

Chapter 1

Changing Special Education Practice: Law, Advocacy and Innovation

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It is somewhat ironic that the very organizations that first legitimized the education of children who have mental handicaps are now the ones fighting to dismantle the systems that are the product of their success. Yet, when the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) established a task force to identify issues facing the advocacy movement for people with mental handicaps, integrated education was rated a top priority (CACL, 1987). The goal of the Association is to promote the participation of people with mental handicaps in their communities by focusing on their citizenship (the power to exercise their rights), their inclusion (as full members of their communities), and their self-determination (the power to make their own decisions).

Rioux (1988) documents how specialized and separate services result from a paradigm that labels individuals with intellectual handicaps as socially inferior. Therefore, the kind of care and treatment available to them, as well as laws, policies, and programs, have been developed solely on the basis of this label. Criteria for generic programs systematically keep out people with mental handicaps and there is a