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Paul Downes

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An Emerging Paradigm of Structural Indicators to Examine System Supports for Children's and Adolescents' Education and Wellbeing

Paul Downes¹

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Abstract This article argues that a distinct focus on background system supports can take place through structural indicators, at both national and institutional levels. Development of structural indicators is already taking place for the UN right to the highest attainable standard of health and in recent publications of the European Commission in education contexts. Structural indicators are generally framed as potentially verifiable yes/no answers, they address whether or not key structures, mechanisms or principles are in place in a system. As relatively enduring features or key conditions of a system, they are, however, potentially malleable. A systems of care focus is resonant with structural indicators and moves beyond isolated, fragmented service provision to an integrated whole system of supports. Structural indicators can aid such strategic planning for systems of care. This focus on structural indicators goes beyond a traditional qualitative/quantitative distinction and beyond reliance on sharing models of good practice to seek to identify key structural conditions for good practice. Structural indicators offer a bridge between central strategic direction and local flexibility. The weight of evidence required for a structural indicator may depend on its scope and purpose. Structural indicators can combine a rights, principles and strategic policy based focus with one that is informed by implementation science issues and evidence. They offer a policy relevant bridge between research and practice.

Keywords Structural indicators · Systems of Care · Education · Wellbeing · Children · Adolescents

✉ Paul Downes
paul.downes@dcu.ie

¹ Institute of Education, St. Patrick's Campus Drumcondra, Dublin City University, 9 Dublin, Ireland

1 Introduction

A new paradigm of structural indicators relevant to children's education and wellbeing has emerged in recent policy documents and research reports published by the European Commission (Eurydice 2015, 2016; Downes et al. 2016, 2017; Cedefop 2016). This use of structural indicators differs from quantitative indicators of the same terminology employed a decade before (European Commission 2003). The newer framework of structural indicators operates by analogy (Downes 2014a, b) with a UN right to health framework (UN Rapporteur 2005, 2006) which outlined an initial conception of structural indicators. Whereas the UN right to health framework treats structural indicators within a rights based approach, the use by the recent European Commission documents is with regard to such structural indicators for promoting quality within a system, whether with regard to school bullying and violence (Downes and Cefai 2016), inclusive systems for early school leaving prevention (Downes et al. 2017) or developing supportive systems in vocational education and training (VET) (Cedefop 2016).

Ben-Arieh (2008) has emphasised the need for policy-oriented relevance for child indicators. This new proposed paradigm of structural indicators similarly seeks to offer such a bridge between research and policy, as well as practice (Downes et al. 2016, 2017) to enable policy decision-makers and practitioners develop their reflective practice as part of a strategic implementation focus in a system. It has potential scope for use in the future for wider contexts of children's education and wellbeing.

This article will seek, in section 2, to outline *what* are structural indicators in the contexts where they are now being used. In developing the conceptual framework for such structural indicators in section 3, the conceptual basis for *how* to select particular structural indicators and key illustrative guiding principles for how to interpret structural indicators will be presented. Section 4 will expand on this conceptual framework through examining contexts *where* such structural indicators can be used, that are relevant to children's education and wellbeing. Such contexts of structural indicators for children's education and wellbeing operate through a focus on systems, on system change as part of an emerging recognition that promoting inclusive systems (Downes et al. 2017) can help address a common group of issues for children and adolescents. Section 5 will centrally address the question *why* such structural indicators are beneficial, as well as addressing their limitations. The concluding section will raise the issue of *who* can lead such review and implementation processes for structural indicators for children's education and wellbeing in the future.

2 What are Structural Indicators?

A key starting point for the proposed framework of structural indicators is the UN Special Rapporteur's (2006) account of a range of structural indicators to give expression to a dimension of the international right to the highest attainable standard of health:

54. Structural Indicators Address whether or Not key Structures and Mechanisms that are Necessary for, or Conducive to, the Realisation of the Right to Health, are in Place. They are Often (but Not Always) Framed as a Question Generating a yes/No Answer. For Example, they May Address: The Ratification of International Treaties

that Include the Right to Health; the Adoption of National Laws and Policies that Expressly Promote and Protect the Right to Health; or the Existence of Basic Institutional Mechanisms that Facilitate the Realisation of the Right to Health...

The focus with structural indicators is on relatively enduring features that are, nevertheless, potentially malleable. For a State to assert the presence of any given structural indicator, generally framed as a yes/no question, evidence may need to be furnished to validate this assertion. The detail of such evidence may depend on the kind of specific structural indicator and may require different levels of detail for different structural indicators (Downes 2014a, b). Any suspicion that a state or institution is window dressing through giving a positive response to a key structural indicator when in fact it is not in a position to do so can be followed up on, if necessary, with further questions to require proof of claims being made. The level of detail may also depend on the form of the reporting process with regard to assessment of a State's successful implementation of a given cluster of indicators. The Eurydice Background Reports to the Education and Training Monitor 2015 and 2016 focus on the presence or absence of key dimensions in a system for educational issues.

Examples of structural indicators identified by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health include as follows:

A national strategy and plan of action that includes the right to health. Because the right to health demands that a State has a strategy and plan of action that encompasses the right to health, including universal access... The participation of individuals and groups, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, in relation to the formulation of health policies and programmes... Access to health information, as well as confidentiality of personal health data. (2006, p.13)

Other examples of structural indicators that can operate on diverse levels in education include curriculum aspects (i.e., presence or otherwise of a subject on the national school curriculum), institutional admission criteria for entry to a school or university, roles in institutions, guiding principles, existence of physical spaces in schools such as parents' rooms, etc. Another example is legislation, such as offering a statutory right to secondary education.

