

MICRO-INSTITUTIONALISATION? ENVIRONMENTAL AND MANAGERIAL INFLUENCES IN TEN LIVING UNITS FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HANDICAP

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INTRODUCTION

Background

There is much research evidence to show that educational and social training programmes are successful in teaching new skills to adult mentally handicapped people. There is however less evidence that these new skills become living skills successfully incorporated into everyday life. This may well be due to training programmes being carried out either in day centres, or only for selected individuals in separate small units attached to a living unit which is detached from the main living environment and population. This then becomes a somewhat artificial exercise often unrelated to daily living experience.

Many adult residential units regard themselves as providers of a type of hotel/home service and do not see their role as being concerned with development. There is also some evidence that any developmental work is hindered by inappropriate geographical locations of living units, misdirected administrative practices and neglect of simple domestic learning situations.

~~— To explore this hypothesis further, it was decided to utilise the LOCO assessment scale (Gunzburg and Gunzburg, 1987) to examine the physical and managerial factors affecting the social and personal development of mentally handicapped people in living units in several geographically disparate areas in the British Isles. The purpose of a LOCO assessment is to pinpoint environmental and management weaknesses which interfere with successful developmental intervention programmes and progress.~~

LOCO

LOCO stands for Learning Opportunities Coordination and is a specialised assessment tool indicating to what extent a living unit for people with handicaps is able to contribute significantly to their social and personal development and enable them to maintain a reasonable level of personal independence. The LOCO was primarily designed as a check list and analysis approach, which draws attention to any material or administrative obstacles which need to be considered to avoid artificial ceilings being placed on developmental progress.

The LOCO scale lists 100 scored items. Of these, 48 LO items refer to learning opportunities depending on environmental and material provisions. A further 48 CO items refer to management practices and their efficacy in utilising these learning opportunities by coordinating training and education programmes which encourage the frequent use of social skills in correct context both in the living unit and the surrounding neighbourhood. A further 4 items record purely management practices (B.T.C.).

LO Items

The 48 learning opportunities items (LO) are subdivided into two groups of 24 items each. 12 items of the first group refer to the quantity and quality of furnishings and provisions found within the living unit deemed **essential** to normal everyday living, whilst the other 12 items refer to **additional** provisions of the same type offering further opportunities within the home for expanding the residents social competence above the minimum level and involving some element of independent personal choice.

The first 12 learning opportunity items (LO) of the second group indicate to what extent **essential** physical and environmental opportunities, usually necessary for normal everyday living (such as shops, public transport, leisure facilities etc.) are available in the immediate neighbourhood. Whilst the further 12 items indicate **additional** similar neighbourhood facilities and learning opportunities in the locality.

CO Items

The 48 Coordination (CO) items are also subdivided into two groups of 24 items and indicate whether managerial practices permit the use of the provisions available in both the living unit and surrounding neighbourhood. The score also indicates how much use is made by the residents of these opportunities and whether any internal rules or regulations interfere with the residents social development.

Coordination (CO) items 25-36a are similar to the **essential** home opportunities scored in Learning Opportunity (LO) items 1-12a and indicate management practices relating to the home living unit. CO items 25-36b are similar to items 25-36a, but whereas the "a" items establish whether residents may exercise normal living practices within the living unit with no managerial restrictions, the "b" items establish whether residents actually use their skills in these situations.

Similarly Coordination (CO) items 37-48a establish the managerial approach to the neighbourhood scored in 13-24a, CO items 37-48b indicate whether residents are encouraged and helped to make full use of their environmental facilities and lead a relatively independent life using taught life skills in a realistic context.

THE LOCO score is therefore not a 'value judgement' but an indication of the number of learning **opportunities** available in a normal environment and the number of environmental and managerial **obstacles** present in a particular Living Unit inhibiting the development of genuine living skills in the mentally handicapped residents.

HYPOTHESIS

The investigation tested the hypothesis that many living units were neither capitalising on nor compensating for their environmental surroundings and that a systematised unified assessment procedure implemented at both living unit and day training units could effectively identify such situations.

It was also hoped that the investigation into these physical and managerial factors affecting the social and personal development of mentally handicapped people in living units would offer evidence to show that if mentally handicapped people were taught more life skills in context they would have either a better chance of long term survival in the new integrated community placements now dictated by government legislation, or a more independent existence in their own present living units.

METHOD

Ten Local Authority residential living units were selected which were thought to be broadly representative of British practice in this field, sampling both urban and rural areas and including one "new town" and one hospital location. An additional selection criterion was that each unit should be a fully staffed residential home for at least 16 mentally handicapped adults.

