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THE DISADVANTAGED STUDENT IN OUR SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

> The education system should, as far as possible, enable
> all citizens to have access to an education which is
> relevant to their needs and which will assist them in
> seeking to fulfil the potential of their abilities and talents.[1]

This, the opening section of the <u>Programme for Action in Education 1984 -
1987</u> is an undeniably commendable aspiration. Yet, sadly, the reality of Irish
education is that a significant number of students do not find "an education
which is relevant to their needs" nor does it "assist them in seeking to fulfil the
potential of their abilities and talents."

Recently <u>The Green Paper on Education</u> published in April 1992 states its main
aim as:

> To establish greater equity in education - particularly for
> those who are disadvantaged socially, economically,
> physically or mentally.[2]

The overall national strategy according to the same document is:

> To provide the opportunity for all to develop their
> educational potential to the full.[3]

The problems in the way of achieving this goal are extensive, and include the
following:

- The social and economic background of some students, who because
  of this, enter the education system at a disadvantage and have greater
  than normal difficulties as they progress through the system.

- The number of students who fail to become literate and numerate
  enough to succeed in the education system. As a result, these
  students are poorly motivated and seriously ill-equipped for life.

- The number of students for whom the current curriculum at second
  level is unsuited and who leave the system strongly dissatisfied and
  without having benefited. For instance, almost one in five students
  currently ends the senior cycle without achieving five D grades.

- The further problems traveller children face, in addition to those experienced by other disadvantaged students. Only a handful of traveller children, out of several thousand are in secondary education.

- The special needs of children with disabilities.

- The difficulties that disadvantaged students face in assessing and benefiting from third level education, particularly in universities. Research shows that the lower socio-economic grouping are strongly under-represented in third level eduction.[4]

It appears very obvious that from the problems listed above, that Ireland, like so many countries in Europe and elsewhere, has a long way to go in breaking down the barriers to equity in education. Those who are most likely to stay on to the Leaving Certificate are the middle and upper class; those who attend third level colleges are also predominantly drawn from these social groups. Children of the unemployed or working class tend to leave school earlier, while only a tiny minority go on to college.

Undoubtedly, the introduction of the "Free Scheme" of education in 1967 proved a major contributory factor in the increase in participation rates in post-primary schooling. In theory, this scheme was to ensure that economic privatiors should no longer prevent students from experiencing second level education. Similarly, the raising of the school leaving age to fifteen in 1972 contributed to post-primary enrolment jumping from 132,407 in 1963 to 231,093 in 1973.[5]

However, although on paper such increases appear praiseworthy, in practice they merely produced a set of new and related problems.

D.G. Mulcahy sums up the situation:

> With an increase in enrolments came also an increase in backgrounds, variety, abilities, interests and educational achievements of pupils.[6]

As the school-going population increased, so too did the number of children coming from unemployed and working class backgrounds.

The effects of low income on educational participation are immediate and direct. Parents who are in low-paying jobs or who are unemployed simply cannot afford to send their children to third level education at present as the grants provided are not adequate, especially if there are other children in the family, which is usually the case.

The cost of even maintaining children in second-level is prohibitive, never mind the cost of third level. Hence, it has long been realised that the level of educational participation often varies according to social class origins. However, this is not just due to financial reasons.

Table 1.1: *Educational Level attained among cohorts of post-primary leavers according to father's occupational group, 1980-82 weighted aggregate results (percentages)*

| | Occupational Group | | | | |
	Upper Non-Manual	Lower Non-Manual	Skilled Manual	Semi/Unskilled Manual	Farmers
Educational Level:					
Leaving Cert	93.0	74.5	53.2	37.6	67.5
Inter Cert	5.3	16.7	25.8	28.1	20.5
Group Cert	1.0	4.4	11.1	16.4	6.5
None	0.7	4.4	10.0	17.9	5.5
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	794	2036	1656	1771	1433

Source: Breen 1984b, Table 3.4, from National Manpower Service Surveys of School Leavers 1978-79, 1979-80 and 1980-81.

Table 1.1 taken from Breen shows that among Irish cohorts of post-primary school leavers, working class school leavers are much less likely to have taken the Leaving Certificate and are much more likely to be totally unqualified, than are middle class school leavers. This table shows that on average, of the cohorts who left post-primary school in the academic years 1978 - 1979 and 1980 - 1981, virtually all those leavers whose fathers were in an upper non-manual (i.e. professional, executive or managerial) jobs left after sitting for the Leaving Certificate (93%). At the other extreme, among pupils whose fathers were semi-skilled or unskilled labourers, only a minority (38%) left after sitting for the Leaving Certificate and almost a fifth (18%) left without having taken any examination at all.

For the year 1983/1984 the Statistics Section of the Department of Education registered 842 children who left full-time education at the end of the junior cycle. A survey carried out by the Department of Labour on school leavers for the year 1984/85 indicates that of some 62,000 second level school leavers, 41,000 studied to Leaving Certificate level, 16,100 studied to Group/Intermediate Certificate Level, while 4,900 left school with no qualifications.[7]

Vincent Greaney and Thomas Kellaghan in their study Equality of Opportunity in Irish Schools found that 7.4% of the overall sample did not go on to post primary school.[8] Similarly, 9.5% dropped out during the junior cycle,[9] and 27% of the original sample left school at the end of the junior cycle.[10] Significantly, it was noted that over 23% of the sample of 500 left school without having sat for a public examination.[11]

The statistics mentioned above do not fully convey the reality of the second-level schooling situation. A large number of Irish children do proceed through the education system but without any experience of achievement. The new Junior Certificate and The Leaving Certificate examinations are instances where success and failure are manifest. Given that, as has been noted previously, a number of students drop out of school without any qualifications, there are still students who despite completing a public examination attain few, if any, qualifications.

