

Education

At Home, At School, At Work

CHAPTER 53

Guided learning to help a child gain skills and understanding for meeting life's needs is called education. In Chapters 34 to 43 we talked about ways to help children with disabilities and developmental delays to learn to control and use their bodies and minds, and to master early basic skills for daily living. But as a child grows up, many additional skills and knowledge are needed.

For nearly all children, education begins in the home. For some it continues in school; for others in the fields, in the forest, at the marketplace, on the riverbank, or in the streets.

In the cities of most countries, a school education has become almost a basic need for getting a job or being accepted by society. In many villages and farming communities, however, "book learning" still is much less important than the skills children learn through helping their families with daily work.

In some rural areas, therefore, it may be a mistake to think that every child should go to school. For the child with cognitive delay who is physically strong, schooling may be a frustrating and unrewarding experience, especially if no "special education" is available. The child may be happier and learn more skills for meeting life's needs by helping father in the fields, or mother in the marketplace, than by going to school.

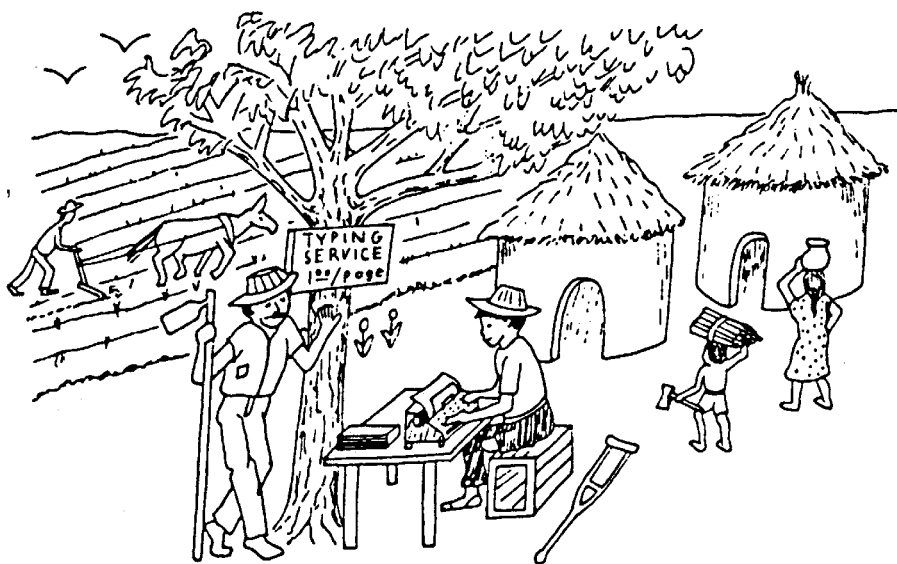


For many children in rural areas, the most important parts of their education may not take place in school.

However, for some children with cognitive delay in rural areas, schooling can be important. If the teacher and other children can be helped to understand the specific needs of the child, treat him with respect, and give him encouragement, this learner may benefit greatly from school, both educationally and socially.

Whatever the case, it is important to consider the local situation carefully. Do not just follow the recommendations from the outside about the importance of schooling. Some school situations are better and some are worse than others. So before deciding for a particular child, look carefully at the good and the bad things about the local school and consider the other choices.

For a child with physical disabilities in a rural area, schooling may be especially important—more so, perhaps, than for children without disabilities. Children with physical disabilities may be unable to do physical farm work. Therefore, they need to learn skills using their minds, so that they can work or take part in community activities. It may help them to go as far in school as possible.



In a village, skills learned through schooling can be more important for people with disabilities than for people without disabilities.

Which schools?

Today, leaders in rehabilitation generally believe that children with disabilities should attend the same schools as other children, whenever possible.

For children with mild or moderate disabilities this should not be a big problem, if the parents, school director, and teachers cooperate. In some communities, however, and especially in rural areas, parents may not even think of sending their child with disabilities to school. They may fear that their child will be teased or have too hard a time. And in some places, school directors or teachers refuse to accept children with disabilities. Distance and other problems getting to school also add to the difficulties.

