



Dr Bill Rogers was the keynote speaker at the ABN/SSEN conference 'Positive Ethos, Positive Discipline, Effective Learning' held in Edinburgh in March 2004. The copyright is held by Bill Rogers.

## Developing a student behaviour agreement (middle and secondary level)

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A 'student-behaviour-agreement' is a fundamental focus in the establishment phase of the school year :- it is the outcome of a process whereby all students and all tutor teachers (or form teachers) discuss and develop *shared understandings about learning and behaviour*. This 'agreement' is based on core rights and responsibilities expected of all members of the school community. The student-behaviour-agreement is the fundamental reference for all behaviour management and discipline within the learning community.

Within a whole-school approach to learning and behaviour it is important to :-

- (i) develop *shared understandings* about the relationship of behaviour to learning with students within the form/tutor groups;
- (ii) develop an 'agreement' for such understandings at a tutor / form-group level;
- (iii) develop this 'agreement' in the establishment phase of the year [in our first tutor / form-group's meeting in term one];
- (iv) This agreement (SBA) focuses on the core understandings, expectations and behaviours as they flow from
  - **shared rights**
  - **shared responsibilities**
  - **shared rules**

### Developing a student behaviour agreement

As noted above a SBA is an attempt to clarify *shared understandings* and expectations about behaviour and learning.

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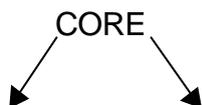
- (1) Central to such understandings are the *core rights* of the members of the school community. These rights form the foundation, and reference, for teacher leadership in the area of behaviour management and discipline. Whenever a teacher addresses unthinking, unhelpful, distracting or disruptive behaviours – anywhere in the school – they do so from these *core rights*.

## FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT BEHAVIOUR AGREEMENT

OUR AIM IN THIS AGREEMENT IS TO ENABLE OUR STUDENTS TO

- : consciously take ownership, and responsibility, for their behaviour
- : respect the rights of others (here in our school)
- : support positive relationships in our class group (and across the school)
- : support our learning together

