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**Sitting on the carpet – children’s attitudes to the spaces of the
classroom**

Claudia Pichon

(PGCE Primary, 2011-2012)

email: cpichon1@gmail.com

Abstract

Children in primary classrooms are often to be found seated on the carpet, but what do they understand its role to be? This paper approaches the fundamental purpose behind sitting children on the carpet by using child-centred mosaic methodology to ascertain children's views and understanding. The children are clear in their dislike of the practice, and demonstrate an extraordinary insight into the extent to which the classroom environment is dictated by a teacher's pedagogical and behaviour management needs. They consistently identify comfort with a sense of ownership and of active participation, and recognise that the carpet fails to meet these needs by being anonymous and a place of teacher input rather than child-led interaction.

Introduction

The instruction to ‘sit on the carpet’ is a familiar one to anyone who has worked in primary schools in the past forty years. Exactly where the practice starts is uncertain, but it seems likely that it developed as part of the ‘progressive’ teaching described in the Plowden Report, as “buildings became more informal and domestic in character and likely to foster friendly, personal relationships” (Plowden, 1967, p.394). The creation of domestic or ‘friendly’ space reflects some of the familiar features of carpet space; the teacher surrounded by her class in a very intimate way.

Carpet time is a rarely questioned part of modern primary practice, and although more common in infant classrooms, is nevertheless widely used with juniors. For many children, a large part of their day is spent on the carpet, but their beliefs about and understanding of why they are sat there is rarely questioned. Similarly, the context of the carpet as a learning space within the classroom, and its correlation with children’s beliefs about where they learn best and where they are most comfortable, merits examination. I will discuss these questions in light of my research findings, and in relation to children’s wider views of the spaces of the classroom. The project consulted the views of a class of 30 year two and three children (ages six to eight), including some with special educational needs.

Critical Review

Although there is a lot written about the spaces of the classroom and about classroom groupings (Fraser, 1986; Dean, 2001), little research has been done specifically regarding the carpet, let alone children’s attitudes towards it. Many authors take it into consideration when discussing the classroom environment more generally, or when talking about the impact of the *National Strategies*, but it is rare to find a specific focus. This itself is interesting; a staffroom discussion

regarding the carpet will inevitably find strongly divided opinions, and children, as found, are willing to talk at length about the subject. Why there should be such a lack of targeted research is unclear, but perhaps finds its root in the very nature of carpet space; often itself undefined in boundary, unmarked unlike grouped tables, and unclaimed for any specific purpose. The carpet area is often little more than a gap between tables in front of the whiteboard, a non-space. As such, it is easily overlooked.

There is a large body of evidence to suggest children learn better in an environment that reflects both comfort and aspiration. Dean argues that “We set standards by the environment we offer to children” (Dean, 2001, p.197). A well cared for and attractive environment thus sends powerful messages about what is expected from a class, leading Fraser to clarify that “the nature of the classroom environment also has a potent influence on how well students achieve a range of desired educational outcomes” (Fraser, 1986, p.182). Expressed simply, a well-considered environment leads to better results for children.

Exactly what makes a successful classroom environment is open for debate. Comfort is frequently highlighted, especially by children themselves. Burke and Grosvenor's *The School I'd Like* (2003) solicited the views of children about the school environment, and comfort is a recurring theme in children's responses. Greta, age eight, commented “there would be soft bean bags to sit on and there would be lovely soft carpet on the floor” (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003, p.144). Similarly, Rebecca, age eleven, states “We should have chairs with cushions for assembly your bottom gets sore and it's not very comfy to sit on the floor” (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003, p.144). Comfort is clearly important, though moderated by adult judgement; as Pointon and Kershner note, “learning environments should not be too comfortable for students, and therefore unstimulating” (Pointon & Kershner, 2000b, p.120). Although there is definite merit in this view, it would be wrong to

discount pupil's views; just as important to classroom environment is an atmosphere of mutual respect in which pupil opinions are acknowledged and, where reasonable, acted upon.

One aspect of comfort is a sense of belonging and of having a space defined as your own. Diane, teacher of school C in a study by Pointon and Kershner, notes that:

I had one child who put drawing pins into his chair so he knew that was his chair. He couldn't see the drawing pins, they were underneath, but if he did not have that chair he got into a terrible state, and he went round and looked at all the chairs until he got his one back. It's like when they put their labels on their drawers. That makes it theirs. That sort of mark I think is much more important than anything else. (Pointon & Kershner, 2000b, p.126)

This suggests that a sense of ownership offers security, offering an interesting insight into the potential problems of the carpet as a space. As previously stated, it is frequently an undefined area, in which children sit wherever there is space. For a child moving from 'his space' to an entire class seat, this may be threatening. Every teacher will have seen children on the carpet who vie for a particular position, often by a table, next to the teacher's chair or leaning against a wall. These are all positions of increased security, in which at least one side of the child is protected or covered. One solution seen in an increasing number of classrooms is to have a rug on which every child knows where to sit, on 'the blue triangle' or 'the red circle'. Children I have observed in classrooms where this is the case seem less likely to pick fights as they are not competing for space or position. Comfort clearly comes with a sense of ownership.

Following the ORACLE survey (Galton, Simon & Croll, 1980) which showed that children learn best if they work both individually and in groups, Campbell researched the nature of carpet time in particular. He noted several key uses of the carpet: administrative tasks, being given instructions,

sharing experiences and imparting information. In a year two class he observed, 40% of the morning was spent on the carpet (Campbell, 1991, p.89). This led him to note that:

Carpet time may be more manageable in terms of organization, may provide the context in which children can be controlled more easily or used as a defense mechanism by the teacher away from the pressures and stresses of teaching in addition to allowing the teacher to make some assessments of attainment. But the outcome of such an approach especially where the balance is lost is that the children become passive rather than active constructors of learning. (Campbell, 1991, p.90)

A sense of passivity contradicts what we know about children as learners. The widely accepted constructivist theory of learning notes that “knowledge is therefore actively constructed by the learner rather than passively absorbed” (Wray, 2010, p.47). Campbell argues that carpet time detracts from this, leaving children without experience from which they can learn. He notes, however, that when used “for reasonable periods of time” carpet activities are “for the benefit of children” if used effectively (Moyles, 1992, p.90). Thus as with any teaching technique, the way in which it is used is vital to its impact.

