Necessity of preparing the retarded for a profitable use of leisure time and recreational activities

Mary Helen Grandetty

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THE NECESSITY OF PREPARING
THE RETARDED FOR A PROFITABLE USE OF
LEISURE TIME AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

by

Sister Mary Helen Grandetty, V.S.C.

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
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This research paper has been
approved for the Graduate Committee
of the Cardinal Stritch College by

[Signature]
(Advisor)

Date March 1, 1976
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every able human being has potential for worthwhile activity. Many seriously handicapped children who are physically or mentally dispossessed of considerable work potential still retain the ability to play or recreate. The retarded, like other children, need opportunities for healthful growth-promoting recreation and leisure. Not only do they require skilled training for health-promoting recreation, they also need the help of skilled assistance to show them how to relax, how to enjoy being in the company of others and how to have just plain fun. If education accomplishes this, it is helping the retardates to make successful social adjustments and to become happy, socializing individuals.

Overview of the Problem

Mentally handicapped children receive academic education in special classes or special schools where they are taught all they can absorb according to their individual capacities. Those concerned with their education try to impart knowledge that will prepare the retarded to become useful citizens. If these less fortunate children are to be wholly educated, they must be taught to participate in the recreational activities offered them and to make proper use of their
leisure time. Significantly enough, living with their leisure time seems to be the great challenge facing the retarded whether he happens to be a young child, an adolescent, or an adult. Since this challenge poses a problem deserving consideration and investigation, it is the writer's purpose to determine what "recreational" and "leisure time" opportunities are available for the enrichment of the lives of the mentally retarded.

Definition of Terms

Because the terms "leisure" and "recreation" will be used interchangeably in this paper, it is necessary to define the terms. Berryman, author of "Leisure and Mental Retardation," states that "in recent years many articles and books have been written concerning leisure, yet no one definition has been accepted by all authors."¹ The dictionary, however, defines leisure as freedom from something—namely, occupation.

Brightbell also defines leisure "as being free from occupation or engagement." He then goes on to say that "it is a time when one may recreate or entertain himself with whom he wants and how he wants."²

Recreation has been defined by Lawler as "fun and enjoyment received from doing some activity." He also defines


it as "any form of leisure time experience or activity in which
the individual engages because of the enjoyment and satisfac-
tion it brings him."¹

Statement of the Problem

The mentally retarded should be so educated that they
will make profitable use of their leisure time and recreationally
activities. If this is accomplished, their education will
prepare them physically, emotionally, and socially to take
their place in society. This research paper is concerned with
the training of retardates in assuming responsibility for their
leisure time.

Justification of the Problem

To justify the problem of leisure, Krishef, the author
of "Recreation The Plus Factor," gives this illustration. A
retardate, after being discharged from a public residential
center, was able to find work, and, however difficult, was ca-
ble of making adjustments to community living. "He didn't
mind the work; liked living at home;"² but making acquaintances
was hard. Using profitably his free evenings in attending the
proper functions after work was something else he was unable
to do. Because of this, he was making plans to return to the

¹William Lawler, "Why Recreation?" quoted in Recreation
for Mentally Retarded, (Atlanta, Georgia: Southern Regional
Education Board), p. 2.

²Curtis H. Krishef, "Recreation The Plus Factor,"
institution where he had friends and people to whom and with
whom he could relate. A "Fun Club" was then organized which
helped him to find new friends and enjoy life.

There will be many more retardates who will return to
community living, but, hopefully, they will remain because they
will have learned to make proper use of leisure time. Therefore,
it is necessary to know how to deal intelligently with
the problem of leisure in regard to the mentally retarded.
Brightbell suggests that "if one learns how to use leisure to
cultivate the mind, hands, and heart he shall preserve and
strengthen human values as well as make leisure contribute to
the order rather than disorder of life."¹

Life is said to be divided into three parts. One part
is spent in sleeping, another in working and the third makes
allowance for some leisure. It is this last phase in the life
of the retarded about which the writer is most concerned.
Normal people work, take time to sleep, and arrange their free
or leisure time with enjoyable and relaxing activities. This
is a natural and normal way of living, but society is faced
with another group of children and adults, the mentally handi-
capped, who are unable to cope profitably with their leisure
time. This group, then, is society's great concern and the
majority within this group seem to lack the ability to use
free time constructively and creatively because they are lit-
tle interested in recreational activities and group work. The

¹Charles K. Brightbell, loc. cit., p. 15.
mentally handicapped need to be helped to use their leisure time fruitfully and enjoyably if they are to derive satisfaction from it for themselves and others. For this reason, society has the obligation to provide basic opportunities for abundant use of leisure which will enhance the individual's personality, help him to acquire social charm or attractiveness, and make him acceptable to society and his peers. Only thus will he come to live a full life. It is Alfred Moore who said:

The organized recreational program, with its facilities and trained personnel, can contribute much to the physical, mental, emotional and social needs of those who participate. These benefits to individuals, through more worthy use of leisure time, carry over to the community and all it represents, making it a better place to live.¹

