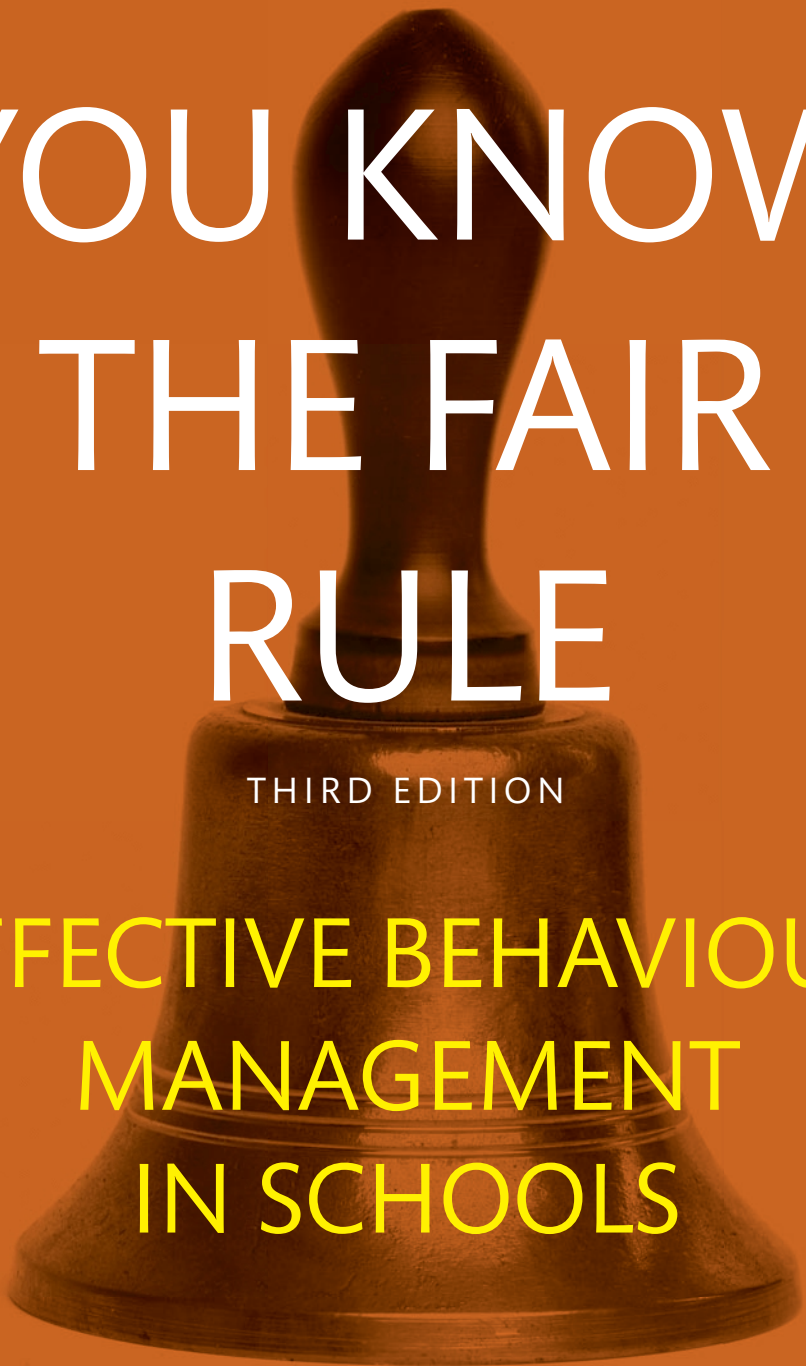
BILL ROGERS

YOU KNOW THE FAIR RULE

THIRD EDITION

EFFECTIVE BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS



ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

Bill Rogers has gained wide respect through his work as a consultant running in-service activities for teachers on classroom and whole-school discipline approaches. *You Know the Fair Rule* provides the depth of discussion and detail required to understand and implement Rogers' strategies.

