Promoting Smooth Educational Pathways: Universal Strategies for Early School Leaving Prevention and to Promote Educational Success

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A. Curricular approaches: Social, Emotional Learning

The Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011 review highlights a range of benefits focusing on 6 outcomes: SEL skills, Attitudes, Positive Social Behaviour, Conduct Problems, Emotional Distress and Academic Performance.

A study of more than 213 programs found that if a school implements a quality SEL curriculum, they can expect better student behavior and an 11 point increase in test scores (Durlak et al 2011). The gains that schools see in achievement come from a variety of factors—students feel safer and more connected to school and academics, SEL programs build work habits in addition to social skills, and children and teachers build strong relationships.

Durlak et al.'s (2011) review found most success for those SEL approaches that incorporated four key combined SAFE features:

Sequenced step-by-step training,

active forms of learning,

focus sufficient time on skill development

explicit learning goals.

Another key finding was that classroom teachers and other school staff effectively conducted SEL programmes so these interventions can be incorporated into routine educational activities and do not require outside personnel.

A limitation acknowledged in Durlak et al.'s (2011) review is that nearly one third of the reports reviewed contained no information on student ethnicity or socioeconomic status. 56% were delivered to primary school students, 31 % to middle school students. A further limitation is that most of the reviewed studies took place in a US cultural context and may not thus directly transfer their relevance to European contexts.

Aber et al. (2011): New York: The 4Rs Program: Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution The 4Rs Program is a universal, school-based intervention that integrates Social and Emotional Learning into the language arts curriculum for kindergarten through Grade 5.

the 4Rs uses high-quality children's literature as a springboard for helping students gain skills and understanding in several areas including handling anger, listening, cooperation, assertiveness, and negotiation.

Some Intended outcomes

Gains in students':

- attendance rates

- social-emotional mental health

- social competence and peer network communication

- reading achievement and maths achievement

Reduction in students':

- depression

- aggressive behaviour

Gains in quality of teachers':

- classroom management strategies and styles, including conflict resolution skills

Actual outcomes:

- After 2 years of exposure to 4Rs, in addition to continued positive changes in children's self-reported hostile attributional biases and depression, positive changes were also found in children's reports of aggressive interpersonal negotiation strategies (i.e., their tendency to select aggressive responses in conflict situations), and teacher reports of children's attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), social competence, and aggressive behavior

Aber et al., (2011) 'Similarly, there were both continued and expanded positive impacts of the program for children rated by their classroom teacher as highest in initial behavioral risk. Specifically, compared to similarly identified children in control schools, children in 4Rs schools at highest initial behavioral risk continued to show the most substantial gains in teacher reports of academic skills, but also in both standardized reading and math achievement test scores' (p.415)

Aber et al., (2011) 'these findings indicate both short-term and longer term impacts of the 4Rs program both for the general population of students as well as for those students at highest behavioral risk as perceived by their teachers.' (p.415)

B. School Climate

B1   Teacher conflict resolution skills and cultural competence

B2   Student participation and voices

B3   Whole School Approach: Health promoting school

B4   Transition to postprimary

B 1. Teacher conflict resolution skills and cultural competence

Key results observed in TALIS (OECD 2009) include:
• One teacher in four in most countries loses at least 30% of the lesson time, and some lose more than half, in disruptions and administrative tasks – and this is closely associated with classroom disciplinary climate, which varies more among individual teachers than among schools

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'

In Poland (CBOS 2006), a national survey of 3,085 students, 900 teachers and 554 parents, across 150 schools

-Concerning conflict with teachers, a clear difference between primary and postprimary students emerged. 33% of students had at least one conflict with a teacher in a school year in primary school, 52% in gymnasium and 54% post-gymnasium.

-Experience of school violence from teachers towards students was reported directly as being hit or knocked over by 6% of students with 13% reporting having observed this occur for others. Teachers' use of offensive language towards students was reported by 16% as having been experienced directly individually and 28% as observed towards other students.

Cefai & Cooper (2010), Malta review of qualitative research: 'the autocratic and rigid behaviour management approach adopted by many teachers in their response to misbehaviour. Their blaming and punitive approach was seen in many cases as leading to an exacerbation of the problem...It looks...that perceived victimisation by teachers was more prevalent and had more impact than victimisation and bullying by peers'

A number of US longitudinal studies provide evidence that a teacher's report of a supportive relationship with a student has positive effects on elementary students' behavioral and academic adjustment (Curby, Rimm-Kaufman, & Ponitz, 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes, Cavell, & Jackson, 1999; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008).