It is possible from Department of Education statistics for 1989 to disclose another group of unsuccessful students. For the Intermediate Certificate, 7.0% of the girls who sat the examination were awarded Grade E or lower in Pass English, while 23.1% of the boys who took the examination achieved E or lower on the Pass paper. In mathematics the percentage achieving E or lower were of the girls who sat the examination 12.2%, and of the boys 16.5%[14]. Given that the New Junior Certificate, which replaces the old Intermediate Certificate and Group Certificate, may well be the final public examination taken by a significant number of students before they leave the school system, it is apparent that a considerable percentage of students are left with little or no tangible reward from their school career.

Thus, although efforts have been made to increase access to education in the past twenty-five years, they have largely proved insufficient. Past experience has shown that merely providing school places for all children will not ensure equal opportunity or success. There are other factors which are deemed to influence a child's school career, and it is some of these which will be considered in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES
INTRODUCTION

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3. Ibid., p.6.

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5. D.G. Mulcahy, <u>Curriculum and Policy in Irish Post-Primary Education</u> (Dublin : Institute of Public Administration, 1981), p.44.

6. Ibid., p.47.

7. Department of Labour, <u>Economic Status of School Leavers 1985</u> (Dublin : Manpower Policy and Information Section, 1986), p.5.

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CHAPTER 1

THE DISADVANTAGED STUDENT

The Effects of the Home Environment
on School Attainment

The disadvantaged child has been defined by Passow as:

> The child who, for socio-cultural reason, enters the
> school system with knowledge, skills, and attitudes which
> make adjustment difficult and impede learning.[1]

According to J.R. Edwards:

> Disadvantaged children are regarded as those whose early
> pre-school life and home environment are such as to
> create difficulties upon school entry.[2]

There are many factors which adversely effect a student's school career. While these factors cannot be rigidly confined to a particular social class, there are many indications that such adverse factors are more likely to occur in the lower or working class groups as opposed to the middle class.

Seamus Holland notes that:

> In a general sense the highest incidence of school failure
> is found in areas of greatest poverty.[3]

This is not to say that a lower or working class background prevents one from having a worthwhile school career. In fact the children of many extremely poor parents have very successful school careers. The point is that such a child is more likely to have to face a greater number of obstacles. Starting as he/she is from a position further down the social scale, he/she may have to travel twice the distance, as compared to the middle class child, to achieve a goal.

William Tyler cites Keller and Zavollini who proposed that:

> Attainment, therefore, may not be determined by the
> value placed on education, but by the social "distance"
> that the child has to travel to reach a particular
> educational or social level.[4]

Social class has long been seen as influential on a child's intelligence and school career. However, care must be taken when using the terms working-class, lower-class and middle-class.

Ken Roberts notes that:

> No sociologist has ever pretended that the class structure
> is really as simple as juxtaposing the middle and working
> class .... Nevertheless, sociologists have argued, the
> working-class/middle-class dichotomy remains useful in
> drawing attention to a genuine cleavage where class
> structures diverge.[5]

Thus in general terms, it is seen as relatively advantageous for a child to be born into a middle-class home as opposed to a working-class one.

Kathleen Cullen notes that:

> In Ireland, at present socio-economic status would appear
> to be the most important indication of the educative
> quality of the home as reflected through the educational
> performance of the child.[6]

Yussen and Santrock cite experiments carried out by Gerald Lasser in the United States 1965, where the following conclusion was reached:

> In all analyses the middle-class children scored higher on
> the IQ tests than the lower-class children did.[7]

There are numerous reasons why many of the children of the unemployed and the working-class do not succeed in school. Primarily, the home environment is often overcrowded. A large family in a small house will result in overcrowding, this in turn occasions a lack of privacy and quiet necessary for homework and study.

Elizabeth Fraser comments:

> Of two children of equal intelligence from the same size of family, the one coming from the less crowded home would tend to do better at school.[8]

Similarly Kathleen Cullen remarks:

> The houses of educationally retarded children were more likely to have poorer physical amenities than those of the educationally advanced children. They also tended to be smaller though the number of people living in them was frequently greater.[9]

From an early age the level and quality of the stimulation available to the child in a disadvantaged home usually leaves a lot to be desired and hence has a critical influence on the psychological development of the child. The absence of reading materials such a books and comics is frequently given as one of the reasons why many disadvantaged children are slow-learners. In addition to the lack of books, building bricks, jigsaws and so forth, many disadvantaged homes seldom contain the wide variety of common household objects that are taken for granted in homes of the more affluent. Objects such as pots and pans, clothes pegs, cooking utensils and tableware are often severely restricted, thus limiting what the child would ordinarily discover for itself, for example differences and similarities in size and shape, width and depth, colour and texture etc.

In homes where furniture is scanty and the decor monotonous, the young child is denied stimuli for exploration. Nothing will appear exciting or interesting.

Seamus Holland maintains:

> Meanings and associations become correspondingly
> impoverished, learning opportunities are circumscribed;
> the child is deprived of those incidental experiences
> which play an important part in building up his/her
> understanding of his/her immediate environment.[10]

In their analysis of date from the National Child Development Study (London) Wedge and Prosser (1973) identified four and a half percent of British eleven year olds as disadvantaged. The criteria for identifying these children were that their families:

- Had only one parent and/or five or more children.

- Lived in an overcrowded house.

- Were in receipt of means tested welfare benefits on account of their low income.[11]

In a follow up study published in 1982, three percent of the same adolescents now sixteen years old, were shown to be disadvantaged on these criteria. The surveys showed a strong relationship between disadvantage and educational attainment.

