

## MISCELLANEOUS

work is the correct placing of the electric sensitive elements, because the muscles which take part in such an action are different in size and strength with each person.

On the recommendation of Dr. Zotovic, the team is now preparing the construction of a new type of the same model with a more delicate regulation of finger movements, so as to enable the user to adjust his grasp in the course of the movement itself, instead of always completely opening and closing the whole hand. This would give the hand an extraordinary flexibility.

“The Laboratory prototype of this device with automatic control has shown that there is a basis to perfect the prostheses on the basis of automation and electronics”, Professor Tomovic told us. In his opinion, and in the opinion of other Yugoslav experts, international co-operation with other countries and interested organizations and institutions, in view of the improvement of this invention, would be valuable not only for the exchange of experiences, but also with regard to concrete solutions of many questions concerning technical processes, usage of materials and construction of parts.

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## EDUCATION FOR THE BLIND

Blindness in children sets a number of problems—educational, occupational and psychological—with which all who deal with the blind should be familiar. *Réadaptation*<sup>1</sup> (No. 119, 1965) published a useful special issue on the situation and prospects facing the young blind. Qualified authors contributed articles on such questions as: modern trends in education for the blind; school organization; teaching through sensory perception, hand-work and motions; occupational adaptation and employment; leisure activities; welfare legislation; educational, occupational training and integration institutes; holiday camps.

The opening article by Pierre Henri, President and founder of the *Groupement des intellectuels aveugles*, traces the broad outline

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of developments in education for the blind and our readers will no doubt be interested in the substance thereof, which we give below.

Without the impact of any social influence, personality development in the blind would be dependent on sensory aptitude. Conduct, attitudes, concepts, vocabulary; all would focus only on the satisfaction of vital needs, following the patterns of thought and action induced by experience. In a society made up entirely of blind people, education would concentrate on adapting the individual to the common way of life. He of course would constantly be "seeing with his hands"; he would dip his finger in his glass to judge how full it was, finger the meat on his plate to distinguish the edible from the non-edible parts, and so forth, but no one would mind. But the blind person lives in a world of seeing people and on him are imposed their language, customs and civilization presupposing the gift of sight. Adapting Durkheim's definition of education, it might be said that the education of the blind "is intended to stimulate and develop in them certain physical, intellectual and mental attributes" required by life in a society of seeing people.

But what society expects of its members varies from time to time and from place to place. In the 18th century, for instance, it was a *quantum sufficit* of knowledge, so Valentin Haüy was up to date in thinking it would suffice to bring culture within the grasp of the blind in order to bridge the gulf separating them from people with vision and that, as the doctrine of sensationalism had just rehabilitated the senses as the perception faculties furnishing the sole data of knowledge, the sense of touch could give the blind access to book-knowledge and many crafts, thus enabling them to provide for themselves. Subsequently, but haltingly, the science of teaching the blind was influenced by progress in general pedagogy (introduction of physical training, intuitive and tangible methods, nursery schools, etc.). In France the development of music teaching—which Haüy only considered as a pastime and means of publicity—and piano tuning had a twofold merit in that it did not confine the blind to the exercise of manual trades which machines were soon to make unprofitable, and—what has not been sufficiently stressed—it brought them into the open competitive trades of the community at large instead of isolating them in the coterie of "protected" workshops.

In spite of trends which moderated the effects of the segregation applied to blind pupils, Valentin Haiüy's influence still affected their teaching. The enormous success of braille even gave the illusion that education for the blind merely involved teaching them the system and thereby bringing within their reach the teaching material available to the seeing (textbooks, maps, drawings) so that ultimately the teaching of the blind involved inculcating into them the academic programme intended for students with sight (same purpose, methods, curricula, examinations) whilst their preparation for life could be reduced to an apprenticeship for a trade (music, tuning, repair of cane chairs, brushware, wickerwork, knitting).

This conception was more inadequate than wrong. The principle so dear to the blind that they differ from the seeing only by the absence of sight, demands that they receive the same education. Not only are the faculties to be developed (attention, memory, power of observation, reasoning), components of the complex ability of "substitution", but culture and the possession of qualifying diplomas—even when, as is more and more frequently the case nowadays, they do not lead to accession to the professions—are nevertheless compensatory attributes for the disabled and are assets, both intrinsically and in relations with society.

For some time, however, it has been realized that neither cultural and professional equality nor even relative superiority is sufficient to integrate the blind into a seeing society or to spare them psychological conflict and frustration. As long ago as 1922 Pierre Villay stressed the importance of "social and moral preparation," in a description of a social programme which in part is still valid.

Contemporary trends and terminology in psychology assign to education for the blind the object of adjusting them to contend with the demands of society in a manner appropriate to their own potential. What does this imply, in fact, if not to train to be inconspicuous, or, in other words, to act like everybody else in a world organized by and for people gifted with sight, individuals whose personality is naturally conditioned by absence of sight and by the exercise of a whole system of substitute faculties and procedures which are not necessarily socially acceptable.

It is a century since Dr. Blanchet, in Paris, and twenty-five years later Dr. Nicati, in Marseilles, suggested the education of

blind children be entrusted to the ordinary schools. This system, first tried in Chicago in about 1900, is now widely accepted in the U.S.A., where its advocates accuse the "institutional system" of cultivating an "abnormality complex" in the physically handicapped, and of perpetuating in the public mind the concept of a special case, whereas school integration is preparation for social integration, promotes normal habits and actions, develops the competitive spirit and accustoms the blind to other people's reactions to their affliction. To this argument the proponents of the special school reply that before the school comes the family, the first contributory factor to distortion of the personality, and that in fact attendance at the ordinary school does not dispense with the need for a braille class with appropriate equipment for the blind to receive lessons adapted to their possibilities and needs . . .

. . . Even more than for the able-bodied, the personality of a disabled person is a delicate mechanism depending on the proper fitting of the parts. Any adjustment requires education leading to conformity to standard, so that school, particularly the special school, is much more than just a set of classrooms. This education should be complete, i.e. it should not only do for the pupils what the normal school does for the seeing, but also take into account the physically, intellectually and emotionally deforming effects which blindness may have ; promote social intercourse ; open wide the door of life ; prepare those who are capable of deriving benefit from additional training to enable them to enter into the normal circuit of production ; encourage co-operation by parents ; enlighten the public, etc.

Therein lies the true nature of education for the blind. It is a long-term task ; pupils should be given the benefit early in life ; and it calls for financial sacrifice. If it is not always successful in enabling its beneficiaries to forgo the compensatory measures which they may legally claim, this is undoubtedly due to the seriousness of their handicap which such education is intended to alleviate. The organization and aim of such compensatory benefits should make employment accessible to the blind. Otherwise their work would not be productive enough to suit either the employer or the blind workers themselves, who would then prefer pure and simple assistance.

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