

# Individuals with physical disabilities

AN INTRODUCTION FOR EDUCATORS

Gary A. Best



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with 29 illustrations



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# **Individuals with physical disabilities**

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*. . . if we were intentionally  
to neglect the weak and helpless,  
it could only be for a contingent benefit  
with an overwhelming present evil.*

**Charles Darwin:** The Descent of Man

# FOREWORD

For the teacher entering the field of special education and for teachers and administrators in the regular schools who will have more children with handicaps placed in their schools by provisions of Public Law (PL) 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975, this book is informative, practical, and challenging. Increasingly, handicapped children will be educated with children who are not handicapped if they can function satisfactorily in regular classes with supplementary aids and services. The author's broad background in teaching handicapped children, as well as in teaching at the university level, enables him to present the special child with a realism we in the field can appreciate.

The reader will see that the emphasis in this book is on children, not their disabilities. There is no advocacy of any methodology or curriculum; there are no generalizations; rather, children are presented as individuals having feelings and concerns much the same as their counterparts in the regular school.

In the chapter on cerebral palsy, and in the one on musculoskeletal disabilities and other health impairments, the concerns the teacher should have in planning for the physical and educational programs are indicated. A wealth of information has been provided for the educator, paraprofessional, parent, or anyone interested in having a better understanding and knowledge of the various disabilities.

The chapter on postschool and adult alternatives forcefully brings to the attention of professionals in special education the need to question what is or is not being done to prepare our graduates to cope and live as independent, contributing adults. Several articles written by adults with disabilities are presented to illustrate some of their concerns. In reading these articles the reader should gain some insight into and, hopefully, be able to share some of these expressed feelings.

I was greatly impressed by the description of a typical day in the life of John, an elementary school-aged boy with cerebral palsy. As a principal of a special school, I could substitute the name of practically any child in our school, and this narrative would be accurately repeated. We are given a step-by-step, minute-by-minute account. It is truly illustrative of what happens from the time John gets up at 6:00 AM—how this affects the total family routine; his need to be out in front of the house on time to be put on the special lift-gate bus (with its unpredictable mechanical problems and breakdowns); his classroom routine with the use of special equipment shared by several of the children; and the teamwork of the teacher and the classroom aide. The growing sensitivity of a young boy being assisted in the bathroom by female aides is probed; and accounts are given of the recess and lunchtime activities, of going to the therapy department, and, finally, of arriving home at 4:00 PM (if there are no bus problems). It is a very long day for a child.

What are the desirable characteristics of successful special education teachers? What type of training is needed? What are the components that should be included in the university training program? These questions are fully discussed, and I believe that after reading this book, one will not be surprised or overwhelmed at what is required.

Dr. Best shares his feelings about special education when he states: "No one ever said it was going to be easy. But it is fun, and it is rewarding."

**Fred S. Lull**, *Principal,  
C. Morley Sellery School,  
Gardena, California*

# PREFACE

The underlying aim of this book is to replace the mystique of specialness with something special: interaction with people. False barriers established because of real or perceived differences are stripped away when one becomes intimate with the topic of individuals with disabilities.

The book contains two main sections. Section One identifies and discusses characteristics of disabilities and disability-related services, and Section Two relates primarily to the learning and educational concerns of those with disabilities.

Section One establishes the concept of primacy of the individual over the fact of disability. Although the characteristics of a disability will have a far-reaching impact on the functioning of the individual, the humanistic qualities of being are what is stressed.

Section Two includes discussions of various concepts of learning, approaches to educational placement and practices, and a special section written by and about adults with disabilities. The book concludes with a look at the implications of Public Law (PL) 94-142 and an expression of where those with disabilities are, and ought to be, in today's social structure.

This book is presented as an overview and introduction to the field of physical disabilities. An attempt is made to present materials that will stimulate thought and awareness of the concerns, characteristics, and practices in the field without beating the reader into submission for accepting any one point of view. The individual teacher cannot be all things to all people, and it is in this light that the reader should approach the education of individuals with physical disabilities. No method or technique is applicable to all students. No curriculum is universally appropriate. No teacher is best suited to teach all children. No school can do it all.

When I first began working with children with physical disabilities, I was unaware of myself in terms of my relations with those who were different. In fact, there were no people who were different as far as I was concerned. This sheltered existence was rudely shattered with my first confrontation at a summer camp with a child "who was crippled with polio." How did one talk to someone who is a cripple? Would I be able to accept this really *strange* kid? Talking was never a problem; acceptance was never a problem. The youngster simply said, "Hi there, my name is Johnny." I was lucky. Those six words made the difference. (His name really *was* John.)

This book was written with the hope that someone would read it. The reading will not in any sense compare to "Hi there, my name is Johnny." However, it might provide some insights into what disability and children with disabilities are about.



If it does, we are indebted to many people who have been responsible for much learning.

It is customary to acknowledge in the preface those who have helped in the preparation of a manuscript. Not one to ignore custom, I wish to thank many. Thank you, John, Maria, Jane, Lila, Mom and Dad, Norbert, Dewey, and Mary. Thank you, Greg and George.

And in my affection, Shirley and Joanna know where they belong.

**Gary A. Best**

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The photographs introducing each chapter are examples of barriers confronted daily by people with physical disabilities. These photographs are courtesy of Carol Stacy and the students and administration of Chandler Tripp School, San Jose, California.

SECTION ONE

**CHARACTERISTICS OF  
DISABILITIES AND  
DISABILITY-RELATED  
SERVICES**



# I Introduction





## IMPACT OF TERMINOLOGY

For many persons, the concept of physical disabilities has been centered around medical aspects or deviations of the human condition. Such aspects or deviations are referred to as the medical model, and this model has provided the base for descriptions of physical limitations that accompany disability. However, this approach is not always clear or understandable and often is associated with a medicus-mysticus aura. For the teacher, the mystique may be in the realization that one is teaching a *child* or classroom of *children*. This rather simple statement may be crucial in its very simplicity—it may be a philosophical set determining the way in which children, and for that matter, all individuals, are treated in thought and action. The individual, the child, has the preeminent position; the modification of the body, mind, and spirit is secondary. The perspective and philosophical stance of this book is centered on the child: the child with cerebral palsy, the child with a limp, or the child with curly blond hair and blue eyes. Verbalizations may vary, but there is a need to bring the individual to the forefront of consideration. To be considered as an individual is the right and expectation of us all, and this is a right that should be adhered to without fail. The medical model, however, is not itself the culprit. It is only a model behind which it is safe to relate, to act. Any model or set of conditions is a referent from which the whole and not the parts, or even a collection of some of the parts, should be dealt with.

In addition to the medical model, which has been used in describing conditions and in measuring and assessing severity, there are other positions or models that have been utilized in describing children and their particular needs and characteristics. Although not readily recognizable as a model or referent, legislation and its accompanying legal declarations have frequently been responsible for the identification of children, their disabling characteristics, and the methods by which their special needs may be met. The following description, provided by the California Education Code, of “pupils considered physically handicapped” is an example of this method of classification:

Any pupil who, by reason of a physical impairment, cannot receive the full benefit of ordinary education facilities, shall be considered a physically handicapped individual. . . . Such pupils include the following, as defined by the State Board of Education:

- a. The deaf or hard of hearing.
- b. The blind or partially seeing.
- c. Orthopedic or health impaired.
- d. The aphasic.
- e. The speech handicapped.
- f. Other pupils with physical illnesses or physical conditions which make attendance in regular day classes impossible or inadvisable.
- g. Pupils with physical impairments so severe as to require instruction in remedial physical education.
- h. Multihandicapped. (California Education Code, 1976, Section 56701)