

play with him in the playground at noon and recess time. This interaction was made possible because the teacher realized that having Patrick off to the side kept him apart and special, and placed barriers between him and his classmates. The teacher also realized that having an adult between Patrick and the students also created a barrier, so she instructed the teacher assistant to move about the classroom and assist other students as well. This illustration also points out the importance of reciprocity. If Patrick had not responded in some way to the initiations of his peers, their attempts at interaction would have diminished over time.

A Means of Communicating

Teachers are now exploring ways of promoting communication among students in the classroom. Non-disabled students are learning how to use communication boards, gestures and signs, computerized devices and eye contact to help students who are unable to talk to their peers.

One teacher gave a student who uses an adaptive device an opportunity to teach her classmates about its unique characteristics. Mary, a senior high school student who has multiple handicaps, uses her eyes and a specially designed communication board to make her needs known. She made a presentation to several high school classes about the organization of her board and about how she used it to gain some control over her life. Mary became the teacher for a time and, as a result of her lesson, the students became interested in other forms of communicative devices. They also were able to see Mary from a different perspective. She was no longer a person of mystery, but another teenager with a unique way of talking to her peers. Her teacher had created a way to highlight Mary's abilities and to show that her desire to communicate her ideas and dreams was the same as that of her fellow teens.