Education of Children with Cerebral Palsy

by Myra Tingle

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the request of the Government of Greece, the Director-General of Unesco arranged for a consultant mission financed under the Organization's Regular Programme for 1984-1985, to be carried out in Athens from 19 to 26 October 1985, with the following terms of reference:

(i) to run a seminar on the education of students with cerebral palsy, addressed to teachers and directors of special schools;

(ii) to elaborate guidelines for schools attended by pupils with cerebral palsy, with special emphasis on curricula, teaching materials and technical aids.

2. Preparation for the consultancy started in July 1985 with communication with the Director of Special Education, Ministry of Education; this was primarily to secure the necessary background information on special educational provision in Greece for the planning of the seminar programme (see Annex E).

3. Details of the plan of work are contained in Annex A.

4. On Friday, 25 October, an evaluation at the Ministry was attended by the author, the Director of Special Education and three colleagues. The Greek National Holiday began that day and so the meeting was brief. Points raised at that meeting are included in recommendations for future action.

5. The consultant wishes to record her appreciation and gratitude to the officials at the Ministry of Education and to the course participants for their kind co-operation and hospitality.

II. MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Historical perspective

6. In just under ten years a major programme to develop special education has been undertaken. In 1976 a Directorate of Special Education was established within the Ministry of Education and in 1979, legislation was passed concerning the rehabilitation of physically handicapped persons. Prior to this the State had done very little for these people relying upon the philanthropic and institutional initiatives which, although they catered for social and educational needs also reinforced the handicapped image and did little to provide for equal educational and employment opportunities for all, regardless of handicap and according to their abilities. This approach reflects similar feelings in the United Kingdom where the aims of special education follow guidelines laid down by the Warnock Report (1978) and the philosophy of the Fish Committee whose Report 'Educational Opportunities for all' was published in 1985.(1)

7. There are no official statistics available, but out of a total school population of 170,000 it is estimated that 10 per cent of children have special educational needs. The majority are already in mainstream schools, but for those that have serious physical handicaps (265) the following provision exists:

(1) See bibliography.
8. At present, few children with an IQ less than 50 and with multiple disabilities, attend school.

9. There are no special units attached to mainstream schools which are specifically for those with a physical handicap. Those units that exist are intended for low achievers with all types of handicap except the blind, the deaf and the severely mentally retarded. With the exception of the two schools that are in Thessalonika and Crete, all the others are in the Athens area.

Assessment for special education

10. The decision to place a child in a special school is made by a 'medico-pedagogical' team which includes the special education adviser, the receiving school and the child's parents. A recent law, 1397/83 has made the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare responsible for setting up 400 health centres throughout the country, and it is hoped that this will facilitate the early discovery and diagnosis of disability and provide early therapeutic programmes. It must be noted that this organization is medically dominated, and at present no other professions make any contribution to its plans. It is thought that it would be advantageous to have some pedagogical input at this point. Experience in the United Kingdom illustrates the benefits of home teaching, the Portage System and opportunity groups at this stage in a child's development. Similar problems to those which are being experienced in the United Kingdom were described, i.e. the length of time that it takes to complete an assessment especially when the child has to come into the city from the countryside. A pre-school assessment programme which included an educational input might facilitate this process.

The curriculum

11. The Greek curriculum is traditionally prescriptive and there is little freedom for teachers to modify this to suit local conditions. The schools for the physically handicapped which include children with all levels of ability (apart from the severely retarded) tend to follow Greek mainstream curricula regardless of a child's intellectual and physical abilities. The teachers have no autonomy in deciding upon the curriculum which is suitable for his/her school population and the possibility of altering schemes of work, daily, weekly or termly is non-existent. Thus the key issue upon which the possibilities for change depended was the flexibility to modify the curriculum.

