational students will receive all of their academic training in the vocational classrooms.

Our drafting courses have been particularly successful. They are under the direction of a man who spent more than 35 years as a machine tool designer who is now retired. It was through this course that we had first been able to gain entry for our students into schools maintained by the large industries. We now have nine of our graduates in company schools for engineering draftsman and all are doing well.
Staffing is the backbone of a program. Yet it offers many difficulties. Unfortunately there is no training center for vocational teachers of the deaf. We have, however, had good success in securing people highly competent in their particular skills and we find that most of them do not have too much trouble in adapting to the deaf. If one has a choice of whether to get somebody highly familiar with the deaf but who does not have the long experience in the craft he is teaching, or a person who is highly skilled in his craft but not familiar with the deaf, it is generally better to choose the latter and to help him get to know the deaf and communicate with them.

Of course, the most important person in the program is the director and we had the great fortune to secure Mr. Edmond Cassetti who has done a tremendous job in developing the overall program. Mr. Cassetti has had lifelong experience with the deaf, has taught them both vocationally and academically and is highly conversant with most of the trades in our program. He has had extensive experience with United Aircraft Company as a tool and die maker and has an understanding of the actual firing line of industrial production. This experience is essential for anyone who is to direct a vocational rehabilitation program for the deaf.

While we regret that we encountered a delay in securing the complete equipment and staffing in some of our new courses, we are most optimistic that this situation will be corrected during the coming school year.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I feel very strongly that at least three or four other vocational rehabilitation centers should be established in strategic parts of the United States. The programs of these centers should supplement the program of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf with the fullest possible cooperation.

Taking into account the unique communication handicap of the deaf, their relatively low average attainments in lan-
guage and reading skills, it is my opinion that the deaf will do better in centers designed especially for their needs, staffed by persons who can communicate with them fluently. With such instruction in a properly equipped center our experience has shown that deaf students with low academic attainment can achieve a high degree of efficiency in skilled occupations.