



Postscript

Downes, P. (2011) The Neglected Shadow: European perspectives on emotional supports for early school leaving prevention. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, 3 (2), 3-36

Recent OECD reports emphasize ten key steps to equity in education, with concrete targets related to low attainment and early school leaving. Such steps, however, neglect the importance of emotional dimensions to early school leaving and the consequent need for system level emotional supports. The current study involves qualitative research interviews with senior government officials and secondary school management representatives across eight European countries, with a particular focus on school climate and emotional support issues. Issues raised by interviewees for students at risk of early school leaving include supports for withdrawn children, for those at risk of suicide and those being bullied at school affecting their nonattendance. Other emerging themes include alternatives to suspension and teacher education for improving their conflict resolution skills. Some interviewees explicitly observe the dearth of emotional support services available in practice in their countries. The pervasive policy gaps across national levels for a mental health and emotional support strategy, as part of an early school leaving prevention strategy, requires serious and immediate attention.

Keywords: early school leaving, prevention, school climate, mental health, alternatives to suspension.

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POSTSCRIPT

The Emotional-Relational Turn for Early School Leaving Prevention: Building on *The Neglected Shadow* for Inclusive Systems in and around Schools.

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In Europe, if not internationally, the past decade in early school leaving prevention research and policy can be characterised as involving an emotional-relational turn. Some key features of this accelerated emotional-relational focus previously documented include the need to address authoritarian teaching and teacher conflict resolution skills, to prevent students being alienated from school. It also involves stronger integration of health and education policy and research, including emotional counselling supports and multidisciplinary teams in and around schools. This emotional-relational turn is argued here to include four further pillars as part of an inclusive systems approach: children's voices, integrated bullying and early school leaving prevention supports, positive school climate, together with social and emotional education.

Features of the Emotional-Relational Turn for Early School Leaving Prevention

In Europe, if not internationally, the past decade in early school leaving prevention research and policy can be characterised as involving an emotional-relational turn (Downes 2018). Some key features of this emotional-relational turn were argued for in *The Neglected Shadow* paper published in this journal. These include a heightened awareness of the need to address authoritarian teaching and teacher conflict resolution skills, to prevent students being alienated from school. It also involves a stronger integration of health and education policy and research, including an acceleration of focus on emotional counselling supports and multidisciplinary teams in and around schools, to address issues of family support, as well as complex needs such as addiction. The EU Commission Eurydice report (2014) has explicitly addressed the issue of the need to overcome policy bifurcation, the diametric splits at system levels between health and education, including social services ministries.

This emotional-relational turn is built on four further pillars: children and young people's voices, recognising the influence of bullying on early school leaving, positive school climate together with social and emotional education. This is not to minimise the importance of macrostructural dimensions such as poverty impinging on early school leaving, including for child labourers (Bademci, Karaday, & Vural, 2016). Ecclestone & Hayes (2009) pit an emotional wellbeing focus against a poverty focus, seeing the former as a distraction from the latter. While this may be the case in a distinctive UK historical context, it need not be the case more widely (Downes 2018a). Nevertheless, it is to be emphasised that structural investment issues such as high pupil-teacher ratio may impact classroom climate issues in countries experiencing high levels of poverty. It is to be recognised that there is not one early school leaving problem and a myriad of reasons why young people wish to leave school early. That this emotional-relational turn addresses a previously largely neglected issue for research and policy for early school leaving prevention is not to suggest that it is the sole lens for this issue.

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A key dimension to bridge health and education concerns foregrounded in *The Neglected Shadow* is the need to bring public health models of differentiated need into analysis of early school leaving prevention, as well as its symbiotic research domain, school violence and bullying prevention. This distinguishes strategic levels of intervention for all (universal), some at moderate risk with a focus on group supports (selected prevention) and few at high risk with complex needs requiring individual intensive supports (indicated prevention). Esch et al.'s (2014) review of mental health dimensions to early school leaving offers notable findings relevant to this indicated prevention level. 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, such as feeling too nervous in class and being anxious to speak in public, both representing symptoms of social phobia.

Bademci, Karaday and de Zulueta (2015) highlight neglect and abuse experienced by Istanbul street youth, while Quiroga, Janosz and Bisset's (2013) research involving 493 high-risk French-speaking adolescents living in Montreal observed that 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. Quiroga et al. (2013) conclude that interventions that target student mental health and negative self-perceptions are likely to improve dropout prevention. Loneliness has emerged as a risk factor for early school leaving in a Norwegian study, being as significant a risk factor as educational attainment (Frostad, Jan Pijl, & Egil Mjaavatn, 2015). This emotional-relational dimension of loneliness is less at the indicated prevention level of chronic need but more at the moderate risk level of selected prevention.

