

Transition: Children Moving from Whole-class Teaching to On-task Learning Time

Many children at this age level find it difficult to sustain bodily, and cognitive, attention for long periods of time. I have seen teachers keep children on 'the mat' for 30–35 minutes (or more!) only to have to keep using frequent “Sshhs!” and “Stop talking” and “Be quiet!” in order to 'get through' that time period.

The amount of time children spend seated – *together* (*en masse* at the front of the room) – will vary with individuals' prior experience; *ongoing experience*; motivation and (of course) age.

Fifteen–20 minutes is ample (initially) to focus the group, and explain and discuss the learning task or activity, to engage in *whole-class* teaching, read a story or have 'morning talk'. It is worth 'timing' ourselves in the reading of picture stories (or task explanations) beforehand until we get to know the range, and extent, of attention and focus in our students. It also helps, with some of the written forms of language in some picture story books which do not lend themselves easily and comfortably to reading aloud, to modify the language.

Transition (between 'whole-class teaching time' to 'on-task learning time' in small groups)

When we direct children to go to their table groups (after whole-class time 'on the mat') it is essential we clarify verbally (and sometimes pictorially – on reminder posters) what we mean by:

- Working at your table group (including *how* we sit ‘into’, and at, our table area).
- Using an ‘inside’ or ‘partner’ voice.
- Where materials are (and how to access and use them). It can also help to appoint a table monitor for each table group. We can normally assess which children might be trusted (early) with the responsibility of being a table monitor (for paper; scissors; glue; felt-tipped pens ...). Later in term one children will have a number of rotated ‘monitor roles’ as they get used to the ebb and flow of classroom life.
- Use of water bottles.
- Toilet procedures (and ‘leaving the room’ procedures for any reason) (see p. 32)
- How to get the teacher’s help/assistance during on-task learning time (at one’s table group ...).

We never, ever, assume children know what to do regarding such routines even if we have actually ‘told’ them. We will need to revisit such routines *daily* until such behaviours become ‘established’ and *routine*. The crucial *core* classroom routines for learning and behaviour are discussed later.

Transition clarity: between whole-class teaching time and on-task learning time (at table groups or other table seating arrangements)

I have worked in many mentoring contexts (as a mentor colleague, team-teaching) where I am not sure *when* the teacher has actually finished whole-class teaching and *when* on-task learning begins. There is a communal frown on the faces of the children; a muttering (*en route* to their table groups) ‘What do we have to do again?’, ‘What did she say ...?’. I have often thought, ‘If I’m not really sure as an adult mentor-teacher what the learning task involves and *when* (and I was there; listening!) I’m pretty certain many children haven’t “got it”’. When we direct children from the carpet area to their table groups for ‘on-task learning time’ we need to remember task clarity:

- Verbal cueing is less effective than verbal *and* picture/symbol/written cueing (on the whiteboard or Smart Board).
- Movement to seat cueing will need regular *positive* reminders, and a ‘correspondence check’ with children: ‘What do we need to remember before we go to our table groups?’ Even at this point (early in the first few weeks) enthusiastic children will call out (with their hands up). It is *always* important to clarify that if at any time a student wants to ask a question, or share, during whole-class teaching time they remember *our* rule: ‘hands up without calling out, or clicking fingers – and wait until (your) teacher calls on you’ (p. 20–21).
- We also need to remind students of how they can get our help and assistance (during on task learning time) *without calling out* (see later).

- Noise levels will, naturally, rise when children move from the teacher directed and attentional focus of the whole-class learning time on the carpet area to their table groups. It is crucial – each day – to remind children to use their ‘partner-voices’ or ‘inside working voices’.

It can even help to briefly ‘role-play’ some of the elements of ‘on-task learning time behaviour’ before children move off to their tables.

‘Partner-voices’/‘inside voices’

Working noise, ‘inside voices’ (or ‘partner-voice’), is a new concept for many children. Some of our children will come from quite loud homes: television is blaring, the parent(s) – stressed – are shouting, even yelling (at times). Siblings vie for attention, space, place, time ... Then, at school, we ask them to use ‘quiet voices’ in this classroom space, with 20 (or so) children several hours a day! For some of our children this is a new, and challenging, expectation (and experience!).

