

a will to create a school system in which children truly had equal opportunities, the new system would have to look very different from the one now in place.

THE REAL MESSAGE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

What then is the real message of an education system which is designed to value things that persons with mental handicaps cannot do, and which then declares them uneducable?

Inherent in its attitude is a presumption about the incapacities of persons with mental handicaps. In addition, there is an implied expectation that persons with a mental handicap will not be in regular public schools or participants in the community in general. It is not surprising that the person with a mental handicap has problems functioning in an environment based on these assumptions — an environment created with no consideration of their abilities or participation.

In the heyday of social darwinism and the eugenics movement, education became the basis of qualification for entrance into elites, and the school system became the certifying agency. Science thought it had found a way to quantify and measure people's intelligence. Science seemed to provide objective criteria which justified selective participation, entitlement and rights — which, in fact, legitimized a system of discrimination. A rationale was created for particular distinctions and labels, which could have a medical and professional basis rather than a social basis.

We now know that science is unable to completely quantify intelligence. However, standardized testing and narrow curriculum persist in disempowering some people and restricting their opportunities to participate. Gould, in his classic work, *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981), claims that we continue to assign to intelligence a whole set of complex human capabilities that support "... the [recognition of] the importance of mentality in our lives and wish to characterize it, in part so that we can make the divisions and distinctions among people