

Learning Resources for the Handicapped

By

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INTRODUCTION

In the International Year for Disabled Persons (IYDP), attention was being focussed at last on a most worthy cause, the information needs of disabled individuals. More people are becoming aware and getting involved in the difficult task of educating handicapped children, a task which for many years has been shouldered, albeit laboriously, by missionaries, volunteer groups and some courageous individuals. It is now mandatory for the Federal and State governments to concern themselves with schools and institutions for handicapped persons who from time to time have shown their mettle in the educational, economic and social arena when given the chance. This paper is concerned with indicating the ways in which the learning opportunities of handicapped persons, especially the children in schools, can be improved. The learning resources and aids for specific handicapping conditions will be identified and institutions and societies abroad which would willingly send materials on request will be indicated. The paper will be concluded with guide to stock selection for a library serving handicapped children.

The British National Children's Bureau in its publication *'Living with handicap'*, defines handicap as 'a disability which permanently or for a substantial period retards, distorts or adversely affects normal development or adjustment. Such a definition covers a wide variety of handicapped person. However, the major groups of handicapped persons to be considered in this paper are: the blind and visually handicapped and the deaf and hard of hearing.

THE BLIND AND VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

Persons who cannot use regular size print materials are considered to have a visual impairment and this could range from partial sightedness or residual vision to a total and complete loss of sight. The legal definition of blindness is having visual acuity in one's better eye — after correction of 20/200 or less. This means that a blind person is one who sees at 20 feet or less what a sighted person sees at 200 feet, which implies that some legally blind persons — the partially sighted or those with some useful residual vision and the totally blind.

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Blind and partially sighted persons are considered print-handicapped because their reading materials have to be produced specially, either in the form of embossed writing called braille which they read with the tips of their fingers or recorded on tape for listening purposes or enlarged for partially sighted people.

Braille: This is a means of writing and communication for the blind. It is a system of six raised dots, combined in different ways to form the basic alphabet in the English Language. It is made manually with the use of a Perkins Braille which is a special braille typewriter. It can now also be produced by computer as is done in some developed countries. These countries, for example, Britain, U.S.A., Denmark and Norway each has a centralized advisory and service organization responsible for producing and distributing educational materials for blind children in schools. The arduous task of producing materials in braille, for example, is not left to schools for blind children as done here in Nigeria.

To be a good braille reader, one must have fingers sensitive to touch to feel the braille dots and a very good memory to remember the different dot combinations and connotations. This is why braille is taught to the young blind, the older blind people find it difficult to master braille. A further complication is posed by the fact that each language has a different braille code and a braille reader has to learn the code and symbols for each language. The English Braille Grade II is however standardized for the English speaking world.

The Royal National Institute for the Blind in Britain and the *Utrecht Blindenbibliotheek* in the Hague have catalogs of brailled materials which they can lend to blind persons outside their countries on request. They however wish to have borrowed items returned. The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress also produces Braille Review, a bi-monthly magazine listing books in braille for blind readers subscribing to this service.

Recorded Media: There are many forms of recorded materials for the blind. The most popular is the talking book or book recorded on cassette tape for play-back and listening to by the blind. Britain, U.S.A., Canada, Australia and the Scandinavian countries have impressive programmes of recording student textbook and recreational reading materials for their blind populations. In these countries, there

are well stocked libraries of talking books and magazines sent by mail to readers on request. Such readers are also provided with play back machines.

The Library of Congress National Library Service has compiled several lists of recorded materials, apart from being a source by itself. One of such lists is *Magazines on Special Media 1976* which list over 300 magazine titles in various formats available by direct circulation, loan, inter-library loan and paid subscription. The American Printing House for the Blind produces textbooks in varied media and keeps a catalog of recorded American textbooks. Recordings for the Blind Inc. also publishes records educational books and loans them to the blind and physically handicapped.

MAGNIFICATION AIDS

There are several magnification aids used by people with residual vision. These range from hand held or desk mounted magnifiers to closed circuit television which create a magnified form of varied printed matter. There are also different reading machines such as the Optacon and Kurzwell. The Optacon converts printed matter into tactile forms which can be felt and identified with one finger, the Kurzwell machine converts it into speech outputs. These machines are very expensive and perhaps out of reach of many libraries in Nigeria.

The Hearing Impaired:

There are different kinds of deafness producing degree of hearing impairment. Some people are born deaf or become deaf before learning to speak. These are the prelingually deaf who experience great difficulties in understanding and communicating. Because he has never heard language, the child has difficulty in speaking and in understanding the spoken word and may therefore become educationally retarded despite normal intelligence.

The child who has partial hearing or who has been deafened through accident or sickness will have heard spoken language and has therefore some experience of speech on which to model his own. Whether prelingually or post-lingually impaired, the deaf child is likely to have defective speech and limited language which both in turn, affect his reading ability. Since reading is the window to knowledge, the deaf child is taught to read, but the literature is replete with the poor reading performance of deaf school children. Prelingually deaf British and American school leavers aged 16 have been found to have a reading age of 9 years only. Consistently, research has shown that deaf children of all ages lag behind their hearing peers (3,4,5,6,) in reading.

