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**The Craft of the Tallis Classroom**

***or The Lighthouse and the Terrier***

We talk a lot about pedagogy and we spend time on research in an impressively collaborative manner. All of it is predicated upon fundamentally sound classroom practice. While it is undoubtedly true that the more engaging the lesson the better the behaviour and learning, good behaviour takes more than that.

Adolescent humans are rebuilding their brains at the time we try to teach them, and experimenting with a personalised world-view. In order to enable and safeguard them and their learning we need to have clear, kind, humane and reliable structures so they are not stressed by having to create their own boundaries. Control, structure and routine in class and classroom are necessary conditions for learning.

This is potentially a conundrum for liberal educators. We want the children to *want* to learn the powerful knowledge that will enable them to understand the world and change it for the better, as we believe it has for ourselves. We are frustrated when they don’t make the option to learn for themselves. However, we expect too much. Adolescents, the great radical educator Paulo Freire said, are *challenged by the drama of their own existence*. We have to enable them to step outside that drama for a while so that they may learn. When they learn, they will increase the tools they have to interpret and explore the world without fear and its twin, anger.

So the happy and safe classroom is the base unit for learning. Happy, in that students are enjoying learning: safe in that they are free from fear and anxiety and protected by structures that make learning inevitable. That is why teacher control over the class and classroom is so important. It’s not a teacher-power thing, it’s a developing-young-people thing. I also believe that adult authority, accepted and used properly, is required for the social sustenance of the characteristics that we value: trust, respect, optimism, fairness, kindness, persistence, imagination, discipline, collaboration and inquisitiveness.

However, even the most experienced teacher will encounter difficulties in the establishment of these practices with some classes, and will have to work hard to get there. They know that from time to time everything has to stop in order to re-establish good order. That they make it look effortless is depressing for new teachers who expect to be able to click their fingers and teach like the best immediately. If you are new, it will take longer. Don’t lose heart!

The basic guidelines are exactly that. YOU CANNOT DO ANYTHING ELSE WITHOUT THEM. You are in charge of your own classroom *as long as you enable safe and successful learning.* If you have problems,the first help you’ll get will be to reboot the class to these norms.

Poor classroom behaviour is a burden to you and the children. The longer you carry it the heavier it gets. You need to take it to pieces and see what you can do to reduce it. Work at the **details,** section by section.

**Basic Rules**

**This is quite a craft to learn so here are guidelines I expect everyone to follow. These are normal, basic expectations and there are no exceptions to this: every teacher should plan and work so that you can enforce all of these with every class. With some classes it will be harder than others.**

Here are the basics to go alongside our teaching expectations:

