

CHAPTER NINE

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

The area of special education is one of particular interest and pride at Eastern because of the pioneering work done here in the training of teachers for handicapped children, and the study of their problems. Prior to 1920 most of the work with these exceptional children was conducted in residential schools. The democratic ideal of equal opportunity for all, however, found a growing response among educators in the second decade of our century. To this was coupled a stimulus in the public schools toward the improvement of teaching by recognition of individual differences in the pupils. The Progressive Education movement (after World War I) in its emphasis on the study of the child (all kinds of children) was especially open-minded to possible transfer values for the teaching of normal children from experiments with atypical children.

The term "special education" connotes, to the educator in this field, a program which provides special facilities and treatment for special needs. It involves a special corps of teachers with special methodology, and special equipment such as buses with lifts instead of steps, buildings without stairs, hearing aids, embossed globes of the world, equipment for braille reading, audiometers, crutches, braces, wheelchairs.

The story of the training of teachers for handicapped children began in Michigan with the work of two men, Charles Scott Berry and Charles Morris Elliot. It culminated in the first teachers college program in the United States for the training of teachers in Special Education.¹

Professor Berry came to the neighboring University of Michigan in 1908 from a position as Traveling Fellow for Harvard University.

His interest in exceptional children became evident at the time in the course work that he gave in *School Hygiene*, found expression a couple of years later in a seminar in *The Study of Individual Differences*, and the next year in *The Psychology and Education of Exceptional Children*.

In the summer of 1914, under the authority of the State Board of Education, Berry organized a small class for teachers of the mentally retarded at the Michigan Home and Training School for the Feeble-Minded at Lapeer. The next year, with the consent of the school, the State Board transferred the course to the Normal College at Ypsilanti, where the basic offerings were given for teacher preparation. Here, under the direction of Berry, the course was given in the summer sessions of 1915 and 1916.

Born in Perth, Ontario, Elliot's parents brought him to this country at a very early age. To prepare for college he attended Michigan's famous preparatory school, Ferris Institute, from which he emerged with an idealism and sincerity of purpose that was strikingly characteristic of Ferris graduates. His college degree was earned at the Normal, where he made his career. As a student and young instructor, he embodied the sentiment and enthusiasm that the Normal inspired in those days by composing the words for three of the college songs that have been preserved.² He was a charter member of the college scholastic honorary society, Stoics.

Elliot, teaching psychology at Normal, was an admirer of Berry and had taken some work under him. Elliot took over the course for the summer session of 1917 and in 1918 organized, as part of the Training School program, the first laboratory class for feeble-minded children, placing Miss Blanche Towne in charge.

From 1920 to 1924, Elliot was loaned to the Detroit Board of Education where, at the Detroit City Normal School, he directed this work for a school system that had long shown an interest in its handicapped children. The Normal College continued to give the necessary preliminary work, and also maintained a room for subnormal children.

In 1923, the State Legislature took an action that greatly stimulated the public school demand for trained teachers of special classes. The act provided financial aid for school districts wishing to organize classes for blind and deaf children. Whereupon, the State Board designed the Normal College as the place where such teachers should be trained, and in 1924 Elliot was transferred back to Ypsi-

lanti, given the responsibility for developing appropriate curricula for all branches, and made head of a Department of Special Education.³

The department was established on the basis of Elliot's recommendation, in which he urged, among other things, that a survey be made of the schools of Ypsilanti and neighboring Ann Arbor to determine the number of deaf, blind, and crippled children, that classes for these children be established in Ypsilanti, and that no teacher be deemed qualified to teach such special classes in the State of Michigan who had not had at least a year of successful teaching experience with normal children, a state life certificate (based on a two-year course at this time) and a year of special training in one of the special education areas.

A department was established, but no funds were appropriated. However, a way was found to ameliorate this hardship. The classes were organized under the auspices of the Ypsilanti School District, making them eligible to share in State aid. These funds, added to the college budget, made it possible to employ the teachers needed.

The establishment of a Department of Special Education involved the development of new and highly specialized courses, for which there was no precedent. Such, for example, were *Pathology of the Crippled Child: The Mechanism of the Ear*; *The Science of Elements of Speech*; *Blindness—Its Causes and Prevention*; *Stammering and Cognate Defects*; *Defective Speech*; *Phonetics and Voice*. The materials for these courses were drawn from every available source.

In the fall of 1926, consequent upon a suggestion from Professor Jacob Reighard, chairman of the Department of Zoology at the University of Michigan, who suffered from deafness, a class in lip-reading was organized for adults, its purpose "to strengthen the social and communicative abilities of deafened adults, and thus aid their life adjustment." It was one of the first of its kind in America.⁴ The following January Elliot secured a gift of \$15,000 in support of the training of teachers for lip-reading from Walter O. Smith of Flint, Michigan.⁵

In 1930, having moved from cramped quarters in the west wing of old Pierce Hall to more adequate quarters in the Training School Building (Welch Hall), the "open window" or "health" class for children of low vitality, long a part of the elementary training school, was absorbed by the department.

