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## Cooperative Education – Past, Present, and Future

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## **COOPERATIVE EDUCATION — PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

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By **MARIAN SAUNDERS**, Chief of Special Programs, U.S. Office of Education

The theme of your conference opens so many doors that I had a bit of trouble deciding which one to take you through with me tonight. Since you will have a chance to explore many avenues during the course of your meeting, I would like to share a few of my experiences and leave a few ideas with you which I hope might be helpful.

Twenty-five years ago, the employment opportunities were almost nil for handicapped persons. Within a few weeks we will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped which was organized and given Presidential authority to make the country aware of this vital source of manpower. The Committee slogan, **IT'S GOOD BUSINESS TO HIRE THE HANDICAPPED**, was seen on billboards, posters, envelopes, letterheads and so forth from one end of this country to the other.

This energetic, driving committee was responsible for one of the most beautiful campaigns possible and resulted in making the entire country conscious of the great jobs the handicapped were capable of doing. Today every state in the Union has a Governor's committee and every city of any size has a Mayor's committee, and from these there are many smaller groups all working to make it easier for handicapped persons to find jobs. The United States can hold her head high as the world looks at her fine record for caring enough to develop jobs and programs for all handicapped.

The U.S. Civil Service Commission has been a fine example to industry in directing departments of government to assign persons in their personnel offices to be the coordinator to interview, develop jobs and place handicapped persons. These persons meet with supervisors and help re-engineer positions when they become vacant and arrange for a qualified handicapped person to be interviewed. The CSC has done a magnificent job in training these coordinators who, in turn, have held innumerable training sessions with the supervisory employees of their respective agencies.

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In 1964, the CSC was instrumental in having special appointing authority given to agencies to enable them to hire severely handicapped persons on a trial basis after CSC qualification requirements, including a written test, were met. As a result of this authority, through 1970, almost 1000 non-competitive appointments were made. Within specific disability groups, more than half of these placements were for profoundly deaf persons. The Postal Service was responsible for hiring almost 450 deaf persons in clerical and mail-handling jobs. In May 1971, additional appointment procedures for the appointment of the severely handicapped was approved by the CSC. We call it the "U" authority. Under this change, certification by a Veterans Administration or a State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation counselor can be substituted for the trial appointment and the written test. We feel this is a great breakthrough for the agencies as well as for the handicapped employee.

As a coordinator for the handicapped ever since the program started, I have found that the profoundly deaf have a most difficult time in entering the labor market. There continues to be great resistance on the part of many employers to interview the deaf because there have been so few deaf persons who have been able to express themselves clearly, even in written language during an interview, and when hired, during the first part of their training period. It is difficult for persons who do not have a hearing problem to be consistently understanding and mindful of the problems of the deaf. If a speaker mumbles, looks away while speaking, or covers his mouth, the deaf person gets little or none of the conversation and can be totally lost. Even an expert, I am told, can lipread only about 25 percent of a conversation. The rest is guesswork.

Rehabilitation workers can be a great help in overcoming many of these resistances of employers by being more honest when discussing their client prior to referral. To tell an employer that the person "reads lips well" is probably quite accurate when he is talking with you, but in the confusion and nervousness of the interview he loses this ability. Indicating that the deaf person speaks understandably may be done in complete honesty by the counselor who has become accustomed to his speech, but again the confusion of trying out for a job brings on all sorts of problems. Whenever possible, a counselor should give practice interviews, give help in how to apply for a job, and how to conduct oneself on an interview. All of this preparation will pay off in the initial acceptance of more deaf persons by employers and in more becoming gainfully employed. In Montgomery County, Maryland, a sub-committee of the Governor's Committee of the Handicapped known as the Employer's Advisory Council is extremely active. They meet once a month for one and one-half hours. Vocational rehabilitation counselors bring handicapped persons in need of employment in for group interviews of about 15 minutes each. After each interview, participating employers either offer a job or give valuable suggestions to the counselors as to where the person might be placed. A good motto here

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would be **LET THE HANDICAPPED HELP YOU!!** It is important to remember that nothing defeats the disabled more than public rejection and indifference.

