

Chapter 2

New class, new year: the establishment phase of behaviour management

Habits change into characters.
Ovid (45BC – AD17)

New year, new class, new start

As you stand in your classroom on the one, pupil-free day, before Day 1, Term 1, you scan the room and furniture (sometimes inadequate and uncomfortable). You think, “Tomorrow there will be 25–30 students in here, each with their unique personality, temperament and needs. Phew!”

For some of you it will be your first class “on your own” as it were; for others it will be another fresh new year that (at times) will soon develop into the daily, hourly, minute-by-minute juggle of demands that make up normative teaching.

Most teachers can remember their first class – and even their entire first day.

One of the important, fundamental, questions at this stage of the year is “What can I do (and what can we do as a collegial team) to *minimise*, and prevent (where possible), unnecessary hassles or problems in establishing positive behaviours in our classes?”

The answer to this question will focus on the necessary procedures, routines and rules to enable the smooth running of quite a complex community. It will be important to integrate routines and rules into a workable system and then consciously teach that system through discussion, modelling, encouragement and teacher-management.

There is ample research to show that effective and positive teachers are acutely conscious of the importance of the first lesson, the first few days, the first few weeks and how they establish the shared rights and responsibilities of classroom behaviour with their students (see Doyle 1986; Kyriacou 1986, 1991; Rogers 1997, 1998; McInerney and McInerney 1998; Robertson 1997).

Establishment phase (practices and skills)

The establishment phase of the year is a crucial time in the development of a class group (and even the school as community). In terms of basic group dynamics there is a psychological and developmental readiness in the students for their teacher to explain how things will be *this* particular year with regard to expectations about behaviour and learning. The three basic phases of the life of a classroom community are set out in Figure 2.1

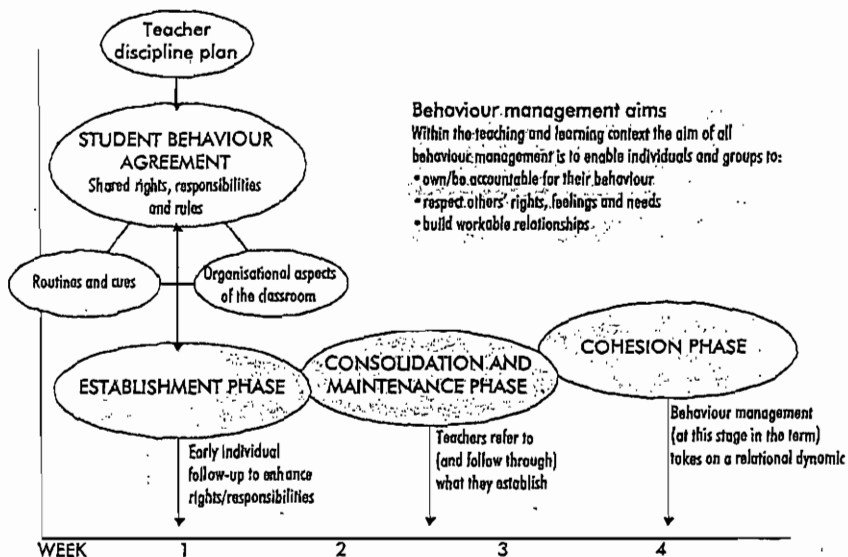


Figure 2.1 The fundamental phases of life in a classroom

Students expect their teacher to clarify:

- Lining up and room entry procedures.
- Seating plans and student grouping for Week 1, and possibly Term 1. Such planning needs to include whether seating should occur in rows, pairs or table groups.
- Student entry to class and settling at workplaces or “carpet space” for infants. Cues will need to be explained, modelled and monitored. With infants, it will also be important to explain, and model, personal space, place when “on the carpet” and keeping hands and feet to oneself (although adolescents can benefit from a clear message about testosterone bonding also!)
- Organisation of locker space/place. At primary age level where locker trays are in the classroom, consideration needs to be given to how they are sited for ease of student movement.
- Use of cues for whole class discussion and questions.
- Use of teacher cue(s) to initiate whole class attention at any stage.
- Appropriate movement patterns between instructional and on-task learning time (transitions).
- Use of appropriate cues to get teacher assistance during the on-task phase of the lesson/activity.
- Routines for tidying work space/place.
- Cues and procedures for lesson closure and exit from the classroom.

These are, of course, the basic – foundational – routines/cues. Teachers also need to establish routines for lunch (dinner times), for monitor systems, for homework procedures, distribution of notices, use of school diaries, quiet reading time procedures, toilet/drink rules, dealing with students who are frequently



(rather than incidentally) late to class, and so on. Most schools plan such routines and procedures on a team, or faculty, basis.

When raising student awareness about behaviour and learning (and their impact on each other) we need to emphasise the fundamentals of our learning community:

- "We share the same place, time, space, resources, every day. We have to learn to get on with each other for our own good and the good of others and to help each other in our learning here."
- "Everyone here is individual – we have our own feelings, needs, concerns."
- "As we would want others to think about us and our feelings so we, in turn ..."
- "The rights and responsibilities we all share here: the right to be treated with respect, the right to learn, the right to feel safe here ..."

It can help to discuss with students the common issues and concerns about shared space, time and resources, and basic, respectful relationships. With younger children, a practical discussion on basic manners will be initially important (and revisited many times in the first few weeks): "please"; "thank-you"; "excuse me"; "asking if you want to borrow ..."; "giving/putting things back where we borrowed ..."; "sharing and cooperative behaviour ...". For some children the classroom environment (notably at infant level) presents expectations and norms of behaviour they are not used to, or that they do not easily accommodate to; it can help to run mini role-plays on manners and helping behaviours.

These early discussions about behaviour and learning can be developed into a *student behaviour agreement* that can form the basis for the teacher's behaviour management and discipline on the one hand, and student-teacher cooperation on the other.

Developing a student behaviour agreement with the class: rights, responsibilities and rules.

Many schools now develop classroom behaviour agreements in the first week or two of the school year. Building on the natural readiness, and expectation of students (about teachers developing rules and routines), grade teachers set aside some classroom time to develop a more collaborative model of classroom management through the establishment of shared rights and responsibilities. Students participate, with their teachers, in an agreement addressing common rights, responsibilities and rules for behaviour and learning, core consequences for unacceptable behaviour and a framework of support to assist students when they are struggling with their behaviour and learning (Fig. 2.2).

At secondary age level such an agreement is best developed by tutor (or form) teachers who set aside one full timetabled period early in the first week to discuss, with their form groups, the key understandings about behaviour and learning (Fig. 2.2). A common framework for such discussions across all form groups is noted in Figure 2.2. Once established such an agreement forms the basis on which subject and specialist teachers can fine-tune rules and routines pertinent to particular needs and contexts.

This agreement is published within the first fortnight of Term 1 and a copy is sent home to each family. At the primary level this classroom agreement (sometimes called a behaviour plan) has a cover page with a photo of the grade teacher and the students (Fig. 2.3).

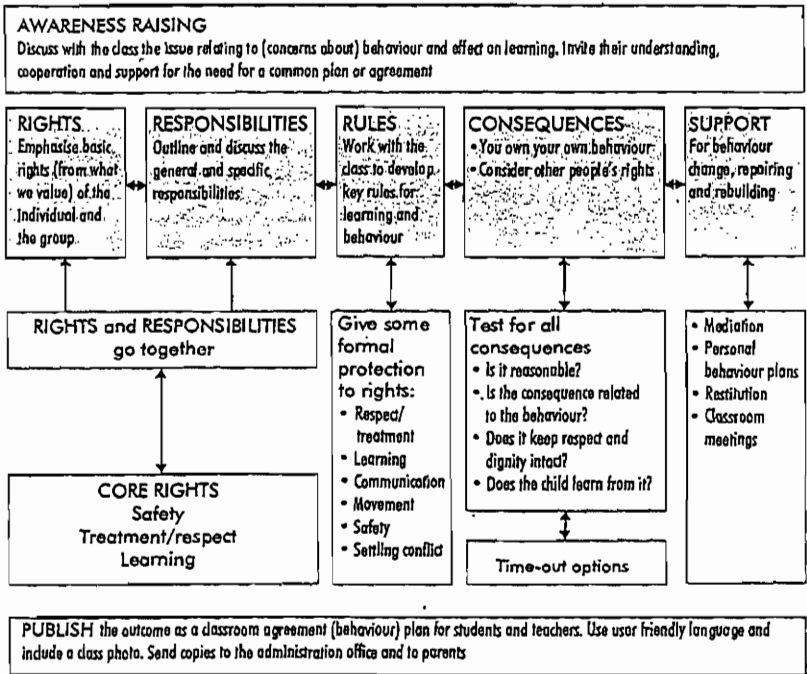


Figure 2.2 Class agreement – behaviour plan (adapted from Rogers 1997: 41)

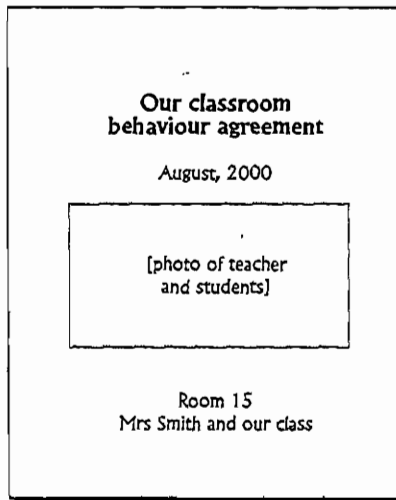


Figure 2.3 Cover of a classroom behaviour agreement

Any classroom based (or year-level) behaviour agreement needs to reflect the values and aims of the whole-school policy on behaviour. The advantage of a classroom based policy or agreement, notably at primary and middle-school level, is that it raises a school-wide awareness and consciousness about behaviour, learning, and relationships, and does so in a class-by-class, age-related and developmental way. This gives reasonable school-wide consistency on the common, and essential, aspects of behaviour policy.