Dublin, Ireland survey (Downes et al., 2006) of students in 4 primary (n=230) and 2 secondary schools (n=162):

*Approximately 74% of pupils at primary level (6th class) and 55% of students at secondary level (first year) stated that they are treated fairly by teachers in school.

*Approximately 15% of pupils at primary level (6th class) state that they are not treated fairly by teachers in school, whereas 25% of students at secondary level (first year) state that they are not treated fairly by teachers in school.

*These differences between 6th class primary and 1st year secondary are statistically significant.

In the EU Commission public consultation 'Schools for the 21st century', classroom management strategies were raised as an issue needing to be better addressed by teacher initial education.

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 2.   Student participation and voices: Art 12 UN Convention on Rights of the Child

Day et al. (2015) EU Commission Review

*'In practice, however, there is an immense variation in the quality and extent of participatory practices within educational settings' (p.219)

- 'In many schools across Europe, however, children's participation is focused principally on formal school structures and committees, and levels of participation in wider decisions relating to teaching and learning, school policies (including for behavior, bullying and exclusion) remain low across the EU' (p.219)

- 'need to go beyond ad hoc project-based opportunities and develop mechanisms for sustained participation' (p.227)

- Distinguishes participation in terms of children as individuals, groups of children and children as a group (p.232) whom may have more limited opportunities to participate than other children' (p.235)

Article 12 (1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which declares: 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'

Practical guidelines for child participation includes 'develop targeted measures to support the participation of vulnerable, marginalised and/or disadvantaged groups such as Roma, children with disabilities, asylum seeking and refugee children,

'a promising model used in several [European] countries is that of training 'young inspectors' to participate on an equal footing as adults in holding services to account, although these examples have tended to be small scale' (p.219)

OVERCOMING SYSTEM BLOCKAGES IN COMMUNICATION (Downes 2014)
Inclusive Systems as Voice – Voices of Students
Inclusive Systems as Systems of Care – Conflict Resolution Skills of Teachers

*In Iceland, Brigisdottir (2013) highlights a process of communication with those dropping out from school, whereby the students are interviewed individually by an education Ministry official to find out why they are leaving school early.

*Yet this dialogue with students arguably comes too late in the process and needs systematic expression at a range of earlier stages as part of a Europe-wide prevention focus (Downes 2013)
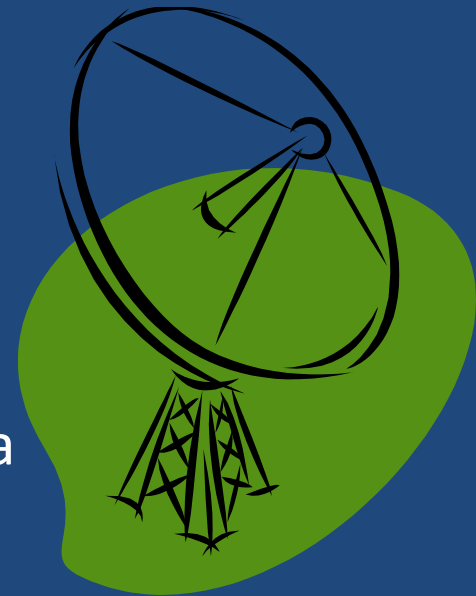
Students' Voices – A Clear Gap in the EU Council and Commission Documents (2011) on Early School Leaving Prevention

EU Commission Thematic Working Group on early school leaving report (2013):

"Ensure children and young people are at the centre of all policies aimed at reducing ESL. Ensure their voices are taken into account when developing and implementing such policies."

B 3. Whole School Approach: Health promoting school

Part of their criteria for inclusion of studies in their review was that they are based on the WHO Health Promoting Schools Framework that includes a focus on each of the following areas:

*School curriculum

*Ethos or environment of the school or both

*Engagement with families or communities or both.

Five pillars of the Schools for Health in Europe network approach to school health promotion are whole school approach to health, participation, school quality, evidence, schools and communities (Buijs 2009).

B 4 TRANSITION

Lester et al.'s (2013) Australian study, 3459 students aged 11–14 years during the transition from primary to the end of the second year of secondary school.

*victimisation significantly increased over the first year of secondary school.
*did not collect information on transition activities offered by primary schools

C. Common Strategies with Bullying Prevention

*Victimisation is associated with lower school attendance in quantitative (Kochendorfer & Ladd 1996, Brown et al., 2011) and qualitative research (Downes 2004, Irish Parliament and Senate Committee 2010)

*children who are bullied are more likely to experience impaired concentration in class (Boulton et al., 2008), want to avoid school (e.g., Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Olweus, 1993; Slee 1995; Rigby 1997) or even leave school early (Fried & Fried, 1996).

