Case report

Craft techniques in conductive education to support the employment of persons with mobility impairments

Robert Mascher*

Institute of Human Sciences, Semmelweis University, András Pető Faculty, Hungary

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Conductive education
Conductor training
Craft techniques
Employment

ABSTRACT

The purpose of conductive education is to enable disabled people to work and to lead an active, meaningful and independent life. Our conductors are constantly working to achieve this goal, as we cannot overlook the fact that the young people who have completed our schools have several decades of active years ahead of them. In addition to my work in the conductor training, I consider it my priority to help our pupils learn as much as possible about the job opportunities available and develop the manual skills that can help them get to work.

I focused my attention on two areas, the first of which is the monitoring of the professions facing our pupils. In the conductor training, we introduce new procedures and try them out continuously during teaching practices. The second is to get to know the inclusive workplaces available in order to get a realistic picture of the job opportunities facing our pupils. In addition to workshops and interviews, my research also involved gathering international experiences and data from institutions.

In my article, I will give examples of collaborative workshops, employment organizations. It became clear that within the András Pető Faculty it would be difficult to carry out a multi-professional training course on its own. Success requires the involvement of collaborative institutions with an educational team and workshop. I also believe that our students in Pető will be much more successful if they are given more manual activities at primary school. Examples will be shown in my article.

The most important element will be the day care in our institution. In doing so, within the framework of development employment, 10-12 people with disabilities can work together, preparing them for employment.

“School is for learning how to learn, for waking up your desire for knowledge, getting to know the joy of a job well done, tasting the thrill of creating, and finding the job you’re going to love.”

Albert Szent-Györgyi, Nobel Prize-winning Hungarian doctor, biochemist

1. Background

An important area of research regarding the integration of people with cerebral palsy in society is to examine employment opportunities. Most of the young people leaving the schools of the András Pető Faculty may never get a job in the ordinary sense. In Hungary, the András Pető Faculty offers primary education and vocational training for persons with cerebral palsy. Several studies have addressed the development of school skills of pupils with cerebral palsy in conductive education [1]. When choosing craft activities, it is important for children to see and experience what they are capable of and what their disability may allow them to do. A key question is whether the craft activity matches their abilities and expectations. If we look at the options available in public education, we see that technical and visual education classes are the right option. However, there are always children with special education needs who will be able to perform some manual activity, but even for these usually only the simplest professions will be available, we must prepare the students even for these.

In terms of choosing craft activities, it is paramount that children get to know, experience what they are capable of, what their disability allows them to do? Is it a priority task to know if craft activity meets their abilities and expectations? If we look at the possibilities of public education, we see that the technical and the visual education classes are the suitable opportunities.

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: mascher.robert@semmelweis-univ.hu.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e10641
Received 30 December 2021; Received in revised form 25 May 2022; Accepted 8 September 2022
2405-8440/© 2022 The Author. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).
2. Objectives

In my paper, I will review these possibilities from two perspectives.

- The first, particularly important focus is on what craft activities our young students can undertake. How can we prepare our young people with disabilities for these appropriately?
- The other area to look at is where young persons can find employment. We need to find out what kind of host institutions and jobs are available. What are the possibilities of cooperation with these institutions?

The techniques revealed during the research or known previously are worth being introduced to children with cerebral palsy already during the years of public education.

During conductive education [2], we have to entrust the introduction of the activities to our conductors who are familiar with the Pető method and the given group of children. As a matter of course, our specialists must be prepared for this task during their training. With conductor students, we already study and try as many different activities as possible. In addition, during practical training in teaching we can test new procedures in a playful manner. We assess how students feel about the given technique, the new tools. This is how we have introduced felting, more recently the knotted batique process, or decoupage (also called napkin technique). Naturally the technique of clay modelling is indispensable. The stretching and tearing of playdough can be linked with it, and then many constructive tasks can be built on these.

3. Methods

There are a number of instruments for monitoring disability and work needs [3, 4, 5] but in my case, the small number of young persons involved and the specific diagnosis of cerebral palsy do not yet allow us to use these efficiently. Thus, in the course of the research, in addition to the directed observation and interviews conducted during the workshop visits, my methods also included the collection and analysis of data and experiences of international employment institutions.

4. Results

In this paper, with the help of the craft of papermaking I illustrate my aspiration, the arc of the process I have envisioned, how we can get from teacher training, through playful creative work in children's conductive groups to the world of labour. This technique is new knowledge and an exciting task for almost all of our students. In our training system, papermaking will be introduced in the spring term of the third year of conductor training, but typically in the following autumn semester, in the fourth year of the training, the student can deliver a lesson with the freshly acquired knowledge. They will be able to show the kids this simple, playful procedure which does not require complicated movements. It is a great pleasure for children to be able to create beautiful sheets from recycled paper or pulp, a rather strange textured pulp. Later on we shall paint on the sheets and make objects. We can see the same task accomplished in mainstream schools, children there are also very happy to learn this technique. In addition, we had the opportunity to introduce paper dipping to the adult clients at the creative workshop of the András Pető Faculty. They embedded plants and coloured papers in the handmade paper, thus creating decorative compositions.

As we can see, paper dipping is a simple, playful task, but it can also be considered a craft and a profession. The English Artizan movement [6] in Ecuador, for example, is working on this. They teach people with disabilities in the area, but not just as a leisure activity, papermaking is taught as a craft. At the end of the training, each participant is provided with a basic set, a sieve, and dipping vessels. They return to their own settlements where they can start a small business as an independent craftsperson. They can sell their greeting cards and other products in markets, but the Artizan movement itself buys a certain amount of artifacts every month, which are then sold online. With this system, they can provide livelihood for many people with disabilities.