A framework for such a plan or policy is set out in Figure 2.2. Each teacher, from infants to junior, junior to senior, follows the same framework, modifying the language and concepts to age and comprehension so that all students across the school share the same understandings.

The process is as important as the outcome. On the first day the class teacher sets aside time to raise whole-class awareness about behaviour and learning, inviting student participation, understanding and cooperation for a plan or agreement about fair and proper behaviour that enhances positive working relationships and learning. Some teachers will take a more discursive approach, perhaps through a classroom meeting (or circle time); other teachers are more comfortable with a formal approach that outlines the key areas of the plan and invites student discussion.

The policy, plan or agreement begins with a general statement:

“Our behaviour plan has been discussed and developed by the children and the teacher in Year [X]. It is a record of how we seek to behave towards each other. It applies to all the people who come into our class and will be used throughout the school year.”

Our common rights

The key elements of a student behaviour agreement

Non-negotiable rights are the basis of a classroom agreement: the right to feel safe at school; the right to learn; and the right to be treated with respect. Rights such as the right to play, the right to equality, the right to have my say, the right to be an individual and the right to teach are all subsumed within these core rights. These core rights are based on the value of mutual regard, without which no group or community could effectively cohere and work together for mutual benefit. A right, in this sense, is that which we believe is fair, *right*, and proper about the way we should relate and work together.

Even very young children have an emerging concept of fundamental “rightness”. Obviously they behave in contradistinction to that rightness (as do we all), but they hold to it strongly. It is the “natural law”.

Simply stating that we have a right to something is not the same as enjoying that right.

We might include in our policy, for example:

The right to safety doesn't just mean being safe – it is about feeling safe too. Put-downs, cheap shots at others, excluding others on purpose, harassment and swearing are all ways that take away someone's right to feel safe here. (From a Year 6 classroom agreement)

In this sense rights imply, and necessitate, responsibilities. If we have a right to learn it implies that the teacher enables the best – most effective – learning that is *reasonably* possible. (This further implies that when we're tired, and it's cold and wet, and we're stuck in the “excuse for a classroom” that looks like a shed we still do our best.)

In discussing these rights with our students we provide a common focus for the way that we look at, understand and address behaviour.

Responsibilities flow from our rights

Individual and group responsibilities overlap:

Shared responsibilities mean that we care for ourselves and others here. Responsibilities and respect go together; when we respect others we are thinking about how our behaviour affects others.

Whole class "brainwaving" ("surfing the collective brain space" sounds less violent than *brainstorming*) will quickly elicit norms about the responsibility to, for example: get to class on time; have the relevant materials; share (ideas, resources and even our time); do one's best; help out; listen to others; manage our whole class noise level(!). A discussion on responsibilities will also need to address respect in terms of basic manners. Basics such as saying please and thank-you, asking when we borrow, returning when you've finished, saying excuse me when moving around others, being aware and respectful of others, allowing personal space, using first names (rather than 'he', 'she' or 'them'), taking turns, lining up without pushing, and so on, are all aspects of self-awareness as we interact with others day after day.

The *core* responsibilities can be summed up in cooperative and respectful behaviour: the consideration of others as well as oneself.

Rules: protecting rights and encouraging responsibility

The primary purpose of a rule is to give a formal, recognised and public protection to one's rights. Fair rules also highlight and encourage one's responsibility.

In the first few weeks teachers can be heard across all classes, using rule-reminders: "remember *our* rule for asking questions", "We've got a rule about respectful language". In the playground teachers will be heard going up to students inviting some cognitive, behavioural awareness, by asking questions such as, "What's *our* rule about playing ball games?" and "What's *our* rule for safe play on the climbing frame?"

In framing rules it is important to remember some basics:

1. Have rules that focus on the core rights: a safe place and safe behaviour; a respectful place and respectful behaviour through the way we treat others; a learning place where we give our best and cooperate to learn. Rules should be few in number but address the necessary behaviours. I have seen classrooms where teachers have posted 20 or more rules on the wall; rules often stated negatively ("You must not ...", "You shall not ...", "You can't ...") and not outlining the desired behaviour. Simply telling a child what he should *not* do is hardly helpful; a helpful rule should at least contain the negative within a positive. For example, "In whole-class learning time we put our hand up to ask questions and to contribute (the positive rule) *without calling out* (the negative caveat).

I have usually found it helpful to have 4-6 rules covering:

- treatment (courtesy, manners, respect);
- communication (hands up, "partner-voices", positive language, active listening);
- learning (cooperation and support, use of resources, how to fairly utilise teacher assistance);
- movement (walking not running, orderly entry/exit to classroom, personal space, sensible movement);
- problem solving (settling problems peacefully, using teacher assistance, using classroom meetings for resolving common concerns).

2. Express the rules behaviourally and positively where possible:

To show *respect* in our classroom we are courteous, and use our manners. We use positive language with each other. This means no teasing or put-downs.

When we solve problems in our classroom we talk it over or ask the teacher to help. We do not fight with words or fists or feet. If we fight we will have to go to time-out.

It can help highlight the key behaviour focus of the rule by having a rule heading such as: Our *communication* rule; Our *respect* rule; Our *learning* rule; Our *safety* rule.

3. Use inclusive language in framing the rules: "In *our* classroom we ...".
4. Publish the rules in both the classroom agreement and on bright classroom posters (even at middle-school level). This can help with a teacher's verbal reminders about appropriate behaviour. Cartoon motifs can help the visual effect of the posters. At infant level teachers can further illustrate the relevant behaviour through photographs attached to the rule poster.



Consequences

Students need to know that consequences follow inappropriate and irresponsible behaviour. Consequences are directly related to rules and rights. Students will need to understand that when a rule is broken, in effect a right is affected or even abused.

If a student is *repeatedly* disruptive by calling out, butting-in, talking really loudly, interfering with others' workspace or materials or acting unsafely or aggressively, he or she is affecting others' rights to learn and, of course, the teacher's right to teach. The necessary, fair, and appropriate consequence in such a case will need to be "time-out" (in-class or even out-of-class) (see p. 100).

Students, therefore, can (temporarily) lose their right to be a part of the learning community through a consequence such as time-out.

Students need to know that beyond rule reminders (as a verbal consequence) they may be: directed to work away from others; take cool-off-time or be directed (even escorted) from the classroom for time-out; stay back to discuss their behaviour with their teacher; or stay back after class time to "fix-things-up"; be directed into a mediation process; or be part of a parent/teacher/student meeting.

All consequences operate on a least-to-most intrusive basis. Students need to know they will always have an appropriate right-of-reply as part of the consequence process (see p. 73).

Support of students

It is important to balance the *corrective* and *consequential* aspects of the classroom agreement with the offer of teacher support (Fig. 2.2). Here is an example of support from a Year 5/6 (composite) classroom behaviour agreement.

Supporting each other in our classroom

There are many ways we can support each other here. Most of all we support others when we take time to think about others – to help, encourage and cooperate. Of course there are days when things don't go right; we recognise this. It is important though, to explain to your teacher, or classmate, when you're having a "bad-day". If we don't let others know they might get confused as to why we look (or sound) annoyed, upset, or angry.

Sometimes we have concerns, worries or problems outside and inside school. It can help to talk about this. Your teacher or school counsellor is always willing to help in any way we can.

If we are making poor choices, or wrong choices about our behaviour our teacher will help us with:

- discussing our behaviour;
- personal behaviour plans;
- a chance to put things right (restitution) – sometimes we may need to put things right by talking things through with a fellow student (mediation).

On some occasions our parents may need to be involved in helping us with our behaviour at school.