We find it helpful to distinguish, and model, ‘partner-voices’ and ‘playground voices’ to children; and why in those places – and spaces – we use different *levels* of voice. We can even introduce the concept of noise ‘volume’.

I have often modelled – in front of classes – a request from a student for (say) a red felt-tipped pen using a ‘playground voice’ (a loud voice). Children invariably laugh. I ask them “What’s wrong?” “It’s *too loud* Mr Rogers!” I ask the class: “If we were playing handball outside would it be OK if we spoke this loud? If I wanted to ‘have a go’ in, say, a handball game?” I then model an ‘inside voice’ or ‘partner-voice’. Using hand spanning, I then model the difference between playground voice (my hands measuring WIDE) and ‘partner-voice’ in our classrooms (my hands – now – close together). Some teachers find a ‘noise meter activity’ can also help visualise, encourage and monitor ‘working voice’ levels. (See pp. 30–1).

Simple, brief, modelling of routines and skills

NB

Even a deceptively simple learning activity involving ‘cut and paste’ with safety scissors can be helped by a demonstration, and inviting a few children, up in front of the class group (if they are comfortable) to practise with the teacher, e.g. how we *hold* and *use* scissors; and how we hold the paper *in relation* to the scissors. This is essential for left-handers ... We should never ‘force’ or ‘over-cajole’ a child to come to the front of the room and – in front of their peers – to model, read, share ... (for any activity); we *invite*. In time the more shy members of our class can be encouraged (privately) to ‘try their hand ...’ in the public forum of their classmates.

Noise volume in on-task learning time

The degree of tolerance by some teachers regarding the *volume* of noise in classes varies considerably. We have taught next door to classrooms where we can not only hear the ‘distant’ voices of many children but also the distinct, and very loud, voice (VERY LOUD) of the teacher. Should we share our concern with a colleague whose class (including their own voice ...) is characteristically loud. It is a delicate matter raising such concerns. However if such a *characteristically* loud class (next door) is affecting our own class we will need to share our concern with a team leader, unless we are willing to have that difficult, professional, ‘conversation’ ourselves.¹¹

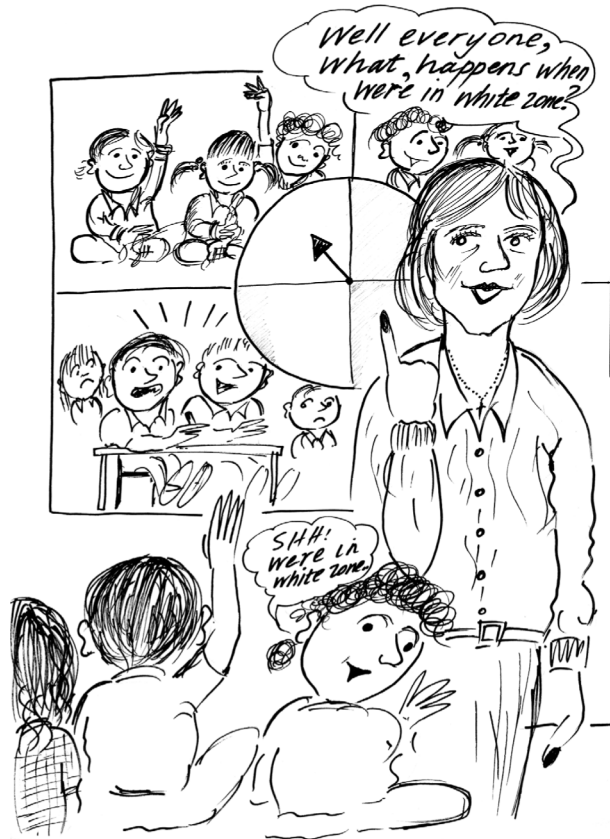
In their book *Transforming Learning and Teaching* (2005) Barbara MacGilchrist and Margaret Buttress note feedback of older primary children who are reflecting on ‘*what gets in the way of your learning?*’. A frequent feedback comment notes the noise level in the classroom and how difficult it is to both concentrate and get on with classwork with noisy students around you (pp. 171–2). I have had similar feedback from early years children when I’ve discussed these issues with them as a mentor-teacher.

It is essential to clarify with our children what *we* mean by ‘working noise’ (day one and over the next few weeks). Modelling can be very helpful here.

