

THE PLIGHT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH COGNITIVE DISABILITIES: SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL FACETS OF AN ARDUOUS EVOLUTION

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BEGINNINGS

In current society where social philosophers, with justification, regularly note that social evolution has not kept pace with technological scientific advances, it is heartening to trace over time the plight of individuals defined by Western civilization as intellectually or cognitively challenged. This article celebrates the positive evolution of social and educational thought concerning such individuals.

Professionals associated with intellectual disability need to know the contexts that have shaped this arduous evolution. As noted earlier by Kolstoe and Frey (1965): "While political philosophy is often thought of as distinct from educational philosophy, the close relationship between political philosophy and treatment of the disabled seems inescapable" (p. 3). There is both a temporal dimension and a cross-cultural dimension which must be considered when tracing the history of intellectual disability. Sarason (1985) suggests that mental retardation cannot be understood fully unless one examines the society, culture and history within which it occurs. Broadbrush sweeps are denied. Beirne-Smith, Patton and Kim (2006) caution against premature closure and simplistic conclusions surrounding historical issues:

While much of the progress made in the field of intellectual disabilities has been due to the unending and dedicated efforts of individuals, strong sociopolitical forces have also been at work to influence its development. When studying history, we must appreciate the social climate of a given time. In the past, as in the present, much of what has happened to people with intellectual disabilities has been determined largely by social and political factors (p. 4).

The treatment of individuals with intellectual disabilities has been fraught with issues and controversies which seem to defy closure. Some social thinkers have described it as a "recycling phenomenon." Long-standing issues remain just below the surface and then resurface as part of current debate.

Many people also think that the issues facing special education today are completely new. But if you read the historical literature of special education, you will see that today's issues and problems are remarkably similar to those of long ago. Issues, problems, and ideals arise, flower, go to seed, and reappear when the conditions are again right for their growth (Patton, Blackburn, & Fad, 1996, p. 305).

Antiquity

The treatment of and attitudes toward persons with intellectual disabilities can be traced to early civilizations including Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Chinese as well as during the early Christian period. More than 2000 years ago Plato suggested in *The Republic* that individual variations in intelligence must be the basic determinant of the social and political order in any workable society (Robinson & Robinson, 1976). Both Greek and Roman civilizations were aware that some citizens were cognitively challenged. The Greeks coined the term *idiocy* to describe persons who did not take part in public life - *those who did not hold office*. The origin of the term imbecile is the Latin word *imbecillis* meaning *of weak mind, feeble, without strength*.

Atrocities were not uncommon in early times. In ancient Sparta, malformed and less than healthy children were put to death. Only those deemed fit to become soldiers were permitted to live. The duty of mothers was to produce strong sons to fight in the Spartan army.

In early Roman times it was required that children be accepted into each family by their father. Early Roman law granted the father absolute power of life or death over his offspring. As with the Greeks, infanticide was an established practice in Roman society. In a formal household ceremony, the Roman father could accept or *not* accept into the family the newborn presented to him. Usually this was a routine matter and a source of family celebration, but this was not always the case. Occasionally, handicapped children were rejected and then abandoned or killed. The *Patria Potestas* endowed the Roman father with the privilege to sell, abandon, kill, offer in sacrifice, or otherwise dispose of his offspring.

That children (not only those with intellectual disabilities) have been harshly abused during the course of early history is not difficult to document. As noted by DeMause (1975), the ability to feel empathy is only of recent origin. The farther back one traces the history of childhood, the greater the likelihood that children would be killed, abandoned, whipped, sexually exploited and psychologically mistreated. In many cases, intellectual disability presented a further risk factor for abuse and neglect (Nesbit & Karagianis, 1982).

The social and educational treatment of individuals with cognitive challenges can be described as a gradual positive evolution, with better treatment in the 21st century than during earlier times – but history has not always been kind. Individuals described as being cognitively challenged have been perceived as “burdens to society”, thrown to wild beasts, and at various points in history, have been utilized as fools and court jesters and described as “village idiots”. They were viewed paradoxically at one point both as “demon possessed” and as “les enfants du bon Dieu” (God’s children). Progress has been slow, difficult and not without interruption.