A recent report for the European Commission views possible users of its structural indicators tool for inclusive systems in and around schools as national policy-makers, inspection/evaluation experts, regional and local authorities, school leaders and teachers (Downes et al. 2017). The structural indicators tool developed in this report is to feed into whole school planning and to external evaluation processes (Downes et al. 2017). Illustrative examples of structural indicators for national policy makers in this report include as follows:

- National strategic approach is in place to establish local cross-school cooperation structures. YES/NO
- Transparent school admission and enrolment criteria at national level to ensure students are not excluded from a local school due to their socioeconomic or ethnic background. YES/NO
- There is a central system for data collection nationally, coordinated by a central body, where data can be integrated at all local, regional and national levels. YES/NO

- Illustrative examples of structural indicators for inclusive systems at school level in this report include:
- Clarity on whether the sending or receiving school is responsible for the transition plan for individual students of higher need. YES/NO
- Alternatives to suspension/expulsion are provided in your school. YES/NO
- Whole school approach to developing a positive relational school and classroom climate exists in your school. YES/NO. (Downes et al. 2017).

It is recognised that some data collection systems may need to be developed to provide evidence on these structural indicators nationally and to improve feedback processes between schools and central levels (Downes et al. 2017).

A different structural indicators tool seeks to identify key features of whole school and wider system interventions for schools, municipalities and national decision-makers to address in their strategic responses to school bullying and violence prevention (Downes and Cefai 2016). Based on a triangle of being informed by evidence, legal issues and health promotion principles, illustrative examples of structural indicators to guide national level strategic decision-making regarding school bullying and violence prevention are as follows:

- Existence of a national school bullying and violence prevention strategy YES/NO
- Bullying prevention built into school self-evaluation processes. YES/NO
- Bullying prevention built into school external evaluation processes YES/NO
- Explicit strategy to directly address discriminatory bullying in schools YES/NO (Downes and Cefai 2016).

Illustrative examples of structural indicators at a given school level include:

- Existence of a whole school anti-bullying policy. YES/NO
- A coordinating committee at the school level to implement whole school approach YES/NO (Downes and Cefai 2016).

Structural indicators can be laws, spaces, roles and responsibilities in an organisation, interventions, services, as well as key guiding principles (Downes 2014a). They can operate at various levels of abstraction. Structural features of a system that are potentially malleable can affect processes of system change. Thus, structural indicators are relevant to dynamic development of many process issues in a system. This framework of structural indicators thereby challenges a traditional division separating a static structure focus from a dynamic process focus (Downes et al. 2017).

Structural indicators go beyond the quantitative/qualitative distinction, as they are factual, potentially verifiable yes/no answers. Many taken for granted everyday facts are not simply numerical; structural features of such a system through structural indicators give expression to some of these verifiable facts. Structural features of a system are not simply subjective perceptions and hence are not qualitative data. They provide a systemic-level focus for change rather than reducing change to one simplistic magic bullet cause. They are policy and practice relevant. Structural indicators offer a scrutiny of State or institutional effort (UN Rapporteur 2005, 2006; Downes 2014a, b). They offer a framework for strategic direction as to *what* issues are addressed at

system level, while also offering flexibility at local or national contextual level as to *how* to address these issues. In the words of a Cedefop (2016)

An important tension in education, including VET, is between prescriptive top-down models based on centralised direction and bottom-up processes that emphasise local creativity and autonomy for learning. Structural indicators offer a bridge between these two tensions, as an approach to aid both central strategic direction and accountability on the one hand, and local flexibility and creativity on the other. Structural indicators also focus throughout on problems and solutions at system level to scrutinise potential for improvement through proportionate measures for legitimate aims. They offer a distinctive focus on availability of services and supports for strategic purposes at system level. (p.129)

It is important to emphasise that structural indicators offer a framework for strategic direction as to *what* issues are addressed at system level, while also offering flexibility at local or national contextual level as to *how* to address these issues. This respects the professional judgments of educators, health and care professionals rather than imposing rigid top-down prescriptive activities in programmatic manuals. While seeking to support the dynamism of local energy and people tuned into the needs of local communities, it is not simply total decentralisation (Downes 2015a). It requires that key structural systemic features be addressed, though giving local autonomy as to how to address it.

As a focus on systems, not simply individuals, structural indicators offer a flexible approach to understanding policy, strategy and implementation in areas relevant to the lives of children and adolescents across different cultural and socio-economic contexts. Such a structural concern is akin to an x-ray – it can, with the right lens of questions, extract key findings about how well a system is bringing progressive change.

These approaches to structural indicators, building from the UN framework, differ from an earlier approach of the European Commission to structural indicators in its 2003 Communication that treats structural features of society as quantitative statistical indicators, comparable to what the UN framework would describe as outcome or process indicators. Outcome-based indicators provide little or no guidance for improvement (Stecher 2005). They do not explain why phenomena occur, or how they could be changed, or obstacles to their change. Structural indicators offer a stronger focus on addressing system blockage than do outcome indicators. Including through a more context specific focus to acknowledge cultural differences between systems of supports, structural indicators can promote system change, overcoming system inertia, including to help attain outcomes.