Many teachers also include an extended note (in the classroom agreement) on classroom meetings (circle time). Some parents may not be aware of this concept so a brief note about the positive and educational features of classroom meetings will assist in the understanding of basic classroom democracy:

We have regular classroom meetings (circle time) in grade [X]. These meetings give all students an opportunity to explore common concerns, needs and problems. These meetings allow shared understandings, active problem solving and student-assisted solutions to common issues of concern.

The last page of the classroom agreement is signed by the students and their grade/tutor/form teacher:

We have discussed, drafted and edited our behaviour agreement with our teacher. We agree to use it and support it.

The classroom behaviour agreement is a document for parents as well as students. A copy will be sent to all parents/caregivers of all children in each grade or class group. A covering letter from the headteacher goes home with the classroom agreement/plan.

Dear _____,

This behaviour agreement has been discussed, and developed, by the teacher and the children in Year 6 ... It outlines the way we address behaviour and learning in our school. We ask you to read through this agreement/plan with your son/daughter. We look forward to your understanding and support this year ...

As the year plods on, all behaviour issues are, one way or another, referred back to this behaviour agreement.

Non-negotiable rules and consequences

There are rules, in a school, that are non-negotiable across all ages — all classes. These relate to issues such as health and safety, aggression, bullying and violent behaviour. These rules need to be made known in the first meetings with students, in the school diary, in classroom agreements and school policies.

For example in Australian schools there is a “no hat, no outside play” rule in the hot summer months. It is a rule directly related to health and safety.

When schools have a common framework for classroom behaviour agreements, each successive year group becomes increasingly conscious of “the way we do things here”, enabling some sense of common understandings and expectations about appropriate and fair behaviour and also some reasonable consistency in behaviour management by adults across the school.

As noted earlier, there are several phases in the ongoing life of a class group (p. 26). If the teacher has thoughtfully established “the way we need to work here”, and has developed positive routines and rules for classroom learning and social interaction, the class, as a group, becomes habituated into workably cohesive “norms”.

Cohesive phase

During the “cohesive” phase, the routines and rules become the norm; “the way we do things here”. At the beginning of each term we might need to revisit the student behaviour agreement (p. 27) and some of the routines (such as noise monitoring) that we have established in the first few weeks. Students “forget” during term breaks, or are “resocialised” in non-school settings. A brief and positive re-establishment can help start each term with a shared focus.

In this phase of the year, most of our behaviour management occurs within a *relational dynamic*. Hopefully we have built a positive working relationship with the individuals as well as the group. We rely less on the rules and routines now and the students are more self-aware and self-directed in their behaviour and learning. Students are taking appropriate “ownership” of classroom life.

During these phases, teachers can utilise classroom meetings (circle time) to discuss issues relevant to individual and group needs and concerns.

Communicating the rules to students

In communicating the necessary rules to students it is important to emphasise the purpose of rules: protection of rights and expectation of basic responsibilities.

In communicating the rules to a new class group (or year group) some teachers are more directive – outlining the expected rules, their reasons, and the normal consequences when rules are broken. Other teachers are more discursive in their approach, emphasising shared dialogue and engaging a *process* of agreement (Fig. 2.2). Some teachers begin the year with a classroom meeting (circle time at infant level) and use the meeting to address the need for rules and consequences.

The approach taken will depend, in part, on one's comfort zone about class dialogue and classroom discussion. I have been in schools where the rules are read out almost perfunctorily by tutor teachers, or (more pedestrian) the students are directed to read the rules in the school diary – full stop.

If your preference is for a more directive approach to communicating the rules it will be beneficial (at least) to give the reasons for the rules and invite student questions.

Visual reminding of routines and rules

In the establishment phase of the year the process of rule encouragement and maintenance can be assisted by visual posting of key rules and routines (p. 31). At infant and early years levels these could include:

- A photo and name card can be used for coat hooks.
- The key classroom rules can be illustrated as a visual *aide-mémoire* posted in a prominent place at the front of the classroom. So could routines such as: partner-voice (working noise), what to do when you have finished the set work, how to set out a piece of writing, and use of wet areas.
- At infant level teachers often take photos of the children working cooperatively – tidying the room, communicating respectfully, sharing cooperatively, – and these photos are displayed with the relevant rules the teacher has established.
- I have seen teachers use a name board with an in/out space for students who need to leave the room to use the toilet/washroom.
- Simple signs for cupboards, quiet areas and the library corner enable association of place, space and purpose.
- I have even used simple posters to remind students at *secondary* level about tidying work space: chairs under table; straightening furniture; chairs on tables at the end of the day; cleaning up any residual litter; and leaving the room in an orderly way (p. 51).
- Baskets can be used for “finished work here”, and there can be an “early finishers box” with worksheets or activities.
- A noise-meter can be used to establish and monitor working noise (p. 48).

Discussing rules within the wider social context

When discussing rules with students (even up to Year 8) it can help to discuss them within the students' experience of rules in many different places and contexts: the highway code, clubs they belong to, road signs, their families, and even board games. The purpose of and reasons for fair rules can be helpfully discussed within these familiar contexts and a natural transition of understanding can be made to the classroom and playground.

Students have already learned that rules *help* govern behaviour, *help* protect people (at least potentially) and *encourage* shared responsibility (thinking of

others), and, when broken, rules occasion consequences. They have seen the yellow card used with adult footballers (and they have also seen adult footballers throw tantrums).

Maintenance and consolidation

It is crucial to maintain and consolidate the rules and routines that are established Day 1, Week 1 (Fig. 2.1). Effective teaching and management in the establishment phase also includes planning for the typical disruptions to day-to-day teaching and learning and developing a workable "system" for the smooth running of the classroom in terms of behaviour and learning. (This is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.)

Simply stating, or even publishing, fair rules and routines is not enough. Teachers need consciously to address issues and behaviour such as lateness, unsuitable noise levels, calling out, time off-task and task avoidance and inappropriate language on a day-to-day basis until there are "norms" of expected behaviour present in the classroom life and learning.

A teacher's discipline plan (pp. 56, 57) forms a key feature of a workable system that thinks through typical (or likely) disruptions and plans the sorts of responses (even one's language) that are likely to invite student cooperation – not as a formulaic system but rather as an enabling framework.

None of us would ever teach a lesson or activity without some kind of plan, but I'm still surprised by how many teachers continue to teach without planning for typical distracting and disruptive behaviours that can affect the quality of teaching and learning.

As noted earlier (p. 27) students expect the teacher to clarify rules, routines and cues in terms of "how things are expected to be here ...". It is important to thoughtfully plan how we will communicate, establish and monitor these rules, routines and cues, not as an end in themselves (teacher control), but as a means to an end (teacher–student cooperation in a shared learning community). In this sense this establishing *enables* effective management, teaching and learning.

Seating plans and student grouping

When planning room organisation we will need to ask what the purpose of the physical seating layout serves ('U' shaped, rows, pairs, table groups) and also student placement (who sits where and with whom).

In some classes, allowing friendship groups on Day 1 may create unhelpful power cliques and habituated patterns of behaviour that are difficult to refocus later in the term. While it is important that teachers allow some freedom in seating arrangements, this freedom is better given later in Term 1.

On Day 1 it will assist in general management to have students seated in random allocation (with a name sticker on each table). This allows easy learning of students' names by the teacher and allows some early classroom socialisation outside the natural friendship groupings. Random allocation may also need to include gender mix and, possibly, ability mix. Also if we know that some students do not work or relate well together that knowledge will need to be translated into student seating arrangements.

In a Year 7 class I worked with recently two students who had robust and motoric expressions of ADD had promised their teacher that they would work well if they sat together. "Really Miss! We'll be good if we sit together please Miss; please!!" It was a time-wasting mistake. After several frustrating promises

we relocated their seating arrangements, and moved the whole class into rows. They settled down and actually became more focused in their learning behaviour.

While socialisation is an important feature of classroom life and learning, it is also important that the students understand, from Day 1, that the classroom is not merely an extension of playground socialisation; *this* place is set aside for teaching and learning. Some children are very easily distracted, for example, when sitting in table groups, so in the establishment phase of the year it may be wiser to use a more formal seating plan (rows, or paired seating, facing the front) to minimise unnecessary distraction.

Simply placing the students in table groups does not facilitate (of itself) cooperative learning behaviour. It can help to use small group seating for more focused cooperative activities and retain seating in rows for the core teaching and learning activities.

I have seen many teachers give up the positive benefits of cooperative learning by early expectations that table group seating will, of itself, engage cooperative learning; it won't. Cooperative learning needs to be structured, and taught, over time and is normally more effective when the class is more relationally cohesive.

Welfare of our students (establishment phase)

Students new to a school can often be anxious about settling in, particularly at reception level and first year at high school. It is important for teachers to be aware of and considerate for a student's natural concerns about how they will fit in; whether other students will accept and befriend them; whether they will be able to cope with the demands of the work, the timetable, the different teachers. In short whether and how they will "belong". The need to belong, to feel accepted and part of a group, is an important aspect of day-to-day existence at school.