- Distinguish between ‘outside voices’ (corridors, playgrounds) and ‘inside voices’ (in our classroom or in whole-school assembly time).
- Explain (and model) the *degree* of volume appropriate to partner-voice (how ‘far’ a voice really needs to ‘travel’ to the classmate next to us).
- Explain, and discuss, that, “We are all together (20 plus ...) in this one room. If we speak loudly, while we are working together, it’s very hard for us to concentrate and learn (this can also be briefly modelled). When we use our inside voices it’s easier for people to think inside their heads (and to talk together about our work) and it’s also easier for me to be able to speak to you when I’m moving around to each table group ...”.

Many teachers find visual cues helpful in the teaching, monitoring and habituating of ‘working noise’.

Over 30 years ago a colleague and I (both with quite challenging classes of 6-and 7-year-olds) developed a ‘noise meter’ cue to teach ‘inside’/‘partner’ voices (Bill). As seen in the illustration, each quadrant on a 30 cm cardboard (laminated) wheel (with split-pin arrow) points to a picture illustrating:



1. *White*: when sitting together on the carpet area we are quiet; eyes *and* ears facing the front (and looking to our teacher or at the interactive whiteboard when necessary ...). We listen with ears and *our eyes*; hands and feet safe; sitting comfortably (personal space consideration); and our hands up (without calling out) for questions and contributions (see p. 14f).
2. *Green*: the children are using their 'partner-voices' ('inside talk'; 'work talk').
3. *Amber* [like the colour of traffic lights; the cautionary colour signal between green for go and red for stop]: this pictures the table group getting too loud, either by forgetting (it takes time for some children to 'acclimatise' to variant voice volumes) or by lack of any conscious effort on the children's part. This picture, when 'arrow-signalled', is a reminder to the whole class (not just one, noisier, table group) that we are getting too loud ... Sometimes children will visually cue to the noise meter (and arrowed colour) and can be seen nudging each other, "Look, it's on amber ...". As the noise *volume* drops (back to a workable 'green level') the teacher will – correspondingly – put the arrow back

on green (as if to say, ‘you remembered – thanks’). She will then briefly thank the children for thinking about their voice levels (and remembering to use their *partner voices*) as she moves around to each table group. The teacher, here, would cue the whole class (p. 22) and briefly remind them of partner-voices. The arrow is then put back to green. The teacher then goes to each table group to encourage, and refocus, we *work with partner-voices*.

4. On rare(r) occasions if the reminder (arrow at amber) is not ‘picked up’ by most children, the teacher will direct the whole class to stop and have a deeply sensitive, focused, caring nag ... I mean whole-class reminder.

NB

You can actually get an app. that can visualise this kind of colour cueing ... (Google away ...).

Our colleagues have used similar, visual cues such as little flags (coloured to cue noise *levels*); a thermometer-type picture going from quiet (green) to too noisy (red); student noise-volume monitors (at each table group) ... Any routine is an attempt to clarify ‘why’ a certain (expected) behaviour is important. What is always crucial is to explain the routine to the class group and *then* expect, encourage, correct (wherever necessary) to strengthen that routine. It will be important to follow through (early in week one) with children who have overly loud voices (see p. 100f).

Getting teacher assistance (during on-task learning time)

Within a few minutes of moving from the carpet (whole-class teaching time) to their table groups (on-task learning time) some children are already calling out, “Miss, Miss ... I don’t know what to do ...”, “It’s too hard can you help me?!” Some children will leave their chair and come over to wherever the teacher is and pull at their skirt/slacks, “Miss, Miss – help me ...” “Miss ...”.

Parent/carer helpers

During small group tasks such as guided reading I made the rule (with my 5-year-olds) that you only interrupt if it is an emergency (the class joke example we used is that you only come and see me if your head is falling off). If children were ‘busting’ to go to the toilet our rule was, to come and tell me you are going (with someone else who preferably needs to go) and Velcro your name up next to the toilet picture on the carpet board as you are leaving the room (Elizabeth).

This is when ‘carer helpers’ come in handy: helping by circulating and helping by reminding children what to do next; explaining instructions again; helping with computer glitches, etc. Good parent/carer helpers and teaching assistants are invaluable to a teacher and her children (if you are fortunate to have one).