The current OECD Education at a Glance focus is on relevant outcome indicators, such as the ones in the 2012 report examining population that has attained tertiary education (2010) and graduation rates at tertiary level (2010). Its scope also includes helpful process indicators, such as ‘Percentage of 15-year-old boys and girls planning a career in engineering or computing’, ‘Percentage of 15-year-old boys and girls planning a career in health services’ (p. 75). While it does refer to ‘structural factors’ in the analysis of how many students are expected to finish tertiary education, ‘such as the length of tertiary education programmes or the obligation to do military service’ (OECD 2012b, p. 63), these are not developed into structural indicators as such, as a dimension of public policy. Similarly, as observed in Downes (2014a, b), the OECD Education at a Glance does engage with structural features of educational systems but

does not do so systematically through the lens of structural indicators, referring to the 'structure of tertiary education: main programme blocks (2010) Proportion of graduations/graduates following the Bologna structure (or in programmes that lead to a similar degree in non-European countries)' (p. 70). Again, despite these references to structure, they are not conducted within an operative framework of structural indicators.

At times in the analysis of specific issues, distinct themes are identified for public policy that could be open to interpretation in terms of structural indicators, such as the headings 'extending parental leave to fathers' (OECD 2012b, p. 78) and 'instituting quotas to increase the number of women on company boards, empower specialised bodies and take legal action against employers who engage in discriminatory practices' (OECD 2012b, p. 79). These structural dimensions are considered by the OECD (2012b) in thematic rather than systematic fashion (Downes 2014a, b). In a different report, the OECD (2012a) again makes important thematic points for structural features of education systems such as to 'prioritise the development of positive teacher-student and peer relationships' (p. 4) but again does so thematically rather than systematically through structural indicators that would focus on consistent systemic availability of professional development and preservice for teachers for their classroom conflict resolution and diversity awareness skills.

The proposed focus on structural indicators not only goes beyond a traditional qualitative/quantitative distinction in assessing system level progress in an area. It goes beyond a discourse reliant on sharing models of good practice to seek to identify key structural conditions for good practice rather than seeking to naively transfer a good practice from one complex context to another. The key structural conditions of good practice are the dimensions for transferability. They can be used in complementary fashion with outcome indicators to evaluate factors contributing to or hindering attainment of outcomes.

3 How to Select Particular Structural Indicators and key Illustrative Guiding Principles for How to Interpret Structural Indicators

3.1 Criteria for Selecting Particular Structural Indicators

Selection of structural indicators has been informed by international research evidence, legal standards and health promotion principles for the tool to address school bullying and violence in a European Union context (Downes and Cefai 2016). Again for the structural indicators tool for inclusive systems in and around schools in Europe (Downes et al. 2017), empirical evidence and legal principles were supplemented by EU policy documents in the area of early school leaving which is an EU2020 headline target for education. These policy documents, informed by international evidence, involve European Council Recommendations, School Policy Working Group Policy proposals, as well as European Commission Staff Working Papers. At a national level or in other international regions, there may be similar thematic reports or policy documents on issues pertaining to children's education and wellbeing, that could be synthesized through a structural indicators tool to inform policy and practice in a given country context or wider regional context.

Prior commitment to key guiding principles for selection of structural indicators was established in the inclusive systems in and around schools report (Downes et al. 2017). These guiding principles, drawn from legal and policy documents, as well as research, include ones such as:

- Equality and non-discrimination: Substantive equality requires a commitment to educational success for everyone irrespective of social background; to achieve this, different groups may need additional supports. Non-discrimination includes a right to equality of concern and respect in a supportive environment free of prejudice.
- Holistic approach: A holistic approach recognises the social, emotional and physical needs, not simply the academic and cognitive needs, of both children/young people and their parents.
- Active participation of parents in school, including marginalised parents: Parental input into school policy and practices, as well as their children's education, requires both a general strategic commitment and a distinctive focus on marginalised parents' involvement (Downes et al. 2017).

The need to engage marginalised voices of parents is also an implication of the UNESCO (2016) report on supporting inclusive education:

... representation tends to be dominated by the most outspoken and articulate groups. This can result in consultation exercises, which, although intended to be inclusive, actually reinforce a sense of exclusion and disaffection among some of the school community' (p. 81).

Thus, the structural indicators tool can be an explicit statement of values to inform public policy documents and practice to promote children's education and wellbeing, and to complement evidence-informed structural indicators.

The weight of evidence required for a structural indicator may depend on its scope and purpose. A strong burden of proof for aspects to be structural indicators would be met through inferences based on weighted mean effect sizes and correlations between study features and effect sizes, in an international meta-analysis. This is available, for example, for aspects of structural indicators in the areas of school bullying and also social and emotional learning (Downes and Cefai 2016). International reviews of whole school approaches to bullying prevention highlight key features of successful interventions. For example, the influential meta-analytical review of Ttofi and Farrington (2011) found that the most effective programme elements associated with a decrease in bullying others were: parent training/meetings, teacher training, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods (that are not reducible to punitive or zero tolerance approaches), cooperative group work between professionals, school assemblies, information for parents, classroom management and rules, and a whole school anti-bullying policy. The most effective programme elements for reducing being bullied were: videos, disciplinary methods, parent training/meetings and cooperative group work between professionals. These aspects can be incorporated into a structural indicators tool, whether for national policy makers or at local school level (Downes and Cefai 2016).

