

# A Holistic Approach to Classroom Management

**Bill Rogers worked as a teacher in Australian comprehensive schools and developed community-based strategies for behavior management based on whole-school approaches with his colleagues. For many years he has conducted training in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and the United Kingdom on school-based behavior management. He answered questions about his classroom management approach for PÄDAGOGIK, describing his experience in the classroom. What becomes clear: A positive relationship between teachers and students matters.**

## SIX QUESTIONS FOR BILL ROGERS

**PÄDAGOGIK:** You have spent many years training teachers and teaching yourself. Your insight: How does classroom management that promotes learning succeed? What are the key basic ingredients?

**Rogers:** All classroom management and behaviour leadership proceeds from clear rights and responsibilities that we communicate to our students at any age. More about this later. The essential factors in all behaviour leadership involve the preventative aspects; the necessary corrective aspects; the essential encouragement we give to our students and the necessary behaviour consequences where students are persistently disruptive. As well as preventative, corrective and consequential aspects of our behaviour leadership, we also need to consciously engage our best attempts to repair and rebuild working relationships with students and restorative outcomes following any correction or behaviour consequence. The preventative aspects of behaviour management include the essential rules and routines based on core rights and responsibilities (as noted in question four). The corrective aspects of behaviour leadership concern how we address distracting and disruptive behaviour in class time. The encouragement aspect of behaviour management addresses the distinction between praise and descriptive feedback that acknowledges and affirms the child's effort and contribution.

The behaviour consequences aspect of behaviour leadership will address how we can apply behaviour consequences in a way that are related to the behaviour of the student and are reasonable in degree of seriousness as they affect the rights of others). It is very important, as the teacher, that we consciously keep the fundamental respect intact between student and teacher when we apply any behaviour consequences. It is also crucial that teachers repair and rebuild with their students and enable restorative outcomes following correction and any behaviour consequences. It is the interplay of these crucial aspects of our behaviour leadership that promote a positive and workable learning community and enable and promote respectful social interaction.

Each of these elements/factors entail the teacher's conscious planning. For example when it comes to correcting students in terms of our behaviour leadership the language of correction needs careful thought. A typical example during whole class teaching time: several students are calling out, a couple of students are chatting, a student maybe fiddling with a toy on his table. The teacher consciously addresses the group by saying 'A number of students are calling out, remember hands up without calling out so we all get a fair go.' She doesn't ask 'Why are people calling out?' or 'People shouldn't be calling out should they?' or 'Do you have to call

# It is very important, as the teacher, that we consciously keep the fundamental respect intact between student and teacher when we apply any behaviour consequences.

out like that?’ In other words the teacher is consciously aware to use positive corrective language wherever possible. As with the students who are chatting, she says (directing her eye contact to the students): ‘You’re chatting’. This briefly cues the students behaviour awareness; the teacher adds the brief directional cue: ‘You need to be facing this way and listening, without chatting. Thank you.’ One of the students mutters – sulkily – ‘We were just talking about the work.’ At this point the teacher does not argue or contend, she briefly (and partially) ‘acknowledges’, ‘Even if you were chatting about the work, you need-now- to be facing this way and listening. Thanks.’ She then turns her attention back to the whole class again, conveying take up time to the students who were chatting. This ‘take up time’ also conveys expectation and respectful confidence of student cooperation. She has been respectful, positive and behaviourally focussed. This approach of calm positive language queueing is in preference to pointlessly asking the students why they are talking, or giving a negative cue such as ‘Don’t talk when I’m talking.’

The teacher has a conscious awareness that when she addresses distracting and disruptive behaviour she will keep the focus of correction addressed to the primary behaviour (at issue) and avoid overservicing any secondary behaviours such as the student indulgently sighing or rolling their eyes or muttering... These secondary behaviours can often be tactically ignored. If the student is particularly disrespectful in their speech and manner then a brief, firm, respectful statement is enough i. e.: ‘I’m not speaking to you disrespectfully, I certainly don’t expect to speak you to speak to me that way.’ The teacher will then resume the flow of the lesson. She may decide, also, to follow up with those students later (one to one) after class to clarify disrespectful behaviour.

