A follow-up study of one hundred mentally deficient school children

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by

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Follow-up report A

Name of pupil ........................................... Born..................
Attended in 1915 ........................................... School—grade ........
Address in 1915 ........................................... Grade..................
Present school ........................................... Grade..................
If discharged or moved where now and what occupation?..........
How is he (or she) getting along?..........................
If still in school state how the child is progressing..........
Has the child been a problem or hindrance at school?.........
In what way? ...............................................
Does it seem likely that he will be able to shift for himself?.
(Use the reverse side of this blank for reporting further details)

Grade of ability
Reading .................................................... Make an estimate of the child's present
capacity in each of the subjects in the adjoining column. Use the average capacity of a school grade as the standard of measurement. Indicate the child's ability in every case by K (kindergarten ability) 0 (no ability whatever) 1 (ability of a first grade pupil) 2 (ability of a second grade pupil) 3 (third grade) 4 (fourth grade) 5 (fifth grade) 6 (sixth grade)
Writing ....................................................
Arithmetic ..................................................
Spelling ...................................................,
Drawing ...................................................
Handwork ..................................................
Plays and games ........................................
Ability to take directions ..............................
Conversation ...............................................

*We wish to thank the supervisors for their co-operation in securing the returns.

A follow-up record of one hundred mentally deficient school children

In 1915 a questionnaire census was made of the mentally deficient pupils in rural and village schools of the supervisory system. The teachers and supervisors did not simply report the names of pupils suspected to be feeble-minded but furnished in each case a home and school record of the child and specimens of school work which enabled us to judge whether the child was properly reported. On the basis of these data we excluded a fraction of cases as being probably normal merely backward or doubtful. There remained however a large group of cases where the evidence strongly pointed at mental deficiency. The present follow-up study which dates three years after the original survey was based on children belonging to this latter group. The syllabus below* furnished us with data for 102 children—one girls and 64 boys (present ages 8 to 20; medium age about 14).

A Thirty-two children are still attending school. The reports often show promotions but such promotions have rested chiefly on expediency and respect for the physical growth of the pupil. In only two cases has good normal progress been reported. In 18 cases there was no progress at all or only poor progress; in 9 cases "fair progress" was reported; in the remaining three cases there was no record. It is safe to say therefore that with a few exceptions these children have made but very slight academic progress and that the time and energy expended in teaching them the three R's has been largely wasted. Reckoned for a period of three years this constituted no inconsiderable item. It does not mean that these deficient pupils have not incidentally profited a great deal in acquiring habits of deportment and many minor personal habits which are of value in their general training. This gratuitous training however should be supplemented by special provisions of a manual and vocational character; and supervisors should encourage or require every teacher of a definitely deficient pupil to make a special program for such pupil in accordance with the suggestions of the state handbook.

B Ten of the 102 children are now reported as being at home. Simply "at home" is the brief but suggestive record for these cases. In practically every instance the child belonging to this group is relatively incompetent and gives no promise whatever of being able to shift for himself. In 18 of the cases in Group A the supervisor is of the opinion that the children may be able to earn a living.

C One-third of the children (33 out of 102) are reported as working. Of these 6 are working in a factory; 12 on a farm; 7 are helping at home; and 10 do odd irregular jobs. We have no detailed data as to the economic value and possibilities of these children but most of them are apparently engaged in simple and not always permanent occupations. In the supervisors' estimate of 33 of these working youths 19 show a likelihood of being able to shift for themselves; in 10 cases this is doubtful and in 4 altogether improbable.

These figures confirm the impression that many high grade feeble-minded pupils succeed after a fashion on leaving school. Sometimes no doubt their vocational success is much more marked than their school success which was gauged by narrow academic
standards. By strict definition a feeble-minded individual is one who can not lead an independent self-controlling economic existence; but there are many stations in life where the conditions of labor are almost as simple and secure as they would be in an institution. Favorably circumstanced these youths may drift along indefinitely as farm hands helpers at odd jobs or factory workers. Permitted to assume the responsibility of founding a home and a family their inferior intelligence is in greater danger of being overtaxed. A study which covers only three years in the lives of deficient school children scarcely reveals the totality of social consequences which are associated with mental deficiency.

D It is interesting and somewhat significant that in 24 children or almost one-fourth of all the cases studied no follow-up data were available. The reports in these cases simply read “lost track of” “can not locate” “no one seems to know of such a child” etc. Our government can not be accused of excessive paternalism when the public records so completely lose touch with children who so recently were on the public school register. Conditions in Connecticut are in no sense peculiar in this respect. But these deficient children are the very ones whom the state ought not to lose sight of. There should be a system of registration supplemented by a form of probationary supervision which would serve the double function of protecting the feeble-minded and protecting the state against the feeble-minded. Such a policy of after care does not exist even in outline. If it is adopted it might well originate as part of the administration of our public schools.