Durlak (2015) highlights issues for social and emotional learning in schools that point to the relevance of a structural focus on implementation issues: Sufficient staff training to execute a new programme correctly; just as quality implementation is vital for effective programmes, good professional development is key for quality implementation; inviting input from stakeholders such as students and teachers. In order to engage ethnically or culturally diverse students, it is seen as vital that their input into materials, activities and goals is included; to retain the active ingredients of a

programme, while allowing for well-planned programme adaptation; revisiting steps as some turnover of staff, including school principals must be assumed. Implementation science can focus on key systemic aspects to implementation that can be helped by structural indicators for system review of implementation. This goes beyond Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1995) systems focus as it examines ways to prevent system blockage and resistance to change (Downes 2014a, b). It also addresses key system implementation problems such as lack of structures such as national committees to implement national strategies and interventions of insufficient intensity to bring change (Downes 2014a, b), as well as the need for system feedback processes and scrutiny of transitions that Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasised.

The burden of proof for evidence to establish the policy or practice relevance of a specific structural indicator may be less stringent for self-assessment (Downes 2008), i.e., assessment of a State's or institution's own progress with regard to its provision in a particular domain, compared with its own previous level of performance in relation to provision. Correspondingly, use of structural indicators for comparative international purposes implies a higher burden of evidence to establish relevant structural indicators. A different possible use for a structural indicators tool is to facilitate policy makers to brainstorm on potential policy options and pathways for system development on a given issue, through identifying structural features of promising practices that could be replicated elsewhere at system levels. Different purposes for clusters of structural indicators bring not only different levels of stringency for being informed by evidence, but also different kinds of review processes for feedback on the presence or absence of these structural features in a given system.

3.2 Key Guiding Principles for Interpreting Structural Indicators by Analogy with a Rights-Based Focus

While structural indicators can play a key role as part of a rights-based argument for system development (UN Rapporteur 2005, 2006, Downes 2007a, b, 2008), the argument for current purposes is by analogy with the UN Right to health to identify guiding principles from a policy and practice perspective for structural indicators for system development for children's and adolescents' education and wellbeing. These include principles of a) Participation of children and young people, b) Progressive Realisation, and c) Common yet differentiated responsibility. These are not necessarily as a rights-based argument per se.

a) Participation of Children and Young People

The need to involve children and adolescents in the development of indicators has been emphasised for their own views of necessities and desirable goods as criteria for item selection and sharing (Main and Bradshaw 2012) in a material deprivation index, as well as for a family affluence scale (Torsheim et al. 2015). It is to be recognised that an optimal source of information for studying children's wellbeing is the children themselves (Ben-Arieh 2008). Article 12 (1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child offers another key basis for structural indicators at a system level regarding system supports for children and young people across education and health sectors. It declares: 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the

views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'. For an example of structural consultation with children and young people, the Dublin City Comhairle na nOg (Young People's Council) is supported by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs and City of Dublin local Council; it was agreed to make the issue of the presence or absence of emotional counselling services in all schools a stated priority for 2016/17. This is in effect a scrutiny of a structural indicator for system change prioritised by children and young people, after a consultation process of dialogue with the Dublin city youth committee.

A number of the structural indicators in the recent tools for inclusive systems in and around schools (Downes et al. 2017) and for school bullying and violence prevention (Downes and Cefai 2016) give concrete expression to the principle of children and young people's participation. Examples of these structural indicators are as follows:

- The right of students to associate at any level in school through student councils is guaranteed by legislation. YES/NO
- Students and parents are directly represented on a whole school coordination committee for inclusive systems in the large majority of schools. YES/NO (Downes et al. 2017)
- Input of children and young people into developing curricular resources for bullying prevention, conflict resolution and overcoming prejudice YES/NO (Downes and Cefai 2016).

These structural indicators concretise the key principle of children's voices and participation, to ensure implementation of this key principle is able to be reviewed, as distinct from being simply a general principle that is less open to system scrutiny as being present or absent in a system.

b) Progressive Realisation

The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of health observed in his 2005 (February 11) report:

33. The International Right to Physical and Mental Health is Subject to Progressive Realisation...put Simply, All States are Expected to be Doing Better in five Years Time than What they are Doing Today (Progressive Realisation).

It is this feature of progressive realisation—involving indicators — which offers an important potential step forward in relation to developing States' and institutions commitments to developing system supports for children and adolescents. The reference point is progress compared with previous performance in an area, whether that of health or education.

c) Common Yet Differentiated Responsibility

Caddell (2008) proposes that the principle of common yet differentiated responsibility be transferred from its recognition in environmental law to the international right to health context of human trafficking:

there is little attempt within the [Trafficking] Protocol to recognise the different pressures under which the social services of different countries currently operate, with no concept of the 'common but differentiated responsibility' as seen in many multilateral environmental agreements applied in the Trafficking Protocol to recognise that some states are in a stronger position in terms of resources to underwrite the practical demands of compliance with their international commitments. (p. 125)

This principle recognises that some states are in a stronger position in terms of resources to underwrite the practical demands of compliance with their international commitments. Caddell's (2008) criticism of the lack of a principle of common but differentiated responsibility depending on resources, applied to the context of human trafficking in the Baltic States, has also been applied to the domain of access to education for marginalised groups with regard to clusters of structural indicators (Downes 2014a, b). It can go beyond this to structural indicators for children's and adolescents' education and wellbeing. At international comparative level, this principle would allow for different rates of progress in relation to investment in progress across clusters of structural indicators, based on resources of the country. The structural indicators provide recognition of diverse starting points of some countries relative to others (see Rajamani 2006 on this diversity in international legal contexts and Lewin 2007 on diverse starting points of countries in relation to access to education issues). Thus, a framework of comparative assessment across States of success and failure in meeting structural indicators can be developed over time.