12. A change in the curriculum has been attempted. Special groups of approximately ten persons from different backgrounds (teachers, psychologists and parents) had been formed to look at the needs of specific areas of handicap, including physical disabilities and speech and language disorders. Guidelines were produced but were based upon scant experience and knowledge – although some of the contributors had visited other special education programmes abroad. The first drafts to be produced covered the 6-14 year age range but need to be approved by the proposed Special Education Council, and then to be piloted in selected special schools. It appears that these curriculum groups have now been disbanded. Their suggestions only related to those children with average intellectual ability and did not refer to those with multiple disabilities. Whether the proposals had included reference to the type of teaching materials and other resources necessary to support the framework outlined, was also uncertain.
Access to the curriculum for the physically handicapped child

13. There appears to be no provision made to 'access' a child with severe physical handicap such as is common in cerebral palsy, to the curriculum, in such a way that they can 'feed back' to the teacher what they have and have not understood. They have no way in which they can offer original, personal contributions. The general attitude seemed to be that if a child was bright he would learn all that he needed from sitting and listening to the teacher. Indeed, plans had been mooted for severely physically handicapped young adults to enter university on just such a basis. The fact that they were present was seen to be enough. The curriculum at secondary level truly reflected the didactic tradition and the teachers were perpetuating the values of both their own education and that of the parents, i.e. that academics held a certain status - regardless of its relevance to the future quality of life for a physically handicapped young person.

14. The idea that an electric typewriter or a computer might take the place of a conventional pen, or that Bliss Symbolics was an acceptable form of communication for the non-verbal child was met with a certain amount of resistance by the course participants in general, although a few greeted the ideas put forward by the consultant with enthusiasm and were desperate for more practical input in this area. Upon questioning, at least a third of the participants admitted to having children in their classes who had no means of either written or verbal communication.

Access to the curriculum for the child with learning difficulties

15. There appeared to be a need for help in breaking down target skills both in the area of basic literacy and numeracy and in the secondary subject areas. Ideally, the ideas presented by the lecture on the Individual Education Programme (24 October) should have been elaborated over time, with greater depth, in a workshop situation. It is difficult to absorb the principles behind task analysis in a short space of time, and first attempts should be related to existing problems to make them effective. There was obviously a great need for further help in this area since it is one way in which the teachers can follow the regulations through teaching the prescribed curriculum but with modifications of pace and skill, which would make it more accessible to the less able child.

16. The author sensed that there was little co-operation between the teachers and the paramedical staffs within the schools. A key issue, fundamental to the successful organization of any special education programme, and one which the author tried to reinforce throughout the seminar, was the importance of teamwork. In this instance a teacher will find it very difficult to design a programme for the remediation of specific learning difficulty - (perceptual handicap) without the help of an occupational therapist; the speech therapist is the language expert and the physiotherapist understands the problems of gross and fine motor control.

The relevance of the curriculum

17. After elementary school, children with a physical handicap move on for three years at the Gymnasium. At the age of 14+ they will then continue with the academic curriculum at the Lyceum, or they will move to the technical and vocational school. In both academic and vocational programmes there is no provision for training in social and life skills. There is no appreciation that such skills, leading to personal independence, is fundamental to a young person's ability in maintaining employment and a certain standard of living.
with emphasis upon the quality of adult life. The consultant, at this point, was able to equate the employment situation in Greece and in the United Kingdom and point out the importance of providing all young people with the necessary skills to cope with the increased leisure that all young adolescents are having to experience in the current economic situation. The students at the Lyceum were aware of this (Annex D) and they pointed out that their society also needs to be educated so that provision is made in terms of access to public buildings, entertainment and transportation for the wheelchair mobile person.

18. Further comments upon the relevance of the existing curriculum are contained in the observations of school visits made on Monday, 2 October (Annex D).

Teacher training

19. Further training for teachers who wish to work in special education is only available to those with five years' teaching experience in mainstream. The training only allows them to apply for positions in pre-school and elementary classes. There is no training for teachers who work in the Gymnasium and Lyceum of the special school system. These have only their graduate training in their specialist subject areas. Postgraduate work in special education is provided by one college in Athens and the emphasis of the training is upon mental rather than physical handicap. It appears that this is because there is no member of the faculty qualified in this specialist area. Teacher-students are selected on the basis of a written examination in pedagogy, psychology, didactics and Greek literature. No previous experience of special educational needs, nor interest, special study or practical experience, is required. The final diploma is awarded on the basis of a written examination.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

Curriculum change

20. The starting-point for progress has to be in the revision of the existing curriculum. It appears that attitudes are changing and that attempts have been made to design a curriculum which caters specifically for the needs of the physically handicapped (paragraph 14). The methods by which this was attempted, though well intentioned, lacked rigour. If the child is to be 'at the heart of the educational process' then all those who have any input to that process must be included in the decisions made. The following model (Annex E) may illustrate this concept:

(a) selected schools for children with a physical handicap in the Athens area could create a post of responsibility for curriculum development. The person chosen in each instance need not be an administrator but a skilled and motivated classroom teacher who would be able to contribute a real understanding of the emotional and social, as well as the learning problems of children with a wide range and degree of handicap;

(b) area educational advisers (already appointed) could then lead a working party which included these post holders, educational psychologists, the paramedical professions and parent representation;
(c) such a programme could begin with a one-week intensive course led by a consultant whose input could take the form of workshop, discussion and video demonstrations. Ideally the working party would be able to visit special education programmes abroad at some point during the planning process;

(d) the programme would be ongoing, spread possibly over a year, during which time the post holder is able to organize curriculum development groups within his/her own faculty and feed information both ways between working party and school;

(e) selected special schools would then serve as the 'resource' for training those teachers in the non-metropolitan areas of Greece and as a 'pressure group' could influence change in the mainstream sector where a modified curriculum may be necessary for the 10 per cent (paragraph 11).

21. The aims of such a model are:

(a) to encourage inter-professional and intra-professional communication and co-operation;

(b) to encourage the faculty of a school to plan appropriately for their own particular situation. No two schools are alike in terms of population, resources etc. and these differences need to be reflected in planning the curriculum for any particular school;

(c) to disseminate information and practical advice in a form that is economic in terms of time and money.

Access to the curriculum for the physically handicapped child

22. As far as the author could gather, from observations and from questioning, no use was made of any technology to allow the child with complex physical and verbal communication disabilities to take an active part in the learning process (paragraph 16). This sort of information cannot be disseminated satisfactorily through the medium of visual aids (slides, films, etc.) or lectures. The area is essentially a practical one and has to be tried out in a 'hands on' situation to prove that it can work. The author felt that there was a desperate need for such technical aids to be made available and makes the following suggestions:

(a) that CENMACH - Centre for Motor and Associated Communication Handicap (Inner London Education Authority) based at Charlton Park School, Charlton Park Rd. London SE7.8HX, is approached, and that staff from there take a variety of teaching aids to Athens for demonstration in the special schools. The staff would need to be able to work with children, explaining how to use equipment effectively (e.g. Pointer boards, large print electric typewriters - modern machines now come with a variety of typefaces). Specially adapted micro-switches for use by the severely physically handicapped could be demonstrated;

(b) if this initial visit was successful and the teachers felt that they could use such equipment a list of necessary aids could be drawn up and costed and arrangements for their importation made;
(c) a follow-up visit could extend the range of technology available to the physically handicapped population. Computer technology and those programmes appropriate for the severely handicapped child, could be introduced;

(d) the staff from CENMACH would need to liaise with a Greek teacher(s) and technical staff who express a real interest in this approach, and who possess the necessary skills to plan teaching programmes, advise teachers and maintain the machines.

23. The Blissymbolics Communication Resource Centre (United Kingdom) at the South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education, Western Avenue, Llandaff, Cardiff, CF5 2YB (National Adviser - Mrs Ena Davies) could be contacted and asked to bring a team to Athens to instruct the teachers in the use of Bliss Symbols with the non-verbal child. This team has already visited the Greek Spastics Society in Athens, and three speech therapists from Greece have been trained in this communication method in England. The author found that this information had not reached the course participants and that again there was a desperate need for such a system to be in use in the classroom.

Access to the curriculum for the slow learning child/the child with specific learning difficulty

24. The concept of an objective based curriculum, precision teaching, and the task analysis skills that are necessary in the construction of such a programme is well documented in the work of Ainscow and Tweddle (1979). Experience of this approach has been gained in England at London University by a Greek psychologist currently attached to the Spastics Society in Athens. The Director of Special Education, Mr Nicodemos also has knowledge of this area, and the author feels that in-service provision might be organized by the Directorate of Special Education in Athens. She did refer course members to an appropriate bibliography and the presentation on this topic was well illustrated with working examples.

The relevance of the curriculum

25. There is obviously a need for the curriculum of the schools for children with a physical handicap to pay more attention to the importance of social skill and personal independence training. To plan a programme in this area definitely requires the shared experience of therapists and teachers, and innovation in this may come as a result of more rigorous planning (paragraph 22).

