

Powerful Learning

Disengaged Learners:

What the research tells us.

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The purpose of the research

To observe a range of teaching 14-19 in three centres of delivery in order to:

- Identify major challenges facing teachers in terms of learner behaviour
- Identify and evaluate strategies which appear most effective in addressing these
- Develop CPD materials based on best practice



The Research Method

- Colleges' own peer observation system used as a means of gathering data.
- These observer/participants later formed a focus group to scrutinise and discuss the data.
- Teachers were therefore involved as researchers as well as participants.
- Research now extended to colleges in Australia (TAFE).



Top five indicators of disengagement

- Lack of punctuality
- Not handing work in
- Phones
- Noise
- Lack of respect

The evidence suggests that disengagement manifests in broadly these same behaviours across all vocational areas, levels of ability and age groups.

Source: Wallace(2014)



Key Finding

Fewest instances of disengaged behaviour were observed in classes where the teacher appeared cheerful and happy to be there.



Reference

Wallace, S. (2014) When you're smiling: exploring how teachers motivate and engage learners in the further education sector. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* Vol 38, No.3, 346-360



Disengagement and Non-compliance

- A disengaged learner shows little or no interest or motivation to take an active role in their own learning.
- A non-compliant learner may be actively confrontational, refuse to do as asked, become argumentative or aggressive.
- A non-compliant learner is not always necessarily disengaged; and a disengaged learner is not necessarily actively non-compliant.



What are the causes of disengagement?



Who's to blame for learner disengagement?

There are conflicting views about this. All the following have been blamed at one time or another:

- The learners
- The teachers
- The college
- The status of the FE sector
- The vocational curriculum



Is learner disengagement the college's fault?

There are several strands to this argument. These include claims that colleges:

- make funding-led recruitment decisions which can result in the wrong learners on the wrong courses;
- do not have sufficiently robust behaviour policies;
- have the policies but do not apply them appropriately;
- are reluctant to exclude disengaged learners because college would lose funding;
- do not support teachers' efforts to establish boundaries of acceptable learner behaviour;
- are large and impersonal organisations in which learners feel unimportant and demotivated.



Other possible causes

Four main factors have been identified as immediate causes of learner disengagement and problem behaviour in FE. These are:

- Fear
- Boredom
- Previous negative experience
- Loss of hope

Source: Wallace (2007)



So what are the implications for our professional practice?

How can we, as teachers and managers and trainers, address some of these issues?



Strategies for encouraging engagement

These are known as the four Rs:

- **Reward** (Behaviourist)
- **Relationship** (Humanist)
- **Razzmatazz** (Behaviourist)
- **Respect** (Humanist)

Source: Wallace (2007)



Strategies for when disengagement becomes a behaviour issue

- **Tactical ignoring of bad behaviour (TIBBING)**

Source: Rogers, 2011

- **Assumption of Compliance**

Source: Wallace, 2012



Other useful strategies

- Look happy to be there.
- Choose your battles.
- Don't make threats and promises you can't keep.
- Avoid direct orders. They can lead to confrontation.
- Don't say, "Do this." Say, "I'd like you to do this."
- Make sure your body language says, "I like you but I'm in charge."
- Make sure the seating or workspace encourages engagement.



Case Studies