**PÄDAGOGIK: You assume that student behavior and teacher behavior are interrelated. As a teacher, how do I figure out what management style suits me and the class? What should I pay attention to?**

**Rogers:** The classroom is a naturally dynamic context, 20 (or more) students and a teacher in a confined space, five periods a day, five days a week, several terms a year. There are students from a wide variety of backgrounds, temperaments, several students with diagnosed or symptomatic behaviour

disorders all seeking to find a sense of belonging and coping with the natural demands of learning. A teacher needs to be able to build and sustain the trust and confidence of their students and to enable the rights and responsibilities of all; this is no mean feat. Those outside our profession have a little idea of the natural demands and stresses such a role entails. Addressing the question ‘What should I pay attention to and how do I figure out a style that suits me?’ What is important is not so much a style as a conscious awareness of how to enact our role as a teacher leader. In the previous question, I sought to outline the critical factors in a teacher’s conscious understanding of their role as a teacher leader. These factors are foundational to everything we do as a teacher leader. To take one of the essential aspects of our role, that of our behaviour leadership and particularly our use of corrective language. We consciously pay attention to the following: The use of positive corrective language wherever possible. We avoid asking interrogative questions such as ‘Why are you calling out?’ ‘Why haven’t you started work yet?’ Or even, ‘Why are you late to class.’ If a student is late to class, for example, the teacher will meet, greet and ‘seat’. ‘Good morning Chantelle, take a seat we’ll chat later.’ The teacher will, then, resume the flow of the lesson. It is pointless asking the student why he is late – at this point – when we are engaged in whole class teaching – we can follow that issue up later one to one with a student. It is important to direct the student to their seat – respectfully – and keep on with the flow of the lesson. We don’t bail the student up at the classroom door with a question ‘Why are you late?’ Or even more pointless, ‘Are you late?’

When we are under natural pressure, even frustration, in the classroom and when students are being distracting or disruptive we do not have time to think of the more appropriate and apposite thing to say. Being consciously prepared for the typical distractions and disruptions, and the language cues we can use one under natural pressure enable us to more likely realize the aims of all behaviour leadership: to raise behaviour awareness; to engage behaviour ownership in the student and to do so in a way that is likely to communicate –even briefly –the rights that is affected by such distracting or disruptive behaviour. To take a typical example, a student playing with their iPhone during on-task learning time. The teacher walks over to the student and focusses the student’s attention to the

# Our characteristic corrective language needs as much care and attention as our curriculum planning and lesson planning.

learning activity: 'How's it going?' 'Where are you up to in your work?' 'Do you need a hand?' So the first interaction is task focus, then – before moving away from the student – the teacher adds, 'By the way, Adam, the phone needs to be on my table or away in your bag. You know the fair rule.' The teacher doesn't demand that the student hand the phone over, he uses a directed choice. If the student whinges or complains, 'Other teachers don't hassle us like this...', the teacher will briefly – partially – agree, 'I can't answer for other teachers, the school rule is clear.' And at this point the teacher will walk away conveying 'take up time' and expectation. He will not debate the veracity of the rule, or what other teachers do or don't do. If the student chooses (refuses) to put the phone away the teacher will come back and clarify the consequence. In this case a deferred consequence: 'If you choose not to put the phone away I'll have to follow this up in your own time later.' Thus giving the responsibility back to the student to own their behaviour. If the student says, sulkily, 'I don't care.' it will be enough to add, respectfully, 'I care.' Then walk away, again, conveying take up time. This in preference to, 'You will care! you will be in detention!' It will be essential of course to make sure that we do follow up with respectful and decisive certainty later. It is the respectful certainty of consequences that is more powerful than threat or harangue.

