Paper 1/5 - Disengagement from school amongst socio-economically disadvantaged students in the UK: teacher support as a protective factor

Neil Kaye, Middlesex University

This paper focuses on students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and the extent to which they are more or less likely than others in their peer group to be disengaged from school. Previous research (Ferguson et al.; 2005, Robson and Team, 2008; Dale, 2010; Lamb and Markussen, 2011) has identified young people from low socioeconomic status (SES) background as being more at-risk of leaving school early, becoming NEETs (not in education, employment or training) and experiencing poor educational and labour market outcomes.

For these young people in particular, the role of social support structures has been shown to be an important insulating factor against such risks (Rutter, 1987; Rak and Patterson, 1996; Malecki et al., 2006), providing access to vital resources and ‘social capital’ that can help them to successfully negotiate their transition from school to work. Such support networks may come from family members, peers or through community networks. For students still in compulsory education, however, the importance of the role of the teacher-student relationship cannot be underestimated.

The paper presents preliminary findings from new empirical data collected in two urban locations within the UK – London and Tyne & Wear – as part of the wider RESL.eu project. The dataset contains survey responses from more than 3,000 young people of compulsory school age.

The findings examine the extent to which students with low SES are more likely to be disengaged from school and goes on to explore significant correlations with the existence of positive social support structures, with a focus on the role of perceived teacher support.