A range of other key process principles can arguably provide a strong basis for informing structural indicators. These include commitments to stakeholder participation in interventions at system level. An 'action guiding' (Beitz 2009, p. 46) approach would give emphasis to clarity, coherence and practicality of implementation in the construction of potential structural indicators. This would be combined with a 'collaborative process necessary to identify the practical measures required' for implementation (Tobin 2012, p. 98). Such consultation and negotiation involves a 'dialogue with the interpretative community' (Tobin 2012, p. 98), which is envisaged for the UN right to the highest attainable standard of health but which can also take place in different areas and for different purposes with regard to structural indicators for children's and adolescents' education and wellbeing. Commitment to these dialogue principles would also focus on identifying relevant structural indicators at local and national levels as initial processes rather than starting at crossnational level; structural indicators regarding system levels supports and strategies would thus be developed from the ground up across contexts, depending on the various starting points of systems of care and supports at different national levels. Again building by analogy with principles identified for the UN right to health, local context sensitivity invokes a degree of flexibility that is 'sensitive to, informed by, and reflect[s] the needs and interests of local populations' (Tobin 2012, p. 111). It involves local community or stakeholder participation. This is related to 'a margin of appreciation' for States at national level 'to allow for a context sensitive implementation of the specific measures' (Tobin 2012, p.12). Lewin (2007) highlights the importance of a dialogue process more generally regarding indicators and benchmarks in observing the 'problematic' relationships between target setters and target getters:

Too frequently they are different groups of actors with different pathways of accountability to different masters. Targets set by others without ownership by those in a position to act are unlikely to deliver benefits and target may lack credibility and commitment. If target setters have not had experience of target getting they may set unrealistic targets. (p. 59)

Dialogue processes with the relevant stakeholders and community on implementation of system supports for children and young people offers not only clarity, relevance and substantive contributions to the clusters of structural indicators, but also aids their legitimacy through stakeholder ownership of the process.

4 Contexts Where Such Structural Indicators Can be Used that are Relevant to children's Education and Wellbeing: From an Individual to a Systemic Focus

4.1 Common System Responses to Promote Inclusive Systems and to Address System Blockages

Structural indicators operate at the level of *system* supports and system change with regard to children and young people's education and wellbeing. It is less a focus on the individual child, though it does focus on the needs of individuals and marginalised groups through system level supports. This is consistent with developments in resilience theory in developmental psychology which focuses on system supports (Ungar et al. 2007; Downes 2017), rather than simply on individual risk or resilience.

The important broadening of resilience by Ungar and his colleagues from the individual to include systemic dimensions as part of a cross-cultural understanding typically relies on Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1995) social-ecological systems approach. A well-recognised major limitation to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework of concentric nested systems of interrelation is that it tended to omit a dynamic focus; it neglected scrutiny not only of time but also of *system change* over time. Sultana (2008) highlights the importance of a temporal dimension, namely, the pace of change, for educational system reform. The more static concerns of Bronfenbrenner (1979) offer a limited conceptual framework for *system reform*, regarding the education and wellbeing of children and adolescents internationally. Despite Bronfenbrenner's (1995) later addition of a temporal dimension though the chronosystem, there is still a gap in Bronfenbrenner's systems account, with regard to system change and system blockage or fragmentation as a force of inertia towards change (Downes 2014a, b). It is this need for scrutiny of system implementation aspects, as well as prevention of system blockage and resistance to system change, that again requires structural indicators to provide structural scrutiny of systems affecting the education and wellbeing of children and young people.

A neglected implication of this shift in resilience theory from the foreground individual to the background system of supports is that many problems and interventions that have previously been represented as separate from each other from the perspective of the individual, can now be treated as requiring common solutions from a systems perspective. For example, some children displaying aggression have language development difficulties (Brinton and Fujiki 1993). Similarly, language development difficulties can affect school

performance in literacy and motivation, affecting early school leaving. Rather than representing bullying and early school leaving as quite distinct problems from the viewpoint of individual children who may be at risk of only one of these problems, from a systems support perspective, intervention through speech and language support services in schools can be a common single system response to address both distinct issues (Downes and Cefai 2016). Similarly, there is increasing recognition of the need to focus on school climate aspects for school transitions (Cadima et al. 2015; Madjar and Cohen-Malayev 2016; Downes 2017), as part of a systemic focus, rather than simply viewing transitions as a problem of the individual.

While structural indicators identify problems as blockages in systems, they are also solution focused, identifying problems and solutions, rather than simply tracing the vast range of causal factors associated with, for example, early school leaving viewed in isolation. Beyond the speech and language support aspect, a recent review for the European Commission concludes that common systems of holistic supports for both bullying and early school-leaving prevention need to include: a transition focus from primary to post-primary; multiprofessional teams for students and their families with complex needs; support for students with academic difficulties; social and emotional education curriculum; systems to substantially promote voices of marginalised students; early warning/support systems to identify pupils' needs for those at higher risk (Downes and Cefai 2016). Furthermore, it is recognised that both bullying and early school-leaving prevention require teacher professional development and pre-service preparation focusing on: developing teachers' relational competences for a promoting a positive school and classroom climate (Downes and Cefai 2016). In other words, areas previously represented as somewhat separate from the perspective of the individual child, such as bullying, educational performance, child wellbeing, language development and socio-emotional learning become integrated through a systemic focus on supports facilitated by a review framework of structural indicators.

