

Chapter 10

The Role of the Classroom Teacher

by Margaret Murray

Other than being a parent, I cannot think of a position in which a person wears as many hats as that of a teacher. Not only are the roles of the teacher numerous and varied, but a teacher must switch from one to another spontaneously, smoothly and professionally.

The inclusion of students with a mental handicap in a regular classroom does not, in my opinion, create new roles for the teacher. It does, however, require a honing of existing skills, and a reassessment of traditional practices and attitudes.

The primary role of a teacher is, as always, to teach; but integration broadens the focus to include an examination of what we are really teaching, in the general sense, and how we are teaching it. This broadening of vision is challenging, frightening and exciting, all at the same time. The combination of such strong emotional forces should jolt us out of our complacency, out of the secure niche we have made for ourselves. If all the support systems are in place and the teacher's focus is positive, teachers and students alike grow and benefit from the experience. The secondary role of the teacher, there-