How many of us have consciously planned how to respond to specific disruptive behaviour, such as students calling out or farting? Through detailed and realistic descriptions and discussions of classroom situations, Rogers builds up a wide repertoire of possible teacher actions.

Throughout the book, Rogers exhibits a compassionate understanding of the difficulties faced by teachers – who have 'one of the most demanding of all jobs'.

This book could (and should) usefully form the basis for teacher training programs on discipline. For those of us in the classroom – from kindergarten to secondary schools – it provides practical strategies for less stressful and more effective classes (and schools) for both students and teachers.

Joy Kite, *Education Quarterly*

Bill Rogers' *You Know the Fair Rule* is a very practical document; one can imagine a harassed teacher hastily consulting a relevant section before facing a difficult class. At the same time, the book is a logical text which deserves leisurely and thoughtful digestion.

The writing is relaxed without being colloquial, informative without being didactic. The text is set under clear headings and often expressed in point form, clarified by use of diagrams and flow charts and enlivened by Kevin Burgemeestre's humorous line drawings.

This book is, I feel, compulsory reading for all educators.

Anna Abbott, *Sydney Morning Herald*

Caveat: In a group setting, point out that it's not *all* the students: 'I'm not saying it's all of you (our voice is calmer now – slower – still concerned), but the rest of you allowed this to happen in our class …'

Sexist remarks, innuendo or touching

There are some student comments and behaviours that call for an unambiguous, assertive response from teachers to protect our rights or those of other students. Sexist remarks, innuendo and touching (including crowding, pinching and provocative gestures) are largely a problem for female teachers and can be quite debilitating to those unprepared for it. They include everything from comments about boyfriends to remarks about a teacher's body. No teacher should ever ignore this or excuse such talk. We have a right to personal dignity. Of course, like all conflict, the way it is managed will affect the nature and extent of the resolution.

> A Year 10 student comments on the female teacher's 'great gear' (her clothes). He says it in a sexually provocative way. She engages direct eye contact. The whole class watches the nonverbal exchange. Speaking from the front of the room she says, 'I don't comment on your clothes and I don't expect you to comment on mine.'
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> He swivels his head to his mates either side, postures with extended arms and protests, 'Jeez, I was just joking.'
>
> She adds, 'Maybe it's a joke to you. It's not to me. I don't expect comments like that. Now (…) let's get back to work.' She looks and sounds confident and convincing. She has judged that *this* comment, in *this* context, needed a degree of unambiguous assertion.

In my view we should never ignore (even tactically) sexist, homophobic or racist comments; even those said 'in fun'. We need to clearly, briefly and assertively address the behaviour – without moving into an argument. Always follow up such behaviours (one-to-one beyond class) to clarify the seriousness and unacceptability of such comments (p. 105).

Be clear in your own mind about unacceptable behaviour. 'Gee, you've got a great figure, Miss!' is different from specific remarks about body parts. If it is offensive to you then say so: 'That remark is offensive (or inappropriate)'.

Move away from, or block with your hand, those crowding behaviours students sometimes exhibit. Keep the response firm, brief, clear and decisive. With younger children who are touching or holding us out of natural affection, we will need to be much more diplomatic, distracting the child aside from his peers to explain our concerns.

Very young children sometimes make unthinking remarks about a teacher's appearance or clothes – they are not intended to hurt. This can often happen with children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

During the reading of a story to a Year 1 class, I remember a five-year-old boy sniffing my shoe and laughing. 'You got some poo on there, hee hee!' He pointed to my shoe. 'That's right.' I briefly acknowledged and distracted him (and the class) back to the flow of the story. It may be appropriate to point out to older students the unnecessary nature of the remark ('We know that remark is unnecessary right now') then refocus the class back to the flow of the lesson or dialogue.