Further examination of the selected centres indicated that they fell into two separate groups. Five units located in Tayside, Scotland were unified by the use of a common assessment tool (the P-A-C) and were systematically following this programme of education and training in both living unit and adult day training centre. The remaining five were characterised by a more casual approach utilising various differing programmes separately in both living units and adult day training centres. It was decided to compare, on the basis of the LOCO results, whether there were any differences in the utilisation of learning opportunities and managerial practices in the two groups who were using different approaches.

Tayside, Scotland

In the light of the subsequent results of the investigation and the unexpected division of the living units into 'unified' and 'casual' groups it is relevant to present a more detailed historical perspective of the Tayside group.

Due to departmental reorganisation in 1984 the Residential Hostels and Adult Training Centres came under unified management. On examination a "rag bag" of ad hoc programmes and packages were found to be in use in all the different institutions and the new departmental team identified a need for both a common parlance and a more scientific approach to enable communication between all related units in the region. The management opted for a behavioural approach utilising assessment, goal planning, training packages and evaluation.

Pilot schemes were run for three to four months using four different 'packages', with the P-A-C programme emerging as the most successful programme to provide a unified common language across the region, i.e. where competence in Perth would equate to competence in Abroath etc.

In September 1984 the region embarked on a comprehensive long term pro-

gramme of staff training in P-A-C methodology, with all assessment procedures temporarily halted in the region until the staff were fully trained. The region brought in clinical services from the Health Board to implement a P-A-C training programme offered to every staff member in Residential and Day Care Services for the adult mentally handicapped population — ranging from domestic staff to unit managers. In theory this would provide standard, valid and reliable goal directed assessment and provisions throughout the region.

PROCEDURE

The staff at the living units contacted were unfamiliar with the LOCO assessment (and consequently had no previous records of any similar type of procedure) but were both interested and cooperative, as were the residents in the living units. A standard procedure was adopted by the author who completed all the assessments personally to ensure uniformity of scoring.

It seemed important to view daily life from the perspective of both the staff and the residents, so where possible residents were asked many of the questions before the staff were approached to validate their replies. Where possible, the author accompanied a resident in visits to the local post office, supermarket, GP taking the correct bus into shopping centre etc., and all relevant geographical locations scored were personally visited. In many cases the residents had a clearer understanding of the local transport network than the car driving staff who did not live locally. Every Post Office where pensions were drawn was visited on foot, with or without a resident. The author shared at least one main meal sitting with the residents, with the exception of the hospital unit, but observed both the initial preparation of the meal and the subsequent clearing up in all the units. She visited (by invitation) male and female rooms in each unit and where possible joined in free-time activities.

Data was also collected on residents such as the severity of handicap, length of time in residential care, what proportion of the residential community were recent hospital release patients and how many residents had either left the hostel and moved into more independent community placements or were hoping to do so in the near future.

Four living units in Tayside, and one in England had a separate training programme housed either within the unit or in the grounds and this was scored on a separate LOCO assessment to test for any significant differences in scores between living units and training units under the same management.

It became apparent that what was considered reasonable walking distance to shops etc. for one community was often regarded as an unreasonable distance by other communities who had either better access to public transport or more local facilities. In the light of this disparity the distance walked by the residents to these various facilities was accurately measured.

Statistical Analysis of Results

The investigation was designed to take account of the raw scores of the LOCO chart which total 100 and to allow analysis in terms of significant differences between Living Units. Where statistical tests are cited they are Mann-Whitney U Test (one-tail).

RESULTS

General Analysis of Total LOCO Scores

The ten living units were scored on an overall LOCO score and a direct comparative score of the 100 items over the ten units was also obtained. Where the living unit also had a training unit under the same management this was similarly scored, enabling a direct comparison to be made between the two related units and with all other units scored. In accordance with the hypothesis the units were divided into two equal groups. The five Tayside units following a unified assessment approach obtained a median LOCO score of 78 (range 5) and the five units following a more 'ad hoc' casual approach obtained a median score of 67 (range 25).

Table I

	Casual					Unified				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
BTC	4	4	1	1	4	4	1	4	4	2
Ftss.	35	36.5	29.3	35	38.8	39.5	40.3	41	39.5	42.5
Add.	28	33	22.3	29.5	35.5	34.7	34	35.5	36	33
Total	67	74	53	66	78	78	75	77	80	78
Median	67		Range 25			Median 78		Range 5		

General LOCO Score

In the light of this validation which shows higher general LOCO scores in the unified system the scores of the two groups were subjected to further statistical analysis to identify any further differences between the units.