Great insight and understanding are needed to provide the mentally handicapped with recreational activities and to guide them in utilizing these activities effectively during their leisure time. The most important task of educators, then, is to help these students to acquire a lifelong interest in an appreciation of diversions which can promote healthful and profitable leisure periods. If education fails to train for leisure, it has not fulfilled its great responsibility to the individual as well as to society in general. The American Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation emphatically states:

Numerous studies indicate that the way in which an older person uses his leisure depends in large measure upon skills and interests he acquired in his youth. The total health and happiness of the aged depends largely on the extent to which they remain active.\footnote{Recreation and Physical Activity for the Mentally Retarded, (American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, 1966), p. 3.}

Within the process of their education, it is also of great importance that handicapped children be included in recreation programs because they have the same basic needs as all children. Since they are mentally handicapped, planning for their recreational programs and leisure moments is of greater significance than for normal children.

The purpose of this research paper finds its summation in the words of Sessoms who, in regard to the retardates says: \"The challenge of his adult life may not be getting or keeping a job, but having to live with leisure.\"\footnote{Douglas Sessoms, "The Mentally Handicapped Child Grows At Play," Mental Retardation, Vol. 3, No. 4 (August, 1965), p. 13.}
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Some great educators, seeing the need for leisure and recreation as related to mental retardation, have contributed their time and talent to this particular study. Their main objective was to provide ways and means by which the mentally handicapped could learn to utilize their leisure and recreational activities to their best interests and their physical and moral well-being.

Social, Emotional and Mental Development

Wylie claims leisure is "a matter of time to do with as one wishes. The only way in which it can gain value is to give meaning and purpose to its use."\(^1\) This is accomplished when one engages in any activity which is purposeful, meaningful and valuable for the individual and society.

For a man to enjoy leisure does not mean that he is idle during this time. Leisure enables him to read, to travel, to look for friendships, and to use them wisely. Wylie further states, "As man became more and more aware of his needs for activity, and, as leisure increased, the term recreation

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became closely associated with leisure."¹ Judging this to be so, it may well be said that recreation is the use of activity during one's leisure.

To prepare the retardates for the use and enjoyment of leisure requires more effort and time and is more difficult than training them for vocational trades. It requires a special program, which, according to Kirk and Johnson, is "a program of the special class, one that is designed to aid the mentally handicapped in their social adjustment."²

Since leisure time has been on the increase, the special class must make definite provisions for experience in leisure time activities. But what leisure types of activity are really open to the mentally retarded? Kirk and Johnson believe that since they commonly take spectators' roles in attending movies, sporting events, or listening to the radio, this narrow use of leisure time can be considerably increased through the special class. The enjoyment of music, both listening and singing, provides valuable experiences that can be carried over into home and community life. Knitting, crocheting, embroidering, leather work, metal work, and wood carving are also excellent leisure time activities and should be encouraged as such.

Ingram reaffirms these ideas when she says that these

¹Ibid., p. 9.
youngsters should be prepared for the right use of leisure time through the formation of proper habits and attitudes thereby becoming an asset to their home and community. "They should learn the joy of good music, the satisfaction of simple handicrafts, learn to share their leisure with others, and to use community facilities for personal and social recreation."\(^1\)

In this connection Slaughter makes the following comment:

How the mentally retarded person uses his leisure time when not at school or vocationally occupied has much to do with his state of well-being and stability of behavior. It is during his moments and hours of leisure that he is most apt to get in trouble. The school has a responsibility of helping the retarded learn how to use his leisure wisely and satisfactorily.\(^2\)

Beck is rather critical of the schools when he says that they neglected a very important objective; namely, "to train the mentally handicapped to utilize their spare time in a socially acceptable way by providing them with ways of enjoying their leisure."\(^3\) The results of his study show that "preparing the retardates for leisure time activity has been largely overlooked or ignored"\(^4\) and that there is great need

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\(^4\)Ibid., 119.
for further research in this area.

Wallace's findings show that many young people do not know what to do with their free time, but that this is especially true of the mentally deficient. Generally speaking, many normal young people spend a large part of their time in "time-killing pursuits of little or no value from the standpoint of furthering mental, social, or physical health and efficiency."¹ Much of their free time is spent in dance halls or theaters or in listening to crime serials on the radio or television, joy riding or reading magazines and comic strips. The problem is more difficult in the case of the mentally handicapped who have "restricted interests and recreational outlets." They have a tendency "to lead lives of indolence or to sit on the sidelines as mere spectators."²

One of the most pressing and difficult problems of every school and community is finding meaningful activities fitted to the age and interests of the individual retardate.