Our communication and conveying of calmness is also important when using corrective language particularly so when we need to be assertive as when a student is using abusive, racist or sexist language. Calmness will enable the assertion. For example a student has put another student down in a class discussion. The teacher focuses her attention to that student and says firmly and assertively – 'That was an unkind comment, and that stops now.' There is a calm firmness that does not 'betray' threat in the teacher's tone and manner. If the student complains that they were just joking the teacher will firmly and calmly assert 'We don't joke like that in our classroom.' At that point the teacher will resume the flow of the lesson (conveying that calmness) while still ensuring that the right to respectful communication has been clarified and the student's responsibility called out. Our calmness has the potential to enable the student's calmness as well as reassuring the rest of the class. When it comes to classroom control it is not an issue of us controlling the students but rather enabling

the students to be aware of and manage their behaviour. What we can control is how we manage our own behaviour and the environment that our students and we share. Our characteristic corrective language needs as much care and attention as our curriculum planning and lesson planning.

**PÄDAGOGIK: So relationship building in a new class seems to be central. As a teacher, what should I look for when taking on a new class?**

**Rogers:** When we take on a new class, there is a natural readiness in our students to make clear how we will work together as a classroom community. From the very outset we are communicating our authority. While we may have role authority, our moral authority has to be earned by the trustworthiness of our character as a teacher leader and our ability to teach with engagement and interest. We establish our authority by behaving as if we have the authority, already, to lead, guide and manage the class in the ways noted in earlier questions. All teachers have the same fundamental role authority, and certain powers within that role. Our moral authority, however, will vary from teacher to teacher and does not result from power itself but from using our authority to enable and empower our students to own their behaviour in a way that respects the rights of others. Respectful confidence is also crucial from day one as we clarify the rights and responsibilities of all members of the class community. It is important to remember that we are the teacher leader and we need to take care to convey a relaxed but assured manner as the adult in the room. We are the adult that can be trusted to manage the classroom environment and the learning activities for the benefit of all. Our students will be alert to this in our characteristic leadership from the outset. Deceptive basics include: getting to class on time, or before time, to greet the class; to have clear seating arrangements (fair and age related) and to have a clear sense of all necessary (age related) routines, more about this later.

It will also be important to begin the lesson promptly. From the outset we will need to address distracting and disruptive behaviour with a conscious sense of raising a student's behaviour awareness and attendant responsibility. It is important again to stress when we address distracting and disruptive behaviour it will be helpful to have a plan for the

# When we lead with respectful authority and grace we are building relational trust with individual students and the class group.

kind of language cues we use when under pressure. These language cues will range from least intrusive to more intrusive as circumstance demands. When we cue a student – or a class – regarding distracting or disruptive behaviour it can range from non-verbal cue to a clear assertive command according to the context and seriousness of behaviour. I would stress again, planning language cues for the sorts of issues we will inevitably face is crucial to our enabling behaviour leadership. Remember we are their teacher not their ‘best friend’ or ‘one of the guys’. We are friendly and respectful and courteous but not the confidante of our students. As we build and sustain a relationship with our students our personality and our sense of humour, – our appropriate sense of humour (no sarcasm) – will all enable a sense of cohesion as a classroom community. Our personality, though, will need be buttressed by our conscious planning and skill in the crucial role of our behaviour leadership. The building of that workable trust and sense of cohesion, with our students, naturally takes time. However it all begins in those critical first meetings with our students. What we establish (in rights, rules and routines) will need to be consolidated and maintained by our relaxed, respectful, vigilance. When we lead with respectful authority and grace we are building relational trust with individual students and the class group.

**PÄDAGOGIK:** You have just pointed out the importance of rules and rituals, and the professional literature also constantly refers to the importance of transparent rules. Why are rules so central to an environment that promotes learning?

