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Second Edition

Behaviour Management with Young Children

Crucial First Steps with Children 3-7 Years

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1 The Critical First Days and First Week

Day one – first meeting with our new class

There are 20 – or more – children sitting on the carpet, it is your first day with your class. (Reception – 4- and 5-year-olds.) The children are – naturally – excited. Some are anxious; a few confused; some are just 'being themselves' (annoyingly). There is a lot of natural, normal, kinaesthetic energy here. Some of these children have already been to playschool and kindergarten. Some have loving and thoughtful and caring parents and carers; some have tired, frustrated parents and carers and are subject to inconsistent parenting and discipline. Some of our children have witnessed very disturbing things – already – in their young lives; and not just on television.

Negotiating the social place, space and purpose of classroom and school life ...

Twenty (or more) children, some with significant and restless energy, will have to learn to understand and negotiate this place and space; to understand *why* they are here – every day. Some will easily sprawl, trip, roll, fall, bump into ...; fail to see someone 'in their way'; cry easily ... Some will speak when (and how) they please, butting in and talking over others ... Some will have been 'spoilt', had far too much of their own way ... Some will not like being told 'what to do ...'.

I recall a mother (many years ago now) earnestly explaining to me (after class one day), "Mr Rogers, my boy is a free spirit you know ... we don't really have any rules at home as such ... ". I assured her that her son (6) would have a very positive experience with us, learning to relate, work, share, co-operate within our whole-class behaviour agreement. She looked worried, but in time Sean learned to differentiate his 'Lotus land' from 'what we did, how we worked, in *our* school ...'.

Beyond those early years of play and life and after having significant and personal adult attention they will need to learn how to *discriminate* and *attend* across others' voices and behaviours; to take their turn in class discussions; to wait (to tolerate normal frustrations of some waiting); to learn that they cannot have adult attention immediately and undividedly. Most of all they will have to learn to modify their behaviour in relation to others. To do that, of course, they need to be aware of their behaviour (and its effects on others ...) and to be taught, encouraged, guided to that end.

They will all need reassurance, guidance, direction and discipline – *from the outset*. From these first moments our children will need to be taught – and encouraged – in those behaviours that will enable social co-operation and focused learning.

They will get used to 'sitting on the mat' – that carpet area facing their teacher. They will get used to putting their hands up (without calling out) to share or ask questions; to take their turn; to wait, think (perhaps) before they speak; to co-operate with their peers … That is all to come. Now they face their teacher; day one. They face the significant adult they will be with for most of each day, five days a week, each term throughout their first school year.

They sit there, some cross-legged and (already) attentive, others are quite restless. We have to initiate *and sustain* whole-class attention: a key skill that will become second nature to us and – hopefully – reciprocated in our children (pp. 14–22).

Prior to this first day the children will – fortunately – have had:

- Transition days, easing reception-aged children into the new world of 'school'.
- Some schools will start with half-days, others with (say) Wednesdays off (again, for reception-aged children).
- Some schools organise 'reception only play times' gradually overlapping with 'buddies play times' until they go to full play times with the rest of the school (see p. 10).
- Transition is vital to easing children into school in a safe and positive way.
- Having tables set out with play activities (similar to a kindergarten set-up) is a useful way to get the children settled for the first week or so (depending on the dynamics of your class) and letting them play until the clingy, tearful parents and carers have left is very useful and allows us to deal with the more demanding and challenging students (p. 168).
- Parents/carers have had information packs and literature (that they have hopefully read) about how to assist their child's transition to school. Activities such as labelling their uniform and letting them try it on, packing their school bag, explaining what happens at school, even role-playing, and trying out the play equipment are all important activities that enable this significant transition in their lives.

Play

It is crucial, in the early stages of the year, to allow time for play. Children have come from kindergarten which is almost exclusively play (both 'free' play and 'directed' play) into a more formal structured primary school environment. To go from a 'play-rich' environment, into an environment that requires children to also be 'on-task' at a table group, can be a shock to some children. They will need some time to adjust to the daily routine of school compared to kindergarten.

At the beginning of the reception grade year, I would set the tables up with various activities, puzzles on one table, drawing materials on another, a bucket of mobiles on the floor, etc. Children were then able to enter the classroom and begin their day in a familiar, non-threatening way, and as lingering parents and carers eventually departed, we were able to pack away and begin some whole-class, focused learning time on the mat. As the initial transition weeks progressed we were able to shift gradually to the more formal routines … e.g.: take-home books in the tub, straight on the mat for roll call, notes in the bag for take home.

