

CHAPTER 2

I See You, I See Everything

I SPEND THE FIRST SIX WEEKS OF SCHOOL teaching children how to behave. It rarely takes less time; sometimes it takes more. It takes six weeks even when many of the students were in the same class last year and have been in the same school for several years. I cannot presume that what was so clear last year is remembered and accepted this year. I start again.

I do not apologize for this use of time. It is not a waste, not a way station along a more important course of educational mastery. It is the critical foundation of learning. It is the first curriculum. I call it “classroom management.” The emphasis is not on the three *Rs* of *readin'*, *ritin'*, and *rithmetic*, but instead on *reinforcin'*, *remindin'*, and *redirectin'*. This approach requires teaching proactively. Proactive teaching involves presenting and helping children practice appropriate attitudes and behaviors rather than constantly reacting to inappropriate ones. We need to focus systematic attention on our expectations of children and our methods of teaching those expectations.

In the Introduction to this section, I described my initial teaching disasters. From my colossal mistakes grew important insights. The first and perhaps most important understanding was that to feel safe, children must feel seen.

A first classroom

I had participated in a stimulating summer workshop for teachers. In the workshop, I had learned to tie-dye, make musical instruments, play logic games, and build simple structures with tri-wall carpentry. I proudly and

enthusiastically fashioned my classroom in Harlem, New York City, from all I had learned that summer. I organized my room in centers, each wonderfully partitioned (with MY dividers!) for definition and privacy. I littered the areas with “goodies” I had made or salvaged.

I soon discovered, however, that when I was watching the group in the art area, I couldn’t see the math corner. When I concentrated on the library, I couldn’t see the easel or the science corner. And when I was working at the blackboard, I couldn’t see anything at all!

Frequently, as I skirted the room, or disappeared into one of my centers, the children couldn’t see me, either. I quickly turned into a whirlwind. The students tested the durability and scaling potential of my tri-walls and chased after me with a constant bleat:

“Look at me, Teacher.”

“Look at my drawing, Teacher.”

“Teacher, look what Jerome did to my book.”

“TEACHER! LOOK!”

It was worthy of one of the classic primers: “Run, Teacher, Run. See Teacher Run. Run. Run. Run.” I became weary and suffered serious headaches.

I was not a quick learner. After several weeks of wiping up spills, re-gluing bindings on books, making excuses to the principal for the disorder in the halls, blaming everything and everyone—from “these children” to “this system”—I had had enough. I swept the room clear of partitions. I removed three-fourths of the materials. I plunked my chair



down in the middle of the room and me down with it. In a fine, firm, clear (maybe even loud) voice ripe with conviction, I announced, “I see you. I see everything.” ❖

I REALIZED THAT CHILDREN NEED TO BE SEEN. It was a simple matter of safety and a more complex matter of recognition and trust. Developmental studies tell us that five-year-olds need to be seen so that they can be free to venture off, leaving the enclosure of the teacher for new experiences with play and work. Six-year-olds need to be seen so they will not climb walls. But I have also found that seven-, ten-, and thirteen-year-olds need to be seen, just as they also need their private nooks and crannies. They need the encouragement and validation that comes from our best attention to their efforts. They need the safety that comes from the belief that their teacher sees them, knows them. Mutual trust grows from this security. When all children feel seen, they are released to work.

“I see you” is not a threat, but rather a message of caring and regard. When we say “I see you,” the “seeing” is not always literal. We may see our children and trust them, at times, to be on their own. But not during the first six weeks. The first six weeks is a time when we focus on getting to know our students.

Michelle

I was watching Michelle at the easel, anxious that she not get distracted and wander the room with paint brush extended. She painted a house, added windows, put in curtains, and even added what looked to be figures in one of the windows. Then she took her brush and painted long, abrupt slashes of red, covering and mixing with the browns of the house. The red got thicker, the strokes more intense. After the red, there came wide swathes of black, until the other colors only peeked from the edges, the building and figures entirely obliterated.

It was the first I knew about the fire that had destroyed her home. It was the first glimpse I had of what might be prompting her sometimes dreamy and distracted behaviors. Because I took the time to observe, I could talk about the story behind the painting and help her classmates understand that the picture was not really “a scribble-scrabble,” as Jeremy was quick to label it.

If we see our children in the process of doing, we may be able to glean what is under the layers of a now-puddly painting, or what is behind confusing or distracting behaviors. ❖

“I SEE YOU”: Noticing What Children Do Right

MY CHAIR, TABLE, OR DESK is where I can see the entire classroom. When I work with a small group, my chair is turned so that I see the room. I often gather the whole group in a circle so that everyone sees everyone else. I walk in the back—not the front—of the line. I want to see everyone. And students know that I see because I let them know with my comments, over and over. I continue to believe that the ways we see our children and the ways that they know they are seen by their teachers contribute significantly to the tone of the classroom.

I see Devon struggle with his writing, puncturing holes in the paper in frustration. I see Lisa avoid the expected routines in her scramble to make contact with her friends in the morning. I see Beth test limits. I see Molly waver in her new role as a friend of boys as well as girls. I see Chris “forget” his have-to’s so he can play games. I see my students enter our room, heads down, neglecting common courtesies.

But primarily I see the efforts, persistence, and desire of the children to please. They *want* to meet the expectations of their teachers, follow the rules correctly, execute each new skill, and succeed in their new class. To sustain that hope, I must focus on their positive energy and accomplishments:

- ◆ “You are remembering how to keep your bodies still.”
- ◆ “I see that you are remembering to raise your hands.”
- ◆ “I notice the way many of you look at Jamie when he speaks.”
- ◆ “Thanks, Jessica and Tim, for wiping off the paint jars and getting the lids nice and tight.”
- ◆ “Monica, I see you worked hard to make your butterfly sketch so realistic.”
- ◆ “Thank you for fixing the pencil sharpener.”
- ◆ “I notice that you are waiting so patiently for your turn to drink, Angie.”
- ◆ “You are ready so quickly today for math group.”
- ◆ “I like the way you included new people in your project.”
- ◆ “I see that you are really trying to make those letters even. It looks hard.”
- ◆ “Andy, you’ve helped Laura a lot. You can do your own work now.”

- ♦ “I notice that a lot of people in this group are interested in the news.”
- ♦ “I see... ”

Commenting on what you see

... for children, hope is as important as breathing.

SARA RUDDICK
Maternal Thinking

EACH TIME YOU COMMENT, your tone and language are extremely important. For example, when a child runs down the stairs, you might say, “Jimmy, don’t run down the stairs” or “No running, Jimmy. That’s the rule.” But rather than catching and correcting Jimmy, you could remind and redirect him instead. “I see too many steps, Jimmy. Show me again how you walk down the stairs.” The result is a positive accomplishment rather than negative “discipline.” Appropriate comments are:

- ♦ Encouraging—They support children’s efforts.
- ♦ Specific—They name a behavior or accomplishment and avoid general labels of “good” and “bad.”
- ♦ Positive—“Show me what you will do...” rather than “Don’t do that.”

Some examples of positive attitudes and language are provided in Figure 2.1. I concentrate on reminding, reinforcing, and redirecting. Remember that the focus of this entire approach is noticing what children do *right*.

FORMULATING EXPECTATIONS

OF COURSE, BEFORE WE CAN EXPECT CHILDREN TO DO RIGHT, we must teach them what we mean by “right.” As we get to know our children, we must also establish and communicate our expectations. Expectations are an essential step between intention and achievement. We must first know what our expectations are and then communicate them clearly to the children. Then we can translate our expectations into daily classroom life with the children. We teach our expectations in many ways.

We build expectations into the routines, rituals, and special situations and events of the classroom. Routines and rituals offer children opportunity for instruction and

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FIGURE 2.1

Commenting on What You See

Here are some examples of commenting on what you see.

Reinforcing group and individual efforts

- ◆ “You remembered to carry the scissors point down.”
- ◆ “I notice that you remember where to put your work so I can find it.”
- ◆ “You are really scrubbing the brushes.”
- ◆ “Many of you like to share your drawings. The nice comments I hear really help people want to share.”
- ◆ “I notice lots of different ideas and ways to draw trees. It’s neat that people have different ways to do things.”
- ◆ “I notice that most of you are taking time to read the directions and are now figuring out things for yourself.”
- ◆ “Nick and Judy, you worked hard to solve that problem on your own this afternoon.”