According to surveys carried out by The Economic and Social Research Institute in 1991, a substantial amount of Irish households "still have extreme difficulty in making ends meet",[12] by relative income poverty lines. According to Mack and Lansley:

> Poverty is a situation where such deprivation has a
> multiple impact on a household's way of life.[13]

The following tables taken from a study carried out by Christopher T. Whealan, Damian F. Hannan and Sean Creighton on behalf of the E.S.R.I. and indicate the style of living many Irish disadvantaged families endure.

TABLE 5.8

PRIMARY LIFE-STYLE DEPRIVATION ITEMS

1. Household manager has had to go without heating during the last year through lack of money, i.e. has had to go without a fire on a cold day, or go to bed early to keep warm or light a fire late because of lack of gas/fuel.

2. Household manager has had a day in the last two weeks when she/he did not have a substantial meal at all - from getting up to going to bed.

3. Household is:-
    (i) Currently in arrears on rent, mortgage, ESB or gas

    or (ii) Has had to go into debt within the past 12 months to meet ordinary living expenses such as rent, food, Christmas or back to school expenses.
    or
    (iii) Had to sell or pawn anything worth £50 or more to meet ordinary living expenses

    or (iv) Receive assistance from a private charity - such as SVP - in the last year

4. Lacking new, not secondhand, clothes

5. Lacking a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day.

6. Lacking two pairs of strong shoes

7. Lacking a warm waterproof overcoat

8. Lacking a roast meat joint or its equivalent once a week

"Primary Deprivation" is regarded as the enforced absence of socially defined necessities of a very basic kind, relating to food, clothing and heat which has the decisive impact.

Table 5.8 sets out the items comprising the scale. The kinds of deprivation implied are of a very basic sort and involve absence of a range of items on whose essential nature a clear social consensus exists. They also reflect a level of day to day strain and exclusion from customary practice which, if enforced, clearly constitute a rather extreme form of poverty.

TABLE 5.2

PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCING EXTREME DIFFICULTY IN MAKING ENDS MEET BY PRIMARY LIFE-STYLE DEPRIVATION

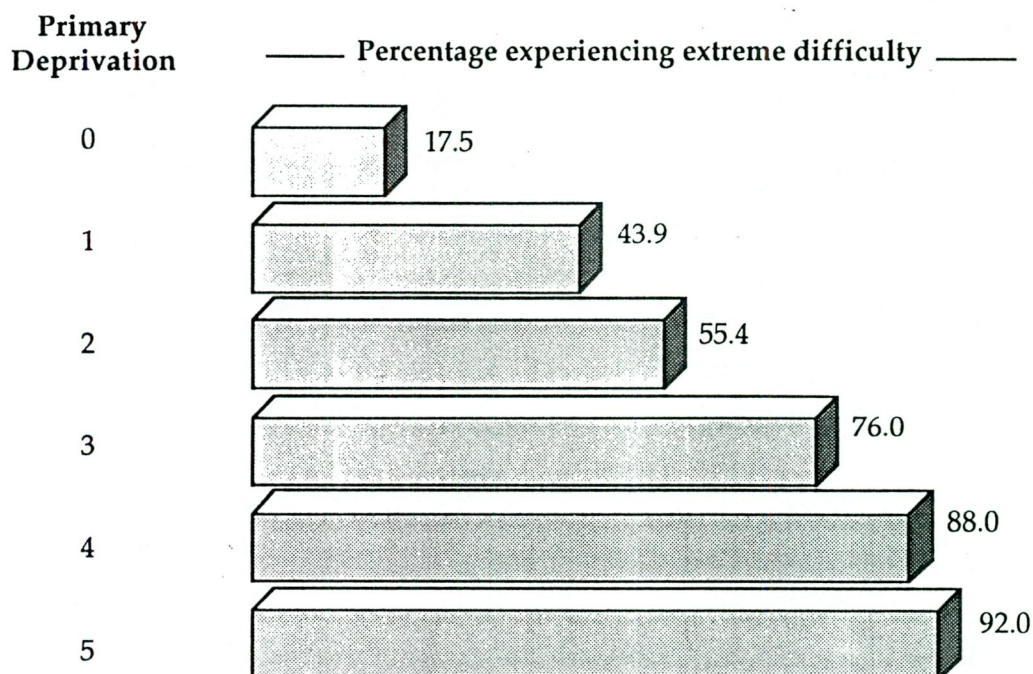| Primary Deprivation	——— Percentage experiencing extreme difficulty ———
0	17.5
1	43.9
2	55.4
3	76.0
4	88.0
5	92.0

Table 5.2 displays the striking relationship between primary life style deprivation and perceived economic strain. Less than 1 in 5 households, not suffering an enforced lack of anyone primary item, is experiencing extreme difficulty in making ends meet. This figure jumps to over 2 in 5 where one item is lacking and rises gradually to the point where it reaches a level of over 9 out of 10 among households suffering an enforced lack of five or more items.

The Adverse Effects of Poor Parenting
on School Attainment

There is another kind of poverty which is invariably in evidence in the lives of those underachieving students whose poor performance cannot be explained by obvious mental or physical handicap. This is the poverty which is the product of the quality of human relationships within the family.

Consciousness of personal worth is necessary for healthy development. Such a need is unlikely to be met if significant people, in particular the parents, fail to establish the kind of warm, accepting relationships with their children which reflect their worth as individuals.

Seamus Holland notes that:

> Growth and maturation are inherent in the human condition, but need the stimulus of a favourable environment. In particular, the growing child needs the assurance and support which only the father and mother can give. Parents can manifest their interest in concrete form by making time available whenever to share the interests and concerns, the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears of the developing child.[14]

The patterns of relationships with their children developed by disadvantaged parents are probably based to some extent on their memory of how their own parents related to them. Certainly to some extent also, there is a response to the environmental conditions under which they live. Living in a state of perpetual crisis and chronic frustration, the parents' capacity to deal with their own anxieties is often so limited they feel helpless and overwhelmed. Hence, they are often unable to provide the necessary support their children need.

