

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE EDUCATIONAL ATTENTION  
TO THE MENTAL ABNORMALS IN PANAMA

We will try to submit an integral revision of the educational problem constituted by the exceptional children in Panama, and therefore, it is necessary to perform a brief historical review in reference to the problems presented by mental deficient children, so much in public as in private schools, taking as a starting point the Republic of Panama's foundation. Immediately after, the primary forms of the special education started to appear, as well as the urgent precautions and the initial difficulties.

These first essays of special education started to reach a slow progress, until it attained today's reality, when it is found on a single Institute of wide projections, composed of 4 scales or basic programs, together with other programs of support and ramifications of these ones, extended through out the Republic.

Of course, since the beginning of the republican era, exceptional children attended regular schools as regular students, and all their teachers confronted the problem of not been able to attend and guide them with different pedagogical measures, since they demanded different care and attention, and almost individual in many cases, due to their special condition.

Naturally, it was the case annually, that one or more mental retarded students entered comun schools as regular students, with visual, auditive, of language, or desnutrition defects, or diversal conditions. All this gamut of tragic and unlike students corresponded to those students not identified as sick since the point of view of a previous clinical diagnostic.

To locate these students for its proper attention was a hard work, extremely impossible for ancient teachers.

Without proper knowledge, lack of proper diagnostic material for the application of proves of psychological, physiological or pedagogical tests, as well as collaboration or convenient and constant help of doctors and specialized psychologists to be consulted, it was impossible for them to widely recognize and point them out, in order to grant them a different pedagogical treatment according to their characteristics.

This phenomenon occurred parallel in private schools, notwithstanding some of them had better educated personnel, due to their better economical possibilities, and by this way all kind of materials and conditions were easily provided, making the conditions of these students more easy to carry on.

Teachers at that period had to perform, so much in public as in private teaching, real heroical efforts, to bear these cases that unfortunately entered as regular students.

Toward the third republican decade, the first systems for the agrupation of students by levels according to the performance and by conditions of environmental inadptability, are being practiced. From this time on begins the separation of the primary school grades by groups, according to the performance of the students (bright, regular, reprobate). So to speak, for reason of mental delay, mainly fisical and social conditions.

Nevertheless the good purpose that inspired them, these systems did not have the desired effect. The teachers assigned to with groups of reprobate studing

ents, felt discriminated or sanctioned by their superiors and the lack of capacity to understand them, made their work more unpleasant, so much for them as for the students. In résumé, the results obtained with this essay were more negative than fructiferous.

PRIMARY STUDIES ABOUT THE CAUSES AND ORIGIN  
OF MENTAL DELAY IN THE CITY OF PANAMA

Already on the third and fourth decades of republican life, more concrete advances are profiled on the deep study of the causes that would determine the index of failures in schools. A Committee for the Child's Study was created by the Educational Ministry, which conducted to the foundation of the first School of Special Teaching established at the initial of school year 1946-1947.

This School of Special Teaching created for the qualification of children that accuse mental deficiencies (mental delay) of diverse etiologies, was completely different to the empirical systems we have referred to previously. It was spoken then of an educational institution of scholar nature, distant of the current pedagogical routines, on which education would be granted to a limited number of students.

Each case entered, presupposed a study of antecedents, and a clinical version of the advisor doctor of the school, relative to the mental deficiency of the child.

The students were already classified, on the school's second year of foundation, by levels of performance, without attention of the grades prevailing

on current schools. The fact was not making recopilation of determined studies, but to offer the deficient child, all the possibilities to be self sufficient and happily compete on the struggle for survival according to the social medium in which he lives.

Teachers on these type of schools, more than teachers of the three R(sub-jects contained on the teaching programs) should be maternal or paternal guides, as student's orientators on all parts of the program(practical and theoretical).

Each case imposed a different treatment, seeing that as a rule, there are fundamental differences found among the students.

