BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY -
A STRATEGIC FOCUS ON CONTEXTS
OF DISADVANTAGE

Dr. Paul Downes
Director,
Educational Disadvantage Centre
Senior Lecturer in Education (Psychology)
St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra,
paul.downes@spd.dcu.ie

Wednesday July 1 2009
• Reports:

• Number of Schools Targeted:
  * Primary: 18
  * Post-Primary: 9

Number of Questionnaires returned:
  * Primary: 932
  * Secondary: 747
  * Total: 1,679
  * Focus Groups: 57

Consultations with members of local communities: 96
Priority Issues

1. Building on Strengths – Intentions to Stay on at School until Leaving Cert
2. Conflict Resolution Skills for Teachers
3. Student Leadership Strategy
4. Part-time work and Transition Year
5. Links with Out of School Services: Student Leadership
6. Alternatives to Suspension
7. Authoritative Leadership in Schools
8. Mentoring
9. Beyond Failure Identity
Building on Strengths – Intentions to Stay on at School until Leaving Cert


The number of 1st year students in secondary schools wanting to stay on until the Leaving Certificate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No 12

Yes 143
1st Year response to the question: “Do you think you want to stay on at school until the Leaving Certificate?” (Excluding don’t know and no answers)
2nd Year response to the question: “Do you think you want to stay on at school until the Leaving Certificate?” (Excluding don’t know and no answers)
5th Year response to the question: “Do you think you want to stay on at school until the Leaving Certificate?” (Excluding don’t know and no answers)
• Perceptions of being treated unfairly by teachers were exceptionally high at 50% of student responses in the fifth year group of one school, with 29% who stated that they were treated fairly by teachers being an exceptionally low figure. This is clearly a matter of concern and there is a need to move to a less authoritarian school climate in that school. The finding, in the US, of MacIver et al (1991) is relevant in this context, namely, that external pressure did bring increased motivation among middle school students but not among high school students.
Perceptions of being treated unfairly by teachers were particularly high in the school which was observed in an earlier section to have a particularly high proportion of 5th year students who stated that they did not want to stay on at school until the Leaving Certificate. It is clear that this problem needs to be addressed as part of a holistic strategy for school completion until Leaving Certificate.
Responses from students who perceived that they were not treated fairly by teachers include the following:

- “No some think they own the school”
- “The students aren’t treated fairly, I don’t know why, they just don’t and it’s very clear”
- “No they pick on certain students”
- “Fairly by some but teachers that hated another family member they think you’re like them when you’re not”
- “Most of them are very, very nice but there is just 1 or 2 that I don’t like one bit”
- “Mainly yes but 1 or 2 can be discouraging towards me. I am a good student and do my work mostly so they shouldn’t have a reason to be unfair”
- “No some teachers would talk to you rashly & then act so sweet in front of your parents”
- “No they pick on certain students”
- “No cause some teachers are bullies towards the students”
- “I’m leaving after the Junior because I hate it”

Would change “the way the teachers treat the students”

- “I can’t wait to leave, I would leave tomorrow if I had the choice because I get picked on by a teacher”
The issue of perceptions of being treated fairly or otherwise in school needs to move beyond an individualised focus on the individual teacher or student to a systems’ level analysis. It is a systems’ level problem and improvement of this problem requires a systems’ level type of intervention, for example, at a national level with regard to teachers of working on their *conflict resolution strategies* and awareness of educational disadvantage at pre-service and in-service levels.
The focus needs to move beyond attributing ‘blame’ to teachers or students and to move to examining the systems’ level problem. There is a need to support improvements at a systemic level that will support an increase in skills to facilitate better communication and cooperation between teachers and students at secondary level in particular. The proposed community based psychological support service for the area can play a key role in developing conflict resolution skills for system level change at secondary level in particular.
A distinctive feature of the South West Inner City area is its strong grassroots community based projects. There is a need to develop a medium and long-term strategy throughout the area to ensure that this extremely valuable tradition of local community leadership is continued and developed.

