
A FRESH START

A re-establishment plan for a
classroom group
[Upper Primary / Middle School

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Fresh start : a re-establishment plan for a classroom group

A note to all colleagues.

This 'fresh-start' plan was originally developed for an upper primary class (year 6), though many of my colleagues have used the ideas and format at middle school years. It is passed on in the hope that it may provide some useful discussions for those colleagues working with harder-than-average classes.

Sometimes class groups develop poor *habits* of learning and behaviour. If this is not checked, and addressed, early in term one this 'habituation' can create significant difficulties for the grade / subject teacher : noise levels; inappropriate calling out; talking over others ..., frequent butting in; inappropriate movement around the room (during on-task learning time); task avoidance; significant messiness and disorganization ...

This fresh-start 'plan' is a conscious, positive, and planned response to the harder-than-average class; it enables the teacher and the students to develop a 'fresh-start mentality' and process. The concept and framework language have (since) been used widely by schools – at 'middle-school' level – as a way of refocusing, and encouraging, a classroom group.

This particular plan (p 6f) was the outcome of a **classroom meeting** where issues of concern about behaviour and learning were raised by the teacher (and colleague mentor) with the grade *and then discussed with the grade in a classroom meeting format*.

'The plan' ('fresh start') was supported by the school principal and monitored closely.

Other aspects of the plan (not noted in this document) involved : a change in seating plan (from table groups to rows)¹; a few students being placed on personal behaviour plans (Rogers, 2004) and a well developed time-out plan to support the grade teacher (and

¹ The seating, in rows, was to reclaim some focus in a quite fractious, noisy and unfocused class group. Later, as the class became more settled and co-operative, the seating options were modified.

class) when certain students significantly affected learning or safety in the classroom (Rogers, 2011 and 2015).

Guided collaboration – between teacher and class

It is important to remember that this 'fresh-start' process is much more than 'a document' detailing appropriate classroom behaviour. The *process* is based on a guided collaboration between grade / class teacher and the students and appropriate support from senior staff.

It is not uncommon for the grade / class teacher to have lost some of the goodwill necessary for a positive classroom relationship and a more positive, workable, teacher and learning culture. The pattern of student behaviour (disruptive, attentional, distracting behaviours) may mean the teacher *and* the class group believe they have 'lost' some of that early relational bond, and energy, necessary for positive teacher-student relationships. This 'fresh-start' is a way of reclaiming that goodwill and rebuilding that relational respect essential in building a co-operative learning community.

It is a process based in supportive collegial goodwill. There is little point in apportioning blame to teacher *or* students. The issue of a hard(er) to manage class is rarely that simple.

It is crucial that the class teacher have **appropriate colleague support** to discuss and develop any 'fresh-start' approach with the classroom group in question. A key feature of the 'fresh-start' process is the initial classroom meeting(s) where the class teacher and students re-appraise their behaviour; their learning; their shared concerns and discuss and pursue necessary changes. These meetings are not always 'easy' to conduct if they are outside the experience of the class teacher; colleague support can help in planning – and co-jointly – conducting such classroom meetings.

It will also be important that the class teacher re-appraise their :

- ~ discipline and management plan (particularly the 'language of discipline') (See Rogers, 2011)
- ~ their overall teaching and learning approaches with respect to this particular class; giving thought to learning styles (as is appropriate), 'engagement of learning' and

appropriate differentiation of learning tasks for students with learning needs. (Rogers, 2015).

- ~ Thoughtful and consistent follow-up with students (one-to-one) to positively address issues of behaviour and learning. Developing 'individual learning plans' and 'individual behaviour management plans' as is necessary (*Cracking the Hard Class* (2006b) : chapter 7, and also *Behaviour Recovery* 2nd edition, 2004).
- ~ On-going colleague support to discuss, develop, maintain and consolidate the 'fresh-start' process with their class.

What follows is a *published* example of a fresh-start plan arising out of a process of classroom discussions between teachers and students. For the on-going utility of such a plan the collaborative goodwill of teachers and students will need to be maintained. This is not always easy. Goodwill is often eroded when a significant group of students become increasingly noisy (*en masse*), overly attentional and poorly focused (and off-task) with their learning.

Consciously adopting a characteristically positive behaviour-leadership approach with such a class is in part goodwill and effort and – in good part – skill.

Students need leadership and guidance never more so than when the spiral of poor behaviour-learning habits *seem* to take over a significant number of the class group.

The earlier this process takes place (in term one) the more effective its outcome will be. The classroom meeting that begins the fresh-start process is discussed and modelled in *Cracking the Hard Class* (2nd edition) 2006. [See also the DVD *Cracking the Hard Class* www.billrogers.com.au]

Classroom meetings :-

Key questions teachers raise with their students

Three key questions are asked of each member of the class group at the classroom meeting :-

- (1) What's working well in our class at the moment *and why?*
- (2) What isn't working well and why?

(3) What do we need to do to begin a fresh-start as a class group (in light of question 2)? [If you have any personal issues of concern they can be raised with your teachers directly.]

This meeting can be conducted as a formal written exercise or as an open forum meeting 'in the round'. As noted earlier, it is better to conduct such a meeting with a colleague experienced in conducting such meetings.

