

the hospital struggling with a life-threatening condition. The two students had spent time together in school during noon hours and they shared a few classes together. Although one of them had difficulty speaking and often engaged in echolalia (the involuntary repetition of a word or sentence just spoken by another person), the friends had obviously found other ways to communicate their feelings, interests and thoughts.

Some teachers had seen the relationship as one-sided and felt that the non-disabled student was being charitable. When it was discovered that the non-disabled student had hitch-hiked fifty kilometres in the middle of a Christmas cold snap, wearing only a light jacket with a broken zipper, to see his friend in the hospital, the adults took the friendship more seriously.

CONCLUSION

Teachers who use the various strategies outlined above to encourage peer relationships know that full integration will only occur when students interact comfortably with one another both in school and in the community. Since most of the hours of a student's day are spent in school, teachers can use curriculum and school activities as a vehicle to encourage and maintain friendships.

Proximity and reciprocity are important in setting the stage for interactions. In order for people to form relationships, they must be in the same place for a reasonable length of time. And if a student's gestures of friendship are repeatedly ignored, he or she may stop trying to interact. The onus is on the teacher to encourage students with disabilities to respond and to inspire non-handicapped students to persevere and search for responses which might otherwise be overlooked. Eye and head movements, position changes, smiles and gestures are sometimes the only way a person has of responding to his or her peers.

Human beings present particular personality traits and