Even basic considerations such as who they will be asked to sit next to and for how long (will it be every lesson?) can concern some students. It can be helpful to rotate seating pairs, or groups, over the first few weeks to enable basic group befriending. It is also important to keep an eye on students who appear to be loners or students who have difficulty befriending others, particularly at playtimes and in sports sessions. Many primary schools (and some secondary schools) now have "buddy" programmes for reception age, for pupils in Year 8 (transitional year) and for students new to a school. Older students take on a peer support role that enables the younger (or new) student to settle into the classroom group and social climate of a playground. The "peer-buddy" receives basic training beyond the natural skills and personality that equip them for such a role.

Group activities that involve games, activities and discussions, can all assist in the settling-in process and in terms of getting to know each other. Name games can sometimes lose their novelty at upper primary level but a basic seat-rotation and getting-to-know-you time can enable a *basic* sense of group cohesion and bonding.

One's welfare obligations to one's students are not confined to primary teachers. As part of a secondary year level team, the house heads and year advisors (home-room tutors) have a particular responsibility to liaise with subject colleagues to keep the lines of communication open about how their students are coping with settling in.

When seating plans don't work

I've worked with teachers who have allowed the friendship-seating option to create little coteries or cliques; the row of students down the back whose *esprit de corps* creates contestable, time-wasting, behaviours; the little group of girls (or boys) who won't let anyone else sit with them.

I've found it helpful in such situations to change the seating plan by partial cooperation with the students. The teacher's concern about noise-level, and time off-task (as it relates to learning) is briefly set out in a *pro forma* with an invitation to assist in a seat change :-

As your teacher I am concerned about the level of noise, and time off-task, during class work-time. I believe a change of seating-plan will help. I would appreciate your cooperation. Please write down the names of two students you know who will make it easier for you to get on with your classwork and get the best benefit out of your time in this class/subject.

While all fair suggestions will be taken on-board I will be the final umpire. I will let you know next class period.

Thanks for your co-operation.

Mr Rogers.

This needs to be developed in a spirit of good-will wherever possible. With a particularly difficult class it can help to have a supportive colleague come in and conduct the exercise with you (see also p. 142).

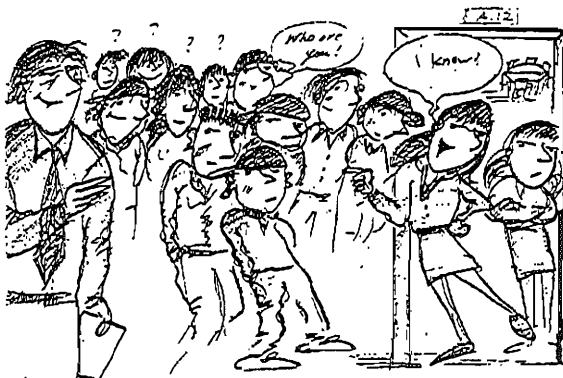
The first meeting with the students

The first meeting at secondary level is normally in the corridor (outside the classroom). I've had some students in more challenging classes immediately start hassling me: "Who're you?", "What's yer name?", "You going to be our teacher today?", "Eh ... where's Mr Smith ...? He was our teacher last time - he's a donk!" (guffaws). Several students are talking over each other and there's some pushing, shoving or playful "testosteronic bonding".

I've seen teachers enter into long time-wasting responses to such group banter; smiling and answering their questions, no doubt hoping they are building an early friendly relationship. The students' definition is different; they are seeking to define how they will "work" the teacher-student relationship.

It is wiser to tactically ignore most of the multi-student banter and questions with a brief, polite statement: "I'm not answering personal questions - now. We need to be ready to go into our classroom. Thanks." Our tone is pleasant, but

I did this drawing of a middle-school class arriving outside their classroom. The girl on the right, Donna, is letting the group know who the new teacher is: "Yooooo, Mr Rogers. I seen you before in another class. Yoooooo, Mr Rogers!" She had a "notice me" kind of voice, often used in warning teachers down. I tactically ignored her. Be careful when tactically ignoring that you don't enjoy it too much!



businesslike, enabling some group "attentional focus" by a relaxed, non-verbal, "blocking hand" indicating such questioning is not on the agenda *now*. Direct group attention quickly so that the core business (teaching and learning) becomes the immediate focus, rather than whether you have a boyfriend, or are married or are new here, and so on.

As Robertson (1997) reminds us, it is important to *define* the first meeting(s) in your own terms as teacher; to be confidently secure; pleasantly firm, without any overtones of "force", perception of threat or perceptible anxiety.

The brief "corridor-settling" by the teacher conveys the change in pace and setting: between *outside* the classroom (play, high motoric, noisy, behaviour, which is natural and OK for the playground) to *inside* (quieter, sitting – mostly focused thinking, cooperating in our learning and social interaction). It will be important to create (even here) an expectant tone, quickly, before going into the classroom.

Scanning the group outside the classroom the teacher will often have some expectation of "lining up" or "considerate one-at-a-time entry" to the classroom. A *reminder* to this effect can calm and focus natural student restlessness:

"Settling down everyone (...). Before we go into our classroom I notice a few hats on; if you have a personal stereo on remember we're going into a classroom learning environment. Thank you." The teacher smiles and nods as he gives brief, positive, feedback to the individuals as they settle. "When we go in I want you to remember ..." Here the teacher briefly outlines the protocol about where students will sit, where their bags go, and so on.

Teacher confidence and authority

Robertson (1997) notes that "relaxed behaviour" is consistent with "high-status" and also implies that one is not threatened. Of course we may have natural anxiety but we need to project an approach, a manner, that in effect says, "I expect your cooperation and compliance in student behaviour". Of course such a leadership style needs to convey respect, good-will and humanity.

When a teacher's manner, body language, posture and communication appear confident and authoritative, and when such confidence is further maintained in both teaching and management, students are likely to cooperate with the teacher's leadership.

There is a reciprocity at work here:

If the teacher feels confident the pupils are noticeably more responsive and this in turn reinforces his own assurance; if the teacher lacks confidence, the process can begin in reverse and he can quickly become thoroughly demoralised.
(Robertson 1997: 66)

Confidence (not cockiness) is a crucial feature in the teacher's overall communication with a group of students.

Confidence, in part, derives from being well prepared and knowing what one intends to teach (Chapter 3) but it also derives from one's characteristic presentation of self: open, relaxed body language; not appearing easily flustered (yet willing to accept fallibility without going to pieces); the ability to regain composure quickly when one has made a mistake – not being easily flummoxed (Rogers 1997); a confident, pleasant, engaging voice; being able to assert where necessary (pp. 56, 60); effective use of eye-scanning, eye contact (p. 66); being aware of one's body language when engaging students' personal space. These are basic but significant features of a confident teacher's personality.

Establishing whole-class attention

It is important to establish, at the first group meeting, the importance of whole-class attention and focus. Developing the habit of whole-class attention is crucial to an effective beginning to class learning.

Verbally focusing attention

Once the individuals are in their seats the teacher needs to cue for group attention. This can be initiated through a combination of non-verbal cues (p. 40) and verbal direction(s).

- It can help to use an imperative form: "Settling down everyone (...)" Allow some, brief, tactical pausing to give the students take-up time to process the teacher's cueing (p. 3). "Looking this way and listening (...). Thanks."

Avoid questioning phrases: "Would you please look this way everyone?"; "Can you settle down please?"; "Would you stop talking?"; "Why are you talking?"

"Thanks" at the end of an imperative form of words implies expectation.

Think about your language for addressing a group: "Class ..."; "Folks ..."; "Everyone ..."; "Guys ..."; "6D ..."? "Guys ..." seems to be favoured as a unisex generic by younger teachers. It's not one of my favourites.

Some teachers find a non-verbal cue helpful *before* they give a verbal direction. With new classes I often "ting" a small drinking glass with the tip of my metal pencil, then follow with the whole-class direction.

- Be aware of posture. An "open", expectant, confident posture and a positive, expectant, tone in one's voice will convey our meaning ("settle", "look", "listen") as much as anything else will.
- Step the voice down with the *part* direction. The initial words (e.g. "Settling down folks ...") are said a little louder to gain initial attention; it may be necessary to repeat the first part of the direction.

"Settling down everyone (...)"	a little louder
"Looking this way thanks	softer
and listening (...)"	softer (in concert with increasing attention and focus)

This verbal form ("Settling down ...") is a variation of "Stop (what you're doing), look this way, and listen".

- Scan the eyes and faces of your class as you speak (it can communicate one's positive manner as well as giving the teacher feedback about student attention and focus). Allow time for the residual noise to settle (...), then proceed with the rest of what you want (or need) to say when the class are attending (e.g. a class welcome and the instructional phase of the lesson).