Since much of the leisure time of the mentally retarded is filled by recreational activities, these should be well-planned if the retardates are to enjoy them and at the same time benefit from them. Well-planned recreational activities help to develop in the mentally retarded "a greater degree of social competencies, emotional stability, and intellectual ad-

²Ibid., 159.
vancement and prepare the retardates for the wholesome use of leisure time."¹

Although everyone has need for new experiences, for belonging, for friends, for social approval, for self-respect, and respect from others, this is especially true of the mentally retarded who are more or less rejected by others and fail in most of their undertakings. Moore says that rejection and failure cause "greater maladjustment than can be attributed to the basic handicap of impaired intellectual development." He considers recreation a powerful "equalizer in helping them to attain personal and social competence."²

How does recreation work as an equalizer? Schreiber states that the mental retardate's most serious handicap is his social functioning. Because his limited experiences make good interpersonal relationships difficult, "a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere, where individual differences are recognized and understood," will adequately compensate to make his "handicap seem progressively less important" and, quite naturally, his "potential for positive change will assert itself."³

²Alfred Moore, loc. cit., p. 404.
Cortazzo and Manefee claim that if the retarded spends less time sitting without a purpose and is furnished with a wide variety of play experiences during childhood and adolescence, "he will attain a higher degree of intellectual development." The authors go on to prove that the retarded will be more apt to succeed in vocational training; he will contribute to his own support; and he will become a more useful citizen. In this manner, "recreation helps prevent further physical, social, and mental deterioration."¹

To insure adequate provisions for recreation and the enjoyment of leisure is the great responsibility of the training program. A carefully planned recreational program is bound to benefit the retarded because recreation is an antidote for loneliness, especially loneliness caused by indefinite isolation and separation. This is pointed out by the President's Panel, which states that the retarded's vital need for successful social interaction and recreational experiences is frequently intensified by isolation resulting from parental overprotection, the numerous failure experiences in school and occupational pursuits, and by his exclusion from normal groups from his everyday play group and social activities.²

For many retardates recreational programs serve as gateways to their future successes. After their initial suc-


cess, they are willing to try other activities in which they previously failed.

From the research studies of Bobroff, Stein concluded that few retarded individuals know what to do with themselves in their spare time; that, compared with members of the non-retarded population, fewer mentally retarded adolescents and adults participate in outdoor sports and activities like hunting, fishing, and boating. Sixty percent of the retarded have no interest in hobbies of any type while a greater number of the retarded population spend more time watching television and doing little if anything constructive with their free time.1

Average children, unlike the mentally retarded, will take advantage of recreation programs. Extending opportunities for recreational activities is not enough for the mentally retarded. They must be made to feel that they are wanted. Since no child is born social, in the sense that he can get along well with others, he must learn to make adjustments to others. His ability to do so can be acquired only as a result of opportunities to be with all types of individuals, especially during years when socialization is an important phase of the child's development. This is true of normal as well as handicapped children. The family group, therefore, must contribute a readiness of belonging and acceptance. The child has to be made to feel that he is an accepted part of the sub-

sequent group into which he enters, and this feeling of belonging and acceptance into the family circle must pave the way for acceptance into other groups.

Sessoms says, "Through play, the child learns to cope with his environment, to extend his reach into the world shared by others." By analyzing the play patterns of children, psychoanalysts have diagnosed some of the anxieties and troubles of children. Likewise, they have used the play process in aiding disturbed children to reach an understanding of their problems and relationships to their environment."¹

Benoit's² and Hunt's³ observations show solitary activities are not very successful for the retarded. Hunt reports that mentally defective children do not respond well to competition and often become uninterested and aggressive if they lose. Successful play experiences, therefore, are absolute necessities for the development of the retarded child and Benoit claims that failure to have a variety of play experiences may actually lead to deterioration in other areas of development.

Benoit emphasizes the importance of play in all retardates' lives by insisting that "they need frequent thrills

of success in order to counteract the many frustrations they are likely to be subject to. It's in play that they work up a will to live, a will to do things, a will to grow. Play is truly the work of childhood and through play, the child grows."\(^1\)

Carroll insists that the mentally retarded need help to learn how to play, because play does not come to them automatically. His program teaches children to be good sports, "to be winners and losers and to respect themselves and others." Thus, they acquire recreation skills which carry over into adulthood for it is unquestionably certain that "as retarded adults they will have many hours of leisure time which must be filled in some way."\(^2\)

These ideas are further advanced by Kirk who says, "The educable retarded are able to adjust to society and lead a normal life in the community if the conditions of the community are conducive to their adjustment."\(^3\)

Interested leaders stress the need of recreation programming for the retarded not only in current literature but also at notable conferences and conventions as well. They see the need of unifying the efforts of all recreation leaders, all organizations and agencies, public and private, to coordinate

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\(^1\) E. P. Benoit, p. 44.


the existing recreation activities for the handicapped and to establish new programs. They also see the need to make the best use of trained leadership and to enlist all community resources in a program that will expand and continue the elementary school programs of play activities and organized sports throughout the adult life of the retarded. The school needs to be reinforced with the programs of all community agencies if a year-round program is to be maintained for the social, mental, and emotional adjustment of the mentally retarded.\(^1\)

What has been said thus far shows that the authors quoted are convinced that the mentally retarded could be taught how to use leisure time profitably and that recreation and play, if properly organized to meet the interests and needs of the retarded, will help to develop mentally retardates socially, emotionally and intellectually.