This poor reading performance on the part of deaf children can be easily explained. While the school age hearing child has a huge vocabulary of words and is fast accumulating more through communicating in speech fluently, grammatically and effectively, his deaf peer knows only a few words which he alters sometimes incomprehensibly. While the hearing child knows through relating sound the meanings of the words he speaks, and the objects representing them, the deaf child has to be taught each and everyone of what he learns. Naturally then, when the hearing child finally begins to decipher unfamiliar print into familiar speech sounds through reading, the deaf child is way behind trying to understand the single word(s) he has learnt. These deaf children are often of normal intelligence but they face the problem faced by deaf children of learning to read without experiencing speech sounds. They learn to communicate by seeing and making signs.

Several means of communication with the deaf exist. There is finger spelling where the fingers indicate letters of the alphabet, there is signing, lipreading and speech. There are also electronic aids such as teleprinters, video-tapes teletext which aid communication. There are also hearing aids which are now being made with increasing sophistication. These imply that sound, vision and touch separately and/or combined are available for communication with deaf persons. Drama is also now being used by the British Theatre of the Deaf. They employ mime speech and signing to bring pleasure and comprehension to the deaf. The National Theatre of the Deaf in the U.S.A. also have similar drama programmes for the deaf.

There are no special books made for the deaf as such. But some books are adapted for less able hearing children and foreign students learning English. These vary from simplified classics to remedialized editions of information books. Examples are *Macdonald Easy Reading Editions* e.g. *Introduction to Nature Series*, *Visual Series*, *Countries Series*, *Heinemann Guided Readers* which includes non-fiction. *Longman Publishers Structural Readers* of popular titles. These can all be used by deaf children because of the high interest but low vocabulary quality of the books.

In Norway, one publisher, H. Ascheboug, has produced a number of books for young children, where above the simple text and pictures, there are, neat drawings illustrating the manual signs. These show the shape of the mouth and the manual sign for each word. Deaf and hearing children can read these books together! The deaf also make use of captioned films which can be run slowly to give them time to read the captions.

STOCK SELECTION FOR THE HANDICAPPED CHILD

Stock selection requires the librarians to assess material from the simplest to the most complex, textually and visually in print and aurally and visually in film and audio materials. This is especially true when selecting materials for handicapped children. The following list indicates the kinds of materials to be selected for libraries serving special children:

1. Picture books with braille for blind children.
2. Large print book and braille materials.
3. Non-traditional materials e.g. tactual books which blind children can feel, pop up, scratch and sniff books.
4. Cassettes, tapes, discs.
5. Films.
6. Simplified editions for the deaf.
7. Kits and games.
8. Toys.
9. Periodicals.
10. Journals of societies for the handicapped and of special educational bodies.
11. Trade catalogues of equipment for the handicapped.
12. Books for parents and others about the handicapped child.

In choosing the books for the library, the librarian must be aware of relevance of the book content to the experience of the children she's serving. The language of the book is also important. Simple descriptive vocabulary is needed because many handicapped children are retarded in reading. Illustrations are useful in aiding comprehension, especially if they are strictly related to the text.

For audio-visual materials, there are numerous catalogues ranging from commercial catalogues to those of educational organizations and scientific and technical associations. Many national libraries abroad record books for the handicapped. The National Listening Library in Britain and the National Library Service for Blind and Physically Handicapped persons in America are examples. In selecting audio visual materials for the handicapped, the librarian must take note of the quality of sound, speed of reading, clarity of photographs in films and slides, availability of appropriate viewing/listening equipment and ease of use of these media by the children with/without supervision.

to end this paper, here are some sources which can render help on request in the collection development of libraries for handicapped children.

SOURCES ON BLINDNESS AND VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

1. American Foundation for the Blind,
15 West 16th Street,
New York, NEW YORK 10011.

Publishes books, pamphlets and a catalog of devices and aids for professional persons, blind persons and the general public.

2. American Printing House for the Blind, Inc.
1839 Frankfort Avenue, Louisville,
Kentucky 40206.

Publishes large type braille text books, grades 1 and 2 in all subject areas.

3. Library of Congress, National Library Service for the
Blind and Physically Handicapped,
1291 Taylor Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20542.

Publishes the following Reference Circulars:

- a. Aids for Handicapped Readers, 1972
- b. Bibles in Special Media, 1973
- c. Commercial Sources of Spoken Word Recorded Materials, 1973
- d. Magazines in Special Media, 1976
- e. Reading Materials in Large Type, 1975
- f. Sources of Children's Book/Record, Cassette/Record and Print/
Braille Materials, 1974.

4. Royal National Institute for the Blind,
224 Great Portland Street,
London, WIN 6AA, ENGLAND.

Offers lending facilities for braille and recorded materials to foreign students.

SOURCES ON DEAFNESS AND HEARING IMPAIRMENT

1. Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf,
3417 Volta Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007.

Produces a variety of resources, on deafness.

2. Gallaudet College,
Kendell Green,
Washington, D.C. 20002.

The bookstore publishes a list of available books, pamphlets, posters and media. Gallaudet Memorial Library has an extensive collection of materials (in varied formats) on deafness in the world.

3. Morayo Atinmo,
Department of Library Studies,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria.

I shall be willing to render help in an advisory/consulting capacity to Librarians wishing to set and/or expand facilities for handicapped children.

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