1. Keep your room tidy
2. Impose a seating plan
3. Learn and use children’s names
4. Never allow talking when you are teaching the class
5. Achieve and use silence every lesson
6. **Plan everything**
	1. You already have a lesson that you’ve planned yourself or collectively, with timings, so you know what you’re going to teach and how.
	2. Have enough of everything you need. Keep extra pens and paper to hand so you’re not derailed by minor hassles.
	3. Know the behaviour system inside out, and what you’ll do for conduct, equipment or homework defaulters.
	4. Have a back-up plan if the IT fails. A good teacher can create learning and order in any room, with minimum equipment.
	5. Be **exact** about timings at the beginning and the end so the lesson is contained in its time-space
	6. Always be packed up on time so that the room is left tidy and the class able to arrive at their next destination on time. Don’t allow pre- break or lunch lessons to overrun. It’s unfair, stressful for the class and builds up resentment.
7. **Own the Space**
	1. Train your classes to line up sensibly and expect order when they do so.
	2. Be in the room first and greet your class at the door while simultaneously supervising your bit of the communal corridor space.
	3. Exchange pleasantries as the class enter: they demonstrate that good behaviour is rewarded by a more interesting relationship a teacher.
	4. The classroom space is yours, not theirs. Whether you’re your own room or share it, the children come into it as your invited guests, on your terms.
	5. Look to your display boards. Keep them tidy and neat, use the visual learning and display guidelines. Ask for help if you need it.
	6. Deal with any graffiti IMMEDIATELY. Report it to your CL and the helpdesk, seek out the offender if you can and arrange for him or her to clean it up.
	7. Keep the front desk tidy so children can see that you, too, take your work seriously.
	8. Make sure the room is orderly and tidy. Every class should clear up at the end of every lesson (‘*Tuck your chairs in and stand behind them. Everyone, look down and pick up 3 pieces of litter’* as you walk round with the bin and check.) Get a trusty to wipe the board clean. Why should the next class put up with its predecessor’s slovenliness?
	9. Having regular givers-out and collectors-in in each class saves time.
	10. If the room has been left in a mess by the previous teacher you must do two things.
		* First, get a couple of early arrivers to tidy it up while the rest of the class line up. Children are invariably happy to do this.
		* Second, later in the day, talk to the teacher who left the mess and ask him or her to leave it tidy in future. This is part of our tidy rooms guidelines. Do it in a friendly and kind manner, and no one will (may) take offence. Everyone has these guidelines, me included.
	11. Close the door to generate a calm, cosy feel, especially when the class are working silently or on a sustained piece of work.
	12. We allow children to drink water as long as it doesn’t become a distraction. We don’t allow chewing gum: anything that’s being eaten in a classroom should be put in the bin.
	13. If a child asks to go to the toilet, its old-fashioned teacher practice to wait a bit to see if he or she really needs to. Then allow it, using his or her planner to enter the details. If a child or a class become vexatious toileteers, take advice. The walkabout person could, for example, escort each of them. That’ll reduce the need.
8. **Own the Seating**
	1. Unless you are in a practical space that has been built otherwise, arrange the desks in rows facing the front.
	2. Have a seating plan for every class – alphabetical boy/girl as far as our unbalanced intake permits – and enforce it every lesson without exception. It is your room and you choose where people sit. Liberate children from the tyranny of the familiar and the expectations of their friends.
	3. Learn the children’s names. Learn their names.
	4. Don’t put yourself at the mercy of atmospherics that form around particular groups. Split them up.
	5. Use group work and grouped tables ONLY when you are able to control the class and then only if you actually need it FOR THE LEARNING to happen. You can teach in pairs and have short snappy discussion groups without moving the furniture: chairs can turn round. Group work can turn a great teacher into a wandering nagger, trying to get the distracted to work. Embark on it with care and very detailed planning.
	6. Use horseshoe arrangements in an average size room with care. They can form a barrier against a teacher intervening quietly with a child and trap a teacher in a difficult class.
	7. When you adjust your plan to separate troublemakers decide whether they are better off at the front or back. There is much to be said for putting one at the back, in your direct line of sight, where they can’t turn round and disrupt or dominate.
9. **Be the Lighthouse**
	1. You must constantly scan the room. Most misbehaviour happens because there is a gap for it to happen when a student is not being observed. If you are always looking, from a position at the front, you can see misbehaviour as it emerges and learn to quell most of it wordlessly with a look or a raised eyebrow.
	2. All children should be facing you at all times unless you tell them otherwise. They should concentrate on your teaching, actually looking at you, all the time. *(‘Eyes to me, please. Now, have a look at this photo. What can you see?’)*
	3. Don’t spend the first 5 minutes of the lesson fiddling with your laptop. Have a back-up plan.
	4. Don’t use complicated technology if it slows down learning. It’s the learning, the students’ relationship with knowledge brokered by your learning and skills that’s the point of your work. Unless you are teaching in a subject where learning to use the equipment is part of the specification, move on. Use a whiteboard and your scholarship and skill.
	5. Don’t turn your back for more than 5 seconds at a time. You need to command the room and you can’t do it if you have your back to the class.
	6. Despite endless rhetoric about personalised education, you teach in classes of up to 30. If you are dealing with one child in an awkward position you can’t see the rest of them. This is why teachers used to call children to their desks to help them. It is a perfectly sensible thing to do: you can see the class
	7. Cultivate withitness. Don’t miss a thing.
10. **Silence is Golden**
	1. Children love jokes and tedious banter but you need to teach them how to concentrate and fulfil themselves. Getting silent working is one of the 5 crucial classroom skills. We have to teach them to consider, wonder, think and express themselves alone.
	2. A young or lively class, especially in the afternoon, may be reluctant to allow the blanket of silence to fall. They will attempt to ask endless questions and seek opportunities wittily to amuse their peers. Quash this. It is quite acceptable to say that you will not help anyone for x amount of time – 5, 10, 20 minutes.