Moyles extends Campbell’s argument by discussing carpet time when used for older children. She states that “large ten year olds are unlikely to relish being squashed together onto a relatively small carpet” but that “most primary children do, however, like opportunities for working on the floor” (Moyles, 1992, p.39). Certainly the age of the children in question relates to the extent to which comfort can be expected; infants will naturally spend some time on the floor in any setting in play, whereas this is less common in juniors. Moyles’ focus on ‘work’ on the floor relates to Campbell’s discussion of the varied uses of the carpet. She appears to suggest that making active use of the carpet is appreciated by children, but that being seated there for more passive, often administrative tasks, is more for the teacher’s benefit than the children’s. Turner-Bisset examines this further, commenting:

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A Year 5 teacher reported to me that her children disliked sitting on the carpet for whole class teaching, because it was uncomfortable. She liked it however because the proximity of the children and the ability to see their immediate responses in their eyes, enabled her to 'fine tune' her teaching to match their understanding. (Turner-Bisset, 2003, p.8)

Once again a contradiction arises between pupil opinions and teacher wishes. For the teacher in question, proximity on the carpet has become necessary for her formative assessment. Similarly, Galton found "teachers reported that...the carpet area...allowed a greater degree of control over the pupil's behaviour and attention." (Galton, Comber & Hargreaves, 1999, p.43). Again, the question of proximity arises, here to enhance, or appear to enhance, the teacher's sense of control.

In 2000, as part of a wider study into children's views of the primary classroom, Pointon and Kershner asked seventy year five and six (nine to eleven year olds) for their opinions on sitting on the carpet. In response to the statement "I feel comfortable when we all sit together on the carpet" (Pointon & Kershner, 2000a, p.68), 54.2% disagreed, 35.4% did not mind and only 10.4% agreed. Although this demonstrates a majority not finding the carpet comfortable, there is nevertheless a significant percentage who do not have a strong opinion. Of those asked, no girls agreed to the statement while five boys agreed, suggesting that there may also be a gendered influence on the response (p.70). As the study did not focus only on the carpet, there is unfortunately no record of why the children disagreed, but the lack of preference for the carpet is clear.

Galton makes some effort to track the use of the carpet historically, and notes that, whereas in the 1970s the carpet was sometimes used for the teacher to talk to the whole class, by 1996 "children were sometimes brought out from their desks to 'sit on the carpet' midway through lessons for whole class instruction or discussion" (Galton et al., 1999, p.43). He notes that this led to an increase in 'partially cooperating and partially distracted' behaviour (p.43). By this he means times when the children are passively sitting on the carpet but paying limited attention. There are strong

behavioural implications when using the carpet, many of which seem to contradict the teacher described by Galton who uses the carpet for greater control.

Research methodology

Given the young age of the 30 participants (from age six to age eight) I was keen to find a research method that gave each child as much chance to be heard as possible, regardless of level of literacy or English acquisition. Malaguzzi talks of “the hundred languages of children” (Edwards, Gandani & Forman, 1998) and I was keen to reflect this idea in my methodology by offering different modes of expression, allowing for greater participation. With this in mind, I chose to adopt the multi-method Mosaic approach as outlined by Clark and Moss in 2001. The approach is modelled on the Reggio Emilia approach and *Te Whaariki*, the New Zealand early years curriculum. Both approaches view the child as an expert in their own life, and record their achievements in any way possible, be it photographs, notes or recordings.

The idea of the child as expert underpins the Mosaic method and reflects the ideals of a study into children's perspectives in a number of ways. Clark and Moss state:

This approach is less about particular methods than a way of conceptualizing ‘listening’ and the relationships and processes involved. The important factors to remember are to find methods which begin from the starting point of children as experts in their own lives and which open up as many different ways of communicating this competency as possible.

(Clark & Moss, 2001, p.8)

With the idea of child friendly methods in mind, I choose a number of different activities for the children to complete to demonstrate their views. The first of these was an individual interview in a familiar setting in which I asked each child ‘Why do you think teachers make you sit on the

carpet?’ following the guidelines outlined by Clark and Moss for child conferencing (see Clark & Moss, 2001, p.19). If a child did not wish to answer, they were told that they did not have to; as Clark and Moss state, “We made it very clear in our introduction to the conferencing that the children could stop answering at any time.” (Clark & Moss, 2001, p.20).

The next activity was to show the children a map of the classroom (see Appendix One) and to ask them to indicate on the map (or verbally, for those less confident), where they felt most comfortable in the classroom. Although Clark and Moss recommend using maps, they get children to make their own maps (see p.30). Whilst an analysis of the significant places of the classroom as demonstrated by their maps would have undoubtedly been useful, time restraints made it impossible to do with the care it deserved. As such, I had to substitute with my own map. I first made sure that each child understood the map by asking them to show me some key places on it. I then recorded their response to the question on a separate map, so that they were not influenced by the choices of other children.

After the mapping activity, each child was given a digital camera and asked to take a photo of the place where they thought they learned best in the classroom. As noted by Clark and Moss, ‘cameras are a medium which appeal to young children and provide a form of communication which is fun’ (Clark & Moss, 2001, p.20). Finally, the entire class was given a picture of the carpet area with the question ‘How do you feel about sitting on the carpet?’ above (see Appendix Two). They were asked to write their feelings and thoughts around the picture. Those who were struggling to write used an adult as a scribe. This gave the children an opportunity to use their increasing Literacy skills in a context that was still visual, following Clark and Moss’s “framework for listening which is an integrated approach, combining the visual with the verbal” (Clark & Moss,

2001, p.6). It also created discussion between the children, as they all did the task at the same time. Some notes were made of the discussions overheard.

