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Contributions of Higher Education To The Rehabilitation Of Severely Handicapped Deaf Persons*

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CONTRIBUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO THE REHABILITATION OF SEVERELY HANDICAPPED DEAF PERSONS*

In introducing this subject I should like to do two things: expose some of the assumptions which the subject implies and define some terms that we will need to use.

Let's look at the assumptions which are inferred by this topic. The subject is really higher education. Higher education encompasses all of the colleges and universities, approximately 2600 of them in the United States. The subject also infers that these colleges and universities have made contributions of a kind. That is they have martialled their resources, committed the staff and purposefully done something. Now what they are supposed to have done is important. They are supposed to have contributed to the *rehabilitation of severely handicapped deaf persons*. That means that these institutions of higher education have contributed specifically to the restoration, to the improved functioning of, not hard-of-hearing persons, but severely handicapped deaf persons. I am sure the audience attending this panel discussion will be interested in hearing these contributions described and perhaps some judgment of their effectiveness.

In order to have a productive panel discussion, we should agree on some key terms. It is very important that we mean the same thing when we use similar phrases and expressions. In order to assist with the definition of terms, a paper entitled "Multiply-Handicapped Deaf People: Who They Are, Where They Are, and Their Needs" by Larry G. Stewart, was sent to each of our panel participants. This paper defines disability, handicapped, multiply-disabled, multiply-handicapped, and severe handicapped. I will not restate all of these definitions, but I should like to share with you one or two distinctions which Dr. Stewart makes.

Dr. Stewart defines disability as "a physical or mental condition that limits a person's functioning in some manner." A handicap, on the other hand, is a "limitation in functioning caused by a disability." Declining visual acuity caused by aging is a disability. It is also a handicap unless it is corrected by glasses which restore vision to near normal. Now I recommend to members of the panel that we use these two terms as defined.

Severe handicapped is a term which refers to a handicap which "restricts the person's ability to cope with important dimensions of his life." In spite of corrective measures, he still experiences limitations in functioning.

Now with these assumptions and definitions before both the panel members and the audience, I should like to challenge the panel to address itself to this subject: "contributions of higher education to the rehabilitation of severely handicapped deaf persons." You have my permission to refer to your own institutions once, maybe twice, but we are concerned with higher education generally. Furthermore, I hope we can shape our discussion of this in such a manner that recommendations will emerge. Something tells me that the picture is not going to be very pretty. If this is the case, we want to address ourselves to what can be done about it.

Now, let's hear from the panel.

*Opening remarks of the moderator, Dr. Edward C. Merrill, Jr., President, Gallaudet College, Washington, D.C., at a panel discussion of this subject at the PRWAD Convention, Tucson, Arizona, February 15, 1974.