In 1938, an event occurred that was to facilitate the work of the department for all future time. Elliot had, from the first, envisioned a separate building for special education, planned definitely for this purpose, with all the special facilities required. In 1937, he approached the Board of Trustees of the Horace H. Rackham and Mary A. Rackham Fund of Detroit for assistance. This Fund had been established for "benevolent, charitable, educational, scientific, religious and public purposes" such as would "promote the health, welfare, happiness, education, training and development of men, women and children, particularly the sick, aged, young, erring, poor, crippled, helpless, handicapped, unfortunate and underprivileged, regardless of race, color, religion or station . . ."

The Trustees lent a ready ear, and in December an announcement was made of the gift of \$250,000 for a building for special education at the Michigan State Normal College. In an explanatory statement, they said:

Professor Elliot's dream of twenty years was an adequate modern building in which to house his department. It was because of his successful efforts with crippled children that the Michigan State Board of Education, eighteen years before, had designated the Michigan State Normal College as the one teacher—training institution in the State to investigate the needs of and to train teachers for the education of handicapped children . . . Professor Elliot's enthusiasm impressed the Trustees of the Rackham Fund with the value of such a project . . .

The grant carried two stipulations: one, that the work of the school would correlate but not duplicate the work of The Institute for Human Adjustment of the University of Michigan (subsidized in 1936 by the Rackham Fund); two, that the State Board would provide continued and permanent support.

The building was planned with a dormitory wing to house 24 children, which would make it possible to serve more distant communities. Facilities were included for physical therapy. Equipment included special desks, books, mechanical aids of various sorts, and provision for avoiding glare and preserving vision of the partially-sighted. For the completion of the therapeutic pool (standing above floor level to enable an attendant to accompany the child from outside; warmed as needed) and the dormitory, an additional \$30,000 was granted. The building, described as the best facility of its kind in the world, was opened for use in the fall of 1939, dedicated June 27, 1940.

At the ceremony of dedication Berry suggested two inscriptions for the building—for those who enter, “Enter to Understand Those Who are Different” and, as they leave, “Depart to Serve Mankind Better.”

Michigan Normal was hailed as the first in the nation to construct a special building for teacher-training in the field of special education and Elliot was henceforth to carry the title of Director of the Horace H. Rackham School of Special Education.

Elliot noted that since the Michigan State Normal College was the first teacher-training institution to organize a Department of Special Education, the department had become widely known in this and other countries, and students were coming from practically every state in the Union and from Canada. Also, visitors were arriving from other countries.

Expansion of the work of the department was inevitable. In 1938, a graduate program was initiated in collaboration with the University of Michigan, leading to the master of arts degree.

In 1946, subsidized by the Bell Telephone Company and in cooperation with the University of Michigan, a research project in “visible speech” was undertaken. The telephone company provided an elaborate instrument called a “cathode ray translator” which visualized on a screen the modulations of speech sounds and thus enabled an analysis which could be used to correct faulty speech and to teach the totally deaf to speak. It also, when connected to a radio, enabled the deaf person to “listen.”

Elliot died in 1941, at age 70. He could leave this world in the full knowledge that the movement which he had pioneered had “taken,” and had spread with great rapidity over the nation. By 1929, 43 institutions in the United States (and 2 in Canada) reported offering courses for teachers of exceptional children. By 1931, the number was 71; by 1936, 118.

His efforts were directed to the formulation and creation of a curriculum, the planning and obtaining of a suitable home for his program, one that would satisfy its unique needs, and the promotion of organizations to further the cause to which he was dedicated. He was a founder of the Michigan Society for Crippled Children and of the International Council for the Education of Exceptional Children. In 1928, he served as president of this organization, presiding over its sixth annual meeting, held at Toronto.

Elliot was succeeded by his assistant, Francis Lord. Lord's

administration was particularly noteworthy for its summer programs which drew students from all over the United States and Canada and, in cooperation with the University of Michigan, provided as lecturers distinguished authorities in specialized fields.⁶ One summer featured the first collegiate course in the nation for children who were both deaf and blind. In 1949, 1950, and 1951 a program was organized for home teachers of the blind by the American Foundation for the Blind, sponsored by the Perkins Institution of Massachusetts. Lay readers from the Ypsilanti community supplied with enthusiasm an urgent need.