Reminding (review and practice)

- ◆ “Before we go to our next period, remind me, what are the three things you will need to do?”
- ◆ “Who remembers what you will need to get for writing? Show me.”
- ◆ “Remind me, what do you do if you can’t think of how to spell a word?”
- ◆ “Who remembers where to find a dictionary in our room? Show us.”
- ◆ “If someone asks you to play a game, what are friendly ways you might respond? Remind me.”
- ◆ “Remind us of what happens in our class if someone makes a mistake.”
- ◆ “Jackie, I see you walking around the room. Remind me, what’s your job right now?”

- ◆ “Denise, remind me of what happens if someone needs to use the markers you are using. What can you say?”

Redirecting

- ◆ “Pencils are for writing, Stephen... [Teacher takes the pencil away]. When you are ready to use the pencil appropriately, tell me and I’ll give it back.”
- ◆ “I hear a lot of talking. This is your time to get your folders—silently, now.”
- ◆ “Crystal, I see you floating around the room. You seem to be having a hard time making a choice today. You may either do a math puzzle or do your science observation. I’ll be back in a minute to see what you have decided.”
- ◆ “We agreed to throw the ball underhand and not whip it for this game. I’ll take the ball now. Maybe we can try again tomorrow.”
- ◆ “I see a lot of silly-looking stuff at this table. I’ll hold your papers for now. Tell me when you’re ready to begin work.”

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daily practice. We make our expectations explicit through the ways we structure independence, self-regulation, and cooperation. For example, classroom materials can be carefully labeled and organized and explored through Guided Discovery lessons (see discussion later in this chapter). Afterwards, they are accessible to children and are under the children’s care and responsibility. We are translating our expectations about independence, responsibility, and sharing into explicit behavioral expectations. In another example, when children face each other around a circle or a table, the implicit concept of a participatory community is made explicit.

We provide choices and create experiences that allow children practice, practice, and more practice in intellectual and social skills. Children need to practice making responsible academic choices. They also need to practice saying hello, raising their hand, and keeping their hand in their lap when someone else is talking. They need to practice getting help from peers and drawing on “classmate expertise”—finding the one who knows how to put the yarn on the needle or multiply fractions. When they make social mistakes, they must practice repairing them through consequences that hold them accountable but that don’t belittle or defeat them. We

also teach social expectations through the authenticity of our relationships with children and our affection for them—our knowing of the children and what they care about. We teach rigor by coming to our classes with careful lesson plans. We teach respect when we are willing to listen and build understanding. We teach kindness through moments of personal attention and compassion. As Marilyn Watson says, children are more apt to develop core values when they feel connected to those who model and teach such values (Watson 1998). Figure 2.2 summarizes some of the expectations that need to be taught to build a learning community.

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FIGURE 2.2

Teaching Expectations During the First Weeks of School

General expectations

For students to take care of themselves, each other, and their classroom, they must:

- ◆ Listen to the teacher and to each other
- ◆ Know and use all classmates' names
- ◆ Greet someone, each day, by name
- ◆ Participate in setting personal goals and articulating “hopes and dreams” for the year (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of “hopes and dreams”)
- ◆ Move with purpose and safety around the room
- ◆ Use and maintain appropriate noise and activity levels
- ◆ Resolve conflicts with fairness and without the use of force
- ◆ Be honest about mistakes and learn to make reparations without loss of face
- ◆ Play games in ways that are fun and safe for all
- ◆ Share respectful and interested questions, comments, experiences, and opinions in the group
- ◆ Be inclusive and friendly to all, not just to best friends

- ◆ Establish solid work habits and the ability to draft, revise, critique, and appreciate their own best efforts
- ◆ Work independently and cooperatively in small and large groups
- ◆ Assert personal needs with teachers and peers
- ◆ Contribute to the community

Some specific expectations

For a classroom to function well as a learning community, students must:

- ◆ Know and get excited about the different areas and materials in the room
- ◆ Learn the routines of the bathroom, the lunchroom, and recess
- ◆ Recognize and respond appropriately to signals
- ◆ Learn how to invite people to join a game
- ◆ Learn what to say if someone wants to join their game
- ◆ Learn how to choose good books from the class library
- ◆ Learn how to share a box of crayons or three pairs of scissors among eight children
- ◆ Learn how to toss a ball in a safe way
- ◆ Learn how to do homework, put a heading on a paper, and turn work in to the proper slot
- ◆ Learn how to fill out an assignment book
- ◆ Learn where to put lunch boxes, backpacks, and treasures from home

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STAGES

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT IS, in part, a process of instilling expectations, routines, and skills which allow children to work with competence on their own, in a group, or with a partner. To accomplish these tasks, we first must establish that we see children take care of the classroom. It doesn't work to try to rush or condense

the process. Rules and skills need to be explained, modeled, practiced, then tried in real situations. I need to be able to say “I know you know how to do... how to take care of... how to manage yourself during... And I know that because I’ve *seen* you do it.”

But how can I do all this seeing?

How do I begin to teach a group to understand place value and how to trade seventeen ones for one ten and seven ones, and still keep track of that bunch in the library corner? How do I see if Jeffrey bluffs or reads? How do I have a conference with Kate about her story if I stop every two minutes to remind the group working on their spelling to spell rather than chatter? How do I notice who is remembering to put caps on the markers, put crayons carefully back in the box, replace the lid of the glue pot, and return the glue pot to the shelf? How do I notice all that when I am instructing my group to blend consonant sounds with a short “a” vowel?

I DON’T! When I am immersed in teaching a group new skills, I need to give them undivided attention. So, I do *not* begin the year teaching complex new concepts or the intricacies of a new subject. When algebra class meets, the focus is on establishing the routines of keeping assignment books, organizing a notebook—setting up and practicing good work habits. The “real meat” will wait a few days or even a number of weeks. Small-group reading instruction will wait as well. Lessons still need to be engaging and appropriate—and challenging—but the teacher’s focus must be on establishing basic expectations and skills rather than on helping children master new material.

I spend six weeks helping children generate hopes and dreams for the school year, goals to reach for, and rules for the classroom; six weeks building community with read-aloud stories and room-beautifying class projects. I spend six weeks taking students through a draft-by-draft sequence for completing a project, until everyone has a beautiful piece of finished work to post on our bulletin boards. I spend six weeks teaching children how to choose books and art materials, sometimes even how to turn the pages of a book or put the caps back on the markers. I teach them to make a heading on their writing assignments, monitor their own voice levels, make efficient transitions, ask for help from classmates, work cooperatively, and many more how-to’s. This instruction takes patience, determination, and confidence that it is important work.

I “open” the classroom gradually. Only some of the areas will be used the first week. Only some of the materials are out on the shelves. New materials are introduced slowly. New expectations and responsibilities are also introduced gradually,

in three stages. Each stage has its own tasks, objectives, and criteria for moving to the next stage.

Stages one and two take place largely during the first six weeks of school but are reinforced the rest of the year. Stage three begins toward the end of the first six weeks and continues through the rest of the year.

- ◆ Stage one focuses on the class, as a whole, learning expectations for behavior.
- ◆ Stage two introduces the responsibilities for working in small groups, and for working independently while the teacher concentrates on a small group.
- ◆ Stage three initiates the skill and content instruction planned for the year, such as instruction through math and reading groups.

These are broad, overlapping categories, but they do outline a progression that I take every one of my classes through. How quickly we move through the three stages, however, will vary with the unique character and rhythm of each class. Some of my classes, for example, need more time to establish whole-group routines and coherence, while others “gel” as a group but take more time to build independence and inter-reliance in small-group situations. The pace is adjusted by the teacher’s assessment of the learning rather than enforced by any strict time guidelines.

STAGE ONE: Whole-Class Learning

THE BASIC GOALS FOR THIS INITIAL STAGE are listed below. In general, children are developing the work habits and behaviors which create competence and promote respect. They are learning to:

- ◆ Listen
- ◆ Use kind language
- ◆ Ask questions
- ◆ Share solutions to problems
- ◆ Put things away
- ◆ Have fun and enjoy jokes (that don’t rely on teasing)
- ◆ Get ready in a timely way
- ◆ Know everyone’s name

- ♦ Generate and follow the rules of the classroom
- ♦ Carry out orderly transitions

Stage one is devoted to whole-class activity. It is a time to set a tone and set expectations, a time to create a positive group ethic. Teaching some basic routines that we often take for granted and holding group meetings help accomplish these goals.

Establishing some basic routines

A safety signal

Inside the classroom, a bell rings. It's the class signal that means "freeze." "When you hear that signal, you stop—you stop everything. You face the person who gave the signal. You are ready to listen."

The bell rings. Children freeze... somewhat. Matt is still finishing his drawing. Cathy continues to drink from the fountain. Angie moves over to get next to her friend. A clutch in the library area continues to read.

