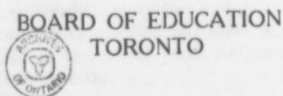


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REPORT
Re
SIGHT-SAVING CLASSES
AND
EDUCATION OF THE BLIND

BY
D. D. MACDONALD, B.A.
Principal Orde Model School

4th NOVEMBER, 1920





REPORT

SIGHT-SAVING CLASSES

AND

EDUCATION OF THE BLIND

BY J. M. McDONALD, ED.

OF THE BUREAU OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON, D. C.

1914



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REPORT OF TRIP MADE TO VARIOUS CENTRES IN
THE UNITED STATES TO INVESTIGATE SIGHT-SAVING
CLASSES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND TO LOOK INTO
THE EDUCATION OF THE BLIND IN GENERAL, BY D. D.
MACDONALD, B.A., PRINCIPAL OF ORDE MODEL SCHOOL.

November 4th, 1920.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Board:—

Before presenting this report permit me to take this opportunity of again expressing to you my very sincere appreciation of the great privilege which you recently granted me, in allowing me to make this trip. It was a very great honor indeed to be sent as your representative on such an important mission, and I trust that I have been able to bring home some of the enthusiasm and inspiration which came to me while visiting the various educational centres.

As space or time will not permit of a detailed account, we shall refer particularly to the more important features, as far as it is possible. I may say that Mr. Sherman Swift, M.A., the Librarian of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, a man very closely in touch with all activities which have to do with the betterment of the condition of the Blind in general, and of those who are handicapped by defective sight, was good enough to suggest for me my itinerary and to advise me as to where I could get the best assistance. Mr. Holmes, the Director of the Canadian National Institute, was also very helpful, and much interested in what might be the result of the visit. Letters of introduction from Chief Inspector Cowley, Mr. Swift and Mr. Holmes made it very easy for me to get in touch with the proper authorities in every case. Throughout the trip the most cordial reception and heartiest welcome were extended. Everything possible was done to give assistance in making the visit in the truest sense helpful, instructive and at the same time pleasant.

The centres visited were Brantford, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston. In these places

are to be found the most up-to-date work in connection with sight-saving classes in the public schools, as well as the most advanced methods in the education of the blind, to be found in Canada and the United States.

It may be said at this point, that as far as sight-saving classes are concerned, Canada lags considerably behind the United States. At the present time there is only one class of this nature in our country, and I feel thoroughly satisfied that this one class is not sufficient to meet the need as it exists today. The class now in existence is to be found in Halifax and was opened there as a result of the recent great explosion.

On Monday, October 4th, we visited The Ontario Institute for the Blind at Brantford, and found it to be doing a most excellent work under the able Superintendency of Mr. W. B. Race, B.A. There are in attendance now about 110 students. These range from Kindergarten age to 21 years. It may here be noted that the modern idea in connection with these institutes for the blind, is, that they are not homes for the aged and infirm blind, but rather centres for the education of blind children. The present day idea in connection with the blind is that they must be made self-supporting, not charity-seeking, and that they mingle with their sighted brethren and come in active competition with them, as far as possible.

BRANTFORD.

In the Brantford Institution it was noticed that many of the students are partially-sighted. Somewhere in the neighborhood of possibly 50 per cent. of the children have partial vision. Many of these children should not be in an institution of this kind at all but should rather be in special classes in the Public Schools. This condition is not peculiar to the Brantford Institute but is characteristic in a measure of every Institute for the education of the blind which I visited. It was the opinion of the Superintendent, I think in every case, that children should not be educated in an institution for the blind, if they have sight enough to admit of their being educated in a special conservation of vision class.

The School at Brantford is beautifully situated on the outskirts of the city. The grounds are large, consisting of 100 acres, and provide ample space for the students, sports, as well as facilities for raising provisions for the use of the school.

One of the most interesting members of the staff whom I met was Mr. W. B. Donkin, the oldest male member in point of service. Mr. Donkin, although absolutely blind, is at the head of the industrial department, and has succeeded in bringing it to a high degree of efficiency. In fact, I believe that the work of Mr. Donkin's industrial department is second to the work of no other industrial department in any of the American Schools which I visited. In fact, I believe that in many respects it ranks among the very first. The great variety of the work and the amazing precision and accuracy with which it is done, appealed to me very strongly. The many devices and inventions made by Mr. Donkin in the carrying out of his work make it distinctive. The man is an inspiration to meet and know.