This lack of support usually follows through into the child's school career. The Plowden Report found that social class seemed to have an effect on the level of parent participation in the child's education. It found that:

The higher the socio-economic group, the more parents attend open days, concerts and parent-teacher meetings, and the more often they talked with heads and class teachers about how their children were getting on.[15]

Elizabeth Fraser concludes that:

Parents who have had the advantage of more than the minimum of formal education required by statute or who have sought to improve on what they had, are likely to have a favourable attitude to their children's education and to give him/her encouragement and help.[16]

It is more probable that such a positive attitude towards education will exist in a middle-class home as opposed to a working-class one.

Seamus Holland mentions:

Parent who are themselves disadvantaged are not as easily converted to the gospel which propounds a correlation between success at school and success in life. Their own school experience may have been harsh and unstimulating.[17]

The Language Factor

Another factor which has been allied to a disadvantaged student's school performance is language, and again there would seem to be some connection with social class.

Philip S. Dale comments:

The failure of many poor children in school is all too obvious; one pervasive explanation is that the language development of these children is impaired by poverty and that this impairment in turn hampers learning.[18]

He cites experiments conducted by Pozner and Saltz, who "found that there were no differences in the abilities of middle-class and lower-class children as listeners". However, as communicators middle-class children were much more effective" while "lower-class children were much more likely .... to omit part of the critical conditional statement".[19]

Kathleen Cullen makes this distinction between working-class and middle-class pupils:

> The typically working-class (public language orientated) pupil, therefore, is at a disadvantage in the school situation vis a vis the typically middle-class (formal language orientated) pupil because unlike the latter, such a child lacks the necessary receptive schemata within which new learning can be integrated.[20]

There is evidence from research carried out in the United States that:

> Mothers from disadvantaged homes engage in face-to-face talking with their children less frequently and for shorter periods than middle-class mothers.[21]

Thus when disadvantaged children are told to "sit down", "be quiet", "leave the T.V. alone", "don't be bold", without being given reasons why what they are now doing is unacceptable, they are being deprived of the opportunity of linking cause and effect and of the opportunity of increasing their knowledge through discussion. Similarly, if for example, the child asks the parent why it should not climb the wall, the parent as had been pointed out, is more likely to appeal to status - ("because I told you so") than to enter into a discussion of the possible consequences of the child's action ("because you might fall and hurt yourself"). The first answer fails to add anything to the child's information, and inhibits discussion. The second gives a logical reason for the parent's command and invites further questions. This reluctance of disadvantaged parents to elaborate for their children reasons for moderating their behaviour, is believed to have an important bearing on the psychological development of the child.

Basil Bernstein notes that:

> Many mothers in the middle-class (and it is important to add not all) relative to the working-class (and again it is important to add not all by any means), place greater emphasis on the use of language in socializing the child into the moral order, in disciplining the child, in the communication and recognition of feeling.[22]

This divergence in socialization, for Bernstein, produces a fundamental division.

> We can generalise ....   and say that certain groups of children, through the forms of their socialization, are oriented towards receiving and offering universalistic meanings in certain contexts, whereas other children are orientated towards particularistic meanings.[23]

In its turn, this division will result in difficulties for the latter group of children when they attend school.

Certainly, these days there has been an increasing awareness of the need to acknowledge a student's background, and a growing concern that the students who do come from backgrounds which are in some way lacking or disadvantaged, should be helped. They are present in our schools - real people who need educational nourishment and a sense of achievement and competence, like every other student. They have their needs. They have their hopes. They have their talents just waiting to be discovered and developed.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 1

1.   *

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9.   Cullen, <u>School and Family</u>, p.150.

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12.   Christopher Whelan, Damian Hannan, Sean Creighton, <u>Unemployment Poverty and Psychological Distress.</u> (Dublin : The Economic and Social Research Institute, 1991), p. 61.

13.   T. Mack and S. Lansley, <u>Poor Britain</u> (London : George Allen and Unwin, 1985) p. 171.

14.   Holland, <u>Rutland Street</u> p. 65.

15.   Department of Education and Science, <u>Children and Their Primary Schools : A report of the Central Advisory Council for Education. (England),</u> Vol. 1 (London : Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1967) p. 34.

16.   Frazer, <u>Home Environment and The School.</u> (London : University of London Press, 1968) p.48.

17.   Holland, <u>Rutland Street</u> p. 81.

18. Philip S. Dale, <u>Language Development Structure</u> 2nd Ed., (New York : Holt Rinehart and Winston 1976), p. 315.

19. Ibid., p.320.

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21. Griffiths, David. <u>Psychology and Medicine</u> (London : The British Psychological Society and the Macmillan Press, 1981), p. 76.

22. Basil Bernstein, "Social Class, Language and Socialisation", in <u>Power and Ideology in Education</u> ed. Jerome Karabel and A.H. Halsey (New York : Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 425.

23. Ibid., p. 438.

CHAPTER 2

WORKING WITH DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS:

The School Environment

Prior to starting the DIP.ADT Course at the National College of Art and Design in 1992, I worked for a year as a part-time art teacher in a boys secondary school in a disadvantaged area in North Dublin. As part of the Diploma for Art and Design Teachers Course, I am presently doing my teaching practice in the same school.

Having spent the previous academic school year 1990-1991, teaching in a community school in a wealthy upper/middle class area in North County Dublin, I was fascinated by the difference between the ethos of the two schools and the type of students who attended them.