Analysis of Unified/Casual Living Unit CO Scores

The results of the unified and casual groups were analysed to see if the overall superiority of the unified group of five living units was maintained in the four separate Essential and Additional Coordination sub-scores (CO). The scores for Essential CO Items 25-36a were not significantly different in the two groups ($p = 0.155$), but the remaining three scores were: Essential CO Items 37-48a ($p = 0.028$), Additional CO Items 25-36b ($p = 0.017$) and Additional CO Items 37-48b ($p = 0.048$). These differences showed a significant superiority in management practices leading to enhanced performance in the Tayside unified living units over those with a more casual or 'ad hoc' approach.

Analysis of Training Units versus Living Units General LOCO Scores

Five of the ten Living Units also had a Training Unit either within the living unit or inside the grounds. Four of these were in the unified group and one in the

casual group. Table II shows little difference in the LOCO scores for the unified group, but a discrepancy of 23.4 in the casual T/U General LOCO score indicating that the Living Unit was not measuring up to the enhanced management practices in the Training Unit, and that the general LOCO score for this Training Unit was still below the scores obtained in the four Unified Training Units.

Table II

	C1	U5	U3	U4	U5
Living Unit	52.9	78.25	76.5	79.5	77.5
Training Unit	76.3	78.50	81.5	79.5	85.5
Difference	+23.4	+0.25	+5	0	+8

General LOCO Scores (Living Units versus Training Units)

Analysis of Learning Opportunity (LO) versus Coordination (CO) Scores in Unified/Casual Living Units

As shown in Tables III and IV both home and neighbourhood Learning Opportunity (LO) scores indicated that there was little environmental difference both within the ten living units and in their surrounding neighbourhoods. There was however a significant difference in the Coordination (CO) neighbourhood scores ($p = .016$) indicating that the casual group were failing to take advantage of their favourable locations, with management practices appearing to restrain the residents from moving freely about their local neighbourhoods. Table V highlights the fact that the general Learning Opportunity (LO) scores for the ten living units were similar as expected but the Coordination (CO) scores were highly significant ($p = .004$) and indicative of better and more cohesive management practices in the 'unified' Tayside group. (The slight difference in some total scores is due to rounding up as defined in LOCO scoring charts.)

Table III

	Casual					Unified				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Home Learning Opportunity (LO)	18	11	8	16	13	16	18	18	12	19
		Median 13 R10					Median 18 R7			
Home Coordination (CO)	17	22	15	20	23	21	23	21	22	23
		Median 20 R8					Median 22 R2			

Home Learning Opportunity (LO) and Coordination (CO) Scores

Table IV

	Casual					Unified				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Neighbourhood Learning Opportunity (LO)	18	20	19	18	20	22	20	19	21	19
		<u>Median 19 R2</u>					<u>Median 20 R3</u>			
Neighbourhood Coordination (CO)	11	16	9	10	15	16	15	19	19	15
		<u>Median 11 R7</u>					<u>Median 16 R4</u>			

(significance $p=.016$)**Neighbourhood Learning Opportunity (LO) and Coordination (CO) Scores****Table V**

	Casual					Unified				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Total Learning Opportunity (LO)	35	32	27	35	34	39	38	37	35	39
		<u>Median 34 R8</u>					<u>Median 38 R4</u>			
Total Coordination (CO)	28	38	24	30	41	36	38	40	41	37
		<u>Median 30 R17</u>					<u>Median 38 R5</u>			

(significance $p=.004$)**General Learning Opportunity (LO)/Coordination (CO) Scores****Comparative General Trends Across Living Units Learning Opportunity Scores (LO)**

There was little evidence of any major home or environmental inadequacies in the Learning Opportunity (LO) scores across all the Living Units. The negative points scored by all ten units were in the organisation of meal times, where the visible absence of standard items to be expected on a dining table represented an obstacle to informal learning, and the general institutional ethos contributed to unnecessary environmental poverty. A similar problem in all ten units was found in management attitudes to the basic provisions for residents bedrooms (and respite care rooms) which illustrated an initial environmental paucity, which was sometimes overcome in time by the more able residents.

The only comparative Learning Opportunity (LO) score difference between the unified and casual units was found in the provision of outside premises for storage and use of tools, paints, outdoor games etc. All to be found very well equipped in the unified Tayside group, but non-existent in four of the five casual living units.

Coordination Scores (CO)

In the coordination (CO) essential scores across all ten units, management practices in four unified and four casual units did not allow residents to look after their own savings, reinforcing surviving institutional practices. In four of the casual group living units residents were not allowed to choose their own doctor or dentist, whereas the majority of the residents in the Tayside units appeared to be offered this facility.

Although the management of all but one living unit had no overt restriction on residents having visitors of either sex in their own rooms, the additional coordination items indicated that in only one Tayside unit was this actually being put into practice. The additional Coordination Scores also indicated that the two units where management had trained residents to be in control of their own finances reported little difficulty in this area. Both essential and additional Coordination Scores highlighted the fact that in all but one Tayside unit residents had to account for their movements when going out.