Safe toileting

In older schools toilets are often a bit of a walk for young children; teachers will allow a child to go with a ‘partner’ for psychological safety (as much as anything else). This is especially helpful in those early weeks of settling in.

Toilet safety is also crucial in non-contact times (playtime). Some children will feel vulnerable about going into toilets. Children need to feel safe about this essential bodily function. In a whole-school ethos this is an issue that each grade teacher will sensitively address in the establishment phase of the year. It will also help use of toilets to speak about this shared place *we all have to use*. Any child suspected of teasing others, or in any way harassing children in or around the toilets should be called to account and their behaviour monitored (by checking with children who report).

“If you sprinkle when you tinkle, be a sweetie and wipe the seatie”. This old standard is a nice way to introduce (and revisit where necessary) *the way we use our toilet facilities* including proper hand-washing and drying (and bin the paper towels – ta!). We do not assume children know proper hand-washing hygiene.

Whole-class ‘prefacing’ – “before we work at our table groups together ...”

Before any transition to on-task learning time we need to explain to the whole class *how* to ask for teacher help and *why* it is important to ask (or seek) the teacher’s help in the way we have nominated. We need to explain we are not ‘an octopus’ (a shared, gentle, humorous aside ...). We cannot be helping everyone *at once*.

The following whole-class *prefacing reminders* are essential:

“First we need to always check what we need to do for our classwork. Today we’re going to be using this sheet (from our story: ‘There were ten in the bed and the little one said ...’). We will cut the sheet like this ...” The steps are noted on the whiteboard.

Having explained (and modelled) the task we also need to remind the children to:

- “... check the task, (the set work) – ask yourself this question when you’re at your tables: ‘What do I have to do now ...?’ The steps, *about what to do*, are on the whiteboard ...”
- “If you’re still not sure ask someone at your *own* table group.” “I’ll also be coming around to each of your tables to help you.”
- “If you’re still not sure you can ask me; if you want me to come over and help, you need to put your hand up (without calling out) I’ll see you need help and I’ll come over as soon as I can.”

- If several children have their hands up it will obviously be important to cue them, “I can see several hands up ‘Sean’, ‘Troy’, ‘Zahreen’; I’ll be around soon. While you wait for me to come over you can go on with ...”, i.e., an ongoing activity, or task.

Conditional directions

When children call out for ‘help’ (during the ‘busyness’ of on-task learning time) it can help (with some children) to *tactically* ignore – initially – to see if they pick up the implied message behind the teacher’s ‘ignoring’. More commonly we will use a conditional direction: “Corey (...) *when* you’ve got your hand up without calling out *then* I’ll come over and help you.” “You’re pulling at my skirt Janine. *When* you go back to your table, and have your hand up without calling out, *then* ...”. This in preference to, “Why are you pulling at my skirt? Can’t you see I’m busy helping here? You’re supposed to wait at your table aren’t you? – with your hand up?” “Weren’t you listening ...?” (this is another example of ‘behaviour over-dwelling’) (p. 20/21).

Whole-class cues/routines

- The ‘ask three before me’ convention. This reminds children to ask others (at *their* own table group) before alerting the teacher.
- Some teachers – with older early years classes – use a ‘teacher help board’ (Rogers, 2011) – where children can quietly leave their table group and place their velcroed name tag on a board. This – visually – alerts the teacher without the more common ‘calling out’ or ‘hands up and wait’. Of course children need to have checked the task requirement *and* checked with a class peer first. Only, then, if they still do not understand they use the teacher help board. They also need to know there are two or three options they can go on with *while they wait for the teacher* to come over to their table group.
- It will always help visual learners to visually cue the learning task with simple stick figure drawings – and keywords or symbols – on the whiteboard. Some teachers have a smiley face with a hat on (the imaginary ‘thinking-hat’) accompanying the key task reminders. Drawings of scissors and pens all enhance the ‘steps’ (where necessary) to enable a visual understanding of the set learning activity.

I would more often than not complete any tricky cut and paste sheets (that involved cutting, folding, etc.) and stick the example on the whiteboard.

For children on the autistic spectrum an individual (small) *personal* reminder-poster can significantly focus key learning steps or behaviour expectations. Such an individualised *aide memoir* will need to have been discussed and ‘rehearsed’ with these children – individually – before *any* classroom use. (See Chapter 6.)