School B was primarily concerned with educating its students towards a successful Leaving Certificate and in the majority of cases, third-level education. For instance, the year I taught in the school, I had a Leaving Certificate class of twenty-two students, of which sixteen went on to third-level education. There was or seemed to be nothing unusual about these statistics. Most pupils just presumed they would eventually attend a third-level institute of some kind.

On the other hand, the school I now work in provides an intimate ethos which is primarily concerned with educating its students to be mature and well balanced people, with confidence in themselves and understanding of their abilities and gifts. They are of course concerned with results, but not to the same extent as many other schools. They know where their students are "coming from". The school principal told me that "As a missionary congregation founded to preach the gospel to the poor, the Oblate Fathers sought to work among those who are marginalised and disadvantaged".

He also told me that the Oblates feel that the system of education based on ideals of equality and freedom can often be used as a weapon to maintain divisions and to perpetuate an unequal system which stifles freedom. As a secondary school working within this system, they are aware of these difficulties and inbuilt injustices and are committed to doing all in their power to create a school environment which fosters and creates freedom, flexibility and understanding.

While appreciating the need for order and discipline within any institution, the school rejects the notion that this involves "control", and the school structure reflects this. According to the schools <u>Parents Information Booklet 1992/1993</u>:

- Curriculum, timetable and internal structures are based on the student as an individual with individual rights and needs.

- A real awareness of the social and family background of students is essential and the school is committed to supporting this family connection as much as possible. This involves not making unreasonable demands of parents in relation to financial support of the school, uniform, books etc. as well as understanding the problems many parents have in becoming involved in school.

- Flexibility in approach must be the key "factor" in the schools dealings with individual students. Structures are not ends in themselves and must always been seen as means by which a student grows in freedom and confidence.[1]

An approach of this kind asks a lot of teachers. A level of openess, flexibility and informality is expected, which would not be typical of many other school structures.

Due to the fact that the school is small in terms of numbers, there is a small teaching staff of twenty. Three of these teachers would teach almost all the students in the school due to the nature of their subject. For example, there is only one Religion teacher, one Physical Education and one Art teacher and all three subjects are compulsory up to the Junior Certificate.

Since I was the Art teacher for the academic year 1991 - 1992, I taught two hundred and eighty of the total three hundred and twelve pupils. The thirty two students I did not teach were seniors, who had opted for computers instead of art. Of the large group I did teach, twenty-eight were seniors. They generally were a well adjusted group who applied themselves to the Leaving Certificate Art Syllabus.

As part of their study, <u>Equality of Opportunity in Irish Schools</u>, Greaney and Kellaghan mentioned that:

> Among males especially, a high level percentage of
> working class entrants to second-level education will have
> left school without ever reaching the Leaving Certificate,
> thus, those working class male pupils who do get to the
> Leaving Certificate should be a more highly selected
> group than, say, their middle-class counterparts.[2]

The remaining group of two hundred and fifty two students were juniors, comprised of four first year classes, four second year classes and three third year classes, (Junior Certificate Students). It was while I was working with these students that I began to realize how many of them were "disadvantaged". At least forty per cent could have been termed "disadvantaged", under the criteria discussed in the previous chapter. Very simple tasks such as ruling a border or cutting out a simple shape presented a problem for many of the students, even at Junior Certificate level. I noticed these sort of problems seemed to occur more frequently in the lower stream classes.

Streaming Low-Ability Students

According to Kathleen Lynch:

> There is evidence from research in other countries that
> rigid streaming, banding or tracking can reinforce class
> inequalities as working class pupils are the most likely
> ones to be allocated to low streams.[3]

The limited Irish evidence available also supports this claim (O'Kelly 1986).

In my opinion, streaming can have adverse effects on many of these disadvantaged students. I have noticed that students who are allocated to lower streams, very often have extremely low levels of self-esteem and self-worth.

For instance, one morning while I was introducing a lesson to a small group of third years, who would be of low ability, one of them turned to me and said: "I don't know why you're showing us lot this stuff. Sure we're the rubberheads of the school. We won't be able to do that, we're thick !". This student really believed that he was stupid. He had absolutely no confidence in himself or his peer group. He was very obviously a child who had learned to expect failure rather than success, and whose feet seemed to be firmly set on the path that leads to scholastic failure.

In actual fact, he was of very average ability in art and after many months of constant re-assurance and encouragement he made great progress. Recent research on individual differences and the needs of disadvantaged students indicates that:

> Students should have the opportunity to participate in small heterogeneous ability groups, which can foster achievement, motivation and social development. The literature indicates that schools should not isolate low-ability students in homogeneous groups so as to avoid fragmentation of skills. Low-ability children seem to need particular help in drawing connections between different pieces of information and skills.[4]

No one today questions that serving the needs of low ability pupils is a high educational priority. However, it is generally recognised, that despite all the improvements of recent times, a disturbingly large percentage of pupils do not master even basic knowledge and skills. This is very much a concern in School A. Low ability students seem to fall behind at an early age and as the years go by, their motivation crumbles and the learning gap between them and pupils of average-highly ability inexorably widens.

Consequently, in my final chapter I want to discuss the area of motivation. In particular, I want to discuss the motivation disadvantaged students in the art room.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 2

1. Belcamp College Parents Information Booklet 1992 - 1993

2. Greaney and Kellaghan, Equality of Opportunity in Irish Schools. p.146.

3. Kathleen Lynch "Developing Abilities : What Are We Doing in Second - Level Education At Present?", in Compass : Journal of the Irish Association for Curriculum Development 17, 2. 1988. p. 52.

