Personality traits and qualifications of a special class teacher

Paul Martin McGuire

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PERSONALITY TRAITS AND QUALIFICATIONS
OF A SPECIAL CLASS TEACHER

by

Sister Paul Martin McGuire, S.L.

A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION
(EDUCATION OF MENTALLY HANDICAPPED)
AT THE CARDINAL STRITCH COLLEGE

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1972
This research paper has been approved for the Graduate Committee of the Cardinal Stritch College by

[Signature]

(Adviser)

Date Jan. 11, 1971
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since just before the beginning of the nineteenth century, special education classes for the mentally retarded have been in existence in the American public school system. The number of classes has increased at a rapid pace much to the satisfaction of all concerned. To show their faith in such classes the federal, state and local funding agencies have given millions of dollars to begin or continue these classes, teachers have been recruited and trained, and children have been assigned to these classes. Administrators hope the children will receive an education which would be more beneficial than had they stayed in a regular classroom environment.

Statement of the Problem

This study was concerned with the personality traits of a special classroom teacher.

"The most important person in the classroom in terms of determining what kinds of experiences children will have, is the teacher."¹ Most of what goes on in the classroom or in a school situation outside the classroom is with direct or indirect reference to the teacher.

When one undertakes to name the traits of character needed by a teacher of special classes, as a rule, just those traits are named that even a layman would demand in a regular class teacher. This suggests that the necessary traits are, perhaps, not so different in kind; if there is a difference, it is likely to be in the degree to which they are developed and the understanding with which they are used.

The problem of defining and describing those qualities that exist in a teacher of the mentally retarded may never be answered to everyone's satisfaction, but certainly some of the qualities that must be present are identifiable. As public pressure calls for an increased accent on quality in education, the role of the teacher takes on new dimensions.

This writer investigated the following questions: (1) What are the personality traits and qualifications of a special classroom teacher? (2) What basic qualities of good teaching are more in demand in a special education classroom than in a regular classroom? (3) Are the personality traits of teachers in special education situations really different or is the difference confined to the way in which the individual teacher utilizes these qualities?

Definitions of Terms

Before attempting to answer or give probable answers to the above questions it is necessary to understand how various terms will be used throughout this paper. Such an understanding will enable one to realize why some children require special programs, different methods and techniques and unusual understanding and treatment.

Mental retardation.--This term refers to "subaverage general
intellectual functioning which originates during the developmental period and is associated with impairment in adaptive behavior.\(^1\) The term "adaptive behavior" refers to the manner in which the individual adapts to the natural and social demands of his environment. Impaired adaptive behavior may be reflected in maturation, learning, and social adjustment.

Kolburne states that mental retardation is a mental disability that critically handicaps a person in his natural maturation processes involved in learning, performance, social growth and behavior. It impairs the intellectual growth to such a degree that, throughout his life, the individual is limited and cannot function as the vast majority of the people do.\(^2\)

**Educable mentally handicapped.**—The term is used to describe the child whose intelligence test results place him in the 50 to 75 IQ range, and whose learning characteristics and social adjustment suggest the need for special services and school adjustments adapted to his needs. The educable mentally handicapped child can, with appropriate training, learn the basic skills necessary to social and occupational independence and may, as an adult, cease to be regarded as mentally retarded.\(^3\)

As defined by Kirk, the educable mentally retarded child is one who has potentialities for development in (1) minimum educability in the academic subjects of the school, (2) social adjustment to such

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a point that he can get along independently in the community, and
minimum occupational adequacy to such a degree that he can later
support himself partially or totally at the adult level.¹

Nearly all educable retarded children are normal or within
the normal range in most areas of their development. Their primary
development is in the area of intellectual growth where their development
is notably retarded. Aside from this single deviation and the impact
it may have on their growth and intellectual development, educable
retarded children appear, react, and grow in much the same way and at
approximately the same rate of speed as do their normal peers.

Exceptional child.—That child who deviates from the average
or normal child in mental, physical, or social characteristics to such
an extent that he requires a modification of school practices, or
educational services, in order to develop to his maximum capacity.²

Children in special classrooms include a relatively large group
with a wide variety of abilities as well as defects and deficiencies.
These children, due to their special needs, cannot benefit sufficiently
from the regular school program that is specifically adapted to non-
handicapped or average children.

