

THREE RS FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

The trigger for this article was a Twitter post in which a teacher shared a poster he was planning to use to create a safe and inclusive space in the changing room. It asked students to follow rules for how they speak to each other, such as avoiding discriminatory or negative language; most of them were prohibitive, i.e. “do not...”. He was seeking feedback from fellow practitioners to produce something useful and appropriate – and, in typical Twitter-style, received plenty! This response is not meant as criticism of that teacher: laudably he wanted all of his students to feel good about themselves. However, coinciding with the ‘party gate’ scandals that revealed some notable people’s reluctance to follow the Coronavirus rules, it did prompt me to consider the use of rules in school and in physical education (PE) in particular. How do rules and rule-making impact on young people, and how do we use them to promote positive behaviours in school?

Another catalyst are the recommendations – phone bans and silent corridors for example – that are regularly regurgitated in the media as ways to instil discipline in schools. Again, they are often restrictive. Indeed, the current chair of the Social Mobility Commission, Katharine Birbalsingh, who has been described as head teacher of the country’s strictest school, said, “I think all schools should be super-strict. It is about believing that children do best in an ordered and structured environment”¹. I completely agree that children and young people need clear and consistent boundaries within which to flourish. Having worked with young offenders, young people at risk of offending and those within the social care system, it is clear that an erratic flux between chaos and constriction has an adverse effect on their lives. However, given my reaction to some of Birbalsingh’s statements (and she has been likened to Marmite!), I suspect my views on how we create those boundaries might differ from hers.

I acknowledge that I am not a head teacher and have never had to manage the behaviour of a whole school. Nor am I a researcher or evidence-informed expert in behaviour management. The thoughts I share here are informed by my experience – and that of colleagues – of working with young people in a range of contexts: schools, youth work and outdoor education. They are also shaped by my ethos: I believe that education should be about youth participation and empowerment. In the words of the United Nations:

“Participation is a fundamental right. It is one of the guiding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that has been reiterated in many other Conventions and Declarations. Through active participation, young people are empowered to play a vital role in their own development as well as in that of their communities, helping them to learn vital life-skills, develop knowledge on human rights and citizenship and to promote positive civic action. To participate effectively, young people must be given the proper tools, such as information, education about and access to their civil rights.”²

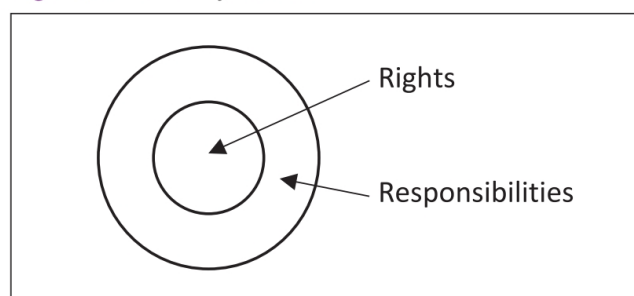
In this article, therefore, I would like to suggest a youth participation approach to rules and rule-making – one that PE is perfectly placed to lead for the whole school.

Rights and responsibilities

Rules tend to be seen as commandments, often proscriptive: “Thou shalt not...”. They can also be seen as the mechanism by which we balance rights and responsibilities. Rights – or freedoms – are what we want for ourselves. Responsibilities are our obligations to others. In pursuing what we want, we need to act responsibly and take account of external factors (people and the environment). In a model we used at Outward Bound™ (for which I do not have a reference), these were shown as concentric circles to reflect young people’s development.

As a child develops, these circles should expand in tandem. A five-year-old has relatively few freedoms and similarly few responsibilities: for example, they may play at home with a friend if they tidy up their toys afterwards. An adolescent expects greater freedom but has greater responsibility and accountability:

Figure 1: A healthy balance

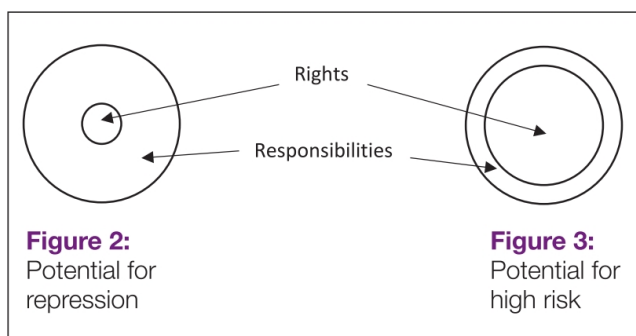


¹ Quoted in Schools Week (10th October 2021)

² <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-participation.pdf>

for example, they may visit friends when they choose if they have completed their homework and will be home by an agreed time. Balanced 'healthy' growth is achieved through ongoing negotiation between young people and adults. It operates at a systemic as well as interpersonal level. For example, we may only live in a beautiful, bio-diverse world if we live sustainably.

