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ABSTRACT

Thirty-three low achieving regular class (RC) and 46 educable mentally retarded special class (SC) adolescents from a white, low-income, urban district were administered the learning potential procedure and were interviewed to determine the differences in their familial relationship. The learning procedure involved three administrations of 16 test and five coaching designs prior to coaching and 1 month following coaching. Ss were considered gainers whose pre to posttest four designs score change was more than nongainers (whose pre-to posttest score change was less than four designs), and high scorers (who solved a difficult block problem in upper level of test during pretest). Results indicated that SC Ss tended to report spending free time with families rather than friends, that both groups reported being given responsible roles at home, and that RC Ss tended to report more responsibility in the home. Also findings showed that nongainers reported themselves most alienated from their parents, desired increased physical contacts, and did not desire verbal interactions; that high scorers and gainers to a lesser degree reported spending free time outside the family though they had good relations with their families, that high scorers reported having good relation with their fathers; and that gainers reported good relations with their mothers and desired better relations with their fathers. The data provided further support for the finding that the more able SC students by the learning potential assessment probably severely educationally retarded; also, data showed that nongainers evidenced the alienation and immaturity in family relations ascribed to the mentally retarded. (Author/MC)

STUDIES IN LEARNING POTENTIAL

LEARNING POTENTIAL AND FAMILY STATUS AMONG SPECIAL (EMR) AND REGULAR CLASS ADOLESCENTS

By

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Summary

Low achieving regular class and educable mentally retarded (EMR) special class adolescents from a white, low-income, urban district were administered the learning potential procedure and were interviewed to determine differences in their familial relationships.

There were few differences between the two samples. Special class students tended to report they spent their free time with their families rather than friends. Both groups reported they were given responsible roles at home and the regular class students tended to report more responsibility in the home.

Nongainers reported themselves most alienated from their parents, and desired increased physical contacts, though not verbal interactions. High scorers, and gainers to a lesser degree, reported spending their free time outside the family, though they had good relations with their families. High scorers reported having good relations with their fathers. Gainers reported good relations with their mothers, and desired better relations with their fathers.

The data provide further support for the finding that the more able special class students by the learning potential assessment

are probably severely educationally retarded. The nongainers evidenced the alienation and immaturity in family relations ascribed to the mentally retarded.

Learning Potential and Family Status among Special (EMR) and Regular Class Adolescents

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Prior reports have described the vocational aspirations (Folman & Budoff, 1971), academic attitudes (Folman & Budoff, 1972a), and social group and interest behavior (Folman & Budoff, 1972b) of samples of white adolescent special and low achieving regular class students from an inner city junior high school. The present report describes these students' reports of their interactions and roles within their families.

A review of the literature indicated that the EMR was perceived negatively by their parents and tended to have a peripheral position within the family. Worchel(1961) using a scale which rated parental acceptance or rejection, reported that retarded children were rated less favorably by their parents on personality traits than are normal children. Peck and Stephens (1960), using the Worchel scale, reported that parents organized their homes around interests other than those of their retarded child though this factor was related to the degree of paternal acceptance. Using the Bales Inventory Scale, Katzen (1966) found that the child's identification with either parent was more important than the mother's attitude toward the child in developing realistic vocational goals.

Jones (1967) distinguished two groups of EMRs - those with no performance-verbal scale IQ discrepancy, and those with a large discrepancy, invariably with a higher performance scale IQ. The latter group saw their parents as giving them less freedom and responsibility. They reported they participated in fewer recreational activities with their families, had fewer value agreements with their families, were less likely to go to their parents for help, and saw their parents as more rejecting, using more unfair discipline. Jones concluded that poor environment and erratic parental discipline causes a great variance in intellectual functioning which may lead to pseudo-retardation.

Budoff (1969) and his colleagues have described as assessment procedure for special class students which demonstrates considerable spread in ability to profit from systematic training on a reasoning task among this supposedly homogeneous IQ-defined population. In this procedure a nonverbal reasoning task (an enlarged version of Kohs Block Designs) is administered prior to and following training on principles relevant to solution of the problems. Three patterns of response are evident among students whose scores fall within the EMR IQ range (50 to 79 IQ). Some Ss (high scorers) demonstrate excellent understanding on the trial prior to training, figuring out the problems as they proceed from easy to harder instances, and performing at levels typical of higher IQ children. Other Ss (gainers) perform poorly on the pretest administration, but do improve their scores markedly following instruction. The third group of Ss (nongainers) performs poorly initially and does not profit from the instructional procedure.