If special provisions are not made for these children, their
dignity as individuals and their worth as members of society is being
lesserened if not destroyed, and in many cases this will result in their
becoming personally degraded and social outcasts.

The exceptional child is a child first of all, a child with
differences and it is because of these differences that special

¹S. A. Kirk, Educating Exceptional Children (Boston: Houghton
²Ibid. p. 4.
education classes are necessary. It is this difference with which the special classroom teacher must work.

Special education.—This term is used to denote those aspects of education which are applied to handicapped and gifted children but not usually used with the majority of average children. "Special" is defined by Webster as "distinguished by some unusual quality; uncommon; noteworthy; extraordinary; additional to the regular; extra; utilized or employed for a certain purpose in addition to the ordinary." These definitions are certainly applicable to special education, which consists of the modifications of, or additions to, school practices intended for the ordinary child—practices that are unique, uncommon, of unusual quality, and in particular in addition to the organization and instructional procedures used with a majority of children.¹

The education in special classes does not present the same program as found in the regular classroom situation. Special class training should be so designed as to assist the child in eventually managing his own affairs with ordinary judgment.

It is the purpose of special education to aid children with markedly low intelligence to become socially adequate and occupationally competent so that they will not be classified as, or perform like, mentally deficient individuals.

Special class.—This is a group of exceptional children of a given classification that is located in a regular elementary or secondary school.² The one great advantage of a special class is that

¹Kirk, Educating Exceptional Children, p. 29.
²Ibid. p. 65.
it brings exceptional children closer to what the normal child might be
doing in school and at the same time provides for these children those
elements of the school program which regular class placement could not
give.

Keeping the above definitions in mind, the terms mentally
retarded, handicapped, educable mentally handicapped, special and ex-
ceptional child will be used interchangeably in this paper; as will
special class and special education.

Summary

In this chapter the question was raised as to the difference
in personality traits and qualifications of a special classroom teacher
and the teacher of a regular class. The terms mental retardation,
educable mentally handicapped, exceptional child, and special education
were defined and note was made as to their use throughout the paper.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This writer, while studying the literature concerning specific qualifications of special class teachers, noted that of the thirty authors writing on this subject, some 70 per cent stated that knowledge of mental retardation was by far the most important qualification. Following in descending order according to Table 1 on the following page, personal maturity and emotional stability, the need for adequate training, resourcefulness, understanding, originality, patience, tolerance, and acceptance also were stressed as being necessary and important.

It was interesting to see that only 23 per cent of the studies indicated that the teacher needed a cooperative attitude and only 20 per cent stated that the teacher should be the best in the teaching profession.

While knowledge of retardation was at the top of the list of qualifications; knowledge of studies in the field, knowledge of agencies concerned with retardation, current trends in retardation and the effect of retardation on the family were at or near the bottom.

The need for the teacher to have a humanitarian spirit was cited by only 23 per cent of the authors, while only 7 per cent felt the teacher should have faith in the child.
TABLE 1
FREQUENCY STUDY OF QUALIFICATIONS
OF SPECIAL CLASS TEACHERS AS
FOUND IN THE LITERATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Qualification</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of mental retardation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal maturity and emotional stability</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate training</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourcefulness</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Originality</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience and tolerance</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of child development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desires for further knowledge in the field of special teaching</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative attitude</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of personal dynamics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian spirit</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permissiveness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topnotch teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy and kindness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheerfulness and friendliness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical fitness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic educational philosophy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of clinical and diagnostic methods</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of other agencies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of major studies in retardation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of a &quot;normal&quot; person</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good personal appearance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in the child</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of current trends in retardation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of effect of retardant on family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

N = 30
Every child deserves an opportunity to achieve his maximum growth and development. This is more or less accepted by all Americans as a basic philosophy. In a majority of ways, retarded children are very similar to normal children. There are the same kinds of differences among retarded children as there are among the normal. The goals for the retarded, in general, are the same as for all children. To many teachers, working with a retarded child merely means that he must be given less materials at a slower rate of speed and over a longer period of time. Actually, in addition to these factors, the kinds of materials to be used in training the retarded child are somewhat different, and the methods of training must be modified.

The mentally retarded child needs a specific, concrete, functional educational program that will enable him to enjoy and share in the worthwhile activities of life. His educational program should be geared to help him live as full and useful a life as he is able on his own in the community or in the institution.