Ethical concerns

Before looking at specific ethical guidelines, examination of broader policies and laws relating to children create a clear parameter within which to operate. Perhaps most important of these is the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. This legally binding agreement states in Article Three that “the best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults should do what is best for children” (Unicef, 2011). Article Twelve likewise states “When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account” (Unicef, 2011). Both articles are crucial in the ethical consideration given to any research, as shall be discussed.

Consider first Article Three. When deciding how to carry out my research, the best interests of the children were always given utmost consideration. Aware that some children may give negative responses to questions, it was made clear that their answers were not to be judged in any way, or punished if they disagreed with a teaching decision. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) stated that researchers “must take all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion and to put [the children] at ease. They must desist immediately from any actions, ensuing from the research process, that cause emotional or other harm.” (BERA, 2011, p.7). As well as offering reassurance to meet this guideline, the children were interviewed in a familiar setting with the class teacher nearby. This also meant cancelling a research session on one day so as not to cause distress; a class member had vomited on the carpet in question, and I was keen not to ask the children to spend time in the area until it was cleared. Furthermore, all names within the study have been made anonymous, to protect the identities of those involved.

Article Twelve is in many ways upheld by the act of research itself. The research specifically intends to ask children for their opinions about an environment in which they spend a large amount of time. One could argue that not consulting children on the classroom environment would be itself unethical. However, the focus here must be on the way in which that opinion was sought. The school already had permission from parents for their children to be involved in research as part of a home-school agreement. As such, I discussed my research with the head teacher, school coordinator and class mentor to refine the method and ensure that all ethical aspects were considered. Formal consent was requested from the head teacher and given (see Appendix Three). BERA (2011) states that when working with children, “researchers must also seek the collaboration and approval of those who act in guardianship (e.g. parents) or as ‘responsible others’” (BERA, 2011, p.6-7). By seeking consent from the head teacher, this demand was met.

It was important to me that the research was as inclusive and accessible as possible. BERA (2011) discusses the non-discriminatory treatment of participants, and in line with this, all children in the class were consulted, including those with English as an Additional Language and statements of Special Educational Needs. I adapted my language to make it accessible to these parties without deviating from the stated goals of the research. Similarly, it was important to allow the children the chance to make an informed choice about participating despite their age. BERA states that “researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged” (BERA, 2011, p.5). As such, I explained in simple terms what I was researching and what it was for, as well as offering the chance not to take part. No children chose to do this, which reflects both the clarity of explanation and how comfortable they felt.

Findings

Before discussing the findings of the research, it is worth noting exactly when the class in question sat on the carpet, in order to contextualize. Unlike in many classrooms, the carpet was not used for administrative tasks such as taking the register. However, it was used frequently in lessons, most notably Phonics; this twenty minute session took place every day with the entire class on the carpet throughout. Similarly, in other lessons, it was common for the class to start and end the lesson on the carpet, following the structure proposed by *the National Strategies* (1998). These sessions were often instructive in nature, with limited 'hands on' activity. They would, however, frequently include use of the interactive whiteboard, with children standing to manipulate the screen. Of this carpet time, a significant use was in the allocating of children to different activities, reflecting trends observed by Plewis as early as 1993 (Plewis, 1996, p.37). The carpet was also used as a basis for Circle Time, with the children sitting around the edge taking turns to speak.

Consider first the results of the labeling activity in which the children were presented with a picture of the carpet, and the question 'How do you feel about sitting on the carpet?'. I have categorized the children's answers (many children gave several) to form the chart seen in figure 1.

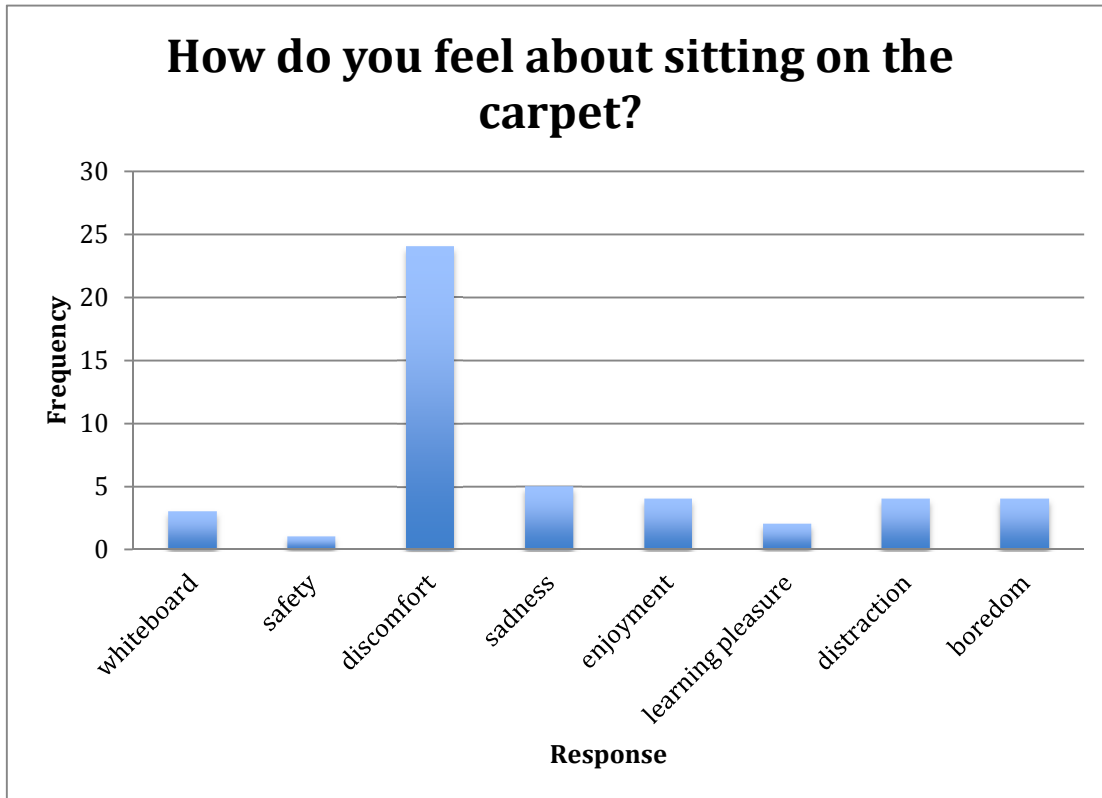


Figure 1 – How do you feel about sitting on the carpet?