Various data indicate that the improved ability displayed on the reasoning task is not task-specific, but that Ss differing in learning potential status demonstrate consistently different levels of competence on other psychometric and learning tasks (Budoff, 1967; Budoff & Pagell, 1968), in their educational capability, (Budoff, Meskin, & Harrison, 1971) and distinctive patterns on some motivational scales (Harrison & Budoff, 1972). The pattern of these differences among psychometrically defined EMR populations suggests that the high able learning potential (LP) children (high scorers and gainers) represent instances of severe educational handicap, while the uniformly poor performance of nongainers, even following training, may functionally define them as mentally handicapped. As with Jones' students, the more able (LP) students tend to have higher performance than verbal scale IQs.

The present study had two objectives. The first was to compare the reports of low income white special and regular class adolescents on some factors related to parent-child relationships. A majority of the regular class students had experienced considerable school failure. The hypothesis was that there would be few differences between the special and regular class students since both samples were drawn from low income backgrounds and shared a history of school failure

The second objective was to further define the validity of the learning potential assessment procedure by examining whether there are different patterns of child-family relationships among the special class students. If, in fact, children whom we classify

as more able by the learning potential criterion (gainers and high scorers) are educationally, as opposed to mentally retarded, it would follow logically that such children would manifest attitudinal responses which are more similar to their low achieving regular class peers than to their nongainer classmates.

Method

Subjects.

The details of sample selection and composition are presented elsewhere (Folman & Budoff, 1971). In brief, the samples consisted of all the non-brain damaged Ss in three EMR special classes (N = 46) and regular class controls (N = 33) drawn from the low academic tracks of the same urban, low-income junior high school serving predominantly white children. Special and regular class Ss differed significantly in IQ (mean = 69.97 and 92.31, respectively), and CA (mean = 14.42 and 13.18, respectively). Learning potential groups also differed significantly in IQ, in accordance with previous findings on large EMR samples (Budoff, 1970). High scorers and gainers had higher IQs than nongainers. The groups did not differ significantly in social class background when the principal wage earner's occupation was rated. Evidence for the academic difficulties of the low achieving, regular class sample are reflected by their low grade point average for their four major academic subjects (< 2.0, when A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, and F = 0).

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

The special and regular class students were administered the learning potential procedure using the Kohs Block designs. This procedure involves three individual administrations of sixteen test designs and five coaching designs: prior to coaching, one day and one month following coaching. Individual tuition is interpolated between the first two administrations (for details of the procedure, see Budoff & Friedman, 1964). Students were considered gainers when they met the criterion of solving at least four or more designs on the post-coaching sessions than on the pretest; nongainers included all those coached Ss whose pre- to posttest score change was less than four designs; high scorers successfully solved one of the difficult 9 or 16 block problems in the upper half of the test series prior to tuition.

The interview.

All Ss were interviewed individually in a one-hour session. The questions relating to child-family interaction, presented in Appendix A, were administered as part of this larger interview. Each question was read aloud by the interviewer and repeated if required.

Family relationships were tapped by questions which related to:

1. Family Interaction

a. Physical proximity. S was asked to report with whom he usually spent his leisure time (family or friends) and with whom he was most likely to engage in specific social activities. The student was asked whether he desired changes in this reported pattern.

b. Verbal interaction. S was read two hypothetical situations, each centered around a different parent. In the first situation, the mother was seeking someone else's opinion before making a decision. In the second situation, the father was seeking someone to whom he could relate an incident that had just occurred. S was also asked to report whether or not he had discussed his vocational plans with his family and if so, with whom - parents, siblings, or others.

2. Family Roles

Daily household responsibilities. S was asked to report the number and kind of tasks for which he was held responsible. In each of two hypothetical situations, each parent was reported to be looking for someone to assist him in a task. S was asked whom each parent would choose for a helper.

On the hypothetical questions, if the student did not name himself, he was asked again whom he thought they would choose if a second person was to be sought. If S still did not name himself, he was asked if each of his parents would ever choose him. The scores for the responses to the hypothetical questions took into consideration the number of individuals living in the home who were older than the subject and to whom his parent might more realistically turn.

Following his response to each question, the student was asked how he would like things to be at home, i.e., what kinds of interaction and roles he did and did not desire.

Results

Family interaction and family roles will be discussed separately,

first comparing regular and special class samples, then examining the differences among learning potential groups within the special class sample. The results comparing learning potential groups within the regular class sample showed few differences and will not be discussed. The tabled results are presented as percentages.