"I see that many of you know just what to do when the bell rings in our class. I see Jonathan has stopped and is looking right at me. I see that Jessie has put down his pencil and is looking at me. I see that the group working at the math table is still and ready to listen. I don't yet see EVERYONE. Go back to work. I will ring the bell again. I hope this time I see everyone freeze."

The quick response to the bell improves, but when the teacher begins her message, talking and distractions resume. It will take more than one practice and more than one day to work on *staying* frozen until the "melt" signal is given. The bell is an essential safety system. The teacher must be able to get the attention and hold the attention of the entire class, even when groups are deeply involved and scattered about the room. Or, in the rare case of an emergency, the teacher needs to silence the room, make an announcement, and begin the transition. Later, even students may ask to use the signal. A student might ring the bell and say to the class, "I can't find my book. Did anyone see it?" or "It's kinda noisy here. Would people please be quieter?"

A few years ago, a school in Washington, DC, had adopted a raised hand as the school-wide quiet signal. It was late fall, and Barbara Freeman's second grade class was highly proficient with this signal. But now the students were on a field trip, far from the confines of classroom routine. In addition, Ms. Freeman found herself momentarily in charge of two additional classes while waiting for some hold-up to be cleared. The groups were becoming impatient. Ms. Freeman raised her hand and,

to her happy surprise, sixty children stopped, looked, and listened quietly while she explained the wait, gave new directions, and let out a deep and relaxed breath.

Circling up

We are about to go outside to play a group game. Week one—day one. I give the class two directions: “I want you to hold hands and make a circle when you get out on the field. I will count and see how quickly you can do that.” Curiously, I have found that the older the children, the harder this will be. I am prepared to be patient.

I walk at the back of the line. The children are ahead of me. As they reach the field, they form a loose huddle. Some take hands. Many race about looking for just the “right” hand. I am counting “1... 2... 3...” Jed won’t hold a girl’s hand. Marty is trying to find her best friend’s hand. “18... 19...” Sam is exploring the limits of arm spans until bodies jerk and tumble. “35... 36... 49... 50...” And there is a collected mass that is holding hands, an approximation of a circle. I am still counting. Their faces show puzzlement. Why am I counting if everyone is holding hands?

“Does this look like your idea of a circle?” I ask. “How will you make it a circle?” Some move out, some move further in. Back to counting. After almost five minutes, they are standing still, holding hands in a circle. They have carried out the simple directions.

“Well,” I say, “you did it. It took to the count of 250, a long time. I expect you to do this to the count of 20. Last year’s class record was 10. I noticed that some of you quickly took a hand. Some of you stood still and waited patiently. Some of you helped create a circle. Let’s see everyone help this time. I will say ‘scatter.’ At the



signal ‘Allee-allee-in-free,’ I will expect you to circle up and hold hands. Twenty seconds! Scatter!”

This technique conveys a tone. Does the teacher mean what she says? Does she care *how* something is done, not just *that* it gets done? Are there expectations about care and treatment of others, such as refusing to hold the hand of someone of the opposite sex or only holding hands of your “friends”? When all children are expected to hold all hands, the message is that we are all friendly to each other in this class. Period.

The process also reinforces the belief that behaviors need to be taught and learned, and that learning them is not a waste of time. The smooth transition, the “good circle,” the quiet line-up, or the responsive class meeting won’t happen the first time, but they will get better the next time. They will be even better the third time.

The bathroom routine

Establishing a routine for students to go to the bathroom on their own is a basic and fundamental piece of management. It reinforces a sense of autonomy and self-regulation. Few classrooms have their own bathrooms, so unless children go on schedule with a teacher, they must take care of themselves on their bathroom trip. If a child doesn’t follow the rules, you might say, “You’ll have to wait until a teacher is able to go with you. It’s *your* choice.” Children can quickly assume this responsibility, but we shouldn’t take the bathroom routine for granted. Deliberately teaching it increases the potential for self-control—even when the teacher isn’t watching.

Of course, there are lapses. Six-year-old boys may attempt a mad dash into the girls’ bathroom. Six-year-old girls come back giggling or in a snit to expose this outrage. Eight-year-olds need reminders that bathrooming is not a social event—“You do not need to go every time a friend needs to go.” Many ten-year-olds also love to congregate for social purposes, to tell secrets or gossip out of sight of the teacher (they hope). Restless students make numerous forays, especially when the classroom subject matter befuddles them. Graffiti and petty vandalism are common bathroom misdemeanors.

I recall when Maurice’s mother came to school to find out why I never let Maurice “go.” Maurice, it turned out, never went to the bathroom because he was afraid to go by himself. A small, reticent child, he was picked on and teased. “Baldy-bean” they called him, and snatched his protective cap off his head. It was Jerome and Grady who proposed confidently, during class meeting, that they escort Maurice to the bathroom “so he don’t need to be scared of nothin’.” Jerome and Grady were usually the class bullies, apt to exploit classmates cheerfully. For a nickel, they would ensure a safe passage from school to home—safe mostly from them. In this instance,

however, the escorting accomplished several important changes in our classroom. It helped Maurice go to the bathroom. It also helped Maurice feel he had friends in school. And it helped Jerome and Grady be friends instead of bullies.

It may seem easier, though terribly time-consuming, to take children to the bathroom. Many schools still require this. It avoids hassles and problems. Or does it? It is my strong contention that the routines of our classrooms must be used as opportunities to teach decent behavior, not to constrict it.

So with our fives we practice going to the bathroom, walking down the halls, first together and then in pairs. We teach our sevens to put up a name card on a “Bathroom Out” hook and to remember to remove the card when they return. We are prepared to reinforce and remind, because if students “forget” the rules or choose not to follow them, they may lose the privilege of going to the bathroom on their own—at least until they are ready to show they remember and choose to follow the class rules. There are consequences, but not consequences which release children from their job—safe and proper bathroom conduct.

Some activities for the early weeks

Journal writing

It is journal writing period in Ms. Nophlin’s second grade classroom early in the third week of school. Part of the language arts program, journal writing integrates a sequenced syllabus of phonetics, sight words, and grammar with the children’s personal experiences. This class is eager to do their best, but their focus lasts only for short spurts before restless energy erupts.

They have been making slow and steady progress since the first day, when they had unwrapped their notebooks to great fanfare and explored the properties of the classic mottled black-and-white composition books. (See “Guided Discovery” later in this chapter.)

“When I open this notebook, what will I find?” Ms. Nophlin had quizzed that first day.

“Nothing!”

“Why do I give you nothing?” she had teased them.

“So we can write,” had come the response.

More questions and conversation in the following days had helped construct the concept of a journal—a written record of a person’s words, ideas, and stories.

In small, incremental steps over the past two weeks, Ms. Nophlin has been teaching students to use their notebooks with precision and care. She has demonstrated

how to open the book, turn the pages, find the top and bottom. “Watch how I turn the page so it doesn’t get all crinkly. Who else thinks they can turn a page without crinkling it?”

The children’s vocabulary now includes terms like “margin,” “line,” and “binding.” They have decorated their journals and attached name labels to the front covers, practiced writing on the lines of the first page, and learned to enter “Tuesday” on the top line near the margin before beginning an entry.

The drenching rain this morning prompts Ms. Nophlin’s question, written on the chart: “What did you do to stay dry on this very, very rainy day?”

“Before we start,” she asks, “who can remind me what we need to do to begin our journal writing?” The short reminders will help settle and focus the group.

“Look at the chart.”

“Put our hands in our laps.”

“Open our ears.”

“Who sees our journal question for today?” Hands go up. Most now know where the question is even if they can’t read all the words. First, with their teacher’s help, they read in chorus, then a few do solos. Once more, they read in refrain, then begin to share their rainy-day mornings. In a burst of competitive zeal, four talk at once. Ms. Nophlin holds up her hand, signaling for silence. Myra continues to wiggle and whisper to her neighbor. “Myra, move over here, please,” says Ms. Nophlin quietly, redirecting the child to a seat next to the teacher.

“Does rain have a sound? Let’s listen,” Ms. Nophlin continues, launching a discussion about rain, wet shoes, protective gear. Children are gathering ideas from this conversation that will be reflected in their journal entries. It is both rehearsal and a way to extend their ideas.

Before they move to their seats to write, there are a few quick reminders. “If you need to sharpen a pencil, what will you do, Dana?” Dana shrugs. “Who can remind Dana?”

“You raise your hand and wait.”