As previously stated, the most important person in the classroom in terms of determining what kinds of experiences children will have is the teacher.¹

According to Wallen, the success or failure of the special class teacher depends on her personality characteristics, inherent and acquired, and her teaching skill.²

¹Lindgren, Mental Health in Education, p. 314.

Knowledge of Mental Retardation

Teaching the normal child is a challenge for it requires an understanding of children as well as a knowledge of their educational needs and the methods used to meet these needs. Continuing with this thought, Magary and Eichorn insist that teaching the handicapped is an even greater challenge, for the teacher must not only understand the child but also appreciate how handicapping conditions can affect adjustment and learning.1

Mackie, Williams, and Dunn agree with the above study for they report that teachers of the mentally retarded should have, among other competencies, the following: a basic understanding of the problems of mental retardation, ability to understand and interpret test results and to teach at the proper level, ability to develop suitable curriculum and understanding of learning problems and of special methods of dealing with them.2

A government study showed that the ideal teacher of the handicapped must understand the physical, mental and emotional deviations of handicapped children, and the effects of the various deviations on children, their families and the community.3

The special teacher needs, too, a genuine interest which will

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enable him to accept the fact that the child can conform only in a limited way, to the educational and social standards of the school. He should receive specific instruction in the psychological, sociological, and educational implications of mental retardation so that he may understand the needs of the retarded, and the procedures to be followed to meet these needs.

Likewise Tarjan showed that the teacher must have a good understanding of the nature, consequences, and limitations imposed by the handicap of their pupils, particularly in relationship to learning ability.¹

In a discussion on the topic of the desirable characteristics of the teacher of mentally retarded children, Hungerford² seemed to agree with the above authors as he stressed that the teacher should have a knowledge of the nature of mental retardation, the nature of the world in which the retarded must live, the things necessary to live in such a world, and the way to teach these things effectively.

In reviewing various studies it was noted that knowledge of mental retardation was not always placed first when listed as a qualification for a special class teacher. While Slaughter³ had this at or near the top of her list, Pollack and Pollack⁴ had this qualification


listed last and some authors, while they did not specifically state "knowledge of mental retardation," implied as much. Raymond\textsuperscript{1} stated that the teacher must not only have an adequate knowledge of mental retardation but suggests that the best way to acquire this knowledge is to live with those who are retarded.

Personal Maturity and Emotional Stability

That qualification which was second in importance was personal maturity and emotional stability. The success or failure of the teacher depends on her personality assets and deficits—her normality or health.

The emotional climate of the classroom, which determines whether the pupil can work contentedly and productively, free from irritating tensions and vexatious worries, is primarily dependent on the teacher's disposition, attitudes, and behavior characteristics.

Slaughter suggested that the full acceptance of the responsibilities demanded of a teacher of the mentally retarded requires maturity. The person who lacks self discipline cannot be expected to develop that quality in children of limited intellectual abilities.\textsuperscript{2}

The influence of the teacher's personality make-up, her basic life philosophy, her prejudices, her emotional poise, her emotional fixations or frustrations and her mental health are reflected in the pupil's attitudes.

The highest duty of the teacher is to develop wholesome, cooperative, and harmonious personalities. Because of her position of

\textsuperscript{1}C.S. Raymond, "Who Makes the Best Teacher of Mentally Retarded Children?: A Panel Discussion," \textit{American Journal of Mental Deficiency}, LVIII (July, 1955), 266.

\textsuperscript{2}Slaughter, \textit{The Educable Mentally Retarded Child and His Teacher}, p. 7.
authority, she can exert an irresistible, pervasive influence that vitally affects every phase of the interpersonal relationships of the classroom.

Hutt and Gibby put emphasis on the need for emotional stability in that even more than the average child, the retarded child tends to cast his teacher in a parental role, and the special class teacher must be aware of this almost automatic form of behavior. She must also be aware of her own emotional reactions in such a role, and learn to accept her own feelings as well as those of the child.\(^1\)

Emotionally stable teachers tend to generate emotional stability in their pupils, whereas maladjusted teachers often create mental maladjustments in their pupils. Following along this line, Hutt and Gibby\(^2\) state that the teacher must learn to perceive how different children perceive her, and how each child differs in his basic demands on her. Despite her own emotional characteristics and personal integrity as a unique individual, she is a different person to each of her retarded pupils, depending upon their particular needs. It is important that she not only recognize the emotional demands made of her, the feelings that each child displays or transfers upon her, but that she also learn how to use the relationship that exists between herself and the child to promote his emotional growth. This last point is of crucial significance; not only must there be feeling for the child, but there must be adequate knowledge of what to do about it.