The key areas of focus (below) are discussed with all tutor / form classes :-



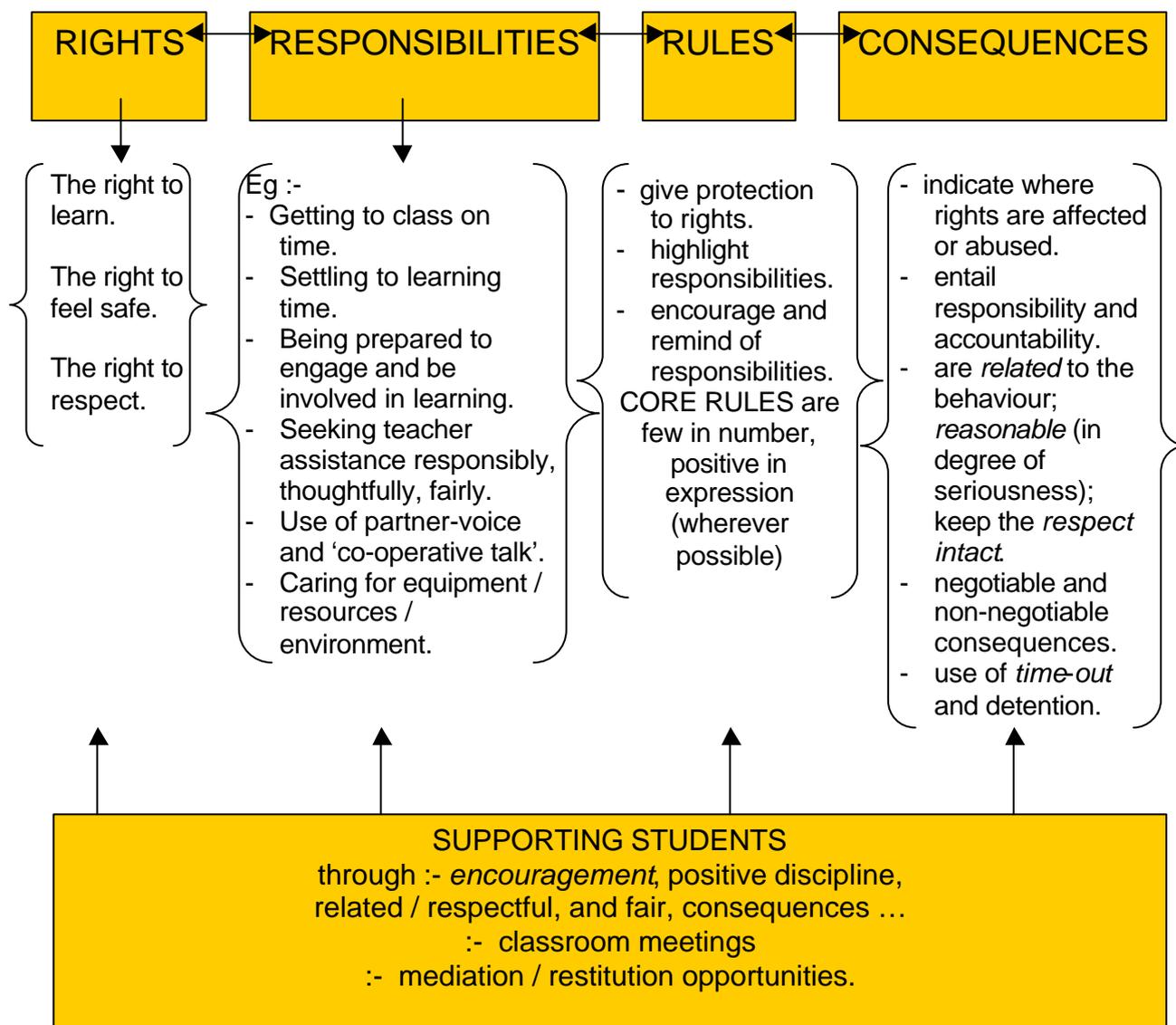


Fig. 1. Student Behaviour Agreement : A basic framework

THE RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE : this right addresses not only one's physical safety, but one's psychological and 'social' safety as well. Behaviours such as 'putting others down', 'cheap shots', unreasonable teasing, name-calling, swearing *at* ..., excluding others *on purpose*... are all behaviours that take away someone's right to feel safe ... This right also addresses 'personal space' issues, gender awareness issues and *any* expression of harassment behaviours.

THE RIGHT TO LEARN addresses the 'learning culture' in classroom (and non-classroom) settings. Students have a right to learn without undue, unreasonable and unfair distractions and diversions from others. Students also have a right to learn in a learning environment where their teachers do not create unnecessary anxiety or pressure through negative comparisons (with other students), overly negative feedback, lack of consideration of learning needs and learning 'styles'. Even a basic awareness of, and compensation for, different learning styles will assist in *engaging* – and motivating – students as learners.

THE RIGHT TO RESPECT / FAIR TREATMENT. As in the right to feel safe, this right addresses the way we interact with – and treat – one another. Basic respect (at least civility) is fundamental to workable learning communities. It is also crucial that all teachers, in all contexts, be consciously aware of how they model respect and civility to students. Even when a teacher is communicating appropriate frustration (or anger) their ability to assert, allow cool-off-time and repair and rebuild will all go a long way to keeping such respect intact without denying the necessity (at times) for assertive teacher discipline.

*Basic* civility includes teachers (as well as our students) using (and remembering to use) students' names; smiling and basic courtesies such as 'good morning' / 'afternoon' (to whole-class group ...); basic manners such as 'please', 'thanks', 'excuse me' ... (there are teachers who will just come into a student's working space and simply take up their work, look at it, make comments, write in their workbook without even a basic courtesy such as "Do you mind if I ...?")

We expect, remind, encourage, (at times discipline) our students to use their manners. We too, as teachers, need to model what we invite, encourage and 'expect' in our students.

When we are engaged in corrective discipline and addressing behaviours such as lateness to class, calling out, butting-in, noise levels of groups (in our on-task learning time) ... etc it is important to remember to use respectful

discipline language. We can all benefit from some professional reflection on our *characteristic* 'language of discipline' (see Rogers, 1998, 2002. See also notes on 'The concept of preferred practices within a whole-school approach.)

- (2) All rights imply and 'entail' responsibilities. It will be important to discuss this relationship of rights-to-responsibilities with students. Even adults forget this social correlation at times. (Look at the sink and draining board in your staff room ... check the coffee stains, spilt milk, random and sugar-encrusted spoons ... lids off coffee ... I've had my whinge!)

