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COMMITMENT AS "DELINQUENT"?

HERMIONE DEALY DVORAK AND AUGUST DVORAK¹

Should a boy, brought into court for repeated truancy or for petty larceny, be committed as "delinquent"? On the basis of the kind of evidence presented, can a judge do more than commit the boy to a "school for delinquents"? Does the "school for delinquents" so study the real nature of the delinquent boy and so understand this nature in environmental terms that the boy will change his tactics and will not become a "repeater"? Surely present conditions in the State of Rhode Island and in certain other states allow no other kind of response than an emphatic negative to all three of these questions.

The very fact that these questions can be answered in the negative is an index of *lack* of intelligent comprehension of the different situations causing delinquency. To sentence a boy to a school for delinquents, lacking mental, social and physical data to show that he actually belongs in that particular school, is a violation of individual rights. This procedure may actually *train* a boy for crime!

The writers publish this article with the intent of noting some of the facts which substantiate the above contention. One of the writers, who, in her professional capacity, conducts the Psycho-Educational Clinic at the University of Minnesota, became interested in the group of boys in residence at the Rhode Island Sockanosset School for Boys during the summer of 1920. Co-operating with the superintendent of the school in his attempt to understand better some of the "problem" cases, twenty boys were given the Stanford-Binet examination. Fifty per cent of these were definitely feeble-minded. Only two boys were above normal intelligence and these were "superior." Histories of the boys tested included improper grade placement in school resulting in dislike of school and teacher, lack of home control, extreme suggestibility to the "gang" spirit resulting in theft, truancy or other misdemeanor, and other forms of social maladjustment.

Curious to know whether this group of twenty boys was *typical* of the entire school, with the assistance of Doctor Harold Gosline of the Rhode Island Hospital for Mental Diseases, the 215 delinquent boys in residence at the Sockanosset School were given the Haggerty Delta 2, a group intelligence test of known reliability. Data obtained

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from the 215 tests were carefully worked over and tabulated by Mr. August Dvorak of the College of Education, University of Minnesota.

These data show (1) chronological age in relation to grade placement in the Sockanosset School; (2) comparison of mental ages with chronological ages; (3) mental age and grade placement in the Sockanosset School; (4) mental age in relation to standard grade placement, e. g., the standard grade placement established by Doctor Haggerty on the basis of 40,000 boys and girls, and (5) range of intelligence quotients. These quotients are indices of intelligence on the basis of which classification of the boys in terms of "superior," "normal," "backward" and "feeble-minded" may be made. For convenience the data were treated in eight groups, namely, seven groups included the boys enrolled in each of grades 3 through 9 in the school and one group comprised "special cases" who could not be assigned to any grade.

(1) *Chronological Age and Grade Placement.*

Table I gives the distribution of chronological ages of the boys

TABLE I—DISTRIBUTION OF CHRONOLOGICAL AND MENTAL AGES

| Grade | Chronological Age | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------|
| | 3d | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th | Special |
| Normal Range of C. A. | 7-6 to 9-6 | 8-6 to 10-6 | 9-6 to 11-6 | 10-6 to 12-6 | 11-6 to 13-6 | 12-6 to 14-6 | 13-6 to 15-6 | |
| Number of boys..... | 23 | 42 | 74 | 23 | 16 | 14 | 2 | 21 |
| Minimum C. A..... | 9-8 | 10-5 | 10-11 | 12-2 | 13-0 | 13-7 | 14-5 | 9 |
| Maximum C. A..... | 16-3 | 17-8 | 18-2 | 17-9 | 18-3 | 18-1 | 14-10 | 18-9 |
| Mean C. A..... | 12-7 | 13-8 | 14-0 | 14-8.5 | 14-7.5 | 15-5 | 14-7.5 | 11-10 |
| Median C. A..... | 12-2 | 13-2 | 14-0 | 14-8 | 14-3 | 15-2 | 14-7.5 | 11-8 |
| No. boys not retarded (C. A.) | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 | |
| Maximum retardation (months) | 81 | 86 | 80 | 63 | 57 | 43 | 0 | |
| Mean retardation (months) | 37.1 | 38.4 | 31 | 26.4 | 15.2 | 14.1 | 0 | |
| | Mental Age | | | | | | | |
| Minimum M. A..... | 6-6 | 7-7 | 8-1 | 7-5 | 8-11 | 11-4 | 15-8 | 6-6 |
| Maximum M. A..... | 10-0 | 12-0 | 16-11 | 14-10 | 19-0 | 18-7 | 16-6 | 9-1 |
| Median M. A..... | 8-4 | 9-0 | 11-0 | 12-1 | 12-9 | 13-9 | 16-1 | 7-4 |