It is immediately evident that a majority of responses saw the carpet as uncomfortable. Many children went on to explain why this was the case, with Sam writing “not cumphthble because nothing to lean on it feals cumphthbler on the chair” (see Appendix Four) before drawing a picture of an unhappy child on the carpet. The theme of wanting something to lean on was echoed in several places, reflecting the call for comfort seen repeatedly in Burke and Grovesnor’s studies (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003, p.144). Many children went further, stating in what way the carpet ‘hurt’ them, with one child writing simply “I don’t like siting on my ars” before being told to rub it out by a particularly vigilant teaching assistant. Milly, who had recently had surgery on the muscles in her legs due to a long term health condition, commented “I don’t like siting on the carpit because it hurts my legs. I would like to sit at my desk because it dusunt hurt” (see Appendix Five). As with

Peter, Milly draws her dissatisfaction, showing a child saying 'ow' on the carpet. Clearly for a child in casts, the carpet was a source of great aggravation.

The nature of the responses to the question can be considered in three lights: positive, negative or elements of both. If they are considered in this way, it is of note that 72.4% of the responses express a negative view of the carpet, compared to 20.7% who offer elements of both and 6.9% who are exclusively positive. Children who suggested elements of both frequently referred discomfort but demonstrated a positive attitude to the carpet as a learning space, such as Adi, who writes "not cumfebl because it hurts my back but I lik to learn on the carpet". These children appear able to accept a certain amount of discomfort if it means they get to learn. Interestingly, these were often the children who stated in other parts of the research that they thought teachers used the carpet for learning, as well as being the children who took photos of the carpet as the place where they learned best. These children were of mixed gender, age and ability, so precisely why they should all agree is unclear.

Of the few children who gave positive responses to the carpet, most related their response to the whiteboard. Liam explained that he liked to sit on the carpet "because I can see the whiteboard". Liam was not only one of the smallest children in the class, he also sat in an extreme corner, meaning that he had to look at the whiteboard from a sharp angle when seated in his chair. Liam's simple response reflects the importance of practical considerations in designing a classroom. This practical consideration was also noted by Pointon and Kershner, who saw in School A that "seven other children in her class refer to the need to see the board as one of the reasons why Liz arranged the classroom like she did" (Pointon & Kershner, 2000b, p.121).

One answer went as far as reflecting on what takes place on the carpet, and how these different uses changed his feelings towards it. John wrote "I feel happy on my own on the carpet. If I sit with

other people I get distracted. If I just watch the whiteboard I get bored. Sometimes I would like to play on the whiteboard". He recognizes his frustration in inactive learning, as discussed by Galton; John falls into Galton's category of "partially cooperating and partially distracted" (Galton et al., 1999, p.43). Such an adult reflection indicates the extent to which even very young children (John was not yet seven) can identify and analyze pedagogical choices made by their teachers.

Consider next the children's responses to the interview question 'Why do you think teachers make you sit on the carpet?' As with their responses to the written exercise, the children were extremely practical, focusing on physical reasons, as can be seen in figure 2. By far the most common response expressed an idea of the teacher moving the children to the carpet so that they could see the whiteboard. Although practical, this was in many respects illogical; the teacher would also use the whiteboard when the children were seated at desks. Similarly logical yet impractical was the idea proposed by Caiden, who felt that moving to the carpet gave the children exercise. Yet as with John's thoughts, this does reflect some of the teaching logic behind the carpet, the idea of a movement or change of scene to increase concentration.

Behaviour management responses also represented a significant proportion of statements, under the categories of 'fiddling' and 'teacher's way'. Such responses included "Um because people might like fiddle stuff in their basket" and "Maybe it's the way of the teachers. It's the teachers that decide not the children". Once again the children corroborated the observations of Galton (see Galton et al., 1999, p.43), who discussed the apparently contradictory need of teachers to use the carpet for increased behaviour control, whilst also exacerbating behaviour problems by offering inactive tasks to their learners on the carpet.

A higher number of children could not think of a reason why the teacher made them sit on the carpet than considered that it had something to do with their learning. This lack of awareness is

striking in the age of learner control, where children are expected to identify what they are learning and what their targets are. The natural extension of this is to let children know and have a say in why they are learning in certain ways inside their learning environment. In the age of metacognition, with *the Cambridge Primary Review* stating “learning in classrooms can be enhanced by developing metacognitive strategies” (Alexander, 2009, p. 288), it is important to let children consider how they interact with their environment.

