

Reducing Early School Leaving in Education: The Role of Universities

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Dr Paul Downes

Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre

Associate Professor of Education (Psychology)

Member of the European Commission Network of Experts on the
Social Aspects of Education and Training (NESET I & II) (2011-2018)
and NESET II Coordinating Committee (2014-18)

Institute of Education

Dublin City University, Ireland

paul.downes@dcu.ie



EU2020 *Headline* Targets for Education

1. The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10 %.
2. The share of 30–34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40 % [This implies a focus on access to higher education for socio-economically marginalised groups]



* The OECD's *10 Steps to Equity in Education* (2007, 2010) omitted a key range of dimensions with regard to prevention of early school leaving, namely, emotional-relational aspects (Downes 2010, 2011, 2017).

The Emotional-Relational Turn for ESL and Inclusive Systems

*Bridging health and education (Downes & Gilligan 2007, Downes, Nairz-Wirth & Rusinaite 2017)



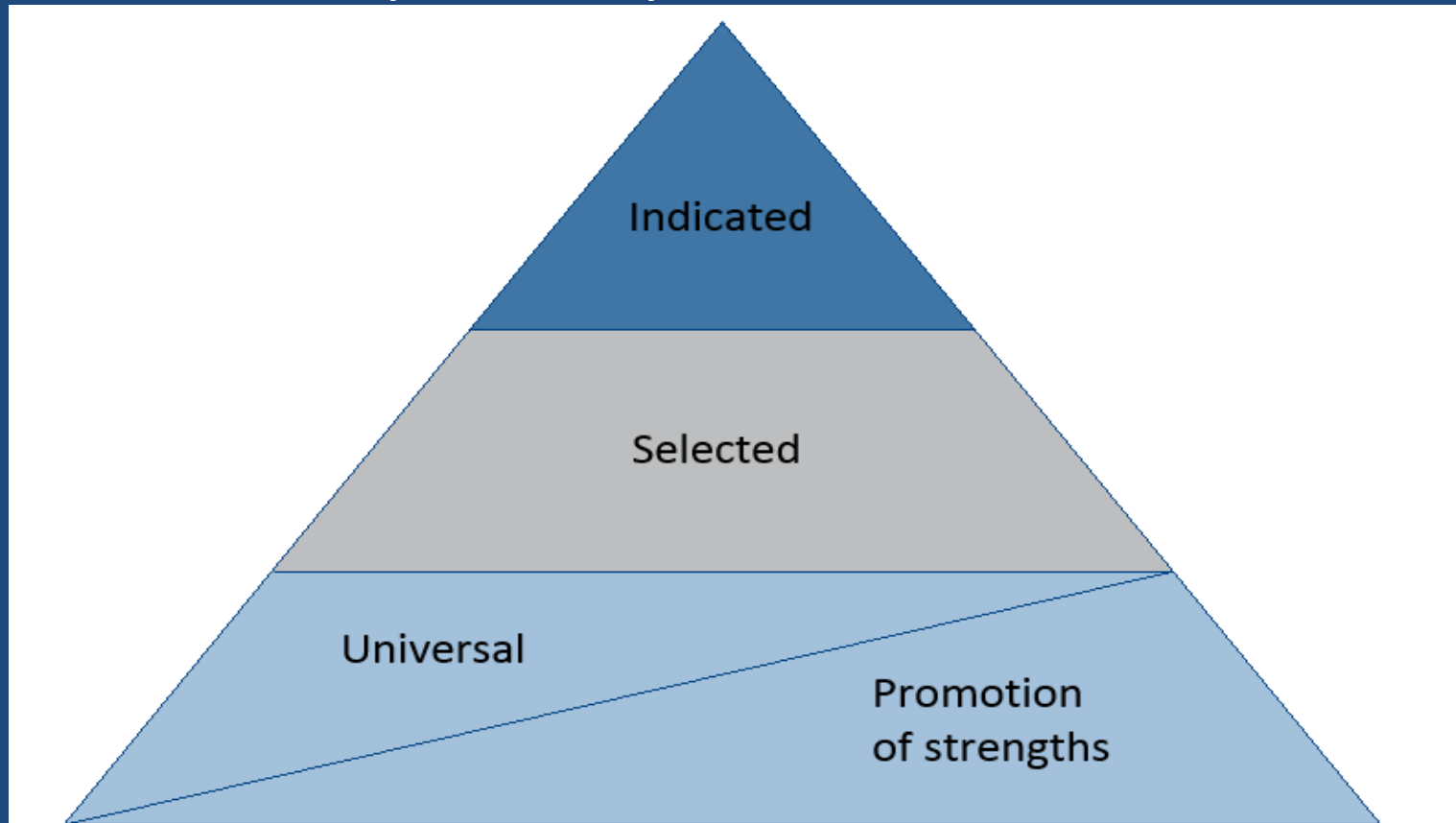
“Simply reframing school dropout as a health issue has the potential to bring new players into the effort — parents, health institutions, young people, civil rights groups — and to encourage public officials to think of the dropout problem as central to community health and as a long-term solution beneficial to population health” (Freudenberg and Ruglis 2007)

Public Health Model of Differentiated Strategies in Place - for Meeting Individual Needs at Different Levels of Need/Risk for Transition (Downes, Nairz-Wirth & Rusinaite 2017)

Universal – *All*

Selected – *Some, Groups, Moderate Risk*

Indicated – *Individual, Intensive, Chronic Need*



The Emotional-Relational Turn for ESL and Inclusive Systems: Selected and Indicated Prevention

Even apart from poverty related depression, emotional distress contributes to early school leaving: **LONELINESS**: Frostad et al. 2015 – intention to drop out



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”.