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\(^2\) Ibid.
Bayles\(^1\) listed emotional stability second while Cain\(^2\) included stability in the second part of his article entitled Recruitment and selection of personnel.

Both Tracey\(^3\) and Tarjan\(^4\) list personal maturity and emotional stability as essential traits in special education and agree that to be able to meet the demands of his profession, a teacher has to be strong physically and mentally, well developed intellectually and capable of preserving his own morality. He needs mental vigor as a wholesome outlook on life and last but not least he must be a well-adjusted individual who is aware of his own motivations, drives, and problems.

Members of a panel discussed various personality traits and qualifications needed by those working with exceptional children and it was noted that several panelists while listing various qualifications did not mention the need for maturity or emotional stability. Perhaps this might have been implied in their writings though this implication was rather difficult to discern. Bemis\(^5\) definitely spoke about liking handicapped people and having a desire to help them, as well as having an understanding of the purposes and objectives of a program for these

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\(^1\) Janet Bayles, "Who Makes the Best Teacher of Mentally Retarded Children? A Panel Discussion," *American Journal of Mental Deficiency* LVIII (July, 1953), 256.


\(^3\) W.S. Tracey, "In Loco Parentis—the Child's 9:00 to 4:00 Parent," *Education* LXXIX (February-March, 1969), 209.


people. Hungerford\(^1\) while listing many desirable traits for teachers of special children also failed to make a point of the necessity of having an emotionally stable and mature person to teach these children. On the other hand, Bode\(^2\) made a definite point to insist that it was very essential that the teacher of mentally retarded children be an emotionally stable individual. Raymond\(^3\) felt that teachers should be psychologically and psychiatrically oriented before undertaking this work, that they should know enough about mental illness to recognize early symptoms and see that certain children are referred to a psychiatrist but he, too, said nothing concerning the importance of personal maturity and emotional stability of the teacher. Perhaps Bemis, Hungerford, and Raymond took it for granted that these traits and qualifications were present within the individual; yet they are too essential to overlook in an individual working with the handicapped.

Because the teacher of handicapped children has to deal intimately with the child and parents, Lord and Kirk\(^4\) wrote that the teacher must be well-adjusted to handle such problems successfully and to avoid being unduly influenced in his own adjustment by his relationship with the children and parents. Individuals who become morbid or

\(^1\)Hungerford, "Who Makes the Best Teacher," *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 264.


\(^3\)Raymond, "Who Makes the Best Teacher," *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 266.

over-sentimental about the exceptional child do not become successful teachers. Personal adjustment and security of the teacher of special children is a "must" in qualifications.

Need for Adequate Training

One of the essentials basic to a program of education for exceptional children is a well prepared teacher.¹ This is perhaps the single most important factor in the education of exceptional children and it is one on which the strength or weakness of an educational program depends.

Teachers should continually strive to improve their knowledge. This is done by keeping up with developments in subject matter pertinent to their field of education and by seeking better ways to give this knowledge to their pupils.

Knowledge, in itself, is never enough. Teachers are constantly being judged not by what they know but rather by what they do with what they know. While Johnson², Cruickshank³, and Kirk⁴ insist that special


teachers should be required to have special and adequate training, Voelker\(^1\) (though he agreed that training was important) listed other qualifications for a special class teacher above that of adequate training.

Other writers also felt that any teacher of the mentally retarded, in order to do a good job, should have specialized training and that teacher training institutions should offer a better program for such teachers. Yet this need for better and specialized training was placed below other traits on many of the lists.

Teachers need to know how to choose goals, how to organize their work both in long range and daily planning, how to choose the best procedures and materials for each situation, how to vary procedures with different types of students, how to establish a good learning atmosphere and how to manage a classroom.\(^2\)

In an article published in *Education*, 1968, Strang stated:

All teachers can become more expert as they gain knowledge of child development and learning theory, more understanding of individual children in their classes, greater ability to provide favorable environmental conditions and more experience in observing children's actual responses under varied conditions.\(^3\)

Other authors who felt that adequate training was so essential


\(^2\)S.L. Clement, "Cooperation, Not Competition," *Education* LXXXIX (September-October, 1968), 55.