When discussing basic responsibilities with a group of students they will easily enable the 'chalkboard / whiteboard list' eg :-

getting to class on time (bad-day notwithstanding), having necessary / appropriate equipment; hands up without calling out; listening when the teacher is speaking / teaching (even if the mind is blank while in the act of listening!); leaving chewing gum, mobile phones Walkman stereos in the bag / locker ... Beyond the basic and prosaic responsibilities students will also nominate:- caring for one another; listening to one another; turn-taking; no put-downs; manners ('please', 'thanks', 'ta', 'excuse me' when moving through personal space, ask before you borrow, return ...); care for our classroom resources, environment ... Caring for our classroom is a basic responsibility. I have taken classes countless times where I have walked into the classroom only to find chairs / desks askew (or chairs on the floor!); residual litter; class sets of books all over the place; the chalkboard / whiteboard covered with other classes' work ... It doesn't take much effort for *all* teachers to remind, and encourage, students (in *all* classes) to **d.t.n.c.a.f.t.** :- "do the next class a favour thanks ... straighten furniture, pick up residual litter ..., leave considerately. Thanks folks." (In some classes, and year levels, it is appropriate that students be 'directed' to leave the classroom row-by-row.)

When discussing *responsibilities* with our students it will help to consolidate the **core** responsibilities from the many offered within the group discussion. These **core** responsibilities will be accepted as fair and reasonable (at least in the

discussion!) The way that all teachers (then) continue to encourage and address those responsibilities will determine how effectively such responsibilities are realised.

Central to the establishment of learning communities (*classroom by classroom, whole-school*) is the quality of teacher discipline and the wide use of encouragement and descriptive feedback in building positive behaviour across a school. (See Rogers, 1998, 2002).

- (3) **Rules give some protection to core rights.** Good, fair, clear rules *highlight responsibility*; give *direction* to personal and group responsibility and give a basis for school-wide discipline when rights are infringed, ignored or abused.

Rules need to be seen as purposeful (at least *reasonable*). It is important to explain to students the reason for a rule (avoid simply assuming).

Rules are better expressed, and published, using inclusive language where possible : ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’, ‘all’, ‘everyone here’, ‘together ,,,’

As teachers when we come to discipline *within* the rules our language of discipline is more positive, more invitational, if it utilises such inclusive language ie : “Justin ... remember *our* class rule for ...” (This to a student calling out.) This ‘simple’ rule-reminder is preferred (as discipline language) over “*Don’t* call out ...” or “*Why* are you calling out ...?” or “You’re not supposed to be calling out *are you?*”

It can often help to publish *core* rules on posters in the classroom (in years 6 – 9).

In the example (over page) (Fig. 2.) the rule poster is a summary of a year level, shared, understanding about rights, responsibilities and rules expressed in a single poster addressing learning.

The poster’s heading highlights :

- *The right to learn* :  
WE ALL HAVE A RIGHT TO LEARN
- *How we learn well here* :- (our responsibilities to each other ...)  
- getting to class on time;

- settling quickly, 'relax' (in seat within whole-class seating plan?); ready ..., prepared, (to give our learning time a fair go)
- hands up (without calling out or talking over others, butting-in, or private chats while a fellow student is asking a question or sharing an issue ...);
- FGFA (fair go for all)
- how to get *teacher assistance* [ie :- *check* first yourself, then with a classmate (quietly); if you still need help write your name on the *teacher help board* (THB); go on with other *set work* while you wait for the teacher to 'conference' with you ...]

Of course these rule-reminders – on the poster – are one 'side' of a two-'sided' (and shared) 'coin' – exchanged between teacher and students. One 'side' of the 'shared coin' entails student responsibilities the other 'side' of the 'shared coin' entails the teacher establishing, maintaining and encouraging the core routines to enable positive learning (in reference to rights and responsibilities). The viability of positive behaviour being realised depends on *how* the teacher *characteristically* encourages and disciplines within those fair rules.

