

CONCLUSION

There are many questions still to be addressed, but it is an ongoing process. We have learned to examine how we do things and discuss new strategies to cope with the situations that arise over the school year. This contrasts with our expectations of last year when we thought we would somehow fix Sue. We acknowledge that she has behaviours that might change, but will not disappear; on the other hand, the supports in place make her behaviours less frightening.

If we are to make changes that support the existence of a variety of learning styles and abilities within a single classroom, we have to be prepared to change our notions about what is and is not feasible within our classrooms. Gentle Teaching is one method of dispelling the mystique that surrounds problem behaviours. We feel that this strategy is compatible with our philosophy of equity and respect for all students.

Gentle Teaching is an attitudinal stance, but is deeply rooted in good teaching techniques, which involve ensuring success with each learning task as well as full participation and involvement. It is our contention that the process of integration, the changes in methodology needed to nurture it such as inclusion, collaboration, multi-level instruction, and cooperative learning, and the Gentle Teaching philosophy are naturally supportive of one another.

The two approaches used with Sue, Supportive Peer Relationships and Gentle Teaching, have fostered the social inclusion of this most challenging youngster in the regular classroom. They have given her the opportunity for interdependence with her peers and a richer lifestyle than most children like Sue have because of their actions. It is important for her to have friends, rather than being a lonely person defined solely in terms of her behaviour. Similarly, we have increased the network of people who can work with Sue and with each other — teachers, peers and parents. In return, Sue has empowered us by increasing our competency. She has shown