Imbalanced growth can have a negative effect on young people's development and lead to 'unhealthy' behaviours. For example, a young carer may have too few freedoms and too many responsibilities, leading to anxiety and a sense of repression. A young person who lacks parental support may have freedoms without the accompanying responsibilities, leading to risky behaviours.



There are weaknesses in this model. Some rights are absolute, enshrined in law or convention, and do not depend on concomitant responsibilities. For example, a child has a right to be safe and free from abuse irrespective of their personal actions. Sometimes the obligations are outwith the young person's control. For example, students may not be able to go climbing, even if they are ready and responsible, if the teacher isn't appropriately qualified. Adults' duty of care aims to protect young people's rights, but they may perceive it as a restriction of their freedoms. Nevertheless, the model provides a useful framework for rule-making with young people, in PE, school and life.



Relationships

At its simplest, the rights-responsibilities model can be used to explain the purpose of a rule to students. At the very least, they are enabled to understand why the rule stands and, even if they disagree with it, can recognise its purpose and validity: 'I am not allowed to do this (rights), because I do not have the relevant skills or authority (responsibilities)' or 'Our obligation to others (responsibilities) prevents us from behaving this way (rights)'.

At its best, though, the model is used to negotiate rules with young people. It asks them to consider the different or competing elements that need to be balanced and challenges us, as adults, to discuss with them what might change. In this way, it encourages both aspiration and a sense of duty: when I achieve X, I will be permitted to do Y; if we do Y, we may be able to do X. This is a motivating approach, preparing young people to take personal and collective action for change.

Crucially, this negotiation shifts the balance of power. Instead of dictating rules – don't do that because I say so – the teacher becomes a facilitator, involving students in analysing, making and upholding rules. Although more protracted in the short term, this can improve relationships between staff and students in the long term as the young people are no longer kicking against the authoritative figure: they have a stake in the rules. It also promotes positive relationships between students: they collaborate to create rules that respect their different needs and, as they are invested in them, are more likely to uphold them, individually and with their peers. Of course, there will still be some rules that are non-negotiable and the need for authority, especially in the physically risky world of PE. As mentioned earlier, young people's safety trumps all. However, for a youth participation approach to be effective, it is incumbent on practitioners to consider when, how and why they wield control. We cannot empower young people unless we are prepared to give up some of our own power. We need to learn to let go. The benefit is that when students understand risk-assessed rules, their behaviours will be safer, whether or not we are there.

Capabilities

Similarly, young people are only empowered if they are equipped with the knowledge, skills, understanding and values they need to negotiate the rules. For example, to balance rights and responsibilities and establish rules for an outdoor activity, they need to:

- know the context in which they will be working, e.g. environment, activity, equipment, weather, participants
- understand the variables and potential consequences, e.g. what happens if...
- have the necessary personal, social, cognitive and creative skills to negotiate, e.g. analyse, imagine, adapt, evaluate, decide, empathise, cooperate, trust and manage emotions
- share values, e.g. respect for self, others and the environment.

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues talks about four types of 'virtues' that are required for "practical wisdom... which enables us to perceive, know, desire and act with good sense" (See Table 1)³. If we are to empower young people to negotiate rules, such practical wisdom needs to be learned.

³ <https://bit.ly/3qxfLCb>

Table 1: The building blocks of character (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues).

INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES	MORAL VIRTUES	CIVIC VIRTUES	PERFORMANCE VIRTUES
Are necessary for discernment, right action and the pursuit of knowledge, truth and understanding.	Enable us to act well in situations that require an ethical response.	Are necessary for engaged responsible citizenship, contributing to the common good.	Have an instrumental value in enabling the intellectual, moral and civic virtues.
E.g. curiosity, judgement, reflection.	E.g. compassion, integrity, respect.	E.g. citizenship, civility, volunteering.	E.g. motivation, resilience, team work.

As with any other area of learning, it is an ongoing, progressive process and should be planned and taught in ways that are appropriate for the age and stage of the students. For example, moral virtues may be shown by five-year-olds as they discuss and apply rules for taking turns in a relay race. In an adolescent, moral virtues may be demonstrated in the way they adapt the rules of a net/wall game so it is fair for disabled players.