Building on this insight, there is growing awareness, including in UNESCO (2016), of the need to promote *inclusive systems* in schools, integrating traditionally separate domains of health and education. Inclusive systems in and around schools concentrate on supportive, quality learning environments, on welcoming and caring schools and classrooms, and on preventing discrimination. It addresses the needs of students in a holistic way (their emotional, physical, cognitive and social needs), and recognises their individual talents and voices. It is open to the voices and active participation of parents, and also wider multidisciplinary teams and agencies (Downes et al. 2017). Inclusive systems in and around schools particularly focus on the differentiated needs of marginalised and vulnerable groups, including those at risk of early school leaving and alienation from society. (Downes et al. 2017).

An increasing systems focus, at least in some international contexts, regarding children's and adolescents' wellbeing and development is with regard to the establishment of systems of care rather than isolated and fragmented individual services for supports (see for example, *American Journal of Community Psychology* 2012, special edition on systems of care, Cook and Kilmer 2012, Suarez et al. 2012). A systems of care focus facilitates a supportive framework for structural indicators and moves beyond isolated, fragmented service provision to an integrated whole system of supports, where the aspects of each activity in the system of care is aware of its distinctive role and relationships with other

support services. Structural indicators can aid such strategic planning for systems of care, including the education system as a responsive system.

Indicators for the OECD *Education at a Glance* somewhat reflect developments in resilience theory that move beyond a focus simply on the individual to examine systems, though they need to go further to embrace structural indicators. Ungar et al. (2007) observe ‘a shift in focus from individual characteristics to protective factors, and finally to health resources and assets in a child’s community’ that ‘has taken place in mostly western contexts’ (p.288). Angel Gurria (2012), the OECD Secretary-General, summarises the systemic vision of the OECD’s indicators in the editorial to the 2012 annual report, ‘The OECD Indicators of Education Systems (INES) programme seeks to gauge the performance of national education systems as a whole, rather than to compare individual institutional or other sub-national entities. However, there is increasing recognition that many important features of the development, functioning and impact of education systems can only be assessed through an understanding of learning outcomes and their relationships to inputs and processes at the level of individuals and institutions. To account for this, the indicator framework distinguishes between a macro level, two meso-levels and a micro-level of education systems. These relate to:

- The education system as a whole
- The educational institutions and providers of educational services
- The instructional setting and the learning environment within the institutions
- The individual participants in education and learning’ (p. 18).

Nevertheless, this systemic dimension requires further scrutiny with implications for broadening the scope of relevant kinds of indicators to structural indicators for not only education but child and adolescent wellbeing generally.

A systemic concern takes place as a dimension of a policy and practice focus on structural indicators regarding presence or absence of system supports and strategic commitment to provision of system supports for a particular issue. Going beyond individual resilience or even resilient systems (Downes 2017), to a focus on inclusive systems, this framework integrates a range of solutions and services as part of an integrated and comprehensive systemic response to meeting children and young people’s educational and wellbeing needs. It reconstructs domains frequently seen as separate, as part of a holistic policy focus bridging health and education domains.

4.2 Structural Indicators as Malleable Supporting Conditions in Empirical Accounts of Systems

A focus on system supports through structural indicators builds on a key point of Rutter regarding neglect of silent supporting conditions in developmental psychology. Rutter (1985) argues that change to background supporting conditions have been frequently overlooked within developmental psychology:

It is commonly but wrongly assumed that a significant main effect in a multivariate analysis means that that variable has an effect on its own. It does not. What it means is that there is a significant main effect for that variable, after other

variables have been taken into account: that is not tantamount to an effect in the absence of all other variables (p. 601).

Structural indicators can provide such silent background conditions.

Rutter's (1985) position here on the tendency to ignore background necessary or even simply supportive conditions for the cause to 'work' is consistent with Mill's (1872) challenge to a clearcut distinction between causal and non-causal states:

It is seldom if ever between a consequent and a single antecedent that this invariable sequence subsists. It is usually between a consequent and the sum of several antecedents the concurrence of all of them being requisite to produce, that is, to be certain of being followed by the consequent (p. 327).

Mill noted that very often one antecedent is termed the cause, the other antecedents being conditions. Intervention models that 'work' causally have hidden supporting conditions, without which the more obvious causal elements could not have occurred, just as striking a billiard ball to hit another presupposes the condition of gravitation. Causes necessarily operate within a background of supporting conditions that are structured sources of the cause's efficacy. With regard to challenging causal determinism, an implication here is that change to background supporting conditions may shift the whole causal pathway of a system. This need not be a negative phenomenon; it may potentially be a constructive phenomenon if the causal pathways from the environment are destructive ones. In other words, a focus on changes to supporting background conditions, such as through structural indicators, may play a key role in resilience of children and young people to undermine damaging causal pathways; if the individual or wider societal system can be active in developing other background supporting conditions as system supports, this may be a key avenue for resilience and change. Structural indicators to examine systems need to reflect this key role of system supports as background conditions affecting outcomes.