That relationships matter is not something that has emerged in research recently. International research in education has previously emphasised the importance of caring relationships in schools (e.g., Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Moreover, Bronfenbrenner & Morris' (1998) accentuation of proximal processes, as microsystem interaction such as relationships offers an apt initial framework for further accepting this truism that relationships matter. Markussen, Frøseth and Sandberg's (2011) research on relational supports and expulsions is a stark illustration of the key role of system relational supports. Their longitudinal study followed a sample of 9,749 Norwegian students over a five-year period, out of compulsory education and through upper secondary education. Not unexpectedly, they observed that the higher the students scored on an index measuring deviant behaviour, the higher their probability of early leaving as compared to completing. However, within this group demonstrating problematic behaviour, Markussen et al., (2011) found that students with high scores on an index measuring seriously deviant behaviour were less likely to leave early than students with low scores on this index; this finding is explained by the extra resources, support and attention these students are provided with, making it less probable for them to leave. Cederberg & Hartsmar (2013) observed that those who were considering leaving school early, but changed their mind, reported that they did so after advice from a teacher or a social worker. The large-scale EU funded study on early school leaving, RESL-EU, also places relationships central to early school leaving prevention (van Praag, Nouwen, Van Caudenberg, Clycq, & Timmerman, 2018), as does an EU Commission report on lessons from second

chance education (Day, Mozuraityte, Redgrave, & McCoshan, 2013). Likewise, school disengagement is in its very own terms of self-description an issue of relationships, a loss of relation to a school institutional environment often due to systemic factors (Rogers 2016).

Integrating Research and Strategic Responses for Early School Leaving and School Violence and Bullying Prevention

Bridging health and education has also involved a reconstruction of domains typically treated as largely separate from each other, such as early school leaving and school bullying prevention (Downes & Cefai 2016). Different problems may invite common integrated system responses. This ecological systems approach builds on Bronfenbrenner to also address system blockage (Downes 2014). While not necessarily the same individuals are at risk of early school leaving and bullying, possible responses show great similarities and therefore a common strategy may be useful, including common systems of supports, such as a transition focus to post-primary, multidisciplinary teams for complex needs (Edwards & Downes 2013), language support, family outreach supports and teacher professional development on issues relevant to preventing both problems, such as teachers' conflict resolution and diversity awareness competences (Downes & Cefai 2016). Direct and indirect effects of bullying on early school leaving relevant to perpetrators and victims include school absence, negative interpersonal relations with peers and conflict with teachers, low concentration in school, decreased academic performance, negative school climate influences, lower school belonging, satisfaction, and pedagogical well-being, with the effects of bullying exacerbated for those already at risk of early school leaving (Downes & Cefai 2016).

System blockages as a variant of authoritarian teaching include discriminatory bullying (Elamé 2013). This is a key issue in the context of increased migration in Europe and beyond. Elamé's (2013) research on discriminatory bullying involved a sample of 1352 immigrant and Roma students as part of a wider sample of 8817 students across 10 European countries. The findings of Elamé's (2013) study regarding the fundamental importance of teacher influence on discriminatory bullying are of particular interest. Those immigrant and Roma students who think the teacher exhibits similar behaviour towards 'native' and immigrant and Roma children in the class are those bullied least in the last 3 months. In contrast, those immigrant or Roma children who sense a bias in the teacher's attitudes against different ethnic groups in their class are also those who have been bullied with the highest frequency during the previous 3 months (Elamé, 2013). Exclusion as systems of relational spaces, and more specifically of diametric spatial systems of exclusion, splitting and mirror image hierarchical inversions are to be contrasted with concentric spatial systems of assumed connection and relative openness for early school leaving prevention (Downes 2013, 2016)

European and International Policy Issues for Emotional-Relational Dimensions

Allied with the key EU2020 *headline* target of reducing early school leaving to 10% across the EU, a more recent EU policy development offers further potential for expanding this emotional-relational turn for early school leaving prevention. This is the new European Key Competence for Lifelong Learning of *Personal*,

Social and Learning to Learn key competence (Commission 2018; EU Council 2018). This places personal and relational development issues at the heart of EU education policy.

