

NEWS      RELEASE

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May, 1973

The mentally retarded are capable of doing far more complicated jobs than they now are given to do, a University of Illinois psychologist says.

To prove it, the psychologist, Dr. Marc W. Gold, tested the ability of 64 moderately to severely retarded adolescents to assemble a 15-piece bicycle brake.

These adolescents, with an average IQ of 40, were in sheltered workshops throughout Illinois.

Gold, a professor at the university's Children's Research Center and the institute for Research on Exceptional Children, points out that assembling the brakes 'is a task which almost no one could do without some training or practice.'

The retarded subjects learned to do the task in just over two hours. And they were able to assemble an average of 22 brakes an hour per person with an overall error rate of less than 5 per cent.

They performed equally well in assembling 24-piece brakes.

The retarded are 'doing garbage' now because their abilities are underestimated, Gold said in an interview.

In sheltered workshops which contract for work, they are given such jobs as putting plastic spoons in plastic bags, sorting colored computer cards for recycling and sealing plastic bags.

The type of work these people are given reflects society's values, Gold said, adding, 'Basically they're the hand-me-downs of society.'

There are an estimated 6 or 7 million persons classed as mentally retarded in the United States.

The moderately to severely retarded, who include most of the Mongoloids, are capable of doing jobs at which they could earn \$2 an hour or more, Gold says.

He is developing plans to start a factory, in cooperation with a partner and a corporation, in which 50 retarded workers will be hired to assemble circuit boards for electronic instruments.

Such employment could provide these mentally retarded workers about \$5,000 a year, Gold estimates.

Once they are given more complicated tasks and learn to do them, Gold said, the retarded 'come out happy, aware they can do things they never thought they could."

It is the organization of tasks which requires intelligence and not the performance of the tasks themselves, the psychologist notes, adding that so-called normal individuals spend much of their time daily doing routine tasks which a 5-year-old can do.

The absence of any correlation between to. and the ability to learn tasks such as bicycle brake assembly suggests, Gold says, that IQ is no indication of how people are going to learn nonverbal, manipulative tasks.