Organisation

As noted, a well-organised classroom is helpful for the children and teacher alike; thoughtful use of cupboard space (open shelving and see-through boxes clearly labelled and adequate access for children).

Children need to know *where* materials go and why lids need to be on felt-tipped pens (etc.) ... Spine on the left (with library books) ...

It is also important not to have a classroom environment that has too much visual stimuli – children’s work hanging in lines, criss-crossing the room (making it even difficult for the teacher to circumnavigate the room!). It will help to change children’s work displays with reasonable regularity. Circulate displayed work (with a child’s photo if they are comfortable).

Classroom mentors

Classroom mentors are children who can be relied on, trusted, to effectively give some mentoring support to children with learning and/or behaviour disorders. When the class is well established (say three to four weeks into term one) the class teacher selects a few children as available peer buddies/mentors to work alongside a child (when needed), or to sit on the same table group (and on the carpet area with) a child who has been identified as needing an individual behaviour management plan (Chapter 6).

If any peer-mentor support is developed, it is important to clarify the mentor’s role. For example, a peer-mentor will often be asked to remind their classmate (quietly, even non-verbally) to remember (say) to, ‘put their hand up without calling out ...’, to ‘read – carefully – their worksheet’ (or help another child to read their learning activity), to use their ‘inside work voice’ (in comparison to a loud voice in class. Some mentors will undertake this peer-mentor role with diligence, enthusiasm and empathy – it is important, though, that their own classwork does not suffer as a result. It will help if any mentor role is rotated among children with the necessary social and emotional intelligence to take on such a role.

Monitors – ‘helping hands’

Monitors play an essential role in the smooth running of classroom life. The role of monitor provides a child with opportunities to take on responsibilities for others. It is important that all children get the opportunity for some ‘monitor role’.

One helpful visual cue for the monitor role is the helping hand(s). Children trace their hand onto card complete with photo. This hand/card is laminated and put into a box and the helping hand(s) are chosen for that week.

Routines for pack-up time

It is crucial to remind children about the need to ‘put things back in the right place’ (unifix blocks; picture story books – spine on left ...); ‘chairs *under* table, *on* the table at the day’s end. This also teaches basic prepositions: (in/on/under/ beside/off/over ...). It is important to remind the children that in tidying the room up (at least at the end of the day) we are tidying *our own place and space* and we are ‘doing our cleaner a favour ...’. We also need to allow *reasonable time* for this routine.

Not all children come from homes where there is basic tidiness. (Not the artificial, ‘clinical’ tidiness often irritatingly portrayed in those television advertisements!) There is, however, no excuse for books just piled up in a corner, pencils on the floor, children’s work left lying around at the end of the day (unnamed and undated ...); or a teacher’s desk area impossibly piled with books, papers and a basic work programme (work programme?). Please excuse the cynical note here (I have seen this). Routine and organisation always *enable* the smooth running of a busy place like a classroom – a learning community.

It often helps to give the children a specific cut-off time for cleaning up, and when it is finished they stand behind their chair and then I come around and ‘inspect’; the tidiest table get their bags first and sit on the mat ready to go home. It is important – though – not to make this aspect of the routine unnecessarily competitive. The emphasis is on *normal* tidiness. We should consciously vary which *group* goes to the mat ‘first’.

As with any *whole-class* direction/cueing it is important for the teacher to go to the front-centre of the room and cue for settling/attention *before* communicating the pack-up routine (p. 22f).

It is important to allow children *time to pack up* and get back on to the carpet area. Once settled – together – on the carpet area, then perhaps a song; a recap of some important feature of learning; reminders about tomorrow and notices to go home ... It is also important to have a dignified exit; nominating children through table groups, or simple ‘games’: all those with hazelnut eyes (hazelnut?; well ... brown ...), all those with magenta coloured eyes (well ...).

Some teachers find it easier if the children come to the carpet area (at the front of the classroom) *with* bag, coat and carer notices and – then – leave (‘camel-burdened’) *from* the mat to the door. Other teachers find it easier to dismiss small groups, from the mat, to the coats/bag area and door.

When dismissing in ‘small groups’ avoid phrases like ‘those who are sitting so *nicely* ...’; ‘those *good* children can go first ...’. There will always be a dozen, or so, children who will *always* sit thoughtfully, ‘nicely’, considerately. It is enough to give a reasonable and firm rotation of children (pairs/trios) from the carpet area. “Thanks Michael/Michelle, you’re ready ...” is enough; with a goodbye of course.