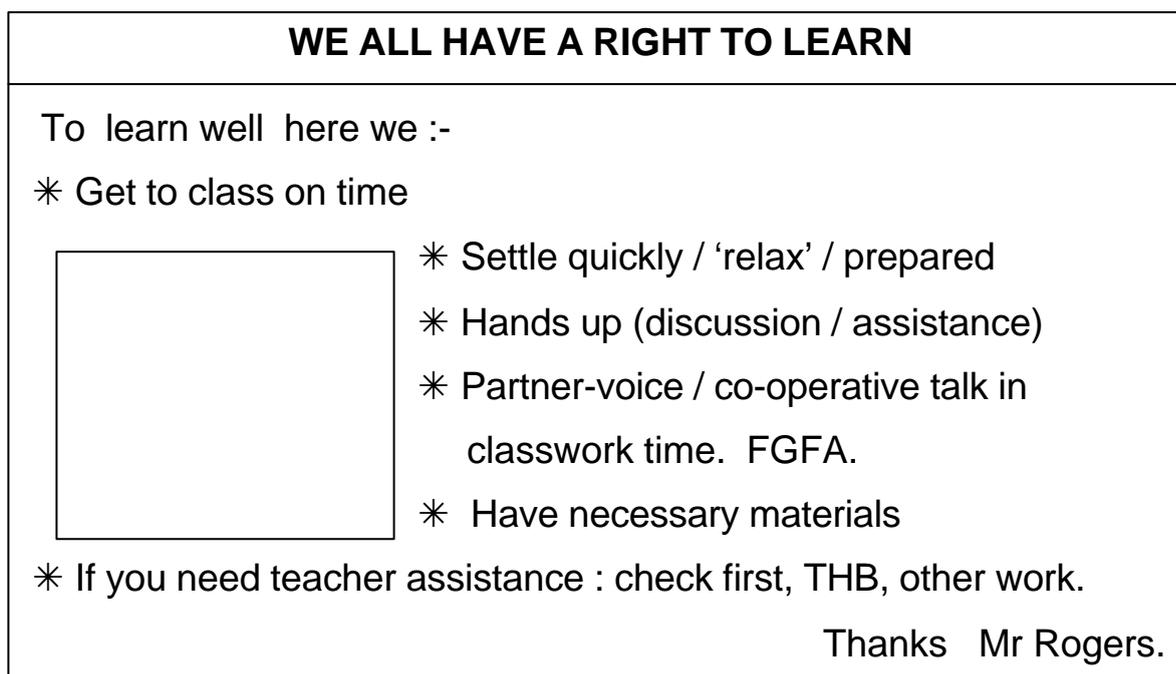


Fig. 2. Rule poster

(FGFA = Fair Go For All THB = Teacher Help Board)

The poster is an *aide memoire* that refers back to the SBA itself within which the year group has discussed the right to learn : *without undue, unfair, unreasonable, unnecessary distraction / disruption*. The rule-poster does not need to attenuate the *qualifiers* (eg 'without unfair, unreasonable distraction ...'). As a succinct, *visible*, expression of the SBA it doesn't list the qualities of behaviour, just the *key* – shared – understandings and expectations relevant to right, rule and responsibility.

*nb* When the poster refers to 'relax' that implies ... ' *without heavy seat-leaning, being overly-comatose, (etc)*'.

When the poster refers to 'partner-voice' it refers to the shared understanding / expectation – previously discussed – about what partner-voice implies (eg : 'quiet', 'softer' voices, a voice that 'doesn't need to travel far' ... the classroom isn't a playground so we do not need to use a footy voice (!) ).

Co-operative talk refers to the nature and kind of talk that focuses on the work we do together in class time (as distinct from 'social time' outside of class time).

- (4) Consequences flow from choices we make about our behaviour. This is not always a 'simple' cause-effect relationship for students to appreciate. It can help to raise this issue with our students :-

Sometimes it doesn't seem that we make 'choices' we just **do** 'behaviour' : we call out forgetting to put our hand up and wait our turn (do we really 'forget'?); we fiddle (a bit too loudly) with our pen, (or mini skateboard) – while the teacher is explaining something; we butt-in while a fellow-student is making a point in class discussion; we make a 'put-down' comment about a fellow student – or what they said in a class discussion – and we may not have thought that we were 'putting-them-down' ... Sometimes we behave in unhelpful ways because we are tired, bored or hungry (gees I could go a Mars bars right now or a bowl of serious pasta!)

Sometimes – of course – we do behave in ways that don't consider others' feelings and needs. We behave in unfair ways, and unacceptable ways because we want others in class to 'notice

us a lot'; to 'laugh at us'; to get others to think we're 'special' ... *We all want to belong* in our own way ... it seems hard, sometimes, to 'belong' in thoughtful, helpful, ways that do consider others' needs and feelings *as well as our own*.