In 1949, a course in the education and treatment of the cerebral palsied child was organized, in cooperation with the National Society for Crippled Children and the Michigan Society for Crippled Children. The following year the program was extended to include the nursery school, and a parent institute for the mothers (a feature that was repeated in 1951, 1952, and 1953). In 1952, a special course in *Parent Education* was offered. In 1953, a special institute was held for parents and friends of retarded children. In that year Lord resigned to become Coordinator of Special Education at the Los Angeles State College of Applied Arts and Science. He was succeeded by Vivian Harway as Acting Director (1953–1954), followed by Morvin A. Wirtz (1954–1958), then by Allen Myers. In 1967, Myers was made Dean of the College of Education, and Frank Wawrzaszek, a member of the staff since 1957, became acting head of the department. (He was named head of the department in 1969.—Editor)

With the passage of time, as must always be the case, changes occurred. The adult lip-reading program was discontinued with the resignation of its very capable instructor, Miss Ann Bunger. It was felt that such a program, subsidized for a limited time as it had been with the gift from Walter Smith, could not be justified in the college budget. It was a rehabilitation program for adults, not a program for the training of teachers of handicapped children. The visual speech analysis program proved not as promising as had been hoped. Children found too much difficulty in associating wavy lines on a screen with specific sounds. The dormitory was discontinued in 1965 and the area turned into office space for a growing faculty. Developments in ease of transportation made it possible for children at a distance to live at home and attend the school, and there was no question of a dearth of children. The therapeutic pool, once such an

important and unique feature of the building, now was used for physical exercise and recreation only. Hydro-therapy had been replaced by more effective methods.

Perhaps most significant, however, was the change in the demands made on the school. Until after World War II, the number of college students enrolling in any one year in the teacher-training curriculum had hovered around 60. Now it had risen to nearly 700. An awakened public conscience, expressed in legislative acts encouraging and appropriating for special class work in the public schools, had created a vastly increased demand for special teachers. In consequence, the character and responsibilities of the faculty had changed. No longer were the teachers of the special rooms (the faculty of the Rackham School) required also to conduct the college training classes. They were now able to devote their full time to the work with the children. At the same time, a professional teaching staff for the students in training in the Department of Special Education was developed that equaled if it did not surpass in size the faculty of the School.

The developing program was but symbolic of a national phenomenon; fruition of a single pioneering venture that was initiated only half a century ago.

A training program for therapists for the rehabilitation of the disabled (mentally, emotionally, physically) was, with the encouragement of the Medical Superintendent of the Ypsilanti State Hospital, Dr. Inch, initiated at Normal in the very year that America was plunged into World War II.

Affiliation of such a program with a state-supported college or university was a pioneering venture. Records of the American Occupational Therapy Association show that Western State Teachers' College (now Western Michigan University), which in 1936 took over the program that had been developed by the Kalamazoo State Hospital since 1922, was the first in the nation to obtain the necessary approval of this Association's Council on Medical Education and Hospitals. This was given in 1938.

Normal's program, initiated in 1941, secured the necessary approvals in 1944. At the same time, programs at Ohio State University (initiated in 1942), the University of Illinois and San Jose State College (initiated in 1943) were approved. Today all schools of occupational therapy are affiliated with a college or university—some 32 in all.

At Normal, the program was placed with the Special Education Department which from 1944 became known as the Department of Special Education and Occupational Therapy. At first the curriculum included the requirements for a teaching certificate. Should the O. T. graduate not find ready employment, she would be eligible for a teaching position in the public schools. The tremendous demands arising from the great war, however, obviated all doubt on this score, and the certification requirement was soon dropped. Beatrice Wade, O.T.R., was placed in charge. After two years she was succeeded by Gladys Tmey, and in 1950 Frances E. Herrick succeeded Miss Tmey. The enrollment grew from well below 100 students to the present (1968) high of 142.

The program of training led to the bachelor of science degree and registration (by examination) with the national association. It required four years of formal courses and an additional nine months of clinical experience in a variety of types of hospitals. Since the therapeutic approach employed the light crafts, considerable attention was given to courses in *ceramics, design, art, woodwork, art metalwork, needlework, stenciling, basketry, weaving*. The problem of deciding which activity would best serve the particular disablement, the degree of activity, and the results obtainable required of the therapist considerable knowledge in the areas of anatomy, physiology, medicine, surgery, psychiatry and psychology. Affiliations for clinical training were established with a score of State institutions and agencies.

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It is a fact worthy of note that some people have both the native capacity and the interest to devote their lives to assisting the handicapped or the disabled. In addition to good intelligence, this calls for qualities of human empathy, patience, and creative imagination. The challenge is to young people who are possessed of these qualities, who see the human condition and are fired by a desire to contribute to its amelioration. Eastern has had the inspiring experience of enrolling ever increasing numbers who are attracted by this challenge.