The Commission's Thematic Working Group (TWG) report on early school leaving (2013) explicitly reiterates the importance of emotional supports, against the backdrop of a relational environment:

Those who face personal, social or emotional challenges often have too little contact with education staff or other adults to support them. They need easy access to teachers and other professionals supporting their educational and personal development (pp.18-19)

Significantly, the EU Council Conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school (2015) formally accepts the importance of these systemic dimensions:

...factors such as an unfavourable school climate, violence and bullying, a learning environment in which learners do not feel respected or valued...or poor teacher-pupil relationships may lead learners to leave education prematurely (p.5)

The Commission's School Policy Working Group report on early school leaving (2015) further recognises the need to bridge health and education sectors, as part of a multidisciplinary team approach:

A 'whole school approach' also implies a cross-sectoral approach and stronger cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders (social services, youth services, outreach care workers, psychologists, nurses, speech and language therapists, guidance specialists, local authorities (p.5)

While much of the focus of the qualitative research in *The Neglected Shadow* was on EU contexts given that it was based on a 12 country European study, and was developed from an EU Presidency Conference presentation (Downes 2010), it is important to also briefly consider these issues for a wider international context. Though the OECD was criticised in *The Neglected Shadow* for ignoring emotional and relationships for equity in education, their more recent work, though not without its limits (Cefai, Bartolo, Cavioni, & Downes, 2018), has at least recognised the key role of social and emotional education. Likewise PISA (2012) offers more than scrutiny of literacy and numeracy and includes a focus on School Belonging and Feeling Like an Outsider, including a specific focus on marginalised students (OECD 2013). The WHO (2012) has foregrounded not only the need for caring responsive teachers for student wellbeing but also explicitly raised concerns regarding authoritarian teaching so as not to publicly humiliate students.

As part of an overall multisector approach, the Global School Health statement for the Integration of Health and Education by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and the International School Health Network (ISHN) recognises that:

The health sector needs to seek integration within the education system—not education's adoption of health priorities. The health sector must find its cultural anchor within education and integrate its processes and outcomes. (2015, p.1)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises voices of children and young people, through Art 12 (1). However, the US is an international outlier in that it is the only country not to have ratified this Convention, now that Somalia and South Sudan have completed ratification. This has arguably had a negative impact on US based research on early school leaving prevention, as well as allied fields of school bullying and violence prevention, with regard to children's and young people's voices.

An Emotional-Relational Turn for Early School Leaving Prevention as Part of Promoting Inclusive Systems

One shift in the past decade is to address the need to promote inclusive systems and not simply to prevent, whether early school leaving or school bullying. Our recent work, published by the EU Commission (Downes, Nairz-Wirth & Rusinaite 2017), has sought to develop a framework of ten key guiding principles for inclusive systems in and around schools, including action-guiding structural indicators for system change. These ten principles include a *systemic* focus on addressing system blockages as barriers and on system supports, a *holistic* approach recognising social, emotional and physical needs and not simply academic, cognitive ones (Downes 2013a); *equality and non-discrimination* acknowledges that different groups may need additional supports in a respectful environment free of prejudice. *Building on strengths* challenges negative deficit labels of vulnerable groups and seeks to promote growth rather than simply prevent. A principle of *representation and participation of marginalised groups* involves a distinct focus on processes and structures for their representation and participation. *Active participation of parents in school* requires a strategic focus on marginalised parents. A *lifelong learning* principle brings educational focus on active learning methodologies for issues of active citizenship, personal and social fulfilment, intercultural dialogue across communities, as well as on poverty and social inclusion, and employment. Other key principles already discussed include *children's voices*, *differentiation of needs* and *multidisciplinarity*.

The inclusive systems framework seeks to expand upon the emotional-relational turn for early school leaving research, and to deconstruct resilience theory to move from the resilient individual and resilient systems to inclusive systems (Downes 2017, 2018a). The interdisciplinary theoretical framework of inclusive systems combines a health and education focus with a reconstruction of both the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) in developmental psychology and Lévi-Strauss' (1963, 1973) structural anthropology in spatial relational terms of inclusive systems as concentric spatial systems (Downes 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017a). As relational spaces that are crossculturally meaningful, a distinctive focus on spatial systems as concentric relational spaces is contrasted with fragmented, hierarchical diametric spatial systems in and around schools. Early school leaving prevention is envisaged as a shift from diametric oppositional, hierarchical, closed and fragmented systems to promoting concentric relational systems of assumed connection that are relatively more open.

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