PART II
SPECIAL REPORTS
DYSLEXIA AND SOCIAL WORK

During the past year several letters have come over the editor's desk which bear on the relation between social work and the recognition and treatment of dyslexia. To one who has had almost equally long and deep involvement with both professions this connection has always seemed inherently appropriate. To say that the quality of the personal relationship is one of the most important ingredients in the "helping process" in any therapeutically directed situation may merely belabor the obvious. And yet it may not be fully realized by those unfamiliar with the social work literature just how much knowledge and skill have been developed within this profession in recent years, to the enrichment of those ready to draw on it.

We hear almost constantly, now, about culturally deprived children for it is the current focus of the public on one aspect of social welfare. Do we know, and do something about, the effects of this deprivation on the language development of the children? On the other hand, what does an underdevelopment of linguistic prowess do to the social living of the language disabled child, youth, job holder (or non-holder) and parent — even grand parent? This is the social side of social work, the sector predominantly accessible to social action and social service programs, facilities and the like.

At its professional best, social work is a disciplined use of a well-developed process of facilitating human relations, and is a full member of the "clinic team," whatever the auspices.

We all know people who seem to have a natural aptitude for doing and saying just the right thing at the right time with children, parents, teachers and physicians. But how much do we know about the conscious and professional approaches to the finer nuances of such interpersonal attitudes and skills? Can they be developed and used deliberately without danger of negating their very values through manipulativeness, however kindly meant?

Perhaps it is social work, better than any other profession, which can help us learn how to make conscious use of our selves as instruments of therapy, while still remaining ourselves, warm, caring, and spontaneous, within the framework of our roles. This is a neat trick, if you can manage it, and nobody knows how better than a first-rate social worker. Managing feelings in social situations, and doing it from the core of the personal life is the developed discipline of this profession.

But the inter-professional learning is a two-way street. For the language disabled person, language and its skills often are reality in its most intensely important form. Feelings don't develop
in vacuo; they center around aspects of living and require that these be dealt with constructively. Only then can the individual be free to act and fully motivated to make progress.

Social worker and therapist, both, function most helpfully if they accept the dictates of reality (such as the constraints of a language to be learned and the nervous system learning it) and then behave flexibly and creatively within the accepted framework. Making constructive use of necessity, they can convey to child or client far greater purpose, direction and effectiveness in learning.

The child welfare specialist, the Veteran’s Administration counselor, the worker with juvenile delinquents, the Peace Corps Volunteer in Africa, the counselor at the Job Corps center, the school social worker, the psychiatric social worker in the children’s clinic and the professor at the graduate school of social work among our correspondents will all recognize themselves here.

Because of its account of the confluence of social work and language therapy, we share with readers as an example one of the letters resulting from the Time correspondence. Harold S. Danenbower, Counselor in the Work Learning Program, U. S. Dept. of Labor, Office of Manpower, Automation and Training, Santa Barbara, California, answered our request for information about his work with adult dyslexics with the following account:

“I would like to tell you how working with dyslexics in our present program came about. . . .

“Our is an experimental and demonstration project contracted for by a local group of citizens and OMAT in the Department of Labor under a 1962 Congressional Act. The funds provide for an administrative organization and its function, education and some vocational training provided under local Adult Education auspices, and training allowances to the enrollees.

“The commitment is to work with 300 unemployed heads of household from multi-problem hard core families mostly recipients of welfare. We are through counseling, motivating, educating, to enable them to become more employable and self-sufficient and to become employed, if possible.

“Before the contract was signed in the late fall of 1964, I had been invited to attend a series of preliminary meetings. As it became evident that the people to be enrolled were school drop-outs and failures both in school and occupation, it also became evident there would be dyslexics to be taught. The group was unfamiliar with the concept, and I had to begin to inform and persuade.

“After the war in the late 1940’s, while in the psychological clinic of The Training School at Vineland New Jersey, I was concerned with a youngster who appeared to possibly be an aphasic rather than mentally retarded. At the same time Ed French, now