

PREFACE

The Eighth Commonwealth Education Conference held in Colombo in August 1980 drew attention to the special educational needs of children and adults who suffer from physical or mental disablement. The Conference recognised that a fresh interest in special education, which would be generated by the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons (declared by the United Nations General Assembly) provided an excellent opportunity for the Commonwealth Secretariat's Education Division to renew activities in this very important sector of education (8CEC Report, Paragraph 140).

In selecting an appropriate and useful activity, the Conference noted that one of the greatest difficulties facing administrators and teachers engaged in special education was the high initial cost and subsequent maintenance of teaching aids. In order to alleviate some of these difficulties, the Conference considered ways of providing practical assistance to practitioners in special education which would enable them to make the best possible use of limited resources and to reduce dependence on distant suppliers. Accordingly, it recommended that the Education Division should carry out a study to examine methods for the design and manufacture of low-cost teaching aids for use in special education, and to publicise the results of such a study. The present handbook represents a response to the concerns of the Conference.

The handbook is in two parts. Part One describes and illustrates a selection of simple tools and equipment which will assist special education teachers, with little or no expertise in the design and manufacture of teaching aids, to set up a suitable workshop. Part Two contains a selection of simple teaching aids, showing a step-by-step approach to their manufacture, based on diagrams and materials in everyday use. Some suggestions are also included on ways to develop these ideas towards further innovative designs, using low-cost materials readily available in Commonwealth developing countries.

The handbook is intended primarily for practising teachers in special education and for members of the community who offer their services in the provision of education to mentally and physically handicapped boys and girls. Although it is not always feasible or desirable that such children should undertake practical work involving the use of tools, there is scope for some participation by them in the design and manufacture of low-cost teaching aids, given close supervision and assistance. Such participation has obvious educational value and underlies the approach of the present handbook.

However, although the handbook is designed specifically for special education, the examples of low-cost teaching aids could also serve the educational needs of other children, particularly in terms of participation in design and construction and we would therefore commend this publication to educators generally.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is grateful to Mr Donald Caston of the City of London Polytechnic, our consultant for the study and to his colleague Miss Joan Thompson, for her excellent illustrations.

Rex E O Akpofure
Director, Education Division
Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House
LONDON