

***European Parents' Association and Step by Step International Conference:
School as the Training Ground for Active Citizenship for Parents and Children***

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Keynote Presentation:

***Future horizons for parental involvement and family support in
and around schools in Europe: An agenda for system reform***

Dr Paul Downes

Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre
Senior Lecturer in Education (Psychology)

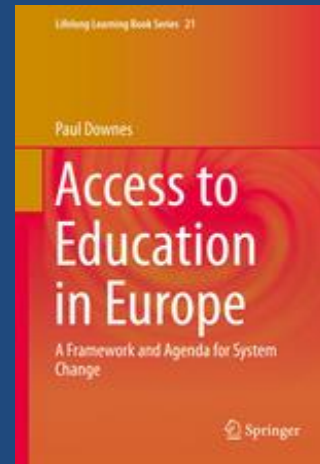
Member of the European Commission Network of Experts on the Social
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St. Patrick's College
paul.downes@dcu.ie



RESEARCH:

- 1) 10 city European study on parental involvement for early school leaving prevention (Downes 2014)
- 2) 12 country European study on Lifelong learning (Downes 2014a)
- 3) Report for European Commission on School Bullying in Europe (Downes & Cefai 2016)



A. Parental input to school policies and practices for democratic inclusive school systems – as a children's rights issue and child welfare and child protection issue (Downes 2014)

Responses to specific needs of their children in school:

- Bullying,
- Authoritarian teaching,
- Academic difficulties

- *Reframing of Parental Involvement - This communication also needs to be as part of the *student voices'* communication process – **parental involvement is both part of respect of the right of the child to be heard and part of an active citizenship process**

***Focus on concrete issues of school policy that matter to students and parents**

*** Issues that require school system change (including to hierarchy of communication)**

***Issues of conflict, specific problems with school actors, policies**

***Anticipated problems might include: bullying, negative interactions with individual teacher, behavioural difficulties of student, learning problems of student, questioning of quality of teaching instruction**

Serious Consequences of Bullying

There is a growing recognition of the serious impact of school bullying.

Frequent victimisation is associated with suicide attempts and completion, anxiety, depression, self-harm. Bullying perpetrators are at risk of subsequent psychiatric symptoms, violent behaviour, anti-social personality disorder. International studies also associate bullying experiences with early school-leaving.



Bullying prevention is a child welfare and child protection issue (Downes & Cefai 2016).

School Bullying and Parental Engagement

Langford et al.'s (2014) Cochrane Review for the WHO on health promoting school interventions highlighted that 'The majority of studies only attempted to engage with families (rather than the community), most commonly by sending out newsletters to parents. Other activities included: family homework assignments, parent information evenings or training workshops, family events, or inviting parents to become members of the school health committee'.

Downes & Cefai (2016): Again this emphasis is overwhelmingly one where the parent is a passive recipient of information, with the exception of the example of the invitation for them to be members of the school health committee.



Parental involvement in school policy making:

- beyond reliance mainly on formalistic parents council approaches for engaging marginalised parents
- beyond discussion in the abstract

*For issues that matter to students and parents

* That require school system change (including to hierarchy of communication)

*Issues of conflict, specific problems with school actors, policies bullying, negative interactions with individual teacher, behavioural difficulties of student, learning problems of student, questioning of quality of teaching instruction

Communicative processes need to be put in place to address these conflicts – these are system issues and not simply individual parent concerns

Reframing of Parental Involvement

This communication also needs to be as part of the student voices' communication process – **parental involvement is both part of respect of the right of the child to be heard and part of an active citizenship process**

Can municipalities foster dialogue processes ? Interviews, focus groups in a neutral space...

Authoritarian Teaching as a Parental Involvement Policy Issue

Pyhältö et al. (2010) Finland, 518 students, 9th grade, 6 schools:
'unjustified and authoritarian behaviour that undermined pupil's agency was considered as a source of burden, anxiety, and anger'

WHO (2012) Modifications that appear to have merit include:

- establishing a caring atmosphere that promotes autonomy;
- providing positive feedback;
- **not publicly humiliating students who perform poorly;**
- identifying and promoting young people's special interests and skills to acknowledge that schools value the diversity they bring



No sunlight ! (Downes & Maunsell 2007)



“I can’t wait to leave, I would leave tomorrow if I had the choice because I get picked on by a teacher”

“No some[teachers] think they own the school”

Downes' (2004) student centered research in Ballyfermot, Dublin, 12 focus groups and 173 questionnaire responses from secondary students:

“Have anger management courses for teachers”
(female, focus group):

“The teachers shouting at you. That makes me really, really down” (Age 13, F)

“If the teachers didn't roar at you” (Age 13, F)

“Have an equal teaching system and sack ignorant snobby teachers...very harsh teachers usually make me stay out of school” (Age 16, M)



