

# THE TRAINING CENTRE

## III EDUCATION OR TRAINING? \*

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"It's not our job to educate them; we've got to train them to work. It's only through an ability to work hard that they'll ever be accepted".

These were the beliefs, quite sincerely held, of the manager of a modern, progressive Adult Training Centre. He is, however, only looking at one aspect of the training of adult subnormals, for there is more to life than earning a living, and there is more to being an adult than taking a job.

A major controversy in secondary education has been 'Vocational training or Education?' The contenders have argued on the one hand, that specialisation must come early in order to prepare pupils adequately for their future careers; on the other, that pupils can only become good workmen if their potentialities and personalities have been fully developed and realised. In fact, the Newsom Report ('Half Our Future') shows that there can be no simple answer. "All boys and girls need to develop, as well as skills, capacities for thought, judgement, enjoyment, curiosity. They need to develop a sense of responsibility for their work and towards other people, and to begin to arrive at some code of moral and social behaviour which is self-imposed. It is important that they should have some understanding of the physical world and of the human society in which they are growing up".

I use this example because I believe that many of the problems of the adult subnormal are comparable with those of a teenager, who is about to leave a secondary modern school, and also that this admirable report can help in the planning of balanced syllabuses and schemes of work in our Adult Training Centres. Too often, we see Centres which are 'work orientated' to the virtual exclusion of an educational programme. Consequently, on occasions, I have been appalled by the work of some Adult Training Centres. Their schemes, their syllabuses, their standards and their organisation are—quite rightly—admired, but too often little or no thought has been given to the right balance between vocational and educational needs. Have we forgotten that we are training people, not machines? And that much of this training would be soul destroying and quite unacceptable if it were made a part of our own lives?

In many Centres, trainees are condemned to destructive contract-work, which goes on interminably. By destructive, I mean, of course, dismantling tasks. This type of work, and the state of mind it produces in trainees is reminiscent of the very worst Nineteenth Century Workhouses. Contract work is valuable and it should have a place in the Centres, but surely Managers and Supervisors can be more selective and imaginative in their choice.

Contract work can be obtained in which trainees can see that their efforts are creative and in which they can be motivated by either seeing an attractive finished

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\* This is the third of a series of articles contributed by workers in Training Centres. The first article (*Has Training changed in the past 40 years?*) appeared in the June 1965 issue, the second article (*Purpose-Built Training Centres*) in the December 1965 issue of the *Journal of Mental Subnormality*.

article, or at least, by knowing that they have helped to produce something which is of value to the community.

The balanced Adult Training Centre scheme can be extended beyond contract work, with its echo of mass production methods, to creative work which can be enjoyed for its own sake and pursued by trainees outside centre hours. Rugmaking and the other tedious, repetitive and unrealistic tasks have, quite rightly, lost their hold on the Adult Training Centre, but is there any reason why carpentry, mental work, dressmaking and home decoration should not be introduced? This part of the scheme enables trainees to produce a worthwhile article—a lamp, a poker, a skirt or a cake—from which they derive satisfaction and which proves to their parents or relatives that they are capable of serious work.

Imaginative work is also important and should certainly not end in the Junior Training Centre. In fact it is by truly imaginative work that lower grade trainees can often be helped.

The emotional outlet which a variety of art and crafts provides is essential to the full development of the individual, but a wide programme requires a critical analysis of the teachers' approach and a provision of the right kind of equipment and rooms. Clay modelling, wood carving, sculpture, pottery, weaving, fabric printing, montage work and leather work offer a variety of techniques and experiences, which extend and develop the potentialities of the trainees.

Such a programme not only provides satisfaction, but also sharpens the perception and helps trainees towards critical selection, and an appreciation of design and function.