I am pleased to say, after having visited the most representative Institutions for the Education of the Blind in the United States, that in spite of the fact that the building at Brantford is not one of the most modern, the work seems to be quite the equal of that done in any of the American institutions.

CLEVELAND.

On Tuesday, October 5th, we proceeded to Cleveland with the purpose of looking into the work of the sight-saving classes in the Public Schools in that city.

Mr. Robert B. Irwin occupies the position of Supervisor of the Blind for the State of Ohio, and makes Cleveland his headquarters. Mr. Irwin himself is blind, but is a man of unusual breadth of mental vision. He is a very keen observer of human nature and knows thoroughly well how to deal with people. From a small beginning made by him about nine years ago,

there has widened an influence which has spread to various parts of the United States. In 1911 he opened a class for blind children in one of the Cleveland Public Schools. Later, in 1913, there developed from this, the opening of a class for partially-sighted children. Similar movements followed the lead of Mr. Irwin soon after in Boston and New York.

There are now in the City of Cleveland about eight special classes for the Conservation of Vision, and two classes for blind children. Most of these classes are in the Public Schools and some of them are in the Junior High Schools. The work in Cleveland is particularly well organized and is under the most expert personal direction of Mr. Irwin and a competent office staff. The teachers chosen for these classes are selected by Mr. Irwin from the general staff and the very best and most sympathetic and resourceful are secured. It may be said here that the most necessary and indispensable requisite for a sight-saving class is a resourceful teacher.

One of the most delightful and helpful days of the trip was the first day in Cleveland, which was spent with Mr. Irwin, in his office and in visiting various classes in the schools. Mr. Irwin is a refined, highly educated, cultured gentleman who is fairly on fire with enthusiasm, in the cause in which he is vitally interested, viz., the education of the blind and those who are handicapped by poor vision. He has completely overcome the handicap of blindness himself and is most anxious to be helpful in assisting others so handicapped, to help themselves. To be personally conducted by Mr. Irwin to several of these classes and to be directed about in a strange city by him, being informed where to cross to the other side of the street, where to board the cars, etc., and to be conducted by this same blind person to the University Club for luncheon, was to me a unique and delightful experience which I shall not soon forget.

On Mr. Irwin's staff is an official who is known as a visiting teacher. She does not actually teach but serves as a connecting link between the home and the school. When a new pupil comes to one of these classes, the home is visited.

Mothers are encouraged to teach their children to be independent, and to help themselves even if they are blind or have defective vision. Complete records are kept of these home visits. This teacher also interests mothers in the care of the sight of their children. The movies are condemned for those whose sight is defective. Everything possible is done to keep in close touch with the homes and to interest the mothers in the welfare of their children.

Before a child is admitted to one of these special classes a supervising eye specialist examines the eye thoroughly, to ascertain whether the child should be a finger reader, or be placed in a sight-saving class. Then the Binet test is given. This test, however, is not yet standardized. No feeble minded children are allowed to enter any of these classes. After the examination by the eye specialist has been given, and the Binet test made, the home is visited by the visiting teacher and the arrangements are made. In many cases guides are provided and these are paid for by the board, but for the most part this is done by arrangement with older brothers or sisters, or with a neighbor's child.

Another important position on Mr. Irwin's staff is that of Vocational Guidance teacher. It is the duty of this person to follow up the pupils for a couple of years after they leave school. The person occupying this position at present is a college graduate. Her time is divided between the home and school. She looks after the individual needs of special cases. During the first of the term much of the time is spent in the schools. It is the work of this person to interview firms with a view to placing the students in positions when they graduate. A careful record is kept of interviews with manufacturing and other concerns in reference to these employees who had been placed by the vocational guidance teacher. Again, intensive instruction may be given a student in some special subject, if thought desirable, e.g., when I was in Cleveland, one little girl was being given this intensive instruction in Dictaphone operating.