(All human beings throughout the world, are different to each other. You will never find two identical sardines, neither two human beings that are similarly equal to each other, no matter how intense our search is).

Some are very bright, others mediocre and others mental retarded, and even within each group, some more or less than others. Therefore, it is normal to be mental retarded - a population without mental retarded would not be a normal population.

The teacher should get to the bottom of the familiar and social ground where the child debates in, the same it is indispensable to learn of genetic antecedents and others cooperating factors.

In synthesis, this School integrates an entire process on which the State, Society and Family relies in order that, in conjunction and through the

teacher's guide, the exceptional child can be possibly rehabilitated.

### PRIMARY PROGRAMS FOR MENTAL RETARDED

The first steps of the School of Special Teaching in Panama were not easy. The first specialists in this branch had to overcome serious obstacles derived from the medium's incomprehension. In effect, some pedagogues from ancient schools sustained that we did not count with the amount of students that would justify the significant effort from the State for the school.

Erroneously, they confounded an eminently qualitative with a quantitative problem, as if only one mental deficient would mean no serious guided problem for the environment on which he lives, in general, to perpetuate in an institution for a whole life, which is generally the end of these children when they are not taken care of.

Also, there was an urgent need of idoneous elements to carry on this program, maybe because this pedagogic specialty has not been wholly pleasant to our best educational outstanding figures.

Professor Carlota Guevara, first teacher specialized at university level, at the University of Columbia, State of New York from the United States, accepted director's functions on this center since its foundation.

All these series of obstacles, together with the complexity of the scholar labors, produced improvisation and opportunism. Job vacancies were filled in with non-idoneous personnel, which had no idea on this specialty, and politics interfered many times on the director's functions of the school.

All this confusion was a natural consequence of those innovations that are implanted without the previous existence of the study and necessary environmental preparation process on the development of every project.

In spite of all these inconveniences, the School of Special Teaching advanced gradually. It showed throughout the years that it is a necessity and cannot be eliminated from our educational system. Its results, based on the resources, can be considered satisfactorily.

The School has defeated the difficult complex that meant for the panamanian family, the child with mental deficiencies. The most important result obtained by the School of Special Teaching on the way to educational realizations, is to have been the seed of IPHE, created by Law No. 51 of November 30th, 1951.

We just have to say that after consecutive buildings' transfers, all inadequate and lacking of the most elemental pedagogical conditions, the school worked out on an old building located in the intersection of Third Street and A Avenue.

There, on dark rooms, narrowed and without any ventilation, teachers worked with overloaded registers that reached up to approximately 200 units. If we compare this number to the one in 1946, it could be predicted with the exact number, the progressive development and the growing importance of the school.

The applied program was elaborated and adapted to the characteristics of our student body by the director of the School, based on collections and

adaptations of other programs already experimented in other countries. The contents on these involved great changes with respect to our pedagogy on early times.

The development and application of standardized examinations showed the most objective description of the individual differences, from which the purposes for the new program should set out. The consideration of the individual differences with respect to writing, reading, numerical activities, difficulties on motor coordination and the unevenness on conduct, showed the rules to organize the programation of the subjects.

#### P U R P O S E

The purpose of this program was educating the disabled child, according to his capacities, limitations, the environment demands and the acquisition of new experiences to achieve self-realization, self-control and realization towards life.

Since a good program of special education is that one which develops on deficient children and youngsters self-confidence, by developing some of their activities, and preparing and educating them to be able to make a living by their own means.

Until then, the most trascendental step in the field of special education in Panama, was taken on the decision for the creation of IPHE, with the sanction of Law No. 53 of November 30th, 1951, Official Gazette: Year XLVIII, Panama, Thursday 20th, of December 1951, during the Administration of Don Alcibíades Arosemena and being Minister of Eduaction, Professor R.

D. CARLES. The Law consists of 23 articles and we will concrete to its summary study, analyzing besides its articulated, the precepts and measures of long range that gave expression and definite consistence to the special teaching in Panama. (Official Gazette No. 11663).