Some teachers will use a raised voice to initiate group attention and, when only half the class are listening, continue to talk to the group while the rest are still whispering or chatting. All this does (of course) is to emphasise that such talking or "chatting" is OK. It is important to scan and wait for whole-class attention. While scanning the group, it will be important to non-verbally (or verbally) affirm students who do settle, face the front and listen with readiness with a smile, a nod, a brief affirming comment: "Thank you, John, Damien, Lucien, Susan ... you're ready"; "Nuyen, Tran, Bilal ... thanks."

At infant level teachers will often give several such encouragers to emphasise the fact the students *are* listening, *are* sitting, *are* facing the front, *are* ready, and so on.

Teacher movement

It doesn't help group attention and focus if the teacher telegraphs too much motoric restlessness by pacing up and down at the front of the classroom; the undiagnosed "ADD students" will tend to over-focus on the teacher's movement only half listening (if at all) to what the teacher is saying. I've watched teachers bouncing up and down on their toes while reading to the class, unaware that their overly motoric movement telegraphs an unconscious restlessness in the students whose eyes involuntarily track the bouncing up and down.

Stand at the front of the room to initiate and sustain group attention: a centre-front position, facing the class group, standing relaxed and scanning the faces of the students while cueing for attention will normally signal the teacher's readiness and expectation.

Non-verbal cues to gain group attention

One of the non-verbal cues to initiate or signal for group attention is the raised hand. When the class is seated the teacher faces the class (from the centre-front of the classroom) and visually scans the room with one hand raised. He or she does not speak; the raised hand is a *cue* to which the students respond by, likewise, raising their hand in a kind of domino effect across the room. Students look around and, in effect, copy. It is a cue to focus and refocus attention (as is necessary during the lesson) and can be quite effective at primary age level and lower secondary level. When the class has responded (15–30 seconds) the teacher lowers his or her hand, thanks the class for their cooperation and continues with a class greeting and the session's activity.

One of my post-grad students had been told this was a good signal for settling a class and proceeded to try it with a new Year 6 class. She had her hand up for a few minutes when a student finally said, "Yes, Miss ... how can we help you?" When using non-verbal cues for the first time it will be important to verbally associate the expectation carried by the cue with directional words. In the case above the teacher could have raised her hand *and* verbally directed the group, "Settling down everyone (...), looking this way (...) and listening (...) ...". When they were quiet and listening she could have then explained that the next time she puts her hand up *like that* at the beginning of the lesson ... So much for hindsight!

Typical non-verbal cues used by teachers include ringing a small hand-bell; a sound from an instrument (many years ago I used my guitar – strumming a chord to signal to my, then, early years class to come and sit on the mat); a hand-clap rhythm copied by all infant students (the teacher then reducing the clap to a two-finger clap, and finally a single finger "quiet clap" and hands resting in the lap). Even standing still, relaxed, scanning the class – waiting – can, *itself*, be a non-verbal cue.

Re-establishing group attention

There are occasions when a teacher needs to re-establish group attention beyond the initial lesson establishment. There may be an occasion when the noise level of unnecessary off-task behaviour occurs, or the teacher may need to refocus an aspect of the lesson task. The most obvious re-establishing needs to occur before lesson closure. It is important to allow appropriate time for packing up, lesson summary (if necessary) and orderly and calm exit (see pp. 51–2).

A primary teacher stops her class 3 or 4 minutes before the closing bell. The students are still busily colouring in or writing on their worksheet. She gives several instructions about materials and where to put finished work, adding, "Stand behind your chairs when you've finished". The problem is that the teacher is speaking over significant residual noise and activity. A third of the class is still working with pencils in hand while she is talking. She "allows" this behaviour to continue where she should have briefly refocused the class, and individuals, for whole-class attention.

Whenever we give *group* instructions, directions or reminders it is important to wait for whole-class attention to enable focus and processing of even routine directions.

A further problem can occur. If the teacher frequently talks *over* talking and kinaesthetic noise the students get used to it, and there is a group habituation that is not easy to change.

- Have a signal or cue for group attention (verbal or non-verbal see pp. 39, 40).
- Use a brief tactical pause (p3) so students can process the direction. Repeat the group instruction if necessary: "Everyone (...) eyes and ears this way now. Thank you (...). Paul (...), Simon (...), Simone (...) Donna – pencils down." This to the several who are still not attending. "(...) Eyes and ears this way (...) Thank-you." Firm, confident and pleasant, it sets the norm; the routine.
- Visual cue reminders can help at primary level (see p. 48).
- A word of acknowledgment and encouragement of appreciation can help: "I appreciated the way in which you all packed up at your tables and put the lids on felt-tip pens – that'll help them to live longer"; "Thank you for listening, and concentrating, when I asked you all to".

Sustaining group attention

The ability to *sustain* group attention depends on the teacher's ability to engage the students in the teaching and learning focus – at that point. The ability and skill to teach effectively and to manage disruptive behaviours is crucial to the effectiveness of any group learning. This is discussed in some detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

The seemingly non-responsive, non-attentive class (first meeting)

This phenomenon is more common at secondary than primary level. The teacher enters the class with a group of restless and noisy students. It seems that they are in a world of their own (and they probably are). The teacher stands at the front of the room waiting, waiting ... students are having private conversations, fiddling with *objets d'art*, rearranging class furniture. Does the teacher exist? What should he or she do?

It will be counter-productive (if tempting) to shout. It might, temporarily, stop the noise and the motoric restlessness, but it will probably restart or, worse, they will react in a hostile way.

It is also unhelpful to stand there *just* waiting.

Ideally if such a class is known to behave like this (even from Day 1), the establishment phase (first few lessons) should involve a team-teaching approach with one of the teachers well known by the students in that group as a teacher with credibility and respect. The new (ongoing) teacher plans the first few lessons (establishment) with this colleague; this allows a kind of "credibility by proxy" (Rogers 1997). It has to be genuine teaming and well-planned. This collegial teaming could also include some ongoing monitoring of students'

behaviour in (and out of) class. What is to be avoided is any *known* “difficult class” being given to a beginning teacher or a teacher new to the school without initial and ongoing colleague support.

When faced with a seemingly unresponsive class, rather than stand at the front of the room waiting, or even cueing for group attention (pp. 39), I’ve found it helpful to leave the centre-front of the room (where students expect the teacher to try to establish some class attention and control) and move around the room initiating conversations with individuals and pairs. This is a kind of mini-establishment, in “their” space. It initially unsettles some of the students. They don’t expect *this*. No doubt they’re thinking, “You should be up the front where we can make life difficult for you ...”.

As I walk up to students and initiate conversations (beginning with a mutual name introduction) I sometimes get cocky, smart-alec responses. I find *tactical ignoring* of such behaviour (wherever appropriate, pp. 66–7) quite effective. I seek to indicate I’m no threat, nor am I threatened by their behaviour, but at the same time I am initiating and establishing my leadership. I ask a few questions about the sorts of things they might expect in *this* English class and assure them that our time together will be worthwhile: the process is brief, excursive, roaming and establishing. Walking back to the front of the classroom I try to hold some key student names in my short-term memory and *then* go to the centre-front of the classroom. Using the remembered names I can now cue for whole class attention, “... settling down, thanks (...), Paul ..., Dean ..., Damien ..., Troy ...”. Most students are settling, calming down and facing the front. They are affirmed (briefly), “Thanks, Crystal (...), David, Donna ...”. Having had some brief relational chats and introductions I can use the names with some early, relational confidence. After a few minutes, and several tactical pauses, the class is substantially settled. It isn’t easy, but it is an approach I have found helpful to initiate group calming and focus.

If a pattern of non-attentiveness is typical it will be important to seek immediate, senior colleague support:

- It may help to see if the problem is wider than your own class.
- It can help to work with the key ring leaders; those students who trigger non-attentive or provocative behaviour in their classmates. Follow-up will need to emphasise the effect of their behaviour on the class and on the shared rights of all, and then work on their responsibility and commitment to change. The follow-up will also be helped by senior colleague support, but it is crucial that the class teacher engages in any one-to-one follow-up with these students.
- It can help to run a classroom meeting outlining the major concerns the teacher has about general noise level, inattention and students talking while the teacher is talking, and then invite student responses about the need for change and developing a class plan to address these concerns about behaviour and learning. Such a meeting, though, will benefit (again) from colleague support (p. 142).

Learning and using students’ names

This may sound like a mundane point, but it is crucial – from Day 1. I have worked with secondary teachers who still haven’t learned the names of their students by Term 3! I know it takes *effort* but it is significant in relational and management terms.

At primary level – at least for the class teacher – the names can be assigned and tagged to the desk itself for Day 1, seating plans can be organised and name-games utilised (even at secondary level).