Gradual Influence of Christianity

One of the positive influences affecting the social treatment of individuals with cognitive challenges in Western civilization was ushered in with the advent of Christianity. Its influence was pervasive, bringing with it strides in the development of social conscience. Society’s view

of individuals with intellectual disabilities shifted to a more humane position. Religious teachings proclaimed that all individuals were "children of God," and as a part of creation, were worthy of life. Central in the Christian credo is the element of faith in which belief is not dependent upon understanding. In brief, a person need not be of high intelligence to be a believer or practising Christian.

Those with intellectual challenges were recognized as people needing to be cared for by society. Monasteries and asylums were constructed to meet the needs of these wards of the Church. Before 1700, when service was provided to individuals with special needs, it was protective in nature (i.e., providing housing and sustenance). This was often offered in the monasteries. Little evidence exists that systematic programs of training, education or service delivery were available (Beirne-Smith, Patton & Kim, 2006).

It is of interest to note that in antiquity and extending into the 18th century, the concept of intellectual disability was enigmatic stemming from the fact that people did not have a sophisticated knowledge base concerning the concept of intelligence which would facilitate understanding. Society associated the term mental retardation only with those displaying more severe limitations and involvements. In an era of wood, wind and sail, when manual labour played a much larger role in the workforce, milder forms of intellectual disability were neither defined nor recognized. As noted by Beirne-Smith et al., (2006): "Not until the early part of the 20th century did mild intellectual disability become a describable condition" (p. 5).

Impact of Humanism

In addition to Christianity, another influence had an impact destined to help create a new social climate. Renaissance thought of the 15th and 16th centuries prompted bold changes to the conceptualization of man. Although the Renaissance rightfully has been deemed important to the world in the realm of culture and the arts, the fact that it "increased man's willingness to look at himself and his environment more openly, naturally, and empirically" (Maloney & Ward, 1978, pp. 21-22) is particularly noteworthy.

"Renaissance thinking encouraged the philosophy of humanism, principally concerned with people's worth as human beings and their freedom to develop. The idea that all were created equal and had inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness was popular" (Beirne-Smith et al, 2006, p. 6). As further noted by these writers, "The prevailing social forces tended to refocus people's concepts of themselves and the world. The ultimate effects of these changes were reflected in the development of a climate conducive to the philosophy of humanism and the revolutionary fervor of the 18th century" (p. 6). The French Revolution which commenced in 1789 had as its spirited cry "liberty, equality and fraternity."

Educational Strivings Associated with Humanism

Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, "a young medical man" in Paris, credited by some to be the father of special education, was the first researcher to extend the humanistic philosophy into the world of exceptionality. In the first documented research concerning intellectual disability, Itard

attempted to educate Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron, the world's most famous feral child. According to 1799 reports in the *Journal des Débats* the feral boy was a specimen of primitive society – "a degraded being, human only in shape; a dirty, scared, inarticulate creature who trotted and grunted like the beasts of the field" (Humphrey, 1962, p. iv). It is estimated that the boy had lived from his seventh almost to his tenth year in absolute solitude.

In his youth Itard was uncompromising in his belief in humanism, particularly as espoused by such writers as John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). With a knowledge (considered somewhat naive in the opinions of some of his contemporaries), Itard embarked upon a five year educational program with his student. Central to the program was Locke's concept of the *tabula rasa*, a term used to describe the initial condition of the mind before it is written upon by experience. He approached Locke's view of child development and the associated dictum that "sense provides all" with optimistic enthusiasm. According to Humphrey (1962), Itard believed "that he had only to find and apply the proper social and physical education in order to supply the mental content that would make the boy a normal human being" (p. vii). His five year educational plan approached human development with an environmental stance, focused upon sensory input.

Perhaps Itard was naive and extended the philosophy of humanism to a convoluted extreme but his work strongly reflected a central core of humanism and its powerful impact upon educational thought.

Of the immediate success of Itard's work there is no question. In place of the hideous creature that was brought to Paris, there was to be seen after two years' instruction an "almost normal child who could not speak" but who lived like a human being; clean, affectionate, even able to read a few words and to understand much that was said to him. The news spread throughout Europe, and brought Itard a European reputation. Indeed the Emperor of Russia, through his ambassador, made him a flattering offer to settle in St. Petersburg. (Humphrey, 1962, XII)

Some contend that Itard's original mistake was apparently to assume, as the result of a somewhat "amateurish" philosophy, that environment could accomplish everything; that a boy who was not a normal human being could necessarily be made normal by the proper training. He failed to see that, even if he were correct in this supposition, the environmental corrective stimulation must be applied at the right time. Training may clearly have been too late (Harvey, 1962).