\(^3\)Ruth Strang, "Role of the Teacher in Instructing Young Children," *Education* LXXXIX (September-October, 1968), 55.
to good teaching were Pollack and Pollack\(^1\) and Kolburne\(^2\) who explicitly wrote that the teacher must learn the necessary fundamental techniques and gradually develop some of her own, and special class teachers should be well educated.

Nations wrote in detail:

The teacher, as a professional person, is strengthened by improving (a) his knowledge of subject matter, and techniques and the processes of inquiry in which he guides his learners; (b) his knowledge of the learning process; and (c) his knowledge of teaching techniques.\(^3\)

Chamberlin, in summarizing an article wrote:

The profession needs more people who are educationally and psychologically prepared to teach, people who can present the proper emotional and social example to the students in addition to providing satisfactory academic instruction.\(^4\)

Again turning to Bayles\(^5\) and Bode\(^6\), this writer found that they, too, list the importance of adequate training among their teacher qualifications. In writing on this subject they state that all special teachers must be adequately prepared in the subject matter taught and that this training is necessary to be successful in their work. Fields in introducing his discussion tells his readers,

A poor teacher cannot convert a carefully planned curriculum into an instrument for good learning. It takes a well-informed,

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\(^2\)Kolburne, *Effective Education*, p. 45.


\(^5\)Bayles, "Panel Discussion," *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, p. 35.

\(^6\)Bode, "Panel Discussion," *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, p. 263.
specially-trained, truly understanding teacher to weave the physical, the emotional, the mental, and the social facets of a child into a unified working personality.\(^1\)

Judging from what had been said about teacher preparation and the necessity for specialized training as well as adequate training programs, this writer was surprised that only 57 per cent of the studies reviewed mentioned this important qualification.

Resourcefulness, Originality and Creativity

This reviewer feels justified in combining the above-mentioned qualifications since they seem to flow one from another. All three traits are of the utmost importance if a special class teacher is to be successful in her work. All are necessary and to exclude one would be to deprive those exceptional children within the class from the type of teaching to which they have a right.

Lord and Kirk explain these qualifications while writing about the capacity for self-direction. This they said was necessary since special teachers are often assigned to schools in which they are required to organize their own programs and outline procedures without any technical assistance from other teachers, principals, or supervisors. And again they said that teachers of exceptional children must be experimentally minded, since they have fewer published materials and fewer ready-made instructional devices at their disposal than do regular teachers. They must, therefore, be able and willing to experiment with methods, materials, and procedures on their own.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) H. Fields, "Who Makes the Best Teacher of Mentally Retarded Children?: A Panel Discussion," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, LVIII (July, 1953), 252.

Phillips and Kokaska made an interesting statement concerning resourcefulness, originality and creativity when they wrote,

A teacher who has an openness to experience, the capacity to find order in experience, the respect for flexibility or a playful kind of originality, and the independence necessary to free oneself from the web of social pressures would possess the stamina for creating such conditions.¹

Other writers agreed that teachers of retarded children must creative in their work, original in the use of materials and resourceful in the materials they have. Kolburne² wrote that the teacher must be able and willing to prepare workable daily lesson plans, as well as specific lesson materials. The teacher of normal children has ample books and materials at her disposal, while the special class teacher has very few appropriate books and materials at her disposal. De Bruin³ followed with a statement on how an individual must learn to use himself as an effective instrument in the classroom. He must be original in his performance, highly creative in his thinking and flexible enough to adjust to the learning situation at hand. One might say that the good teacher possesses versatility, flexibility, and creativity.

Again citing Bayles⁴, Bode⁵, and Raymond⁶ it was noted that

²Kolburne, Effective Education, p. 41.
⁴Bayles, "Panel Discussion," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, p. 255.
⁵Bode, "Panel Discussion," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, p. 262.
these qualifications were specifically listed while other members of the panel either did not mention them as such or made the implication within the context of their papers that resourcefulness, originality, and creativity were needed and required.