Incorporating moments of play into the rigours of the day can enable children to relax and celebrate their achievements. Using play in learning activities is also a positive way to enforce concepts that we are teaching. Be it hands-on play using different-sized containers with water or grain to demonstrate volume and capacity, cooking activities and puppet plays to demonstrate different writing genres, or memory games to teach sight words; play can be woven into almost anything and can also help to develop a love of learning. (Elizabeth).

That is not to say that play only has a role at transition time. It can also be used as a vehicle for learning (social interaction, motor skills, role playing, spatial relations, the list goes on) as well as a 'reward' celebration. I used to allocate Friday afternoons as 'developmental play time'. I would arrange various play activities ranging from collage and paper jewellery making to baby dolls and cars. I would use a task management board (similar to that used for literacy groups) and ask children to put their names next to the play activities set up for that afternoon. This enabled the children to try new games and activities, learn new skills and even make new friends. I would then use this time to observe my children and make annotated assessments of what the children were playing with and how they were learning through that play time. Without trying to sound too 'academic' about the whole thing … Friday afternoons, end of the week, tired little kids, a bit of play is good for them (Elizabeth).[9]

As Jerome Bruner et al. (1976) noted, play is as much *process* as it is ever 'product'. The distinction between undirected (sometimes called 'free play') and *directed* play is – therefore – not firmly fixed. Free play is, primarily, voluntary. Any concept of 'free' – at the most – means free from *directed play focus*. This does not mean that such play is 'better', or 'richer' in form (or function) – it is different in its genesis and focus.

Nor is 'free play' (where adults are present, or *need* to be present) without guidelines for play behaviour, or even basic directed ends on how we clean up, and put the right toys, activities, in the right boxes ...

All play has the power to stimulate imagination, creativity and learning.

- It can enable formative skills: fine motor, organisation, pattern and order, social imagination, to name a few.
- It can enable symbolic imagination and social engagement (turn-taking, perspective-taking on others' feelings about space, sharing, contribution ...) and co-operation.
- It can enable frustration tolerance (as when sorting; 'building'; construction activities; jigsaws, etc.).

As Bruner et al. (1976, p. 55) note, '(it can engage) the possibilities inherent in things and events'.

My writing table – directed play?

Some of my students were not writing; they frequently said they couldn't do it or didn't want to write because it was "too hard …". I set aside a 'special' table with A3 paper, crayons, felt-tipped pens, magazines (but not magazines like *Who* or any of those hyped up sorts …), age-related comics … I also put up a smallish whiteboard where students could take turns in 'writing' anything on the board.

It was part 'play' and part 'free writing' opportunity. For those students it reduced their anxiety and increased their motivation. All children could access this writing table area.

I also find that some children will write more 'freely', and expressively, if they are allowed to 'draw their writing thoughts first'.

Planning for day one

Having greeted our children and organised name tags (essential), we would normally bring all our children to the carpet area for our first meeting together as a class group. Learning children's names is essential, particularly when we need their individual and selective attention, in any context. Even before our – formal – day one we will probably have a 'photograph register' so we can normally learn their names by the end of the first day.[10]

Sitting 'on the mat' (the front of room carpet area) is a crucial routine we will utilise several times a day – every day of our teaching life. It is easy to assume that children will know how to behave *in this group context* whether on the mat, in table groups or moving – when appropriate – around a crowded classroom. As with all the core routines we develop, we work with the children's natural, developmental 'readiness'. We also need to *teach* behaviour related to that readiness (within that group context).

Some infant classes have children sitting at table groups for *all* learning activities, Even where this is a chosen seating arrangement, it is still crucial to teach behaviours appropriate to *whole-class teaching time* as distinct from small-group, on-task, learning time. I have witnessed teachers who, while speaking to the whole-class group, are ignoring the several students who have their seat backs to the teacher, or are rocking in their chairs, or still chatting ... Children need to be taught the expected behaviours for any *whole-class* teaching and discussion time.

'Sitting on the mat' (Carpet area)

It is deceptively basic – surely – to expect children to understand what we mean when we say 'sit on the mat'? Perhaps not.

What we normally mean by 'sitting on the mat' is that we teach (and encourage) children to:

- Sit cross-legged; *relaxed* (without pushing back onto others), or sitting knees up and arms around knees. The *actual* sitting (in such a small area), 'cheek by jowl', is not easily comfortable if we do not consciously consider personal space and place. It is easy to bump and push into, or across, another child's 'space' on the carpet area. A *brief* discussion, and modelling, of these deceptively basic specifics will help enormously. (This is very important for children diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder. See, later, pp. 14f).