There is a need for an area wide strategy to develop new leaders in the community. Accredited community leadership training courses need to be accessed, though the site of these courses does not necessarily have to be within the local area itself. Increased development of students’ councils among the local primary and secondary schools can facilitate future community leaders among local youth.
Previous research in the Blanchardstown context found that 63% of all second level students in the Blanchardstown area have a part-time job – and a third of this are working over 17 hours per week (BYS & BAP 2000). Burtenshaw Kenny Associates (2005) noted that JEDI:

Challenged the perception that career guidance is for young people who have educational qualifications and are interested in progressing to third level education. It made guidance accessible for one hundred and twenty seven young people who are interested in reestablishing their career path. Many of these young people availed of two or more guidance sessions.
The figures provided by Forkan (2005) are as follows: Of the 844 students who started second level education in 1995 in 5 schools in Blanchardstown, **30% left school early**

9% of males, 7% of females had left school by the time they would have sat their Junior Certificate (average ESL 8%; overall retention rate to Junior Certificate 92%)

Another 24% of males and 20% of females had left school before Leaving Certificate

Of the 805 students who started second level education in 1996 in the 5 schools, **30% left school early**

8% of males, 3% of females had left school by the time they would have sat their Junior Certificate (average ESL 6%; overall retention rate to Junior Certificate 94%)

Another 27% of males and 20% of females had left school before Leaving Certificate
Forkan (2005) observed that many young people in Blanchardstown did not know the consequences of early school leaving. His examination of school leaving patterns concluded that a clear majority of students from both cohorts ‘left school during the Senior Cycle’ and:
Recommended that consideration be given to the different character of early school leaving when it occurs after a young person has attained a Junior Certificate qualification
It is important to emphasise that a decision to leave school after Junior Certificate is the end product of an ongoing process from the beginning of secondary school and arguably earlier. As a process of alienation from the school system, it is important to recognise that leaving the school system after Junior Certificate may share a range of similarities with those who leave school prior to Junior Certificate. Nevertheless it is arguable that there is a need to develop discussion of a career plan with students as early as possible at secondary level in conjunction with the Career Guidance teacher.
This attempt at developing an individual plan for the student at second level seeks to remedy the situation noted by Forkan (2005) that some students do not realise the consequences of early school leaving. It can incorporate issues of the effect of part-time work on the student’s study habits and school performance within part of this career plan and can require the student to officially inform the school of part-time work and hours involved as well as to schedule a meeting with the Career Guidance teacher to work out a plan for study in relation to this work. The plan allows for the planning for time management and may explore how the work may relate to any of the student’s course or project work and be linked to it in some way in Transition Year.
It communicates the need for high expectations with regard to the student’s learning and future career; the basic approach of such planning is a cognitive-behavioural one where the student sets realistic goals and targets and receives feedback on these targets. A constructivist approach of consulting with students about how transition year can be developed and made more relevant to their lives is to be recommended and students’ perceptions of the relevance and status of transition year may need to be challenged.
For example, one of the Youthreach interviewees stated with regard to transition year: “Transition year? “That’s only for people that are slow” (Female, age 15). Some student focus groups in the Ballyfermot study emphasised the transition from Junior Certificate to 5th year as being a time when students particularly need academic support as the adjustment to the academic level of 5th year can be particularly difficult and the workload intensive if students have not done the transition year (4th year).
QDOSS: An Agenda for Development

QDOSS is calling for a national strategy on Out of School Services – a strategy that is sensitive to the needs of local contexts.
• Key Structures Underpinning Out-of-School Services

• Out-of-School Services: Bridging Health and Education

• Needs

• Out-of-School Services: Contribution to Development of School Climate
ALTERNATIVES TO SUSPENSION


- It is a matter of concern that suspension is being used as a strategy in at least one primary school in the South Inner City area. There is a need for a supervised time out area in every school for children with disruptive behaviour and to resource alternative strategies to suspension from school.

- There is a need for a supervised time out area for children and young people with disruptive behaviour.

- Any such supervised time out area requires support from counsellors, whether this is school or community based.
Some 6th class responses on this theme are as follows:

- “If you swing on a chair that’s enough for a suspension”
  - “She suspended 7 boys”
- “I was one of the boys who got suspended, cos being very cheeky”
  - “Need suspension only for serious things”
- “About 8 out of 17 suspended, she suspended 7 people in one day”
  - “Worst thing about school “getting suspended”
- “He says if you do that boy you’ll be out of the school in a second and you’ll never come back”
- “He threatens you, I’ll suspend you, I’ll expel you and you’ll never come back”
  - “Get suspended for taking a sup of water

[It must be noted that these comments are the subjective perceptions of pupils though with strong internal consistency in their responses]
Interviewed early school leavers also raised the issue of the need for alternatives to suspension at second level:

- “Suspension is stupid, just gives them a break”
- “getting sent home for 3 days isn’t punishment”
  - “sit outside the door for hours”
  - “Teachers leave you in corridor”
- “Suspended for phone ringing in class and for talking”
- “Suspended for not doing homework”
- “Three bookings and then detention, bookings for very little i.e. talking or being a minute late”