Survey of Organized Activities

Research on the part of educators and those interested in planning and organizing profitable programs of recreation for the mentally handicapped has made some startling revelation. For example, of the 2,200 community recreation programs surveyed, only two percent offer programs for retarded children or adults, and most of these are sponsored by parent groups. It is no wonder then, that the "mentally retarded people take spectator roles in recreation or leisure time activities."\(^2\)

Accordingly, Mrs. Eunice Kennedy Shriver, executive

\(^1\)Recreation and Physical Activity for the Mentally Retarded, pp. 7-8.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 6.
vice-president of the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation, states:

Only a small percentage of the nation's recreation departments are conducting any type of recreation program for the retarded; no major city has a model year-round program for the retarded; and no one has a special budget for recreation for the retarded.¹

She called on the public to start year-round recreation programs for this country's six million retarded persons who are in urgent need of recreation.

Cortazzo and Manefee's study of a survey conducted by the National Association for Retarded Children shows that there are 111 institutions for the mentally retarded in the United States. Of these, ninety-eight responded to the questionnaires which furnished some valuable information.

All ninety-eight institutions, with one exception, provide some kind of recreation program for the retarded. Ninety-three institutions have programs for the moderately mentally retarded, while ninety-one indicate that they have programs for the severely retarded. Eighty-nine institutions claim they provide recreation for retarded residents who are also physically handicapped.

The Cortazzo-Manefee study further shows that fourteen of these institutions have camping programs with both the day and the resident camps.

The number of campers range from a low of fifteen to a high of fifteen hundred. Seventy-six institutions reported that they have a Scout program while twenty-two reported none. Sixty-six institutions have Boy Scouts programs accommodating 1,493 boys; twenty-four

¹The President's Panel on Mental Retardation, p. 95.
have Cub Scouts programs for 309 boys; forty-nine have Girl Scouts programs for 724 girls; and twenty-four Brownie programs for 153 girls.\(^1\)

This survey indicates the importance of well-balanced recreation programs providing various activities and the need for more full-time recreation personnel who can give the necessary guidance, supervision, and direction to the mentally retarded who need to learn to utilize their free time wholesomely and profitably.

Woods states that "more than six hundred mentally retarded children participate in recreation programs provided by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation," and that about "150,000 mentally retarded children and adults who live in Los Angeles County are beneficiaries of the county parks and recreation program."\(^2\)

A cross-country survey of activities for the mentally retarded reveals that Norwood, Ohio, has appointed a special supervisor for the mentally retarded. Its year-round program is carried out within the framework of the regular recreation program. One of the greatest benefits of this program is the breakdown of barriers between parents and children and their normal playmates. Detroit, Michigan, has established programs in three recreational areas, with a professional staff of four members assisted by a group of mothers. At River Crest, in

\(^1\)Arnold D. Cortazzo and Allen R. Manefee, pp. 304-305.

Mount Clare, Pennsylvania, arts and crafts are an important and engaging activity. "Creative dramatics for retarded children is a continuing hit in Allentown, Pennsylvania." At Brandon Training School in Vermont, horseback riding is a year-round sport. "In Massachusetts, the Hampshire County Association for Retarded Children organized a group of Girl Scouts whose ages range from seven to twenty-one." In Kentucky, the Bluegrass Association for the Mentally Retarded sponsor a four-week summer playground program with one trained playground director and one volunteer helper for every four children. In Eugene, Oregon, the Association for the Help of Retarded Children started a teen club for the retarded. Its members receive free dancing lessons and swimming instructions. In Michigan, the Kalamazoo School for Retarded Children has a program for young adults seventeen to thirty. Evanston, Illinois, maintains a "Play School for the mentally retarded which is sponsored by the city recreation board."1

The Detroit Plan, organized to give the retarded an opportunity to be happy, to feel that he belongs, that his rights are the rights of a normal youngster, has proved successful in affording the retardates an opportunity to make social contacts. Considine claims that the Detroit Department of Parks and Recreation was only too happy "to place its facilities at the disposal of the Detroit Association for retarded

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children."¹

The School's Life Department in Vineland, New Jersey, developed the annual Summer Program. It was directed by a leader who had professional training in conducting recreational activities consisting of swimming, crafts, special trips and entertainment. This summer recreation program has helped the retarded to "derive the normal benefits of good sportsmanship, fair play, acceptance by peers, development of emotional control and quality of leadership."²

These surveys conducted by educators, learned men, and others interested in planning and organizing activities for the mentally retarded show that retardates can be helped. Opportunities for play and fun, for training and for group living, are among the most important forms of help that recreation can give the mentally handicapped. These surveys also show that the American people are being aroused more and more to the realization that the retardate's need for recreation during his leisure time is every normal citizen's concern.

Organizations Interested

What is most encouraging about today's organized recreation program is the increasing concern for an attempt to meet

the needs of the mentally handicapped. Many organizations have reorganized their program of recreation in order to prepare and equip the retarded for a better and fuller life. In fact, the first activity of concern for the National Association for the Retarded Children or the NARC is recreation.