4. O.E.C.D., Review of National Policies For Education (Ireland : 1991), p.105.

CHAPTER 3

A PERSONAL APPROACH

Motivation In The Art Room

Within an art context motivation has been defined as:

> The process of arousing, sustaining and regulating activity for the purpose of causing the pupil to perform in a desired way.[1]

As an art teacher working with quite a large number of disadvantaged students, I feel motivation is crucial in my art room. Any motivation should make the "art" experience much more than just an activity. It should stimulate the students' awareness of their environment and make them feel that the art activity is extremely important. Simply instructing a class of students to work with a medium on their own, or handing them paper and saying "Draw what you want", may result in "busyness", but, it will fail miserably in being a meaningful learning experience. A student certainly will not gain knowledge and confidence and sensitivity towards his environment, if there is a barrier between himself and his teacher. The teacher as well as the student, needs to feel that the lesson is an important, meaningful and stimulating experience.

From research carried out by Ronald Silverman he concludes that:

> Motivation will be stimulated when the art teacher:

- Knows about his students' aptitudes for art and what is truly meaningful to them.

- Utilizes a carefully structured inductive, and in-depth approach to teaching which recognised differences in the interests in concrete and ideational materials of slow and fast learners.

- Provides opportunities for discussions which attract attention to the complexity of art and thereby arouse curiosity;

- Helps students to identify the criteria by which they can evaluate themselves as they work and, thereby, serve as a stimulus for accomplishment.[2]

From my personal experience, I have noticed over the last three years that motivation differs for different groups. Second-level students of high ability tend to be motivated by the challenge of an ambiguous situation, rich with opportunities to be flexible and original, while on the other hand low ability students would be inclined to respond more readily to a situation which is easily definable in terms of its limitations and rewards. It is this type of student that I now want to discuss.

Motivating Disadvantaged Students
For Art Activity

While working with disadvantaged students it became obvious to me that the creativity and excitement that they bring to an art activity depends to a large extent on their motivation. This motivation may come from several sources, for instance, I teach a couple of students who have a natural drive for expression when they are filled with enthusiasm for a particular topic; I also teach a large group of students who totally rely on me to stimulate their interests.

This group, as a whole, exhibit those group traits supposed to characterise city-centre students. They are more extrovert than students in the affluent suburbs, and definitely more talkative. They are also more restless and attention seeking and they disliked having to sit still and listen for an extended period.

Yet, they are a normal and very likeable group of students. They can converse with fluency and animation on topics in which they take a personal interest.

Taking all of the above into consideration, I try to design my lesson plans with their interest in mind. It has been suggested by Ernest Boyer that: School programmes should be challenging and in particular, that pupils ought to be given the opportunity to follow legitimate personal interests.

The Curriculum and Examination Board's document,

"In our schools" emphasises the notion of relevance:

> relevance to the interests and needs of pupils as well as
> relevance to the needs and interests of society.[3]

I feel that by introducing teenage areas of interest as themes for my lesson plans cause my students to benefit significantly.

A Sequence Designed for Disadvantaged Students

One of my class groups this year is a second year class of boys called 2:C. They are the second lowest stream in the year and by academic standards, they would be considered to be of very low ability.

I feel as a group, that they have a very poor self-image due to the *"label of failure"* they feel they received upon school entry. From talking to other teachers or the staff about certain students in the class, I discovered that a couple of the boys occasionally portrayed anxiety symptoms related to "failure". These included occasionally:

- Bursting into tears when reprimanded by a teacher
- Consistent failure to do homework
- Refusal to go to school or to do particular lessons

Knowing what I did about the class and their disenchanted attitude towards a lot of subjects, I knew I had to make their art class relevant to their interests in order for it to be successful. I wanted the students to feel at ease and happy in my classes, but more than anything, I did not want any student in the group to feel threatened by an art exercise.

Like most teenagers, the boys I teach are very caught up in their appearance. Clothes and shoes are a constant source of conversation amongst the group. Sports clothes and trainers are of a particular interest to them, thus, with this in mind, I decided to design a four lesson art sequence based on <u>footwear.</u> I wanted the students to feel in touch with the source, while they developed an awareness of their environment. By following legitimate personal interests, I felt that the students would learn an awful lot from the sequence of lessons.

Prior to starting the first lesson in the sequence, I gave all twenty four students in the class a questionnaire based on shoes. As a group we discussed the questions and answers relating the questions to the shoes we were wearing at the time.

I encouraged the boys to talk openly and freely about what they noticed about their shoes. We discussed all types of art elements within the conversation. The twenty minutes or so spent on this exercise proved to be very fruitful as the lessons unfolded.

I feel the class's ability should be the foremost factor that a teacher considers when designing a lesson. Thus, with this consideration in mind, I decided to pitch my learning objectives towards an average ability group, so as to include the handful of artistic boys within the class. This way the good students were naturally motivated, while the weak students were motivated by a realistic goal that had been set for them.

The overall aim of my sequence of lessons was to develop the students awareness of shape by exploring shoes both in isolation and in groups. The visual studies throughout the sequence were to show how shapes occur when shoes are viewed from different angles and sections are abstracted and so forth. I felt that the notion of shape would be one of the simplest art elements to grasp, considering the groups ability, but I also felt it was one of the most versatile art elements, as it can be explored and interpreted through numerous other art elements.

LESSON PLANS

A Sequence Designed
For A
Disadvantaged Second Year Class

LESSON 1

The cognitive objective of my first lesson plan was that the students would come to understand how line can define shape. The boys were required to draw a shoe of their choice in line, concentrating on the shape of the shoe and the shapes within the shoe. The lesson was very successful in numerous ways.

For instance, the boys were very motivated by the activity throughout the eighty minute period. They worked very hard and they were delighted with the finished work they produced. At the evaluation, we discussed the work and overall the feedback was very positive. I definitely feel that the source for the exercise was crucial to its success.