Sometimes we are tempted to think we're 'extra important' we can 'do what we want and no one can really stop us ...'; sometimes we might not even care (!) But our behaviour is our responsibility, and our behaviour has consequences – for ourselves and our classmates. It affects how well we can work together, feel good about ourselves and feel safe here ...

Students understand these conceptions and realities about daily behaviour at school. Students, generally, understand consequences (often they interpret them as 'punishment'). What is important is that students see consequences in a *relational* way; connected to how rights are being affected (even abused) and how rules are being broken.

An important key to establishing consequences is to remember that a consequence should :

- **Relate** – in some way – to the disruptive behaviour. For example, none of us (as teachers) use 'lines' any more for that reason (write out 500 times "I must not be stupid in class ..."). We might, however, use a right of reply proforma, where appropriate, as part of our consequential discipline where students have

the opportunity to write down :- *What happened?* (to cause them to be 'in detention'); *What rule or right was affected / broken?* (by their behaviour); *What's your side of the story?* (How do you see the situation?); *What can you do to fix things up ... change ... things?*

*How can your teacher help?* (See Rogers, 1998).

- Have a **degree of seriousness** / and be reasonable; there's a big difference between a 'consequence' for calling out several times in class, or being late, or homework not done ..., and a bullying incident. The consequences vary significantly related to the *degree* of seriousness about the behaviour at issue.
- **Keep the respect of the student intact.** There is no place for 'keeping a student back after class', or 'in detention', and *then* speaking to them in unthinking, mean-spirited, petty, arrogant ways. " ... I'm sick and tired of your stupid behaviour! You *never* listen; you're wasted space here ..." (*ad nauseam*). Such behaviour is unacceptable, unnecessary and unprofessional.
- When we speak with students in such contexts we need to allow some **appropriate right of reply**, while *still* exercising the consequential follow-up and follow-through. We should also refer back to the SBA (as is relevant) as affected by the student's behaviour.

The consequence is – thus – directly related to the rights and responsibilities within the SBA.

It will help to discuss with students the difference between 'negotiable' and 'non-negotiable' consequences.

Most consequences are 'negotiable' *in the sense* that individual teachers will work through with students what needs to happen *as a result of their* inappropriate, or disruptive, or rights-infringing *behaviour(s)*. They will negotiate in the sense of an 'after class stay-back session', or a short lunch-time detention, or a more 'formal detention'.

The degree of 'negotiation' will vary, of course, but will focus on questions such as :- what happened?; what right, or rule, was affected by your behaviour?' what is your understanding of what happened?; what can you do, now, to 'fix' or 'change' things ,,,'? (as noted earlier).

Non-negotiable consequences refer to behaviours such as :-

- *repeated* disruptive behaviour in class (behaviours affecting others' rights to learn or feel safe);
- any hostile, threatening or aggressive behaviour in / or out of our class;
- drugs, (including smoking) weapons, violence ...

All of these behaviours occasion some form of immediate, non-negotiable, consequence ranging from time-out to suspension (temporary exclusion within school time or exclusion from school – 'at home').

Teachers, as part of their 'classroom discipline plan', will make it respectfully clear to their students that “If you make it difficult for others in our class to learn here, to feel safe here, to have fair respect and fair treatment here you will be reminded of our rules, you may be asked to work away from others, you may be asked to take 'time-out' (away from our class group) – you will always have the right to discuss your behaviour with me in non-class time ...”

Students will 'wear' the consequences of their behaviour if they know (in advance) that any consequences will be fair and will be carried out with as reasonable a consistency as we can (as they relate to our fair rights and rules in the SBA).

## **Developing a Student Behaviour Agreement with a form / tutor group**

In developing an SBA with our tutor / form group we will (as teachers) need to consider how to present the core ideas in our first meetings. (see Fig. 1.)

- RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES and how they relate to each other.
- How RULES are there for *everyone's* benefit; 'to give everyone a fair go'.
- How CONSEQUENCES are the outcome of our 'choices' and our actions. We are responsible, and accountable, for our choices and actions. This is life; there is a fundamental sense of justice here if (and when) the consequences are administered *fairly* and *reasonably* and *respectfully*.

The *core* rights (pp 1 – 4) are non-negotiable and always entail responsibilities eg :- we all have a right to have 'our person', 'our property' respected. Whether we enjoy that right depends on others – around us – being responsible in relation(ship) to us (and our property and our environment). We can't really have *one* (our rights to something ...) without the *other* (our responsibilities to others so they can enjoy those rights – *their* rights).