As if to admonish all teachers but especially the special class teacher Haskott stated:

The special education teacher has been assigned a heavy responsibility. She is charged with providing the child who has not been able to maintain the scholastic pace of his peers with a program that will satisfy his childhood need of a meaningful classroom experience and which will ultimately equip him to compete on equal terms with those peers in adulthood. ¹

Understanding and Acceptance

The above-mentioned traits, understanding and acceptance, were given special recognition by 50 per cent and more of the writers reviewed. Those teachers working with mentally handicapped children were found to need and possess a deep understanding of the type of child in the classroom, the child's mental capacity and ability and an acceptance of the child, as he is, in order to aid that child in any way in an academic program.

Bettelheim ² put it in the title of his book, "love is not enough." More than good intentions toward the retarded child are needed. It is basic that the teacher have feelings of warmth, acceptance, and love for the child.


²B. Bettelheim, Love is Not Enough, (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950).
Likewise, those writing a manual for teachers put the need for understanding and acceptance first as they wrote, "A sincere interest and special understanding of the exceptional child is needed." ¹

Patience and Tolerance

Patience is required to teach the child who comprehends feebly, learns slowly, and forgets easily. A higher than average number of mental retardates deviate from the normal in physical appearance, or are hampered by coordination defects. Any aversion on the part of the teacher toward some physical anomaly is likely to be sensed by the child no matter how well the teacher attempts to conceal it.²

This statement seems to speak for itself in that a teacher, especially the teacher of exceptional children, must be willing to go at a slower pace and accept the children for "who" they are as well as "how" they may be.

Enthusiasm

Any teacher should like her work but the teacher of the educable mentally retarded must never consider her position as just another job. The teacher should like her job. It should be a great challenge to her. Among those traits needed to help her class she should have zeal that can be transmitted to her pupils.³

Studies reviewed on enthusiasm showed that teaching involves a certain amount of showmanship and salesmanship. The teacher should

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²Slaughter, The Educable Mentally Retarded Child and His Teacher, p. 7.
not be afraid to be different or unusual in her teaching methods.\(^1\) Continuing along this line Curran wrote, "The good teacher is enthusiastic. The enthusiastic teacher fires up the most unimaginative material simply because she enjoys teaching and children."\(^2\)

Raymond agreed with this showmanship quality, "The teacher should be a good actress, able to keep up the appearance of enthusiasm and joy in her work even on days when it is difficult to do so."\(^3\)

In his report Tarjan briefly said, "Teachers must be enthusiastic about their work and have a missionary zeal as far as their own program is concerned."\(^4\)

Knowledge of Child Development

On the basis of studies by Chamberlin\(^5\), Nations\(^6\), and Symonds\(^7\), this reviewer concluded that it is very important that the teacher have some knowledge of child development. Slaughter\(^8\) also felt this

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\(^1\)R.W. Calish, "So You Want to be a Real Teacher," Today's Education, LVIII (November, 1969), 51.


\(^3\)Raymond, "Panel Discussion," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, p. 266.


\(^6\)Nations, "The Teacher as a Person," Educational Leadership, p. 103.


\(^8\)Slaughter, The Educable Mentally Retarded Child and His Teacher, p. 6.
was necessary, as did Fitzgibbon. In the words of Tarjan, "The teacher should know normal child growth and development and normal child behavior." 

The special teacher must know many things; knowledge of physiology and psychology is included in this list for these will help him understand the behavior of the children in his class. The teacher should always be aware of how the retarded child thinks and what his personality is like.

Basic Educational Philosophy and Humanitarian Spirit

Every teacher of the mentally retarded should have a basic educational philosophy and should be guided by this philosophy which was founded on an understanding of the retarded, their needs and the principles involved in the fulfillment of those needs.

Bayles wrote in detail,

An effective teacher is one who has a philosophy that sees the whole child, recognizes the problems of the exceptional child, and recognizes every little element of growth toward a solution to his problems. Unlike the regular teacher, her reward is in the small steady changes of behavior in any field of achievement or social adjustment.

Pollack and Pollack spoke in favor of the humanitarian spirit when they stated, "The teachers and administrators who dedicate them-

selves to instruction of the retarded must be imbued with a strong humanitarian desire to help the weak." Also Reger felt this qualification was important, "The teacher of the handicapped child is charged with more than teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic; also he or she is responsible for guiding children in ethical and moral behavior as well as in general social behavior."^2

Likewise another study stated:

The exceptional child more than any other looks for a ready smile from his teacher, even when accomplishment is almost at a standstill. He needs a sense of being loved, regardless of his handicap. He needs security and a feeling of belonging. The teacher of exceptional children must be friend, counsellor, and confidante. The teacher must "always be the same," so that the child will feel free to bring her his personal trials and questions, and know that always he will find the same attention, understanding, and warm human relationship. This affords the teacher the rare opportunity of helping her pupils in many areas. 5

Sense of Humor

That mentally retarded children find happiness in life is very important. Tarjan^4 thought a sense of humor was important and must not be superficial but rather sincere.