“Show me. Pretend you are writing and your pencil point breaks and you need to sharpen it.” Later, students will be encouraged to get up and get what they need on their own. For now, they are learning to stay in their seats and concentrate.

A pleasant hum settles over the room as the class gets to work writing about their day. Tyrone casts a critical eye at Jordan when Jordan starts his sentence on the same line as the date. “You’re supposed to skip a line,” Tyrone admonishes. Jordan looks as if he wants to argue, but he looks around at others’ pages and then begins to erase furiously.

As the period continues, hands go up to ask for spelling help or permission to sharpen pencils. Jason's notebook remains unopened. He skates it vigorously over his desk until it bumps Leesha's arm.

"Look what you did!" Leesha cries. The disruption brings Ms. Nophlin, who helps Jason apologize and erase Leesha's smudged marks. Opening Jason's notebook, the teacher sees the jagged, unruly strokes that are his writing and realizes just how difficult this task is for him. She modifies the task, inserting some dots for Jason to connect into letters. Moments later she returns, has him dictate a sentence to her, and instructs him to trace the letters in it.

Ms. Nophlin continues to circulate, noticing, reinforcing, and asking questions. The egg timer on a shelf in the front of the room reminds students that there are three minutes to go in the twenty-minute writing period. They have almost made it—in their seats and still writing!

There is time for a few to share their work. The three readers stand tall in front of the class and wait until everyone is ready.

"The rain makes my shoes get wet," Alonzo reads.

"I like rain," reads Tanya, and she shows off a beautifully pencil-washed picture. "My brother likes to jump in puddles and he gets me all wet. I said Robert Stop. But he don't listen." An appreciative laugh greets her story.

"I got a new baby brother," Teresa reads. Everyone claps. It's not rain, but it's important.

Seventh and eighth grade book posters

During the first week of school, I started the seventh and eighth graders at Greenfield Center School in Massachusetts on a two-week project to help them learn work habits I hoped they would apply throughout the school year. I asked them to make a poster to promote a book they had read and "loved" over the summer, a book they wanted to recommend to their peers. The project taught students to create work in carefully sequenced steps, from a rough sketch or brainstorming, through several drafts, to a final product displayed proudly in the classroom.

Students needed to think carefully about how to convey their ideas using only a few words and chosen images. The project began with a worksheet asking a series of questions about the book. Students were asked, for example, to circle words that describe their book. Was it a fantasy or realistic fiction? Was it a mystery, horror, sci-fi, or historical fiction? What were some of the book's strengths—character, dialogue, suspense, action, interesting issues?

Students then created many drafts: first a small “thumbnail” sketch, then a larger, extended sketch including favorite ideas. Next, a written blurb or a few catchy sentences could be added. After this thorough preparation, students explored different art materials and approaches to adding color and collage to their draft. Next, they proofread and got a final okay from the teacher. Yes, the author’s name is spelled correctly, there are periods in proper places, and the background and foreground colors are figured out.

Throughout this process, I circulated, asking questions, prompting, encouraging, and helping students find various resources to solve problems. To a lost-looking Myles, I said, “Who can show you ways to shade using Craypas?” To Wen-hai, I said, “Where might you find a good picture of a castle?”

I concentrated on how students did their work throughout the project. For example, when the class was about to leave their meeting area and go to a forty-five-minute quiet work time on book posters, I asked, “Before you go, what will you need to remember?” Students listed supplies such as paper, markers, and folders. I prompted them to recall the procedures for quiet work.

“Find a place where we can work.”

“Not sit where we’ll talk a lot.”

“Get what we need first so we don’t have to get up a lot.”

I knew that students’ social agenda was huge and that talking would easily become the focus. I also knew that while some of the students could talk and work at the same time, others needed a singular focus and very few distractions. A tone conducive to work had to be established for the good of the group. It needed to be industrious and quiet, with minimum movement.

Students got up, sharpened a pencil, asked a friend for an idea, went to the bathroom. Comments at one table appropriately accompanied the ebb and flow of work:

“I like your tree.”

“May I have the black when you’re done?”

“What’s another word for exciting?”

At another table, whispers and giggles drew attention away from posters and into socializing. “I’m asking her about my poster,” Justina cried as she saw me approach.

“I don’t think so,” I said. “I think this group is mostly chatting.”

“I’m stuck and I don’t like my draft,” Justina whined. Stuck, she had diverted herself and others into the comfort of the social arena, a place of strength for her. To get past her frustrations, she would need redirection. I quickly realized that Justina often gave up quickly and digressed from independent work in the classroom. It would be a goal for the year for her to gain more confidence and improve her ability to concentrate. It was especially important to begin right away, before bad habits got established.

Justina was redirected to sit away from friends, closer to me. A brief conversation and a look at an earlier draft got her restarted. Several days later, she would complete her poster, proud of the design and shadings of color, a beautiful final completion to start off her year.

Morning Meeting

MORNING MEETING IS A DAILY GATHERING of the class that builds group cohesion and an attentive, responsive community. (See Figure 2.3 for the components of Morning Meeting.) *The Morning Meeting Book* by Roxann Kriete offers detailed explanations and descriptions of each component as well as specific greetings, activities, and charts.

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FIGURE 2.3

Components of Morning Meeting

Morning Meeting is a fifteen- to thirty-minute class meeting at the beginning of each day. It builds community, creates a positive climate for learning, reinforces academic and social skills, and gives children daily practice in respectful communication. Morning Meeting consists of the following four components:

Greeting: Students greet each other by name. There are many different greeting activities that can be used throughout the year, including handshaking, singing, clapping, and greeting in different languages.

Sharing: Each day, two or three students share information about an event in their lives. Listeners take turns offering empathic comments or asking clarifying questions.

Group activity: All participate in a brief, lively activity such as singing, chanting, playing a game, reciting a poem, or dancing.

News and announcements: Children read the news and announcements chart that their teacher has written. Sometimes they read silently as a group, sometimes they follow as the teacher or a fellow student reads, sometimes they read aloud as a group. The news and announcements chart usually includes an activity that reinforces academic skills.

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Children count on and internalize the consistent and predictable rituals of Morning Meeting: greetings; time to share personal news; a repertoire of games, chants, and songs; classroom news for the day. The strength of a Morning Meeting also depends on the capacity of children to take responsibility for the routines of the group—by listening actively, making relevant comments, playing enthusiastically, sitting still, raising a hand. There is a lot to learn.

Meetings vary from teacher to teacher and class to class. Each meeting incorporates the character and flavor of the group. Each teacher lets her/his own rituals evolve.

“It’s time for meeting... It’s time for meeting...” is the melodious signal in Ms. Porter’s kindergarten-first grade class. The tune passes spontaneously as children drift over to the rug, their meeting area. “Where is Rosie, where is Rosie... there she is... there she is...” they go on to sing.

In Mr. Jenkins’s seventh grade group, students begin Morning Meeting by teaming up to move tables and chairs to form a space large enough for twenty-five adolescent bodies. They initiate their circle by naming all class members, without the melody. Every student is named, everyone is included in the circle with a resonant “Good morning,” and everyone has the responsibility of greeting and including others. Noticing who has yet to be named takes keen attention and watchfulness. No one gets left out.

My third graders sometimes made number sentences for the calendar date. It is September 20th. We will need twenty sentences for the number twenty. “Who has one?” I ask.

“I hope we don’t have school on the 30th!” someone whispers.

Molly says, “One-fifth of one hundred is twenty.” Molly loves to be first and loves to demonstrate her superior skills.

Danny is next. “One hundred take away eighty is twenty.”

It’s Patty’s turn. She says with hesitation, “Nine and nine is twenty.” I notice Molly smirk and nudge her neighbor.

I say with strong feeling, “I like people to contribute in our circle. It’s pretty easy to do that when you feel very sure of what you know. It takes courage to speak when you don’t feel so sure. I want this to be a class where everyone feels they can contribute. Their math ideas, their singing voices, their stories—their sure things and their not-so-sure things. That’s what’s most important.”

Often during meetings, someone gives an answer that is not correct. *This is an opportunity to teach “right behavior,” not “right answers,” a critical moment to set the tone and instill group ethics.* I am easily reminded of the childhood fear that lurked in my stomach every time I had to give an answer. So afraid to be wrong, I rarely volunteered. I dreaded those looks and barely smothered giggles. I was



afraid to forget seven times eight, the capital of Maine, the longest river, the last verse. Yet, though I hated being ridiculed, I was not hesitant to ridicule others, perpetuating the climate of fear in the classroom. Such fear stifles and hinders learning.