  I once had a child who was so overweight he simply could not sit cross-legged, so those children who wanted to could pull up a chair or cushion (so as not to single him out). Naturally they would lose the privilege if there was any distracting and disruptive behaviour (while sitting on their chair).
- Face the front of the room – and your teacher – and listen with ears *and eyes*. It is important that children learn to 'listen with their eyes'. This helps *maintain* attentiveness (even transitory attentiveness!). This basic listening skill also (obviously) has wider currency than when the children are 'on the mat' (e.g. any *group* contexts such as assembly times ...). Some of my early years colleagues call this 'whole-body listening'.
- Hands and feet in their lap or around legs (if the student has a strong – physical – preference for sitting that way). A key verbal cue we will need to use many times (in the first week) is, "Keep your hands and feet safe – in your laps." Never assume 4- and 5-year-olds know what a 'lap' is; explain and *briefly* model 'relaxed sitting'. Simple games are often helpful such as 'Simon says …' for modelling close listening, body parts and spatial awareness. If a student wants to ask a question or contribute to the class discussion they will need to put their hand up (without calling out or clicking their fingers) and wait for their teacher to 'cue them in'. One of most commonly cited distractions (noted by teachers) is *calling out* in

whole-class teaching time; closely followed by *talking while the teacher is talking* (Rogers, 2011).

- Some children think that it is 'OK' to call out, *as long as they have got their hand up*. In their minds they are 'obeying' the rule (even when they call out *while* having a raised hand).
- It is important to establish the fairness of the 'hands up rule' from day one. This means reminding children who forget, or those who are impulsive or overly attentional (p. 19f). We do this each time we have 'carpet time' (the class, together) on 'the mat'. A visual poster cue can assist children's short-term memory here. The poster is displayed on the wall, near the whiteboard, able to be seen clearly by all children. It illustrates how children have their hand up (without calling out or 'clicky' fingers). (See p. 21) Children can be encouraged, and reminded, to think *inside their heads* before they ask or share. This is a behaviour pattern they will quickly learn and develop. After a week (or two) the *occasional* reminder is normally enough; often a non-verbal reminder.
- Children need to learn that a *quiet* raised hand (as one of my colleagues puts it) is like a flag. Your teacher can see the 'flags' and knows who wants to share. Your teacher will know you're ready to share and will call on you in turn (so we all get a fair go).
- Those children who *frequently* call out, butt in, talk while the teacher is talking, or annoy others on the mat (pinch, poke, nudge …) will need to be followed up beyond any normative classroom corrective reminder. The procedures for follow-up and follow-through are discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Establishing whole-class attention and focus

Once the children are 'on the mat' we have to assist them to settle, relax, attend *and* focus. Unless children can do this they will miss the essential features and benefits of any whole-class discussion and, teaching and learning time.

Communicating and conveying 'calmness'

A crucial skill – in whole-class management – is the ability of the teacher to consciously communicate and convey a sense of calmness to the class; as a group. This 'calmness' is communicated by our physical and vocal presence; it *enables* attention and focus in the individual and the group. Without attention and focus from the children (during whole-class teaching time) we cannot – meaningfully – engage and sustain a positive and workable teaching and learning environment.

I have worked with teachers who, in seeking to settle and focus a more restless class group (for whole-class teaching time), will often add to any kinaesthetic restlessness (in

the group) by their verbal and non-verbal behaviour. I have sat next to colleagues whose voice has a volume, and 'edge' that is not only loud (and I do not mean shouting) – but actually raises unhelpful emotional energy in the children.

You have no doubt seen those television advertisements where the presenter is waving his hands, moving 'zig-zag' across the screen, speaking in an abnormally 'hyper' voice, with 'Mr Bean eyes' all agog and hands waving as he seeks to exhort and con(vince) the viewers. I have worked with teachers who are *SO* ANIMATED they actually 'wind the children up' (!) Many colleagues I have worked with are often unaware that their *degree* of vocal and non-verbal body energy actually *telegraphs corresponding energy* to the more restless children; unhelpful energy *at this point in the lesson*. When the children are supposed to be actually listening, focused, attentive (eyes and ears …) and (yes) engaged, they end up being *over*-engaged.