One service provider in the SICCDA study suggests that: “suspension used a lot, need to put something in place if suspended, not much endeavour to keep them in school.”
Suggestions for alternatives to suspension in secondary schools made by a range of local services strongly resonate with recommendations made at a national in-service of School Completion Programme to ‘improve the climate for teaching and learning in classrooms’ included at the ‘school systems’ level: ‘Requirement for alternative needs based individual curriculum with elements of youth work approach’

• ‘Requirement of a room/area of school devoted to difficult students with professionals delivering extra support in anger management/personal development/core subjects. Time and space sanctioned for this work’

• ‘Alternatives to suspensions/expulsion/reduced timetables such as restorative justice practices/one to one small group tuition/circle time etc’

• ‘More positive rewards and acknowledgement of positive or good behaviour systems for earning awards’

• ‘Curricular adjustment to involve practical tasks’
In the 2006 Blanchardstown study, a range of service providers raised the issue of the need for alternative strategies in secondary school to that of suspension, with many referring to the need for a ‘time out’ room:

'We need a time out room in the post primary school as most of our target students hang out in the assembly hall if they have been asked to leave class', there is a need to do 'constructive work' with them

Need a ‘more holistic approach to student behaviour’ ‘suspensions are a waste of time/something else, some other means of working positively with kids’ ‘review the suspension theory’ ‘create a more positive environment’ ‘A more practical approach to bad behaviour’
Eliminate suspensions and work towards dealing with issues alternatively.’
‘Time out for certain students (e.g., perceived as being at risk) to engage in more tailor built programmes i.e., students with poor attendance records who may also have substance use issues either themselves or within their families or peers’
‘More engagement with relevant services/providers, time out and off site education, tailor made programmes, small target group work i.e. substance users’
‘Develop a model of withdrawal/return’
‘Creative ways of school retention to Leaving Certificate’
These points echo somewhat the criticism of ‘suspension’ noted in Forkan’s (2005) research in Blanchardstown:

‘being suspended and “kicked out of school” was a dream come true...in many cases they were out of school more often than in it, which was exactly what they wanted...It was suggested that instead of suspending an individual, the school should punish them by keeping them in school and making them do the work they should be doing’

As noted already with regard to developing opportunities for at risk pupils to develop practical skills, another SCP (2005) report cites as an example of good practice from the Dublin North Region a social and personal development programme that includes a garden for time out for disruptive students during school time, as well as being available during lunchtime and afterschool.
The development of an inclusive and equality agenda in primary schools requires strong leadership from school principals and (Boards of Management) BOM throughout the country. The onus will be on both the principals and BOM to:
• Manage and foster an ethos of inclusion in their schools;
• Promote and facilitate co-ordination between school personnel and personnel from statutory, community and voluntary services;
• Develop and implement inclusive enrolment and integration policies;
• Promote policies and practice pertaining to parents as equal partners;
• Promote understanding of educational inequality at personal and institutional levels and the manner in which the school can contribute to the marginalization of children and their families from the system;
• Ensure that the cultures of all children are reflected equally throughout the school;
• Ensure flexible teaching to meet the diverse needs of pupils;
• Ensure delivery of the full primary school curriculum.
This is a significant challenge. In this regard it is proposed that leadership training be provided to principals and BOM of primary schools around the country. It is recommended that the proposed mobile in-service education teams and regional educational structures would view this as an area of immediate concern upon their establishment and facilitate this leadership training to take place at the earliest possible stage. It is also recommended that the mobile in-service education teams would work in partnership with the community and voluntary sector in the development and delivery of this training.
In the 2004 Ballyfermot study some focus groups at secondary level were of the view that mentoring from older students would work better with regard to bullying than with regard to substance abuse, as the danger was that older students would be involved in more ‘advanced’ levels of substance abuse.
The potential for a high percentage of the cohort of students in Ballyfermot to stay on at school until the Leaving Certificate offers an extremely important resource for the future of Ballyfermot. The need arises for a strategy to ensure that the talents of young school leavers are channelled back into the community to a significant extent. The service to meet the psychological needs of children/youth in Ballyfermot that was recommended in the 2004 report can only provide one small part of that overall strategy through seeking to develop peer support and mentoring programmes between local youth.
In the 2006 Blanchardstown study, it was stressed that the good practice of mentoring between Irish students and foreign nationals, as well as with students from the Travelling Community, which takes place in individual classes needs to be adopted at a systemic level across all schools in Blanchardstown.
“the need to provide recognition of achievement, particularly for more marginal students. Recognition is seen as a preventative measure which avoids some pupils being seen as failures and lessens the chances of premature drop out” (MacDevitt 1998)
Kellaghan et al (1995), commenting on the experience of U.S prevention of early school leaving schemes:

“success in one kind of target domain may have a snowball effect on other kinds so that the net beneficial effect may be greater than predicted for any one domain” (p.90)
A plethora of educational theorists and educational psychologists recognise the danger of labelling students as failures (e.g. Merrett 1986; Glasser 1969; Warnock 1977; Handy & Aitken 1990; Kellaghan et al 1995; MacDevitt 1998; Kelly 1999) with the consequent knock-on effect of early school drop out.
Kellaghan et al 1995:

“A first influence [on early school drop out] is school failure. While there may be occasions when young people who are doing well may leave school, the vast majority will have had a history of doing badly. The issue of school failure is intimately related to the breadth/limits of the curriculum. With a broader curriculum, there is a greater chance of achieving success in some domains, while a curriculum which is based on academic learning only will ensure success only for those with an academic aptitude”
Gardner’s (1993) examination of multiple types of intelligence in educational psychology highlights the need for the educational system to be flexible enough to allow for expression of different types of intelligence and not just linguistic (verbal) ability.
In O'Donnabhain's (1998) words:

“As the IFAPLAN working document reported, it was no longer possible for schools to insist on young people fitting into whatever the school decided. Disgruntled young people react in one of two ways - they either rebel openly and cause major discipline problems or they simply drop out and grow up as a part of the deviant section of the society. Thus many educational initiatives attempt to put the young persons at the centre and allow the learning environment to grow around them so that they can develop a sense of active citizenship”
Working with Young People

Constructivist psychology approaches:

- Small group work
- Cultural relevance issues
- Their ownership over the process
- Public speaking skills
Target Groups for SBP?

- ‘Cherry picking’ brightest students who may go to university anyway?
- Working with lower streamed students?
- Working with gifted though alienated students?
- Working with teachers?
- Working with principals?
- Working with Community organisations?
Wider Issues for Contexts of Disadvantage
PRIORITY ISSUES

- Developing school climate at post-primary level
- Developing teachers’ early literacy instruction skills
- A mental health strategy and fund for contexts of socio economic disadvantage
- Community development and lifelong learning
Developing school climate at post-primary level

- No sunlight! Not money!............
- NDP ........................................
- Transition – not merely a problem of the individual
- H.Dip........................................
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAP 28</td>
<td>M. Darmody</td>
<td>Strengthening the school social climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAP 34</td>
<td>P. Downes et al.</td>
<td>The jolt between primary and post-primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAP 35</td>
<td>C. Maunsell et al.</td>
<td>Primary to post-primary: Perceptions of pupils with special educational needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAP 36</td>
<td>G. Farrelly</td>
<td>Bullying and social context: Challenges for schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAP 38</td>
<td>A. Murphy</td>
<td>Peer mediation: The power and importance of children’s voices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developing teachers’ early literacy instruction skills

- Speech and language – system level skills for teachers and parents

- NDP – ring-fenced funding
  - an aspect of drug prevention

- More hours in curriculum? Integrate with other subjects

- Motivation and reading

- Arts and literacy: Fear of failure – process drama for language, emotions and social skills
BEYOND EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE
(Downes P & Gilligan A. L. Eds 2007).

Relevant chapters:

- CHAP 15: S. Quinn ..... ‘Only brainy and boring people read’
- CHAP 16: S. Kazmierczak ....... Preventing potential weaknesses in early literacy instruction
- CHAP 17: Y. Mullan ...... Raising literacy levels locally
- CHAP 18: E. Kennedy ..... Literacy in designated disadvantaged schools
- CHAP 25: C. Hefferon ..... A model of drama for educational disadvantage
- CHAP 26: P. Murphy .... Drama as radical pedagogy
- CHAP 27: D. Butler & J. Kelly .... The digital era: Empowerment or digital divide ?
A mental health strategy and fund for contexts of socio-economic disadvantage

- Not one early school leaving problem: ESL is a behaviour with a range of motivations
- Beyond piecemeal approach of SCP, beyond 8 week bereavement courses
- Wider referral processes – reach withdrawn kids: ‘a slap in the face’
- Need for prevention and early intervention: non-verbal
- Alternatives to suspension
- Drug prevention issue
- NEPS
BEYOND EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE
(Downes P & Gilligan A. L. Eds 2007).

