INTEGRATED AND SHELTERED WORKSHOPS
FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED

by

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(Paper prepared for the 5th International Congress on Mental Retardation, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, October 1-6, 1972)

The International Labour Organisation in its Recommendation No. 99, adopted by the General Conference in 1955, emphasises that vocational rehabilitation services including vocational guidance, vocational training, selective placement and sheltered employment should be made available to mentally as well as physically handicapped persons. In providing such facilities, the ultimate aim wherever possible must be to integrate the handicapped in a normal working environment and to give them equal opportunity with the non-disabled to perform work for which they are best qualified. In the case of the severely disabled who are employable but cannot attain the tempo and production requirements of normal competitive employment, sheltered workshops provide the best avenue of resettlement.

In considering the question of integrated and sheltered workshops for the mentally retarded, this paper deals with the wider concept of the subject. For example, employment in an integrated workshop is taken to mean the integration of the retarded, not only with other disability groups but also with the able-bodied in normal employment. Similarly a sheltered workshop is not regarded in the narrowest sense as one providing industrial work, but rather as an avenue of protected remunerative employment for the more severely retarded which embraces special work centres and units in an industrial rather than an institutional atmosphere as well as agriculture horticultural and co-operative type enterprises.

Unfortunately, in many vocational rehabilitation programmes there has been and still is a tendency to regard the mentally retarded as a severely disabled group, who at best, can manage sheltered employment in segregated groups, who at worst are unemployable or capable only of performing simple diversionary tasks under constant supervision and institutionalised care. What are the reasons for this misguided approach? It would be easy to lay the major share of the blame on the vocational counsellor, but his approach is too often governed and restricted by rigid standards of acceptance for rehabilitation centres and sheltered workshop courses; by public prejudice and unrealistic job entry requirements, and too great a reliance on the results of I.Q. tests.
Undoubtedly, the greatest single obstacle to the satisfactory placement of the mentally retarded in the integrated or segregated work is the lack or inadequacy of pre-vocational preparation in special and normal education and training programmes which should embrace not only an introduction to the world of work but also give special attention to social adjustment and competence including activities of daily living. For the mildly retarded, who according to a survey undertaken in the United States in 1963, represent some 85 per cent of all retarded persons, training for semi-skilled, unskilled and service work in a normal environment can be contemplated but only on the basis of sound pre-vocational preparation and social adjustment. For the moderately and severely retarded, an extended period of special vocational preparation and social training is usually required after they have completed their schooling and prior to entry into sheltered employment.

There is also reason to believe that many existing pre-vocational preparation and work training centres for the mentally retarded, at the post school level, do not achieve optimum results with their clients because they do not provide an environment that conveys to the trainees a positive feeling of their moving toward an adult status; moreover the WHO Committee on Mental Health meeting in Geneva in 1967 felt, and this is the ILO’s experience too, that work supervisors with experience in industry tend to be more successful in these situations than teachers who reflect a school atmosphere. In other words a training or sheltered workshop must try to simulate an industrial rather than an educational or institutional atmosphere and must, as far as possible, provide the conditions (hours of work, work procedures) which are usually found in normal industrial or commercial establishments.

Before going on to describe the organisation of sheltered workshops and possible avenues of open employment for the retarded, it is necessary to emphasise that the pre-vocational preparation, vocational and social training of the mentally retarded may well be a lengthy process to be measured in terms of several years rather than weeks or months. Moreover, as Professor A.D.B. Clarke emphasises in his excellent booklet (Recent Advances in the Study of Subnormality), instructors must remind themselves that initial level is a very inadequate predictor of response to training, and that if no progress is made for a considerable time, it is likely to occur if training is considerably prolonged. Professor Clarke goes on to describe what he calls principles of training the moderately and severely retarded for industrial work, which if applied conscientiously can help to determine whether open, sheltered or diversionary employment is the proper avenue of resettlement.

The principles he sets out are summarised as follows:

1. Incentives - the retarded like the normal are very much affected by the presence or absence of suitable incentives.
2. **Breakdown of Work** - the work must be broken down into simple basic constituents, each step being taught separately but in the right sequence.

3. **Correct Movements** - e.g. the correct way to hold a tool.

4. **Spaced Learning** - short concentrated spells are likely to produce best results.

5. **Neat for Over-Learning** - the learning process must be taken well beyond the stage at which correct responses are made, so that it becomes deeply ingrained.

6. **Verbal Reinforcement** - this entails learning the actual movement needed for the task and reinforcing this with a parallel verbal commentary in the simplest language.

7. **Accuracy** - this should be stressed rather than speed.

8. **Method** - material should be arranged in such a way that muddle or fumbling can be minimised.

It is suggested that these basic principles of preparing and training the retarded for a work situation, coupled with an active programme of training in activities of daily living (i.e. such simple matters as using public transport, shopping, punctuality, personal hygiene, etc.) will help to ensure that many retarded persons have a reasonable opportunity of being integrated into a normal social and working environment.

