

Merit eliminates the need for measures that enable or ensure equality because it is based on an acknowledgment and acceptance of the "aristocracy of merit". That means there are a few people who, because of their superior intellectual qualities and their efforts, are born to be leaders. It is assumed that there is a natural order where the welfare, culture and progress of society depend on an aristocracy of these intellectually skilled. The argument continues that social efficiency and progress depend on rule by the elite of merit. Further, meritocratic rule must be implemented with supremacy over all other social values:

*The meritocratic assumption that efficiency (and civilization) depends on inequality means that it is more important that human affairs be in the hands of an energetic, capable, skilled elite than that every person has an equal chance to rise in its ranks. (Livingston, 1979)*

The school system has become the vehicle for sorting people this way. It is less and less a place for educating people in the most important sense. Because most people with mental handicaps are judged to have few natural (innate) cognitive skills, they are simply denied, by definition, any access to the meritocracy, to the rewards of society. The characteristics they possess are not relevant or valued according to the standards of the meritocracy. Effort without intelligence does not provide access to the rewards of society.

Over-valuation of certain forms of intelligence and experience has become entrenched and reinforced through the public education system. This can be seen in how the school system awards excellence in certain disciplines and ignores competence in others. At its simplest level, the sciences are much more relevant than the arts within the formal school system. At a more complex level, the individual achievement of a person with a mental handicap in accomplishing certain skills is often viewed as irrelevant. This is because of a persisting