Prior to 1959, when the NARC was organized, there were very few educational rehabilitation and diagnostic programs because local associations lacked professional guidance to develop them. In the early 1950's, NARC provided camping areas, swimming, bowling, scouting and arts and crafts for the mentally retarded. Then, too, many local ARC's have been showing an increased interest in developing recreation programs particularly for the teenage and adult retarded by sponsoring over 250 day camps and 250 residential camps and other recreational activities.

The main purpose of the Recreation Committee of NARC is to guide and encourage the formulation of recreation programs and leisure time activities, with special emphasis on providing recreational programs for adult retardates in order to meet the individual needs of the mentally retarded.

The American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation is particularly concerned with leadership, preparation for organizing and conducting clinics, institutions and workshops; research studies of recreational programs for the mentally retarded; and interpretation and program development.

In 1966, The Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation supported about thirty-two day camps in twenty-four states, serving
approximately 5,000 mentally retarded children. "To encourage professional preparation, the Foundation has contributed towards scholarships for further study in the field of mental retardation."¹

There are other agencies at work like the National Recreation and Park Association which is interested in consulting services on recreation for the ill and handicapped and the Association on Mental Deficiency, concerned with assisting schools and community agencies in implementing recreational programs for the retarded. As further supplementation, the Boy Scouts of America have adopted a program which now includes mentally retarded boys. Their records show that in 1966 there were 901 troops organized specifically for the mentally retarded, 296 cub scout troops, 521 boy scout troops and 84 explorer troops. In like manner, the Information Center of Recreation for the Handicapped provides many services of recreation for the handicapped.

This is a rather abbreviated listing or summary of some of the organizations interested in helping the mentally retarded, nevertheless, it presents a brief but adequate picture of what is being done to help the retarded use leisure time and recreation advantageously.

The Need for Local, and Nation Action

If the mentally retarded are to get the most out of

¹Wayne L. Sengstock and Julian U. Stein, p. 494.
recreation and leisure time activities, there must be united action, both local and national. This is pointed out by The President's Panel which states that "trained leaders are needed at the national, state, and local levels to plan, develop and direct specialized recreation programs."\(^1\) To assist individuals and groups in developing programs, the public must be made aware of the recreational needs of the mentally retarded. The Panel further says: "Pilot studies of programs and resources in communities should be designed to develop and test guidelines for community planning and action. Projects should be undertaken by national groups, universities, and colleges."\(^2\)

Speaking of colleges and universities, Throne says that

> not one department of physical education or recreation provides training, graduate or undergraduate, which is fully adequate to meet the needs of the retarded. What little research is being done in universities is mainly confined to the physiological aspects of growth and development in the retarded.\(^3\)

The situation on the local level is equally brought out in the President's Panel which states that because

> most mentally retarded individuals live at home, recreational activities are largely dependent upon the interests, skills, and available resources of the family and the community. In many communities when organized recreational facilities are available, these facilities are seldom used by retarded persons. This limited usage may be partially due to a lack of public awareness concerning the retarded person's need for

\(^1\)The President's Panel, pp. 96-97.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 97.

constructive leisure-time activities. Nevertheless, during the past decade, new opportunities mushroomed. Playground programs, swimming instructions, day and night camping, bowling leagues, Scout troops, and social clubs organized for the retarded.¹

Schreiber says that there are three types of group service settings serving the retarded.

First, there is a specialized agency serving only retarded children. Secondly, there is a special group for retarded individuals within a community group serving agency, and thirdly, there is the placement of the individual retardate within a group in a community center setting on the bases of his individual needs and the program of a given agency.²

From The President's Panel, it is evident that there is a great need of united action on the part of all public and private organizations interested in providing recreational opportunities for all young and older retardates.

¹The President's Panel, p. 96.
²Meyer Schreiber, p. 42.
CHAPTER III

MEETING THE PROBLEM WITH WELL-ROUNDED LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES

Every child, including the retarded, is entitled to develop his potential according to his native ability, in such a way that this potential will bring him satisfaction and help him find his "niche" in the social community. This achievement, of course, will be realized only if the child, in spite of his limitations, is accepted by members of his social community. If social acceptance is to materialize, a well-planned program of activities must be the ultimate goal of those whose work is centered around the retarded. Only in this way will the retarded child learn, develop, and become a useful member of society. Therefore, leisure time activities should not be neglected nor should they simply provide the retarded child with "something to do." Rather, each of his leisure time activities should be directed toward specific goals. Carlson and Gingles confirm this when they say:

Recreation in its broadest sense is a wholesome use of leisure time. In any good recreational program, participants develop physically, socially, and emotionally and, sometimes, intellectually as they have fun.

In any kind of good adult recreation program for normal or handicapped persons, a participant has social contact in interaction with his peers. As a rule, he develops new interests, and learns new skills and he experiences that he is a unique individual who is a part of the community in which he lives.