According to Blackstone and Berdine (1993) Itard's "through the senses" approach to the education of individuals with intellectual disabilities extended to other early educators such as Edouard Séguin (1812-1880), a French physician, who in 1866 published a methodology text titled *Idiocy and its Treatment by the Physiological Method*. According to Mercer and Payne (1975), Séguin was overly optimistic that "mentally deficient" people could be cured, i.e., gain normal intellectual functioning: "He [Séguin] believed in the manipulability of human behaviors

and did not regard mental retardation as a permanent deficiency" (p. 110). His method was in essence a bombardment of the mind with stimuli provided through the senses.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952), an Italian physician concerned with early childhood education, further developed Séguin's elaboration of Itard's techniques, which came to be known as "sensationalism". As noted by Farber (1968) "Although the modern movement toward the education of the mentally retarded began with Itard and the Wild Boy of Aveyron, the diffusion of programs for retarded children living at home was sporadic until the beginning of the twentieth century" (p. 224).

Since that time there has been much discussion in psychological and sociological literature as to the relative part played by heredity and environment in determining human nature.

However, progress was slow during the 1800s. As aptly stated by Ellis (1975):
 By 1900 we, too, had lost our enthusiasm for training education, and habilitation of the retarded. The ebb in our attitudes was reflected in overcrowded custodial institutions, in the indictment of the retarded as criminal and degenerate, and in a forceful and highly vocal eugenics movement. To be sure, the humanitarian view of the retarded was in eclipse until after World War II. (pp. iv-vi)

A NEW DARK AGE

The Eugenics Movement

The eugenics movement, dating from Sir Francis Galton's publication entitled *Possible Improvement of the Human Breed* (1901), moved to the foreground. Galton had coined the term *eugenics* to describe "the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race." Ways to prevent the number of individuals with intellectual disabilities from increasing became the major concern of medical practitioner and educator alike. So solidly were society's fears entrenched, that the period from 1900 to 1946 has become known to history as the "Alarmist Period" (Clausen 1967).

By 1915 the eugenics alarm had sounded widely, and discussion topics such as "uncontrolled mental deficiency" became preoccupations. What had been an exceedingly small and insignificant social issue mushroomed into a pressing social concern. Copious pamphlets, articles, and official reports documented the widespread alarm. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the public's view of individuals with a mental challenge was at a new low. The spirit and reality of bygone days when children with disabilities were considered unworthy of life had returned. References to "holy innocents," "eternal children," "heavenly infants," and "les enfants du bon Dieu," had given way to a less charitable view. The concepts of guardianship, universal kinship, and protection of such persons from an exploitive unkind society, were replaced by a fervent desire to protect society from the evils associated with the "damaged goods."

The true spirit of the early 1900s was captured in the words of Karl Schwartz (1908), the rector of an established church in Syracuse, New York.

The author holds that it is not a pessimistic view of life to wish to see a man get out of the world, who is not fit for it, and who has little or no chance of ever becoming so. To one who anticipates the general upward trend of human life, it is evident that the occasional removal by society of an individual, or even of many individuals, may be necessary to the welfare of the social group. The hypothesis that individuals are virtually equal or ever can become equal in terms of social value, leads to the most monumental follies (p.83-84).

The tenor of the times is further illustrated in an article by Whitney (1929) entitled “The Control of Feeble-Mindedness”:

The biological process which we term heredity functions according to, and with the guidance of, certain well defined laws. One of the most fundamental laws of this biological process is, “Like begets like.” This indisputable law we have at our command. It is up to us to use it wisely by preventing the feeble-minded from begetting more feeble-minded (p. 12).

These expressions of fear, intolerance, hostility, and panic typified the reactions of Western man toward those whose lives were mentally challenged during this period (1890-1950 approx.). Social thought of the post-Industrial Revolution era lagged far behind technological advances. In fact, with reference to those with intellectual disabilities, social views became harsher. Among the historical influences noted by Adams (1971), the Puritan ethic with its emphasis on competence and success contributed to many pejorative views about those described as “mentally retarded”. Within this framework such individuals were perceived as an irredeemable loss rather than as a victimized member of society. Views such as those presented by Schwartz, and Whitney were typical of the times.

