

Book Review

Classroom Behaviour Management in the Post-School Sector – Student and Teacher Perspectives on the Battle Against Being Educated (Mervyn Lebor)
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Andy Armitage

Former Head of Post-Compulsory Education and Training at Canterbury Christ Church University

Former Ofsted FE Initial Teacher Education Lead Inspector

Mervyn Lebor's book is timely. With the raising of the participation age, post-14 teachers are being required to manage the learning of a wider range of students in an increasingly broader spectrum of institutional contexts. Many of these students, as Lebor demonstrates time and again, have little alternative to college and this (among other things) can lead to low motivation and disaffection. This difficult situation is hardly helped by government policy such as the requirement for students to retake English and mathematics GCSEs, which they are likely to have already failed and often more than once. This looms large in Lebor's interactions with students and teachers as a key driver of misbehaviour. In my experience, and in the view of the many student teachers Lebor consults, the nightmare of the new trainee teacher is of walking into a classroom and confronting a group they cannot control. And, as Lebor shows, a disturbing picture emerges of existing, experienced teachers lacking support in managing difficult behaviour, principally from managers who are more likely to see those teachers struggling to cope as demonstrating professional weakness rather than in need of developmental support.

Lebor offers a useful critical evaluation of the work of some of the gurus or leading theorists regarding behaviour management. He rightly points out that most of them

are concerned with the school sector and he notes that there are some fairly major differences which affect students in post-14 institutions: colleges are often on many sites, each of which may have a cultural identity of its own, as might each faculty or department; with 10-20,000 students, colleges are likely to be less personal communities; overall there is an older age group in colleges; most students will be spending a much shorter time in colleges than they will have done in schools.

Unfortunately, all this militates against a whole organisation approach to behaviour management, which Lebor believes, rightly I think, could only be beneficial for post-14 institutions and is often manifested in the behaviour policies of schools.

Although a small number of theorists have contributed to the debate about post-14 behaviour management, what distinguishes Lebor's book is the extent of primary research he has completed to support his discussion. He has used a wide range of research methods: surveys, case studies, interviews, focus groups, and observations. These elicit the views and experiences of many in the sector in a multi-perspective approach – of students, trainees, teachers, Teacher Educators, and managers. As a result, there is a vast richness of real, lived experience to draw upon. Each chapter is very clearly structured, with topics well signposted, and each ending has a helpful list of suggested strategies relating to the chapter's topics. These features facilitate accessibility and readers can dip into the book according to need and interest.

There is a very interesting chapter on digital learning which, as Lebor points out, is often seen as a panacea for behavioural problems but, as the author clearly shows,

brings with it a range of potential behavioural problems from cyber-bullying to plagiarism and the ghost writing of assignments.

Finally, Lebor addresses the question of how Teacher Educators should prepare trainees for managing disruptive classes. Although most of his Teacher Educator sample (85%) feel this preparation should be embedded across training programmes, the majority of his trainee sample (90%) feel a separate, discrete module would benefit them. The author then sketches out what the aims, objectives, content, and teaching and learning strategies are which such a module might contain. At a time when the Education and Training Foundation is consulting on how the Diploma in Education and Training might be enhanced, Lebor's suggestions here could prove timely.