A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO BEHAVIOUR LEADERSHIP

The concept of preferred practices within a whole-school approach to behaviour-leadership and discipline

Dr Bill Rogers
Education Consultant
2014

www.billrogers.com.au
The concept of ‘preferred practices’ within a whole-school approach to behaviour-leadership

Bill Rogers Education Consultant

The concept of ‘preferred practices’ relates to a *school-wide consciousness* about the way we – as teachers – *characteristically* seek to lead and manage student behaviour (bad-day notwithstanding!) Even on our bad days our leadership can model respect as well as normative fallibility.

The term *preferred* is deliberate; there are some behaviour management practices we prefer (when it comes to management and discipline) because of certain values we hold. *Core* values such as mutual regard, mutual respect and dignity of the individual give a focus and direction to our daily management and discipline practice.

In relating our preferred practices back to our core values we also give *meaning* and purpose to why we discipline the way we do (our *characteristic* practices). Management and discipline practice, then, becomes purpose driven not merely task-driven.

**The following preferred practices in these notes are outlined for staff discussion.**

[See also, particularly, Rogers, 2006 *Behaviour Management : A Whole-School Approach* (Scholastic, 2nd edition. In the UK : Sage Publications, London).]

**A brief note on teacher skill**

It is also worth noting that each ‘preferred practice’ – noted here – implies thoughtful conception, and utility, of teacher skill. For example the preferred practice No. 3, (p 3, these notes) *The Language of Discipline*... (least to most intrusive management), implies that a teacher has a wide repertoire of positive corrective language. A basic example:

two students are talking while the teacher is talking (during whole-class teaching time). Rather than say, “Lucas, Mark, *stop* talking …” Or “Lucas … *why* are you talking …”  The teacher
could more thoughtfully say, “Lucas, Mark, you’re talking …” (this briefly describes what they are doing that is disruptive – at that point in the lesson). This ‘description of reality’ is often enough to raise behaviour awareness and invite co-operation. Sometimes we will need to add a brief behavioural direction, “… Facing this way and listening now. Thank you.” This is one, small, example of countless examples that could be given. Of course the mere words in one’s corrective language are hardly enough; one’s characteristic tone, respectful manner and expectation all carry conviction, confidence, expectation or indecision ...

Preferred practice No. 2 (p 4, these notes) implies skill in managing potential, and actual, conflict in a way that does not see the teacher engaging in petty emotional, ‘brow-beating’ or sarcasm, or ‘cheap-shots’ or other unnecessary, ‘un-adult’, (and unprofessional) teacher behaviour. Even when we need to communicate appropriate anger we can do so by :-

- assertion rather than verbal aggression (assertion and respect are not inconsistent concepts in the way we communicate).
- communicating our frustration, even anger – briefly – on issues that matter (racist, sexist, abusive language) rather than on less significant issues such as lateness, uniform, homework not done; these are issues that have to be addressed but issues that merit concern rather than anger.
- focusing on the behaviour or issue – at that point – rather than reactive behaviour simply directed at the student ...
- de-escalating the natural tension, (using a ‘calmer’ – slower voice – after having made our point briefly, and as clearly as we can).
- allowing appropriate cool-off time ( even formal ’time-out’ where necessary). A time to ‘separate’ off, ‘withdraw; for both teacher and student.
- engaging in repairing and rebuilding with the student at a later stage that day (if possible). It is crucial that the teacher directly involved in the incident(s) take the initiative at this point (with support from senior staff where necessary).

The skills of positive correction and the skills of thoughtful follow-up with applied consequences are addressed in ancillary notes – see p 9.
Preferred practices imply whole-school commitment to skilled discipline and management practice.

The concept of ‘preferred practices’ within a whole-school approach to behaviour-leadership

Preferred practices

Core aims of our discipline and behaviour management :-

Within a whole school plan for behaviour management teachers agree to common behaviour management and discipline practices at the classroom level and ‘duty of care’ level and take active responsibility for management and discipline. These preferred practices do not de-limit a teacher’s own sense of professionalism and contextual management and discipline. They, rather, enhance such professionalism and increase the sense of shared professional consistency across the school.

Aims of management / discipline

The aims of all management and discipline are to : enable the student(s) to own their behaviour, and be accountable for their behaviour; to respect mutual rights and to do so within the context of workable relationships with other students and their teachers. The core rights underpinning all our leadership are : the right to feel safe; the right to learn (without undue distraction or disruption) and the right to respect and fair treatment. These rights entail responsibilities by all. These rights and responsibilities need to be taught and given leadership protection by all teaching and support staff.

The teacher will consciously discipline within these aims (above) in order that the primary business of the classroom (teaching and learning) can take place, and that students can feel safe within their school community.