In 1902, Barr, a past president of the parent organization to the American Association on Mental Deficiency, delivered an address entitled “The Imbecile and Epileptic vs. the Taxpayer and the Community.” Describing mental retardation as the “mother of crime, pauperism, and degeneracy,” Fernald (1912) spoke to the Massachusetts Medical Society concerning “The Burden of Feeble-Mindedness.” He claimed that:

The feeble-minded are a parasitic, predatory class, never capable of self-support or of managing their own affairs. The great majority ultimately become public charges in some form. They cause unutterable sorrow at home and are a menace and danger to the community (p. 90).

As late as 1930 many professionals were expressing fear concerning the social consequences of the perpetuation of cognitive disabilities. In England, Berry and Gordon (1931) lamented the

perceived “relative disproportion of poor stock to good” (p. 152) as a result of the restriction of family size in the upper strata, the advance of preventive medicine, and war losses: Emerick (1917) had expressed similar fears concerning American war losses noting that “the great misfortune of war is that it destroys our best blood and leaves the weaker brother at home to multiply” (p. 74). So widespread were these fears that sterilization, segregation, and institutionalization gained popular support and acceptance.

Out of fear of overpopulation by those who were cognitively challenged, the sexual interests and activities of these individuals became magnified out of all proportion by the public. Although both sexes were presented as being promiscuous, women in particular were regarded as a source of potential danger to society.

It is certain that the feeble-minded girl or woman in the city rarely escapes the sexual experiences that too often result in the birth of more defectives and degenerates. Feeble-minded women are almost invariably immoral, and if at large usually become carriers of venereal disease or give birth to children who are as defective as themselves. The feeble-minded woman who marries is twice as prolific as the normal woman (Fernald, 1912, pp. 90-91).

Sterilization, or asexualization, was not without support as a proposed means to curb the threat to future generations:

It would now be well to prepare our several states to call to our assistance the surgeon’s knife to prevent the entailing of the curse upon innocent numbers of yet unborn children (Perry, 1903, p. 254).

It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind (U.S. Supreme Court, May 2, 1927, cited in Davies and Williams, 1930, pp. 112-113).

Perceiving these persons as an immediate danger to society, Barr (1897) fervently urged for a growth in institutional facilities:

Assuredly if we are to arise to the responsibility of the times, to grapple with the enemy one hundred strong, which enters all homes alike and threatens the very life blood of the nation, we must enlarge our borders and extend our operations. We need space, and yet more space, and who than we better fitted to claim it? (pp. 12-13)

Byers (1916) concluded that “we know too much to delay longer” (p. 42), and urged that parenthood be prevented by permanent segregation of individuals with cognitive challenges in state-controlled institutions.

The size of institutions grew, with the “colony” of many hundred becoming the desired facility. Institutions grew—not to rehabilitate, not to improve the quality of life, not as a paternalistic gesture. Remote from population centers and social interaction they flourished, zealously committed to their custodial function.

Along educational lines, this did not mean that classes for children with intellectual disabilities were not in existence. In some instances they served as mini-institutions. Murdock (1903), President of *The Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Persons*, posited that special schools are “no doubt a necessity and do a good work” (p. 71), given the lack of sufficient institutional accommodation. Noting that some children sent to special schools should have been sent to institutions, Murdock emphasized the inappropriateness of attempting to educate such people to enter society. A New Dark Ages had been ushered in for those with intellectual disabilities.

A PENDULUM SWING

As noted by Nesbit and Hadley (1987), “change is an interesting phenomenon. Sometimes it is deceptively simple and quickly accomplished; at other times it is extremely complex and spans many years. Most significant social changes are of the second type, not immediate nor the result of a unitary cause or event” (p. 23).

Gradually, over time, views concerning individuals with intellectual disabilities began to soften. One of the most influential spokesmen for a more positive view was Fernald who earlier had championed institutionalization and had warned society of the danger and burden associated with intellectual disability. In an about turn Fernald, who had been a central figure in the eugenics movement and had advocated that “tainted families should become extinct” (1912, p. 98), became a leading advocate for change. By 1919 Fernald’s writing concerning education reflected a view very different from his earlier thoughts on the subject. Noting that “we have begun to recognize the fact that there are good morons and bad morons” (p. 119), Fernald attempted to sensitize society to the rights of children having cognitive challenges: “It should be recognized that the defective child is entitled, even more than a normal child, to education according to his needs and capacity.... Provision should be made in the normal schools [teacher training facilities] for training teachers of defective children” (p. 118).

