

Book Reviews . . .

a go at the Turks as well, and she says:

“there are many more habits they have like keeping chickens in kitchen cupboards and I understand neighbours have to ring the Health Department because of odour. These people are a health hazard.”

To be fair, the selected evidence does present rather more on the side of the sober and progressive than the other end of the spectrum.

The book, and of course the report, provides us with an invaluable insight into human relationships. On the whole the picture is an ugly one, there is not much to be proud of about how we treat women, children, migrants, the handicapped and aborigines. If the material appears to be too slanted towards the sexual side of human relations, then we must put this down to the fact that it is a highly topical area for discussion. What is missing, however, is some insight into what is positive, equitable and good in human relationships in Australia; surely there must be some good things to be said too? There is no word about truth, love, beauty, altruism, service, nothing about kindness, consideration, sacrifice or just sheer humanitarianism, yet we all have experience of some or all of these aspects of human relationships. More specifically, the topics themselves seem to me at least to have left out some pretty important areas for discussion, for instance, what about human relationships at the work-place?

All the same, I recommend this book to every thinking person, and when you have read it, tell your

friends about it and make them read it too. You will end up, I am sure, with the conclusion that we have a long way to go in Australia, on the evidence provided, but it is up to every one of us to play a part in bringing about improvement. The late Pablo Casals once said something like this:

“it is a hell of a rotten world, but we must make a start.”

. . . I feel the same way.

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Visually Handicapped Children and Young People.

Author: Elizabeth K. Chapman
Publisher: Routledge, and Kegan Paul London, Henley and Boston 1978

Price: \$16.50
162 Pages

There would appear to be some appeal in the availability of a book which, in 150 pages, claims coverage of the education of the visually handicapped from pre-school to further education. Unfortunately, this brevity means that some aspects are dealt with in a superficial fashion. For example, within a five page section covering the “Structure of the

Eye and Some Possible Defects and Diseases”, the author condenses a discussion of the structure of the retina to simply: “the highly sensitive retina lining the back of the eye is embedded with rods and cones”, with neither explanation nor diagram for the unwary that these may not be geometrical protuberances. Devoting an eight page final chapter to the assessment of the intellectual, social and educational attainments of visually handicapped children has some appearance of being an afterthought to “round out” the book.

In contrast to this attempt to provide extremely broad coverage, it is in the three central chapters of almost 100 pages that the book excels. Relying heavily on British references, there is a comprehensive review of the development of educational provisions for blind and partially sighted children through their school years, and their social and personal development from childhood to adolescence. The author’s approach is significant largely because the content is not simply a well-compiled and ordered presentation of other people’s research but gives, in addition, personal opinions and practical approaches to teaching situations and educational philosophies.

Illustrating this approach, Chapman warns that “devising and reproducing (tactile) material can be so fascinating that it can tempt the teacher into being almost overingenious so that the resultant work is overcrowded with a diversity of texture and detail”; believes that “braille is not literacy but rather represents the gateway to literacy”, and emphasises that education in the self-help independent living

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skills must not be an unimportant “extra” relegated to odd times and places. It is this injection of personal experience that enriches the book’s central portion that covers early and present provisions for the visually handicapped in Britain, special teaching techniques, learning to listen, reading and writing braille, print reading and writing, mathematics and number concepts, orientation and movement training, self-concept development, development of communication and personal relationships and sex education.

These chapters devoted essentially to the practitioner give full recognition to the need to promote and provide appropriate learning through visual means for the large number of visually handicapped children who are not totally blind, but who are essentially visually functioning. However, the book will again be confusing to those who have no more complete explanation of what constitutes “blindness”, other than that contained in this book. While the Snellen “ratio” defining visual acuity is explained, the author nowhere clearly distinguishes between “blind” and “partially sighted”. This is unfortunate when so many of the references to research and educational provisions in the U.K. relate specifically to children on these “registers”.

It is in the various references to the provision of segregated education that many Australian special educators will be interested. Reflecting, as it appears to do, the hesitant steps towards integrated education in the U.K., there is little recognition of the situation in other countries. It would be unfortunate if a reader was left with the impression that, universally, the special school

for the visually handicapped is “increasingly one of weekly boarding, or at least frequent weekend visits home by pupils”. In Australia, as in other countries, the provision of a peripatetic (visiting) teacher service is not directed solely to partially sighted but also to the totally blind child in mainstream education. Nevertheless, it must be said that the author (again in the context of British provisions relying on peripatetic staff operating over a wide range of handicaps) devotes a number of thought-provoking pages to the topic of the visually handicapped pupil in the ordinary school.



In a chapter on further education, vocational guidance and placement, Chapman describes the British approach where specific training is provided within vocational and assessment centres, and suggest that there may indeed be some overlapping of services in that country. While advocating the need for career education to begin early, rather than simply providing information in the last school years, the author reports (surprisingly, without further comment) that of the 16 schools surveyed in one study, only **three** schools for the **partially sighted** had identifiable work experience programs (Reviewer’s emphasis).

For the serious student or experienced reader there will be some

difficult factual statements to interpret, such as the description of the use of the blindfold as “a normal aspect of training procedure in mobility”. Furthermore, a review of this book cannot pass without comment on the awkward and unsettling style of much of the writing and the apparent lack of editing. Many examples exist throughout the text and make for difficult reading — viz.: “Tobin (1971a) underlines the implication of this aspect of the cognitive development of children who see little or nothing in his coordination of some of the conclusions drawn from internationally based research (p. 20)”. To conclude an already lengthy sentence of seven lines, the author is left saying “. . . ; the points for the teacher to watch here are to see if the working position can be made easier and more comfortable when holding the work at a near distance does seem helpful to the pupil (p. 47)”.

Dubious though the claim is to being the first British book on this subject, **Visually Handicapped Children and Young People** constitutes a welcome addition to a sparse field, particularly where it focusses on the real and functional aspects of the education of the visually handicapped. As **part of** a guide for the person interested in the education of such children, this book therefore makes a valuable contribution.

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