Bode stressed a good sense of humor and its importance as follows:

A good laugh a day is a very fine therapeutic measure in that it gives them (the mentally retarded children) an opportunity to release the tension and built-up emotional strain.

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2R. Reger, "Teacher Aides in Special Education Courses," Education LXXXIX (September-October, 1968), 79.


It also gives the teacher an opportunity to laugh with the children to see something funny in a situation, to see the joke equally well when the teacher is the butt of it. These qualities or the lack of them can either make or break the relationship of the teacher with her class.¹

Similarly, Tenny wrote,

Patience, hopefulness, kindliness, and a sense of good humor that will result for these children in a feeling of security and of being accepted regardless of their own limitation, uncertainties, and lack of prolonged self-control is very important for teachers of mentally handicapped children.²

Top Notch Teacher

Cain³ pointed out that above all successful teachers in this field must be good teachers. Tarjan agreed for in his list of teacher requirements was found this statement, "Teachers of the handicapped must be topnotch teachers to begin with."⁴ Citing again from Bode it was found that the teacher of mentally retarded children should not only be a good teacher but the very best teacher that could be found.⁵ Selection of the right personnel to work with the mentally retarded is of utmost importance.

Cooperative Attitude

The special classroom teacher does not and cannot work alone.

¹Bode, "Panel Discussion," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, p. 263.


⁵Bode, "Panel Discussion," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, p. 264.
It is vital to the education program that she be able to work well with others. The teacher of exceptional children has the rare opportunity of seeing how medicine, psychiatry, psychology, social casework, occupational therapy, and education can work together without confusion or interference. Teaching the exceptional child is no longer a one-sided enterprise. It is a team affair. Continuing with this idea Slaughter wrote,

The teacher of the mentally retarded may be called upon to cooperate with individuals who can furnish psychological, medical or sociological information about pupils. He will be called upon to cooperate with other educators, the supervisor, the principal, and fellow teachers. The more cooperatively the teacher reacts toward them, the more help he can expect from them.

Returning to a survey already cited, it was found that good administrative relationships were necessary. The teacher can function most effectively when there is an awareness that the administration is not only interested but also willing to cooperate with the teacher in her work.

Physical Fitness

All classroom duties are strenuous. Added to these regular duties will be many extracurricular activities. The teacher should not be so fatigued by professional activities that there is no opportunity to "live a life of his own."

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4 Slaughter, The Educable Mentally Retarded Child and His Teacher, p. 7.
In agreement with the above statement Bayles wrote,

The challenge to the teacher in this field is tremendous. To meet this challenge successfully with an adequate amount of energy for your work and outside social and recreational activities, it would seem essential to have good physical, mental and emotional health.1

Concerned with the physical fitness of the special teacher Symonds stated, "Teaching exceptional children in most cases is difficult and trying. Physical limitation on the part of the teacher which in any way restricts his service to his children cannot be defended."2

Good Personal Appearance

The teacher of exceptional children must not concern herself with just school subjects. As in any field of teaching, an important part of the teacher's responsibility is to help the child develop good habits of health, cleanliness, and personal appearance. The teacher should be a daily example of what she wants the child to learn.

Accordingly, Bode wrote concerning the importance of personal appearance of the teacher:

Children are very conscious of good personal appearance on the part of their teacher. Many of these children come from homes in the lower socio-economic levels which are neither clean nor beautiful. It is necessary that they have a teacher who is attractive in her personal appearance because they react favorably to this. It has been found that mentally retarded children react favorably to good patterns that are set for them. They learn more readily by example. Therefore the personal appearance of the teacher is very important.3

1Bayles, "Panel Discussion," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 255.
3Bode, "Panel Discussion," American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 265.
Faith in the Child

Each child, no matter what might be his physical defects or his behaviorisms or lack of abilities, wants to be accepted. Every child needs to belong, needs to be loved and wanted. Richards reminded teachers of retarded children of the faith they must have in their class.

