

ever, it seems to be the human condition that few of us are prepared for the major challenges in life, such as marriage, parenthood, or career changes. While I think it is important to recognize the challenge of an integrated classroom, I believe it is equally important to embrace integration with optimism.

In addition, preparation does not necessarily mean textbook knowledge of various physical and mental conditions. Preparation may simply consist of studying the student's individual education program from the time he or she entered the school system. It helps put things in perspective to see where the student was at the beginning of his or her education and what growth has occurred over the years. It relieves teachers from feeling that they have complete responsibility for the future success of the student and it gives teachers reassurance to see themselves as part of a team. Further preparation would involve discussions with parents to strengthen understanding of potential goals.

Avoid lists of things the student can and cannot do. They can be both discouraging to the teacher and damaging to your creative vision. Children who have a mental handicap can be handicapped by our perception of their limitations.

The most important part of preparation is to meet and get to know the child. No matter what physical or mental challenges the child presents, he or she has the same basic needs as all other students — the need for understanding and respect, the need to be listened to and appreciated, and the need to learn in his or her own style. If teachers address these needs competently, everything will fall into place.

Creative Freedom

When teaching in an integrated setting, teachers should permit themselves some creative freedom. When teachers first begin their careers, they are daring, trying new ideas, making mistakes, revelling in their successes. Unfortunately, creativity is an early casualty in many classrooms, not by design or intent but by a slow and quiet process as teachers slip into