The degree of assertion in language and nonverbal behaviour (such as tone and level of voice) depend on context and behaviour. A comment on a teacher's clothes said softly, in passing, might warrant a quiet drawing of the student aside for a brief one-to-one explanation of what is offensive (if anything) about the remark. The same comment made loudly, in front of a whole class, would occasion a firm, unambiguously assertive direction or command (p. 283).

Put-downs

A student in one of my Year 8 classes called out to a student in the front of the room. 'Jeez, you're a dog-face!' and started to laugh, quickly pulling in several of his coterie, who laughed with him.

I eyeballed him, without moving close, and said, 'Samuel (…) That's a put-down. That language is disgusting and totally unacceptable here.'

He started to argue, as he grinned to his mates: 'I was only joking.'

'That's not a joke in our room, *ever*. It's a put-down.' He started to butt in. I put up a blocking hand. 'I'll speak to you later.' I was clearly angry, but assertive. I followed up with the student (after class) to clarify the nature of his behaviour and work on restitution to the girl he had verbally abused.

Put-downs, if used frequently in class, should always be followed up on a one-to-one basis or form part of classroom meeting discussion on the nature of positive and hurtful language.

An assertive comment should refer to the affected right – briefly, clearly and as unambiguously as possible. The tone should convey our displeasure; even (where moral weight occasions it) our disgust. The tone needs to convey an appropriate expression of anger but with assertive control. Address the behaviour without attacking the student.

When we're assertive on issues that count, it is important for the individual or class to hear and feel the seriousness of the assertion (the 'moral weight') without it becoming a haranguing session or lecture.

Overlapping

> Mr S is sitting next to Ella trying to teach her how to calculate the long side of a right-angled triangle (the hypotenuse – remember?). He doesn't crowd or tower from behind but sits next to or alongside, or sometimes kneels to get to the student's eye level. While he is working with Ella, he hears Riley and Dimi talking really loudly. He turns his head and addresses them: 'Remember your partner voices, thanks.' He gives his attention back to Ella.

The teacher does two things while working with one student. He divides his attention briefly and decisively to discipline the two noisy students (a rule reminder) while staying with the student he was supporting. This is preferable to running from one behaviour issue to another. Jacob Kounin (1977) called this teacher strategy 'overlapping'. Keeping a regular eye-sweep, a teacher is able to 'overlap' their discipline within the teaching dynamic. My colleagues and I use the term 'relaxed vigilance'.

Overlapping works when teachers are aware of what is happening in the room. I once worked with a teacher who, apparently, didn't hear the stomping under the desk by an attentional five-year-old during the on-task phase of the lesson; another whose visual field missed the low-level play-fight on her left;

another who completely missed the paper-spitters on his right. That is not tactical ignoring, it is blind ignorance.

> Ms E is working with Noah (Year 1) at his desk. Jess comes up to ask for help. The teacher notices Jess waiting for five seconds and she immediately turns and encourages her. 'Thanks for waiting, Jess, I'm nearly finished with Noah.' She turns again to Noah. She gently calls over to Oliver, who looks like he's about to muck around with the maths blocks and diverts a possible disruption by giving a simple direction. 'Oliver, sit down, I'll be over in a minute.' She finishes with Noah and looks at Jess's work as she walks across the room. She marks it at Jess's desk, then proceeds towards Oliver, noticing two girls pushing and poking in the reading corner. She quietly walks over and gives them a directed choice. 'Marisa and Sinead (…) you can either both read quietly here, or I'll have to ask one of you to go back to your seat.' She uses brief eye contact. They stop. She moves off (take-up time). As she walks over to Oliver, she encourages Max and Con at their desks. 'You're working well on those maths problems. When you've finished you may go on with your spelling words, OK?' They smile and nod.

She gives feedback and indicates she is aware of what's going on; of what she'll tactically ignore and what she needs to address. She doesn't let incidents get out of hand. It's pointless waiting until there's a fight in the reading corner … Timing is important in discipline.