A teacher's *characteristic* verbal and non-verbal behaviour is a crucial feature of their overall behaviour leadership. When we communicate in a relaxed, calm, confident manner, we *telegraph* calmness. This is particularly important when we discipline. Calmness is not inconsistent with the need, on occasion, to communicate assertion, even appropriate anger. We would further argue that a teacher cannot be *effectively* assertive (when required) without that essential calmness.

You will note, at the head of this section, that we've put inverted commas around the noun 'calmness'; this is deliberate. We do not mean a teacher should be perpetually 'holding in' their feelings or conveying some kind of quiescent passivity. Calmness (in this sense and in this text) is akin to self-control, the ability to create a sense of relational confidence, and relaxedness so that (with our children) we convey that sense of trust (to our children) to lead and manage peacefully, respectfully and (when the need arises) with a calm firmness and assertion. The issue of assertion is addressed later. It is important to be *consciously* aware of how we normally 'come across' as the adult teacher-leader.

- How confident, assured, and relaxed do we characteristically appear, and sound (in contrast to hesitancy, abruptness, timidity or an arrogant, and petty, self-confidence)? Can our children sense our assuredness within our role?
- What kind of corrective language do we use in that whole-class 'settling time'? Some teachers will overuse (or *characteristically* use) negative corrective discipline: "*Don't* sit like that"; "*Don't* talk when I'm teaching"; or 'ask' pointless questions: "*Why* are you so noisy?"; "Do you *have* to do that?! Do you?" When a teacher characteristically uses these forms of language (particularly in an overly tense, or stern, petty or harsh voice), it communicates uncertainty in the teacher's role. It also *creates* residual tension in children; both anxiety and annoyance. Some children even interpret an overly and characteristically negative tone and manner (in a teacher's discipline language) as an invitation to negatively react back to their teacher. *Authoritative* behaviour is not to be confused with a bossy, *authoritarian* manner or a characteristically harsh, sharp, voice (Rogers, 2011).

- I have worked with colleagues whose characteristic voice has a 'sheepish', almost frowningly, overly cajoling, even pleading tone that appears to say (even to 5-year-olds), 'My teacher doesn't really believe what she says when she is directing us to be quiet, and listen …'. Children quickly – very quickly – pick up how confident a teacher is; how kind; how fair and whether they have a sense of humour, and how far the teacher will tolerate or is able to 'rein in' distracting and disruptive behaviour.
- The need to present with a calm (not unemotional) voice; the need to speak *clearly* (and not in long complex sentences); the need to convey lift, mood and necessary energy in one's voice (instead of a monotonic, flat, overly sighing tone) is crucial in one's leadership communication.
- A helpful way to 'observe', or test out, one's *characteristic* teacher-leadership is by casually observing our children during 'developmental play time'. A group of children (usually girls) will go and sit on the 'mat' (one in our seat) and will proceed to play 'teachers'. They will have our teaching behaviour 'down pat'.

Cueing for children's attention and focus during whole-class teaching time

The children are settling on the mat, finding a place and sitting ... As we scan our children, we allow a little time for them to actually settle in their place/space on 'the mat' (or carpet area). Our conscious cueing of calmness will help in those first few minutes.

Some teachers use non-verbal cues such as a clapping rhythm, or a bell; years ago I used to use a vibrant *strum* on my trusty Spanish guitar. One simple clapping cue is to use a responding clap (from the teacher to children) starting with full hands, then (becoming quieter) with a two finger clap, then a one finger clap, then hands relaxed 'in lap'. A non-verbal cue we rather like (used by my wife – a former primary school teacher) is the *cue to head, shoulders, heart and lap*. Waiting for the initial settling of children sitting down on 'the mat' she then verbally cues the class, "When we come into class we think with our heads" (here the teacher touches head with both hands) "and relax our bodies …" (here the teacher touches both shoulders with her hands and demonstrates a relaxed breathing and sitting position). "We also think with our hearts" (here the teacher touches 'her heart' with both hands) adding – in a whisper – "and we put our hands into our laps to show we're ready to begin …" (she models hands/lap). The children then practise this several times. This, in subsequent occasions, becomes a *non-verbal* group cue whenever the children come onto 'the mat' as a group.

"One (...), two (...), three (...) look at me."

When we *verbally cue* (for whole-class attention) it is important to make clear what we are actually communicating and expecting. "Everyone (…) looking this way now (…) with

your eyes and ears." "When you are *looking this way* (I can see you are listening (...). Thank you." It can help to *briefly* acknowledge those who are listening and facing the front ... "Sean (...) thanks. Yes, Fatima (...) I see you're listening, and Paul, Halid and Carmella (...). Thank you." The brief tactical pausing (…) can help attentional take-up by children (p. 19).

