



Response by Educational Disadvantage Centre to Draft Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education 2011

Submission: Dr. Paul Downes
Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre,
Senior Lecturer in Education (Psychology)
St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra

The Educational Disadvantage Centre welcomes a number of aspects, in particular, of the Teaching Council document on The Continuum of Teacher Education – the recommendation that school placement needs to take place in ‘various socio-economic and cultural environments’; the need to explore ways of facilitating entry to the profession by underrepresented groups and alternative ways of assessing competence in numeracy, literacy and Gaeilge, prior to entry; the focus on teachers’ personal growth; the focus on classroom management and differentiation; the renewal of registration being contingent on engagement in CPD and the focus on a lifelong learning framework.

The following issues require further identification and emphasis to address the needs of children, young people and teachers in DEIS schools:

- 1) A Stronger Focus and Priority to be given to Teacher Conflict Resolution skills and Sensitivity to Diversity at Post primary Level Especially through ITE and CPD**
- 2) Explicit Commitment to a Learner-centred and Child-Centred Focus for the Foundation Disciplines**
- 3) Recognition of an Active Citizenship role of the Teacher as part of a European Lifelong Learning Framework**

- 1) A Stronger Focus and Priority to be given to Teacher Conflict Resolution skills and Sensitivity to Diversity at Post primary Level Especially through ITE and CPD**

Recent international research regarding prevention of early school leaving is giving a strong focus on the need to develop teachers conflict resolution skills, sensitivity to

diversity as part of their classroom management skills. The recent European Commission and European Council documents on meeting the EU 2020 goal of 10% of early school leavers highlights the following points on this issue:

- The Proposal for an EU **COUNCIL Recommendation (2011) on policies to reduce early school leaving states:**

“At the level of the school or training institution strategies against early school leaving are embedded in an overall school development policy. They aim at creating a positive learning environment, reinforcing pedagogical quality and innovation, enhancing teaching staff competences to deal with social and cultural diversity, and developing anti-violence and antibullying approaches” (p. 12).

It continues: “Supporting and empowering teachers in their work with pupils at risk is a pre-requisite to successful measures at school level. Targeted teacher training helps them to deal with diversity in the classroom, to support pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and to solve difficult teaching situations” (p. 12).

- **The European Commission (2011) communication states that “Intervention** addresses emerging difficulties at an early stage and seeks to prevent them from leading to school drop-out. Intervention measures can focus on the whole school or training institution or can address individual pupils who are at risk of discontinuing their education or training. Whole school measures aim at improving the school climate and the creation of supportive learning environments” (p. 7).

In the EU Commission public consultation ‘Schools for the 21st century’, classroom management strategies were raised as an issue needing to be better addressed by teacher initial education (see also Commission staff working document 2008). An OECD (2009) report concluded that: ‘classroom discipline, aggregated to the school level, is a core element of instructional quality. In PISA, it is positively related to the school’s mean student achievement in many participating countries (Klieme and Rakoczy, 2003). Also, it has been shown that – unlike other features of classroom instruction – there is a high level of agreement about this indicator among teachers, students and observers (Clausen, 2002)’ (p. 91). Key results observed in TALIS (OECD 2009) include that:• One teacher in four in most countries loses at least 30% of the lesson time, and some lose more than half, in disruptions and administrative tasks – and this is closely associated with classroom disciplinary climate, which varies more among individual teachers than among schools.

In an Irish context, a range of reports from both the Educational Disadvantage Centre (Downes 2004; Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006; Downes & Maunsell 2007; Downes & Gilligan 2007), Barnardos (2006) and the ESRI (2008;2010) continually point to the central issue of teachers’ conflict resolution skills and relational skills as both a risk and protective factor against early school leaving. This issue was also recognised as an

important one needing to be addressed in the Joint Oireachtas Committee Report on Early School Leaving (2010).

Downes, Maunsell & Ivers (2006) observed a statistically significant difference between 6th class primary pupils across a number of DEIS schools and 1st year students in the postprimary schools. The report concluded:

- “It is of concern that there is a statistically significant increase in 1st year compared to 6th class responses in those students who are *not* willing or are not sure if they would tell a teacher about an academic problem and a statistically significant decrease in 1st year compared to 6th class responses in those students who *are* willing to tell a teacher about an academic problem”
- “It is also of concern that there is a statistically significant increase in perception of being treated unfairly by teachers in secondary school (1st year) compared to primary school (6th class)”.
- “The issue of perceptions of being treated fairly or otherwise in school needs to move beyond an individualised focus on the individual teacher or student to a systems level analysis. It is a systems level problem.”