Importantly, students need to learn what such virtues look and sound like in practice, in PE, school and life. This supports them to adopt positive behaviours rather than just avoid negative ones. Rules can then become prescription not proscription: 'do...' instead of 'don't...'. These promote practical actions, leading to positive behaviour change. The slogan 'Stay at home, Protect the NHS, Save lives' was more motivational than the long lists of 'do not...' Covid rules. It also created an ethos that (most) people bought into – a guiding spirit for considerate behaviour rather than a list of restrictions that (some) people sought to circumvent. The students' negotiated rules can work in the same way: practical, pithy and persuasive.

Rights and responsibilities in PE

This might have sounded nebulous so far, but the vehicles for PE – physical activity and sport – are rooted in rules. Taking part invariably involves following, upholding or being penalised for breaking them. This makes PE the perfect subject for involving students in rule-making, and that includes the wider rules of behaviour not just the specific laws of a game.

Rules for sports and activities differ but, generally, they help to balance the same types of rights and responsibilities (see Table 2 for an example).

Unlike elite sport or formal competition, in PE the rules can be adapted by and for the students – as long as they support that balance of rights and responsibilities and the learning aims. For example, most of the mini-games that are played in primary schools today, such as tag rugby or high five netball, use rules that better balance the rights and responsibilities of younger children than the traditional rules do. The same is true for adapted sports, such as wheelchair basketball or blind cricket, for young disabled people. Enabling students to negotiate their own rules is a natural extension of this and supports differentiation as well as their tactical learning.

The same process is used to address rules for general behaviour in PE. As well as rules for physical safety, students can negotiate rules for emotional safety, drawing on, for example, the virtues of empathy, fairness and respect. Again, these should be presented as positive rules – 'I will choose any classmate to join my team' or 'I will give everyone constructive feedback' – rather than negative ones. Enabling the students to negotiate them deepens their understanding and commitment.

Opportunities

Schools across the country are already empowering students to negotiate rules – in and through PE. The following examples give a flavour of the different opportunities that PE and sport offer for promoting positive behaviours, both within the subject and in support of the whole school.

Preparing to play

Outdoor education is full of opportunities to engage students in rule-making. For example, for a climbing session, we need to sort equipment, pack rucksacks, drive to the site, walk in to the crag, and set up ropes and personal equipment, all before touching the rock face. From 'What equipment do we need

Table 2: Rights and responsibilities in physical activity and sport.

	<i>Sport and physical activity in general</i>	<i>In practice, e.g. rock climbing</i>
RIGHTS	I want to: - Take part - Be fully included - Be safe (physically and emotionally) - Have enjoyment - Pursue my goals - Have a sense of achievement	I want to: - Try at least two climbs - Access an appropriate pitch - Have a competent belayer - Receive encouragement - Set my own height limit - Be praised for progress
RESPONSIBILITIES	I need to: - Allow others to take part - Include others fully - Keep others safe - Play fairly - Respect those who uphold the rules - Respect the environment	I need to: - Take turns to climb - Take turns to belay - Communicate with the climber - Pay out the rope as required - Stop when instructed - Leave any vegetation alone

and why?’ to ‘What are the hazards of this site and how will we manage them?’ there are multiple moments in which to explore rights and responsibilities. School-based PE might offer fewer ‘preparation’ slots but any moment will do. For example, primary pupils can consider a question as they walk from their class to the hall: ‘What will help you to enjoy this lesson?’ or ‘How will you keep your classmates happy and safe?’. Secondary students can identify a right and a responsibility with a partner as they get changed or, where appropriate, research them as homework. Use previous rights and responsibilities posters as prompts.

Stop! Change the game

As mentioned earlier, students have many opportunities to negotiate rules when adapting games (and other activities). Use prompts, such as Table 2, to help them to explore what to adapt and why. This applies as much to young children as adolescents, only the questions change. For example, ‘Why do we want everyone in the team to have a go?’ and ‘How can we make sure they do?’ through to ‘Create a game that celebrates respect’. For secondary-age students, an ideal tool to negotiate rules during play is *Stop! Change the game* (courtesy of Ron Tully, formerly of Sports Leaders UK). Set up two officials whose role is to look for how rights and responsibilities are balanced within the activity. When they spot an imbalance, they shout, “Stop! Change the game” and suggest a rule change. They swop with two other players. Their suggestions can be weighted towards, for example, safety, inclusion or fair play according to the focus. Rule changes can be reviewed against rights and responsibilities as part of their evaluation and adopted for future, or not.

