

Loneliness and Solitude in Education

How to Value Individuality and Create an Enstatic School

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Preface

Aloneness in its many forms is something trivial and something profound:

- Trivially, I am alone when I am not in company. Profoundly, I may be, or believe myself to be, alone when I am in company.
- Trivially, company means being with other people. Profoundly, I may be – or believe myself to be – in the company of long-dead people, fictional people, non-human animals, nature, God or gods, and much more.

This project explores aloneness, trivially and profoundly, in good ways and in bad. Analysing and dealing with school-based aloneness, both as loneliness and as solitude, is a vital task. This is the first book of its kind dedicated to that purpose. Based on years of work on the nature of schools as learning communities, this particular book arose from recent research for the *Spirit of the School* project (Stern 2009). In that research, and in extended interviews since the completion of that book, children and young people, teachers, and headteachers describe times when they felt lonely, and times when they felt the need for solitude. The causes of loneliness are numerous – from people's home lives, the media, society – but the consequences of loneliness are significant for schools. How do schools deal with people when they are lonely, and how can they overcome some loneliness? And, complementing this work, how do schools create opportunities for healthy solitude, which is often a welcome alternative to loneliness? Sometimes schools, with the very best of intentions, deal with lonely or 'loner' people by making being alone seem altogether wrong, and by forcing them together into social activities. In such ways, schools can sometimes try to *include* people, but end up making them feel even more *excluded*. A school that teaches solitude well, and that helps people deal with and at times overcome loneliness, can be called an 'enstatic' school: a school in which people are comfortable within themselves.