5 Why Such Structural Indicators are Beneficial and Areas of their Limitations

Specific tools of structural indicators to address the strategic systemic needs of a given domain for children's and adolescents' education and wellbeing offer a potentially key lever to promote quality development in a system (Downes 2015a, b). It can contribute to quality promotion and review processes for strategic system change. Structural indicators clarify if an issue is being addressed strategically or not. As a user-friendly tool to guide practitioners and policy-makers, it can provide a condensed, action-guiding framework that synthesises a wide range of policy documents and research. In doing so, it helps prevent a policy amnesia where a large number of policy documents on an issue at national or international level can bring a lack of focus through information overload. A structural indicators tool, informed by the relevant evidence, legal principles and key policy documents can help bridge the divide not only between research and practice but also between policy and practice. Well-worded

structural indicators tools can help bring transparency and accountability about what is taking place in a given system.

Bridging research and policy/practice, structural indicators offer a balance between central direction and local ownership regarding policy and practice through giving direction regarding the *what* of the issue being addressed, while giving local flexibility and ownership regarding the *how* of addressing the issue. An important tension in areas of education and wellbeing for children and adolescents is between prescriptive top-down models based on centralised direction and bottom-up processes that emphasise local creativity, ownership and autonomy for learning and health promotion approaches (Weare and Nind 2011). Structural indicators offer a bridge between these two tensions, as an approach to facilitate both central strategic direction and accountability on the one hand, and local flexibility and creativity on the other hand.

A value of the proposed framework of structural indicators is that it provides scope for self-assessment at national and school levels, with a view to progression, year by year, in implementing strategic system change informed by these structural indicators. In setting out key areas for monitoring, feedback and transparency for the structural indicators, for example, for schools, flexibility is retained as to how these strategic areas are precisely to be addressed, while remaining cognisant of professional autonomy, and the distinctive cultural features and support services of a given country or region. Structural indicators can provide strategic direction that is sensitive to cultural context, as well as offering scope over time for comparative analysis internationally as takes place already with the Eurydice structural indicators 2015 and 2016. The indicators can distinguish State *and* local municipality and school effort. In doing so, they offer an incentive for governments to invest in the area of system supports for children and adolescents. They go beyond a one size fits all approach regarding *how* to intervene, which would be unsuitable across country contexts, even in a common region such as the EU. There is also scope to add country-specific structural indicators, as well as ones agreed across wider domains. Structural indicators can be at a national strategic framework level and at an institutional project level, both for external evaluation and self-evaluation. The indicators provide recognition of diverse starting points of some countries relative to others.

Waddington (2011) highlights that an investigative process at national level into structural, process and outcome indicators is especially obtainable for structural indicators, as this requires little financial investment and no statistical data as such. This is because structural indicators are basically relatively simple yes/no answers as to structural features of a system. Structural indicators at institutional levels could occur as part of self-evaluation processes to inform national level progress. The obstacles here are less in terms of financial resources and more in terms of changing institutional inertia. It may therefore require some change to institutional practices to ensure that this data are collected consistently. Nevertheless, they are less expensive and time consuming than quality labels (Downes 2015a, b).

Structural indicators offer a distinctive focus on availability of services and supports for strategic purposes at system level. It is to be recognised that such clusters of structural indicators are not to be set in stone but change historically over periods of time in a given country or local context. These are necessarily historically changing in light of system support provision improvements.

Structural indicators offer a framework for ongoing review and dialogue both within a State and across States. They allow for self-assessment where the comparison point

for progress is the State's and a given institution's previous performance in relation to these indicators. Clear targets for progress can be established based on the indicators. They can bring greater unity to areas of system supports that may be fragmented at national or local levels (see also Downes 2014a, b).

The structural indicators can be combined in complementary fashion with a focus on outcomes. As supporting conditions to obtain outcome indicators, structural indicators can provide a lens to explain why outcome indicators as targets may or may not be met. This is not to reduce a given cluster of structural indicators to service of only one outcome indicator or simply to service of outcome indicators. A commonality of system supports, identified as structural indicators, can contribute simultaneously to different outcome indicators. For example, supports such as emotional counselling services in schools, multidisciplinary teams in and around schools for family support and for provision of speech and language therapy, existence of alternatives to suspension/expulsion from school, may be structural indicators of system support conditions that are relevant both for distinct outcome indicators of early school leaving reduction and school bullying prevention (Downes and Cefai 2016). While structural indicators may be treated as a means to the end of outcome indicators, they may also offer a broader paradigm for social policy goals and strategies than one simply reduced to measurement of social policy impact through outcome indicators. A focus on standardisation and measurement in schools through outcome indicators is susceptible to a critique in terms of deprofessionalisation of teachers in schools through a bureaucratic managerialism (Ball 2012; Lynch et al. 2012). Structural indicators may be of particular relevance for system development for meeting the complex, relational, learner-centred needs of marginalised groups, through a contextual focus on emergent objectives, where a generic outcomes-driven focus can be questioned (Downes 2007a).

Focusing on background enabling or hindering conditions for system functioning, structural indicators are more systemic and solution focused than predominantly causal and problem focused. They are holistic, systemic and solution focused in their examination of structural enabling conditions blocking or promoting system change in education. The indicators, as a cluster, provide a systemic level focus for change rather than reducing change to one simplistic magic bullet cause. The structural indicators can offer transparent criteria for establishing a State's and institution's progress over time in an area of children's and adolescents' education and wellbeing. To achieve this, it is also vital that poverty issues are included (Downes 2014a, b) for many issues concerning children's education and wellbeing.

