

0 Bullock, J.R. (1992, Winter). Children without friends: Who are they and how can teachers help? Childhood Education, 92-96.

The article that I chose to read was Children Without Friends: Who Are They and How Can Teachers Help? This article discussed children who have difficulty forming friendships and gaining acceptance among peers. This study has received a tremendous amount of interest over the past decade. Research indicates that six to eleven percent of elementary age students have no friends or receive no friendship nominations from peers. In order for a child to develop normally, he or she must possess good peer relationships. These positive interactions help students achieve competency in many different areas.

There are two techniques used in determining a child's status within a peer group. The first technique is the sociometric measurement technique. These measurements rely on children's perceptions of others and can identify those children who are neglected or rejected by their peer groups. A widely used sociometric technique is the peer nomination method. In this technique, children are asked to pick from a list the names of three children with whom they like to play and three children with whom they do not like to play. It is used to assess children's impact on their peers. The second technique is the rating scale measure. In response to questions asked about certain classmates that they like to play or work with, children are asked to rate each classmate on a 1-5 Likert type scale. This measure is used to assess social acceptance or preference within the peer group.

Information is typically gathered on child behavior in three ways: peer reports, teacher reports, and direct observations. Across age groups, peers accept children who are friendly, helpful, cheerful, cooperative, and pro-social. Peer rejection is generally associated with disruption, aggression, and fighting. Quiet children lacking social skills are often neglected. Children who continually experience rejection are considered more likely to drop out of school and report lower levels of self-esteem and feelings of loneliness.

A teacher can help these children by first doing careful observations. Teachers can choose from several strategies to help these children. Coaching involves identifying the problem and providing some form of direct instruction to use when interacting with peers. Some children may benefit from practice with younger age-mates. Children who have difficulty reading other children's cues may benefit from watching others who interact successfully. Self-control training is also a choice for students who act aggressively towards others in the classroom. Disruptiveness is another behavior often related to peer rejection. Two different techniques (reinforcement and token incentives) can control the problem of disruptive behavior. Identification and intervention may help modify the negative experiences that some children encounter from not having friends.

My experience as a student in public schools showed me that children who encounter long periods of isolation due to their difficulty in forming friendships and gaining acceptance among their peers were those students who were disruptive, aggressive, unhappy, disrespectful, and many times held grudges against the more popular student – sometimes as in my personal experience, severe enough to take another person's life.

As a future educator, I wish for all of my students to leave my classroom feeling confident and good about themselves. After reading this article I realized more fully that not all students interact and form friendships as well as others. I will go out of my way to make sure that all of my students accept one another and learn to appreciate one's differences. However, after reading this article I also know the tools available for my use in case I encounter a student who has difficulty interacting with his or her peers. My hope is that all my students leave my classroom with a higher self-esteem and a positive connection with his or her peers. I enjoyed reading this article and hopefully will be able to apply this information in my teaching career.