Now, as a teacher, I give a clear, direct, emphatic message to my students: *"I will not allow ridicule in our classroom."* Students transfer this learning to other parts of the day. Because we have established that put-downs are not acceptable in Morning Meeting, I can reinforce it with my eighth graders in English class. I can react to a sharp, sarcastic remark by one of my very articulate students as he disagrees with a peer's comment. Academic classes build on the social learning of Morning Meetings.

Sharing personal experiences in Morning Meeting

In our Morning Meeting, there is a time for sharing events and experiences that occurred outside of school. Morning Meeting serves as a transition, connecting lives at home to lives in school. In our routine, a student makes a brief report and then asks, "Any questions or comments?"

The rest of the group then becomes active. They may ask for more details, probe for more information, make reactive comments. They learn to respond with attention and authentic interest. When we permit the outward appearance of indifference (bodies turned away from the speaker, whispering to a neighbor, staring out windows), we encourage disengagement. When we expect the outward appearance of attention (looking at the person speaking, sitting still, a verbal response), we provide conditions for interest to develop.

Deidre reports that her mother got a new job. Deidre isn't sure just what the job was, but her Mom starts today.

"Any questions or comments?" No hands. Deidre is a quiet nine-year-old, apt to hang back and give a sour appearance. I raise my hand. Deidre calls on me shyly, "Ms. Charney."

"Are you glad your mother has a new job?"

Deidre replies uncertainly.

Janie's hand (at half-mast). "My mother got a job recently. She comes home tired and grumpy." Deidre smiles at Janie.

"What kind of job?" someone asks Janie. Before Janie can answer, I intervene and redirect the sharing back to Deidre by selecting a student and asking him for one more question for Deidre. He complies.

"Thank you for your interesting sharing. I'd love to hear more about your mother's new job, so let us know what you find out," I conclude.

In this meeting, I modeled a response with a question and comment. I also redirected the meeting when it began to shift away from the original sharer. Some children are naturally more outspoken and popular. Some command more attention from their peers. The group dynamics can be quite complex. The more comfortable and secure the group becomes, the more our quiet, reserved, or less popular children can risk coming forward.

Morning Meeting with older children

Many teachers of sixth through eighth grade students use a modified version of Morning Meeting that teacher, principal, and Northeast Foundation for Children co-founder Chip Wood named "Circle of Power and Respect" (CPR). Given positive direction and clear guidelines, older children relish opportunities for sharing.

I observed Ron, the class "outsider," tell a spell-bound audience in his Maine school an antic tale of a mishap on a hunting trip. "See, I had my cousin's three-wheeler, and I thought my Granddad said to take the right fork trail, only he didn't..."

"Did you see how everyone listened to you?" his teacher asked later, reinforcing his success. "They did?" Ron responded, a smile belying his question.

Older children also bring up subjects which spark important and intense discussions. When a student relates, with obvious relish, the events of a baseball game he watched that nearly erupted into a fan riot when a bad call was made, some students suggest beating up the umpires. The teacher intervenes and extends the discussion to violent actions at sporting events and the ethical questions involved.

When a sixth grader describes a weekend activity, a prank played on some female classmates that involved calling them sexual names, he explains it was just “fun.” “See,” he insists, “they’re grinning.”

“I’m having trouble with this,” Ms. Ellison says firmly. “We’ll stop and talk about this later.” Morning Meetings provide a format and opportunity for these discussions that are just as important for older children as for younger ones.

DURING STAGE ONE OF THE FIRST SIX WEEKS, I introduce the areas of the room and establish routines and ways to use materials. We start a routine called “quiet time.” Children choose an activity that they wish to do alone and quietly for a sustained period of time: puzzles, sewing, drawing, reading, independent math sheets. I observe as some students do elaborate things, others dream, and a few watch the clock.

During this stage, I set up an art activity or a new technique for using the pastels. We may go outside and sketch a tree in the schoolyard. I urge them to look at shapes, textures, colors. I ask, “What part of your sketch do you like the best? What part do you think you might want to do differently next time?” I am teaching children to self-evaluate, to survey their own work before asking “Teacher, is it good?”

The children have to know the place for the stapler, how to carry scissors, where to find the bin for lined paper, the place for finished work, the proper storage for the paint brushes. I demonstrate. I explain. I model. One technique for opening the room during the first weeks is called Guided Discovery.

Guided Discovery

GUIDED DISCOVERY IS A PROCESS for introducing materials, opening areas in the classroom, and preparing children for different aspects of the curriculum. For example, teachers may use Guided Discovery to introduce journal books, the library area, or a “choice” period. The process sparks children’s interest in the activity or classroom area while giving them opportunities to be creative and to practice making productive choices.

Guided Discovery lessons may establish routines for whole-class or independent work. They may take thirty minutes or only ten. In any Guided Discovery lesson, there may be the following objectives:

- ◆ Motivate and excite students by exploring creative possibilities.
- ◆ Stretch individual students toward involvement in new or extended areas of learning.

- ◆ Give information and ideas to guide and deepen the understanding of materials and activities in the classroom.
- ◆ Give instruction in the techniques and skills needed for effective use of tools and materials.
- ◆ Establish a common language and vocabulary.
- ◆ Share ideas and procedures for independent use of materials or areas. (These ideas may come from children who have invented or found alternatives.)
- ◆ Teach or reinforce social or cooperative guidelines.
- ◆ Teach and reinforce care and clean-up routines.

Importantly, Guided Discoveries may be used not only to introduce new materials or activities, but to stimulate new interest in familiar resources. One year, I used the process to get fourth graders to experiment with new techniques for using the number two pencil in sketching. The value of Guided Discovery is its power to excite children and help them unlock the potential uses hidden in a tool—be it a pencil, atlas, or microscope—while teaching them to use the tool with care and respect. (See Figure 2.4 for the steps in a Guided Discovery.)



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FIGURE 2.4

Steps in a Guided Discovery

In general, Guided Discoveries include the following steps:

- 1. Introduction**—The teacher and children name the material or room area in a way that excites the children and motivates them to explore.
- 2. Generating ideas**—The teacher helps children generate ideas for possible ways to use the material or room area, and the teacher demonstrates the uses.
- 3. Children explore**—Children try their hand at using the material or room area in different ways, with guidance and encouragement from the teacher.
- 4. Sharing**—Children show their work to the group, pointing out features they would like others to notice. The audience offers comments.
- 5. Clean-up and care of material or area**—The teacher asks children to suggest and demonstrate good ways to clean up, establishing expectations for the care of classroom materials and areas.
- 6. Extensions**—Children work in groups, pairs, or alone to continue exploring or discovering further uses of the material or room area.

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Guided Discovery with a box of crayons

I often introduce a box of crayons with more than thirty different colors during the first week of school. Even with older groups, I deliberately start with a common material, one that is taken for granted. I want to extend possibilities, as well as model a considered approach to the resources of our classroom.

I have covered the box of crayons with a wrapper. “Who can guess what I have? I’ll give you a clue—it’s something we regularly use in

school.” Quickly, this six-year-old group, feeling and shaking the package, guesses correctly.

“Yes. It’s a box of crayons. But how many? A few or a lot?”

“A lot,” replies a chorus of voices.

“Well. What’s a lot?” I write down some of the numbers, enjoying the ideas of quantity that vary so with this age. One thousand, some say. Twenty-hundred is another possibility. Eighty-eight, a more precise fellow suggests.

“How will we find out?”

“Open it,” come the excited answers.

I unwrap the package, but I don’t open the box. “Where does it tell us exactly how many?” As I hold up the box, different children try to locate and distinguish the numbers. Finding them easily, they are satisfied. And some will read them. But is it 46 or 64?

“Sixty-four crayons. That is a lot. Think now—are they all the same color? Are there sixty-four blue crayons? Sixty-four red crayons?” A quick poll shows that most are pretty sure there are sixty-four different colors. “Do you think you might be able to name ten... twenty?” Lots of nods.

Remember now, what we are exploring is a standard box of crayons, not a jazzy new product! By the time I actually open the lid in order to display sixty-four different colors, there is considerable interest, even drama. “Let’s see if you can figure out ten of these fancy colors. I wonder...” The children eagerly begin to name first the obvious, and then silver, gold, turquoise. I put their inventory on a chart, locating the crayon with each given label. They name ten, then twenty, and are pleased with their own knowledge, excited by their discoveries.

Perhaps I will add one new color. “Here’s a very fancy one... magenta, it says on the label. Can anyone guess what color magenta might be?” I wiggle it in the box, keeping it hidden. Guessing adds to the final pleasure of discovery.

“It’s sort of like reddish-purplish-pink,” someone says.