**Rogers:** In our first meeting with any new class, at any age, there will be a natural readiness in our students for us to make clear with them regarding how our class is going to work, this term, this year. That readiness is both psychological and developmental. Our students expect us to make clear what the fundamental rights, rules and responsibilities are and what will happen where those rights are affected or abused and the responsibilities that need to be called to account from our students. From day one we need to build a working relationship with our students, as a group and as individuals. This of course will take time, however from the outset it is important, indeed, crucial that we clarify the essential rights

and responsibilities that will enable us to have a class where we can feel safe, both psychologically as well as physically; to be treated fairly and with fundamental respect and the right to learn without undue distraction or disruption. We will of course communicate these non-negotiable rights and responsibilities through an age related discussion with our students on day one. Any right, for example a right to be treated with fairness and basic respect, is – essentially – that which we value as a community. Rights entail responsibility, that means your right is my responsibility and vice versa.

Rules essentially give protection to those rights. Of course a rule needs to be fair and necessary to enable social wellbeing. However, such protection depends on the kind of behaviour leadership of the teacher and the relationship they are able to build and sustain with their students (more of this later). So too with routines; routines enable the smooth running of a classroom community. These routines will cover such issues as seating arrangements (age-appropriate and task appropriate); the transition from social time/play time to in class work time. Students need to learn the classroom environment requires different movement patterns and noise levels (inside voices/working voices), appropriate routines for class discussion including hands up routines (again age-appropriate). It will even be important to discuss with students how to give opinions or points of view and reasons for those points of view in class discussions. It is crucial to develop expectational routines for workable and purposeful classroom discussions.

Routines are essential with any age of student, including appropriate movement around the room during on-task learning time, how to fairly obtain teacher assistance during on-task learning time even routines for leaving the room for toilet procedures or if the student is unwell. All these routines enable the smooth running of each classroom community within the school. It is also important to have routines for lesson closure, including pack up time and leaving the classroom tidy for the next class, or if it's the last period of the day ‘doing the cleaner’ a favour by chairs on the table and tidying up for litter. Rules and routines give our students a sense of secure boundaries within which we can create and sustain and even enjoy the benefits of our learning community. To enable that kind of classroom environment to exist we also need to be consciously aware of how we lead for behaviour when stu-

# Rules and routines give our students a sense of secure boundaries within which we can create and sustain and even enjoy the benefits of our learning community.

dents are distracting or disrupting. As noted our behaviour leadership will call the students to their responsibility within these rules and routines and also our encouragement when they are behaving considerably thoughtfully and cooperatively. It will be essential from day one to establish these rules and routines by explanation and discussion-at any age. It will also help to have posters outlining the core rules and routines with illustrations by students or photographs attached. For example with infant age children a poster outlining: 'When we come together on the mat for discussion and story time we remember to sit with safe hands and feet, we listen with our eyes and our ears, we put our hand up without calling out when we want to share and wait for our teacher to call on us.' Each of those behavioural cues would be a bullet point (on the poster) and include an illustration of students engaging in those behaviours. When the students forget or behave distractingly the teacher will remind them with a firm, brief, positive reminder: 'Remember, hands up without calling out thanks.' 'Thanks' is to be preferred rather than 'please'; it is not a request it is a reminder. 'Thanks' also carries the note of expectation. An example at upper primary/middle-school would be a poster with a heading: We all have a right to learn. With the following the dot points:

- to learn well here;
- we get to class on time;
- we have our relevant materials;
- we settle relax in our seating ready to contribute and discuss;
- When we discuss, as a class: it's hands up without calling out so we all get a fair go.

During class learning time if we need teacher assistance, again hands up without calling out. While we're waiting for teacher support there are other learning tasks you can go on with. Some teachers will utilise a teacher help board where students can record their name to alert the teacher for assistance or feedback. Students know that they need to check the work themselves by checking their learning task requirements; to check with a classmate next to them; if the class work is still not making sense then they write their name on the teacher-help board. A second poster will outline: the right to respect:

- to enjoy respect in our classroom: we remember that we all share the same place and space in reason for being here;
- we all share the same the same basic feelings and needs;
- we use considered language (no putdowns, we disagree respectfully in class discussions, harassment will not be tolerated);
- we use courtesy and manners with one another.