#### COVERAGE OF IPHE'S ACTIVITIES

In the performance of the delicate mission to qualify and train the children and youngsters with physical and mental deficiencies, IPHE develops and administrates programs and services by means of a complex net of schools and workshops, and through these tasks lead its attention until integrating the qualified deficient as a useful element to society.

#### SCHOOLS:

- School of Special Teaching and Special Classrooms
- School of Deafs
- School of Blinds "Helen Keller"
- Center of Industrial Apprenticeship (C.I.A.)
- Superior Institute of Specialization (S.I.S.)
- Center of Infantile and Familiar Orientation (C.I.F.O.)

#### PROGRAMS:

- Autism
- Program of Rehabilitation of Blind Adults
- Precocious Stimulation
- School for Parents
- Program of Auditive Detection in the Schools of the Country
- Program of Visual Detection in the Schools of the Country



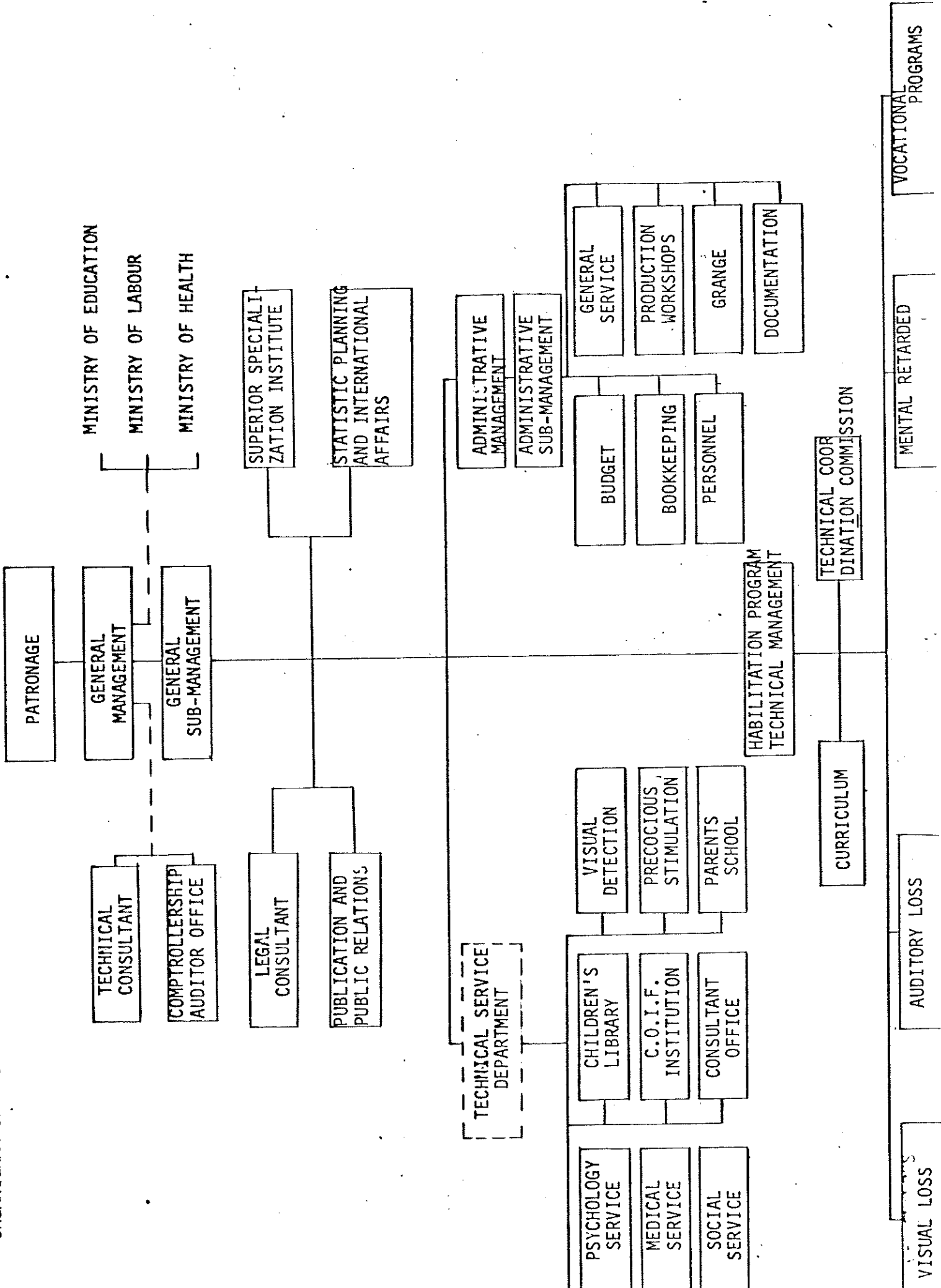
SERVICES:

- Psychology
- Fonoaudiology
- Therapeutics (Physical Therapy)  
Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Recreational Therapy
- Social Service
- Counselor
- Optometry
- Otolaryngology
- Ophthalmology and Odontology
- Library Services  
(Infantile and Specialized)
- Orientation and Diagnostic
- Others: (Cafeteria, kiosk, Various Sales)
- Divulgation, Information and Public Realties
- Documentation
- Statistics

WORKSHOPS OF PRODUCTION:

- Secretarial
- Sewing
- Cabinet Makers's Workshop
- Metalworking
- Tapestry Shop
- Toyshop
- Flower Shop
- Piñata Shop
- Bookbinding
- Agricultural Farm
- Monitory

ORGANIGRAM OF THE PANAMANIAN INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL HABILITATION



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
 MINISTRY OF LABOUR  
 MINISTRY OF HEALTH

SUPERIOR SPECIALIZATION INSTITUTE  
 STATISTIC PLANNING AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT  
 ADMINISTRATIVE SUB-MANAGEMENT

GENERAL SERVICE  
 PRODUCTION WORKSHOPS  
 GRANGE  
 DOCUMENTATION

BUDGET  
 BOOKKEEPING  
 PERSONNEL

TECHNICAL COORDINATION COMMISSION

VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS  
 MENTAL RETARDED  
 AUDITORY LOSS  
 VISUAL LOSS

## (IPHE'S) ORGANIGRAM (MEMORY)

After this general review of the Institution, we will expose the facts related with the Program of Mental Delay.

The program responds to the necessity of educating and qualifying the scholar population with mental delay and the functioning of its different levels.

It is granted in the nine (9) Provinces of the Republic, in schools already established for these needs and in special classrooms located on regular schools. Generally, the teachers are specialized in the Superior Institute of Specialization (S.I.S.).

They try to guarantee the means for the development, apprenticeship, maturity and social adaptation, and equal opportunities near their home and community.

### BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM:

- 1.- To qualify the mental retarded on his different expressions, by means of:
  - 1.1 Development of behavior, socially acceptable.
  - 1.2 Development of perceptives skills - motors.
  - 1.3 Development of the abilities for the oral and written communication.
  - 1.4 Development in the cognitive area.
  - 1.5 Development of the integral behavior:

a) Affective

b) Emotional

c) Moral

1.6 Development of the sexual behavior.

1.7 Training in the pre-vocational area.

- 2.- To strengthen the Program of Mental Delay on its levels, systems and programs.
- 3.- To formalize the special education services for the children that are integrated in the regular classrooms under the special teacher's control.
- 4.- To evaluate permanently the educational politics of the Program of Mental Delay.
- 5.- To reinforce and establish the actions of support of the doctors and technicians at a treatment level and continuation of the case in the program.
- 6.- To promote work systems and schedules that will allow the teacher the best individual attention of the students facing a numerous scholar population.
- 7.- To distribute the Direction and Supervision Service in the Program of Mental Delay.
- 8.- To up-date the activity of the teaching staff by formulating a work program.
- 9.- To fasten and coordinate with family parents, joined work programs for the immediate solution of the program's necessities.