Art and craft may appear to be a fringe benefit, but an important, if often neglected, part of our work must be concerned with language development. The spoken English of our trainees can be improved with a consequent greater possibility of acceptance by future employers and the general public. No amount of formal teaching can improve the spoken language, but if a rich variety of stimuli is provided, often spectacular results can be obtained with even the most introverted or the most hesitant. I have found that visits can provide a necessary stimulus. These can easily be arranged and many public bodies are willing to provide good facilities and to send members of their organisations into the Centres to give short talks to the trainees. The visits extend the trainees' awareness of the community, and form an integral part of the rehabilitation programme. Trainees often fail in employment, not through an inability to reach the required standard in a skill, but owing to difficulties experienced in coping with the complexities of our society.

Other expeditions, accompanied and unaccompanied, must also be included—shopping (in familiar and strange towns) visits to cafes, coffee bars, exhibitions, art galleries and public libraries, will provide situations for the encouragement of social behaviour.

The Training Centre is a buffer against much of the harshness of the adult society, but it must never be regarded as a special community with its own standards. If we are to place trainees in worthwhile jobs we must evolve a programme which will introduce them gradually to the realities of the community and—equally important—we must introduce the community to them and their difficulties. The term "Occupational Centre" is obsolete, but all too often it is easier to 'occupy' than to 'educate'. The old repetitive tasks have gone but have not others—equally tedious—taken their place and are not too many of our visits reminiscent of the crocodile of little children on nature walks who 'walked through' the countryside but never reacted or responded to it? Exciting work is being done in our schools, which aims

to release pupils from the confines of the artificial classroom situation and to educate them for the realities of life. Our task is similar, and let us tackle it with imagination and energy.

This pre-supposes that teachers can free themselves from the idea that classrooms are the only places where teaching is carried out. In Social Sight Vocabulary work it is essential to see the signs, directions, and warnings against their true backgrounds. The use of a telephone can only be taught in a telephone kiosk, and the complexities of a modern bus station need to be experienced with a competent guide.

The same kind of approach can be used in social arithmetic. To write 2/6d. on a board and then to try and relate this to the coin is ludicrously inadequate. Concepts must be related to situations in a much more realistic way. Trainees must be given a chance to shop, to look at prices, to pay themselves, and to relate these prices to their wages. Here projects would seem to be an ideal method of instruction. A girl could knit a cardigan or make a skirt and work out the cost beforehand: a boy may decide to make a stool or a coffee table and buy the wood. Do-it-yourself projects involving repairs can cover the same areas of experience.

Leisure time activities even when taught in the Centres are often neglected outside Centre hours, although the buildings and facilities could be used in the evenings as youth clubs or community centres for the trainees. One youth club for the mentally subnormal (run by parents) works well because other young people are encouraged to come in as helpers. Often the co-operation of the Local Authorities is needed, but the problems are not insuperable.

Frequently the boy or girl who appeared to be successfully placed in employment has failed through ignorance of sex. Positive guidance to both male and female trainees is essential on sexual morals and any problems which may arise. I would never advocate sensational sex education, but it is essential that staff should make a friendly, unembarrassed approach which will help the trainees to take a balanced view of sexual experiences and to regard sex as a natural and healthy part of life.

The female trainees' natural interest in dress and appearance can be used as a starting point in discussions and a biological approach could be made through slides and pets.

Finally, I should again like to refer to 'Half Our Future' and to quote a passage which summarises our problems, and I hope, will give some sense of direction. "Our pupils, because some of them acquire skills slowly, and others only with the utmost difficulty, may be in danger of spending their whole time at school in continual efforts to sharpen tools which they never have opportunity enough to use. They may be kept busy, and yet never have their minds and imaginations fully engaged; and leave school very ill-equipped in knowledge and personal resources. Again, because many of them do not acquire or retain factual knowledge easily, the range of information and ideas to which they are introduced may be seriously inadequate. Yet it does not follow that because they will not long remember everything they have thought and talked about in school—who does?—the experience will be of no value. How is it possible to devise for pupils of only moderate, and in some cases very limited, skills, a content of education which exercises their minds and emotions and feeds their imagination? What kinds of experiences will help them to develop their full capacities for thought and taste and feeling? Without some satisfactory answers, both the individual and society remain that much the more impoverished."

#### Reference

Ministry of Education: "Half Our Future". A report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England), H.M.S.O., 1963.