

### ***Socialization and Learning***

Yet another myth fostered by special education theory is that children with a mental handicap will be socialized better in the regular classroom, but that their academic work will suffer. We were once told that this was the trade-off and that we would have to make a choice between socialization and education for our son. People who say things like that seem to believe that children with a mental handicap have little understanding and no feelings. They are wrong. Parents will understand what we mean when we say our son is slow, not stupid. He and his friends understood quite well that they were in segregated classes because they had been rejected by the regular school system because they were considered inferior.

When our son had a chance to go into a regular class he reacted well because he clearly felt he now belonged. He worked harder and progressed more quickly than he had in the segregated classes. Better socialization had a positive, not a negative, effect on his academic progress. A pupil who is surrounded by other pupils behaving normally is likely to behave normally and to work as others work. A pupil in a segregated class is likely to be distracted by behaviours around him or her and imitate them, rather than working.

Most segregated classes provide less individual attention than regular classes, making them inferior learning environments. This was true of the segregated classes our son attended, despite the efforts of excellent teachers in those segregated classes. Some of those teachers who went on to teach in regular classes told us that, in a segregated class, each exceptional pupil gets only five to ten minutes of individual attention on most days. A properly organized teacher with a regular class containing an exceptional pupil can provide more than ten minutes of individual attention to the exceptional pupil without short-changing the non-exceptional pupils. So not only is the learning environment better in a regular class, but experience suggests that there are more opportunities for individual attention.