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# Making a discipline plan



**Classroom 1/04** focused on classroom organisation and discipline. This article has been written by Bill Rogers to follow-up some of the ideas in that issue and to reinforce the importance of establishing, and acting upon, a discipline plan. As he says: 'a discipline plan will enable us to keep the focus of our classroom leadership on our core business—teaching and learning, rather than on student behaviour itself'.

**W**hile most teachers make focused and careful plans for day-to-day teaching, I've come across some who do not give the same reflection, consideration and planning to their day-to-day discipline. Yet we know there will be naturally distracting behaviour occurring in our classrooms as the social mix of students find 'their place' and the students 'measure' our *characteristic* leadership of the class.

A discipline plan is essentially a *conscious framework* for how we thoughtfully address the typical range of distracting and disruptive behaviours that can occur in any classroom. In the heat of busy, teaching and management moments, we do not have the luxury of time to think about appropriate, helpful, apposite, discipline strategy and language.

## Discipline plans

A discipline plan needs the same reflection that we give *typical* lesson plans:

- The preventative aspects should include clear, *fundamental* rules for learning; respect and manners and safety.
- These rules should be positive where possible and few in number.
- Routines are the teacher's way of enhancing the smooth running of classroom life and learning. These include the way we enter (and leave, and pack-up and tidy) our classrooms; how we engage in whole-class questions and discussions; *appropriate* seating plans; appropriate noise levels in class learning time; how to *fairly* get teacher attention and support.
- These sorts of routines should never be 'assumed knowledge'; they should be explained why they are essential; discussed with the class (day one); positively enforced and encouraged. It is the balance of encouragement and appropriate 'enforcement' (discipline) that creates workable learning communities.
- At infant level these routines should also be actively *modelled* as well as taught. Having clear, positive, even *published*, rules is never enough in itself. It is the foundation and reference point for all subsequent and necessary discipline.

The purpose of a discipline plan is to:

- enable students to be responsible for, their behaviour
- respect others' rights for example, to learn without undue distraction and disruption
- feel safe in class and in school.

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## Characteristic language

Our discipline plan also needs to address the *characteristic* language we will use to meet the above aims when students call out, butt in, wander, roll distractingly on the carpet etc.

The language of discipline seeks to:

- be least intrusive where possible, for example by giving a student a *directed choice* if they are playing with a 'secreted' toy (in class work time). 'I want you to put your toy in your locker tray or on my table'. This is in preference to simply, taking (or snatching) it off the table. A 'choice' *enables* a 'sense of ownership of behaviour'.

## It is the balance of encouragement and appropriate 'enforcement' (discipline) that creates workable learning communities.

There are times we do need to be 'more intrusive' in our discipline. Being more intrusive doesn't mean being more hostile or mean-spirited and should *never* mean we are aggressive. 'More intrusive' is the ability to be assertive (unambiguously assertive) where necessary as in situations where students put each other down or use aggressive swearing or aggressive physical behaviour.

- be positive where possible. 'Facing the front and listening' is a simple direction focused on the behaviour we fairly want, or expect. Contrast this with 'Don't talk while I'm teaching'. Or 'You *shouldn't* be talking now'. Or the pointless interrogatives 'Why are you talking?' (Of course they were; why ask 'why'?)
- use firm, clear, decisive, language: 'I don't expect anyone in our class to use language like that. *It stops now!*'

For younger students: 'I don't speak with a mean (or 'rude', 'unkind' or 'nasty' voice to you. I don't want you to use that voice with me.)

With older students avoid 'arguing the toss'—it will help to keep the focus on the main issue at hand; for example: 'It's not fair Miss! I wasn't the only one talking'; 'I was only . . .'; 'Miss Smith in Art lets us sit where we want'. 'Blocking' is where we don't engage or 'defend' or argue; we *repeat* the necessary reminder or direction two or three times then expect their co-operation (or at least compliance).

*Partial agreement* is also helpful where we acknowledge (in part) what the student says then refocus

to the main issue, for example: 'Maybe Miss Smith does let you sit where you want (I'll check that) but in our class we sit with our class seating plan' (the re-direction).

If a student *continues* to prevaricate, or argue, it will be important to make the consequences clear. Again we should have a prepared plan as to how we will carry such consequences through.

## Behaviour consequences

Students learn through consequences; they can learn to 'own' their behaviour in ways that respect others' rights—if those consequences are fair, known in advance, related to the core rights and rules, and carried through with 'certainty'. Some teachers use the consequential due process in ways that unnecessarily highlight severity: lecturing, even 'hectoring' students, or seeking to make them *feel* bad.

Fair *certainty of consequence* is always a more powerful learning for students than intentional severity—which breeds unnecessary resentment in students. Students should know in advance how consequences work in the classroom, for example:

'If you continue to make it difficult for other to learn you will be asked to go to time-out'. Time-out as a classroom and school-wide consequence should always be explained as part of a classroom behaviour plan.

'You will always have an opportunity to discuss your behaviour with me (your teacher) later'. Students should always be given appropriate right of reply later when things are calmer.

## Repairing and rebuilding

We all know how damaging it is to hold grudges against students we find difficult to work with (or even like). It is important to finish the day with the class (or individual) as positively as you can.

## Summary

While a discipline plan obviously cannot cover every discipline contingency, it will enable us to keep the focus of our classroom leadership on our core business—teaching and learning, rather than on student behaviour itself. Of critical note in our plan is our language; learning to frame our discipline language positively (where possible), focusing on *behaviour* with brevity (wherever possible) and in a way that avoids 'overdwelling' on a student's 'secondary behaviours' (their 'sighs', 'frowns', 'raised-to-the-ceiling eyes', 'shoulder-shrugs', 'whining' etc).

## References

Rogers, Bill 1995, *Behaviour Management: A whole-school approach*, Scholastic Sydney.