When overlapping, it will help to keep the following in mind:

- Correctly target distracting/disruptive students by briefly focusing on the rule, or their behaviour.
- Discipline from where you are. When working with X, discipline Y and Z *from that position* where possible.
- Give simple reminders, or directions; even directed choices. 'Layla, you can either work by our safety rule or I'll have to ask you to leave the experiment and sit over there.'
- Be brief in the direction of the disruption, then 'overlap' back to what you were doing. Expect compliance – act as if compliance or cooperation is the most natural outcome.

- When the distracting student has settled, go over (some minutes later) and give some specific encouragement. 'I see you've worked out how to do that problem there, Dimi – well done. How will you do the next one?'

Choices

Directed choices

Children sometimes bring *objets d'art* to the classroom (footy cards, comics, toys, iPods, nail varnish, mobile phones, etc.). These often interfere and distract from on-task learning. Rather than snatch up the distracting object, the teacher directs the student(s) to put them in their bag or on her desk. (I've never had a student yet say, 'Oh, thanks for giving me a "choice" within the fair rules. I'll put it on your desk. No worries!')

Some students will whinge, 'But I wasn't looking at the cards!' or 'using the phone'. Rather than argue, the teacher will refocus the student (but partially agree): 'Maybe you weren't. However, I want you to put the cards in your work-tray or on my table. Thanks.'

Two students have been talking (and restless) for ten minutes or so. The teacher has reminded them, twice. She walks across (she knows not to physically rush and thereby telegraph unnecessary emotional arousal). 'Riley and Ali (…), if you're finding it difficult to work here I'll have to ask you to work separately.'

She telegraphs the consequence as a 'choice' before applying the consequence. It is not a threat. It sounds as if she is putting the responsibility back on to them.

I'd asked Emily and Rafa to settle down to their work. They continued in bursts of laughter, culminating in Rafa falling off her chair. I made the 'choice' and consequences clear, as above. A few minutes later Rafa fell back off her chair. 'Rafa (…), bring your books and work over here. Thanks.'

Rafa grumbled and groaned but eventually walked over to the only spare seat (it was fortunate there was one!) and slammed her books down, sulking. Later in the lesson I went across for a brief chat to re-establish a working relationship.

It is important to communicate to children, especially older children (middle primary and onwards), in the 'language of choice'. Empty threats by teachers are quickly seen by children as meaningless: 'One more word, just one more word and it's 1000 lines for you, do you hear?' It is important to focus on the student's distracting behaviour and the likely consequences. One way of doing this is to present them with a *directed* choice. If we have given a direction, a warning, or restated the rule, or used a question–feedback approach and the child is still behaving disruptively, then they need to be given a clear 'choice' in the light of the fair rules and the appropriate consequences.

Relocation in the room

If a child has been given a directed choice to work quietly or face moving to another desk and refuses to move when asked, saying, 'I'm not going to move, you can't make me!' (power-broking time), there is little point in the teacher forcing a no-win battle, or sending the child out with a yell, 'Right, out! Get out of my class!' We refocus: 'If you choose not to work over there, I'll have to ask you to stay back and we'll discuss this at lunch', leaving them with a *deferred* consequence. If the student settles down at this point it is still important to follow up at some stage to address the argumentative behaviour in class.

It's also worth pointing out that few teachers can actually move a big, loud, 'tough' Year 10 or even Year 6 boy or girl (and that it's not worth all that attentional effort!). By using the 'language of choice' rather than threat, the teacher can enable face-saving. 'I'll have to ask you to move' is better than 'I'll *make* you sit down the back.' If they continue to act disruptively in a way that cannot be tactically ignored, we will then employ the exit and time-out procedures (see Chapter 6).

If a child is persistently calling out, and if tactical ignoring, rule reminder or simple directions are not working, the next step would be to give a choice via the rules: 'Cooper, you know the rule for asking questions (or communication or whatever the stated class rule is). If you continue to call out we will have to ask you to leave our discussion.' With smaller children who are persistently rude, brash and aggressive, direct them to sit away from the group or to face time-out procedures within the classroom (p. 163).