Wherever possible, try to overcome these problems. Village rehabilitation workers can talk to teachers, parents and other schoolchildren and try to work out the best situation. At times parents may need to organize and put pressure on the schools to change their policies. In some countries, laws exist requiring government schools to accept and make special provisions for children with disabilities. Rehabilitation workers and parents can find out about the laws, and try to have them enforced. Or they can work to get laws passed if they do not exist.

Every effort should be made to make schooling easier and more enjoyable for children with disabilities. Some possibilities that involve other schoolchildren have already been discussed in Chapter 47 (CHILD-to-child).

For children with more severe disabilities, attending the same schools as other children often may not be possible, at least as schools exist today. Yet, sometimes if you talk with the teachers and other children, they will become more understanding and make special arrangements.

For example, we know a boy with spina bifida who lacks bowel control and therefore never went to school. But after his parents talked with the teacher and schoolchildren, an agreement was reached. Now the boy goes to school. When he has an accident in his pants, he quietly gets up and goes home to bathe and change. (Fortunately his house is very near the school.)



Children with developmental delay get a “head start” in a pre-school program near Bangalore, India.

Children with hearing loss can learn well in schools where there are both children with and without hearing loss if the teacher makes an effort to teach all children sign language. But if a child with hearing loss is not taught sign language, it can harm his ability to learn. Sometimes it is best for a child with hearing loss to go to a residential school where he can study with other children with hearing loss and come home to his family on weekends.

In cases where some children with disabilities cannot attend school, other alternatives may be possible. In cities of some countries there are special education programs for children with certain disabilities. Such schools, if private, can be very expensive, and if public, can be overcrowded or have long waiting lists.

In the rural areas, with rare exceptions, there are no special education programs. However, parents of children with disabilities may be able to organize and form their own school. The group helps each child to learn at her own pace and in her own way. An example of such a school is Los Pargos in Mazatlán, Mexico, described briefly on p. 517. Also, the Centre for Community Rehabilitation Development in Pakistan has helped organize parent-run special education programs in many towns (see p. 520).

Another option is a study at home program. Children who do go to school can help teach children with severe disabilities at home after school. A community rehabilitation program can also include a study program for children and youth with disabilities. Project PROJIMO has arranged at the local village school for attendance of children with disabilities who have had difficulty in schools elsewhere. In addition, the rehabilitation workers with disabilities assist the children who need tutoring in the evenings.



At the village school



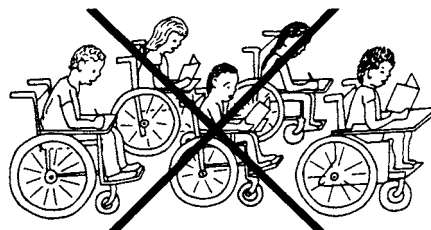
Extra help with a tutor

This book does not cover the details and methods of special education. It is important that the methods used be adapted to the local customs and situation—not just borrowed from Europe or the USA, as is often done. An excellent book on *Special Education For Mentally Handicapped Pupils*, by Christine Miles, has been developed for a program in Pakistan, and has many ideas for adapting to the local culture (see p. 640).

Meeting the physical needs of children at school

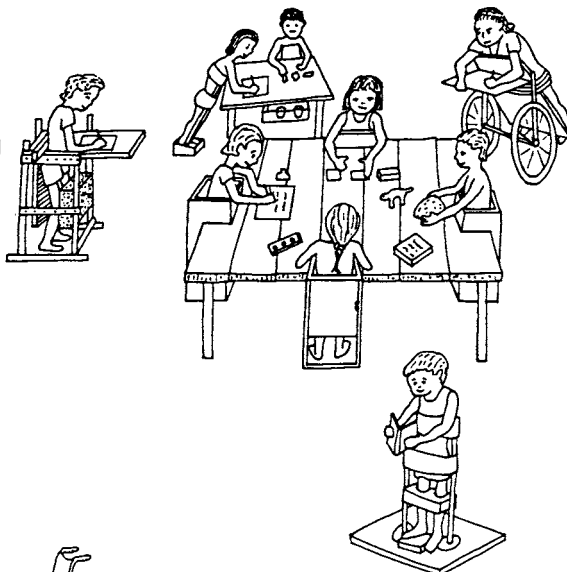
When children with physical disabilities are in school or studying, it is important to remember their needs, and try to meet them.