It may be objected that structural indicators lose critical information. A limitation of the yes/no structure of structural indicators is that it does not generally focus on dimensions of degree, as distinct from presence or absence of a structural systemic feature. This loses key quality information about the scale of implementation of a dimension in a system. This more detailed level of quantitative data regarding degree can supplement the structural indicators approach. The structural indicators questioning is particularly important when seeking to establish a new aspect in a system, to ensure it has been addressed strategically; its subsequent refinement and scale of implementation requires additional kinds of monitoring processes, such as through process indicators which are quantitative.

It is to be acknowledged that the flexibility of use of structural indicators is such that concepts of gradation can be somewhat incorporated within a review process, for example, to assess if a practice is typical or mainstreamed in a system though not necessarily present everywhere. For example, the question can be framed with regard to

a percentage of a practice in a given system, such as whether a large majority of more than 80% of schools in an area provide a particular feature, so that it can be characterised as the norm within a system – or alternatively a question can be asked as to whether less than 30% of schools provide a particular feature (Downes 2014a) which would highlight its lack of mainstreaming into systemic practice. The cut off points depend on the purposes of the particular structural indicators tool and the scale of information available to a given system. Structural indicators perform different, though complementary, functions of scrutiny compared with outcome and process indicators. Structural indicators are tools and as such, are only as useful as the purposes and strategies to which they are put.

6 Conclusion: Who Can Lead Such Review and Implementation Processes for Structural Indicators for children's Wellbeing

Structural indicators can operate at different system levels such as individual institution, local, regional, national, EU and UN levels. Examining key structural enabling or blocking conditions for development of policy goals throughout a system involves a holistic understanding of causality and system change that does not simply foreground one or two simplistic causes for reform but rather a cluster of action guiding supportive conditions to enable change through a cluster of structural indicators.

Establishing a substantial, clearly defined set of structural indicators is a substantial enterprise that requires clear lines of communication between a designated section in a State's Education Ministry and other levels. As the focus is on structural indicators rather than quantitative indicators, the key responsibility would lie with a policy-oriented section/unit in national Education Ministries more than necessarily being tasks directed by national educational or other statistical services. Such social inclusion policy units already exist in a number of European countries' Education Ministries (Downes 2014a, b). A process of dialogue between, for example, the UN and national Education Ministries could be established in relation to such structural indicators. In education systems with a strong regional or municipal focus, there would additionally need to be a process of engagement to develop such structural indicators, whether for international comparison or self-assessment. A focus also needs to be kept on the interface between structural and outcome indicators at the level of State policy units. Links are needed within a given State's Ministerial Department sections to integrate policy analysis of structural indicators with outcome indicators, so that both are not treated as totally different compartments, even if the data collection systems for the two kinds of indicators are in different sections.

Key issues for concern in developing structural indicators are: a) the quality of the dialogue process for their development, b) clarity of purpose regarding what social policy goals the structural indicators are key system conditions to support, c) clarity of terminology for each structural indicator, d) development of adequate review processes and feedback mechanisms for the system scrutiny (Table 1).

Different clusters of structural indicators bring different kinds of system review processes which are underpinned by various processes for dialogue in the construction of these structural indicators. Part of the legitimacy of any structural indicators tool is the quality of the dialogue process that has taken place, together with the different

Table 1 Structural indicators: Framework summary

What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes/no questions about the presence or absence of an enduring, yet malleable, system feature - Operates flexibly at different levels of a system, such as legislation, existence of a key service, roles in institutions, guiding principles, physical spaces
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rationale for given structural indicators informed by evidence, law, policy documents - Policy and practice relevant pathways to implement goals, background system supporting conditions, action guiding - Address system blockage, balance top-down direction with local contextual ownership - System transparency to explain why goals, outcomes are or are not attained, relevant for attainment of multiple strategic goals through addressing interconnected system processes and structures relevant to these goals
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of review processes for self-evaluation, external evaluation, comparative evaluation - Reviews for system quality promotion, for strategic action plans or for a human rights based implementation focus - Review processes could be informed by key principles such as children's participation, progressive realisation, common yet differentiated responsibility, dialogue with target groups
Where	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International, national, regional, local, institutional levels. - Potentially for supranational organisations, e.g., UN, OECD, European Commission - National data collection in ministerial policy units, linked with but not the same as statistical units analysing outcome indicators
When	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review timeframe depends on system strategic goals

purposes towards which the structural indicators clusters are being used. Structural indicators can combine flexibility with precision. There is a need for the wording of each structural indicator to be sufficiently tightly drafted to ensure there is clarity and consistency about what is being expected for system level reporting. There may be different standards of evidence required for something to be employed as a structural indicator in any given system of structural indicators.

It is important that there be a basic consistency between clusters of structural indicators identified at national and/or regional levels and those for institutional levels. This is for at least two reasons. Firstly, there is a risk of a displacement of responsibility effect whereby institutions have little decision making capacity or scope to meet the system levels issues raised in the institutional structural indicators review process; it may be demotivating for an institution to have little control over the issues addressed in the structural indicators, especially where the focus is placed on the institution rather than the structural issues at a national and/or regional level that need addressing. Secondly, a connected strategy for system development is needed between national and/or regional and institutional levels to maximise the relevance of the structural indicators as a tool to implement this linked strategy. The structural indicators review processes offer an opportunity for mutual feedback and dialogue between different system levels, whether international, national, regional, local or institutional.

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