As a mentor/teacher with every new class I work with I ask a student to draw me a classroom plan of the furniture and note down the first name of the students in relation to their desk, or table group. I then use that name plan during the on-task phase of the lesson. I also find it helpful to double check the *sound* of students' names so I don't cause unthinking offence (or embarrassment). I use these hand-drawn plans *at every* lesson until I've learned the names.

Some colleagues have a class list with a small photo of each student – this assists the short-term memory in each lesson as we build those workable relationships. It is also important to use the students' names in non-classroom settings (corridor and playground), and even in brief, civil, exchanges.

Small aside

It isn't easy learning students' names at high school (or if you are a 'specialist' teacher at primary level). I've found that when I do forget a name I'm trying to remember it sounds a bit nicer to say to the student, "I'm trying to remember your name" (the truth), rather than, "I've forgotten your name" or even "I don't know your name".

Addressing disruptive behaviour during instructional time

When students call out, butt in or talk across the room

Like any aspect of classroom management we need to:

- discuss such behaviour within the class agreement (p. 27);
- have an age-related established routine (at junior level it might be "hands up without calling out", whereas at senior level it might be "one at a time in class discussions");
- be able to confidently manage the calling out when it occurs.

In the first few lessons the teacher will need to define, establish and maintain the fairness of one person speaking at a time and others consciously making an effort to listen. Before any group discussion we can *preface* any question-time by reminding students: "Remember our rule (or agreement) for ...". We might add, "I know some of you will be really keen to contribute; however if you just call out, or talk over someone, that is unfair to the other person if they are waiting. If you are waiting to make a point or contribute and others call out, you, too, would feel their behaviour is unfair."

If students do forget, or call out to gain some attentional advantage, then a brief reminder of the rule will be important to the several or the individual.

When giving directions or reminders it is important to be brief, giving a few seconds of take-up-time, and then re-engage whole group attention to and focus on the activity. If we accept calling out and validate such behaviour in the first few meetings we will find it difficult to re-train the group later.

It is important not to ignore such behaviour in the illusion that it will go away or that the students will naturally settle.

I have seen teachers teach *through* such noisy, disparate behaviour as if they are teaching when, in fact, several or more students are actively ignoring the teacher through their cross-talking. If we accept a student's butting in, calling out or cross-talking we ratify that such behaviour is OK.

A "hands up" correction is a necessary correction in most classes – even in some Year 11 and 12 classes – particularly in the establishment phase of the year.

Some basic cues to correct and refocus calling out are:

- *A non-verbal reminder:* (At infant or middle primary level). The teacher raises his or her hand (to simulate hands up) and, briefly, covers his or her mouth (to indicate hands up *without* calling out). She then acknowledges a student with their hand up.
- *Incidental direction:* The teacher describes what the student is doing: "Jason (...), you're calling out and clicking your fingers". The teacher then gives some take-up time, then acknowledges other students with their hands up, and names them – "Jason ..., Dean ..., Carla ..., I see your hands up 1, 2, 3" – and responds in turn to their questions or contributions (p57).

If several students are calling out it will be important to stop the class – a blocking hand – and scan the room, waiting for quiet: "Folks (...), several students are calling out (...). We have a class rule. Thank-you". The teacher then, in a positive, expectant manner, resumes the class discussion. "I don't mind *which* hand, as long as you have a hand up [teacher smiles]. Alright ... let's go for it ..."

Other examples of verbal cues to a group or individual:

- "Hand up without calling out, thanks ..."
- "Remember our class rule for asking questions."
- "Hands up so I can see your voice."
- "I can hear questions; I can't see hands up."
- "I get concerned when several of you call out (...) *we* end up not able to hear anyone." (This is a brief, whole-class reminder.)

If a student, has persistently called out during Day 1 it will be worth following-up with them after class time, perhaps even making some form of verbal agreement (one-to-one) about hands up behaviour (p. 49).

Like any corrective management, we need to have the preventative focus in place, and will need to have thought through simple, brief, positive forms of corrective language to remind students of their responsibility and to bring students back on task. Avoid negative or interrogative corrections like: "Don't call out!"; "Are you calling out?"; "Why are you calling out?"; and "You're not supposed to be calling out are you!?"

Transitions

When a teacher moves from the instructional to the on-task phase of the lesson it is natural for the noise level of the class to rise; some students who were not listening earlier now tend to be unfocused and want teacher assistance (quickly!); many start talking to their classmate (which is acceptable providing such talking is not loud or significantly non-task in focus); there will also be students who do not have the appropriate equipment.

More than anything teachers need to make the transition between instructional time and on-task time clear and definite. I've worked with teachers who have a fuzzy, inchoate transition, where the students are unclear what they are supposed to be doing *now*. The teacher may just tail off a series of task instructions, or even start answering individuals' questions, leaving the rest of the class uncertain as to where the focus of the lesson is *at this point*.

Basic, but crucial points like having the work task/activity written-up as a question, or series of points/steps and having monitors for distribution of materials (particularly with group work) need to be established from Day 1.

It will be important to plan for these behaviours and contingencies by explaining to the class what is meant by "working noise" and *why* a reasonable level of working noise is important. It will also be important to discuss reasonable and acceptable movement *around* the classroom (this will, naturally, vary according to subject area and context). If students need teacher assistance they will need to know how they can, fairly, get teacher help in a classroom of 25–30 students.

It will also help to have some spare pens (blue and red), some spare rulers, pencils and erasers, and some lined (and plain) A4 paper, just in case. Initially the teacher will not know if a student without a pen is being difficult, lazy, indifferent or genuinely forgetful. A box of necessities is essential in the first few lessons at upper primary level onwards (p. 6).

In developing such routines, cues and procedures with their students, teachers will find it helpful to plan ahead with colleagues who teach similar ages of students and in similar teaching/subject areas.

Cater for the visual learners in the group

Some teachers over-rely on an auditory approach to teaching. We might (sometimes) be critical of the so-called "chalk and talk" days, but then many teachers did understand the importance of visual cueing: writing key points on the board, building up concepts from main concept to subsidiary points, or using the "well-known to less-known" principle. Long before the modern emphasis on "multiple intelligences", visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning, and so-called left brain/right brain learning, effective teachers were using "mind-map" concepts¹ and catering for visual and experiential learners.

I was team teaching with a senior teacher in an English class a few years ago. She was discussing (with a Year 10 class) aspects of positive communication. As she developed some quite complex ideas I noticed (ten minutes into the session) that a third of the class were restless and unfocused. I asked my colleague (casually) if I could "write a few of these points on the board". She replied (pleasantly), "... of course, Mr Rogers". As I wrote her key points up I noticed the students re-engage, almost straight away. It was as if the words on the board had given them a framework for the flow of the lesson, as well as their own thinking.

If, for example, I'm conducting a classroom discussion I like to have a student write up key points so the class can have a visual focus (it also validates a student's contribution). I also like to have another student record the points down (as a class scribe) so I'm free (as the teacher) to manage and chair the class dialogue and discussion.

Noise levels

In an old *Punch*² magazine I read an unusual word: "charivari". I couldn't figure out its meaning from the context so I looked it up. It's French in origin: "A serenade of rough music made with kettles, pans, tea-trays, etc. Used in France in derision of incongruous marriages ... hence a babel of music ..." (Oxford Shorter Dictionary). I've had quite a few Year 7–10s exhibit charivari! Some students are not (seemingly) aware of how loudly their voices carry (along with 25–28 others) and may be unaware of the chair scrapes, the kinaesthetic movements, that all add up to a "charivari".

Teachers have differing levels of tolerance regarding noise levels. Some can tolerate very high levels of noise whereas the teacher next door may (rightly) find the next door's classroom noise inhibiting their own classroom teaching

and learning. To ask a colleague if they are aware of how loud their normal classroom is can be a sensitive and touchy issue.

When 25–30 students are grouped several times a day in small rooms with tightly orchestrated furniture and space and are, then, expected to cohabit, think, discuss, cooperate, work and move, there is bound to be noise. How do we manage the environment, and student behaviour, so that we have reasonable and fair levels of noise proper to the place and activities we set?

We could try Cardinal Hume's approach when he was a school master: "I don't mind you making noise if you don't mind me stopping you" (Morimer 1984).

It is important that the students understand and appreciate the difference between "outside the classroom space", "inside the classroom space" and the purposes of *each* "space" and "place". Some children bring all their kinaesthetic energy and louder (outside) voices into the classroom context and do not adjust and monitor their movement and voices accordingly (p. 38).