Colleague planning

Any fine-tuning of any of our *core* routines will need to be carefully thought through in terms of their benefit to the aim of a *co-operative* teaching and learning community.

The routines we have noted here are *core* routines; basic and essential to the establishment and *maintenance* of a positive learning community.

These core routines are best discussed, and developed, within our year teams. Our colleagues' experience, input, clarification, shared common values and expectations will help shape these routines and enable reasonable consistency across the early years department.

Core routines and (specialist) subject teachers¹²

There are some core routines that are helpfully passed on from grade teacher to each subject teacher in that critical first week:

- Lining-up routines for classroom entry (even specific language cueing that the grade/year teacher has found helpful).
- Any *particular* seating arrangements (who sits with whom, and who should definitely not sit with whom!). The grade teacher's knowledge about physical seating arrangements (table groups, split rows) can also be helpful to the subject teacher(s).
- Cues for any *whole-class* settling/attention.
- Noise volume cues for on task learning time.
- How to get teacher assistance during on-task learning time.
- Group-forming cues.
- Monitors (where appropriate).
- Toilet procedures (must be a whole-school routine).
- Pack-up and exit from the classroom cues.

The subject teacher is not obliged to use exactly the same routines as the grade teacher, but why 'reinvent the wheel' if such routines have been found to be supportive, practical, positive and helpful? In 'handing over' and 'picking up' our class from subject teachers it is also important to mention (quietly) any *specific* issues of concern about behaviour and learning (particularly if a child is on an individual behaviour plan (see Chapter 6).

End the day positively

In the following picture I am counting down (at the end of lunchtime in class¹³) to table clean-up and off to 'lunch play'.

The ‘pack-up’ reminders are on the board. I am also singing (badly) a song “You are my sunshine ...”. I ask the children to nominate a song at the end of the morning (before lunch play).

Prior to the ‘pack-up-song’ is the ‘I-can-see-your-lunch-song’ “I can see a banana, a banana, a banana, A healthy yellow banana in your lunchbox today ...”¹⁴ (we had been looking at the letter ‘Y’ in that lesson). “I can see some yoghurt, some yoghurt, some yoghurt ...” (well you get the idea).



The last ‘home-time words’ should be positive – not manufactured *bonhomie* – but *positive* in tone, rather than “You’ve been so badly behaved today! You’ve *really* disappointed me! I don’t know why I came into teaching. Let me tell you ...”.

Most of the children want (of course) to get out of the classroom and go home. Mind you – I have had a few children who have asked if they can come home and live with me (Elizabeth)! There are also parents and carers standing near the exit door (sometimes *too close!*).

Some teachers compound the negative end-of-day lecture the next day; they begin the day with the lecture continued. “I hope you’re not going to be like you were yesterday! I went home with a bad headache and it was your fault. Well! Today you had better not upset me again ...” (I wouldn’t share this if I had not observed it a few too

many times. Let's hope such behaviour is the exception and not bad-day syndrome). It is rarely the whole class anyway. It is unfair – and unnecessary – to verbally chastise the class group for the behaviour of half a dozen annoyingly behaved children.

The last word to the difficult child

It is important that if we have had to exercise discipline in any significant way with one of our children that they go out to play and (more particularly) go home at the end of the day with a reassuring word – and gesture – from their teacher. So that the 'last word' from their teacher has the emphasis of some repairing and rebuilding (see, later, p. 100f).

'Lining up' (classroom entry)

Early years children have 'lined up' outside the classroom, in playgrounds, for as long as we have had schools. Any inherent purpose in such a routine lies in that conscious, and appropriate, separation we establish (as teacher-leader) between children's social (play) time and in-class teaching and learning time. Some teachers allow children to haphazardly push, shove, elbow their way into a classroom noisily. It – then – takes the children longer to settle and refocus their kinaesthetic energy and playground voices. While social play is essential in children's emotional and social development, the classroom is not an extension of that social play. Children need to learn we come into a different place, and space, and to learn; we are here for teaching and learning time. Of course we have structured play (and role play and imaginative play ...) factored within class time, but the classroom is essentially geared for focused teaching and learning.¹⁵