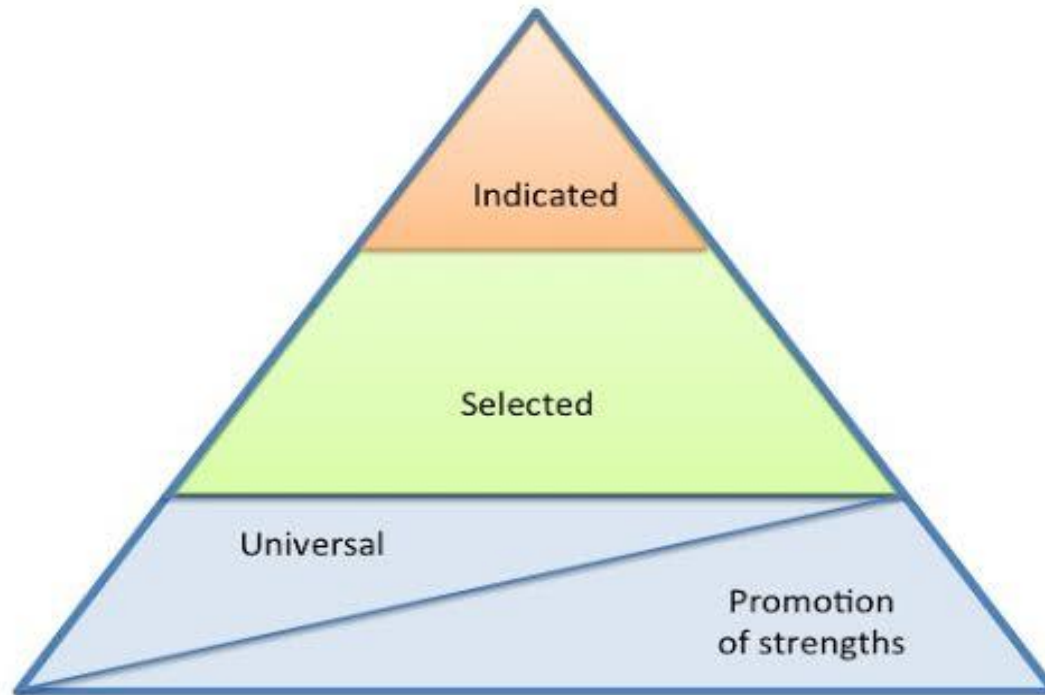
B Multidisciplinary 1 stop shop – Community Lifelong Learning Centres and Family Support Centres (Downes 2014a)

For parenting support that is close to home and easily accessible, parents in Eindhoven can go to a so-called SPIL centre in their neighbourhood. The name is derived from Spelen (play), Integreren (integration) and Leren (learning) and the Centre is built around primary education, playgroups and childcare. Other services may be added, such as parenting support, child welfare, youth healthcare and social work (Eurochild 2011).

Community outreach and health-education bridges for family support and parental involvement

- Eurochild report (2011) Nordrhein-Westfalen state programme *Familienzentrum* has been launched by the government in order to develop up to 3,000 children's day-care facilities into family centres by the year 2012.
- Between 2006 and 2012 approx. 3,000 of the total 9,000 child care centres in the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) are being developed into certified “Familienzentren” (family centres). Family centres are designed to bundle services for families in the local community. (Eurochild 2011, p.44)
- Eurochild (2011) argue for such family support centres to be universally available

Figure 1. Building on Strengths and Differentiated Levels of Need: Promotion and Prevention Levels



Indicated prevention level (chronic need, intensive individual focus)
Selected prevention level (moderate risk, groups focus)

C. Schools as Site of Community Lifelong Learning After School Hours, Weekends, Summers

Parental Involvement (Downes 2014a): Structural Indicator - **Availability of School Site After School Hours for Lifelong Learning Classes for Parents**

Country	On a scale of 1-3 where 3 means at least 80% of schools in your municipality open their doors after school hours for lifelong learning classes and 2 means at least 30% of schools do so and 1 means less than 30% of schools do so – which number best describes the situation in your municipality?
The Hague	3
Gijon	3
Tallinn	2
Stockholm	2
Antwerp	1
Usti	1
Munich	1
Nantes	1
Sofia	1

Overcoming System Blockages: Beyond Intergenerational Splits in Policy to Lifewide Community Lifelong Centres to Engage Ethnic Minorities such as Roma

Balkan Sunflowers NGO in Fushë Kosova, early school leaving rates over the two years of the Learning Centre operation decreased dramatically, from 120 in 2007-2008 to 14 in 2009-2010. Primary school enrolment has more than tripled in Gracanica since the Centre's opening in 2004 from 25 to 85 children.

According to figures from Balkan Sunflowers NGO in Fushë Kosova, early school leaving rates over the two years of the Learning Centre operation decreased dramatically, from 120 in 2007-2008 to 14 in 2009-2010. Primary school enrolment has more than tripled in Gracanica since the Centre's opening in 2004 from 25 to 85 children.



Balkan Sunflowers

Volunteers for Social Reconstruction

None of the children attending Gracanica Learning Centre dropped out of primary school in 2010, while only one child in Plemetina dropped out of school that year. 75% of all registered Roma children in Plemetina attend the Learning Centre, while girls' school attendance has increased and there are currently 58 girls in primary school

- **Local community lifelong learning centre**
 - **Life-wide**
- **School as site of community education**

Education outreach supports for parents in
community lifelong learning centres (Downes 2014),
other community sites (Parent cafes, shops, churches,
mosques, pubs)

D. Quality Standards for Parental Involvement and Family Support for Inclusive Systems in and around Schools at European Level

Developing Structural Indicators for school system review and reform to ensure parents' engagement is no longer a Cinderella Issue

- EU Commission Quality Mark for Children and Young People's Voices and Democratic Communication to be heard in school together with a similar Quality Mark for Parental Involvement (Downes 2014, PREVENT project)
- *Opportunities for parents to respond individually and in groups to the findings of the student surveys as part of input to school policy (Yes/No)
- *Clear role of municipality or other local agency to mediate dialogue between school and parents on policy issues (Yes/No)
- *Specific key workers in school for parental involvement
YES/NO
- *External inspection of schools includes a focus on parental involvement for marginalised groups YES/NO

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