

Madhumita Puri and George Abraham (eds.). *Handbook of Inclusive Education for Educators, Administrators, and Planners: Within Walls, Without Boundaries*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004. 309 pages. Paperback. Indian Rs 450.00.

The book is a manual aimed at educators, administrators, and planners involved in dealing with disabled children. Although education is considered to be a basic human right, yet according to UNICEF some 113 million children have no access to education. For disabled children, “only 1 in every 50 children with disability has access to education” (p. 18).

The manual has been organised in three parts. Part I is basically a bird’s eye view of Inclusive Education. The term is defined on page 25 of the book in the following words: “Inclusive education is concerned with removing all barriers to learning, and with the participation of all learners vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation. It is a strategic approach designed to facilitate learning success for all children. It addresses the common goals of decreasing and overcoming all exclusion from the human right to education, at least at the elementary level, and enhancing access, participation, and learning success in quality basic education for all”.¹

After a brief introduction, the editors of the handbook highlight some of the international steps taken that cover the field of inclusive education. These include some of the following: International Year of Disabled Persons (1981); Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1992); and the United Nations World Conference on Special Education (1994). A significant resolution passed at this meeting strongly endorsed the view that children, who are disabled in any way, must be able to enter the normal educational system.

Furthermore, this handbook also highlights some of the actions taken in India to deal with the issue of disabled children by bringing them into the mainstream of society. Some of the initiatives proposed in India include the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (1974); the National Policy on Education (1986–92); the District Primary Education Programme (1994), and the Persons with Disability Act (1995). In general, the purpose of these initiatives, both at the national as well as the international level, is to help disabled children to have access to education so that they can lead productive lives as normal children do.

Part II of the manual/handbook discusses the main disorders that affect disabled children. These include difficulties in hearing, in seeing, and in learning—for example, dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia, and cerebral palsy. Other disabilities include those that relate to orthopedics and intellectual impairment as well as autism.

¹*Education for All 2000 Bulletin*, UNESCO, No. 32, (1998).

Each of these disabilities is dealt with in detail with suggestions as to how the teacher is expected to deal with each case. Classrooms need special features and the teaching requirement is different, to some extent, from that in normal schools. Furthermore, the training of teachers is very important because interacting with disabled children requires special skills as well as patience.

Part III of the handbook looks at the role of special schools and how an 'ideal' school should be established and operated. The central message of this book is that no child should be denied education, especially those who are disabled for no fault of their own. The educational system should be flexible enough to cater to the needs of the special children so as to enable them to become part of the society as a whole. Disability should not be looked upon as a stigma. Although the book is about disabled children in India, Pakistan also has similar problems, and it is necessary that non-governmental as well as governmental organisations take the necessary steps to bring into the fold of the formal schooling system those children who suffer from one disability or the other. This requires not only successful legislation but also a dedicated teacher training set-up that caters to the requirements of such special children.

To conclude, this book breaks new ground in an area of growing interest in developing countries. Like all handbooks/manuals, it is simply written, with numerous examples and diagrams. In particular, Part II of the book, which discusses various types of disabilities, shows how schools and teachers need to adapt to the teaching of children with physical and mental disabilities. A number of appendices are also attached to the manual, one of them being a very useful glossary of terms associated with disabilities affecting the general population and the children in particular. Words like anoxia, ataxia, Down's Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, dyslexia, flexion, etc., are some of the many terms that make up the vocabulary associated with disabilities. Such a glossary is useful to the layman to understand the issues and problems that confront disabled persons, whether children or adults. The book would serve as a useful guide to planners and administrators dealing with the concerns of special children.

Samina Nazli

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics,
Islamabad.