Looking back over the years, Fernald (1924) noted with pleasure an emerging positive view of persons with intellectual disabilities, commenting that “the rapid extension of the special class idea is a matter of history” (p. 207). No longer should these individuals be considered “an object of horror and aversion... who should be ostracized, sterilized, and segregated for his natural life at public expense” (p. 211). Consistent with his new view, Fernald advocated for education and limited social integration.

Murdock (1924), who earlier had been an avid supporter of large institutions, noted that “much can be done for the high grade mental defective” (p. 149). In a refreshing statement, Murdock acknowledged the role of environmental influences with regard to cognitive challenge:

We believe we have discovered that notwithstanding hereditary influences, they can be markedly influenced for good or evil, by their environment, particularly in the development[al] period. If properly trained and supervised many may become most useful citizens, capable of fulfilling an important field of usefulness in the economic life of the community. (p. 148)

These views were very modest seeds of change. Such views notwithstanding, little public thought or concern was given to the education or social integration of individuals with intellectual disabilities until the 1940s. As suggested by Begab and Richardson (1975), the public's concern had dissipated with the growth of institutions, and mental retardation was pushed temporarily into the background of social consciousness. With the disappearance of this population from public visibility came a corresponding reduction in public concern. In addition, issues related to the 1930s' depression and World War II were of greater priority than issues related to those with cognitive challenges.

Impact of World War II

During the post-war years, many people reconsidered the plight of those in society who were cognitively challenged and began to confess to doubts concerning the philosophy and direction of existing services. Professional views varied greatly on topics ranging from institutional placement to eugenics. Everything was open to question during the 1930s and 1940s and this in itself was a healthy sign.

The shift in social attitude toward those with intellectual disabilities does not date from a single event. Rothstein (1961) linked the growth of interest in this area during the post-war years to four influences:

- A thorough revulsion toward the Nazi mass slaughter of persons with disabilities.
- An adamant, unashamed, and well organized parent movement.
- A reawakening of interest on the part of biological and social scientists.
- Public awareness of how little had been done for these "forgotten people." (p. v)

By the end of World War II, the number of exceptional individuals had increased. Individuals returned from combat with a variety of newly acquired disabilities including intellectual disability. In a grateful attempt to rehabilitate the returnees, the public disposition toward exceptional persons (including those who were cognitively challenged) became more positive. As noted by Begab and Richardson (1975), "Perhaps the most significant outcome of these efforts was the new insights gained regarding the remarkable restorative capacities of the human organism and resilience of the human personality" (p. 8).

Normalization

If there is a specific concept which characterizes recent and ongoing social strivings (particularly since the early 1970s) with regard to individuals defined as having a cognitive challenge, it is “normalization”. Basically, Western civilization has shifted from a traditional custodial model to an educational model when viewing the exceptional individual. Indigenous to this model is the belief that exceptionality must not be viewed as a reason to deny individuals the right to participate in society and maximize their potential through education – a functional prerequisite for social participation.

During recent decades in North America, four interrelated terms – *normalization*, *mainstreaming*, *integration* and most recently *inclusion* – have come at different points in time to signify the major shift in thought and direction that has taken place in the provision of educational services for exceptional individuals.

The concept of normalization has had, and is still having, a profound influence. Bank-Mikkelsen (1969), head of the *Danish Mental Retardation Service* is credited with first use of the term. He defined normalization as “letting the mentally retarded obtain an existence as close to the normal as possible” (p. 27). When introduced to North America in the *Report of the President’s Committee on Mental Retardation* (1969), it had great import for exceptional individuals. Zipperlan (1975) described the introduction of the concept as “the first breeze through a newly opened window” (p. 265).

Crediting the roots of the concept to Scandinavia, Wolfensberger (1972) broadened the definition to include all areas of human services and treatment defining it as:

Utilization of means which are as culturally normative as possible in order to establish or maintain personal behaviors and characteristics which are as culturally normative as possible (p. 28).

Thus, in its basic form, normalization has come to mean that whenever possible the treatment of exceptional members of society should be as normal as that afforded other members of the culture in which they are living. That is, the entire range of life experiences must be made as near “normal” as possible.