The $\underline{X}^2$ statistic was employed for all analyses with the retarded X nonretarded and the nongainer X gainer X high scorer comparisons being based on one and two degrees of freedom, respectively. While a statistical interpretation of a $\underline{X}^2$ of a 2 X 2 table (retarded X nonretarded) is clear, since it is actually a test of the differences between two proportions, this is not the case for contingency tables with more than one degree of freedom. Consequently, more detailed analyses were employed in comparisons among the three learning potential groups in which the overall $\underline{X}^2$s with two dfs were subdivided into their linear and quadratic components, each based on one df. This latter method increases the sensitivity of the test in that while an overall $\underline{X}^2$ may not be significant, it may have significant components which ordinarily would be overlooked. The decision to seek out linear and quadratic trends as opposed to other possible components was based on the fact that the learning potential groups are defined to indicate a linear description of ability. The quadratic contrast tested this prediction of linearity.

Family Interaction.

A. Special and regular class comparison.

There were few differences between the special and regular

class samples. As indicated in Table 3, a remarkable picture of similarity emerged from subjects' responses to all questions except on two variables, free time and negative family interaction discrepancy. On the first variable, the results suggest that more special than regular class students reported spending their free time with their families but these represent a small proportion of each sample ($p < .10$). The second finding suggests that more special than regular class students desired less interaction with their families than they reported having ($p < .10$).

Insert Table 3 about here

B. Special class comparison by learning potential status.

As is evident from Table 3, there were marked differences when the special class students were grouped according to their learning potential status. There was a tendency for fewer high scorers to spend their free time with their families and to desire being with them. Few gainers desired to spend more time with their families. More nongainers and fewer high scorers wanted to spend their leisure time with their family rather than with their friends.

The relationship changes when the child is asked with whom he interacts verbally rather than who he wants to be with (physical proximity). More gainers than nongainers and high scorers reported and desired more verbal interaction with their mothers. Fewer nongainers and more high scorers reported and desired more verbal interaction with their fathers. The results for mother and father interaction also differed when compared within each learning

potential group. While there is little or no difference in any group between reported and desired father interaction, a larger proportion of each learning potential group wanted more mother interaction than they reported was usual in their home situation. Almost two thirds of the high scorers reported they had discussed their future vocational choice with their families as contrasted with much lower proportions of the other two gruups.

When scores are summed across both types of interaction (physical proximity and verbal interaction) the total scores exhibit a quadratic component with gainers highest and high scorers lowest. As is evident in Table 3, the gainers reported more physical and verbal interaction with their families. While the high scorers say that they spent proportionately more of their leisure time with their friends, they still maintained a good degree of verbal interaction with their families, particularly with their fathers. Summing the scores for desired family interaction indicated that more nongainers and fewer high scorers desired more family interaction. The higher proportion of nongainers desiring family interaction was mainly due to more nongainers desiring to be in closer physical relationship to their parents (Family Togetherness, Family in Free Time) rather than desiring verbal interaction. The gainers want less family interaction.

Family Role.

A. Special and regular class comparison.

As Table 4 demonstrates, the majority of the special and regular class children reported they were given responsible roles

at home. The tendency for regular class children to report they were given more responsibility in each of the three role situations (Parental, Mother, and Father Roles) becomes most evident when the scores are summed for the Total Family Role Score.

B. Special class comparison by learning potential status.

There were few differences within the special class sample. Fewer gainers than nongainers and high scorers reported being given or desiring more responsible daily tasks. When the questions related to being given responsibility by either mother or father who required help, fewer nongainers and more high scorers reported they were given responsible roles by their father. The majority of each learning potential group desired the same or more responsibility than they reported their fathers gave them. Also, more gainers than nongainers and high scorers were given responsible roles by their mother and the majority of each group desired this attention from their mother.

Insert Table 4 about here

There were no differences on the total role scores. These findings were consistent with the responses to the family interaction variables.

Discussion

A review of the literature leads one to expect differences between the special and regular class students' perceptions and interactions with their families. These results indicate there is no distinctively EMR type of family pattern when race (white),

approximate chronological age, socio-economic status (low), residence (inner city), and prior history of school success are controlled.

The analyses by learning potential status within the special class sample allow one to substantiate further the heterogeneity found among psychometrically defined EMR students. Nongainers report relative isolation both in physical and verbal interaction with their parents. They want more interaction, but mainly physical contact rather than more mature verbal interactions. Few report positive interactions with their fathers or mothers. The gainer reports more closeness to his family, particularly with his mother, but ambivalently wants to break away and spend more time with his peers. The high scorer reports more physical and verbal interaction with his friends and desires to be more independent, though he reports well established communication lines that permit him to turn to them when necessary. In the areas of communication and level of responsibility in the family, many high scorers reported good paternal acceptance.

If, as Peck and Stephens (1960) reported, paternal acceptance is critical to familial acceptance of the EMR child, the peripheral position in the home described by the nongainer most closely resembles the position ascribed to the retarded child.