A distressing fact emerging from the additional Coordination (CO) results was that although all ten living units encouraged residents to invite acquaintances and friends to their home, in only one unit did residents have any visitors other than close relatives. A similar result indicated that although the management theoretically allowed residents to pursue their own hobbies and interests in the living unit, there was only evidence from one of the casual and two of the unified groups that residents were actually doing so.

Discussion of Results

In the light of the prevailing political policies for people with mental handicap and the resulting emphasis on a shift from large scale institutionalisation to small scale integration within the community, current literature abounds with examples of 'normalisation' techniques and projects. A comprehensive overview of this can be found in Chamberlain (1988). However, a closer look at the results of both this investigation and the more cautious research reports may well beg the question of whether this so called 'normalisation' in the community context could become synonymous with isolation, finally giving rise to its own form of "micro-institutionalisation". Felce et al. (1988; 1989) in his well documented Hampshire research projects resettling people with mental handicap into small houses within the community, stresses the need for "many more examples of high quality services and further work on what distinguishes a high quality service from a mediocre or poor one before we can be satisfied that such services can be delivered routinely to those who need them". With this proviso in mind, the LOCO assessment procedure proved to be an informative predictor of the environmental and managerial influences defining the quality of service offered to the residents in the various living units in this investigation.

The use of a unified cohesive P-A-C procedure may also explain the fact that four of the five Tayside living units also saw the need for separate training units as opposed to only one of the casual group. The efficacy of these training units was proved by the number of residents who were then able to live relatively independent lives in local community houses.

It was evident from the results of the LOCO assessment that although all the units were comfortably equipped and had access to most of the environmental facilities deemed necessary for twentieth century comfort, only the unified Tayside group (through initial P-A-C assessment) had identified and provided for the more subtle self-actualising leisure needs of their residents. Felce (1988, 1989) identified that the major need of residents was to be meaningfully occupied for the bulk of their time, and provided opportunity, choice and support to this end. Sinson and Stainton (1990) reported cases of failed community placements and subsequent return to institutions of people with mental handicap unable to deal effectively with their increased leisure time when faced with the new liberal policies of integration. It would appear that meaningful leisure choices can only be present if the environment (here in the form of the living unit) provides the support which the casual group were clearly not facilitating. The results also emphasised the relative isolation in the form of community contact of all the living units, although most were ideally placed within the centre of small neighbourhood communities. The inference drawn is that in the light of this community isolation, individual leisure choices must become more meaningful to the individual.

Even accepting that in the concept of normalisation, individual meaningful leisure is a somewhat abstract concept, many of the living units fared no better with more concrete aspects of normalisation. In four of the casual groups of living units management concurred with local authorities in time saving/cost cutting decisions to provide various contract cleaning, catering and gardening services to the units, thus in one fell swoop not only depriving the residents of many of the purposeful everyday experiences of their more able peers, but denuding their environment of any opportunity of learning life skills in a real life context. Combined with the fact that in eight of the ten living units residents had little or no financial independence...local authorities ruling that they were not capable of handling their own money, savings or pension books, except in daily management 'handouts', opportunities for normal personal development appeared to be severely curtailed especially in the casual group. By contrast, in the two units where residents had been carefully trained to appreciate their financial status, handle their own pension books and given financial responsibility relative to their growing appreciation of the value of money, little difficulty was reported.

In the course of this investigation the author noted several of the minority already living in the community returning to the units for Sunday lunch, weekday tea, lifts to Gateway Club etc. Appearing to feel isolated, lonely and unable to make new friends they returned to see the residents and staff they regarded as their friends. Independent community living is not a realistic option for many people with mental handicap, and certainly most older people will end their days in similar local authority units to those in this investigation. Given an informed choice and true self advocacy it may well be that many adults would prefer the companionship and caring concern they currently experience. One would hope they could be given adequate opportunities within their living unit for personal

development where "normalisation" was not seen as a hypothetic concept or research strategy — but the experience of the developmental challenges of normal everyday life.

Conclusions

The investigation supported the hypothesis that many living units were not capitalising on or compensating for their environmental surroundings. The enhanced unified group (Tayside) LOCO assessment scores indicated that a systematic unified, goal directed assessment procedure (P-A-C) implemented in both living and day training units, combined with an environmental LOCO score could effectively identify such situations.

The investigation also identified those management practices that limited the personal development and normalisation of people with mental handicap resident in living units, facilitating a process that the author has termed "micro-institutionalisation". The characteristics of which would appear to be the transference of those institutional practices found in large scale institutions to their smaller community replacements, whereby management assume total control over basic individual life and leisure experiences such as cooking, cleaning, gardening, decorating, financial experience and freedom of movement.

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