(1.) Each teacher will establish and clarify classroom rules responsibilities and consequences based on a year level framework and known 3Rs (rights, responsibilities and rules). These will be developed with the students in the ‘establishment phase’ of the year. At secondary level these core rights, responsibilities and rules are discussed at tutor / form
group level and then fine-tuned / adapted by subject teachers. (See Developing Behaviour Agreements With Students in Middle Years. Rogers, 2013 in-service notes.) The teacher will also establish (and where necessary teach) the core routines necessary for the smooth running of classroom learning eg: - calm/orderly entry to classroom; a positive settling in preparation for whole-class teaching time; appropriate seating plans; cues for questions / discussion in whole-class teaching time; appropriate movement around classroom; how to fairly get teacher assistance in learning-task time; teaching appropriate noise levels; pack-up, clean-up and an ‘orderly’ exit from classroom ... (See in-service notes on The Establishment Phase 2013/2014).

The school wide 3Rs (rights, responsibilities and rules) will be the basis for corrective, consequential and supportive management/discipline, and those 3Rs will be expressed in the student code of behaviour. At primary age level this can be developed within a classroom behaviour agreement. [See Rogers and McPherson (2009)]

(2.) When correcting / disciplining students, teachers minimise any unnecessary confrontation (in management and discipline) i.e.: - undue criticism, sarcasm, ridicule, embarrassment, public shaming... Unintended, hurtful communication by a teacher should always entail an apology.

(3.) When developing and utilising corrective discipline we:

- Plan the ‘Language of Discipline’ (giving some thought to words and meaning within our typical, characteristic, discipline language),
- Balance ‘Language of Discipline’ with ‘Language of Encouragement’,
- Use a least-to-most intrusive intervention approach when managing and disciplining individuals and groups; becoming ‘more intrusive’ only as is necessary. This means becoming appropriately assertive where necessary (it does not mean becoming hostile, mean-spirited or verbally aggressive).

(4.) In addressing distracting and disruptive behaviours we seek to keep the focus of our discipline on the ‘primary behaviour’ or ‘primary issue’; avoid arguing or debating
'secondary behaviours' (the sigh, the pout, the frown, the eyes-to-ceiling ...) or ‘side issues’ and ‘last word’ ... (wherever possible).

Where necessary we direct the student aside from their peers and in a heated conflict situation we always allow cool-off time (this may occasion formal time-out for the student).

Some behaviour consequences will need to be deferred until after ‘cool-off’ time. We need whole-school clarity for all uses of informal and formal time-out procedures.

(5.) Establish a year level approach to the use of behaviour consequences for common rule-breaking behaviours and behaviours that infringe on others’ rights. We emphasise reparation, restitution and reconciliation as the norm. There is a degree of seriousness in the application and kind of behaviour consequences used say between ‘homework not done’ and bullying.

Distinguish between ‘negotiable’ and ‘non-negotiable’ consequences. Non-negotiable consequences are school-wide and address issues such as drugs (including smoking); bullying; aggression (verbal or physical), violence, drugs (including smoking ...). In ‘negotiated’ consequences we use any one-to-one chat/or detention time to raise a student’s awareness about their behaviour (and how it affects others’ rights, including the teacher). We do this through key questions that enable a student’s appropriate right of reply and an expectation of supported restitution, see questions below ...).

When applying behaviour consequences we emphasise the fair, and reasonable, certainty of the consequences rather than merely the severity of the consequences; we remember to always keep the fundamental respect intact when applying the consequence.

When establishing behaviour consequences, where possible, we try to gain a relatedness between the disruptive behaviour and the consequential outcome. Where appropriate we should ask the student what they think they should do to address the behaviour in question. The sorts of questions we ask are:

- What happened (regarding your behaviour?)
- What rule (or right) was affected by your behaviour?
- What is your ‘side of the story’ ...? (a basic right-of-reply question)
- What can you do to make things better? fix things up? repair/rebuild?
- How can I help?

At the school wide level employ **degrees of seriousness** with respect to behaviour consequences (especially detention practices).

(6.) Consciously ‘separate’ the distracting, disruptive, offending behaviour ‘from’ the student. This is not easy in practice; it is fundamentally about the way we treat the student when we have to discipline (particularly consequential discipline).

(7.) Actively promote positive behaviours with all students through verbal, relational and appropriate symbolic encouragement. Consider the range of possible ‘incentives’ and public recognition programs (beyond academic ‘achievement’). Regular use of **descriptive** feedback and encouragement should be the norm in our day-to-day teaching.