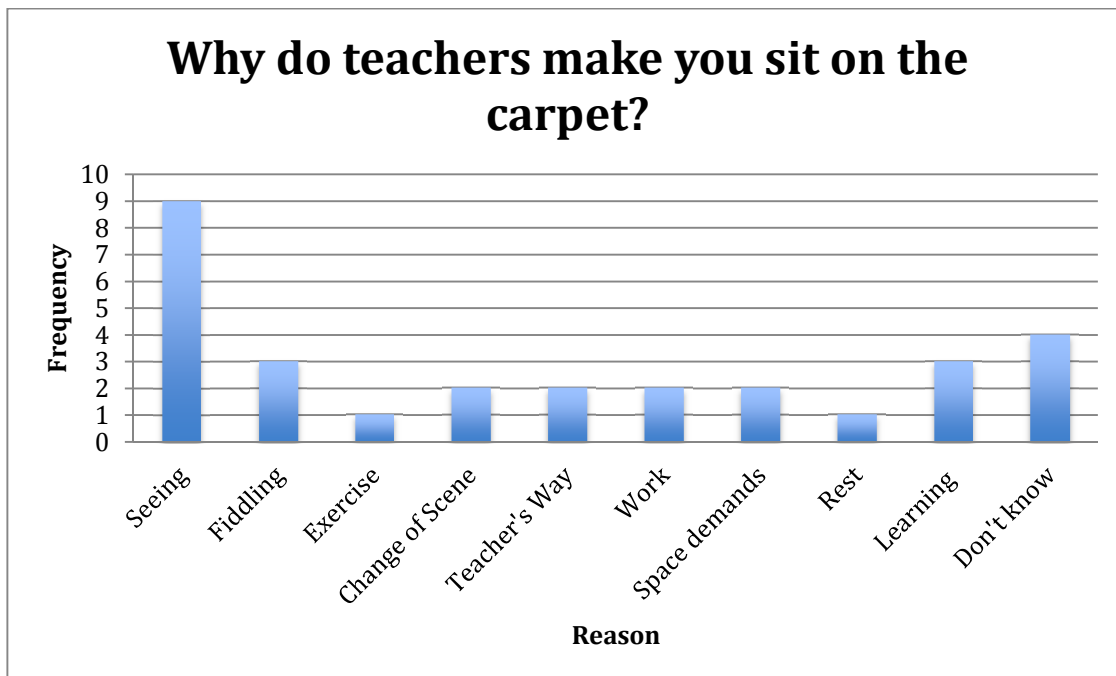


Figure 2 – Why do teachers make you sit on the carpet?

Consider next the children’s wider views of the classroom environment and the ways in which these inform our understanding of their views of the carpet. I have examined the photos taken by the children of where they felt that they learned best and summarized them in Figure 3. Over half the class took a photo of their own place, supporting the teacher in Pointon and Kershner’s study who described a child who had to mark his chair (see Pointon & Kershner, 2000b, p.126); a sense of

ownership underpins what children value in their classroom. Mark, a statemented child with various needs, went further when taking his photo (see Appendix Six). His photo focuses particularly on the posture-correcting wedge placed on his seat, designed to support his emergent writing skills. He said as he took the photo “it’s my wedge so it’s all mine, my learning wedge”. He identified the wedge as not only exclusively his, but also as a learning tool. Learning and ownership for Mark are united and represented in the wedge.

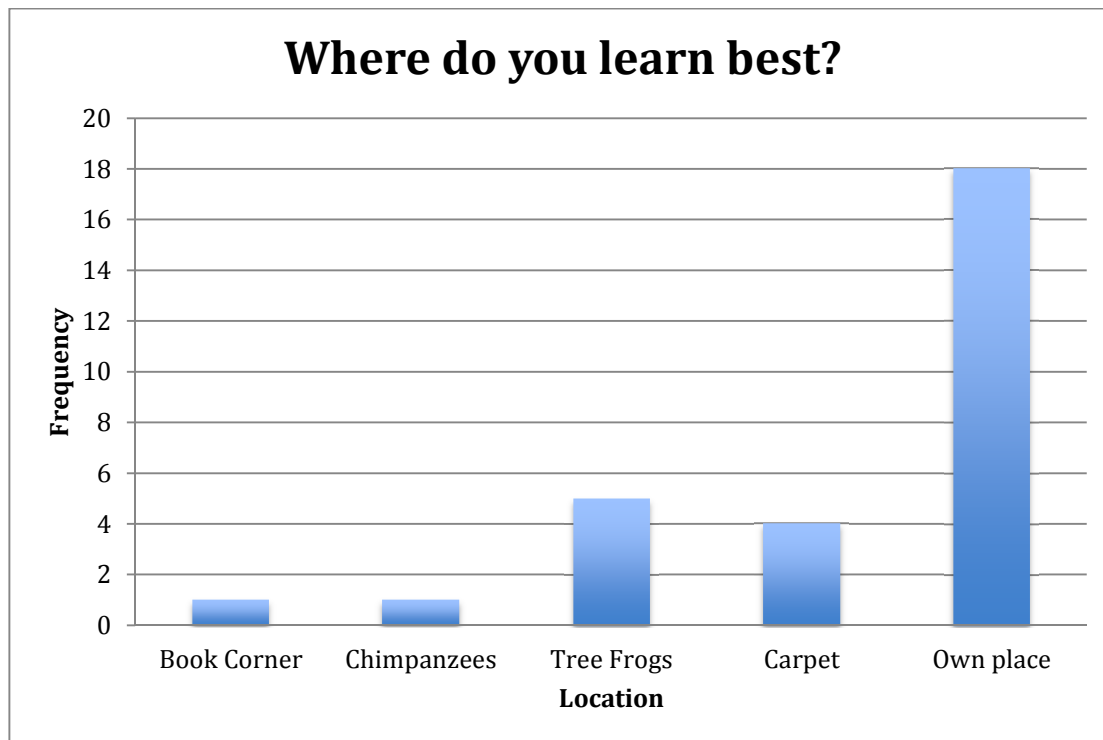


Figure 3 – Where do you learn best?