A calm, quieter atmosphere inside a classroom will enable attention, focus and effective teacher–student communication:

- Explain why we, as a class group, need to have inside or "partner-voices" as distinct from louder, outside voices. The classroom is, principally, a teaching and learning place: "we (therefore) use our voices, and the level of our voice, differently in here".
- Teach the difference between the levels of voices to emphasise whispering and appropriate partner-voice (Robertson 1997). One of the ways I've found helpful is to point out to the class that at any time during the on-task phase of the lesson, "I should be able to speak in a normal voice from the front of the room to the back of the room – without raising my voice – and be heard". Teaching by modelling can help. I have modelled partner-voice by, say, asking a student for a pen in different levels of voice to qualify, to the whole class, the meaning and extent of partner-voice. When I ask students (even at secondary level) to describe partner-voice they invariably use qualifiers such as "soft", "close", "using eye contact", "first name", "using manners – please, thanks, etc."
- Monitor and encourage conscious habits of appropriate and reasonable working noise. There are a number of simple, visual ways to give students feedback about working-noise (see later).
- Review noise levels with the class during the first few weeks to maintain positive, and conscious, habits of voice moderation.

I prefer, and use, the terms "partner-voice" and "working-voices" rather than "working noise": I try to get away from the "noise" motif where possible.

*We remember to use our
partner voices at our
table groups*



The teacher's voice

Sometime the teacher's normal – characteristic – voice level and volume are UNNECESSARILY HIGH(!), raising the residual noise level of the students' voices and creating a kind of normatively louder classroom. Most often the teacher is unaware that this is a feature of their NORMAL VOICE LEVEL. The problem is that when they need to project a firmer, or slightly louder voice (for emphasis) it is not effectively heard. If a teacher's normal voice is particularly loud, or it sounds as if he or she is frequently annoyed or irritated, the classroom will be an unnecessarily tense place that will inhibit learning, even if the teacher falsely believes he or she has "good control".

If the teacher has an overly controlling voice, and "peppers" his or her remarks with negative language (overusing "don't", "mustn't", "shouldn't", "why?" and "are you?"), the class becomes an unpleasant group to be part of. I've seen older students, eventually, react against such teachers by overt or covert sabotage.

Keeping our tone and volume of voice pleasant, confident and adult will aid group calmness and enable student attention.¹ Then when we need to raise our voice for *particular* attention, or to communicate our frustration, or even anger, (Chapter 7), it will have an appropriate effect. When we raise our voice to *emphasise*, or to *gain attention*, it helps to drop the voice (de-escalate) to a calmer or more controlled (firmer) voice. This reduces residual tension.

Teaching partner-voice(s) to early years (age 5 to 7)

Like many social experiences that involve self-control we cannot assume that all the children in our classes understand what we mean by "working noise", "partner-voice", "taking turns", "lining up", "hands up without calling out" and "moving *carefully* and thoughtfully around the room"; even basic manners can't be assumed.

In the establishment phase of the year (Day 1, Week, 1) it will be important to explain why we need to use our partner-voice inside our classroom; and to teach and monitor working noise. A classroom is a physically small environment in which to creatively house and engage 20–30 young children. If poor habits of working noise develop it can be stressful for the teacher, who will frequently have to use a raised voice to regain group attention. It can also affect the attentional behaviour of children during on-task learning time.

The children are sitting on the carpet area at the front of the classroom. Before the first on-task session for the day the teacher talks about the large room and 25 (plus) voices sometimes all talking at the same time. She hypothesises with them about what could happen if we talked loudly during work time at our desk. She models with her hands apart as far as she can stretch to indicate a loud voice. She speaks about places in the school where we would use loud(er) voices (such as the playground), and why. She asks why we need quieter (much quieter) voices inside our classroom. She discusses what a partner is and introduces the concept of partner-voice or inside or working voice (Robertson 1997; Rogers 1997). Here she indicates a smaller, quieter voice with a non-verbal cue of hands close together.

She invites a few students to role play partner-voice with her in front of the class. A table has been set aside and she sits at the table with a couple of students, asks to borrow a coloured pencil, modelling partner-voice, and asks the children what they noticed. She soon has class feedback on observed behaviours such as "softness" and "manners". She models "whisper", and "quiet-work talk" as features of partner-voice. She invites modelling from the other children in the role play. As a contrast she models "playground-voice", and the children laugh.

"Imagine if I used that kind of voice if I was asking to borrow a pencil or scissors or even if I was talking to someone about the work we were doing ..."

The noise meter

The teacher introduces some large drawings (at least A3 size) depicting children in classroom situations. The first picture illustrates the key behaviours during "carpet-time", and depicts children sitting facing the teacher and listening. Some of the children in this picture have their hands up (they are not calling out). The children and the teacher look relaxed and are smiling.

"When we sit together on the carpet we face the front and listen ('eyes and ears') and we sit comfortably."

It will help to explain sitting options that do not annoy others: sitting space. The teacher also discusses other behaviours such as "taking turns"; "listening when others speak" and "hands up without calling out if you want to ask a question or share".

By having the picture, as a visual cue, the teacher can refer to it during instructional time or class discussion time, and can simply say, "Remember our rule about hands-up ..." and physically point back to the rule reminder poster.

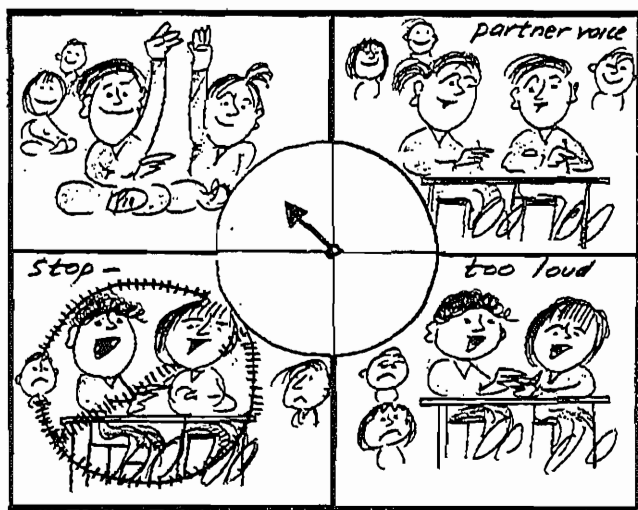
The second picture illustrates a table group during work time. In the background are a few faces, and in the foreground the table group are portrayed using partner-voices.

The third picture is similar to the second picture but the children at the table group are clearly using loud voices. The children in the background are frowning, indicating social disapproval.

As with all teaching about social behaviours we emphasise the effect of individual behaviour on others and that we don't just live to/for ourselves.

The fourth picture is the same as the third picture but has a circle encompassing the loud-talkers and a diagonal line through the circle.

The teacher explains what each picture means.



These pictures are portrayed together with a coloured meter (a circle of cardboard about 30 cm in diameter) in the centre. Each quadrant is coloured: white (carpet-time voices), green (partner-voices), orange (partner-voices getting too loud – this signals a reminder/warning) and red for stop. The meter has an arrow (with split pin) that can rotate to any of the four pictures. The teacher explains the arrow and colours. He or she has the arrow on white during carpet-time, and on green for partner voice.

If children become too loud during on-task learning time the teacher can put the arrow on orange as a non-verbal and visual *aide memoir*. He or she will wait to see if students pick up on this cue. If necessary he or she will cue for class attention (wait) and point to the warning picture and either non-verbally cue for partner-voice (p. 66) or will give a brief, positive, verbal reminder, "Remember your partner-voices. Thank you", before putting the arrow back to green.

If the teacher puts it on red it signals stop and everyone has to refocus back to partner-voices. This involves a *brief*, whole-class, reminder about partner-voices. Like any routine it takes time to develop general habituation about inside partner-voices.

At Year 1 to 3 level it can help to appoint noise monitors on each table group. Their role is to keep an eye on the noise meter from time to time. The teacher can assist their role by cueing the noise monitor with a brief reminder. It can also help to rotate this role in the first few weeks.

As the teacher roves the room he or she will also encourage students when they are using their partner-voices.

"You're keeping your voices soft and I noticed you're looking at each other when you speak and you're remembering your manners ... That all helps us to get our classwork done. Thank you."

In this way the teacher describes what they do that helps their table group (brief, descriptive feedback) and encourages group members.

The noise meter and picture cues are means to an end; they are props and prompts. They have their acute focus in the establishment phase of the year and can be shelved as the behaviour generalises.

The noise meter is both an establishment teaching device and a monitoring *aide-memoire*. In time it can be replaced by a tablecard reminder: "At our table group we use our partner-voices" (p. 46).