according to their enrollment in the different grades. For instance, 23 boys were in the third grade, the youngest of these being 9 years 8 months, the oldest 16 years 3 months, the mean or average age 12 years 7 months and the median age 12 years and 2 months.

In order to have some criterion for grade placement in terms of chronological age, in accordance with present practice a range of two years was allowed as inclusive of the ages which normally ought to belong in any given grade. That is, reading the figures which head each of the grade columns, any child in the third grade *normally* should be between the ages of 7 years 6 months and 9 years 6 months. Comparison of the ages usually found in the different grades and those actually found there in this study, it is literally amazing to note that *all* of the boys in the third grade are *retarded*, *all but one* in the fourth grade are retarded, *all but three* in the fifth grade, *all but four* in the sixth grade, *all but three* in the seventh grade, and *all but four* in the eighth grade. That is, of the 194 delinquent boys in grades three through nine, only 17 or *nine per cent* of them are *not retarded*. This fact in itself indicates maladjustment of serious nature.

Furthermore, in the same table, directly below the figures indicating the number of boys not retarded in school, are figures showing the maximum and mean retardation in months. Again the figures are of rather unusual size, especially in the lower grades, with average retardations of approximately 37 months, 38 months and 31 months in the third, fourth and fifth grades, respectively.

Table II shows more clearly how the boys of widely differing chronological ages are found in any given grade. To illustrate, note in the fourth grade boys who are 15, 16 and 17 years of age associated with boys 9, 11 and 12 years. The only possible justification for this condition would lie in the fact that, irrespective of other factors, *mentally* all boys in each of the grades are practically on a par, that is, their capacity to handle the work of the grade in which they are located is about equal. The median mental ages for the different grades given in Table I show that in a way this is a correct deduction.

(2) *Mental Age Versus Chronological Age.*

For purposes of comparison the minimum mental age, the maximum mental age and the median mental age of the boys in each of the eight groups have been arranged in Table I under the figures repre-

TABLE II—DISTRIBUTION OF CHRONOLOGICAL AND MENTAL AGES ACCORDING TO GRADE

| Grade | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Special |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Chronological Ages | | | | | | | | |
| 7-6 to 8-5 | <u>0</u> | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 8-6 9-5 | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 9-6 10-5 | <u>3</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| 10-6 11-5 | 5 | <u>0</u> | <u>3</u> | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 11-6 12-5 | 5 | 9 | <u>12</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>0</u> | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| 12-6 13-5 | 3 | 16 | 13 | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>0</u> | 0 | 2 |
| 13-6 14-5 | 2 | 17 | 15 | 4 | <u>7</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>1</u> | 2 |
| 14-6 15-5 | 2 | 3 | 15 | 4 | 2 | <u>3</u> | <u>1</u> | 1 |
| 15-6 16-5 | 3 | 3 | 12 | 6 | 2 | 3 | <u>0</u> | 0 |
| 16-6 17-5 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 17-6 18-5 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Totals | <u>23</u> | <u>42</u> | <u>74</u> | <u>23</u> | <u>16</u> | <u>14</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>21</u> |

senting chronological age. These figures mean that in the third grade the lowest mental age is 6 years 6 months, the highest mental age is 10 years, and the average mental age is 8 years 4 months. Evidently the well-known fact that chronological age is no index of mental capacity is strikingly illustrated in this study. In the third and fourth grades the median mental age is approximately 4 years below the median chronological age. In the fifth and sixth grades the discrepancy between these two ages is approximately 3 years. The minimum and maximum of each of the two ages in the first four grades show wide variation.