NB

It really does not help to over-praise children who are sitting up 'straight' (some annoyingly 'ramrod straight'). "Oh! Johnny – you're sitting up soooo NICELY!! That's great!" This is particularly important for children who *expect* over-praising; it is also unfair for those children who *are normally* sitting relaxedly; attending and focusing to the front ...

The issue of praise (and over-praising) is addressed later (p. 91). It is enough to *briefly* affirm and acknowledge children who are sitting appropriately and *then* engage the story, the 'morning talk' the learning activity focus, nurture group time ...

One of the phrases I find helpful in *establishing* whole-class attention is to say: "I want everybody to face this way and listen with their eyes and ears." If a child calls out – with a mischievous grin – "You can't listen with your eyes – ha ha ha!" it is enough to *tactically* ignore that kind of comment. On those occasions I have *refocused* the student's comment (without looking at him) by saying to the class group: "Some of you may be wondering how we can *listen with our eyes and ears*. Let me show you." At that point I will then model the basic elements of attentional behaviour. We can also, of course, simply demonstrate these behaviours with a child at the front of their class.

Eye-scanning of the group

It is also important to scan the faces (and eyes) of the group – briefly – and relaxedly, so as to connect with each child while we *cue* for whole-class attention. This also enables the teacher to gain necessary non-verbal feedback (to see if the children are listening and attending).

While this seems obvious – patently obvious – I still work alongside some teachers who either forget this, or are unaware that they are exercising a narrow visual focus as they address 25 (or more) children in front of them.

I have worked with colleagues who utilise such a narrow visual scanning they completely miss the boys who are 'play pinching', poking, even pushing; the girls who are turning around frequently and chatting; the boy taking his shoes off and …

This aspect of initiating, and *sustaining*, whole-class attention *and focus* should be a conscious feature of our teacher leadership.

- Scanning the group involves *temporary eye-contact* with each child. It demonstrates a connectedness between teacher and child, teacher and group.
- Even when reading a book to a class group it is important to pause (briefly) and scan for this 'connectedness'.

- Scanning gives a kind of instant, non-verbal, feedback to the teacher. We can – often – sense if a child (or the group generally) is 'with us'.
- Scanning also alerts us to any potential distracting or disruptive behaviour, enabling us to decide what (if any) behaviours we can *tactically* ignore and what we will need to specifically address. Until we get to know our class – as individuals – it is wiser to 'err' on the side of the *brief*, clear, positive, corrective reminder (pp. 19–21).

Verbal cues for whole-class attention and focus

When giving verbal cues for whole-class attention it is unhelpful to ask the class group *if* they would face the front and listen. For example: "*Would* you please face the front and listen?"; "*Can you* please be quiet and look this way?"; "*Can you* please stop talking …?" A whole-class direction is not a request; nor do we actually want an answer to the implied question (i.e. "Can you …?", "Would you …?", "Will you …?").

A brief, simple, clear direction to the class group is enough: "Looking this way everyone (…) without talking (…). This is our teaching time (…). Looking this way and listening with your eyes and ears." Allow some tactical pausing (…) (p. 19).

Thank the children as they settle … "Sean (…), Halid (...), Zyin (…), Chien (…), Fatima (…). Thank you for listening and settling quickly". Other children (at this eye level) will often 'pick up' on this brief acknowledgement and 'copy'. It will be helpful to then thank the whole class (as the class settles and faces the front). "Thank you everyone. You're all looking this way and listening and relaxed … Good morning to you all."

A whole-class cue can be as simple as:

> "Feet are down, legs are crossed, eyes to the front (...) we're ready. Thanks (...) Good morning."

One of my colleagues draws a single oval on the whiteboard (as the children settle on the carpet area). He says nothing, adding to the oval eyes and ears; this is non-verbally cueing the students to focus to the front of the classroom. Still not speaking, he scans his students' faces, then adding curly hair, straight hair, long hair ... he scans their faces again – as they relax, settle and focus. He adds a nose and a smile ... Returning the smile (as he scans their faces) he waits and then gives the class greeting. So, guess who is on the board today?

Some of my colleagues use 'a bit of Mozart or Bach, Hayden ...' to cue the children 'to the mat'.

Whatever cues we use to initiate, *and sustain*, our children's natural restlessness as they settle on the carpet area, it is important to emphasise calmness, positive expectation and co-operation.