The student feedback from such a meeting forms the basis for a second meeting and the fresh-start that will address :

- fundamental rights and responsibilities
- essential, fair rules
- core routines for learning and classroom life
- necessary behaviour consequences (including time-out)
- how we resolve issues of concern in a restitutive way.

The underlying principles of this 'fresh-start' concept are found in :

Rogers, B. ~ *Cracking the Hard Class : Strategies for Managing the Harder than Average Class* 2nd edition (Published in Australia by Scholastic : Sydney, [second edition, 2006]; in the U.K. by Sage Publications : London, 2006)

~ *Classroom Behaviour : A practical guide to Effective Teaching, Behaviour Management and Colleague Support* 4th edition (Published by Sage Publications, London, 2015). Available in Australia via *Footprint Books* www.footprint.com.au

~ *You Know the Fair Rule And Much More* 3rd edition, 2011. (Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne). [In the U.K. : published by Pearson Education].

~ *Behaviour Recovery* 2nd edition (2004) In Australia Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne). Sage Publications, (London).

~ The DVD *Cracking the Hard Class* contains video footage of a real-time classroom meeting with a secondary class. See the website for details www.billrogers.com.au

See also :

Chapter 4 in *How to Manage Children's Challenging Behaviour* 2nd edition (Bill Rogers, editor). Sage Publications : London. In Australia via Footprint Books www.footprint.com.au [This chapter contains several case studies using this approach].

FRESH START OUR CLASS PLAN

Term _____

Grade Teacher _____

Grade _____

_____ Primary School

To all of us in our class ...

As a class group we have developed a classroom plan for our behaviour and learning.

This plan will support us in our fresh start for term two. It is important to remember that we all share the same place, the same resources, we have similar needs and feelings. We all have a common reason for being here together.

This plan is designed to help us co-operate with each other to support and enjoy the teaching and learning in our classroom.

As you all know, we discussed some issues of concern about behaviour in our class during term one. These concerns were discussed at a classroom meeting and this plan was the result.

We believe this plan will benefit *all of us* here in our class as a learning community to :

- (1) Remember our rights and responsibilities as members of our school community.
- (2) To think about others' welfare; their needs and feelings.
- (3) To improve the learning of all the members of our class.

OUR PLAN outlines :

- our rights and responsibilities
- the routines that support our learning and well-being here

- the classroom rules
- the consequences for rule-breaking (rule-breaking always affects others' rights.)
- how we support one another here.

Our classroom rules are also published in our classroom.

OUR RIGHTS

- We all have the **right to feel safe** here – this means we think about others in our classroom (not just ourselves). We all have similar feelings and needs. The right to feel safe means we have a responsibility to others, to consider how we speak to them: put-downs, 'cheap shots', 'scoring', teasing are all behaviours that take away a person's right to feel safe.
The right to safety, here, also means that *any* bullying of *any* kind is totally unacceptable. It will never be tolerated.
- We all have a **right to respect and fair treatment** – this means we show respect to other people in our class and to their property.
The right to respect also includes our responsibility to show manners and basic courtesies to each other.
- We all have a **right to learn** – this means we all have the right, here, to learn without interruption or interference from other students. The right to learn also means our teacher will support us to do our best in our learning here. We also seek to help others with their learning here wherever possible

We have discussed these rights as a class group. They are the *foundation* for our responsibilities and rules here; and they are the ***foundation for our learning community***.

OUR CLASSROOM RULES

To show respect here in our class :

- We show courtesy to others (we treat others as we would like to be treated ...).
- We use our manners, here, to *all* the members of our classroom group.
- We work in ways to help others around us to feel as comfortable as possible.
- We take turns in classroom discussions.
- We do not use disrespectful language; this means no teasing, put downs, 'cheap shots', swearing or threatening others.

To learn well here in our class :

- We have our necessary equipment (eg. table pencil case).
- We co-operate with our teacher's requests and directions.
- We use active listening, and remember the hands-up routine during class discussions.
- We are supportive of other people in *their learning*. This means we remember our 'partner-voices'; we do not distract others or annoy them during learning time. We use '*co-operative talk*' during all classroom activities.
- We give people their 'own space'; we respect their 'own space'.
- We move around the room *only* for sensible reasons.

To settle problems here :

- If we have a 'hassle' or 'problem' with a fellow student, we discuss our concerns or problems peacefully. If we find this difficult, we discuss the concern or problem with our teacher who will help us.
- We will also have opportunities to share concerns or problems at classroom meeting times if we feel comfortable.
- If we argue or fight (with words or fists!) we will immediately be directed to work separately or we may be directed to immediate time-out. We will always have the opportunity to have our say later to work with our teacher to put things right.

To be safe here in our class :

- We consider others' feelings and needs as well as our own.
- We use *all* our equipment *thoughtfully, appropriately* and *safely*. We look after our own property, class property and the property of others.
- We wear sensible clothing and safe jewellery at school, (tie, or pin, our hair back when appropriate – particularly during class learning time).
- Bullying is totally unacceptable *anywhere* in our school. It will not be tolerated.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROUTINES

To have a *right* to 'something' means we also need to show responsibility to enjoy that right; to enjoy *our* rights. We have discussed our rights *and* our responsibilities as a class group.