It is also very important to explain (and show) our children where exactly we line up and how we line up *and why*:

As I was 'lining up' with a class of 7-year-olds, I noticed Ibrahim grab Danielle's shoulder ('in-line') and pretend to knee her in the back. I was not sure if my colleague had noticed this (we were about to team-teach in her class). I quickly (and quietly) asked her if I could have a quiet word with the class prior to classroom entry ... I verbally cued the rest of the class ('waiting' in line ...) "Excuse me class (...). My name is Mr Rogers. I'll be working with you today." (I hadn't been introduced to the class by their regular teacher – yet.) "I need to have a quick word with these two students here before we go in ... I won't be long." (They were at the front of the line.) The boy stopped as soon as I cued the class ('in line').

I asked the boy and girl their names. I asked Danielle if she was OK. She looked a little nervous, but smiled, "Yes I'm OK". Looking at the boy I said, "Ibrahim, I saw you grab Danielle and pretend to knee her". (I modelled a very minor knee lift, and pulled

at my own shirt, to briefly connect to his behaviour awareness). He frowned and said sulkily, “I was just joking!”

Many boys will say they are ‘just mucking around ...’ when they pinch, push, pull, elbow, ‘pretend punch’ or trip a fellow student ... (non-malevolent ‘testosteronic bonding’ my colleagues and I call it). It is pointless to have a routine for ‘lineup’ if we easily overlook, minimise or ignore such behaviour – and the typical excuses (“I was just joking!”).

I said, “Ibrahim (...) we don’t ever joke like that in our class. We keep our hands and feet safe”. He returned a sulky, knotted frown.

Looking back at the ‘line’ of children, I gave a short, group, reminder about hats, and coats, and then directed them into their classroom and to ‘settling in to your table groups’. “Thanks everyone for waiting ...” (after all they had to wait while I’d spoken to Ibrahim ...) “Remember your hats.” (This to the several students who still had their hats on ...) “Let’s go in ...”

I also had a one-to-one talk with Ibrahim later (at break time) see p. 100f.

Any routine we choose to establish is – hopefully – purposeful. That *purpose* will have been discussed with the class group. The degree to which any routine enables the fair, smooth-running of a class group depends on the *relaxed* vigilance with which we *maintain, consolidate and habituate this routine*.

You will always get those overly, demonstrably, keen children who ask the playground duty teacher for the time and line up ‘ten minutes’ before the bell. Then there are those children you will have to ‘round up’. I have found it helpful to choose those stragglers on occasion as the ‘line leaders’ *en route* to specialist classes, thus giving them a chance to take responsibility and not be ‘type cast’.

Training?

As with any routine, or cue, or procedure (whether ‘hands up’, ‘inside-voices’, or ‘pack-up’ ...) there is an element of ‘training’: by this, we mean thoughtful initial explanation and *modelling* to all children. We then *expect and encourage* the appropriate behaviour, as well as bringing correction – as the need arises – within the routine. In this way the routines enable a positive *habituation* about fair and cooperative behaviours.

A note on lateness

When a child is late (a.m. lateness) it is almost always an issue of parental/carer responsibility. When a child comes in late (even in the middle of a story, or lesson) we should *always* stop what we are doing, briefly, cue the class (“Excuse me for a moment class ...”) and welcome the child. We should never blame the child for being late, or add a scornful look (or word) to the parent/carer (if he or she is there with the child).

At the point when 20 pairs of eyes are watching this late ‘entrance’ we need to communicate a calm, warm, genuine and brief welcoming: “... Morning Jason (...) Welcome. Just put your bag over there. Thanks. Then join us on the mat. Come over here; sit next to Adam. Melissa please move over a little (beckon). That’s it; thanks Melissa.”

It is also important not to ‘overdo’ the welcome. Often a smile and a welcoming gesture to ‘join us’ are enough.

It is our confident, pleasant, welcoming tone that enables the (late) child’s sense of inclusion; it also avoids over-attentional responses by the rest of the class.

If the child is frequently late (very frequent) – in the first week or two – it will be important that the principal (head teacher) has a private meeting (at school) with the parent(s)/carer(s) and grade teacher.