The educational services are supported in all its dimensions with the Technical Services: Psychology, Social Service, Pedagogic Orientation, Pre-Vocational and the Medical Services: Pediatrist, Ophthalmologist, Psychiatrist, Fonoaudiologist, among others.

During year 1980, the actualization, incrementation and adaptation of the technical services, teaching staff, administratives and directives services have been intensified, by means of the formulation of preliminary plans of curriculum programs, instruments of teaching's evaluation, support for didactical, physical, economical and nutritional resources; scholar reorganization, facilitation on the entrance and the child's formation, programs's integration, etc.

As well, work systems of commissions of teachers have been activated, as well as the Association of Family Parents.

With the effort of all personnel and permanent work and consultation, the organizational structure of the Program with other instruments of administrative character such as: the use of chronograms, informative bulletins, manuals of functions, scholar regulation, laws and regulations of the Ministry of Education, among others, is also formed.

For year 1981, the educational programation will be organized based on the scholar population's growth, its necessities and the institutional politics that will govern on special education's matter in Panama.

## PROGRAM OF MENTAL DELAY

- I. The Program of Mental Delay attends the population in the primary pre-scholar stage.
- II.
  - A. Technical, teaching staff and medical services are offered, to give attention, support and orientation to the program.
  - B. The cases proceed from the community, referred from the Program of Precocious Stimulation, Social Security, Health Centers, The Child's Hospital, Particular Clinics and other Programs of the Panamanian Institute of Special Qualification. Members of the group evaluate and give them the adequate treatment.
  - C. They are placed in the special attention service, in special classrooms, classrooms of resources and regular classrooms.
  - CH. Once the primary scholar period is reached, pass to vocational instruction (Center of Industrial Apprenticeship).
- III. For the admission of the case, following is taken into consideration:
  1. Diagnostic and/or functioning level of mental delay.
  2. Chronologic age from 4 years with school and 6 through 13.8 with or without school.
  3. School under IV Grade.
  4. Study of the case by the group.
  5. Limitations determined by the program's resources.
- IV. The cases are integrated:
  1. Special Classrooms.
  2. Classrooms of Resources.
  3. Regular Classrooms.

V. Once formation criterions are reached:

1. Scholar performance.
2. Age 14 years and 5 months.
3. Certificate of Studies.
4. Evaluation based on the minimum and maximum essentials of the program.
5. Graduation.

1. PROGRAM FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED
2. ORIGIN OF THE CASE  
HEALTH CENTERS - REGULAR SCHOOLS  
COMMUNITY OTHER PROGRAMS OF THE IPHE
3. APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION  
ORIENTATION AND DAIGNOSIS SECTION
4. CASE ORIENTATION  
WITH OR WITHOUT REFERENCE
5. REGULAR CLASSROOM
6. EXPEDIENT OPENING  
BASIC APPOINTMENTS
7. HEALTH CENTERS
8. CLASSROOM RESOURCE
9. BASIC REVALUATION  
PEDIATRIC PSYCHOLOGIST SOCIAL WORKER  
PEDAGOGICAL AND OFTALMOLOGY ORIENTATION  
AND OTHERS IF WORTHWHILE
10. SPECIAL CLASSROOM
11. MULTIDICIPLINARY EVALUATION  
DIAGNOSIS THERAPY AND REMEDIAL TREATMENT  
RECOMMENDATION REFERENCES
12. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM LOCATION
13. CONTROL AND FOLLOW-UP OF THE CASE.
14. CASE PROMOTION  
REGULAR HIGH SCHOOL REGULAR VOCATIONAL SPECIAL VOCATIONAL



## INTEGRATION OF THE DISABLE

As a greeting to the International Year of the Disable, the institution has considered necessary the participation and equality of our children, Specially with regards to the mentally retarded; acquainting their objectives towards the integration of those to the regular classrooms.