Placement of the right handicapped individual in the right place can be an asset. A good example would be employers who have an industry where there is a high noise level. This might be a perfect spot for placing the deaf person provided other factors are equal. It is also important to try to place deaf persons in pairs as it can be a terribly lonesome experience if there is no one with whom to communicate.

Speaking of communication, I was extremely encouraged a few weeks ago when I read that the American Broadcasting Company put on a demonstration of a new device that could help deaf people get more out of television. It included equipment developed by the National Bureau of Standards which flashes a typed translation of the plot or dialogue along the bottom of the viewer's television screen when a special box has been attached to his set. Since then, I am sure you have also seen along with me several efforts by the media to reach the deaf viewer through an interpreter in one corner of the screen signing during a performance and at the same time printed captions flashing across the bottom of the screen. At long last consideration is being given to the deaf through this important channel of entertainment and information.

So often there is evidence of underemployment because planning was not done early enough for the handicapped to reach their potential. I am sure I have been as guilty as any one in this room in saying or at least thinking of a person who seems dissatisfied with his promotional opportunities – **AT LEAST IT'S A JOB!!!** There is more to a job than a pay check. Satisfaction is so important. This leads me to an idea I hope many of you have been thinking of and more of you will be involved in shortly after returning home from this conference.

**AND THAT IS** combining education with a work program. Several years ago the Stay-in-School program was started in which the local State Employment Service offices were able to locate positions for underprivileged youth in government and industry during the summer months and in some cases on a part-time basis through the school year. The benefits were three-fold giving the student an insight into the business world, gaining practical experience, plus an opportunity to earn and buy clothes and other incidentals so important to every high school student.

Another program known in this area as the VOT or Vocational Office Training program places high school seniors in positions relevant to those for which they have had training. These students are placed in their last semester of high school for four hours a day five days a week. They have opportunity to put to use their typing or stenographic skills, and upon graduation are usually offered a permanent job.

There is also the more sophisticated Cooperative Education Program which is available in over 300 institutions of higher learning today.

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Cooperative education is a college program through which the students are employed for specific periods of off-campus work as a required part of their academic program. This employment is related as closely as possible to the individual student's course of study and interest. The working periods consist of full-time employment and there are full-time study periods. Such periods vary in length depending on the calendar of the college and may be on a quarter basis, semester basis or any other time period the college may plan. Most cooperative bachelor's degree grant programs are five years in length, while many junior and community colleges have programs which are as short as two years. Students are paid full salaries by the co-opping employer which can be of great help in financing a college education. Financial earnings are secondary to the educational benefits derived from the job, but it is often the enabling device to make such an education available.

The cooperative education/work program is organized so that the student will have the opportunity to hold progressively more responsible positions on each work assignment and after graduation will be a well-trained person often continuing on as a professional with the employer with whom he worked during his school years.

The CSC recognizes the importance of cooperative education by allowing the waiving of the Federal Service Entrance Examination for those students who have at least 36 weeks of government cooperative experience. For those persons who have had difficulty placing extremely high on a written test, this has been most helpful.

Southwest Minnesota State College in Marshall, Minnesota, now in the early stages of implementing its program, places special emphasis on educational services for the physically handicapped. Because the handicapped are often restricted as to kinds or types of employment, this program enhances the opportunities for such persons to develop more fully their career potentials.

Gallaudet College is considering setting up a Cooperative Education program which will be watched with interest by many employers in this area who have successfully hired their graduates over the years.

On May first, a blind student will be starting his first co-op assignment with the U.S. Office of Education. He is coming from Beloit College, Wisconsin, and we are looking forward to having him on our rolls for four months.

The Cooperative Education Association has given much thought to making more opportunities available to all handicapped college students and has a committee devoted to the handicapped. The chairman of this committee is Dr. Clarcq, Assistant Dean for Technical Education, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester Institute of Technology. Representatives of such companies as 3M, Western Electric, U.S. Steel, General Electric and Dupont, to name a few, work with him in developing guidelines on employment of the handicapped which can be used by all colleges in the Co-op program and which are made available to employers.

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In respect to the above, I found this quotation which I feel should be left with you –

**I READ AND I FORGOT**

**I SEE AND I REMEMBER**

**I DO AND I UNDERSTAND**

On this note I would like to conclude with best wishes to you all for a very successful conference. Thank you!