PORTAGE PROJECT

Portage Project is a carefully structured service established for preschool children living at home. It has been developed by David Shearer and Marsha Shearer in Portage, Wisconsin, U.S.A. in 1969.

The materials used include a developmental checklist which lists skills which normally develop in children in the first five or six years of life. Skills are listed under the headings of self-help, motor, socialisation, language and cognitive. In addition there is an infant stimulation section containing pre-requisite skills in each of these areas. For each of the 850 skills listed on the checklist, there is a card containing a behavioural description of the skill and suggested materials and ideas for teaching it.

The materials are used by home-teachers who have been specifically trained and who follow a carefully specified home visiting procedure. Each child is first assessed using the portage checklist and the teacher and parent select one or more target behaviours for the child to learn during the coming week. The home-teacher ensures that realistic weekly targets are set and draws up a specific teaching procedure for the parent to follow. This is checked with the parent and a written "activity chart" is left. The parent is also shown how to record on the chart progress on each behaviour on a daily basis.

The parent works with the child during the week, following the teacher's written guidance and recording the results of each session. Parents typically spend two or three 10-minute sessions each day working with their children. The following week, the home teacher reviews progress and leaves further activity charts.

In this way individual teaching takes place, specifically for that child and parent. Goals are set and teaching programmes drawn up specifically geared to the child's needs and the parent's abilities. The scheme has been successfully used with parents who themselves have learning problems or who might otherwise be considered "difficult". The onus is on the home-teacher to select appropriate goals and devise an appropriate teaching and recording method. Each home-teacher is regularly supervised by a supervisor with experience in the Portage method and in behavioural teaching techniques.