In considering the question of the organisation of sheltered workshops for the mentally retarded, the aim should be to organise these facilities in such a way as to provide opportunities for evaluation, assessment, social training and job preparation as well as production work. This will usually entail the creation of a section devoted entirely to assessment and evaluation; much of this process involves individual tuition and personal counselling, and guided development, and the smaller the unit the more effective the results will be. Both sexes should be served to ensure that social training is carried out in a realistic setting. In summary the main purpose of this pre-vocational preparation or vocational rehabilitation aspect of the sheltered workshop should be to offer:

- training in basic skills of daily living activities;
- Opportunities for social adjustment;
- group and individual counselling;
- actual near-life experiences, involving contact with a specific skill or through field visits to actual work situations;
simulated job experiences to develop skills and experience in working with others on the job;

- opportunity for the development of desirable attitudes towards work, favourable work habits and the stability necessary to hold a job;

- provision for suitable reception of the retarded in the community.

The production unit of the sheltered workshop should be organised on industrial rather than institutional lines and be prepared to offer long term employment to the moderately and severely retarded, who have graduated from the assessment and evaluation unit. Again it is suggested that the workshop should serve both men and women, preferably in mixed groups. Normally the workshop will not serve the mildly retarded except where open employment opportunities for the latter are very restricted, e.g. as in developing countries with a high level of unemployment. Under no circumstances should the workshop be regarded as a terminal or closed facility, and every opportunity of transfer to open employment should be afforded those workers whose stability and rate of productivity match up to normal industrial standards.

Production work undertaken in a sheltered workshop should be as diversified as possible, based on contract or subcontract with local firms or government departments, or on the making of articles for which there is an assured market. Provision might also be made by the workshop for small groups of supervised workers to be employed on outside contract work such as harvesting and fruit picking (as in Israel), parks and garden maintenance (as in the United Kingdom), planting and pruning of trees in forest areas (as in Denmark). An interesting example of sheltered workshops for the mentally retarded is to be found in Poland, where several workshop co-operatives have been established for this group. Products range from footwear and furniture to small glass containers and cardboard boxes. These workshops employ on average, some 30 to 40 retarded workers, with up to five able-bodied employees allocated to each workshop to undertake the more difficult tasks beyond the capability of the retarded. The co-operatives also provide specialised medical and social services and time is devoted each day to a period of remedial exercises.

At the Tel Mohammed Sheltered Workshop in Baghdad, Iraq, 54 mentally retarded young persons are employed on simple production work including paper bag and carton manufacture, assembly of electrical plugs and spring loaded clothes-peggs, painting wrought iron work and packing paper clips. In an effort to increase productivity and earnings, consideration is being given to admitting a small number of physically disabled persons to the workshop.
A small sheltered workshop at the Jacaranda School, Nairobi, run by the Kenya Society for Mentally Handicapped Children for eleven mentally retarded persons is being assisted by a Norwegian volunteer to produce leather goods, jewellery and dresses. It is offering an excellent service, concentrating on habit training, attention to repetitive work and quality. The workshop cannot keep up with the demand for its products and the possibility of introducing other disability groups may have to be considered.

In Iran, on the outskirts of Teheran, the National Organisation for the Protection of Children is developing an ambitious residential rehabilitation and training centre for some 120 mentally retarded orphans, offering training in carpentry and wood carving, welding, assembly work, weaving, knitting and other crafts.

After a period of vocational and social training it is envisaged that the mildly retarded will be transferred to open employment; sheltered workshops including farm estates are being developed for the more severely retarded who cannot reach normal employment standards.

The ILO has been associated indirectly with all these projects through its technical co-operation activities and is encouraging governments of developing countries to make provision (in the form of direct assistance and also support of voluntary organisations) for programmes aimed specifically at the vocational rehabilitation and integration of the retarded.

In most developed countries vocational rehabilitation programmes were initially directed towards obvious cases of physical impairment or special groups such as the blind and deaf. Only recently has the vocational potential of the mentally retarded been recognised. This is probably the reason why vocational rehabilitation programmes in developing countries are geared mainly to the needs of the physically handicapped and why the ILO has never been requested to provide expert assistance solely for the mentally retarded. However, wherever possible ILO experts do endeavour to ensure that some mentally handicapped are admitted to pilot rehabilitation centres and sheltered workshops in both urban and rural areas. Obviously, much more effort needs to be directed towards the vocational needs of the retarded. With this in view, the ILO thanks to the generosity of the Danish Government and in co-operation with the International League of Societies for the Mentally Handicapped, organised an inter-regional seminar last October on vocational rehabilitation of the mentally handicapped and provided training in this field to twenty-five participants from the developing world. First follow up results indicate that the course has stimulated the planning, or establishing, of training programmes for the mentally retarded in countries where no previous service existed.
The ILO is firmly convinced that in developing countries, where the majority of people live in rural areas, employment in agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and rural crafts will offer the best avenue of resettlement for the mentally retarded. Many rural communities in these countries are self-supporting with a wide diversity of rural crafts and trades contributing to the maintenance of homes and the well-being of their people. There are close knit family and tribal ties and the mentally retarded can be successfully integrated in the family working group. To facilitate this integration process, the ILO is helping to develop rural rehabilitation centres for physically and mentally handicapped persons, particularly in African and Asian countries, where courses of up to 12 months' duration provide "all-round" training rather than training for a specific trade. The first two months is devoted to evaluation, physical and mental reconditioning; thereafter, a programme embracing various rural crafts and trades (rural house building, home tailoring, shoe and sandal making, crop raising, animal husbandry etc.) and subjects such as hygiene and citizenship, is undertaken. The aim of the course is to provide the handicapped with several skills to a sufficient degree to make them self-supporting at village level.