Theme: Footwear	Belcamp College
Source: My Shoe	Class: 2.C
Lesson 1	Ability: Low
	Date: October 19th

AIM:

To develop the students awareness of line and shape by visually exploring a shoe. The visual studies will show how different shapes occur when a shoe is viewed from various angles and sections are abstracted. A variety of media will be used throughout the sequence.

OBJECTIVE:

To understand how line can define shape.

INTRODUCTION:

(A)   *Ask the students to look very closely at the selection of shoes on the table. After looking, get the students to select a shoe they feel they would like to use as a drawing source. (Their own shoe may be used for a more personal response).*

(B)   *Explain to the students that they must look at the shoe in terms of line - Visual Aid No. 1 quality of line.*

(C)   *Ask the students to look at their shoe from various angles and do three line drawings. (15 minutes per drawing).*

(D)   *Tell the students to be as accurate as possible and to record all the lines they see within the contour of the shoe shape. I will put a lot emphasis on the quality of line present in my shoe.*

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

●   *Can you show me an interesting section in your shoe.?*

●   *Can you show me the lines you see in that section.?*

●   *Are these lines heavy, light or broken.*

VISUAL AIDS:

1.   *A line drawing of an elephant by Rembrandt.*

2.   *A line drawing of a young hippopotamus by Landseer.*

EVALUATION: - (15 Mins Before The Bell)

Get the students to put their sketches together on the large table. Ask them the following questions.

●   *Pick out the drawings they feel have dealt successfully with the element of line. Get the students to elaborate on their answers.*

- *Describe where they see a heavy line, a soft line. (I will have selected a sketch).*

- *Are these lines describing the shoe correctly?*

CLEAN UP:

LESSON 2

My second lesson plan was primarily concerned with encouraging the boys to develop the idea of how an object is made up from a series of shapes that relate to each other. I introduced collage as an activity to develop this idea. The collage technique in itself was a great source of motivation for the group. They really enjoyed the ripping, tearing and sticking, all aspects associated with psychomotor skills. The fact that the students were basing their collages on the drawings from the previous week, which had been very successful, helped the lesson enormously.

Theme: *Footwear*	*Belcamp College*
Source: *Line Drawings*	Class: *2.C*
Lesson 2	Ability: *Low*
	Date: *November 2nd*

AIM:

To develop the student's awareness of line and shape by visually exploring a shoe. the visual studies will show how different shapes occur when a shoe is viewed from various angles and sections are abstracted. A variety of media will be throughout the sequence.

OBJECTIVE

To promote the idea of how an object is made up from a series of shapes that relate to each other.

INTRODUCTION:

(A)   *Ask the students to study their line drawings from last weeks' class.*

(B)   *Get the students to select a drawing that they feel they would like to continue working from.   The drawing must be:*

- *Easy to understand*

- *Have a variety of shapes within the composition - contrasting shapes.*

VISUAL AID NO. 1: - *Discuss the shapes within the drawing - How they connect etc....*

(C)   *Instruct the students how to make a view finder - 5 minute demonstration.*

(D)   *Show the students how to use it by selecting a section from the visual aid.*

(E)   *Let the students make their own view finder and then use it to select an interesting section from their drawing pause - 10 minutes.*

(F)   *Introduce the idea of collage using Visual Aid No.II.*

(G)   *Ask the students to make a collage of their selected section using the variety of collected materials provided. Emphasise the importance of working to the edge of the A2 page.*

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- *Can you point out some contrasting shapes in the room? Get four examples.*

- *Do any of these shapes look like the shape of anything else? Discuss.*

VISUAL AIDS:

1.   *A line drawing of a bowl of fruit by Cézanne.*

2.   *A section of Cézanne's still-life worked in collage.*

EVALUATION:

Ask the students to put their collages together on the floor. (They will be half completed). Select a successful piece and get the students to describe the shapes in it. Get the students to pick out areas of contrasting shape within the piece.

CLEAN UP:

LESSON 3

Lesson 3 was designed to further develop the students idea of abstract shape. The lesson involved transcribing the abstract shapes in the collage into a repeat structure. I felt this lesson was perhaps the most difficult, but the students really worked very hard at the activity.

At the start of the lesson, I showed the group two visual aids, one demonstrated a finished layout for a repeat pattern and the other demonstrated the same pattern painted up with bright colours. The boys were impressed by the aids, but more importantly they were motivated by them. I had succeeded in getting the students to realise the art activity was within their capability.

Theme: Footwear	Belcamp College
Source: Shoe Collage	Class: 2.C
Lesson 3	Ability: Low
	Date: November 16th

AIM:

To develop the student's awareness of line and shape by visually exploring a shoe. The visual studies will show how different shapes occur when a shoe is viewed from various angles and sections are abstracted. A variety of media will be used throughout the sequence.

OBJECTIVE:

To develop the idea of abstract shape a stage further into repeat.

INTRODUCTION:

(A) Get the students to look closely at their collages from Lesson 2. Discuss how their pictures no longer look a shoe but how it now has lots of abstract shapes.

(B) Explain abstract shape - Give examples.

(C) Tell the students to field their A2 Sheet of paper into eight sections. (Demonstrate the technique of folding the page three times to get eight rectangles.

(D) Pass a piece of tracing paper to each student. (One of the boys will do this).

(E) Ask the students to transcribe the abstract shapes in their collage into the top left hand rectangle on their new page, using line only.

(Emphasise that although they are reducing their shapes, they must be as accurate as possible - Visual Aid No. 1

(F) Ask the students to trace their rectangle with a soft pencil - (4B) - demonstrate. Ask them to apply led to the reverse side of the tracing, pause 10 minutes.