“It’s like Kim’s shirt.”

“Magenta, magenta,” someone else sings.

The concept that there are shades of color—that magenta is a shade of red—would be an interesting one to develop in another lesson, or it might be the focus for an older group. Now, I move on to using the crayons. I explain that later in the morning there will be a drawing time.

Everyone will have a chance to use these special boxes of sixty-four crayons. “Where do you think we should keep them?”

“On the art shelf.”

“Why would that be a good place?”

“Cause you use them for drawing and art.”

“Yes. They are things that artists use.”

“How do you think artists take care of their crayons?” I tell students that I’ve noticed how full the box is and how hard it can be to take out the crayons and find where to put them back. I demonstrate. “Should I just dump them all out, because I’m in a hurry?”

“You gotta be careful,” someone tells me.

“Show me how you would be careful.” A student comes up and gingerly extracts a single crayon. I make it tricky and shake the box, challenging her to then replace the crayon. She does. “How did you know to put it there?”

She smiles. “I could see.”

“What could she see?” I ask the others. The rest of the class peers into the box, intrigued with this mystery. Others want to try, but I remind them that they will all have a chance when it’s time for art (or “choice”).

“I’ve noticed something else about these crayons. I’ve noticed that they have a pretty sharp point.”

“It’s kind of roundish, too,” someone observes.

“What do you think will happen if I need to press down hard to make it dark?”

“It will break?”

“You shouldn’t do it so hard.”

“It gets flat.”

“Suppose I want to make a dark sky and I press hard and it does break, but I want it sharp again. Does anyone know a way to sharpen a crayon? Can you sharpen crayons?”

“They get stuck a lot.”

“They do get stuck in pencil sharpeners. Is there another way?” We might experiment with different types of crayon sharpeners at another meeting—a group of seven-year-olds once took off on a study of crayon sharpeners! But for now, I just introduce the tool.

Before finishing the day’s Guided Discovery lesson, I may need to talk about sharing. As one of the children finds space on our art shelf, I ask someone to count how many boxes we have in our class. There are

six. “Will that be enough for everyone? Suppose more than six children want to use them at the same time? Suppose the whole class wants to use them for drawing later? How will we do that?” This may be a good time to introduce, or reinforce, behavior and language for sharing.

“If I want the black, do I say, ‘gimme it!’? What should I say? Remind me.” I ask a child to demonstrate. I may propose other dilemmas. “What happens if the box is out of my reach?” or “What if we both need the same crayon at the same time?” I find that children need to go through this, even when they have heard it before, and even when they are ten years old. Managing these courtesies helps children be polite, kind, and helpful to each other, to visitors, and to teachers.

“Show me that you remember how to ask someone to pass over a marker,” I say. “Who knows what to do if you have been waiting for the brown crayon for a long time? Is it okay to grab?”

As the children go to work with the crayons, or the math manipulatives, or their new readers, the role of the teacher is to watch. S/he reinforces the discoveries, notices the careful handling of the material, observes the behaviors.

“I see that you are trying both light and dark coloring.”

“I like the way you are passing the box around the table.”

“What nice words I hear... ”

“You found another new color. What other color do you think it’s like? Would you like to add that to our chart so others can look for it?”

And, of course, the teacher must remind and redirect when children “forget,” because the process will always break down—for sixes and eights and tens and twelves. ❖

Guided Discovery with a dictionary

The following energetic and engaging Guided Discovery took only twenty minutes. Yet it instilled an interest and competence that lasted through the year with these middle school students. Ms. Foot gathered her group into a circle and in the center placed about eight different dictionaries, including one that was quite huge and weathered, which she boasted as a garage sale find. Her pleasure immediately infected the group. “What do you notice about these books?” she asked.

“They’re all dictionaries.”

“They’re all different.”

“Some are much bigger.”

“You like the one you found in the garage sale.”

Ms. Foot next asked students what they knew about dictionaries and how they had used them before. The many quick answers showed familiarity. She then assigned each student a partner and asked each pair to select one of the dictionaries to study. Each pair was given a “scavenger hunt work sheet” with about ten questions, including:

- ♦ What’s the longest word you can find in the dictionary?
- ♦ Find a word that you think no one else in the class will know.
- ♦ What letter has the most (or the fewest) words?
- ♦ Find a symbol that is used and tell what it means.
- ♦ English words come from other languages. Find two words that come from another language. How did you find out?

In the process, the students worked at problem solving. “Medical words are always big. Let’s think of a disease and look that up.” Or to find the letter with the most words, one student wanted to get a ruler and measure. That strategy, overheard, quickly made the rounds. “‘X’ won’t have hardly any,” someone said. “Whoever heard of words beginning with ‘x’ anyway?”

“X-ray,” someone quickly piped up.

“Okay, besides ‘x-ray.’” There was a sudden interest in “x” words.

Students came back to the circle and combined results. In the final few minutes, Ms. Foot talked about where the dictionaries would “live” in the classroom and how she particularly wanted her favorite to be taken care of so it could “continue to grow old.” ❖

Moving on from stage one

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE ALWAYS SLIPS, times when even the most basic routines and expectations need to be reestablished, I know that a class is ready to move on to stage two when they meet five simple criteria:

1. They group up quickly for meetings, story time, games, work periods.
2. They can locate and replace materials in the room.
3. They listen and make relevant comments at meetings.
4. Most can stay with an activity for the expected and appropriate period of time.
5. They can make simple choices.

During stage one, teachers need to see what is right in front of them, as the whole group learns expectations and routines. During stage two, when the class begins working in small groups and teachers must divide their attention among groups, teachers need to see everything—in the literal sense and in the sense of extending a feeling of security to all students. During this stage, teachers are expanding their expectations of the classroom beyond their line of sight and noting whether children are beginning to internalize those expectations.

STAGE TWO: “Paradoxical Groups”

STAGE TWO OF THE INITIAL SIX WEEKS establishes expectations for group work. It’s a time when children learn to function in two ways:

- ◆ In small groups, with the teacher
- ◆ Away from the teacher, with independence

I call the groups I set up during this time “paradoxical groups” because I pretend to teach the small group while I am actually continuing to teach the whole class.

It is essential that children work effectively in small groups as well as in a whole class. Small groups and independent work are ways to accommodate students’ different levels and rates of learning. Small groups can generate interest and participation; they allow teachers to teach in greater depth and students to pursue individual questions and divergent lines of inquiry. As I teach a small group, I provide a model for cooperative, peer-directed groups as well.

When the teacher is teaching the group, the rest of the class still needs to work productively. I will not be able to concentrate on my group if I need to attend to disruptions and interruptions coming from the other corners of the classroom. If the rest of the class idles or can only handle “busy work” without the teacher’s undivided attention, they miss a great deal of learning. A primary objective of stage two is for children to learn to be productive while the teacher teaches her/his group.

The basic goals for independent work away from the teacher are explained to the children and regularly repeated:

- ◆ You plan ahead what you will do.
- ◆ You decide what to do from clear choices. It is your job to know the choices. They may be posted or they may be announced at Morning Meeting.

- ◆ You talk quietly.
- ◆ You keep your mind on your work.
- ◆ You stay in the area you have chosen to work in. (Fives and under may change areas more often.)
- ◆ You try to solve problems on your own or with the help of your classmates.

My strategy for teaching these behaviors is to provide the small group with work that needs little of my attention while actually focusing on the rest of the class. At first, the teacher appears to be teaching a small group, but the real agenda is “I see everything.” While the teacher is meeting with a small group, her/his chair is always facing the class. The teacher’s eyes can see all the students.

A math group and a poetry assignment

The bell chimes, signaling that it is time to get ready for the next class period. Ten of the twenty-six third graders have a math group with me. The others are to finish copying and illustrating a poem, an activity that we began together. It still takes five minutes for many to make a transition. There are reminders:

“I notice that many of you get ready quickly.”

“I see students ready with their notebooks.”

“Jeffrey, you’ve chosen a good place to work today.”

“Alice, will you really be able to see the poem from there?”

“Everyone needs to be settled now,” I say. “Last chance—THINK. Remind me, what do you need so that you will be able to concentrate and work for this entire period?” There is a quick review of work habits. “Do I have everything I need? What will I do if I finish early? Have I found a good place to do my work?” In this case, children have choices about location—it is one of their responsibilities to find a spot for writing from which they can see the posted poem, or a place where they can concentrate on their drawing.

My math group is seated around the table. There is a single box of manipulatives on the table. A few children start to grab objects from the box. “How do you know what you will need?” I ask. Most shrug and remove their hands. “That’s a serious question,” I repeat. “How will you know what you will need to do for math groups?”