(8.) ‘Exit’ and ‘time-out’ procedures: - All teachers work together to establish appropriate year level, and school wide, due processes for exit, time-out and follow-up of any students whose distracting, disruptive or dangerous behaviour has necessitated ‘exit’ from the classroom. Eg :- **persistent** refusal to work within the fair rules and within reasonable teacher direction; safety concerns; verbal abuse; aggressive behaviour. Address fundamental questions with regard to time-out such as: *How?*, *To whom?*, *How long* should the student stay in time-out?, What happens when the student refuses to leave the classroom and go to the time-out area?, *Where* do they go for time-out?, *Who supervises ...?* *What happens* to/with the student *during* time-out? On what basis does the student re-negotiate entry back to the classroom that day?

**Class/subject teachers are – primarily – responsible for follow-up of any time-out consequences with (support of senior colleagues).**

Emphasize the crucial importance of re-establishing working relationships and reconciliation between the teacher who initiated time-out and student(s) concerned. Avoid holding grudges (tempting as that may be!). Where the relational / conflict issues are serious, use supporting mediation (from other colleagues) for resolution outcomes.
(See Establishment Phase notes in particular, 2013/2014). Where necessary – and where possible – involve parents (case-by-case), through diaries, phone calls, parent/teacher conference (let them know positive outcomes too!).

- Clarify roles in the discipline/pastoral sense (ie of class/subject teacher through to head teacher). Establish clear communication processes for follow-through of the more serious and persistent discipline incidents. It is important that the grade teacher, or subject teacher, be directly involved in the follow-up and follow through of disruptive behaviour by any student.

- Emphasise collegial responsibility of duty-of-care management school-wide: ‘relaxed vigilance’ in out-of-class contexts: - corridors, playground, lunch supervision, bus-supervision, after-school supervision. It will help to have a school-wide plan for such duty-of-care management rather than leaving such management merely to professional discretion.

- Most of all, we need to build and utilise a supportive colleague culture for problem-solving and ‘structural’/policy support. Colleague support is essential in the management of difficult students and students with emotional and behavioural disorders. The ‘hard class syndrome’ and playground supervision are also crucial areas that benefit from focused colleague support (both moral support and organised, planned, practical support options).

These preferred practices, and shared expectations, need to be expressed in a common policy school-wide:

(i) with a common discipline framework at the classroom level;
(ii) a common ‘duty-of-care’ framework (ie: in non-classroom settings) eg corridors, playgrounds, wet-day, bus supervision.
(iii) due processes for consequences, counselling and ‘contracting’ for long-term behaviour change with students who have on-going disruptive patterns of behaviour.

See framework page below.
BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT: A WHOLE-SCHOOL FRAMEWORK

OUR CORE VALUES

AIMS
For group and individual e.g.:

- establishment of common rights, responsibilities, rules.
- least-to-most intrusive discipline / management.
- avoiding unnecessary confrontation in discipline and application of consequences.
- keeping fundamental respect and dignity intact in management / discipline contexts.

PREFERRED PRACTICES – professional consistency

e.g.:
- establishment of common rights, responsibilities, rules.
- least-to-most intrusive discipline / management.
- avoiding unnecessary confrontation in discipline and application of consequences.
- keeping fundamental respect and dignity intact in management / discipline contexts.

CLASSROOM PLANS

- Common rights/responsibilities.
- Class based rules and routines.
- Least-to-most strategic discipline plan
- Time-out options

INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR PLAN(S)

Developing individual behaviour management plans.

CASE OF CARE PLAN(S)

Outside of class setting:
- Corridor management
- Playground management
- Wet day management
- Bus duty management

STUDENT BEHAVIOUR AGREEMENT

Negotiable (common framework) consequences

Non-negotiable consequences

School-wide consequences

Sanctions policy

BEHAVIOUR RECOVERY

- Mediation
- Restitution
- Counselling
- Behaviour plans

The ‘Hard Class’ issue
Dr. Bill Rogers is a teacher, education consultant and author. He conducts in-services and seminar programmes across Australasia, New Zealand, Europe and the U.K. in the areas of behaviour management, effective teaching, stress management, colleague support and teacher welfare. He has also worked extensively as a mentor-coach in classrooms; team-teaching in challenging classes in Australia and the U.K. {He is a Fellow of the Australian College of Education and Honorary Life Fellow of All Saints and Trinity College: Leeds University and Honorary Fellow at the Graduate School of Education, Melbourne University}.

End notes
1. Interrogative questions (“Why are you …?” or “Are you …?”) are the least helpful questions to ask in a discipline context (particularly in front of a student’s peers).

References

See also ancillary in-service notes :
• Preferred Understandings/Practices and core skills for school-wide behaviour leadership. (2013)
• Student Behaviour Agreements : Middle school years (2014)