Children will – generally – rise to our expectations, providing we communicate those expectations with a calm, positive, expectancy in our language and manner. (The issue of corrective and encouraging language is addressed, at length, in Chapter 4.)

NB Tactical pausing (...)

You will note the ellipsis within brackets often used in the snatches of teacher to child communication in this text, Tactical pausing (...) after verbally cueing a group, or individual (always by personal name), allows for cognitive take-up by a group or an individual student (Rogers, 2011).

Sometimes we will need to repeat the child's name (or group instruction) to alert, and initiate, eye contact and to sustain initial 'attention'.

For example the direction to a child who is inattentive and chatting to a fellow student while 'on the mat' (in whole-class teaching time) would typically occasion a brief, clear, direction. However we need to initiate the child's attention *before* any direction (or reminder) is given; tactical pausing enables that 'initiation' (as it were).

"Sean (...), Sean (...)" Sean turns to his teacher (he had been turning and whispering to a classmate) ... "Looking this way and listening." As the child responds to the direction a brief 'thanks' is enough. 'Thanks,' is preferable to 'please' in most 'correctional' reminders. 'Thanks' is more expectational than 'please' (which can often sound like a request).

Tactical pausing is essential in out-of-class contexts (corridor, playground) where we are seeking to establish eye contact and acknowledgement from a student 'over distance'. The first verbal cue (often the child's name) may need to be said a little louder (to initiate focus without shouting) and then we drop the voice to a normal level when the child is attending.

Sustaining whole-class attention

It is one thing to initiate whole-class attention, another to *sustain* it through the whole-class lesson activity; 'the class story'; 'the morning talk'; nurture group time … As we sustain their attention – and learning momentum – we will often need to briefly discipline (by reminder or direction) the students who chat, fiddle, call out ...; particularly in the establishment phase as children 'socialise' into the routines of whole-class teaching time and on task learning time ...

Some children will call out (while the teacher is still talking) "Miss McPherson! Miss McPherson …!" If we sense such distractions might merely be over-enthusiasm or forgetfulness, it can help to *tactically* ignore the distraction (p. 70f). Some children pick up on our *tactical* ignoring quickly and they – correspondingly – note the way we *selectively attend* to those children who do put up their hand and wait – without calling

out. When the child stops calling out and puts his hand up (no clicky fingers either) it is enough to say (when *we're* ready), "Michael (…) I see your hand up. I'll answer your question in a moment. Thanks for remembering to put your hand up."

If several children have their hands up and are 'waiting' – again briefly thank them, "Thank you for remembering our fair class rule Chien, Fatima, Zyin, Bilal ... I'll answer you one at a time." We then nominate a child, while briefly assuring the others that we will come to them in turn and they 'can put their hands down for now'.

It can also help to *preface* any whole-class teaching time with, "I know some of you *really* want to share, and you may know the answer to a question *before* anyone else. In our class we remember to put up our hand and wait. I will see you. Then we *all* get a fair turn to share or ask a question."

In the first few weeks it takes children time to learn, and get used to, waiting their turn in a large group.

If any children are chatting while the teacher is talking to the group it will help to pause and – *briefly* – name and direct their behaviour.

"Sean (…), Kalim (…) – you're talking. This is class teaching time, (or 'story time', or 'discussion time' …). You need to face this way and listen – without talking." Again, a brief 'thanks' can often balance, and affirm, the correction.

If two children are distracting each other – the nudge, poke, push – 'testosteronic bonding' – it is often enough to *describe* and *direct*: "Shannon (…), Paul (…). You're poking and pushing. Safe hands in your lap. Eyes and ears this way."

If the behaviour is repeatedly distracting, or disruptive, potentially hurtful, or hostile, a clear – and brief – desist will be necessary: "Michael (…) stop that *now*. Move away from Sean and sit here" (teacher beckons to an area near to the teacher's chair). A 'desist' conveys a teacher's decisive '*stop*' message (see pp. 84–6). Desists convey serious, firm intent. Any desist should, however, be communicated with a *respectfully* firm, clear, calm, assertive tone. We are also aware of not *pointing at* a child when giving any corrective cue; we use an *open hand* to focus and direct (even with assertive cueing).

After any corrective language to a child/children it is important to continue with the lesson or activity – to resume that sense of calm purpose. In this the audience of peers receive a sense of security and focus from their teacher. If children refuse to comply with directions, reminders, desists or directing a child to sit away (or work away) from others, we may also need to consider whether we will direct them to in-class time-out. This should be the exception (though not, necessarily, a 'last resort'). On some occasions (where safety is at stake) we may need to resort to time-out as a *directed exit* from the classroom. (See Chapter 5.)