Relevant chapters:

- CHAP 29: M.C. Byrne.... Health for all
- CHAP 30: C. Ryan & P. Downes.... Future steps for NEPS ?
- CHAP 37: T. Hegarty.... Towards a narrative practice: Conversations in a city centre school
- CHAP 39: P. Downes & A-L Gilligan.... Some conclusions
Community development and lifelong learning

- Schools as a community resource: e.g. Nicholas of Myra
- Collaboration not contracting out
- Parent peer support – Freirean models
- Community leaders from ethnic minorities including Travellers
- HSL – evenings, wider than teacher-only
- Regional educational structures
BEYOND EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE
(Downes P & Gilligan A. L. Eds 2007).

Relevant chapters:

CHAP 11: L. Bane....A seagull’s view- Adult and community education
CHAP 12: D. Mulkerrins....The transformational potential of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme
CHAP 13: T. Owens.... The development of men’s community education in Ireland
CHAP 14: L. Waters....Community education: A view from the margins
CHAP 22: A. Boyle.... Traveller parents and early childhood education
Morgan (1998) cites Kaplan et al’s (1994) North American study of 4,141 young people tested in 7th grade and once again as young adults which found a significant damaging effect of dropping out of high school on mental health functioning as measured by a 10-item self-derogation scale, a 9-item anxiety scale, a 6-item depression scale and a 6-item scale designed to measure coping.
This effect was also evident when controls were applied for psychological mental health as measured at 7th grade. Moreover, the significant damaging effect of dropping out of school was also evident even when controls were applied for gender, father’s occupational status, and significantly for comparability.
EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AS A % OF GDP

IRELAND 2005: 4.6%
OECD AVERAGE 2005: 5.8%
IRELAND 2000: 4.5%
IRELAND 1995: 5.2%

JOINT 20TH OF 29 COUNTRIES FOR PRIMARY/SECONDARY/POSTSECONDARY NONTERTIARY
Galbraith – The Culture of Contentment (1992)

BUILDING ON STRENGTHS
DO YOU THINK YOU WANT TO STAY ON AT SCHOOL UNTIL THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE?

Primary Pupils: 5th/6th Class
Total: 750 yes 80 no
2 probably 15 don’t know
15 no answer
Era 1: Joe Lee – no policy

Era 2: Isolated programmes, territories, some attempts at strategies: Some progress
Teachers’ Unions as Driving Forces Early On
- Ad hoc SCP, Isolated HSL, Narrow Behaviour Support Service, Unfocused In-service

Era 3: ???
ERA 3: ???
- The Drive for Evaluation and its Limitations: Causes need supporting conditions to ‘work’
Holistic Strategies: Teams not individuals, developmental and lifelong focus, community development and schools
School as community focal point?
HENRY KISSINGER: “EVEN THE MOST AFFLUENT COUNTRIES WILL CONFRONT SHRINKING RESOURCES. EACH WILL HAVE TO REDEFINE ITS NATIONAL PRIORITIES” 20 JAN 2009 ‘THE INDEPENDENT’
- A PEELING AWAY OF INVESTMENT?

ERA 3: ???
- THE KEY ROLE OF UNIONS
- WHAT ARE THE MISSING ELEMENTS OF A HOLISTIC STRATEGY?
NO MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY FOR CONTEXTS OF EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE: A KEY BARRIER TO PROGRESS
EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IS A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE!

A mental health strategy and fund for contexts of socio-economic disadvantage
Not one early school leaving problem: ESL is a behaviour with a range of motivations
Beyond piecemeal approach of SCP, beyond 8 week bereavement courses
Wider referral processes – reach withdrawn kids: ‘a slap in the face’
Need for prevention and early intervention: non-verbal therapeutic intervention Cf. Familiscope NEPS – Reactive to critical incidents
Alternatives to suspension
Drug prevention issue
### The Need for Community Based Emotional Supports

**Would you talk to an adult working in the school about your problems?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe/depends</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

The table above shows the distribution of responses to the question of whether students would talk to an adult working in the school about their problems. The responses are categorized under primary and secondary school levels. The numbers indicate the number of students who chose each response option.
A DISTINCT FUNDING STRAND FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE SUPPORTED BY FUNDING FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND LAW REFORM FOR MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENTS AT RISK OF SUSPENSION/EXPULSION - INCLUDING MEDIATORS
References:


References cont.,