(G) Ask the students to pay very close attention while I demonstrate the technique of repeating the tracing into each rectangle. (Reverse the tracing in every second rectangle).

VISUAL AIDS

1.   *A line drawing of my collage to actual scale.*

2.   *A reduced drawing of my collage inside the rectangle.*

3.   *A completed tracing in full repeat.*

EVALUATION:

Get students to put their patterns together on the large table. Ask them to:

- *Pick out the patterns they feel look well repeated.*

- *Describe the shapes they see in two of the repeat patterns.*

- *Select two or three repeat patterns that show a variety of contrasting shapes within the composition.*

CLEAN UP:

LESSON 4

The learning objective for lesson four was to make the students more aware of how colour can effect shape. At the introduction of the lesson, I reintroduced the colour wheel, so that the notion of complementary colours and contrasting colours would be fresh on their minds. The discussion about colour definitely got the boys motivated because they responded very enthusiastically to my questioning.

When I designed the class plan, I gave a lot of consideration to the medium that would be used to colour the designs. Considering the group's ability, and the length of time they take to complete an exercise, I decided it would be appropriate to use water based drawing inks as opposed to poster paint. Paint can be very daunting for low-ability students because of the accuracy that is involved in mixing up the right consistencies and so forth. On the other hand, inks are an exciting medium for these type of students because they are more straight forward and definitely a lot more vibrant. My choice of medium proved to be quite successful as the boys loved the exercise. I practically had to push them out the door when the bell went.

Theme: Footwear	Belcamp College
Source: Repeat Pattern	Class: 2.C
Lesson 4	Ability: Low
	Date: November 23rd

AIM:

To develop the student's awareness of line and shape by visually exploring a shoe. The visual studies will show how different shapes occur when a shoe is viewed from various angles and sections are abstracted. A variety of media will be used throughout the sequence.

OBJECTIVE:

To understand how colour can define shape.

INTRODUCTION:

(A) *Having explored the colour wheel in first year, ask the students to select four colours that work together. (I will suggest opposite colours etc. Visual Aid No. 1).*

(B) *Ask the students to paint their repeat patterns, demonstrate how to apply water based drawing inks correctly.*

(C) *Emphasise to the students the importance of painting the same shape in every rectangle with the same colour to make the repeat work - Visual aid No.2*

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

● *Can anybody tell me what colour looks good beside:*

> *Red ?*
> *Green ?*
> *Blue ?*
> *Purple ?*

● *Can anybody tell me what colour does not look good beside:*

> *Red ?*
> *Yellow ?*
> *Green ?*

● *How do you mix*

> *Orange ?*
> *Green ?*
> *Purple ?*
> *Brown ?*

VISUAL AIDS

1. A colour wheel showing tones of the secondary colours

2. Half of last weeks repeat pattern visual aid painted up in four colours.

EVALUATION:

We will put all the work together and I will get the students to pick out their favourite pieces. I will get them to discuss why they work so well.

CLEAN UP:

This sequence of lessons took six double periods to complete. Throughout the lessons I moved amongst the students and gave them advice and encouragement. I firmly believe that with these particular children it is crucial to praise achievement rather than to criticise failure. I found that I asked myself alot of questions when I encountered any of the students having difficulties. "Why is this student failing in this exercise?". "It is a matter of lack of ability or lack of interest and motivation?". "Is it a matter of gaps in previous achievement?". I wanted to know the answers. I had no intention of giving up on any of the children who were failing, rather than seeking new ways to develop their talents. I believe that my role as an art teacher is not to present facts for practice, but rather to create active learning opportunities for children. I feel the organisation of individual lessons must provide greater scope for more creative and imaginative problem solving and skills enhancement approach to learning. Recent research on individual differences and the needs of disadvantaged students indicate that:

- Effective teaching should emphasise both lower-order and higher order skills for all learners. This is especially important for low-achieving students, who may have more difficulty developing higher-order thinking on their own.

- The quality of time devoted to learning is often more important for low-achieving students and for higher-order learning than is quantity of time.

- Direct Instruction, which seems to be particularly effective for low-achieving students, is a necessary but not sufficient method for teaching higher order skills to any student. It needs to be combined with more open ended strategies in order to foster knowledge construction.[4]

Students as they mature, should be shouldering more responsibility for their own learning and at every stage they should be encouraged to display more initiative and independence of mind.

FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER 3

1. Ronald H. Silverman, What Research Tells Us Above Motivating Students
    for Art Activity", in <u>Foundations For Curriculum Development and
    Evaluation in Art Education,</u> eds. G.W. Hardiman and T. Zernich,
    (Champaign, Ill. : Stipes, 1987), p. 431.

2. Ibid., p. 438.

3. Curriculum and Examinations Board, <u>In Our Schools : A Framework for
    Curriculum and Assessment,</u> (Dublin : Curriculum and Examinations
    Board, March 1986), cited in D.G. Mulcahy, <u>Irish Educational Policy:
    Process and Substance,</u> eds. D.G. Mulcahy and D. O'Sullivan, (Dublin :
    Institute of Public Administration, 1989), p. 91.

4. Ibid., p. 105

CONCLUSION

From what I have read and researched while writing this dissertation, it appears, again as in other countries, that the majority of underachieving pupils are located in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods and that, in these neighbourhoods, some schools have more under-achieving pupils than others. General recognition of the under-achievement phenomenon has been complemented by the efforts of educationalist's and researchers to measure its extent, to analyse the reasons for it, to study the experiences of other countries in trying to cope with it and to propose strategies for action. All appear to agree that the source of the problem is social and cultural at least as much as educational and that close home/school links are indispensable. I feel confident that schools will no doubt continue to experiment with teaching methods in an effort to improve the service they provide for disadvantaged, and indeed for all children.

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