The Parent Movement

Parental concern for offspring with intellectual disabilities has had a major impact upon the provision of legal, social, medical, and educational services. Many parents had disagreed with and had not accepted the principle of mass institutionalization. Adams (1971) noted that, during the 1940s, middle-class families acquired a more sophisticated knowledge of their rights and were prepared to argue their cases skillfully.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), founded as *The International Council for Exceptional Children* in 1922, grew in both size and influence as professionals and parents awoke to the realization that much better provisions were possible than the repressive lifestyle of institutionalization. The CEC became an advocate for securing the rights of the exceptional individual, a clearinghouse for information, and a professional focal point for special educators and parents.

During the 1950s parents rallied to think, work and cooperatively promote common goals and aspirations. This fostered the 1950 establishment of *The National Association for Retarded Children* (NARC) having as its basic goal the promotion of the rights and general welfare of persons with cognitive challenges. The NARC became a model for other parent advocacy groups as it grew in strength. *The United Cerebral Palsy Association* (UCP) and *The Association for Children with Learning Disabilities* (ACLD) brought parents together in a union of strength and mutual support. Continuing in the tradition of the NARC and the CEC, *People First* came in to existence in 1974 as a self-help organization for those with mental challenges. Legislative recommendations of *The World Health Organization* clearly illustrate the rethinking of the 1950s concerning intellectual disability. There was a realization that neither sterilization nor institutionalization was appropriate. Clearly, the movement was in the direction of human rights, with the exceptional individual perceived as a member of society rather than as an adjunct to it. The United Nations 1959 *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* which defined the rights of all children was another major first step in the direction of social inclusion.

Ability Assessment

Of interest and importance in the discussion of change, is the questioning attitude of the 1950s with regard to intellectual assessment and the intelligence quotient (IQ). Binet's intellectual measures, which since the time of their inception had been viewed as sacrosanct measures of natural endowment, were now viewed with a more skeptical eye.

As noted by Clausen (1967), the recognition of experiential and cultural factors as causative variables in cognitive disability served to reshape the concept of human intellect. With intelligence perceived as variable rather than as constant, modification of abilities became a central focus in the discussion of services for those with intellectual disabilities. It was posited that education should usurp the position of traditional custodial care.

INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS

During the 70s the resurgence of interest in the education of exceptional individuals throughout the Western world prompted Canada, the United States and Great Britain to publish major documents to update their respective aspirations for special education in each country: *The CELDIC Report* (Canada, 1970); *Public Law 94-142 – The Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (U.S., 1975); and the *Warnock Report* (Great Britain, 1978). These three international documents had a profound influence in shaping and determining the direction of special education globally.

The CELDIC Report (1970) – Canada

The CELDIC Report, first of the three, was in many ways the trend-setter for the other two documents. In the mid-sixties, numerous people in Canada were concerned with problems presented by inadequate knowledge, treatment, services and education of children experiencing emotional and learning disabilities. Consequently, in 1966, *The Commission on Emotional and Learning Disorders in Children* was established to engage in a comprehensive nationwide study of such problems. Recommendations from the CELDIC inquiry contained in *The CELDIC Report (1970)*, commonly known as *One Million Children*, were many and dealt with a wide range of problems associated with Canadian children defined as having special needs.

The Committee took as its basic premise the right of every child to the assistance that is required to realize his/her full potential. The intent was not that all children would require equal treatment; for some children would require assistance beyond that given to other children if they were to realize their potential. The most significant recommendation concerned proposed changes in the school system and the reorganization of special education. It was recommended that special education should function primarily in the regular classroom and not in segregated classes and schools. This was a major shift in thinking at the time. In the years, since the publication of *The CELDIC Report*, there has been a growing acceptance of what became known popularly as the “mainstreaming principle”. A further strong CELDIC recommendation was that the Government of Canada and the provincial governments should be responsible for setting standards and providing funds to make services available for the exceptional child.

According to the Commission, without the backing of Canadians, a new emphasis on helping exceptional individuals could not hope to succeed. Fortunately, following *The CELDIC Report*, such a change in attitude swept the country enabling many important favorable changes in provincial legislation concerning exceptional individuals. There is no question that *The CELDIC Report* played a significant part in prompting changes in the manner in which exceptional individuals are treated in Canadian society.