The downward spiral of mental disorders and educational attainment: a systematic review on early school leaving Esch, Bocquet, Pull, et. al. BMC Psychiatry 2014 14:237

When adjusted for socio-demographic factors, mood disorders (e.g. depression) were significantly related to school dropout

Among anxiety disorders, after controlling for potentially confounding factors, social phobia was a strong predictor of poor educational outcomes

...as indicated by early school leavers themselves, were feeling too nervous in class and being anxious to speak in public, both representing symptoms of social phobia

Holistic Systemic Issues: Percentage of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students who Agree/Disagree with the Following Statements: School Belonging and Feeling Like an Outsider (PISA 2012)
(OECD 2012)

Countries	I feel like I belong at school, % Agree	I feel like an outsider (or left out of things at school), % Disagree
Australia	72.6	81.3
Belgium	63.5	88.4
Czech Republic	73.6	80.5
Denmark	69.3	90.3
Estonia	78.2	90.0
Finland	80.5	89.2
France	38	73.2
Germany	83.8	89.7
Greece	87.8	83.9
Hungary	83.5	85.6
Ireland	76.7	91.6
Italy	75	89.3
United Kingdom	74.9	86.9
OECD Average	78.1	86.2

Authoritarian Teaching

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;**



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”

Key Guiding Principles for Inclusive Systems (Downes Nairz-Wirth & Rusinaite 2017)

Differentiated – not one size fits all

Systemic - Beyond individual resilience to **inclusive systems** to go beyond Bronfenbrenner's (1979) neglect of system blockage



Inclusive systems - Beyond Rutter's (1987) resilience in adversity (poverty, early school leaving, bullying, trauma) as superman or wonderwoman ! (Downes 2017)

Has the emotional-relational turn for early school leaving prevention taken place in Australia in research, policy and practice ?

- Emotional trauma, mental health and emotional counselling supports linked with schools
- Multidisciplinary teams in and around schools (Edwards & Downes 2013), including for alternatives to suspension/expulsion
- School climate and move to authoritative *not* authoritarian teaching
- Marginalised Students' voices in schools and research
- Common system supports for bullying and ESL prevention
- Preservice preparation of teachers' conflict resolution skills - cultural & relational competences

Can universities support and lead area and school wide holistic early school leaving prevention strategies ?



* **System blockage for access:** 12 national reports

* 196 interviews took place in total with members of senior management from 83 education institutions, as well as from senior officials in government departments relevant to lifelong learning in each country.



* 69 of these interviews were with senior representatives from higher education across 30 institutions.

**Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, England, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania,
Norway, Russia, Scotland and Slovenia.**

Downes, P (2014). *Access to Education In Europe: A framework and agenda for system change*. Dordrecht: Springer

Downes 2014:

1. Differentiation at Faculty Level
2. Representation in University Structures
- 3 Assertive Outreach including to Primary Pupils
4. Space – Physical and Relational





Differentiation at Faculty Level:

A Faculty and Departmental Level Focus to Increase Access

Missing in University Access Strategies across EU (Downes 2014)

- Domains such as law, psychology, history, geography, social work, sociology, politics, education, literature and business can significantly benefit from interrogation through a learning involvement with diverse voices rather than through participation from a largely homogenous, dominant culture of students.
- This is a clear consequence of a Vygotskian framework for intellectual development which prioritises socio-cultural interaction as pivotal to learning
- Access to teaching profession a distinct focus now in Irish HEA National Action Plan for Access 2016

Austrian Official (Downes 2014):

What obstacles and/or opportunities in your opinion exist to development of such an incentive?

We need a different mix of teachers, especially in urban areas where certain ethnic groups may be represented more strongly. There is a strong interest on the operative level. We are still a little behind in strategic planning, ...On the whole I don't think there are big obstacles. We just have to do it. Maybe it isn't so much a problem of reserving admission, because I think that there are enough places....We just have to improve the attraction of teacher training for these groups, that's what I see as a problem... (Rammel and Gottwald 2010).



University Outreach Strategy to Communicate with Community Leaders in Socioeconomically Marginalised or Ethnic Minority Communities



The Norwegian national report in Downes (2014)

observes from one educational institution that:

“The communities are approached by building on existing networks and associations as well as making use of spokespersons and opinion makers within the communities.

Students with a corresponding ethnic background are engaged as role models, communicating in their familiar language at meetings with the target groups” (Stensen and Ure 2010).