“You’ll tell us?”

“Any other way?” I ask. My goal for this group session is to introduce written directions as a prompt for an activity. On the blackboard next to our table, I have written out directions. Someone notices and begins to read aloud: “When you think you know what to do first, show us by doing it.” That sentence is followed by more directions, which I have made simple and easy to read. I observe how different children in the group respond differently. Some go right to work; some seem cautious and hesitant; one student looks puzzled. After a few minutes, I ask, “What could you do if you’re not sure how to read a word, or if you don’t understand the directions?” I take time to affirm the many resources available in a group. “You can ask a friend. You can read it again. You can ask the teacher.”

We also talk about what it means to be helpful. I ask some of the children to model asking for help and giving the help. This takes only a short time, and soon the children understand the directions clearly and have the materials they need. They are ready to explore on their own. Now I can do the essential task for stage two. I can watch the students outside the group as they follow through with copying or illustrating the poem.

As my math group figures out different ways to combine and arrange the pattern blocks I have distributed, I circulate throughout

the room and quietly reinforce these other students' efforts at working independently:

"I see very good concentration."

"I notice that people are using quiet voices."

"Thanks for helping Renee find an eraser."

"Kyle, I see you are being very careful with your writing today."

Usually, I need only a few moments to check in, to affirm and confirm the efforts I see. Still, my attention is necessary to validate the importance of independent work. No matter what we say, there is a sense that the real business is in the group, the place where the teacher is. It must be clear that the work done outside the teacher's circle is also serious and has purpose. Otherwise, children will be all business in the group, while outside of it, they will fiddle. There should be essential learning going on outside the group: planning, making choices, sustaining attention, solving problems.

We need to pay attention to the work the children do outside the group. We need to make sure it is real work, not "busy work" meant largely to keep children quiet. Busy work is mechanical, repetitious, and long. Real work is relevant, takes skill, provides a challenge, and may be interesting or fun. Copying and illustrating a poem that the class recites and enacts together has meaning. Writing it beautifully, centering it on the page, and illustrating its message take skill and pose a challenge for many eight-year-olds. Marcie wants to do the title in cursive. Jessica wants to do it fast and be done first. Carlos is fascinated with Emily Dickinson's line "The rose is out of town." He is working hard on drawing the rose.

Some of the children are already into the tempo and rhythms of their own industry. A cluster of children is copying the poem. A few recite it, practicing with each other. Others draw the gentle autumn scene evoked in the poem with ease and pleasurable concentration. Comments and spontaneous utterances create a wonderful hum.

I never object to talk. Instead, I want to teach children the distinction between distracting and productive conversation. The group working on the library rug, for example, chatters about a "cute boy on TV." Distracting conversation, I decide. They need reminding ("What do you need to be doing?") or redirecting ("Find another place where you will be better able to concentrate."). Some return easily to their work.

Others flounder. Meg writes one word at a time, looking around, flicking her braids. Her gaze wanders over her paper and about the classroom with an abstract, dreamy look. Jimmy has created his own hockey arena with select crumbs of eraser and a pencil. The goal is now Meg's adjacent paper. She becomes a willing goalie. Andrea monitors the room. "Teacher, someone's at the door," she informs me, seconds after a visitor arrives.

I remind and redirect Andrea:

"Andrea, you need to finish the poem. If you are looking at the door, your eyes can't see the chart. Where will you keep your eyes? I want you to try to concentrate for the next ten minutes. Eyes staying on your own work. Think you can manage that? Show me."

I redirect Jimmy and Meg:

"I expect to see the poem finished. What do you need to do so you can accomplish that goal?"

I continue to reinforce and encourage the class:

"So many of you are working on your poems. I see fine concentration. I see lots of people keeping their minds on their work. The quiet voices help us work. I notice the way Carrie found something to do on her own when she finished her poem. I liked seeing people help each other recite. You look happy with your illustration, Carlos."

I have not abandoned my math group. When I see they are ready for a new activity, I demonstrate a simple attribute game these students already know. The objective of the game is to guess the general category that someone has in mind by asking if certain shapes belong to the set. "Pick a shape. If it's in my set, I will say 'yes.' If it's not in my set, I will say 'no.' After you have five 'yes' answers, see if you can name my set. Let's try a round." They are quick to catch on and soon generalize from the collection of small yellow, red, green, and blue circles (both thick and thin) that my set is small circles. The next set is a bit trickier and involves three attributes.

They go around the table, taking turns questioning and inventing new sets. I am able to monitor the activity of both the group and the class. I see that this group is able to categorize by three attributes and to identify categories. I see they are anxious to get their turns and need reminders to go in order. When I change the game and assign them partners for the activity, I find they are more focused as pairs than as a small group.

Most of the children outside the math group have sustained their work and conduct for the period, though a few had trouble, and concentration got more ragged near the end. At the close of the period, the math group talks about other ways to use the math materials for independent activity. We also go over clean-up, placing (not pitching) the objects in the container, checking the floor, and putting the bin back in its place on the shelf.

The bell rings again, signaling the end of the period. I again compliment the class on their independent work. I remind them that if they didn't finish their poems, they will have another chance after lunch. I ask everyone to think about what they have next on the schedule. I am satisfied that we have made progress in stage two during this class period, in both small group work and independent work. ❖

Working in small groups: “Self-Portraits”

I use stage two to establish both work and social habits: how to look up a word in a dictionary, make a straight line with a ruler, revise a first draft of a composition, and study with a partner. During this stage, my instructional objectives in reading groups, for example, concern *how* children choose a book to read and a time and place to read, rather than *what* they know about main ideas or digraph blends.

One project I introduce during stage two is “Self-Portraits.” In this project, students record facts about themselves, events they were involved in, and their personal feelings. They will tell about siblings, pets, and middle names and describe likes and dislikes. They will narrate a summer experience or reveal interests and hobbies. And they will study their image in a mirror, carefully noting shapes of eyes, shades of hair color, contours of lips, and textures of skin. They will draw themselves. It's a project well suited for paradoxical groups: I often meet with a small group on their portrait work while the rest of the class is busy with their portraits or doing another task.

Self-Portraits calls on a variety of skills that students will use all year long. It involves composition, art, and research. To answer the questions that arise in their explorations of self, children learn to use a number of

sources, from a phone book to a parent—"How do you spell Grandma's name?"—and learn to think about whether the answers they find make sense.

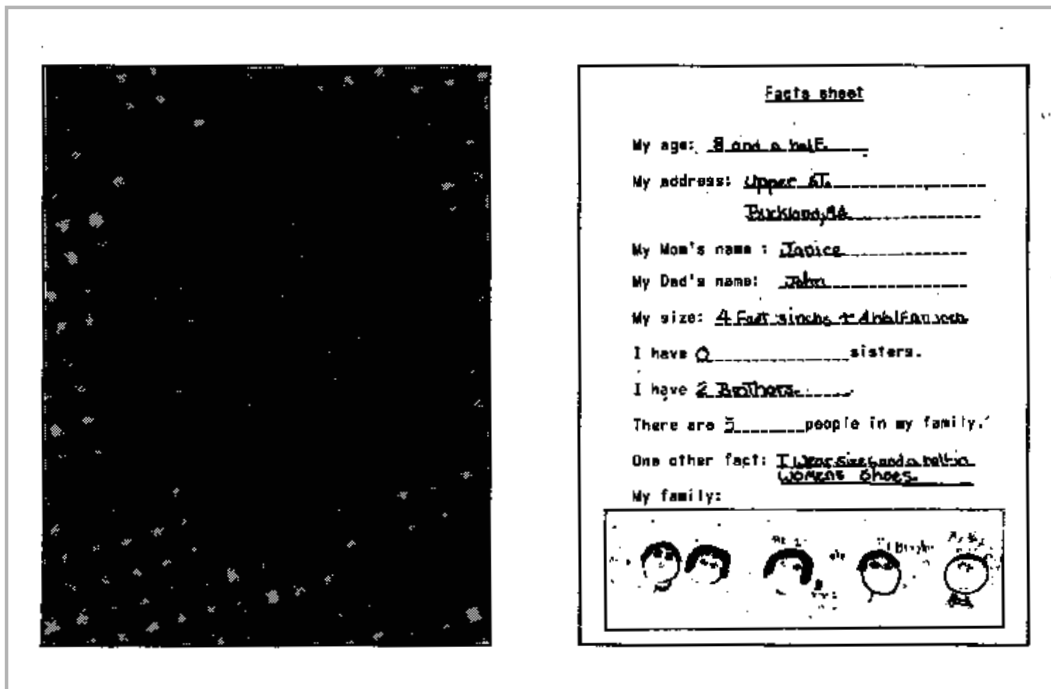
The project may be done by kindergartners through eighth graders and may be repeated year after year with minor adaptations. Seventh and eighth graders can produce a wonderful portfolio by using a detailed interview procedure and precise portrait drawings.