Integration

26. This was obviously an area of interest to the course participants and it appears that units have already been set up in certain schools, some of which have physically handicapped children attending (paragraph 11). Since the consultant did not observe one of these programmes she is unable to comment on the possibilities for development. It would appear, though, that few of the children observed would have been able to cope in mainstream schools without the necessary aids and modifications to the existing academic curriculum.

Teacher training

27. The fact that extra training in special educational practice is only available to those who will teach in pre-school and the elementary levels, and that the criteria for admission appear to be irrelevant, is beyond the scope
of comment in this report. The consultant's own experience after considerable years of postgraduate training in special education would suggest that the content of the diploma needs to be reorganized to include more practical experience (placement in special classroom for part of a week - college for the remainder) and for an equal number of both elementary and secondary teachers to be invited to apply for the course. The structure of the courses offered abroad might provide guidelines for improvement in this area.

**Experience abroad**

28. The consultant suggested to the Directorate that a group of teachers visit England as a 'follow up' to the seminar. The consultant's experience of programming similar tours for the University of California would enable her to offer a comprehensive experience which would include lectures and visits. Inexpensive accommodation could also be arranged. Should the Directorate of Special Education act upon the recommendations concerning curriculum change (paragraph 22) the most suitable group to start with would be those teachers who had been chosen to have responsibility for curriculum development. Providing sufficient funding was available the group could be multidisciplinary. The British Council might be approached to support this.

**IV. CONCLUSION**

29. The consultant felt that the mission to Athens provided her with a professional challenge and hopes that the course participants had a similar experience. The task was all encompassing - cerebral palsy is a large topic to cover and the pace of the three days was difficult for both the author and the course members who had to concentrate hard to cope with translation and many new concepts and ideas. If this were to be replicated it would be more sensible to organize a team of people, all offering different emphases.

30. There is a limit to what can be covered in a short time and it was difficult to know the correct level at which to start. In evaluation it was pointed out that many of the course members had no grounding in basic pedagogy and would have preferred a psychological ('scientific') introduction to the presentations on specific learning problems. The author pointed out that basic learning theory is usually taught in teacher training, and that she did not feel that it would have been relevant to spend time on that in this instance.

31. The Greek Special Education Programme has moved fast in the last ten years but it still has far to go. There is obviously a need for support within their own system and encouragement to form their own professional association with regular publications to disseminate ideas. There is also a great need for more in-service education either by day-release or at evening classes. The consultant feels that the expertise is there amongst those who have chosen to study abroad, but that it is not being used to the benefit of the country.

32. There is much work to be done, change will not be easy, especially when change means that not only one's own personal values are being challenged but also those of a culture which goes back to the earliest education system recorded. This will be no mean effort but once attempted cannot but benefit the many handicapped children for whom equality of opportunity is a right.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Comprehensive bibliographies were attached to individual lecture notes.
ANNEX A

TIMETABLE OF THE MISSION

Monday, 21 October

a.m. Visits to schools
p.m. Set up exhibition of children's work, aids, etc.

Tuesday, 22 October

Introduction to the three-day course.

Lead lecture: The child is at the centre of the education process.
The importance of inter-professional communication.

Break for discussion.

Lead lecture: The curriculum at Richard Cloudesley School,
London EC1. An inner-city school for children with a
physical handicap.
Video - Richard Cloudesley School.

Comment and questions.

Wednesday, 23 October

Lead lecture: Specific learning problems of the child with cerebral
palsy.
(a) Early perceptual training.
(b) Low technical aids to help overcome minimal physical
dysfunction.

Break for discussion.

Lead lecture: Provision for the severely physically handicapped child.
(a) Pre-computer technology.
(b) Bliss Symbolics.
Video - Communication and the micro-processor.

Thursday, 24 October

Lead lecture: The individual education programme.
(a) Setting priorities.
(b) Writing objectives.
(c) Assessment and record keeping.

Break for discussion.
Closing lecture: School leavers - what have we/they achieved?

(a) The concept of integration.
(b) Social skill and independence training.
(c) Education for leisure.

Friday, 25 October
a.m. Evaluation - Directorate of Special Education.