Overdwelling and talking over children

It is important not to *overdwell* when correcting children; "Michael, Sean, Patrick why are you talking? You know you're not supposed to be talking now don't you? How will

you know what you're supposed to be doing later if you're talking now? Eh? No one else is talking are they? … Are they? …". Quite apart from the use of unnecessary (and irrelevant) questions ("*Why* …?", "*Don't you*?", "*Are they* …?") the teacher is verbally, and attentionally, *overdwelling* to the distracting/disruptive student/s and contributing to potential restlessness in the rest of the group.

We also avoid talking *over* any noise during whole-class teaching time or when giving *any* whole-class direction (say at cross-over activities or at pack-up time). This only habituates that it is (in effect) 'OK to talk, call out, and surreptitiously annoy, pinch and push other children, others while on the mat' (and *while* the teacher is talking with the whole class). I have seen teachers talk over – or 'through' – behaviours such as children chatting, calling out and fiddling (loudly) with *objects d'art* such as pens, pencil cases, water bottles, rulers (etc.). The teacher – then – (often) has to overly raise their voices. This adds to residual tension in the room as well as hampering *necessary* attention and focus by the children.

We have found it helpful to have a poster – already on the board behind where the teacher sits – clearly visible by the children.

The poster (see below) illustrates the expectations and cues (such as 'eyes – ears' and 'hands up and wait').

We put our hand up and wait when we want to share.
We listen with our eyes and ears.
We take our turn.

Whole-class directions

NB

Whenever we give *any* whole-class directions, instructions or even reminders it is important we go the front/centre of the room. This 'anchors' – as it were – the place and purpose of why the teacher is standing there: she is expecting the whole class to stop what they are doing, with their eyes and ears facing front of classroom, without talking. This enables the children to get used to *expecting whole-class* directions *when the teacher is standing at the front of the classroom*.

I have (for example) seen many teachers give whole-class instructions to 'pack up' from different locations in the room: "Alright everyone, you need to be packing up your pencils, papers – and scissors. Remember to put the glue sticks away *with the lids on* (!), lids on the felt-tipped pens because they'll dry out won't they? And makes sure there are no paper bits on the floor, and …".

Quite apart from a rapid ten-item instruction – the teacher is talking *while moving* around the room. She will be fortunate if half a dozen children are actually half-listening. It is essential the teacher goes to the front of the room, cues for the (normative) whole-class attention and focus, and *then* gives the instruction or reminder. With pack-up reminders a visual 'pack-up cue-card' (laminated, on each table) will help. Many teachers appoint table monitors (each week) to remind and encourage their table group classmates during pack-up time.

Seating organisation (early years), for on-task learning time

It is important to plan ahead (for day one) for seating arrangements: do we organise seating as table groups, straight rows, split rows or table groupings? The most common seating organisation involves mixed gender, 'mixed-ability', table groups. The key is not to *simply* let the children sit in friendship groups or *only* sit with their best friends; it is easy for 'cliques' to form (even at early years). The more restless and inattentive personalities are also more likely to distract their table group peers *if* we have not planned ahead regarding who-sits-with-whom. It is worth discussing this issue with grade team colleagues (and subject specialists) on the planning day before our first formal meeting with our children.

The least helpful seat-cueing (day one) is to say, "OK guys, sit on whatever table you want" (is 'guys' a helpful group generic at this age?). Naturally the more gregarious children will tend to group with like-minded personalities and the more restless boys may quickly rush to the furthest table from the front of the classroom. Of course the children will need to know there will be times when we will sit with our friends in class time …, but that decision is best left with the teacher.

Seating space

Children will spend a lot of time in their table groups; apart from the uncomfortable seating often used in many schools, we need to plan the formal seating arrangements thoughtfully. Test (prior to day one) the 'physicality' of seating space:

- Can a child move into their seat without distracting the child behind them? I have seen children far too easily bumping chairs (mostly inadvertently) because there simply is not enough space to move the chair 'back and in'. While this sounds basic (in print) I have seen far too many classes where lack of thought (and care) in seating organisation actually contributes to unnecessary bumping, which can – then – trigger disruptiveness and misbehaviour.
- Movement flow is also crucial between, and around, tables, locker-tray areas, and resource areas (for maths equipment, flash cards, games, library corner).
- Movement flow is crucial:
  - to, and from, the carpet area to the table groups.
  - to, and from, locker areas and table groups. I have been in classes where (for example) children's seating actually backed onto the plastic locker-tray trolley (where children kept their ongoing work and personal pencil cases, etc.).
  - to, and from, the coat/bag/hats area and (then) around table groups to the carpet area (at the front of the classroom).

