

BOOK REVIEWS

***Disengagement from Education*, by Lynne Rogers**

London: Trentham Books, 2016, 188pp., £21.99 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-8585-6681-8

The challenge of maintaining students in education is not new. While legislation has generally increased expectations of the length of time young people spend in educational settings, no system has yet emerged that ensures engagement of all pupils.

In the UK, recent changes in provision for children with special educational needs has laid out responsibilities for the state to ensure provision of education, health and care plans for vulnerable young people until the age of 25. This covers the time bridging the end of statutory education and the beginning of some kind of economic activity, such as employment or training for employment. People recognizing the risks to physical and mental health and associated life chances arising from disengagement are publishing their findings in a number of arenas. Dr Rogers's timely contribution to this field is most welcome.

In the preface, the book sets out its aim to 'provide an evidence-based review of disengagement from education among young people aged 11 to 19' (page x). The first chapter, outlining the background, has useful definitions of disengagement, exploring the different meanings that are found in different parts of the world. This leads to an essay on understanding disengagement. I was a little surprised that the section on risk factors did not take into account the literature on the importance of analysing local conditions rather than relying on national statistics. These ideas are being used in many different areas of the UK and Europe. Nevertheless, the chapter is a useful primer in the field.

The chapter on secondary schools also has some useful information about the value of early interventions in mainstream contexts, although some information about the outcomes of these is omitted and would have been of interest. Similar comments are appropriate for the chapter on further education, vocational education, and training.

The next chapter summarizes the position for young people who have offended and may be in custody. This is an excellent contribution, with many useful statistics and references about an area significantly under-represented in most educational publications.

In subsequent chapters about young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), about special educational needs, about transitions, and about alternative provision there are many excellent examples. I particularly liked the celebration of staff working in alternative provision. This is a much-neglected area in education and I am sure that staff reading these chapters will smile at the recognition of their dedication and hard work.

At the risk of giving way to dyspepsia, the book has a number of gaps. Much information is given about different interventions found in different countries, sometimes illustrated with insightful vignettes and personal accounts from people involved. However, there is no information about their effectiveness. Some evaluation of the initiatives and the impact they have had on the lives of young people would have been very useful. References are made to the importance of the role of teachers in the lives of the young people at the heart of the text and there are some practical ideas, which no doubt represent good practice, but the evidence of outcomes is omitted. This is unfortunate, as evidence of the importance of managing the transition between school and work is available. Political drivers are not given much prominence either. The work

by organizations such as the National Audit Office (www.nao.org.uk), who have calculated the financial cost of disengagement and the cost/benefit of early intervention, would also have been worthy of mention.

The influence of structural unemployment is not considered. For some young people, dropping out of education in order to get an early foothold in the world of work (whether legal or not) can be a very attractive proposition. Disengagement from education can have different interpretations when the young person actively engages with some other activity.

In a book so clearly well researched and providing a strong international perspective, I would have expected to see some reference to transnational projects, such as the Safe Arrivals Project (Baker and Nemcova, 2015), but I note that the publication date may mean that such information was not available.

Similarly, the book may have gone to press before the outcomes of the EU presidential summit in Luxembourg in July 2015 were published, although other references from this time are included. The summit addressed this area and included nearly all of the EU member states. Whatever future relationship the UK may have with the rest of Europe, the concerns about disengagement will transcend national boundaries and the policy documents will be useful in many different contexts.

Finally, I would have liked to see a theoretical model being applied. Models help the reader to conceptualize and analyse the field. Models do exist in this area, and some reference might have enhanced the structure of the information.

These criticisms are small when compared with the enormous amount of information provided about the state of education for hard-to-reach students. There are numerous examples of good practice and a wealth of ideas. The book is well written and nicely structured, and is likely to inspire those charged with reaching out to disengaged and potentially disengaged students with new approaches and energy in a field too often passed over. It will be a very useful addition to the shelves of school and college staffrooms, and in particular to the shelves of policymakers who have genuine concern for improving the outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

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Reference

Baker, T., and Nemcova, M. (eds) (2015) *Arriving Safely in the Future: Methods and interventions to reduce drop-outs*. Oldbury: Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.