There appear to be conflicting views as to whether agriculture and horticulture offer a satisfactory avenue of resettlement for the mentally retarded in the more developed countries. As already indicated in this paper, group work in park and garden maintenance, fruit farming, harvesting and forestry offers excellent prospects, even for the moderately and severely retarded. On the other hand, some institutions are curtailing or abolishing farm training programmes for their clients; a case in point is that of a large central institution for 1,200 mentally retarded persons at Brejning in Denmark.

At the 1971 ILO/Danish Seminar, the Director of this institution indicated that up to the mid 1960s the majority of clients there received training in farming. Since that time, the occupational structure in Denmark has changed dramatically; farming has become highly mechanised, requiring a much smaller labour force and industry has rapidly expanded. Consequently, it has become very difficult indeed to find places for trainees on the farms, and the institute has expanded its workshop programme substantially. The Director's comments on this situation are significant. "Some twenty years ago" he said "we were criticised because we placed the mentally retarded in farming jobs or domestic work. Today we face criticism because we employ the mentally retarded on monotonous industrial work. I think this criticism is unfair because many of the normal population are occupied in similar jobs in industry. I do not believe we have yet found the complete solution to occupation of the mentally retarded. Their occupational needs will constantly change and we must be prepared to adapt our thinking to changing conditions in the labour market".
A major problem facing sheltered workshop management is to decide whether to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped in the same workshop or decide on a segregation policy. The ILO experience indicates that whilst segregation in developing countries may at times be unavoidable, the integrated approach is the more rewarding, not only in terms of productivity and viability of the workshop, but also in the interests of the handicapped themselves. This view seems to be shared by a number of organisations who specialise in this field. For example, the US National Association for Retarded Children lists the advantages of a mixed disability workshop as follows:

- larger groups of handicapped persons can be served;
- programme content is enriched since different handicapped persons have varying abilities permitting a wide range of work to be undertaken;
- operating costs are less;
- workshop staff who are relatively hard to find might be more attracted because the workshop responsibilities will be broader and offer greater challenge.

To this could be added that the integrated approach for some of the mentally retarded provides them with wider opportunities for socialisation; furthermore it prevents duplication of services and facilities.

One of the conclusions of an International Congress on Sheltered Employment held in Sweden stressed that persons belonging to various handicap groups should wherever possible be integrated in the same sheltered establishment provided each placement is carefully considered on its individual merits, with a view to:

- overcoming prejudices of handicap groups towards each other;
- saving capital and running expenditure;
- facilitating the recruitment of sufficient and competent management and supervisory staff.

At a Symposium on Sheltered Employment for the Mentally Retarded (Frankfurt 1966), it was revealed that the majority of the 200 sheltered workshops in the Netherlands, served the mentally and physically handicapped, both male and female.

It is the experience too, of Goodwill Industries of America, that the mentally retarded can be admitted to multiple-handicapped workshops with no detriment either to other handicapped persons or the economic well-being of the workshop, provided careful attention is given to their selection, training and supervision.
Outlets for the mentally retarded in open employment are gradually widening and in the case of the mildly retarded, experience in recent years has shown that they are capable of performing tasks of some complexity, not only in industry, commerce and agriculture but also in the public service. As with other disability groups, however, it is unrealistic to draw up a list of jobs which the mentally retarded can perform. The range is far too wide for this but it may be said that there is an increasing tendency for the retarded to be placed in service trades (restaurants, laundries, hotels, etc.). It must be stressed again, however, that permanent resettlement cannot be achieved unless the retarded individual has been physically, emotionally, socially and vocationally prepared and is ready for job placement. In this connection it is suggested that there is an urgent need for job induction officers, specialised in placement of the mentally retarded, to be attached to placement services. Such a specialist could help to introduce the retarded worker to his employer and workmates; but more important still, stay with him on the job for the first two or three days to help overcome the initial settling-in difficulties which any new worker has to face, and which, to a mentally retarded person may well seem insurmountable.

Finally, it should be recognised by all concerned with the vocational rehabilitation and employment of the mentally retarded that if their full integration in society is to be achieved, greater flexibility in the approach to their resettlement problems is essential. Old stigmas and misconceived ideas about their employment limitations must be removed. Attempts to label and classify them under convenient headings such as "employable", "unemployable" and "ineducable" should be discontinued; instead, each case should be treated individually on its merit, and through patient counselling, social training, comprehensive assessment and evaluation techniques (practical as well as theoretical), ensure that every effort is made to utilise the maximum employment potential of the mentally retarded. Only through such an approach can we help mentally retarded to achieve, in the words of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons, "the right to economic security and to a decent standard of living ... a right to perform productive work or to engage in any other meaningful occupation to the fullest possible extent of his capabilities."
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