Like any routine it is extremely helpful to discuss with our early years colleagues how to plan and *fine-tune* these organisational details. By 'walking through' (as if a child), and around, these areas (in the classroom) one can get a feel for likely concerns. While we cannot plan for every contingency, we can minimise unnecessary problems by thoughtful *preventative* planning.

Name tag each individual seat/table space, chair and coat hook, and name label the normal table items such as pencil holders (keep felt-tipped pens away until needed!).

If tables are labelled (with an 'iconic marker' such as a primary colour, or animal, or something based on your current theme) this can help with grouping or direction (see below).

Seating groups will change throughout the day – obviously – as early years literacy and numeracy groups are often ability based. Sometimes such groups (in grades 1 and 2) are spread *across* the year level and will involve movement between several classrooms.

I have found it helpful to have groups visually cued up on the 'carpet poster board' at the front of the classroom. (See below.)

It is then easy to say at then end of the morning teaching time, "Righto everyone (…) hippos are on the red table, giraffes are on the blue", etc. I have also used little icons

to show the early years literacy activities they would be moving on to at 'changeover time'. For example:

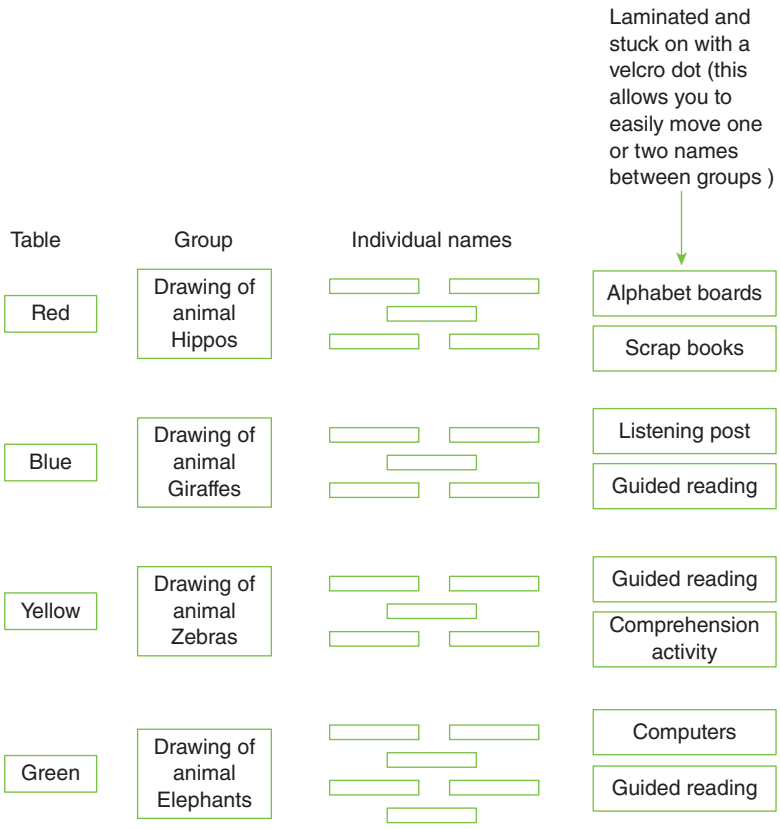

Table groups

While table groups are probably the most common seating arrangement at infant level (commonly at new entrant stage), it is not necessarily the only seating arrangement appropriate at this age level.

Early years teachers tend to use table groupings to enhance 'natural' co-operative behaviour and social bonding. Such behavioural-learning goals, however, rarely occur fortuitously, simply because we have simply grouped our children into table groups. Teachers need to discuss basic behaviour expectations of table groups. They then need to teach *and model* those behaviours, that encourage and support students' co-operative behaviour as they move around the classroom during on-task learning time.

If a class is particularly fractious (from day one) we may need to consider a more 'formal' seating arrangement (say split rows), and organise where particular children will sit (and with whom) for maximum co-operation and learning support. Again – it is always worth discussing these issues with our collegial team. We can then (later) organise groupings based on our observation of characteristic behaviour patterns in our students during on task learning time.

Another alternative (with more fractious groups) is to organise table groups for specific learning activities (and specific time allocation). During these times we can teach and encourage those co-operative behaviours that can lead to more sustained table group arrangements.