(3) *Mental Age and Grade Placement in the School.*

The suggestion made that in order to justify the placement of boys from 8 to 15 years of age in the third grade it would be necessary to show a likeness of mental capacity among them is in measure illustrated by the distribution of the 215 boys in terms of mental ages and grade placement. Table III shows that in each grade the greater number of boys concentrate around the mental ages commonly found in the different grades, e. g., the frequencies underlined. At any rate this

TABLE III—DISTRIBUTION OF MENTAL AGES ACCORDING TO GRADE

| Grade | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Special |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---------|
| Mental Ages | | | | | | | | |
| 6-6 to 7-5 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| 7-6 8-5 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| 8-6 9-5 | 9 | 22 | 14 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 9-6 10-5 | 1 | 6 | 13 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 10-6 11-5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 11-6 12-5 | 0 | 2 | 14 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 12-6 13-5 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 13-6 14-5 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 14-6 15-5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 15-6 16-5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| 16-6 17-5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 17-6 18-5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 18-6 19-5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | 23 | 42 | 74 | 23 | 16 | 14 | 2 | 21 |

distribution of ages in relation to grade placement takes a different form from that noted in Table II. The obviously over-age boys in the earlier grades are usually found to be the *youngest* mentally. For instance, in the fourth grade the boy who is 17 years 8 months chronologically has a mental age of 11 years 2 months; another boy in the same grade, age 16 years 8 months, has a mental age of 9 years. In brief the educational department of the Sockanosset School without objective tests has done exceptionally well in placing the boys in the grade where they *can* learn something rather than in the grade where by right of chronological age they ought to be. However, there are striking exceptions where mental capacity is hopelessly at odds with the grade placement. Take, for example, the boy with nearly 17-year mental capacity competing in the fifth grade with boys whose median mental age is 11 years. Also there are two boys of 16 and 19 years' mental capacity competing with a median intelligence of 12 years 9 months in the seventh grade, and two other boys of 16 years 9 months and 18 years 7 months mental age competing with a median intelligence of 13 years 9 months in the eighth grade!

(4) *Mental Age and Standard Grade Placement.*

Better than a subjective estimate of the grade in which children should be placed at different mental ages is an objective judgment based upon actual placements of thousands of pupils in the public schools of the country. Dean Haggerty has so standardized the Delta 2 examination that, knowing the mental age of a pupil, other factors being equal, it is possible to indicate the school grade where he should

be placed. Consequently the mental ages of the 215 boys have been assembled and distributed among the grades where normally they should belong, keeping as before the eight groups separate. See Table IV.

TABLE IV--DISTRIBUTION OF PUPILS IN TERMS OF MENTAL AGE AND STANDARD GRADE PLACEMENT

| Grade | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Special |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Standard Grade | | | | | | | | |
| Below | | | | | | | | |
| 3..... | <u>13</u> | 6 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| 3..... | 9 | <u>24</u> | 13 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4..... | <u>1</u> | 8 | 17 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 5..... | 0 | <u>4</u> | <u>28</u> | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 6..... | 0 | 0 | <u>6</u> | <u>6</u> | 7 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 7..... | 0 | 0 | 4 | <u>3</u> | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 8..... | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | <u>0</u> | <u>1</u> | 0 | 0 |
| 9..... | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | <u>4</u> | <u>2</u> | 0 |
| 10..... | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | <u>0</u> | 0 |
| 11..... | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 12..... | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | <u>23</u> | <u>42</u> | <u>74</u> | <u>23</u> | <u>16</u> | <u>14</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>21</u> |

In each grade the number of pupils, underlined, represents the frequency of pupils whose grade placement corresponds to the mental ages usually found in that grade. All pupils above the underlined frequency are advanced for the grade, all pupils below are retarded. That is, in the third grade, 9 pupils are properly placed because they are so qualified in terms of mental capacity, 13 pupils are "advanced" because they are assigned to the third grade even though they have mental capacity which is less than that required for that grade, and one pupil is "retarded" because he is held back in the third grade when actually he has fourth grade capacity. Only 28 of the 74 pupils in the fifth grade are placed at age. Only 6 of the 23 pupils in the sixth grade are placed at age. All members of the special class, with one exception, are mentally below third grade capacity, despite the fact that the range of chronological ages in this group is from 9 years to 18 years 9 months.