Formal Links Between Universities and Non- governmental Organisations Representing Marginalised Groups & Schools (Downes 2014): Irish HEA Access Strategy 5.2 ‘To strengthen the linkages between higher education institutions and local communities’



The Bulgarian national report in Downes (2014) observes that ‘no interaction is evident between the NGO sector and the formal education system’ (Boyadjieva et al. 2010).

However, a Bulgarian institutional interviewee recognises the need for such interaction:

There should be more aggressive policy, targeted towards these groups

Cooperation agreements between universities and schools operate in **Estonia (Downes 2014)**: [The University] organises courses, summer schools and workshops for upper secondary students: *We have signed cooperation agreements with 17 schools. Faculties and institutes introduce learning opportunities. Our students also take part in these events* (Tamm and Saar 2010).

Inequality of access to university will be perpetuated by “a ‘former student’s approach’ to word-of-mouth promotion schools, areas and communities without a tradition of attending university. Our students who go to their former schools are good ambassadors” (Tamm and Saar 2010).



Development of assertive outreach institutional strategies that go beyond mere information based models

Downes (2014) Asked whether parents with immigrant background were reached:

Norwegian reply:

No, it was too difficult, because it had to be a person from the local environment which could, who knew different places and who was engaged, quite simply (Stensen & Ure 2010).

My informant had an immigrant background and her experiences and knowledge was crucial for how they decided to recruit participants to the project. She knew where to reach them and how to move forward (Stensen & Ure 2010).



The Belgian national report (Downes 2014) highlights the severe limitations of an informational approach to an abstract other:



The Sociale School Heverlee Centrum voor Volwassenenonderwijs vzw (SSH-CVO) also uses printed press (programme brochure, local newspaper, flyers, adverts, documents, etc.) and online tools (such as a website) to increase the access to their educational provision.

Although this type of advertisement reaches the most people, a recent evaluation research by the SSH-CVO has shown **the effects of this strategy are rather minimal** (Vermeersch & Vandenbroucke 2010).

* emphasises formal institutions cooperating with community leaders.

The Scottish national report (Downes 2014) provides the important example of community-based outreach strategies - less threatening and more convenient for those who have had negative experiences of the school system:

College A's distribution strategy had **opened up campuses in local communities...The college provided taster programmes in the community...**rather than going straight into a main college



*Classes were located in a wide range of locations through the local authority for example, in schools, in the local colleges, libraries, community centres and miners' clubs. The aim was to get the provision into the communities (Weedon et al. 2010).

Assertive Outreach: Beyond information processing to construction of meaning (Bruner 1992) for concrete other

- Information-based communication approaches focus on the *what* question. But need to focus on the *where*, the *how* and *who* questions:
- The **where** question asks about the location from which the student is engaged with.
- The **how** question asks about the way the person is being communicated with.
- The **who** question not only asks about the specific needs of the person being reached out to, but also asks who is the person communicating to that student.
- In some approaches in Europe, there is recognition of the *where* question, through the need for a *community outreach* approach. Services are located in easy-to-access and culturally familiar places to reach those on the edges of society.



An Access Strategy of Third-Level Institutions Which Engages with Primary and Secondary Students Experiencing Socio-economic Marginalisation (Downes 2014)



The Scottish national report provides one of the rare examples of a strategic approach to access to education which engages with younger learners, including those at the primary school level:

The college was heavily engaged with local schools with many children from 3rd and 4th. Members of staff had a big involvement with schools: We teach in schools, we run special projects for primary school kids so the kids in school are aware of us from a young age (Executive Director, College A) (Weedon et al. 2010).

Structural Indicator: Physical Space - Availability of school and university institutions free of charge during summertime and evenings for community groups from marginalised areas

The Slovenian national report in Downes (2014) provides an example where an educational institution makes its rooms available free of charge for community groups:

Institution's building is available for evening and summer events for many associations. Especially in the summer time, they can use it in the evenings for their meetings, lectures etc. *Yes, they also use it.*

Various societies use lecture rooms, above all as a place for their meetings (Ivančič et al. 2010)



Crosscultural relational spaces for inclusive systems (Downes 2012, 2014; Lévi-Strauss 1963, 1973): Diametric and Concentric Spatial Systems

Fig. 1 Diametric Dualism

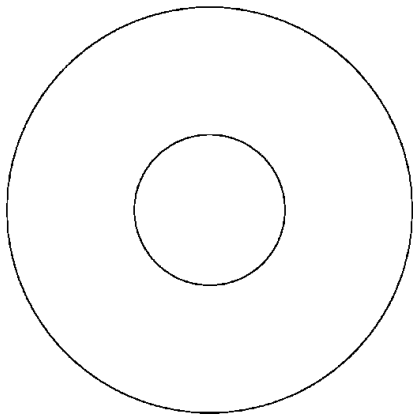


Fig. 2 Concentric Dualism



A **diametric** spatial structure is one where a circle is split in half by a line which is its diameter or where a square or rectangle is similarly divided into two equal halves (see Fig. 1). Separation, Splitting, Closure, Hierarchy, Mirror Image Reversals

In a **concentric** spatial structure, one circle is inscribed in another larger circle (or square); in pure form, the circles share a common central point (see Fig. 2). Connection, Openness

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