

Book reviews

Papantuono M., Portelli, C. & Gibson, P. (2014). *Winning without fighting: A teacher's handbook for effective solutions for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in students*. Malta University Publishing. ISBN 978-99909-44-66-2, Pg 275.

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About twenty percent of school children experience social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, such as behaviour or conduct problems, anxiety and depression, during the course of any given year, and may need the use of mental health services. The prevalence of such difficulties has been on the increase in the past decades. A report on adolescent health just published by WHO in 2014, portrays depression as the top global cause of illness and disability amongst adolescents, with suicide being the third-biggest cause of death. The report mentions that half of mental health difficulties begin before the age of 14, underlining the need for early intervention and mental health promotion from an early age.

A book like *Winning without fighting: A Teacher's Handbook of Effective Solutions for Social, Emotional, Behavioral Difficulties in Student* is thus very welcome in such a landscape, particularly for teachers faced with challenging behaviour in their classroom. Challenging behaviour is a major source of stress for classroom teachers, with teachers in Europe spending about 15% of teaching time dealing with misbehavior. *Winning without fighting* offers teachers a practical but evidence and theory based guide on how to take "informed and effective action" when faced with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties in the classroom. Unlike many other texts in the area, however, Papatuono, Portelli and Gisbon, provide a text with a difference. It focuses on one particular approach to behaviour change, namely the Brief Constructivist-Strategic approach, providing teachers and practitioners with a new lens on behaviour problems, "a major shift from traditional child theories and the ordinary ways of defining and intervening on children's difficulties" The book is based on decades of action research and practice carried out by practitioners in clinics, schools and other contexts making use of this approach to behaviour change.

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Winning without fighting is a valuable, refreshing and complementary addition to the many texts on behaviour management based on cognitive – behaviour interventions, provoking teachers and practitioners to be bold in making use of non common sense, non ordinary logic, paradoxical and contradictory strategies which have been used for many years by practitioners working within this approach. It moves away from the medicalization, categorization, diagnosis and pathologising of children’s behaviour, encouraging instead a new lens focusing on a constructivist and strategic model of behaviour, on dysfunctional interactions, on systemic and circular models of interaction, and on operative solutions to problems. Through a number of chapters ranging from theory to interventions to specific behaviour problems to case studies, Papatuono, Portelli, and Gibson provide a number of useful tools for classroom teachers on how to deal with difficult and seemingly impossible behaviours in different and novel ways. The practitioner is provided with operative knowledge which enables him or her to construct their own interventions as they arise in their classroom and put them into practice within an action research framework. A detailed step by step problem solving model, constructing the problem from an operative perspective and identifying concrete practical ways the problem could be solved, is presented in Chapter 4.

The first section of the book which presents a ‘new lens’ from which to look at, understand and solve social, emotional and behaviour problems in school, is followed by a second section featuring common difficulties presented by children and young people, including fear, pain, anger and pleasure based problems, and a third section on effective non ordinary interventions. A very useful chapter at the end of the book presents a number of detailed case studies (stories from practice) illustrating effective strategies. The whole book is written in a very accessible but engaging and practitioner-friendly style, with numerous examples and case study boxes illustrating effective solutions to problems, and very effective use of imagery coupled with numerous proverbs and quotations underlining the issues being discussed by the authors interspersed throughout the book.

This book seeks to provide school teachers, practitioners, educators, and parents amongst others with a new lens, practical tools and effective solutions to challenging behaviour in children and young people. It provides hope to practitioners in the face of seemingly impossible ‘no-win’ situations, encouraging them to take effective control of the situation through ‘non common sense’ practical, effective and ‘winning’ interventions. *Winning without fighting* should thus be an invaluable resource for adults working with children and young people manifesting social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, a roadmap in their journey to find the key to effective solutions for challenging behaviours.