

THE IMPACT OF INTEGRATION

When the concept of integration in education was gaining momentum in the early 1980s it had few supporters. Now, however, there is a critical mass of people representing different interests working to make integration a reality for all students, regardless of disability.

As many of the chapters in this book indicate, integration works when there is a careful analysis of the needs of the student with the disability. It usually requires close collaboration among professionals, involvement of parents, activity-based learning, a child-centred focus, and an emphasis on pluralism and cooperation rather than competition. These factors improve the system for all students.

In the broader vision of a more inclusive society, integration in education makes *Community Living 2000* a possibility. If all school-aged children are taught by example that people who have a disability are equal members of our communities, there will be less risk of exclusion later in life. Parents will be better prepared to deal with the challenges of having a child who has a disability. Adults who have a disability will be better prepared for the workforce and co-workers will be better prepared to accommodate them. Opportunities will increase for people who have a disability to be supported to live in their own homes rather than group homes. The number of segregated programs such as sheltered workshops and group living arrangements should dramatically decrease. While some of these changes are beginning as the transition to inclusive education continues, the rate of change is hampered by existing systemic discrimination as well as by inexperience on the part of community opinion-leaders. These leaders need direction as to the role they can play in promoting community living for all. Experience in the classroom with students who have a disability will assist the opinion-leaders of tomorrow in