I was able to find more examples as well. One of these is the Pfennigparade [7] workshop in Germany, where craft activities are also carried out while there is regular conductive education and work in addition. The other notable enterprise is the craft brewery of the Israeli Tsad Kadima [8] organization. A small factory has been set up where young people with disabilities brew their own beer. They also bottle, design the label, but are also involved in sales.

Of course, I also found a good number of opportunities in our home country, in Hungary for our young people with disabilities to practise useful activities. We have to inform the young people growing up at the institutions of the András Pető Faculty about the workshops operating all over the country and it is also worth contacting them at organizational level as well.

Based on the experience of my research, three forms of cooperation can be developed:

- Our students with disabilities can visit the given workshop to experience what a factory is like in real life, where persons with reduced capacity to work can be employed. They can learn about several activities up close.
- In a reverse line-up, due to the limited mobility, it is more practical for these plants to visit our school at Villányi street. They can show what job opportunities are available in their organization, what activities are going on, what tools they use. They can also talk in person to people with disabilities who may work for them.
- In the third construction, intensive cooperation could develop with one of the organisations. They would create a workshop at the András Pető Faculty to provide employment opportunities for our students within our walls.

I have been dealing with the matter for several years, getting to know the organizations working in the field. In my writing, I flash three examples of different sizes and locations.

The first location we have visited is Kaposvár, within the framework of the Institute Development Project operating during the time of the then András Pető College. Our destination was the aquaponic farming of the Napsugár Rehabilitation and Habilitation Center [9]. In addition, we examined how people with disabilities live and work in the specific handicraft workshops, where boxes, pots, and gift-making took place. *Ezt nem értünk!* A larger organization is Cooperation for Equal Chances Nonprofit Ltd. Company [10], where 500 persons with disabilities are employed. They work on setting together the Farm Smartly board game. A ceramic duplicating plant, a textile workshop is in operation. A lot of people find their account there.

The nearest location, Marczibányi square, is the MEREK Rehabilitation Centre for Physically Disabled People [11], whose director is a former graduate of our conductor training programme. As part of our collaboration, one of our student conductors volunteered there for a year in connection with her Students' Scientific Association research in order to acquire further knowledge regarding the activities of young people with disabilities. He summarized the results and experiences of his observation in his dissertation. Among the products made there, the production of linen bags and the making of small ceramic ornaments should be highlighted, of which we could find a parallel at the Conductive School on our campus at Villányi Street [12]. During their practical training in teaching, our students also delivered a bag painting session. In connection with the small ceramic ornaments, we can refer to the playdough-cutting tasks of small children in the lower grades. The two parallels show how easy switching from play activity to work activity can be.

5. Conclusions

These observations are encouraging, indicating that we are on the right track. We are currently taking steps in three areas:
Our practice school, SE PAK EKPMI (Semmelweis University András Pető Faculty, EKPMI Conductive Practice Vocational School Institutional Unit) [10] is a suitable field. There is still great technical education, but the upper grade techniques need to be reformed, it is advisable to implement several craft activities here.

The Conductive Vocational School has been operating for four years. Now students can obtain a qualification in IT and data management but from the very beginning, the gift-making activity was also included in the plans. We can establish that it is important, and it has been realized but an optional module must be started to prepare them for craft activities.

The most important element is Semmelweis University’s strategic infrastructure development program, which allows us to implement day care in our institution. In doing so, within the framework of development employment, 10–12 people with disabilities can work together, being prepared for employment.

This case report shows that we must not forget that students with special education needs are in our care until the age of 16–17, and then many of them could spend up to fifty years in the world of labour. In addition to providing conducive development, we also have a responsibility to help them find a craft which may enable them to make a living or become their passion [13]. In addition to introducing them to the world of labour, we should not underestimate the fact that spending free time with creative activities is also important in maintaining spiritual freshness and self-esteem.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

All authors listed have significantly contributed to the investigation, development and writing of this article.

Funding statement

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability statement:

Data will be made available on request.

Declaration of interest’s statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

References

[1] H. Pintér, F. Gál, P. Molnár, The professional network underlying cerebral palsy intervention research based on systematic reviews and meta-analyses published in international journals: authors’ communities, institutional networks, and international collaboration, Helyon (2022) (in press) Manuscript Number: HELION-D-21-1209682.
[2] E. Balogh, I. Kozma, The neurological indication of conductive education for children, Neurological Review (62) (2009) 1–2, p. 12-22. (Balogh, E. & Kozma, I. (2009). A konduktív neveles gyermekneurológiai indikáció. Ideggyógyászati Szemle, (62) 1. 212-222.).
[3] European Commission, European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52010DC0636&from=EN.
[4] F. Andries, A.M. Kremer, W.E. Hoogendoorn, C.W.J. Wevers, D.J. van Putten, Working with a chronic disorder—the development of the work and handicap questionnaire, Int. J. Rehabil. Res. 27 (1) (2004 Mar) 37–44.
[5] R.D. Wilton, Disability disclosure in the workplace, Just Labour 8 (2006).
[6] www.artizaninternational.org.
[7] www.pfennigparade.de/produkte-und-dienstleistungen/handwerkliche-dienstleistungen.
[8] https://tsadkadima.org.il/en/homepage/what-we-do/special-programs/homebrewing/.
[9] https://napsugarkozpont.hu/felnott-intezmenyek/napsugarkozpont.hu/home.html?
[10] https://onze unpopular.hu/english/.
[11] https://www.merek.hu/node/69.
[12] https://semmelweis.hu/peto-ekpmi/konduktiv-szakiskola/.
[13] Ricardo Pagán, What makes workers with disabilities happy? The importance of non-Pecuniary Characteristics, Health Econ. 23 (2) (2014 Feb) 241–247.