For example, children who cannot get up and run around should usually not spend all day sitting in a wheelchair. This tends to lead to contractures, swollen feet, weak leg bones, spinal curve, and other physical problems.

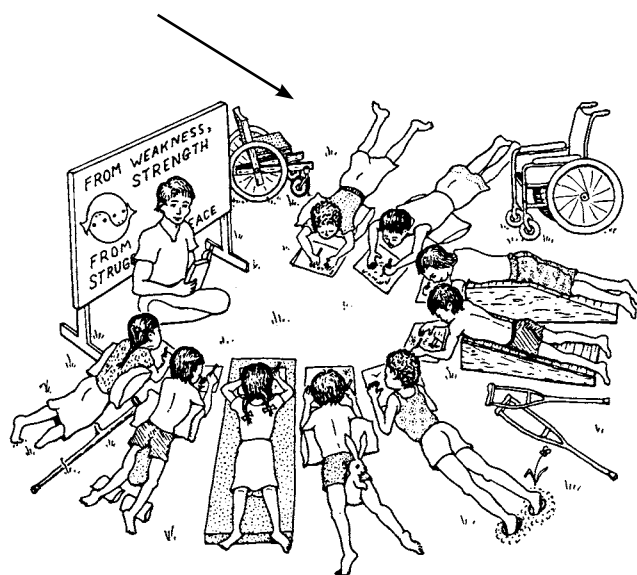


So try to arrange for the children to spend at least part of the day with their bodies in a straight position.

Part of the day this can be done in standing frames (but usually not for more than half an hour at a time).



And part of the time it can be done lying down, either on the floor, or on wedges or mats that permit better positioning and use of the hands and arms.

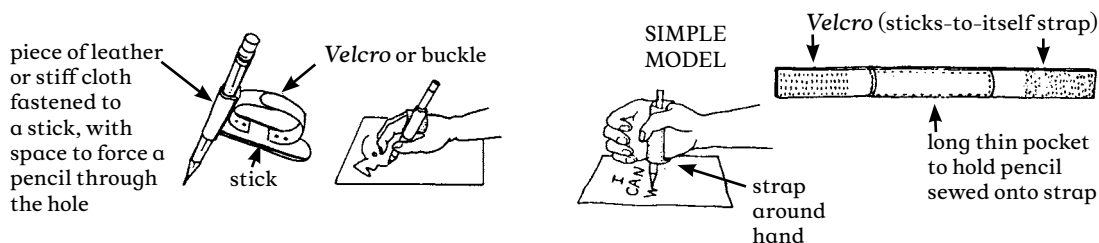


For design details, see pp. 571 to 575.

AIDS FOR READING, WRITING, AND DRAWING

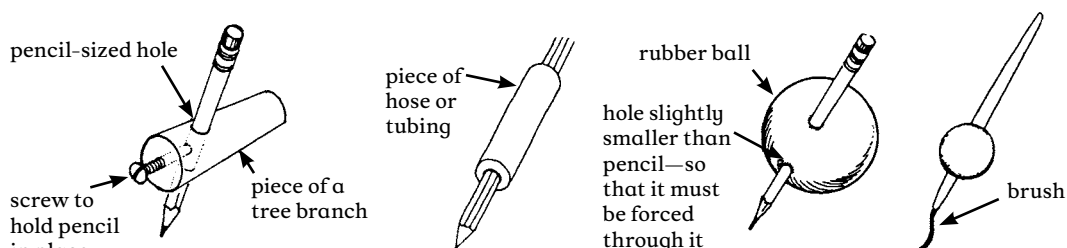
PENCIL HOLDER FOR A WEAK OR PARALYZED HAND

For children who have difficulty holding a pen, pencil, or brush, or turning the pages of a book, you can think of all sorts of adaptations. Here are a few examples:



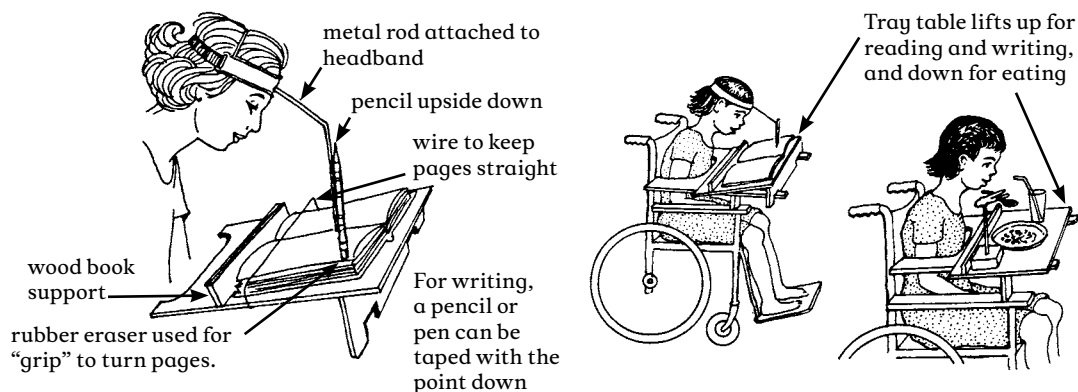
AIDS FOR HOLDING PENCILS, PENS OR BRUSHES

A thick handhold gives better grip and control.



For other ideas, see pp. 223 and 330.

PAGE TURNER (Design for head)



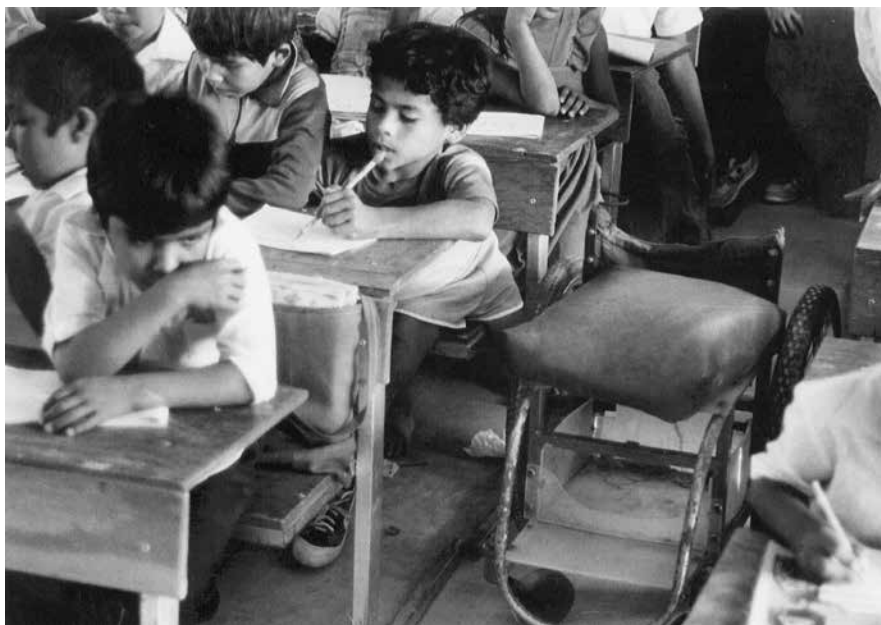
Many children who have difficulty with hand control and cannot write clearly by hand can learn to use a typewriter—using their hands or a stick attached to their heads. A typewriter or computer may be a wise investment for a child with severe disabilities—and may in time provide a way for her to earn money.



A pocket calculator is much cheaper than a typewriter. A person with disabilities who is good with numbers can do many different kinds of accounting jobs.

For more ideas on aids and adaptations, see Chapter 27 on amputations, Chapter 9 on cerebral palsy, and Chapter 62 on special aids.

Lupito's family was afraid to let him go to school. They thought the other children would tease him. Village rehabilitation workers convinced his family to let him go to school, and to also lead a CHILD-to-child activity with the schoolchildren. Lupito now attends school happily and does very well.



Lupito at school...



...and at play.