Where possible, lead lectures were supported by slides and overhead transparencies.

Additional videos about integration in England and the value of the micro-chip for the severely physically handicapped were also available for viewing.
ANNEX B

VISITS TO SCHOOLS

Monday, 21 October
National Institution for the Physically Handicapped. Lyceum.

I arrived with Mr Nicodemos and Ms Kanellopoulou at 10.15 a.m. Unfortunately the staff were intending to strike at 10.30 a.m. and so there was little time to see a classroom occupied and a lesson in progress. The one room that I was shown into was laid out in a formal way and as far as I could see no allowances were made for the different seating needs/table heights of the young students. I was introduced to one boy who had very poor speech and no real use of his hands. He did not appear to have any writing aid with him or any augmentative or alternative communication system.

At 10.30 a.m. we were invited into a common room to meet the students and their visitors from a local mainstream school. This visit is on a regular basis and organized by the games teacher who trained in special education in the U.S.A. It was suggested that the children asked me questions about special education in England, in particular about physically handicapped teenagers and the provision made in the United Kingdom for them. Mr Nicodemos acted as interpreter.

Some of the students were fluent in English and others who were not were well able to put their points across in Greek. I observed a variety of handicaps and at a rough guess would say that only about 50 per cent of the group had cerebral palsy. The level of ability was high and as a result the children’s awareness of their disability and their needs if they were to take part in society as equal members was very evident.


The Trades Union marches hindered our journey across the city to our next appointment, consequently we arrived just as most of the children were preparing for lunch/home. I was introduced to the Principal of the school, the Senior Social Worker and the Principal of E.L.E.P.A.A.P., the therapeutic centre in which the school is based.

I was able to see one group of children working with a play assistant and one class group. I was also able to talk to the speech therapist about Bliss Symbolics. Again there was no evidence of writing or communication aids and I was told that although Bliss was being taught to one child it was taught by the therapist in isolation and the child was not encouraged to use it in class or at home. There seems also to be parental resistance to alternative communication systems. The school maintained that some children were able to use a typewriter but that 'they had gone to be mended'. The one remaining was not of a type suitable for use by a handicapped child - in my estimation. There was obviously a need for suitable aids and many children who could benefit from using them.

At the end of the visit I was asked to meet the staff. Most of these were planning to attend the seminar. The opinion was expressed that they had had enough of theory and wanted practical ideas. I assured them that my presentation would be biased towards this direction and well illustrated.
MODEL FOR CURRICULUM CHANGE

ANNEX C

Teams drawn from each of the categories of schools for the physically handicapped. At least ONE teacher must come from each school.

PRE SCHOOL ELEMENTARY GYMNASIUM VOCATIONAL LYCEUM.

Discussion, practical experimentation, feedback lead by working party members within each faculty. This becomes a two way process, the working party members report back to regular planning sessions led by the advisors.

PRE SCHOOL ELEMENTARY GYMNASIUM VOCATIONAL LYCEUM.

EXAMPLE INFLUENCES MAINSTREAM CURRICULUM FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS.
ANNEX D

NAMES AND FUNCTIONS OF PEOPLE MET

Stylianos Nicodemos
Director of Special Education
Ministry of Education

Ms Kanellopoulou
Directorate of Special Education
Main support and interpreter for the author

Mr Elias Markos
Directorate of Special Education

Mr Paskalis
Directorate of Special Education

The Headteacher
Lyceum, National Institution for the Physically Handicapped

The Headteacher
Senior Social Worker, Speech Therapist
Principal of E.L.E.P.A.A.P.
At the Hellenic Society for Disabled Children

Nikoloulis Nivos
Teacher in Special Education
Representative of the Greek Ministry of Education
'Special Education and the New Education Law 1566.30.9.85'
presentation on Tuesday, 22 October

Patelaros Hercules
Special Education Teacher
'The physically handicapped child, organization of its education'
presentation on Tuesday, 22 October

Many teachers who talked with me during the seminar and whose names were too numerous to record.

Personal contacts

Mrs Popi Michalikas
Educational Psychologist. Spastics Society, Athens

Cristos and Daphne Econoumou
Founders of the Spastics Society, Athens

United Nations Development Programme

Odd. A. Nordstrand
Resident Representative

Members of his staff at a reception to celebrate United Nations Day.