	3. Effective personal help requires ruthless method. If you are scanning the room like a lighthouse, then a child needing help will have to come to you at the front, when invited, so that you can continue to supervise the silent room.
	4. The learning of the class can’t be sacrificed to the noisy and selfish needs of one or two. Getting them to learn to work alone is more important than being at the mercy of one or two’s whims. Use the sanctions firmly for those who disrupt your class’s thinking space.
	5. Children who acquire knowledge more slowly are also capable of silent, sustained work as long as it is properly differentiated for them. They’ll need those skills in adult life as much as anyone else.
	6. You MUST confiscate phones that get in the way of learning. They can easily become the enemy of concentration, as all adults know.
11. **One voice**
	1. No one talks when you’re talking to the class. Not ever. Stop, reprimand, wait for silence. Do it as often as it takes.
12. **Make yourself clear**
	1. Give clear instructions
		* ‘*Find page 33 and click your fingers when you’ve got it’*,
		* ‘*Spell Ozymandias and hold up your whiteboard’*,
		* ‘*Get up, tuck your chair in and stand next to a partner whose name begins with the same letter as yours’*
	2. This is especially the case with transitions. Exaggerate the distinctions between activities.
		* ‘*Listen carefully, please. Now we all know what rat poison is I’m going to show you an experiment. Put your goggles on and come and stand round the front bench. Don’t eat anything’*.
		* ‘*You’ve translated that bit of Sanskrit nicely in pairs but now we’re going to form teams of 5. Line up from left to right in front of me and listen carefully for your number’*.
		* *‘Now we need to get this into your books. Cut out the questions and stick them in. Then cut out the answers and glue them in the right place. Put the scrap bits of paper, the glue and scissors on the front of your table and I’ll collect them while you’re working in silence’.*
	3. If there is any moving to be done in class start with stillness and give clear single instructions.
	4. Give positive instructions.
		* *‘Quiet now please, everyone back to their seats in 5’* rather than ‘*You’re making too much noise and you’re all over the place!’.*
	5. Never ask a question to which you don’t want the obvious answer.
		* *‘Why are you over there?’* invites the response ‘*Because she’s got some juicy gossip that’s way more interesting than your lesson’.* (Demonstrating Tallis Character honesty but requiring a sanction). Say ‘*You know the rules. Go back to your seat and stay there unless I tell you to move’.*
	6. Always give specific instructions for behaviour.
		* Don’t say ‘*Behave yourself’* but ‘*If you talk you disturb everyone around you. Please be silent until I ask you to speak’* or
		* Don’t say *‘I’m sick of you always swinging on your chair‘* but *Swinging on the chairs is dangerous for you and the chair, and looks really disrespectful. All legs on the floor, please, and concentrate hard on what we’re reading.’*
	7. Don’t worry about sounding a bit pompous. In your classroom you’re a fussy terrier of a teacher, no matter what sort of louche hipster dude you are in your own time.
13. **Good manners**
	1. Good manners are kindness in action. They are important to us.
	2. Remember that the human beings in front of you are children. You must *at all times* model the behaviour you want to be universal behaviour, and the respect you wish to receive
	3. Start each lesson with stillness and a dignified taking of the register. Insist on a polite answer from each child if you are taking it out loud. *‘Yeah’* is just rude. Don’t accept it. Insist on a *‘Here, Sir’* or be imaginative.
	4. Make eye contact with each child, frequently.
	5. Always be polite with ‘*Please*’ and *‘Thank you’.*
	6. Try always to be calm. **Don’t shout**: you gain nothing by it and we are not a shouty barky school.
	7. You can be witty, but not at someone’s expense. Don’t be sarcastic. It is no way to talk to children.
	8. Don’t get in a child’s space for long. Make your instruction then back off for a bit (90 seconds usually works) to give them chance to comply without losing too much face.
	9. Don’t get into argy-bargy. Many young people live their entire lives outside school through the medium of argument. They can keep going at it way longer than you. Make your instruction and expect compliance.
	10. Never allow a child to speak disrespectfully or dismissively to you. Explain what they’ve done wrong and insist on good manners.
14. **Be the Terrier (friendly but determined)**
	1. Think about the relationship you want with the class at the end of the year, not the start. Get the basics in place and the secure atmosphere you develop will generate pleasant relationships
	2. However, all classes are different and you will sometimes need to adapt your approach. You might remain dissatisfied with your relationship with some classes even after a year.
	3. Use praise, but be specific and don’t devalue it. Praise effort and the Tallis character and Habits so that young people become better self-motivated learners.
	4. Don’t give too much publicity to troublemakers. Deal with them quietly and, where possible, privately. Don’t allow them to grandstand.
	5. Remember, even in a friendly school with liberal values and comparatively few rules, your relationship is a professional one financed by the taxpayer. You are not their friend, but their teacher. Learn to say no and let it be no. Children respect teachers who know what they’re doing, and they thrive on consistency.
	6. Use a formal voice and register. Be clear and use the formal grammar that children have to be able to speak and write. Don’t pepper your talk with *‘Sort of, y’know, kinda’*. Disadvantaged children need to be articulate if they are to have any hope of escaping being disadvantaged adults. (Please never say ‘yous’ as in ‘all of yous’. It’s not an English word.)
	7. Schools have conventions that act as community glue, like not shouting all the time or lining up in silence for Assembly. Always follow them. If you don’t like them, or you have a better idea, talk to someone on LG
15. **Finally**
	1. **You** are **always responsible** for behaviour. You cannot walk past it or ignore it just because someone senior to you is at hand or it’s a school event.
	2. You are responsible for your children’s behaviour in assembly.
	3. Make every effort to sort out behaviour in your own classroom yourself, taking advice behind the scenes, before you pass it up. If you don’t, you’ll never get there. One of the problems with the quick, on-the-job teacher training schemes and rapid promotion expectations is that teachers don’t appreciate how long it takes to build up the craft skills that are vital to staying in the job for 40 years.
	4. Pace yourself. Don’t get overtired. Good behaviour helps your workload.
	5. Work with your team persistently on behaviour.
	6. Your aim is good order, with children working and thinking hard. Obvious happiness and motivation **follow** the conditions for learning, they don’t precede them.
	7. If you can do all the above, you’ve got it.

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