In regard to the nature of sight-seeing classes and the method of operating them, it will be necessary to give a few words of explanation. A class is opened in any centre where it is deemed desirable, provided there are the required number of children whose vision is defective. An ordinary, well-lighted class room of full size, is the first requisite. The number of children must not exceed 12. The object of the small class is that there may be the opportunity to do individual teaching. The seat and desks used in Cleveland are the Moulthrop with adjustable tops. A piano is supplied in every Sight-Saving Class room. There is also a typewriter for every class from the 5th grade up. A small gas stove or electric ring is supplied in the room for preparing luncheon for the children. In each of these rooms in Cleveland there is a climbing pole and swing attached to the ceiling, for the use of the children at any time. A part of the other equipment consists of a work table, large type text-books, charts, special maps, much material for hand work, such as reed for basketry, raffia looms, and material for weaving, etc. Special artificial lighting is required for dull days, double shades on windows fastened at centre, one pulling down and the other up, are considered very necessary. For details of equipment see Mrs. Hathaways' Manual for Conservation of Vision Classes.

In Cleveland the plan for the children of these sight-saving classes is, that they give their recitation in the ordinary class-room and return to their own room at the end of each lesson, where the work is followed up and individual instruction given. In this manner the handicapped children are enabled to compete in a measure with their fully-sighted fellows. This gives them confidence in themselves and they seem to respond well. This same plan is followed in the case of the classes for Blind Children and seems to work equally well. In order that this plan may work out satisfactory in a school, it is absolutely necessary that there be a hearty co-operation between the regular teachers and the teachers in charge of special sight-saving classes or classes for the blind as the case may be. There are usually from three to four grades in one of these classes. Another intensely interesting feature of the work in Cleveland is

the policy of the Board of Education in reference to the blind children in the schools. Many of these children come from homes which are bare and uninviting, and the majority of these children have not been taught to be helpful to themselves.

The Board have deemed it wisdom, to purchase two eight-roomed houses, which they have very cozily and comfortably furnished. About five blind school girls occupy one of these homes, from Monday until Friday, when they go home. A matron is in charge of them. The other cottage is occupied by five or six boys, and these are in charge of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin for this year. In this way these blind children have all the good influences of a model home cast about them for the week. They are taught to wait upon themselves, look after their bed-rooms and to do the house-work generally. If Mr. Irwin finds any of these children possessing exceptional talent along any one line, he makes it his business to see that this child is given special help and consideration. These two homes impressed me greatly. I visited both of them and saw the work actually going on. The Domestic Science teacher lives in one of these cottages, and instruction is given the girls along this important line. It may be of interest to note that two teachers for full time and one for half time are teaching music to the children of these special classes in Cleveland. It is also of interest to note that there is a psychological department consisting of three persons, in connection with the Board of Education. Dr. Lucky is at present the Head of this Department.

LARGE TYPE TEXTS.

In reference to the large type texts used it may be pointed out that no pains were spared in finally determining what is the most satisfactory kind of print to be used for pupils whose sight may be more or less defective. It may be said that when sight-saving classes were first opened, the amount of large type material available was very limited indeed. Several different styles have been experimented with and it has been concluded that the 24 point type is the superior kind. Much material is

available but the cost of these texts is still quite high. Mr. Irwin supplied me with a complete list of these books, with prices.

The second day in Cleveland was spent in visiting sight-saving classes, in company with one of Mr. Irwin's office assistants. The classes varied somewhat according to the locality, where the school was situated, as well as in proportion to the excellence of the teachers in charge, but all the classes seemed to be particularly well managed and seemed to be doing excellent work. In one of the Junior High Schools visited there are two classes for blind children. In one of these classes we found a student who was studying Spanish along with the regular pupils of the sighted classes, and apparently making most excellent progress. It was our privilege on this second day to visit the two homes purchased by the Board of Education for the use of the blind children. I have referred to these earlier in the report and would just like to say again in passing that it was a distinct pleasure to spend an hour or so in these delightful homes and see at first hand what is being done to develop these blind children, as far as possible, into normal beings prepared in a great measure to take their places among sighted people.

FINANCIAL ASPECT.

It was gratifying to know that Mr. Irwin's splendid work is being so liberally supported by the State. In 1917 the Ohio State Legislature passed a bill allowing \$250 a year for each child attending a sight-saving class. In this connection it may be said that in 1919 a similar bill was passed by the Minnesota Legislature making an annual allowance of \$200 per sight-saving class child.

PITTSBURG.