Partner voice feedback (Rogers, 1998)

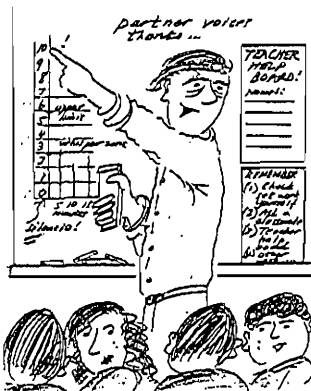
If an individual student is still struggling with his voice level, and use of voice, it can help to develop an individual behaviour plan with him. This plan attempts to teach him (one-to-one) the "why" and "how" of a quiet working voice (in effect it teaches him individually what most students have adapted to normatively). In teaching a child one-to-one (in non-contact time) the teacher can:

- use simple picture cues to illustrate how individual, noisy voices affect others;
- mirror the child's typical noisy voice (ask permission, "Do you mind if I show you how it sounds when you ...?", and keep the mirroring brief (p. 72));
- model appropriate partner-voice;
- practise partner-voice with the child (one-to-one);
- let the child know this is his or her (personal) reminder plan (a small card illustrating the student using his partner-voice).

As with any individual plan for behaviour or learning it is developed away from other children, one-to-one, with an emphasis on support and encouragement (p. 122).



Personal reminder plan for Travis



It can be helpful with middle-school aged students to give some non-verbal feedback on how the students are using their partner voice during the lesson. A simple way to do this is through a graph on the board.

The teacher uses a simple histogram. The vertical axis runs from 0 (silence), through 2 (whisper zone) and 5 (the upper limit of partner voice) to 10. Any noise in the 5 to 10 region is too loud (10 being House of Commons on a normal day!).

The horizontal axis is divided into five minute sections. Every five minutes during the on-task phase of the lesson the teacher goes to the board and draws in the vertical line denoting the level of partner-voice.

Students are often unaware of how loud they are when conversing and working during on-task time. This simple graph gives the students visual feedback every five minutes (or more often if necessary). I've heard, and seen, students (many times) nudging each other as I go to the board and give the "histogrammatic" feedback.

If their noise level creeps above the 5 mark (vertical scale) it can help to see if the class picks up the visual feedback cue and brings the level down by themselves. If they do a visual scan of the room with a non-verbal OK sign indicates your encouragement.

This approach is an "establishment routine": it is a means to an end, like the noise meter (p. 26); the end being reasonable working noise.

- Explain and discuss partner-voice with the class on the first day or session.
- Explain the graph and the feedback cues.
- At the end of each class period give the class some descriptive feedback on how they performed across the on-task time period: "Folks, you kept your partner-voices well below 5 for most of the lesson (...) a couple of times you crept over 5, but you remembered when reminded. Thank you ... I appreciated your efforts".
- As with any establishment routine it can be phased out as positive group behaviour generalises.
- With particularly loud, and kinaesthetically robust classes, I've used a points system whereby the teacher grants points for students (as a group) keeping their partner-voices below 5 (and awards more points if the level is below 4 or 3). If the class has achieved 20 points five minutes or so before the bell, the teacher packs up the class early and students chat quietly until "bell time".

Giving assistance to students during the on-task phase of the lesson

The main point behind any cue, or routine, for giving students assistance during class time is the rational fairness and distribution of teacher assistance for so many over a short period of time.

- The teachers should explain, even discuss, how he or she can equitably support students who ask for assistance during work/task time. The explanation will include the obvious point (humourously made) that a teacher is not an octopus!
- The teacher should discuss the importance of "checking set work yourself – read through, ask yourself: what am I asked or required to do here and now; where should I start; how do I set the work out?" These self-monitoring questions can be taught as part of a class discussion on positive learning habits.
- For set work procedures it can help to have a class poster with the basic reminders about drafting a piece of writing, page lay-out, and the writing process.

- The teacher could remind students that they can quietly check and discuss the work with their immediate classmate (not a classmate on the other side of the classroom!)
- When the class group is well established it can help to appoint classroom mentors (peer-mentors) who can assist their fellow students with conferencing about their classwork. Such students need to be well received by their class peers and possess natural social skills such as effective listening and communication.
- The teacher could establish a routine: "Check (quietly) with three (directly near you) before you check with me". This can also help students to gain peer assistance before easily, and quickly, seeking out the teacher.
- At primary age level it can help to have the key learning tasks for the day set out on a separate board, as a visual focus, so that students can rotate between tasks as they complete each appropriate phase or stage.
- At upper primary onwards it can help if students go on with other work while they wait for teacher assistance or conferencing. One way of visually focusing the teacher assistance process is to have a teacher help board where the students note down their name if they need to conference with the teacher. Of course before they note down their name they will need to have:
 - (i) checked the set work requirement/task/activity themselves;
 - (ii) checked with their classmate or working partner;
 If they note down their name they can go on with other set work (or other options) *while* they wait for the teacher. This avoids having children just waiting with their hands up until the teacher gets around to them.

Lesson closure

It is important to plan ahead for lesson closure, particularly in the first few lessons. The teacher will need to discuss with the students routines such as:

- packing up and straightening the furniture; chairs under the table (or *on* the table at the end of the last class period of the day);
- picking up any residual litter and putting it in the litter bin on the way out;
- leaving the classroom in an orderly fashion (this may need to involve dismissing the class row by row, or table group by table group).

- LET'S DO THE NEXT CLASS A PROOF



Remember there is a natural readiness on Day 1, Week 1, for the teacher to make these expectations and routines clear. It is also important to finish the lesson, or activity, positively (even if it has not been the best lesson in the world). Aim for a calm, positive closure with a reminder that, "Another class is coming in after us, let's do them a basic favour. Chairs under ...; litter in the bin ...; we leave quietly, row by row (teacher nominates the rows). Thanks ..."

Homework cues are best written up on the board or printed reminders handed out. Auditory reminders about important topics are misused by many students in the last few minutes of a lesson as most students are just waiting for the bell. In fact some students will already have packed up well before the bell; it will be important to speak to such students (one-to-one) and encourage them to recheck their work, or read the class novel, or ...

It may be important to remind the class politely that the bell is a reminder to both the class, and the teacher, that *this* lesson has ended; it is the teacher's responsibility to dismiss the class.

Caveat: There are some occasions when a *brief 'stay-back'* of the class may be warranted.

A quarter or more of the class make a bee-line for the door on Day 1 (Lesson 1) as soon as the bell goes. The other 70 per cent or so hold back. The teacher calls the two or three students who have left the room back inside (she does this quickly, firmly, confidently, "hopefully").

"Stop (...). Back inside, fellas (...), back inside."

If she knows their names she will use them (a small but crucial point).

"Bilal, Nazim, Craig, (...) back inside (...) now, thanks."

They whinge, naturally. "Gees - it's recess, come on!"

She re-directs. "I know it's recess," she partially agrees. "Back inside fellas (...), I won't keep you long."

Most students come back (certainly Day 1, Session 1, the students are generally more likely to comply not having worked through, fully, the teacher's leadership style). They come back in (grumbling and muttering). I've been in classes where they flop in their seats sulking and muttering ("Gees what kind of sh-t class is this!").

She stands at the front of the class, scans the group, tactically ignores the sulkers, and says, "When you're all settled, I'll explain (...)."

They quieten.

"This is not a detention folks. It's a minute past the bell. In a minute you're out of here." She smiles. "This is a class reminder. In our class we leave the place tidy, straighten the tables, chairs under the tables, litter off the floor. As I said earlier (...), let's do the next class a favour. Let's try it again. Thanks for all those who did make the effort two minutes ago. So; let's all try it again."

This time when the class leaves they are more subdued, more focused. This approach is preferable to saying, "Right! If you're all going to waste my time, I'll waste your time!"

She stands at the door giving a brief goodbye as the students leave. It has only taken a couple of minutes but she has re-established the class routine she had discussed earlier about a "thoughtful class exit" (p. 51).

If something very valuable has gone missing (lost, mislaid or stolen) the teacher will (where possible) finish the lesson earlier and have a class discussion about the missing item.

"I don't know if someone has taken item X by mistake, or accidentally put it in their bag, but item X has gone missing. It is very important to _____ (the person concerned), as I'm sure you can understand. I'll stand outside this classroom for three minutes and I expect the item to be back on my desk, no questions asked. I'll *then* dismiss the class."

Prior to this mini class meeting the teacher might send for a senior colleague to give some immediate assistance in finding the item.

Situations like these are always tricky especially when time is of the essence. Senior colleague support should always be involved if the item is important and is not returned.

Before you leave your working area

1. Put all materials away (lids on felt-tip pens, pencils in containers, work away).
2. Tidy your own work space; help others out too.
3. Chairs under tables. (ON tables at end of day)
4. Litter in bin. Check.

THANKS! Mr Rogers

Notes

1. A mind-map is a visual representation of a core idea, issue, question or concept with its supporting and subsidiary ideas, concepts or questions. It can give focus and direction and help to hold several ideas or concepts together.
2. *Punch* was an English satirical magazine, which is not well known in Australia.
3. Some infant teachers affect a babyish voice when working with small children. This is unnecessary. Obviously we need to modify concepts in our language use, but we don't need to adopt the kind of tone or manner that Joyce Grenfell portrayed so skilfully in some of her comic monologues.