United States Public Law 94-142 (1975) – United States

With this Act the United States moved further than any other country in attempting to provide a meaningful life for exceptional children. This unique piece of legislation mandated publically supported education for all children with disabilities aged 3 to 17. The Act clearly indicated who would be considered to have special needs citing two criteria: (1) having one or more of the difficulties listed in the Act such as deaf, mentally retarded, orthopedically handicapped, emotionally disturbed, etc. and (2) requiring special education and related services.

Public Law 94-142 defined a number of terms related to those with disabilities:

- “*Free appropriate public education*” was defined as special education and related services to be provided at public expense, under public supervision and meeting standards set down by the state. This would be carried out at all school educational levels

and would conform to an *Individualized Education Programme* (IEP) written for each child.

- The “*Individualized Education Program*” concept required that a written statement of program for each exceptional child be developed at a meeting of the appropriate educational officials with teachers, and parents or guardians.

US Public Law 94-142 represented a milestone in the education of exceptional children. Mandatory education for the child with special needs supported by public expense was a major step forward. States were now required to provide appropriate educational services in order to receive federal funds. It is also interesting to note that the Act stated that:

Handicapped children should be educated with nonhandicapped children where appropriate and should only be educated in separate classes or schools or removed from regular classes when the nature or severity of the condition is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

The Act had a significant impact on the education of children with disabilities. It created much discussion and renewed interest in special learners in the United States and other countries.

The Warnock Report 1978 – United Kingdom

The Warnock Report, published 1978, was the result of a five-year deliberation by a British Government Commission set up under the chairmanship of Mary Warnock to investigate provisions for exceptional individuals in the United Kingdom. The resultant document, entitled *Special Education Needs: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Youth*, has become known as *The Warnock Report*. It was a comprehensive document and encompassed most areas of concern in the education of handicapped children in Great Britain.

The question concerning where exceptional children should be educated was a key focus. The Warnock Committee described integration in three forms: – locational, social and functional. An exceptional child placed in a special class within a regular school for example, would accomplish locational integration. *Social integration*, characterized by social interaction, would be facilitated if exceptional children played with other children on the school grounds. *Functional integration*, which incorporates both locational and social integration, would be achieved when exceptional and nonexceptional children jointly participated in academic educational programs.

The committee pointed out that special schools would and must continue for three groups: those with severe or complex disabilities who need additional facilities of a special nature and expert teaching which cannot be provided in an ordinary school; those whose behavior is such that it causes disruptions in the classroom or prevents them from forming social relationships; and

those whose handicaps are multiple and prevent them from functioning in the regular school, even with additional help.

In concluding their report, the Warnock Committee encouraged a more active and concerned social attitude toward the handicapped: “There must be a general acceptance of the idea that special education involves as much skill and professional expertise as any other form of education, and that, in human terms, the returns on resources invested in it are just as great” (p. 355).

Supportive Canadian Strivings

In the broader context of human rights in Canada, as applied to those with cognitive challenges, the federal *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1985) advocates on behalf of exceptional individuals and is very positive in tone. The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is the federal and supreme law of Canada and has the power to override provincial legislation.

Crealock (1996) noted that provincial legislation is found in the Education Act of each province and territory. For students who are exceptional, the specificity of the law in each province varies from the minimal right for most students to attend school to the right of full inclusion in the general classroom. As pointed out by Winzer (2005) “Canadian provinces and territories have recognized the right to an education for all children in different ways, which can be broadly categorized [both] as mandatory and permissive. Mandatory legislation says that boards ‘must’ include students with special needs; permissive legislation allows, but does not require, the integration of such students” (p. 55). Winzer further points out that, at present in Canada, three connected factors – the inclusion movement, the willingness of advocacy groups to support parents, and interpretations of the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* – are fuelling much of present court activity regarding educational rights. The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is, and should be, a reference point in establishing and maintaining the rights of all exceptional children and adults.

CONCLUSION

Social systems are composed of individuals playing roles competently. If the person with a disability is to receive full membership in the community, he/she must assume a competent social role. The label “mental retardation” has carried with it through time a personality stereotype with associated behavioral expectations. A traditional social role has been designated by society. Unfortunately, it is the case that pre-existing negative perceptions still linger in some quarters and contribute to community definitions of mental retardation which confront those who have challenges as they integrate with society. The social perception of having an intellectual disability can, in itself, be disabling.