The next city visited was Pittsburg. Here we spent a most delightful day with Mr. T. S. McAloney at the Pittsburg Institute for the Blind. The various departments of this institute seem to be doing a most excellent work. One of the departments which appealed to me most was the physical training, which is being carried on under the direction of Mr. Chester

Smith. It was worth going a long way to see those blind boys doing their gymnasium work with such precision and zest. Mr. McAloney, the Superintendent, is a thorough believer in physical training in the education of the blind. It has a steady influence morally, and gives poise and control which are a great asset to a blind boy or girl.

It was interesting to learn from Mr. McAloney that Miss Marjory Stewart, a graduate from the Pittsburg School, took her B.A. degree from Pittsburg University, with very high standing, surpassing many of her sighted sisters, and having 25 credits more than required. She is now with the Brooklyn Eagle and is making good.

It was of special interest to learn that in the Pittsburg Institute there is a sight-saving class. About 24 students out of a total attendance of 140 are in this special class. It is conducted along the same lines as the classes in Cleveland.

The Piano-tuning, Industrial, Domestic Science and Music Departments were each found to be most interesting but time will not permit of any further reference here.

It was most pleasing to know that several blind students from the Institute were taking classes at a High School nearby and were thus coming in daily contact with sighted children and competing with them in their work. The welcome extended to me at Pittsburg was indeed a most hearty one, and the day was in every way delightfully pleasant.

BALTIMORE.

The next place visited was Baltimore. There were two centres of special interest which I wished to see here. One of these was the Maryland School for the Blind at Overlea, under the Superintendency of Mr. Bledsoe, and the other was the Red Cross Institute for Blind Soldiers. Both of these institutions were most interesting.

One of the distinctive features of the industrial department is the switch-board operating which is taught. Blind girls get \$15 a week for this work. A blind boy of 20, who could not get beyond the 6th grade at school, is now earning \$83 per month. Another distinction of the school is the numbers who have gone on to take a University course after graduating. A number of these have taken very high standing.

The school is ideally situated just outside the city limits of Baltimore, in a suburban district. The 100 acres of ground are naturally beautiful. Mr. Latimer, a blind man, is one of the outstanding teachers of the school. A History lesson to a senior class, on the subject of The League of Nations, was most interesting to a Canadian. Mr. Latimer spoke in strong terms against the whining of his country in connection with the League. It was refreshing to find this in a class room in the United States.

At the Red Cross Institute we had the privilege of chatting with a number of the blind soldiers who were being trained along various lines. Some of those lines were osteopathy, business, book-binding, manufacture of cigars, repairing automobiles, vulcanizing tires, basket making, raising of poultry, etc. The men seemed to be quite happy and optimistic. There were in attendance about 65 or 75 soldiers, and about 18 civilians.

A beautiful old estate and home, with about 100 acres of ground, was loaned to the Institute for the purpose of serving as headquarters for the training and re-education of blinded soldiers.

A couple of hours were spent most delightfully with Mr. Charles F. F. Campbell, Assistant Director of the Institute. Mr. Campbell is the editor of the Outlook for the Blind, and a son of Sir Francis Campbell, the founder of The Royal Normal College and Academy of Music for the Blind of London, England, and the only blind man who ever ascended Mt. Blanc.

Mr. Campbell believes that the prejudicial public is the biggest drawback in the education of the blind. He claims that Mr. Irwin of Cleveland is doing a great deal to educate not only the whole family of the blind child, but that this reflects on the entire population. It is the belief of Mr. Campbell that the Institutes for the Blind are failing in that they cater more or less to the upper 60 per cent. of the blind. The Public Schools, he believes, can do better work for many of the blind than Institutes can.

PHILADELPHIA.

After leaving Baltimore, our next stopping place was Philadelphia. Two or three days were spent here, part of the time visiting the Institute for the Blind at Overbrook. Mr. O. H. Burritt is the Superintendent and he spared no pains in endeavoring to make pleasant and profitable for me, my stay in Philadelphia.

Without going into detail in describing the work of the Institution, it may be said that there are three very distinctive features of the school which should be mentioned. (1st.) The Declamation work under Mrs. Graves. In this department is taught public speaking and elocution. (2nd.) The placement and follow up work under Mr. Delphino, a graduate of the Institute. (3rd.) The research department under Dr. Hayes and two assistants.