This evidence simply emphasizes the facts presented under "Mental Age and Grade Placement in the School." One of the prime causes for poor mental and social adjustments is that persons attempt to do work for which they have *not enough* or *too much* capacity. Clearly knowledge of the intelligence of delinquent boys must be secured if there is "justice." Differences in intelligence are associated with different social problems and with differences in physical health. All

these differences deserve careful evaluation in order to guarantee the "delinquent" a square deal.

(5) *Intelligence Quotients.*²

Table V shows the distribution of intelligence quotients found in each of the eight groups. In substance, these quotients show that 82 or 38 per cent of the 215 delinquent boys at the Sockanosset School for Boys are *definitely feeble-minded*. In addition, 110 or 51 per cent of the boys are mentally backward (below 1.00 I. Q.), and of these, 40 per cent are appreciably backward (below .90 I. Q.). Only 23 boys or 11 per cent are of normal or superior mentality. Results of 138 Stanford-Binet tests given by Miss Herrick at the Sockanosset School for Boys during the summer of 1919 show that only 9 boys, about 7 per cent, were of normal or superior intelligence (above 1.00 I. Q.), while 38 per cent were *definitely feeble-minded*.

TABLE V—DISTRIBUTION OF INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENTS

| Grade | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Spe- Total cial No. |
|-----------------------|---|----|----|---|---|---|---|------------------------|
| Intelligence Quotient | | | | | | | | |
| .40-.49 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2— 6 |
| .50-.59 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4— 20 |
| .60-.69 | 5 | 21 | 17 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6— 56 |
| .70-.79 | 7 | 9 | 19 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6— 44 |
| .80-.89 | 2 | 4 | 17 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 2— 38 |
| .90-.99 | 0 | 1 | 13 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 1— 28 |
| 1.00-1.09 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 0— 13 |
| 1.10-1.19 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0— 7 |
| 1.20-1.29 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0— 1 |
| 1.30-1.39 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0— 2 |
| Total | | | | | | | | 215 |

This situation, however, is not unique among delinquent institutions of the United States. A study of the Whittier State School in California shows 30 per cent definitely feeble-minded and 48 per cent mentally backward, making a total of 78 per cent of the school population who are either feeble-minded or mentally backward. The school for delinquent boys at Red Wing, Minnesota, report 28 per cent of the boys definitely feeble-minded and 49 per cent mentally backward, a total of 77 per cent. It would seem that some change in the administration of schools for delinquents is an immediate necessity, unless the phrases "school for the feeble-minded" and "school for delinquents" are to be used interchangeably. Then, too, the methods employed in

²This quotient is the ratio of mental age to chronological age. The chronological age of 15 years was assigned to all boys of 15 years or above.

the education of children assigned to these two types of school are supposedly *different*. A feeble-minded child in a delinquent school who received the delinquent educational technique would deteriorate rather than gain. Such a condition is like giving a person the wrong medicine and blaming the chemist for grievous illness or death—except that in the case of the feeble-minded child no one person is actually to blame for his assignment to the wrong state institution.

The obvious conclusion summarizing these facts is that the school for delinquent boys in Rhode Island is a nest of maladjustments of many varieties. The boys have been committed to that institution on the basis of *one of the symptoms* of this maladjustment, namely, some form of delinquent behavior.

Is this situation conducive to social progress? Social progress implies, among other things, investigation of the *causes* of anti-social behavior and the alleviation of conditions which make delinquent behavior probable, instead of purposeless commitment on the basis of some delinquent act. Charles E. Vasaly, Superintendent of the Minnesota State Reformatory, in a recent address on "The Basis of Parole" given before the quarterly conference of the Minnesota State Board of Control, voices this same point of view, namely, "It is the distinctive fact about modern penology, and perhaps its greatest achievement, that the *offender, his history, with all that concern him*, should be the *principal thing* in a proper system of parole, and his crime secondary." That is, the psychologist, the social worker, the medical doctor and the courts must co-operate in the analysis of the maladjustments of each individual delinquent. Otherwise all those persons who aid in the commitment of delinquents will themselves be guilty of misunderstanding human values, of wasting human capacity and of furthering the degeneration of human character.