Reasons to Celebrate and Hope

The definition of intellectual disability has drastically changed in recent years. Instead of relying on a traditional IQ score as the sole criterion for definition, the current definition calls upon multiple indicators to portray a more holistic perspective. This is a welcome change. The current *American Association on Mental Deficiency* (AAMD) definition of mental retardation is as follows:

Mental retardation refers to substantial limitations in personal functioning. It is characterized by significant subaverage intellectual functioning, **existing concurrently with related limitations in two or more of the following applicable adaptive skills: communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self-direction, health and safety, functional academics, leisure, and work.** Mental retardation manifests before age eighteen (AAMR, 1992, p. 1).

It must be noted that the “adaptive functioning skills” aspect of the definition must be fulfilled before perceiving that a person has an intellectual disability. *Adaptive behavior* is defined as the effectiveness or degree to which the individual meets the standards of personal independence and social responsibility expected of his/her age and cultural group. Since these expectations vary for different age groups, deficits in adaptive behavior vary at different ages.

The AAMD definition provides an exciting challenge for teachers and service personnel. It is interesting to note that in 2007 the AAMR changed its name to the *American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* (AAIDD) and replaced the term *mental retardation* with *intellectual disabilities*. (Schalock, Luckasson & Shogren, 2007)

Inclusive Education

In recent years there has been a very active movement afoot directed toward the integration of exceptional children into regular school classes. Although there is much agreement concerning the merits of the normalization philosophy, the realities involved in its educational implementation have become the centre of a pervasive educational debate. The debate concerns “full inclusion” - the belief that all children irrespective of the degree, complexity or type of disability should be educated full time in the regular classroom.

Today, there are few who would actively oppose the educational integration of exceptional children who have the potential to thrive and succeed. Many, many with intellectual disabilities have been integrated successfully in regular education classes since the 1970s. The question is no longer unanswered whether exceptional children should be included in regular classes or be educated in segregated settings. The answer is a resounding “yes” in favor of inclusion with regard to the greatest majority of these children.

POST SCRIPT

Improvement has been laudable in both social and education realms as noted by various writers in the field today. Howard (2006) presented the progress as follows:

During the past 25 years, we have witnessed significant improvements in the education and treatment of children and adults with mental retardation. After more than a century of almost complete exclusion and segregation from everyday society, people with mental retardation are beginning to experience some of the benefits and responsibilities of participation in the mainstream (p. 201).

As Sandra Kaufman (1999) pointed out, compared to just a few years ago, there's a world of difference in the quantity and quality of services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (earlier classified as mental retardation).

With reference to the United States, Howard (2006) recently reflected upon progress with reference to the 1976 report of *The President's Committee on Mental Retardation* which set out the nation's major objectives for the remainder of the 20th century. Howard summarized the four key objectives:

- Attainment of citizenship status in law and in fact for all individuals with intellectual disabilities in the United States, exercised to the fullest degree possible under the conditions of disability.
- Reduction of the incidence of intellectual disability from biomedical causes by at least 50% by the year 2000.
- Reduction of the incidence and prevalence of intellectual disability associated with social disadvantage to the lowest level possible by the end of the century.
- Achievement of a firm and deep public acceptance of persons with intellectual disabilities as members in common of the social community and as citizens in their own right. (abridged from Howard, p. 230)

Howard concluded that "although a great deal remains to be done to realize these goals, significant accomplishments have been made in each key area" (p. 230).

With regard to the ability of individuals who are defined as having a cognitive challenge, perceived inadequacies are often confined to their educational experience. We agree that many have "six-hour" deficits (President's Committee on Mental Retardation, 1969). It is our firm belief that the overriding factor in an exceptional individual's success or lack of success in community living is the quality of preparation provided by the school rather than the degree of mental retardation. With regard to work adjustment and social living skills, the school can do much to prepare the child to take his/her place in society. It is critical that curriculum planning

start early to ensure that the acquisition of requisite skills is not left to chance or until the last two years of the senior program.

A major extension of the normalization concept in recent years has been the advocacy movement, having as its basis the advocate relationship - the person with an intellectual disability (the "protégé"), and a capable volunteer (the "advocate"), working together in an atmosphere of mutual respect. In collaboration with the various local citizen advocacy offices, such programs have become a major influence. A definite part of the social adjustment of adolescents with special needs relates to education of the community. The community must accept each individual and relate to him/her outside the pejorative, traditional framework. A grassroots interest is required. It continues as a long and winding road.

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