Officiating

Many schools already use sport-related tools as part of behaviour management. Young people may be shown red or yellow cards as warnings or go to the ‘sin bin’ and have time out to defuse. In a youth participation approach, students must be involved in negotiating the rules that, when broken, result in these sanctions. Real and recent analogies, from school or elite sport, can support the students to recognise the responsibilities (consequences) that relate to these misdemeanours. Use forums, such as sports councils, to nominate officials to work alongside adult behaviour managers.

Codes of conduct

Codes of conduct or charters almost always balance rights and responsibilities. At the start of each school year, work with groups of students to jointly agree your group charter. These not only establish the rules but enable staff and students to develop – and maintain – positive relationships from the outset. Make them simple but broad enough to relate to a range of potential behaviours and ensure they apply to staff as well as students: we agree to conduct ourselves in this way. Using a PE lesson to co-create a long-term agreement is well-worth the loss of one active session.

As part of Fit for Girls, a female PE teacher from Grangemouth High School in Scotland negotiates a contract with girls at the start of each year, gets everyone to sign it, gives them a personal copy and posts it at the entrance to the sports hall. It revolutionised her relationship with the girls and their attitude to PE. As part of the joint British Council/Youth Sport Trust Dreams+Teams youth leadership programme, we used the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴ as a stimulus. Young leaders discussed the most relevant rights then agreed how they would uphold them practically while running activity festivals. In

turn, the leaders created simple posters to share with the younger children. Many governing bodies or sporting organisations have codes of conduct, for players, officials, spectators and coaches. These might be sports-specific, such as the FA Respect Code of Conduct for Young Players, or issue-specific, such as the Leap Sports Scotland Manifesto for Inclusive PE (LGBTI). Use them as examples to get students started or to extend their awareness.

Values awards

As part of the London 2012 legacy education programme, I developed a set of Values Awards on behalf of the Get Set Community. These used the inspiration of the Olympic and Paralympic Values to enable children and young people to apply them in their own lives, in and beyond school. Participants took part in a wide range of online and practical challenges to earn their awards. There are many such value-based schemes, from UK Anti-doping’s Spirit of Sport to Rugby Union’s TREDs and the School Games Spirit of the Games. Typically they are used to reward young people’s manner of participation in PE and school sport, for example ‘Fair Play Award’ or ‘Team Work Award’, and some schools use them in other lessons as part of a whole school process. For a youth participation approach, it is the students who need to create these award schemes: from selecting the values and agreeing the criteria to nominating and awarding the recipients.

Life skills learning

Finally, as mentioned earlier, students can only negotiate rules if they have the underpinning knowledge, skills, understanding and values. It is easy to talk about creating a culture of equality and inclusion, but what does that look like in practice? Do we have a shared understanding? One tool that addresses this is the Youth Sport Trust’s My Personal Best programme, with variations for primary, secondary and special schools. My Personal Best supports teachers to embed life skills within the PE curriculum and make their teaching explicit within PE lessons. Learner cards for each skill provide simple definitions and exemplification. These are invaluable in enabling students to recognise, articulate and practise the life skills that inform our rights and responsibilities. Many schools use them within PE and as part of a whole school approach. Some, such as Clare Mount Specialist Sports College on the Wirral, also involve parents, using social media channels to highlight weekly skills.

Summary

As I write this, ‘party gate’ – and cases of broken rules – still dominates the headlines. Conversely, most of our young people demonstrated exemplary behaviours during the pandemic, despite the fact that Coronavirus seriously damaged the balance between their rights and responsibilities. Lockdown, home-learning and loss of contact with family and friends was, for many, incredibly repressive. At the same time, they were all too aware of the risks to those around them. So much for negotiating those rules. Yet this experience also demonstrated young people’s willingness and ability to navigate complex and changing rules. If they can do that in the midst of a global pandemic, undoubtedly, they have the capability to negotiate rules in PE. It is now the responsibility of practitioners to give them the right to do so! ■

Carol Hawman [afPE member]

Carol Hawman is a freelance author and trainer who has developed many resources and courses relating to young people’s wider development. She is a former youth worker and outdoor educator and now primarily works with schools.

⁴ Download a child-friendly version: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version>