Although four children identified the carpet as the place where they learned best, this figure was outnumbered by children identifying the ‘Tree Frog’ table (the children’s tables were named after rainforest animals). This number does not include the children who sat at the table normally. A similar result occurred when the question ‘where do you feel the most comfortable in the

classroom?' was asked (see Figure 4), with children identifying the 'Tree Frogs' and the 'Pandas' tables extremely frequently. When asked about their choices in both cases, all of the children made similar comments, to the effect of 'The children who sit there get the most house points' and 'The nice girls sit there'. In other words, the children correlated comfort and quality learning with achievement and niceness. The correlation with achievement reflects Fraser's proposal that "the nature of the classroom environment also has a potent influence on how well students achieve a range of desired educational outcomes" (Fraser, 1986, p.182). From a teaching perspective, it is fascinating that the children had noted this too. It would be wrong to state that it was only the location and design of the two tables in question that let the children seated there 'get more house points'; it so happened that these tables included all of the highest achieving girls in the class, who would have undoubtedly been successful in other locations. However, this was a logical step beyond the capabilities of the children. It reflects a powerful insight into the way in which the children defined the extent to which they can achieve success both socially and academically by where they sit. As argued in the Expectancy-Value theory of achievement motivation, suggested by psychologist Martin Fishbein in the 1970s (as cited in Wigfield, 1994, p.50), children's beliefs about what they can achieve ultimately define their actual achievement. Thus as teachers we need to be extremely careful about our choice of groupings, so as not to undermine children's confidence in their abilities.

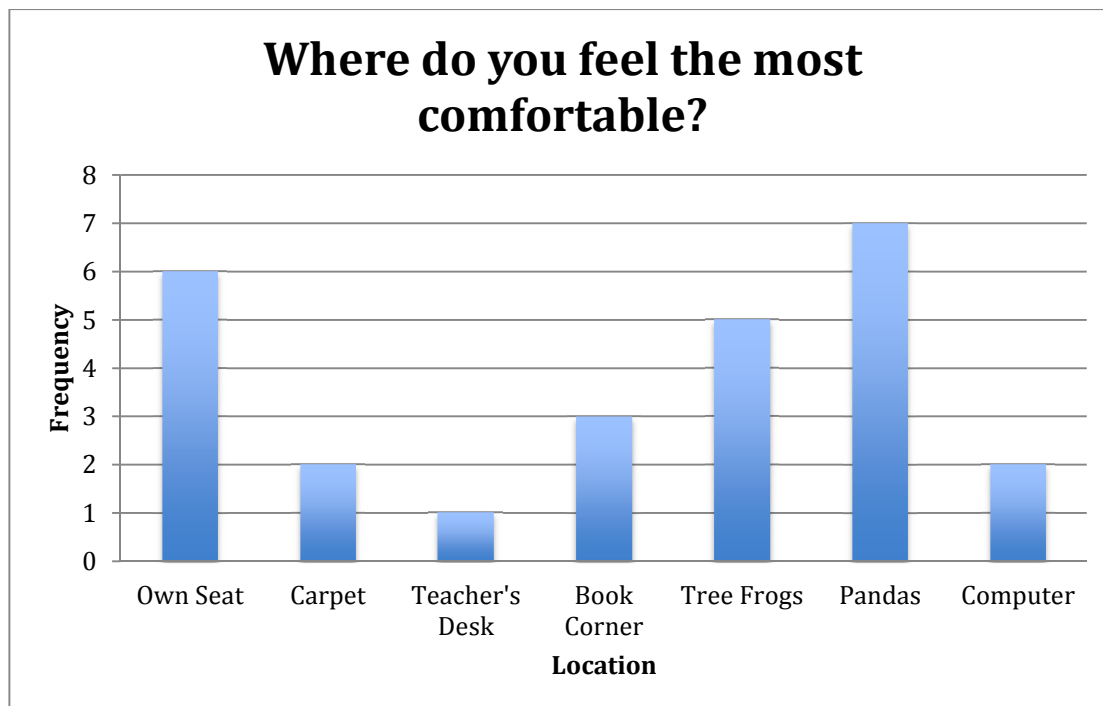


Figure 4 – Where do you feel the most comfortable?

Responses to the question ‘Where do you feel most comfortable?’ produced more varied results than seen in previous questions. The map used with the children, with their reactions marked as stars, can be seen in Appendix Seven. As previously discussed, both ‘own seat’ and ‘Tree Frogs and Pandas’ were the most popular choices. The carpet, however, was not ignored, with 6.7% of responses in its favour. This corresponds almost exactly to the 6.9% who had an exclusively positive view towards the carpet when asked ‘How do you feel about sitting on the carpet?’. The only child to respond positively to the carpet in both cases was Liam, who, as discussed previously, was small in stature and seated in an extreme corner. For him, the carpet offered comfortable viewing that he was not able to get in his chair.

Ultimately, all four questions and corresponding methods demonstrate a majority of children who do not like sitting on the carpet, and do not recognize it as an environment of learning. The

research also demonstrates the ability of even very young children to engage intelligently with their environment, and to reflect upon its impact on them.

Methodology evaluation

In many respects, the Mosaic approach was successful in this research: it allowed the children to adopt the role of “co-researchers” (Clark & Moss, 2001), a role most took on happily. They also showed pride in being asked for their views, having positive effects on their self-esteem and sense of worth in the classroom. As Clark and Moss described, “listening to children’s views and experiences in this way conveys that adults believe they have something to learn from children” (Clark & Moss, 2001, p.60). By allowing the children to adopt the role of the expert, I was able to have intimate access to their world as they perceived it, before reflecting on what they were telling me as an adult.

The various methodologies used to allow the children to express their opinions offered greater potential for every child to make a contribution. Those children who struggled to express themselves in one way were often very able to access another element, ensuring that no child’s voice was unheard. For example, Liam found it difficult to write his thoughts, even with the help of an adult scribe, but he was very articulate in interview and used the cameras and maps to focus his thoughts. This adaptability developed from Clark and Moss’ insistence that “the important factors to remember are to find methods which begin from the starting point of children as experts in their own lives and which open up as many different ways of communicating the competency as possible” (Clark & Moss, 2001, p.8).