Peer support: first weeks

Some children cannot wait to start school. They will run in, full of enthusiasm, day one, without even a brief goodbye to their mum or dad or carer. Other children will see the school as a large, strange, confronting, confining and confusing place. Some are anxious; some even ‘fearful’ of being left here at this place called school.

Most of their normative socialising at school will occur in relationship with their grade teacher as well as their peers. ‘Their’ teacher forms a significant *in loco parentis* role. It is natural that aspects of emotional dependency, protection and security arise in such a setting.

In the playground it is a different matter. In that rough and tumble world, with big (very big) children – all that space, competition for use of equipment – the concern over friendships and social identity soon looms large for these shy, or anxious, children.

Many primary schools have a peer support (peer-buddy) programme in place for the first few weeks of term one (some schools conduct such support programmes for a full term). Children aged 9–11 are selected (and trained) to team up with a nominated new entrant child, or any early years child new to the school, even in mid-term.

Peer-buddies are thoughtfully selected and trained in how to initially meet with their early years buddy on day one – first play period. They then walk them through the playground: showing them the equipment (and play) options; the sand pit area; the quiet areas; the board games/art options in the library ...; the canteen (tuck shop); the toilets; managing school bags, personal belongings, lunch routines, etc. They will also link them up with other early years peers and often set up, teach and monitor, play activities.

A senior teacher is responsible for the training of all ‘peer-buddies’ and will discuss – with them – the aims, expectations and limitations of their role and when to notify an adult if they have any concern about a child’s welfare (particularly bullying). The peer-buddies – themselves – always have a clear idea of the sorts of concerns a 4- or 5-year-old has entering school for the first time. The peer-buddies are selected for their social and

emotional intelligence and their common sense. We often role-play how to introduce yourself to your 'buddy', how to reassure, where to meet, etc.

Playground buddies

In many schools the playground buddies send their new entrant buddy a letter introducing themselves and how they will support them when the 4½-year-olds come into the big school.

There is wide research demonstrating that such peer-support programmes correlate with the development of confidence in early years children, a positive sense of identity and belonging, and emerging resilience and social coping behaviours. There is also research indicating links between established peer-support programmes and school attendance.¹⁶ See also appendix F.

Summary: core routines

- Organise seat plans and student groupings. (Table groups? Split rows? 'Who sits with whom?')
- Lining up.
- ENTRY to the classroom from outside: that cueing for expected, and *necessary*, differentiation between 'outside social time' and 'in-class teaching and learning time'.
- Cues for coats/hats/lunchboxes/water bottles (when in the classroom).
- CARPET TIME (after children have put hats/coats etc. away); the need to have a core routine for the group sitting 'on the mat'. Some children will need specific placement cues as to *where* to sit.¹⁷ Attention/focus cues (to whole-class) need to be taught, maintained and encouraged from day one.
- Cues for questions/contributions in whole-group time. Hands-up convention.
- TRANSITION ROUTINES (between whole-class teaching time and on task learning time). It takes children a while to understand, and habituate, the concept of *class-work* (or learning activities). For any meaningful on-task learning time we need to *clarify with the group*:
 - how we move from carpet area to table group (not *en masse*)
 - sitting comfortably (without rocking on chairs and sitting 'in' to the table). This one takes a while for the more kinaesthetic child! (See also p. 142)
 - noise *levels*/volume in our classroom
 - how to use table equipment (e.g., lids on felt-tipped pens straight after use, lids on glue sticks straight after use ...)
 - sharing manners

- how to get teacher assistance for classwork *or* concerns about other children. In time children will soon learn that ‘telling’ teacher about every ‘small’ indiscretion (by other children) will not be overly reinforced
 - what to do with completed work (in time children will learn to date/name their own work)
 - leaving the room procedures (e.g.: toilet, ‘going with a message’ ...)
 - how we leave our classroom when we go to the specialist/subject teacher and-classroom.
- PACK-UP ROUTINES (tidying table group areas, work handed in, getting ready for home time, on the mat ready for teacher to dismiss class ...).

All transition cues (from whole-class activities to ‘on-task’ learning time in table groups) need to be prefaced before we direct the children from the mat. Over a week or two these behaviours will start to become the norm and (hopefully) we will only need to give occasional reminders. A small percentage of children will need some form of personalised (individualised) behaviour support plan to enable those behaviours. This is addressed in Chapter 6.