Mental Retardation in the 21st Century: Introduction to the Special Issue

Michael L. Wehmeyer and James R. Patton

he articles that appear in this issue of Focus on Aution and Other Developmental Disabilities address a number of important topics in the field of mental retardation. The publication of this special issue was intended to provide the readership of the journal a timely opportunity to pause and reflect on what has transpired historically, and to consider where we are headed in the future, within one area of developmental disabilities.

The articles included in this special issue are taken from a recently published book titled Mental Retardation in the 21st Century (Wehmeyer & Patton, 2000), jointly spearheaded by The Arc and PRO-ED. The reason for assembling this book was twofold. First, its publication came at a momentous time: the turn of the century and the dawn of a new millennium. Transitions from one century to another are times to reflect on the past and speculate about the future, and as we depart the 20th century and enter the 21st, it seemed apropos to do so about the field of mental retardation.

A second event that precipitated the emergence of the book was the marking of a milestone for The Arc, the nation's largest voluntary association devoted exclusively to promoting the welfare of people with mental retardation and their families. The Arc celebrated its 50th anniversary in the fall of 1999. Over the years, many of the advances in service delivery and policy affecting people with mental retardation have been spear-headed by this organization, and, like

the turn of a century, 50th-anniversary celebrations provide unique opportunities to consider where we've been, where we are now, and where we're going. The contributors to the book were selected because of their worthiness as interpreters of history, discussants on the present state of affairs, and speculators on future directions.

A Brief History of the World

The field of mental retardation has a relatively long and colorful history. One could do an analysis of the past century strictly for events that affected people with mental retardation and their families. What jumps out on the "how things are different" scale are the changes in the lives of people with mental retardation over the course of this momentous century.

To catalog these changes, we could track the history of mental retardation across the century, describing the rise and fall of institutions, examining the impact of the parent movement and the passage of legislation like the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and so forth. The changes have been stark, as highlighted by the words of Goddard, who in 1912 wrote his treatise on the Kallikak family and concluded in a chapter titled "What Is To Be Done?" that

no one interested in the progress of civilization can contemplate the facts presented in the previous chapters without having the

question arise, Why isn't something done about this? What can we do? For the lowgrade idiot, the louthsome unfortunate that may be sent in our institutions, some have peoposed the lethal chamber. But humanity is steadily tending away from the possibility of that method, and there is noprobability that it will ever be practiced. But in view of such conditions [as described about the Kallikak family in Goddard's book] we begin to realize that the idiot is not our greatest problem. He is indeed loathsome; he is somewhat difficult totake care of; nevertheless, he lives his life and is done. He does not continue the race with a line of children like himself. It is the moron type that make for us our great problem. (pp. 101-102)

These words—venomous, insensitive, and insulting—are difficult to read at the beginning of this century. We can almost hear Goddard's regret about society's hesitancy to use the "lethal chamber" as a solution to the "problem" of idiocy, and we marvel at the inhumanity of it all. Contrast this with today's message of normalization, integration, inclusion, and self-determination, and it is evident that this century has been one of incredible progress, thankfully, for people with mental retardation and their families.

Then we are reminded of the abusive treatment of people with mental retardation who are cared for in nursing home settings. We are also shocked by a recent newspaper account of the number of people with mental retardation who died in the 1990s as a result of the use of restraints. We are still horrified by Blatt

Mental Retardation In The 21st Century

Brendan G. Carr

Mental Retardation In The 21st Century:

Embracing the Beat of Expression: An Psychological Symphony within Mental Retardation In The 21st Century

In some sort of used by displays and the ceaseless chatter of instant communication, the melodic beauty and mental symphony developed by the written term often fade into the backdrop, eclipsed by the persistent sound and distractions that permeate our lives. However, nestled within the pages of **Mental Retardation In The 21st Century** a wonderful fictional treasure brimming with organic thoughts, lies an immersive symphony waiting to be embraced. Crafted by an outstanding composer of language, this fascinating masterpiece conducts viewers on a mental trip, skillfully unraveling the concealed songs and profound influence resonating within each cautiously constructed phrase. Within the depths of the moving analysis, we can explore the book is main harmonies, analyze their enthralling writing style, and surrender ourselves to the profound resonance that echoes in the depths of readers souls.

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