Although some success was experienced, various limitations became apparent as the research progressed. Interviewing children individually meant that I was limited in the questions I could

ask, as I was pressed for time to ensure every child was heard. Had I instead chosen a sample to represent the class and conducted a group interview, I would have been able to hear more and the children would have benefited from being able to expand upon the views of their peers. As Clark and Moss state, “child conferencing could be extended to form the basis of a group discussion or ‘focus group’” (Clark & Moss, 2001, p.20).

Furthermore, the nature of the research meant that a key element of the Mosaic approach was not used. Clark and Moss outline a two stage approach, in which the first stage is when “practitioners and parents reflect on what *they* think life is like in a particular setting for children in their care” (Clark & Moss, 2001, p.11). This stage offers an important comparison point, as well as valuing parents and teachers’ opinions as those who know the children best. As this research focused solely on the perspectives of the pupils, this insight was not available.

Another restriction imposed by time constraints was not being able to discuss the photographs taken with the children. Clark and Moss explain how once the photographs had been developed, “lengthy discussions took place with the children...to clarify what they had intended their photographs to be about and how they felt about the results” (Clark & Moss, 2001, p.24). This clarification stage would have insured that I was not interpreting the photographs in a way that did not truly reflect the children’s ideas.

Conclusion

My research has a number of implications for my future professional development. Perhaps most profound of these is my newfound recognition of the importance of allowing the children to have a say in the classroom environment. As demonstrated in the children’s responses, they have not only strong but rational responses to their surroundings. I was particularly struck by Liam’s sentiments

about his seat and the problems it caused him. I had spent a lot of time with the class without even considering that he may be experiencing difficulty and even discomfort in seeing the board from his seat. Given the chance to explain, he was able to articulate his problems, offering the class teacher a chance to move him and allow him greater access to the learning that was going on. In future, I will discuss the classroom layout with the pupils, with a view to coming to a compromise that suits my needs as a teacher and theirs as pupils.

The most evident conclusion has been that the majority of children surveyed dislike having to sit on the carpet. Whilst this has not led me to reject using the carpet in lessons outright, it has led me to reflect upon when and how it should be used. Too often, the children are expected to sit on the carpet arbitrarily when they could have equal or greater success seated elsewhere. What, for example, is gained by sitting the children on the carpet to take a register when they all have seats? The children were very articulate in expressing the physical discomfort they experienced on the carpet, and some also commented on the issues it posed them in terms of managing their own behaviour. However, as a teacher, there are still situations in which, in the future, I will use the carpet. Circle Time and group discussion situations are still more successful if the class can come physically together in some way. There are also times when I will want the children to make use of the interactive whiteboard, requiring the closer proximity that a carpet normally offers.

Another aspect that I will seriously consider in future is the choice between flexible and fixed seating. The children's understanding of certain tables achieving more success and their subsequent belief that sitting there made you more successful and even nicer poses obvious concerns. As the Expectancy-Value theory suggests, this is a dangerous precedent to set in an educational environment. As such, I will use a rotational, mixed ability plan where possible in future, in which no child is permanently sat in the same place based on their achievements. This does not prevent

differentiation; rather it encourages more thoughtful differentiation than assigning different tables different worksheets. It also encourages collaborative work between children of differing abilities which is ultimately beneficial for all.

Finally, I will endeavour never to underestimate the importance of comfort to children in the learning environment. Just as the children in Burke and Grosvenor's study spoke at length about wanting 'comfy' chairs, so too did the children in the research class reflect on how their chairs were 'more comfy' than the carpet, but not as comfortable as the teacher's chair! It is unreasonable to expect children to concentrate for long when they are distracted by more pressing physical demands. Thus I will either limit the amount of time children spend on the carpet or provide a softer surface for them to sit on, such as cushions.

