

began to emerge where Sue's behaviour required support, then the support alienated Sue further from her peers, which escalated the intensity of her outbursts, which required tighter measures, which further alienated her, and so on. It became evident that while Sue attended her neighbourhood school with her regular peers, she was alone; her life paralleled the lives of her peers but rarely intersected with them.

Factors in the School Structure

The school environment was also a factor in her lack of friendships. The school was perceived as a place where Sue was to learn new skills and demonstrate appropriate behaviour while in a learning environment. These are important objectives for all students. However, for Sue, these skills and behaviours were being taught without the benefit of friendships to provide the impetus, motivation or relevancy needed to make them seem important or desirable to her. When children work or play with one another, they imitate each other's behaviour and identify with friends possessing admired competencies or skills. As a result, they provide each other with powerful models of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

Our schools seem to play down the importance of peer relationships, which are mainly relegated to extracurricular activities. In most classrooms, students work alone, doing seatwork or listening to the teacher's instruction. Students' attempts to interact in groups are considered disruptive to the learning environment. Similarly, there is no instruction in the social skills necessary for interacting effectively with peers. These skills have not been considered pedagogically useful for learning.

Much of this can be attributed to the way our schools have been set up. Until quite recently schools have been institutions where skills were learned in a rigid, assembly-line fashion. The teacher's role was to impart knowledge to the students. Similarly, there were clearly defined roles for other school