Even our *self-rights* (the right to 'relative good health') entail obvious responsibilities (ouch my tooth! I knew I shouldn't have kept drinking that crummy sweet lemonade ...)

Students are used to the language of rules from a very early age (at home, in sporting clubs, on the road, even in board games ...). A reference to this – in whole group discussion – can assist younger students to appreciate the 'why' of rules; the need for protection of fair rights, and common reminders about responsible behaviour.

What makes a good / fair rule?

What would happen if we didn't have rules? (say in a board game, on the road, in football / rugby / cricket / in a courtroom ...(?))

Some rules are non-negotiable (they are made *already* on our behalf) and some are semi-negotiable dependent (always) on protection of core rights (safety, fair respect and treatment, shared learning).

The *degree* of dialogue and discussion around these core themes of the SBA (rights, responsibilities, rules and consequences – see Fig. 1) depends in part on the comfort of the form teacher, in part on the age of the students.

## General discussion

I like to begin *any* discussion of *rights, rules* and *responsibilities* with a reference to why we're all here, together, in the first place.

Beyond our first, immediate, settling in (on day one as a form / tutor / house group) it will help to reaffirm that

“ ... we all share the same reason – and necessity – for *being here together* every day. We come together as a *special kind* of community; a learning community. Of course we spend a lot of time (hopefully *mainly* out of classroom time) ‘socialising’ with friends, but together in here (in our classroom) we seek to build a teaching and learning community. We share the same place, space, furniture; we *also* share the same feelings and needs – *all of us* ...”

Being aware of our rights and responsibilities means we are aware of our feelings, needs and relationships here ...

From here, the tutor / form teacher can begin to emphasise the core, *non-negotiable* rights *we all share* here in our school; in our class together.

As a visual learner I appreciate simple posters and key words so I like to have the key, *core*, rights listed with the key points underneath and use that for a basis for group discussion with the group. (See Fig. 2).

Some teachers prefer to discuss the rights and responsibilities as a more 'formal' exercise, with a printed sheet attenuating the *core rights* (and what they mean); the *core responsibilities* (and key, essential, examples of such ...); the *core rules* (and the elements of the rules) and the *core consequences* (and key examples).

I believe it is important to discuss – as a collegial team – how we can more effectively develop this student behaviour agreement through some shared student-teacher dialogue (or at least discussion) with each of our form / tutor groups.

It will be important to allocate a full class period for form / home group tutors to develop the SBA approach in the first meeting, first week, term one.

Some 'form' teachers find it helpful to have a 'lesson-plan format' for developing the SBA with their 'form' [year / tutor/ 'home' groups]. This approach supports the comfort-zone of form teachers who may not find whole-class discussions particularly 'easy' or 'comfortable'.

In some schools the SBA is simply a formal expression of shared expectations. If this is the case in your school *at the very least* give the students an opportunity to discuss, ask questions and clarify the SBA so that it is more than a mere *fait accompli*. It needs to be more than a printed page or two in the student diary!

By the end of the first week it is expected that all form tutors will hand back to their form [tutor / 'house'] groups a printed copy of the SBA as discussed and shared together in that first meeting together.

I would encourage colleagues to reflect on how they will utilise that first tutor / form group with respect to the concept, purpose and usage of the SBA.

## Subject teachers

Subject teachers obviously do not develop an SBA with each class group; they will, however, *refer to it* in their first session (with each class) as a reference point for shared understandings about behaviour and learning.

Teachers will obviously need to *contextualise rules* eg : in art / textiles / materials design tech. / I.T. / science / drama/ home economics, wood design / automotive workshop classes ... In these learning areas rules will need to be more focused on aspects of

safety, reasonable movement ... how to fairly get teacher assistance in a busy woodwork class!

The *core SBA* – though – is relevant at every year level, every age, every class group as it forms that shared understanding about behaviour – and learning – across the school community.

### **Key References :-**

- See - ROGERS, B. (1998) *You Know the Fair Rule and Much More ...*  
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(In the U.K. Paul Chapman, London).
- ROGERS, B. (2002) *Classroom Behaviour* Paul Chapman London.  
(Revised edition).

See also notes on :- *The Establishment Phase* (Practices and Skills) (2003).