People who deal with children confined by illness and disability must have a deep faith in the individual. They must believe that that individual is a real human personality (like all other humans) with hopes, aspirations, and a need to participate creatively in his world, no matter what the temporary or permanent limitations of that world may be.

Those who lack this faith should stay away or be kept away from children, including the handicapped. Children who are handicapped need what other children need: to be surrounded by people who respect, encourage and guide them.1

In 1964 Witty2 made a study on the traits of teachers. With the aid of the children's program, Quiz Kids, he sent 12,000 letters to school children who were in the second through twelfth grade, ages six to fourteen. The children were asked to mark those qualities of the teacher who helped them most, using a rating scale of one to twelve—one being the highest mark possible. The results of the study are as follows:

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TABLE 2
OVER-ALL RESULTS OF THE STUDY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Qualification</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative, democratic attitude</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindliness and consideration for the individual</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness and impartiality</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal appearance</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide range of interests</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humor</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good disposition</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in pupil behavior</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praised pupil</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unusual proficiency in subject matter taught</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was noted that the traits, "cooperative, democratic attitude," appeared with the highest frequency, while second highest was "kindliness and consideration for the individual."

The quality, "sense of humor," was placed half way down the list while "unusual proficiency in teaching a particular subject" (although at the end of the list) was considered by many children to be a characteristic of importance.

The children in the six-to-nine age range placed "wide interest" first and "sense of humor" last. Those children ages nine to fourteen marked "kindliness" first and "unusual proficiency in subject taught" last while the children fourteen years of age and older chose "cooperative, democratic attitude" first and "proficiency" last.
Conclusion

No teacher will be a model of perfection. Certainly no teacher will deserve placement at the top of each quality listed as desirable for the teacher of the mentally retarded.¹

It is not enough that the teacher know his subject matter, for he is more than a dispenser of knowledge and skills. Martens stated:

The teacher of mentally deficient children should have a wide variety of interests from which he can draw both for his own satisfaction and for his pupil's stimulation. He should be a continuous learner, looking for new developments in the field and new materials of instruction.²

Unlike the classroom teacher in the ordinary school, the special class teacher takes upon herself complex responsibilities when the retarded child enters the school. The family sees the teacher not as a teacher only but also as a social worker, nurse, confidante or comprehensive service agency; in other words, as their major resource to help them cope with their problem.

Teachers of mentally handicapped children need the qualities desired in all teachers, with perhaps an emphasis on certain of these qualities and in addition other very special qualifications.

One study showed:

Those who teach mentally retarded children must make use of all the teaching skills to a greater extent than do other teachers. They should possess the character and personality traits required for the teaching of normal children, plus as

¹Slaughter, The Educable Mentally Retarded Child and His Teacher, p. 8.

²Elsie H. Martens, "Preparation Of Teachers For Mentally Deficient Children," American Journal of Mental Deficiency LIV (April, 1950), 452.
much special training as possible. Even more important they must have a spiritual dedication and an understanding of the individual child's problems and needs.¹

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper was to review those personality traits and qualifications necessary for a special classroom teacher. Thirty studies were reviewed and it was concluded that knowledge of mental retardation, personal maturity and emotional stability, adequate training, resourcefulness, originality and creativity, patience and tolerance, as well as understanding and acceptance were stressed by more than 50 per cent of the authors. These qualifications and others were cited in Chapter II.

There is no substitute for a good teacher and there never will be. Yet no teacher can hope to possess all the information and qualifications listed as essential for the proper education of his students.

The studies cited revealed that an effective teacher of the mentally retarded is one who has a philosophy that sees the whole child, recognizes his distinct problems, and is aware of every little element of growth that indicates a solution toward those problems. A special teacher needs, too, a genuine interest which will enable him to accept the fact that the child can conform only in a limited way, to the educational and social standards of the school.
Teachers differ one from another in almost every respect. There is no set pattern, no outline or mold from which teachers are made or to which they must conform. There are some traits common to all teachers and seemingly those traits and qualifications are needed most especially for the teachers of exceptional children.

What it takes is physical strength, emotional stability, creativity, and ingenuity, empathy, patience, tolerance, the ability to take whatever comes and hopefully to teach. Somewhere along the line there should be a postscript concerning humor. A sense of humor is so basic that it underlines all other qualities of a good teacher.
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