In the course of compiling their portraits, students discover the satisfaction of sharing work in progress as they read and compare results. "I hate getting stung by jellyfish," Anthony writes, reading aloud as he works.

"You got jellyfish stings?" Christopher asks. Anthony tells Christopher about his day at the beach with jellyfish. Later, he expands the sentence into an entire story, prompted by the interest of a friend.

"I hate spinach and throw up," a younger child notes, to a gleeful consensus that erupts around the table. An appreciative audience is a powerful motivation for work.

Some pages from an eight-year-old's self-portrait



Jessica shows others how she blended the pastels to get shades of color for her portrait. Justin helps others punch the holes to bind the sheets of paper. The proficient readers help the uncertain ones. The skillful artists demonstrate ways to etch the eyes. The good spellers supply a word or two. The quick workers may help the slower ones. The group works on working together, a primary objective of the project.

As always, I remind, reinforce, and redirect:

“I notice the way Anita is helping Joey read the directions.”

“What a good way to make a mouth. Will you share this idea with the class?”

“Remind me, how do the guide words in the dictionary help us find a word?”

“If you’re not sure what to do next, how can you find out? Show me.”

“How is this conversation helping you with your work right now?”

“I notice the good listening I see when people are reading their stories to each other.”

Along with the other objectives, I see something else from the self-portraits. I see my children. I find out who likes horses, who likes to invent, who loves to draw. I find out about big brothers and new babies and special grandparents. I discover the things that intrigue children, their particular fascinations and expertise. I notice the way they do things—who helps others, who is first to talk, who is in a hurry, and who takes their time—as well as what they do. I have much more to learn, but this foundation will help the building.

It is still important that the demands of the small group do not absorb the entire focus of the teacher. As I work with a group on their self-portraits, I continue to monitor the rest of the class. The class is still learning to plan, stay in their seats, keep their minds on their work, control their voices, and work cooperatively.

Everyone will complete a self-portrait book. The books will be read aloud, cherished in the class archives, and shared with families. Everyone will have learned, or started to learn, the ways I expect students to work in my class. And we will all have learned more about each other. We know about Marsha’s operation, Gerald’s motorcycle ride, and Danny’s dislike of bees. We even know Tommy’s middle name. ❖

Moving on from stage two

BEFORE I CAN CONCENTRATE ON TEACHING NEW SKILLS, concepts, and content during stage three, the class needs to be relatively proficient in the following skills:

1. Children work independently for structured periods of time. They should be able to:
 - ◆ Choose an appropriate task
 - ◆ Choose an appropriate workspace
 - ◆ Stay on task for most of the work period
 - ◆ Moderate voice and physical movement
2. Children work in pairs or small peer-directed groups (for example, playing an attribute game or rehearsing a poem together). They should be able to:
 - ◆ Choose an appropriate task
 - ◆ Choose an appropriate workspace
 - ◆ Stay on task (illustrating, not tickling, for example)
 - ◆ Moderate voice and physical movements
3. Children work in teacher-led groups. They should be able to:
 - ◆ Come prepared and on time with necessary materials
 - ◆ Follow directions, written or spoken
 - ◆ Attend to group-given information
 - ◆ Cooperate with peers by sharing space, materials, and information
 - ◆ Cooperate with the teacher by listening, asking for help if needed, and participating in activities

STAGE THREE:

Independence and Responsibility

STAGE THREE LASTS THE REST OF THE YEAR and stresses independence and responsibility. The children are ready for content groups, which require undivided attention from a teacher and present new, challenging subject matter.

The goals for stage three are part of a continuous learning process. Depending on the nature of the classroom, you may expect students to be able to:

- ◆ Follow through with a plan for an entire work period
- ◆ Make an appropriate choice
- ◆ Demonstrate voice and body controls
- ◆ Solve a problem without the teacher
- ◆ Set up, care for, and clean up materials
- ◆ Be helpful and friendly when working with a partner, in a small group, or in the class as a whole
- ◆ Care for the rules of the classroom

When I am teaching decimals to a small math group, the rest of the class works independently. Some students are busy with a piece of writing. Some are busy with weekly assignments. A few work on an art project or play a game together. They are purposeful and engaged, using quiet voices; but if they forget—which they will—there are consequences (see Chapter 6).

Now that we are in stage three, I don't always stay in the back of the line or observe the progress of the children through the corridors. I no longer need to angle my chair and divide my attention as I sit with a group. Most of the time, the rest of the class is industrious and responsible, as most of the children have internalized their responsibilities. The words that remind, reinforce, and redirect, although never scarce, are more focused and particular.

If during the first six weeks we have patiently taught students how to manage, we can refer back to those basics at any time during the year. If children internalize the expectations established during stages one and two, we can generally rely on their behavior as they grow in knowledge, independence, and responsibility. (See Figure 2.5 for an overview of the stages, including some content and techniques discussed in this chapter and later in the book.)

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FIGURE 2.5

General Stages of the School Year

Stage One: Whole-class learning (first six weeks)

Key goals and activities

- ◆ Class members learn one another's names.
- ◆ Children learn to listen, use kind language, ask questions, solve problems together, and have fun and enjoy jokes without teasing.
- ◆ The class generates classroom rules and practices following them (see Chapters 3 and 4 for details).
- ◆ The class holds a Morning Meeting every day.
- ◆ Students learn the expectations for behavior during basic classroom routines, such as academic work times, meeting times, outdoor times, and trips to the bathroom.
- ◆ Children learn activities, such as responding to the safety signal and circling up, that support basic classroom routines.
- ◆ Students practice putting things away and making smooth transitions between activities.
- ◆ The class does Guided Discoveries of materials (crayons, math manipulatives, etc.).
- ◆ The teacher focuses on the three Rs—reinforcing, reminding, redirecting.

Criteria for moving on

- ◆ The class gathers up quickly for meetings, story time, games, and work periods.
- ◆ Children locate and replace materials in the room efficiently.
- ◆ Students listen and make relevant comments at meetings.
- ◆ Students stay with an activity for the expected period of time.
- ◆ Children are successful at making simple choices.

Stage Two: Paradoxical groups (first six weeks)

Key goals and activities

- ◆ Students learn to work in small groups with the teacher, as well as independently away from the teacher.
- ◆ The class does Guided Discoveries of classroom areas (block area, computer center, etc.).
- ◆ Critical Contracts are being created (see Chapter 5).
- ◆ The class discusses logical consequences for rule breaking (see Section II).
- ◆ Students learn how to use time-out (see Chapter 7).

Criteria for moving on

- ◆ When working without the teacher in small groups, in pairs, or alone, children choose appropriate tasks and workspaces, stay on task, and moderate their voice and movements.
- ◆ When working in groups with the teacher, children come prepared and on time, follow directions, pay attention, and cooperate with peers and the teacher.

Stage Three: Independence and responsibility (the rest of the year)

Key goals and activities

- ◆ Children continue to care for classroom rules and materials and to be helpful and friendly with each other.
 - ◆ Critical Contracts are completed.
 - ◆ Inappropriate behavior results in logical consequences.
 - ◆ Children continue to practice making choices and work on following through with a plan for an entire work period.
 - ◆ Students work on solving problems independently or through problem-solving class meetings (see Chapter 13).
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SUMMARY

THE PROCESS OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT is based on the assumption that to feel safe, children need to be seen. Literally, we see children, observing how they do things, as well as what they do. But we also “see” more symbolically. During these first six weeks, we get to know new children and we get reacquainted with ones we already know. We show students that we see what they do by commenting on it in positive language. We give children the sense of security which comes from knowing that we see them as individuals and as a group. Then we work to “see everything,” to extend this sense of security beyond our line of sight.

We articulate our expectations and make sure the children know and understand how to apply them. When children begin to internalize positive expectations, they are then free to learn in an atmosphere that fosters independence and responsibility.

I think of the year as divided into three stages. Stage one establishes expectations for whole-class routines and group cohesion—meetings, rules, circling up, “freeze,” etc. Stage two focuses on small-group work (“paradoxical groups”) and independent work away from the teacher. Stage three lasts the rest of the year and stresses independence and responsibility as children take on new, challenging subject matter.

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