Psychometrically defined EMRs are not a homogeneous group, and unless responded to stereotypically because of the label, will not respond homogeneously. In academic situations where they performed homogeneously, they also responded most similarly

to each other by interpreting their failure and stigmatized status to indicate low expectations from further schooling especially as related to their job choices. But interestingly, the more able (learning potential) special class students still desired more positive outcomes in school.

Low-income parents implicitly may expect failure in school but do not necessarily relate this failure to other areas of the child's life or future. They may define the child's ability by the degree of responsibility and independence they accord him. The IQ-defined EMR child who performed well on the LP task also perceived himself to be competent within his own home. By contrast, middle class parents view school success as more central to the judgment of their child's competence. They may devalue the child's efforts in the home in a manner parallel to the severe difficulties he is experiencing in school and devalue their child's abilities (Worchel, 1961; Peck & Stephens, 1960). But children from middle class homes who are psychometrically defined as EMRs invariably evidence brain damage while the vast majority of low-income children in this category are not damaged. Within the low-income home, then, the child may be reacted to on the basis of his ability to perform satisfactorily there. This basis for a competence judgment for the marginally inadequate student (EMR) is uncontaminated by his malfeasance in school and is analogous to the rationale underlying the learning potential assessment.

Blood, Dyer and Mooney (1966) interviewed parents of children who had been placed in special classes. Parents of high scorers and gainers saw their children as adequate outside of school.

They reported he would successfully marry and support himself, did not require supervision in his play, etc. Many parents reported school learning problems in their own childhood. Parents of nongainer children, however, expressed sentiments that reflected that their child had more general difficulties. They reported they sought supervised play situations for him, were not surprised by the placement in a special class, and expressed doubts about the degree of economic and social independence he would attain as an adult.

These familial data represent additional evidence for the more general relevance of a training-based assessment of ability rather than one based on the IQ test which has particular strength in predicting academic school outcomes, but serious deficiencies as a measure of general intelligence among low-income, white or non-white populations.

It is likely that Jones' (1967) high difference EMRs would score as gainers and high scorers since they display the same pattern on the Wechsler tests (Budoff, 1970). His interpretation that his high difference group has an unfavorable environment may be due to his failure to understand that these children come from low-income homes. Learning Potential assessment indicates that the pseudo-retardation Jones infers is a function of cultural differences and disadvantages, when the referent behaviors are those of the middle class biased school.

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APPENDIX A

FAMILY

Just as kids are different in what they like to do and dislike to do, so are parents. Some parents think that it is good for parents and kids to do things together (like going to the movies, out to eat, ball games) while other parents think it is better for each person in the family to do things on his own, with his own friends.

FAMILY TOGETHERNESS

1. What does your family usually do?

Together_____

Each on own_____

2. What would you like your family to do?

Together_____

Each on own_____

Suppose it was Saturday and since you're in school all week long it was your only chance to do something together with your parents.

3. Where would you choose to go?

4. Where do you think your parents would choose to go?

5. Where would you end up going?

Child's choice_____

Parents' choice_____

Some children like to spend their free time with their family, other children would rather spend it with their friends.

6. With whom do you usually spend it?

7. With whom would you want to spend it?

Parents_____

Friends_____

Some parents like to spend their free time with their friends,

other parents would rather spend it with their children.

8. With whom do they usually spend it?

Friends_____

Sib and him_____

Sib and not him____

Him_____

9. With whom do you think your parents would like to spend their free time?

Friends_____

Sib and him_____

Sib and not him____

Him_____

Just as families differ in what they do during their free time, they also differ in what they do everyday at home. In some families, kids have special jobs at home which they are in charge of (such as taking care of younger brothers and sisters, deciding where the family goes when they go out). Other kids don't have special jobs, but just help around the house when they are needed. Others just keep their own things in order without having to help with anything else in the house, and still others don't have to help at all - not even take care of their own things.

10. How do things work in your family?

11. How would you like things to work in your family?

Suppose you and your family had just moved into a new apartment and there were many things needed to be done to fix it up. Your mother needed to pick out curtains and furniture, sweep out

the room and do some grocery shopping. Your father still had to unpack the boxes, hang the pictures and fix some of the doors and furnitures.

12. Whom would your mother ask to help her?
13. If she needed another person, whom would she ask?
14. Would she ask you to help?
15. Would you like her to ask you to help?
16. Whom would your father ask to help him?
17. If he needed another person, whom would he ask?
18. Would your father ask you to help?
19. Would you like him to ask you to help?

Suppose something new came up at your father's job and he wanted to tell someone about it.

20. Whom do you think he would tell?
21. Whom else?
22. Would he tell you?
23. Would you like him to tell you?

Suppose your mother was having a problem deciding about some new furniture. She wanted someone else's opinion.

24. Whom do you think she would ask?
25. Whom else?
26. Would she ask you?
27. Would you like her to ask you?