If we want to be respected and to have *our* property respected it means *we too*, as an individual, need to be responsible in making sure we respect other students' feelings, and to show respect for their property. Remember basic manners : ask before you borrow; return what you borrow; ('first name', 'please', 'thanks', 'excuse me', consideration of 'personal space' ... are all examples of fair manners and basic courtesies).

When we use manners it means we think about others as well as ourselves.

These are the routines / responsibilities we believe are fair and necessary here :-

- To line up considerately outside our classroom when the music signal comes (from playtime) ...
- To enter our classroom respectfully and go to our table rows – to sit quietly until we begin our learning time together.
- To have our necessary materials ready for learning time (table pencil case, 'thinking hats' on ...).
- To use our 'partner-voices' with our classmates during on-task learning time, and remember 'co-operative-talk' (talk that supports shared learning time). Our teacher will remind us when we need to use 'whisper-time' (we do not talk during quiet reading time).

- We raise our hand (without calling out) during class discussions. We wait our turn. We give our classmates a fair-go; this means we don't talk over each other during class discussions. We share opinions / we *disagree respectfully* and share why ...
- If we need help during class learning time we put our hand up and the teacher will come and assist us – in turn. We need to remember to :- check the set work first, ask a classmate (quietly) next to us *before* we ask for teacher assistance. Always remember to ask yourself : *What am I actually asked to do now with this learning task or learning activity?*
- When we work in co-operative groups our teacher will organise the groupings and remind us of our special responsibilities during co-operative group times.
- All completed work is placed in the 'to be marked' box on our teacher's table.
- Our teacher will conference with us – several times during the day – about our class work, projects or reading times.*

Our teacher will support us in every possible way with all aspects of our classroom learning and behaviour here.

Our responsibility is also to let our teacher know when, and where, we are having difficulties or concerns. Our responsibility also means that we will seek to do our best to make the effort, to try, even when the work is not easy! If our class work is not up to our standard (of what we know we **can** do) our teacher may ask us to redraft or edit it again.

- We all help to keep our classroom tidy : return all materials to their proper place (including dictionaries, and encyclopaedia), all litter in the bin, straighten and tidy furniture each break time (chairs on tables at the end of the day). We do the cleaner a favour.
- We share computer time by using the class roster.
- At recess breaks, and the end of the day, we leave our classroom quietly (row by row); consider each of the classes near our classroom. Thank you.

Being responsible means everyone here gets a fair go.

It also means thinking about – and considering – how your behaviour affects others around you.

*(This at primary level.)

CONSEQUENCES

We all make choices about our behaviour; consequences follow our choices.

When our teacher gives a consequence it is because a rule has been ignored or broken – consequences are there to help us take responsibility for our actions and behaviour.

If any student in our class makes it difficult for any student to learn or feel safe here they will :-

- Be reminded of our fair classroom rules.
- They may be asked to work away from others.
- They may be asked to take 'time-out' away from others.
- They may be asked to leave our class to go to supervised 'time-out'.
- They may be directed to 'stay-back' after class time to discuss their behaviour with their teacher. This is our opportunity to explain our behaviour and work with our teacher to put things right or work on ways to improve things or make things better.
- Parents may be contacted to discuss a student's behaviour.

Remember *your behaviour is your responsibility*.

You will *always* have the opportunity to explain, and discuss, your behaviour with your teacher.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER HERE

A co-operative classroom means a classroom where we all help to support one another.

We do have 'bad-days' – all of us.

We do have days when things don't always go right. It will help to let your teacher (and classmates) know when you are having a bad day otherwise they might get confused if they just see you looking upset, grumpy or angry.

If you have any concerns or worries please let your teacher know as soon as possible.

If you are making poor choices, or wrong choices, about your behaviour or learning, your teacher will help you :

- By discussing your behaviour and helping you to put things right or make things better.
- By mediation and restitution if you have a problem involving another student in our class or our school.
- By working with you on a personal behaviour-learning plan if necessary.
- On some occasions we will ask your parents to be involved with us in helping you with your behaviour here at school.

We look forward to a fresh start in our class this term.

We will have further classroom meetings to discuss how we are all going as a classroom group. Our next classroom meeting will be on _____ .

We have discussed and drafted this behaviour plan with our teacher. We agree to use it and support it.

(Children can be invited to sign this 'fresh-start' document.)

Mr / Ms _____ Grade / Class teacher

date :- _____

Sometimes these whole-class 'behaviour-plans' [fresh-start] are sent home to parent(s) with a covering letter from the school principal. E.g. :

This behaviour-plan has been developed by the children and teacher in grade / class with

Ms / Mr _____ .

It discusses how behaviour and learning work together in our class to achieve the best outcomes for all.

We ask you to read this with your son / daughter _____ .

We look forward to your support this year.

Thanking you.

Y.S. _____ .

Note :- It is important not to convey to parents that this is some kind of 'legal' document. It is a *memorandum of shared understanding* between home / school about appropriate, desirable, expected, behaviour.

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