*evidence suggests that the effects of bullying are exacerbated for those already at risk of early school leaving; Beran (2008) concluded that preadolescents who are bullied are at some risk for demonstrating poor achievement, although this risk increases substantially if the child also receives little support from parents and is already disengaged from school.

*The Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England (Green et al., 2010) age 16 young people who reported being bullied at any point between ages 14-16 are disproportionately likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET)

Pyhältö, Soini and Pietarinen's (2010) research in six schools in Finland of 518 students in 9th grade highlights the importance of a peer interaction focus for factors associated with early school leaving, such as bullying prevention and a sense of belonging and satisfaction in school students who bully others demonstrate more negative perceptions of their relationships with their teachers (Bacchini, Esposito, & Affuso, 2009).

Students who bully others are more likely to have low academic competence (Strabstein & Piazza, 2008), are often more unhappy at school (Zubrick et al., 1997) and demonstrate an increased likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviour (Van der Wal et al., 2003)

Bullying increases at points of transition between primary and postprimary school in Australian (Rigby 1996) and US (Pellegrini 2002) contexts.

European bullying research final report Bulgarian section, Europe's Anti-bullying Campaign Project, December 2012: *Европейско изследване в областта на тормоза. Резултати от изследване в България.* Author: NGO *The Smile of the Child*

- 1067 children 51:49 boys: girls

- An electronic anonymous questionnaire connected to bullying in school is used and used questions like:

   They call people names or insults because of the colour of their skin or their ethnic origin where 36.50% with students - happens especially with Roma students

Orpinas et al., (2014). The US sample consisted of racially diverse students (n 675) attending sixth Grade from 9 different schools. Different compositions of problem behaviors, learning difficulties, internalizing challenges, and low assets were related to early school leaving.

Results highlight the importance of early interventions to improve academic performance, reduce externalizing behaviors, and enhance social assets

Fortin et al., (2006) highlight externalizing behaviours, such as aggression with peers, as an important factor in early school leaving.

US study, Cornell et al. (2013) found that one standard deviation increases in student and teacher-reported Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying were associated with 16.5% and 10.8% increases in dropout counts, respectively, holding all other variables constant:

A basic conclusion from our study is that the Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying in high schools deserves serious consideration by educators in addressing the problem of dropout. In a sample of 276 high schools, the level of teasing and bullying reported by both ninth-grade students and teachers was predictive of cumulative dropout counts over 4 years after the cohort reached 12th grade. (p.145)

Cornell et al. (2013) continue:

Because educators are often concerned about the impact of student poverty and academic capability on dropout rates in their schools, these findings suggest that a climate of teasing and bullying in the school also deserves consideration. Notably, the increased dropout count that was associated with Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying was quite similar to the increases that were associated with FRPM [i.e., poverty] and academic failure. (p.146)

Cornell et al. (2013) highlight bullying as an issue of communication and trust, 'teasing and bullying may be a neglected source of decay to the social capital of schools that generates an atmosphere of mistrust and alienation, animosity and fear that ultimately pushes students to abandon their educational aspirations' (p.147).

D. Emotional and mental health supports

INCLUSIVE SYSTEMS AS EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Poverty impacts on mental health, mental health impacts on early school leaving

- Mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, disruptive behaviour disorders, eating disorders, or post-traumatic stress disorder, can negatively impact on a child's school success, as well as general well-being (Kessler 2009; World Health Organization 2003)

- Children living in low-income families are especially vulnerable to mental health difficulties (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2009; US Department of Health and Human Services 2001).

Quiroga et al. (2013) 493 high-risk French-speaking adolescents living in Montreal

*depression symptoms at the beginning of secondary school are related to higher dropout mainly by being associated with pessimistic views about the likelihood to reach desired school outcomes; student negative self-beliefs are in turn related to lower self-reported academic performance and predict a higher risk of dropping out.

Quiroga et al. (2013) "interventions that target student mental health and negative self-perceptions are likely to improve dropout prevention".
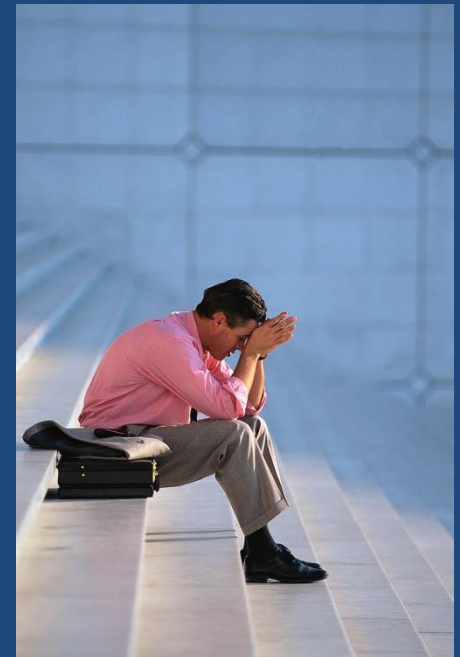
Emotional trauma (bereavement, rape, sexual abuse, bullying, family break up, sleep related problems) – supports needed to prevent early school leaving