### 1. What is integration of the disable?

If we rely on the word, we will see that it means: incorporated in a whole. The disable, which includes the deaf, blind, retarded or injured is originated and lives in an integrated society and is managed by human elements. This is the reason why, by legal right, due to his origin, should enter in the group called society and share the common activities in defense of his personal interest and that of the group.

### 2. How should the integration of the disable be initiated?

The integration of the disable should start from the first stage of his life, with the acceptance of the family nucleus, which will permit a conductual growth, similar to the children without problem, and consequently, be able to evolve, subsequently in the infantile group.

### 3. The integration of the disable is given only in the family sphere?

No. The integration, by logical conclusion, begins in the family, but, in order for the disable to enjoy a participation an full equality, he should also be integrated in the school and to the society with the same duties and rights of any "normal" child and citizen. Of course, his development will be proportional to the magnitude of the impediment and the habilitary oportunities (therapy and acceptance) offered to him.

### 4. What is school integration?

School integration is the location of the disable in regular schools, with the purpose of: promoting his acceptance in society, thru the development of imitative social behaviour such as language, recreative

conduct, perceptiveness and motion. This will bring a subsequent development in the disable, of academic conduct... of course we must emphasize that the same will develop according to the severity of the problem, and as with any "normal" child or adolescent, the abilities of the disable will depend on the amount of security which his teachers will offer him (acceptance, attention as an individual, respect and educational dedication in the process of teaching-learning).

5. How is the school integration given?

The school integration is developed with different modalities. We can say that, as is done with all educational process, the school integration should respond to the political and socio-cultural reality of the country where it is given.

However, the worldwide tendency in the last years have been to integrate the disable in regular schools, and, even in controvertible countries like Iran and the United States of North America, the general tendency is to integrate the disable child in regular schools. Of course, the school integration of the disable has to be supervised and reforced by the specialized educator. This education will guaranty the adequate location of the disable child or adolescent in the regular teaching system and will take care to strengthen all the areas, stressing mostly in the perceptive and motion areas and language, and will orientate the parents and the family nucleous of the disable so that they will offer the support and attention to the academic areas of the students.

6. Will the school results of the integrated disable be the same as that of the regular students?

No. When we integrate a disable, we don't do it with the purpose of achieving unreachable goals. What we really look for is that such an individual that came from an X or Y community, be accepted responsibly by the people who surround him, because his acceptance as a person, as a member of a community is necessary just as it is for a regular student, in such a way that he is offered an opportunity that will permit him to evolve in the daily learning process.

From there that the school results will depend on multiple factors as in any other child in our environment.

All of us in Panama know of a number of disable people who carry out different jobs, according to their cognitive possibilities and skill for the same.

With the school integration we hope to offer greater work expectations to the disable, in such a manner that, by developing greater social relations will procure for the disable an easier acceptance in the labour field.

7. How can better results be obtained in the school integration? Well, in the educational process there are no categorical and inmutable discernments, but, as an educational principle, we know that the best results in the disable are obtained starting from his possibilities, for the acceptance that he receives and the adequate specialized attentions.

8. How is the integration carried out in Panama?

The Panamamnian Specialized Habilitation institute was founded as a special educational center in Panama by the Law #53 of the year 1951, which was subsequently modified.

From that moment on, its actions have been more extensive and supported itself in the educational philosophy of our country. This is, to qualify the individual for his development in the society in which he belongs.

Obviously, this has been a process which has developed by stages, and a little more than a decade, the coverage of the programs of the IPHE was extended, changing the modality with which it had been working until that moment, to go to the communities with the so called Special classrooms. In these classrooms are attended the mentally retarded children by specialized teachers, even though a large population of mentally retarded are still attended in the central instalations.