The maturing retardate has a special need for organized recreation because all too often he is among the socially deprived. Almost without exception, he
lacks sufficient opportunities for personal development as well as opportunities for social development that would have helped him feel comfortable while learning skills, for mingling with people.¹

**Group Centered Activities**

Planners of leisure time activities will do well to remember that many retarded children are too shy to perform individually. If they are placed within a group, their performance becomes better because they have the support of the group and are no longer fearful of performing alone. Activity within a group situation during leisure time gives the retarded the assurance of being socially accepted.

Carlson and Ginglend confirm this belief by saying that, in a group, the retarded acquires the feeling of belonging and tends to develop acceptable social habits and attitudes while enjoying himself. On the other hand, a child left alone and inactive tends to become withdrawn and fails to identify himself with his environment. "A mentally retarded child needs association with other children who are closely allied with him at the same level of learning and achieving." However, his association is not to be restricted to his own peer level. "His needs require that he associates with those who are above and below his level of achievement."²

Many of the leisure time activities such as music,


²Ibid., pp. 24-25.
dancing, camping, arts and crafts, swimming, bowling, drama, sports, reading and various types of hobbies are enjoyed by both the normal and the retarded child. Since the retarded child is slow intellectually, he is limited in what he can do. He needs direction to choose only such activities which will be helpful in constructively developing him as an individual. Carlson and Ginglend, believing that music activities help the retarded child to express his feelings and enjoy himself in a group situation say:

Group music activities provide a framework within which a broad range of abilities may be contained, and in which everyone can experience a feeling of successful personal achievement to some degree. Everyone is important when a group has a "songfest," presents a musical program, or does folk dancing, square dancing, or social dancing.

In music activities for the retarded, children grow and learn. Music enables retardates to give acceptable expression to their feelings and yearnings, and, in fact, all their emotions. Many retardates are sentimental and music allows them to express this sentiment.¹

Many retardates have their own record players and recordings which afford them the opportunity to share these with their peers during leisure time activities. This sharing affords not only listening and singing enjoyment, but also creates a group situation wherein spontaneous learning takes place.

The enjoyment of music eventually leads to expression in dancing, but teaching the mentally retarded social dancing is a very trying experience. If successful, however, it can

¹Ibid., pp. 98-99.
be a very rewarding experiment.

Rothstein claims that dancing is an important factor in today's social life and should be included in the daily curriculum for the mentally retarded child. However, dancing should be taught early in the life of the retarded. One cannot wait for the retarded child to mature. If maturity were to be criterion for teaching him dancing, then the retardate would be denied the opportunity to lose his self-consciousness and shyness. "By means of dancing, he develops an acceptance of rhythmical music. The dance also teaches the retarded child to mingle with others early in life."1

Chapman also encourages dancing for the mentally retarded because it helps the individual to become more sociable and to gain self-respect. He further states that "this type of activity is more for enjoyment than for attaining perfection in the art of dancing."2

As is evidenced in the studies made by authorities in the field of recreation for the mentally retarded, social dancing has many advantages in the life of the mentally retarded child. It helps the retardate to become socially accepted by others, thus reducing his tendency to shyness and awkwardness. It helps him to appreciate others as important


individuals with whom he comes in contact. Social dancing, likewise, affords the retardate a better opportunity for becoming a happier individual through sharing his evening leisure periods with others.

Although dance activities help the retarded to gain social acceptance, these alone are not sufficient for the total development of the child. Other areas require exploration.

Arts and crafts tend to develop creative ability, at least to a limited extent. Through clay modeling, soap carving, spatter painting, toy making, weaving, wood craft, yarn craft, sewing and drawing, the retardate expresses his inmost sentiments and experiences personal satisfaction of achievement and success, which, in turn, are very essential to making his life seem worthwhile. Speaking of crafts, Fitzgibbon says that they can be conceived as a leisure activity which is related to the development of the individuality of a person, not as a simple enjoyment or manipulation experience. Therefore, a primary justification for crafts exists in the contribution to the uniqueness of the individual. The essence of developing a unique individual, it appears, is to have the opportunity to be one. Craft workshops can provide this opportunity for the teachers who, in turn, can provide such opportunities for their pupils.¹

Since the retardate needs more help than the normal child in reaching some degree of proficiency in any activity, the arts and crafts activities must be carefully planned if the mentally retarded child is to benefit from them.

The total development of the child requires that the retardate experience the ordinary pleasure of the out-of-doors. Therefore, organizing camping trips for the retardates, especially during the summer months, provides a wholesome leisure-time activity. Both young and adolescent retardates can benefit from such programs. The day camp provides an excellent opportunity for personal growth and development through the ordinary give-and-take experiences of everyday living. Besides the daily encounter with group living, such activities as camp crafts, nature games, music games, folk dancing, dramatics, story telling, and swimming help to develop new skills and interests which may have lifetime values and rich experiences for those involved. The very idea that the retardates are working, playing, and living in a group situation has great value for their proximate and remote adulthood experiences.