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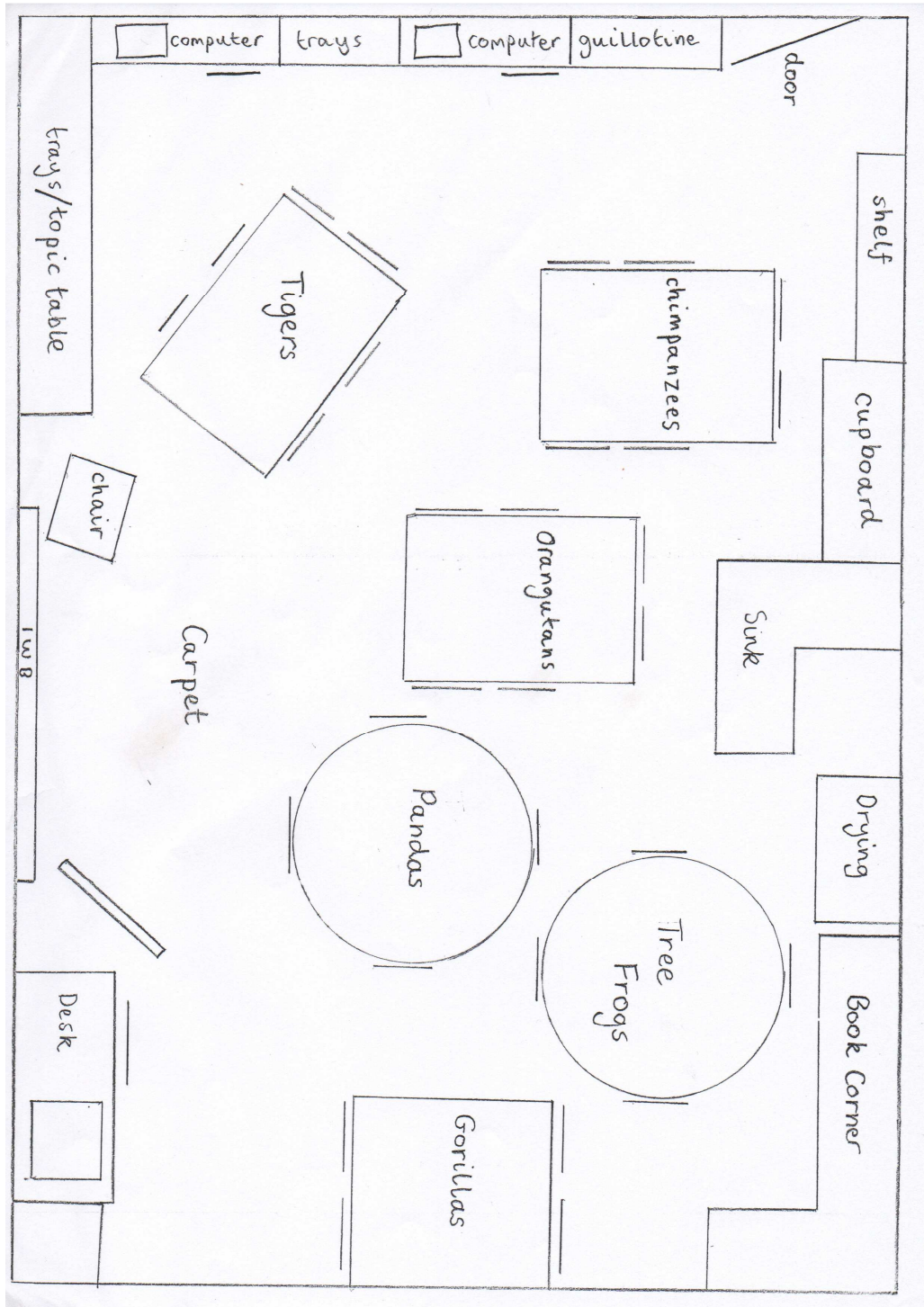
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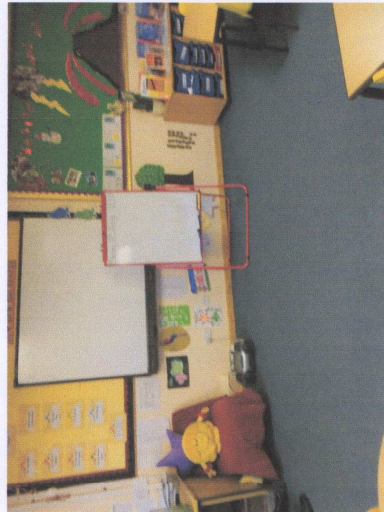
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Appendix One: Classroom Map

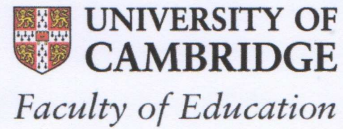


Appendix Two: Writing Activity

How do I feel about sitting on the carpet?



Appendix Three: Headteacher Consent



Dear Headteacher,

I am carrying out a small-scale research project as part of my Post-Graduate Certificate of Education course. The data from this research will be used in writing an essay focusing on children's ideas about factors that have an impact on their learning. The subject that I'm investigating is children's beliefs and feelings about being made to sit on the carpet.

In order for me to collect information about this topic it will be necessary to interview children and make a written recording of the interview ready for analysis. The interview recordings that I make will only be used for analysis by myself. All of the recorded material will be destroyed at the end of the 2011-12 academic year. All references to the school and to the children involved in the research will be anonymised in the essay that I will write using the data.

In order for me to be able to carry out this work I need to ask you to confirm, by signing the reply at the bottom of this letter, that the school's existing permissions are sufficient for me to carry out this work.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Pichon

I can confirm that the existing school permissions are adequate for you to carry out your research work with a group of children from the school.

Name of School _____

Head of Faculty: Mike Younger MA Acting Secretary of the Faculty: Marina Ballard
184 Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 8PQ Telephone: 01223 767600 <http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/>

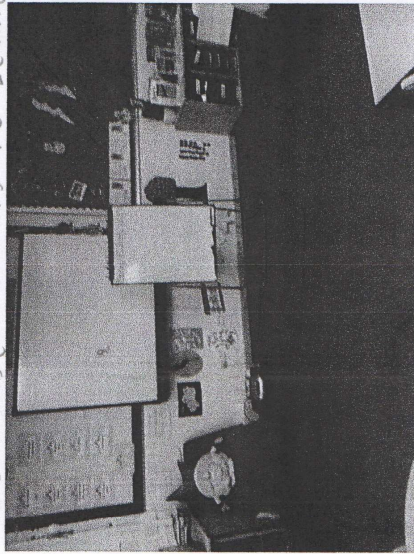
Appendix Four: Sam's Writing

How do I feel about sitting on the carpet?

NOT COMFORTABLE

BECAUSE NOTHING TO LEARN ON IT FEELS

COMFORTABLE
ON THE CARPET

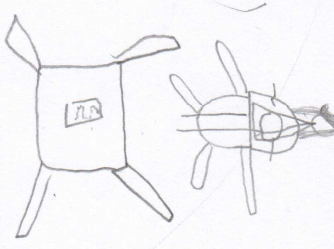


EFFE

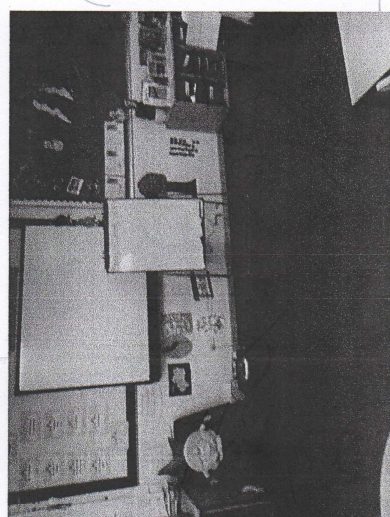

Appendix Five: Milly's Writing

How do I feel about sitting on the carpet?


I would like to sit out my desk because it doesn't hurt.



It feels much more comfortable at my desk.



I don't like sitting on the carpet because it hurts my legs.



Appendix Six: Mark's Photograph



Appendix Seven: Map of children's responses