The buildings of the Overbrook Institute are very artistic and attractive. They were designed and built under the personal direction of Mr. E. E. Allen, who is the Superintendent of the Perrin's Institute of Boston, and the dean of Superintendents on the Continent.

The Public Schools of Philadelphia are not progressive as far as sight-saving classes are concerned. They are called Ocular classes here and are not to be compared at all with the sight-saving classes of Cleveland. In fact there are only two or three of these classes altogether and the equipment is very meagre.

NEW YORK.

In New York we spent one day in the New York Institute for the Blind, under the Superintendency of Mr. Van Cleve, the Director of the National Institute for the Prevention of Blindness in the United States. This Institute is one of the oldest in the States, dating from about 1833. The building is very antiquated but the work done appears to be very good indeed. We shall take no time here in referring to it further.

Mr. Van Cleve had very kindly arranged to have Mrs. Hathaway, who has done so much for Conservation of Vision Classes, and who has written such a valuable book, descriptive of this work, accompany me on a visit to the most representative of the Conservation of Vision Classes in New York. It was indeed a rare privilege to visit these schools under the guidance of one who is so competent an authority on this subject.

In the first of these schools visited, Mrs. Hathaway spoke to the children of the entire school, in her own charming and forceful way, on the important matter of preserving their eyes. The address was given in story form and was apparently quite effective. The school referred to is situated in a very poor district of New York, known as "hell's kitchen." In this school 90 per cent. of the children are Italians. The early settlers of this district were almost entirely Irish. These in turn gave place to coloured residents, who were later followed by Jews, who have now been replaced by the present inhabitants. The opening exercises, with the saluting of the flag and the children's united pledge of loyalty to their country, impressed me as a Canadian very forcefully, and reminded me as a teacher, that a little more of this kind of thing might well be done in Toronto, and particularly in the foreign districts of our city.

The classes for sight-saving in New York are not so well equipped by any means as those in Cleveland, nor do I think is the teaching as good. It was, however, the lack of necessary equipment which seemed to be the most evident.

Before leaving New York, I visited "The Lighthouse," which is under the New York Association for the Blind. The work done here is primarily for the adult blind, to help them to help themselves, but some training is given to blind children as well. There are many departments of this splendid work, which we can not take time to refer to now.

BOSTON.

The last city to be visited was Boston. Here we remained two days. One of these was spent with Mr. E. E. Allen, to whom reference was made earlier in this report, as the dean of Superintendents for the Blind in the United States. Mr. Allen spent with me the entire day in going over the magnificent plant, which he himself designed and planned in every detail. It was indeed a rare treat to have the privilege of spending this day with Mr. Allen, who is so competent to express judgment on all phases of the subject, the Education of the Blind and those who have the handicap of poor vision.

It may be said here that The Perkin's Institute, of which Mr. Allen is the Superintendent, is the most modern and best equipped plant for the Education of the Blind on the Continent. The buildings are arranged on the cottage plan, built in two groups after the design of an English Close. There are 12 cottages, each one being in charge of a matron or house mother. The idea is to have the children under conditions as much like a home as possible. The danger of institutionalizing the children is well guarded against. The situation at Watertown, the buildings, the general equipment, the magnificent library and the administration of the institution, seem to be as near the ideal as possible. Space will not permit of further description.

The second day was spent in the Schools of Boston, where there are sight-saving classes. Mr. C. B. Hays, the Director of the Commission for the Prevention of Blindness in the State of Massachusetts, gave much useful information in regard to this work in this State. It was interesting to know that the

State makes an annual allowance of \$500 for each sight-saving class in the entire state. If a new class is opened an additional allowance of \$250 is made.

Several of these classes in Boston were visited and the equipment was found to be particularly good. In regard to excellence of work done, equipment and general management of sight-saving classes, Boston would rank next to Cleveland. The classes are conducted along very similar lines to those in Cleveland, so that it will not be necessary to describe them at any further length.

I feel that this report has been more or less of a rambling nature, but it is very difficult to give in a limited space a very adequate idea of a trip such as the one you gave me the great privilege of enjoying.

I trust that it may be possible to have one or two of these sight-saving classes opened in Toronto at an early date, as there is doubtless a great need for them.