Irish Parliament and Senate Report on early school leaving (2010): Case studies of those who left school early due to trauma factors of rape, bereavement, sexual abuse

Wider referral processes – reach withdrawn kids
-Evidence suggests that the emotional support needs of withdrawn students, who are at risk of early school leaving, may be missed by teachers compared with those students displaying and externalising problems through aggression (Doll 1996; Downes 2004).

Downes & Maunsell (2007):
"Why do you think some people are dying ? Because there is no one to talk to"
- "we should do more personal development"
- "girls slit their wrists"
- "girls take tablets and slice their wrists"
- "girls sleeping around to hurt themselves, other ways instead of slitting wrists"

D. 1 Alternatives to suspension

Alternatives to Suspension/Expulsion to Stop Diametrically Opposing Strategic Approaches

Suspension rates themselves are predictive of dropout rates (T. Lee, Cornell, Gregory & Fan, 2011).

An English study by Rennison *et al.*, (2005) found that young people in the NEET [Not in Education, Employment or Training] group were over three times more likely previously to have been excluded from school than young people overall.

E. Professional Development

An acceleration of focus on early school leaving prevention at CPD level:

teacher conflict resolution skills, diversity awareness and cultural competence,

capacity to provide social and emotional support,

skills in working interprofessionally with a view to playing a key role in referral processes for vulnerable and marginalised children and youth,

abilities to foster democratic classroom environments centred on voices of children and young people, including through the arts, and bullying prevention approaches

F. Parental involvement

System Blockage as Resistance – Parental Involvement

In a Swedish context, Bouakaz & Persson (2007) ask 'do the teachers' distrust parents ?'
the 'apparent' official organization and the
'below the surface' unofficial organisation
(Scholtes 1998).

Resistance as it is perceived as peripheral to main job (PREVENT 2014) – put parental involvement in teachers' contracts and promotional posts (O'Reilly 2012)

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…

Downes (2014) 10 City report: 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 ?

A quality label for social inclusion: rationale

- **Promotes** sharing good practice across institutions and beyond – promoting attitude and conceptual change, promoting and not simply preventing
- While a quality label could clearly be applied to a municipality's local action plan for early school leaving prevention – a more positive quality label is needed for schools on issues related to early school leaving *together with bullying prevention*:
- *Inclusive systems
- *Relational systems
- *Democratic systems
- The Quality Label would include all the themes highlighted

A-F together with a focus on additional supports at the high risk level (indicated prevention) such as multidisciplinary teams (Edwards & Downes 2013)

Levels of assessment (Karin Doolan 2015, personal communication)

General assessment	Points	Description
Fully implemented (A)	8	Yes, fully achieved; the evaluation of effects has been externally reviewed and recognised.
	7	Yes, fully achieved; the evaluation of effects is in progress.
	6	Yes, but the evaluation of effects still needs to be carried out.
Partially implemented (B)	5	Relevant processes are underway and a large number of staff, students and programmes are involved.
	4	Relevant processes are underway but only a small number of staff, students and programmes are involved.
Beginning phase (C)	3	No, but a plan has been fully developed.
	2	No, but an initial plan is being develped.
	1	No, but there is awareness about the need to change.
Not started (D)	0	Not being considered.
	N/A	Not relevant.

Challenges with a quality label for social inclusion in education

- **Time consuming**: may be particularly problematic for smaller units of assessment;

- **Costs**: depend on the nature of the quality label process, but include both direct and indirect costs;

- **Long-term commitment** required: from the unit of assessment and co-ordinating body. (Karin Doolan 2015, personal communication)

- Danger of **displacement of focus** from national strategic issues onto education institution level

- Need to sustain a cross-sectoral focus for social inclusion in education (Edwards & Downes 2013) and not simply a school or university based one

- EU Countries have developed school inspection systems so structural indicators and quality labels could be built into these existing quality processes

- Potential key role of municipalities/local authorities both as recipients and implementers of quality labels for schools for social inclusion

- * Develop Local Action Plans for Early School Leaving guided by structural indicators and establish Local Support Groups for these, including schools and NGOs (See Downes 2014a, 2015 and PREVENT project across 10 municipalities)

- Quality label for these local action plans and for individual schools in a municipality

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