Each of those points are a bullet point under the heading: 'We have a right to respect.' As with any rules/routines it will also help to discuss and plan these core rights/rules with our colleagues. This is essential with schoolwide rules and routines, as well as classroom based routines. Again, the teacher leader will need to call students responsibility to these rights and responsibilities when they forget, or are behaving distractingly, and encourage students when they are considerate courteous and cooperative.

**PÄDAGOGIK: You have already indicated: There are certainly students who don't follow the rules and disrupt the lessons. What do you recommend teachers do to deal with such situations?**

**Rogers:** The issue of students not following the rules or being distracting or disruptive is an issue of degree. In the normal course of events when a student is distracting or disruptive we will seek to remind, or direct the student to their responsibility, or clarify the consequence regarding their continued disruptive behaviour. Where the student is repeatedly disruptive then of course we may need to use more intrusive measures such as Timeout away from the classroom to enable the student to calm down and think about their behaviour. The consequence of Timeout is a serious but – at times – necessary consequence for repeatedly distracting disruptive, hostile or dangerous behaviour. Timeout away from the classroom would normally be supervised by a senior teacher. Time-out is not some kind of benign chateau d'if experience. It is a temporary, supervised, exclusion from class peers to enable the student to calm, settle and refocus under caring, supportive supervision. It is crucial that the class teacher who directs a student to Timeout will follow up with that student, one to one, at a suitable time to repair and rebuild

# Time-out is not some kind of benign chateau d'if experience.

and engage in a restorative conversation. In such one to one contacts the teacher will: briefly tune into how the student is feeling at that point e. g. 'I know you probably want to be outside at Playtime, however I need to speak to you about what happened earlier today in class.' The teacher will then refer to the behaviour issue or concern; again briefly and specifically. It can also help to ask the students permission if the teacher can show the student what they mean – in terms of what their typical disruptive behaviour looks or sounds like. The teacher will spend ten seconds briefly 'mirroring' the repeated calling out or tone of voice. This mirroring can help to clarify – kinaesthetically – the behaviour in question. Such behaviour mirroring should be conducted respectfully in order to clarify the behaviour, never to humiliate the student. It is not uncommon that students will laugh when we mirror their behaviour in this way. This is normal and often arises from some anxiety in the student (or because it genuinely looks funny). My colleagues, and I, have modelled rolling on the mat, hiding under tables, attentional clowning behaviour (with infant age children you understand). We have modelled/mirrored calling out, butting in, talking while the teachers is talking, inappropriate wandering etc. This brief mirroring/modelling raises the kinaesthetic awareness in the child or young person in this one to one setting. Always with the proviso of asking permission: 'Do you mind if I show you what it looks like, or sounds like, when you...?' (be specific). We, then, give the student a right of reply. If the dissembles ('I'm not the only one...', 'Other students call out too!'), or discounts or denies what they did or said, it will be important to reframe: 'Other students were calling out, I reminded them, they put their hand up without calling out, you continued calling out making it difficult, and it was unfair in our class discussion; that's why we're talking now.' Our tone and manner is calm, specific, respectful and supportive. We, then, remind the student about the relevant right/responsibility. We encourage them to make the responsible choice back in class time. We separate amicably with no last minute remonstrance. Where a student's disruptive continues on in class time with a behaviour profile of: frequency (of

disruptive behaviour); duration of disruptive behaviour (more than 'bad-day-syndrome') and the pattern of disruptive behaviour as occurs in other teachers/classes, then it will be crucial to work with the student on a personal behaviour support plan. This is best developed with senior teacher and student-welfare support. Any such behaviour plans will be developed one-to-one with the student with and each classroom teacher will take a common supportive approach with the student (within the plan) back in the classroom. Each teacher will be encouraged to consider how they will encourage and – when necessary – use positive correction in class time.