Marpet believes that every parent is hopeful that his child will spend a happy summer at camp, learning to work and play with others. Every parent wants his child to have "a healthy summer in the out-of-doors, sharing experiences that every growing child enjoys—body exercise, plenty of sunshine, profitable summer fun." Likewise, every parent realizes that all the while the skills which the retardate has learned in his daily living experiences with other individuals will enable him "to advance a little more toward the goal of becoming an acceptable citizen."¹

Marpet further emphasizes that an ideal camping facility for mental retardates should include "such services which they cannot obtain elsewhere." He believes that costs should be moderate to accommodate children from lower socio-economic families and that the facility should be staffed and directed by professionals who are specialists in the fields of Special Education for the Mentally Retarded. He insists that all indoor and outdoor activities should be programmed "so that the children learn new skills and develop those which they formerly acquired." His idea of avocational programs includes "sports with emphasis on group activity, quiet games and hobbies, music appreciation, social and folk dancing, and singing."[1]

If camping is well organized and planned, the retarded child is in a better position to benefit by his attendance at camp and parental hopes will more readily find fulfillment.

The field of drama, with its numerous activities, is still another means of helping the retarded to use his leisure time. Activities suitable for the development of the retarded child include dramatizations, short plays, pantomimes and creative dramatics. Such activities offer opportunity for personal enjoyment and allow the retardates to provide pleasure for others. Through special programs in the curriculum of the child's life at school, dramatics could be correlated with other programs like the arts and crafts and clubs and hobbies.

Inskeep believes that "knowledge gained in a play

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[1] Ibid., pp. 102-103.
atmosphere is more readily retained and recalled because of the pleasure that is associated with it."  

Carlson and Ginglend also consider play as very important in the life of the retarded child. Most retardates, like all normal children, enjoy playing. When they play, they not only have fun, but they also tend "to develop physically, mentally, and socially." Since they have to be taught to play, this avenue of recreation often remains closed to them. "It is through play that the retarded child can grow and learn."  

Family Centered Activities  
Many a retarded child enjoys family activities because these give him knowledge and satisfaction of being accepted. How the mental retardate spends his leisure time in a family circle is a serious question for consideration. If he is accepted in the family and is permitted to share activities with them, chances are that this acceptance and sharing in childhood will shape his adulthood and enable him to develop his own hobbies and leisure time activities.  

The family group provides many special experiences which, if well-planned, can occupy the retarded and keep him busy indefinitely. Some of the activities suggested by Blodgett  

and Warfield include the following:

1. Family picnics at the different parks and playgrounds
2. Family camping
3. Visits to zoos and carnival fairs
4. Suitable movies
5. Train, bus, or plane trips
6. Automobile drives
7. Outdoor community events: baseball and other sports, band concerts, parades, and festivals
8. Excursions, boat rides, fishing and swimming
9. Walks in different parks

Some of the events listed may not be recreational in character. To the retarded child, they are important because they are concrete experiences. Unless he sees, feels, and hears the many aspects of living in a complicated world, he cannot know about them since he is limited in his ability to enjoy and learn from vicarious experiences.¹

Because the retarded spends more time at home than elsewhere, it is necessary that members of the family accept him into the family circle and share recreational activities with him. Since he must be taught to play and recreate, his play and recreational activities necessitate such planning and organizing that will insure not only his enjoyment and happiness, but also his physical, mental, and social growth.

Special Individual Interests

Retardates generally lack initiative to get themselves involved in any activity but, with some encouragement, they will and do respond. Like normal children, they possess special interests but they have to be prodded along because their abilities are limited. This statement finds confirmation in Blodgett and Warfield who have this to say:

Like normal people, many retarded teenagers and young adults are keenly interested in sports and especially in baseball. They know the names of all major players. Interest in sports keeps the retarded person in tune with the world around him. It strengthens his social communication, and it keeps his mind alert as he adds new names and new statistics to his fund of knowledge. If the retarded child shows an interest in sports, this interest should be kept alive as years go by.¹

Some retardates become interested in reading, especially when it is their privilege to visit the library for the purpose of selecting books suitable to their taste and reading ability. Those having reading difficulty select their books and have others read to them. Others again find enjoyment in looking through picture books.

Reading is a very interesting and educational hobby; therefore, leisure time reading should be fostered and encouraged and the school should be particularly mindful of the reading interests in older retardates. It is important for retardates to become acquainted with librarians who are in a position to assist them in the location and selection of books. Equally important is the establishment of hobby interests in the

¹Ibid., pp. 201-202.
retarded. It is the school's obligation to introduce them to hobbies which may carry over to their adult life. These hobbies can be weaving, basket making, leather tooling, woodworking, sewing, embroidery, or some current handiwork fad. "Whether the hobby is making or growing something, collecting something, developing some talent, participation in some type of sports, or whatever, is of little importance as long as it holds the interests and efforts of the participant."\(^1\)

The retardates need not be always in someone's company. They should be taught how to occupy themselves while being alone, either by reading, solitary occupation, working on some hobby, playing games, or putting puzzles together. If they are engaged in some constructive pastime, they have fewer opportunities for getting into trouble.

