

## A NEW SOCIAL AGENDA

Education in the regular school system is one of the fundamental elements upon which participation in the community is built. Advocates for individuals with a mental handicap first began to promote the idea of integrated education in the early 1970s, and the first attempts at "planned integration" began at that time. However, the people calling for inclusion of all students in the regular school system were few and far between. Examples of successes were even more scarce, and little effort was made within established forums to seriously address the issue.

As bleak as the prospects were twenty years ago, the early 1990s have seen visitors from around the world look to Canada for models of inclusion. In Canada, integration in education is now a priority of the national advocacy organization; independent advocacy organizations have begun to promote integration primarily and it has become a preoccupation of school boards, departments and faculties of education and a regular subject in the media. What happened in the years since 1970 to push integrated education onto the social policy agenda?

It appears that several factors have converged to create a climate in which support for inclusive education has flourished. These factors include developments in the advocacy movement of and for persons who have a mental handicap, the broadening human rights perspective in Canada, and educational reform.

Within the advocacy movement of and for persons who have a mental handicap, the adoption of the *Community Living 2000* plan has helped mobilized efforts to include all students with mental handicaps in regular education. The analysis which produced that plan was greatly influenced by the principle of normalization, which gained recognition in the 1970s and 1980s. Originally conceptualized by Bank-Mikelson and Nirje in Scandinavia in the late 1960s and