When giving encouragement to students we avoid using global cues such as: 'great', 'fantastic', 'awesome'. These global cues give no specific or enabling feedback or information to the student about their effort and application to their work or behaviour. When we praise student's work (using such global cues) -for little effort engaged by the student- they are unlikely to ascribe any significant value to their work or achievement. Descriptive feedback, however, will enable the student to focus on their effort and the progress of their effort, in that work or learning activity. e. g. a grade four student is writing about the use of adjectives in a piece of writing. The learning activity requires them to describe a box using adjectives of shape, colour, size, comparison etc. The teacher comes over to the student who has written, 'I've got a big yellow box.' Instead of saying 'Great job' or 'That's awesome' (perhaps in the mistaken belief that this will build our student's confidence) it will be more effective to give the student feedback on what he has actually written, and how he has used adjectives in his writing (in terms of describing 'his box'). 'Well Thomas, you've got a big box – you've described the size and the colour. Think about whether the box is empty or...? What shape the box is, is it heavy or light? Remember how we used different adjectives to describe 'our box' in our class discussion? You're on the right track (even a 'well done' may be apposite). I'll come back and see how you're getting on later.' The teacher's tone and manner is encouraging and supportive; not over the top. The student doesn't need to be told his work is great or fantastic.

## When clarifying what we mean by respect, to our students, we will focus on respect as the way we treat others: our social courtesies, fundamental manners, fairness... the core elements of the 'social contract'.

**PÄDAGOGIK:** You say that the key is to create an atmosphere of trust between the teacher and the class. Do you have an example of how I succeed in doing that as a teacher?

**Rogers:** Building trust with our students is based in our trustworthiness and that of course is built over time through the kind of respect we characteristically convey: that is, mutual respect conveyed by the teacher, modelled by the teacher and exemplified by the teacher. If we see respect as honouring someone, giving a sense of worth to that person because of who they are in their character, their reliability, their skill and competence, their care and attention to those they lead and serve... then this understanding of respect is invested with positive qualities that have a sense of 'deserving' of human connectiveness. Respect is also a word that can also be invested with convenient, personal, content and manipulated by those who seek – even demand – respect on a purely self-interested basis. There are some young people who will say 'Unless I think you deserve MY respect I won't give it to you unless you've earned it to MY satisfaction'. This clarion call for 'respect' derives from a belief invested in a 'deserving of respect' such that when the student behaves in a disrespectful way to others, any teacher correction is seen by the student as 'disrespecting ME' – irrespective of their behaviour. It is a blind eye view common to many, and not just young people. I've also come across some teachers who believe that they deserve respect simply because they are teachers, irrespective of how they treat their students. Furthermore, if earning the respect and trust of our students means behaving in ways where we feel we have to be liked by our students then that is also a shallow concept of respect and trust. However if respect and trust means that we seek to be one who cares, who exercises goodwill without holding grudges, who has integrity and keeps their word, who communicates and conveys relational value to their students and – knowing that they are fallible – will apologise and seek to repair and re-build – then, seeking to be that kind of teacher leader we would hope that our students respect and trust would be forthcoming. We do not begin with a merely hopeful desire for the respect and trust of our students, we set out to be the kind of teacher who our students will learn to trust and respect. How we – as teachers-characteristically treat our students and show our

respect to students does not depend on whether we like all of our students all of the time. Liking is preferential, based on mood temperament, past experiences. Treating others fairly, considerately, respectfully with integrity ought not to depend on whether we like a particular student. Respect, at this level, is a more challenging understanding and our modelling of this kind of respect will go a long way to enabling its reciprocal possibility in our students. When clarifying what we mean by respect, to our students, we will focus on respect as the way we treat others: our social courtesies, fundamental manners, fairness... the core elements of the 'social contract'.



Bill Rogers is an Australian educational consultant. He has worked as a teacher in comprehensive schools, conducted research on conflict cultures as a professor of education, and published various articles and books on classroom management. He works in workshops and lectures with teachers and education authorities on whole-school approaches to student behavior management.

🌐 [www.billrogers.com.au](http://www.billrogers.com.au)