**Community Centered Activities**

In certain communities, recreational activities for the mentally retarded have been on the move for some time. However, a great deal of thought and study is needed to provide them, particularly teenagers and adults, with well-organized activities.

Berryman seems to confirm this when she says:

For the older child who needs outside-of-the-home participation in leisure hours, the available opportunities will be largely determined by the kind of community in which he lives. In urban areas, there are some organized groups which plan activities to

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help meet the needs of the retarded adults. There are
fun clubs, dances, and game nights provided, as well
as a few organized Boy Scout and Girl Scout Troops.
Special Sunday School classes have been provided by
some churches.

Parent groups can and have sponsored many special
events for the retarded. Outstanding is the organiza­
tion for the summer day camps, where children are
grouped according to age and level of ability and
adequate trained leadership is provided. 1

Because the older retarded has more opportunities to
mingle with others after his regular work is completed, there
should be a place in the community where he could go to enjoy
his leisure.

Perry is of the opinion that it is only with the com­

munities' cooperation and through the communities' agencies
and organizations that the mentally retarded could be provided
with necessary services. Therefore, each community's interest
in problems of the mentally retarded should be stimulated.
The retarded need the community's support and understanding
if they are to be happy citizens. 2

Since preparation for wholesome leisure time activities
is the responsibility of the home, school, and community, edu­
cators should make the youngsters aware of the community's
recreational resources such as: parks, supervised playgrounds,
community hall, boys' and girls' clubs, Y.M.C.A.'s, Y.W.C.A.'s,
Y.M.H.A.'s, Y.W.H.A.'s, 4-H Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts,

1Harriet E. Blodgett, pp. 112-113.

2Natalie Perry, The Teaching of the Mentally Retarded
Camp Fire Girls, summer camps, and other community facilities. If the mentally retarded are to use these facilities and benefit from them, the cooperation of school and community agencies will be necessary.¹

Campbell, Daly, and Hanson also see the value in having some knowledge of the activities and services offered within the community. They believe that the "retardates should be encouraged to join various social, recreational, civic, and religious groups within the community."² They see the retardate's need of involvement as an antidote to loneliness. This involvement calls for skills and abilities acquired through recreational activities.

Recognizing the retardate's need of a community center where they could meet their friends and voice their opinions, Meyen says:

There is a definite need for a small local center for the mentally retarded where they can foregather for social purposes and companionships. This would avoid idleness at home and provide recreation and self-satisfaction which would be occupationally profitable and avoid morbid loneliness.³

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¹J.E. Wallin, pp. 259-260.


In meeting the leisure time and recreational problems of the retarded, cooperation on the part of all concerned is imperative. The retardates must be acquainted with the possibilities at their disposal in the home, the school, and the community, if they are to use them enjoyably and efficiently. Family centered activities, where the retarded member is accepted, serve as gateways to school and community acceptance. With the harmonious cooperation of these key centers of group activities for mental retardates, their physical, mental, and social growth is more readily assured.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Education for retarded children is well-rounded and complete if it adequately prepares, organizes and provides for the wise and beneficial use of leisure time. The proper utilization of leisure time activities, therefore, is essential to the growth and social acceptance of all retardates. When carefully and thoughtfully planned, recreation and leisure time activities give the retarded an opportunity to live comfortably, happily and meaningfully with themselves, their peers, their families and the community at large. To insure this wholesome and worthwhile living, community agencies must provide the retarded with an increasing number and a greater variety of recreational activities especially for their after school and evening hours and their week-ends. Without this provision, the leisure time of retardates can be the cause of intolerable boredom and untold trouble.

The schools, too, should interest the retarded in devices and diversions of sufficient recreational skills and activities in order to keep them realistically occupied during leisure time.

Studies made by various authors cited in this paper show that training the retarded for proper use of free time should be begun early in the home and continued through school
into adolescence and adulthood; that well-organized activities should serve the retarded as a means of enjoyment as well as emotional, intellectual and social growth that will make them acceptable citizens of society.

Studies also show that a greater number of organizations are becoming interested in the mentally retarded and are making attempts to solve their recreational and leisure time problems, therefore, parents should avail themselves of such opportunities as are being offered for the improvement of their children.

Strangely enough, this growing advancement in the quality of programs for the retarded somehow indicates insufficient participation on the part of the retarded. This negligence is perhaps occasioned by a lack of awareness as to where, and when, and what kind of activities are available. Consequently, now, and no less in the future, well-planned, well-organized and well-directed programs of activity must be the key to a wise, profitable, healthful, and happy use of leisure time.

It seems fitting, therefore, to close this paper by paraphrasing a portion of President Kennedy's inaugural speech since those who have done much and are doing still more to help America's retarded have brought to this endeavor "the energy, the faith, and devotion" which, like a torch of love and understanding, lights the way for this nation to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardships, support any friend" to assure the happiness and the success of its retarded members.
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