

Historical antecedents of special education

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Some attention was given to the care and protection of handicapped children shortly after the beginning of the Christian era in Western society, but special education did not truly begin until the 16th century. Pedro Ponce de León successfully taught some deaf pupils in Spain to speak, read and write. It is assumed that Juan Pablo Bonet, who in 1620 published the first book on the subject, followed his methods. This gave rise to a wider interest in the education of the deaf in Europe. In 17th-century England, John Bulwer wrote about teaching the deaf to speak and read the lips. In France a similar work was carried on by Charles-Michel, abbé de l' Epée (1712-89), who made a most profound contribution in developing the natural sign language of the deaf into a systematic and conventional language, to be used as a medium of instruction. His work was developed by the abbé Sicard and gave rise to the manual system or silent method of teaching the deaf. In Germany Samuel Heinicke educated deaf children orally. Later in the 19th century Friedrich Moritz Hill (1805-74) - perhaps one of the greatest educators of the deaf -, developed his method in relation to the concept, that education must relate to the “*here and now*” principle - known as the natural method. Thus arose the oral method of instruction, that continued to influence the teaching of the deaf and in time became an accepted practice throughout the world. The first Hungarian institute for deaf (hearing impaired) opened its doors in 1802 in the city of Vác.

No really serious attempt was made to educate or to

train the blind people until toward the close of the 18th century. Valentin Haüy a Frenchman got the title of the “father and apostle of the blind” afterward, because he opened the National Institution of Blind Youth (Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles) in Paris in 1784, with 12 blind children as his first pupils. News of Haüy’s success in teaching these children to read soon spread to other countries. Subsequently, schools for the blind were opened in Liverpool (1791), London (1799), Vienna (1805), Berlin (1806), Amsterdam and Stockholm (1808), Zürich (1809), Hungary (1827) and Boston and New York City (1832).

Scientific attempts to educate mentally retarded children began with the efforts of Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, a French physician and otologist who was connected with an institution for the deaf. In his classic book “The Wild Boy of Aveyron” (1801), he related his five-year effort to train and educate an 11-year-old boy - Victor -, who was found running naked and wild in the woods of Aveyron. Later Edouard Séguin in 1848, devised an educational method from Itard work, that used *physical* and *sensory* activities to develop the mental processes. This was the first *sensory-motor therapy* in the history of special education. Séguin’s published works influenced for example Maria Montessori; an Italian paediatrician who became an educator and the innovator of a unique method of training young mentally retarded and culturally deprived children in Rome in the 1890’s and early 1900’s. Self-education through specially designed

“didactic materials” for *sensory-motor training* was the keynote of the system.

In advanced countries in the latter half of the 20th century, special education of the disabled has become universal and in the process there are two concepts about individual differences:

- 1.) the concept of “inter-individual differences”, which compares one child with another,
- 2.) the concept of “intra-individual differences”, which is concerned with how the child’s abilities in one area compare with his abilities in other areas.

The grouping of children in special classes rests on the concept of inter-individual differences, but the instructional procedures for each child are determined by intra-individual differences - that is by his abilities and disabilities.

Historical review of the relationship between medical and educational science on the field of special education

Historically, there has been a very close relationship between medical and educational science – theory and practice - on the field of special education. During the history of special education there was always a question about who should take care of the “handicapped”- the people with disabilities. Different institutes and schools started, some of them with teachers who sometimes were specialised for this job, sometimes not at all, but they studied from the practice. Some institute was on the hand of medical doctors who became “*special teachers*” too. Nurses, who firstly “only” take care of the patient and after continued not just a medical, but an educational “care” too. Since the 18th century we

can find, that professionals call today’s special education a “remedial-education” and “medical- or curative-pedagogy”. This shows us the fact, which since from the start the medical care and education of the people with disabilities goes together. Doctors became teachers, teachers studied to become doctors, nurses took special interest in therapy and education and so on. Therefore require a professional *teamwork*, with a *multidisciplinary view* to make the best possible help as they could.

For example in Hungary between 1830 and 1840 a medical doctor whose name was Bálint Köszeghy made a private school for hearing and speaking impaired. He wanted to make a better institute; therefore he made a plan how it should be look like. He wanted to integrate a medical treatment of disorders with professional teaching methods. Köszeghy said that “we have to start the children’s education at least when they are 5 years old to make the best progress with their development”. He was one of the earliest professionals dealing with disabled, who recognised the importance of early-development. He wanted to work with medical doctors who are also had a teacher training or with special teachers who are become medical doctors or at least capable for special therapies and also understand the medical point of view, therefore could work with doctors side by side. Unfortunately Köszeghy’s plan never took place, but his thought is still an important point in special education.

We find the same thinking in Germany by that time -e.g. Deinhart and Gerorgens (1861) wrote a two-volume book about “how to teach handicapped children”. In their book, they wrote, that the special teacher’s duty is a “*curative/medical education*” - Heilerziehung.

This historical inheritance of special educational heritage give me the thought, that in the *21st century*

special educational approach we have to continue this kind of close medical- and educational science teamwork as a “*remedial-education*” or “*medico-pedagogy*”.