These findings build on well established international research regarding prevention of early school leaving. Using primarily populations deemed to be ‘at risk’, research in the US has shown that the students’ sense of belonging influences the acceptance of educational values, motivation and commitment to school (Goodenow & Grady 1992; Wehlage et al 1989). The perceptions of school as a personally supportive community is critical to school completion and satisfaction (Fine 1986; Kagan 1990). US and Australian adolescents cite a sense of isolation and lack of personally meaningful relationships at school as significant contributors to academic failure and to their decisions to drop out of school (Institute for Education and Transformation 1992; Wehlage & Rutter 1986; Hodgson 2007; McIntyre-Mills 2010). Power (2006), Meier (1992) and Kuperminc et al. (1997) cite personalized, caring relationships with teachers as a prerequisite for high school-level reform - to avoid students becoming ‘eased out’ Smyth & Hattam (2004) of school.

Against this backdrop it is essential that:

- initial teacher education at postprimary level be reformed to centrally include such conflict resolution skills, diversity training and courses on teaching in DEIS schools. The proposed extension of the H.Dip to two years brings a real opportunity for this to occur in practice.
- a more explicit commitment is given to providing availability of courses on conflict resolution skills and diversity awareness to teachers as part of their CPD for their continued registration – both at primary and post primary level

2) Explicit commitment to a learner-centred and child-centred focus for the Foundation Disciplines

The draft document states that the Foundation Studies ‘should a) provide research-informed insights into student teachers’ understanding of the practices of teaching, learning and assessment’. This recommendation is open to interpretation in at least three ways: it is adopting either a teacher-centred focus, a learner-centred focus or both.

- It needs to be made explicit that a learner-centred focus includes research on children and young people’s needs and voices. To the extent that the recommendation is learner centred it is to be welcomed, though as it stands currently it clearly neglects a child-centred focus. This is of major concern and it needs to be amended to give recognition to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the National Children’s Strategy which would require a child-centred approach – and to the fact that the New Revised Primary Curriculum (1999) is meant to be a child-centred curriculum.
- Other recommendations for the Foundation Studies (p.10) would be greatly strengthened by addition of:
 - B) Socio-cultural context to the discussion of professional context
 - C) a strong professional ethic in teaching to be directly linked with a personal self-awareness dimension
 - D) explicit commitment to critical thinking as part of reflective practice

3) Recognition of an Active Citizenship role of the Teacher as part of a European Lifelong Learning Framework

The lifelong learning framework of the Draft Document is to be very much welcomed. It would however be strengthened by recognition of the following European context for lifelong learning:

“the EU Council (2009/C 119/02) agrees that:

1. In the period up to 2020, the primary goal of European cooperation should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at ensuring:
 - (a) the personal, social and professional fulfillment of all citizens;
 - (b) sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue.”

Recognition of the active citizenship role of the teacher, as both a lifelong learner and as a teacher in a local community context is particularly important for DEIS schools but goes further to give cognisance to the leadership role of teachers and schools across local community contexts, both urban and rural.

References

Athanasidou, M.S., Geil, M., Hazel, C.E., & Copeland, E.P. (2002). A look inside school-based consultation: A qualitative study of the beliefs and practices of school psychologists and teachers. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 17, 258-298

Barnardos (2006). *Making the Grade*. Dublin: Barnardos

Byrne, D & Smyth, E. (2010). *No Way Back: The dynamics of early school leaving*. Dublin: ESRI

Byrne, D. McCoy, S and Watson, W. (2008). *School Leavers' Survey Report 2007*. Dublin: ESRI/DES

Commission Staff Working Paper SEC(2007)1009 *Schools for the 21st century*

Commission staff working document {SEC(2008) 2177} accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *Improving competences for the 21st century: An agenda for European cooperation on schools*.

Clausen, M. (2002), *Unterrichtsqualität: Eine Frage der Perspektive? Pädagogische Psychologie und Entwicklungspsychologie*, D.H. Rost (ed.), Waxmann, Munster.

Downes, P (2004) *Psychological Supports for Ballyfermot: Present and Future URBAN Ballyfermot*.

Downes, P. (2007). Why SMART outcomes ain't always so smart... In *Beyond Educational Disadvantage*' (Downes, P & Gilligan, A.L Eds.), Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Downes, P., Maunsell, C & Ivers, J. (2006) A Holistic Approach to Early School Leaving and School Retention in Blanchardstown. Blanchardstown Area Partnership

Downes, P & Gilligan, A.L. (eds) (2007). *Beyond Educational Disadvantage*. Institute of Public Administration: Dublin

Downes, P & Maunsell, C. (2007). Count Us In. Tackling early school leaving in South West Inner City Dublin: An Integrated Response. SICCCA and South Inner City Dublin Drugs Task Force

European Commission COM(2011) 18 final Communication from the Commission to the European parliament, the council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the committee of the regions. *Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda*

European Commission COM(2011a) 19 final Proposal for a Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving SEC(2011) 98 final SEC(2011) 97 final SEC(2011) 96 final

EU Council (2009/C 119/02) Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020')

Fine, M. (1986). Why urban adolescents drop into and out of public high school. *Teachers College Record*, 87, 393-409

Goodenow, C. & Grady, K.E. (1992). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 62, 60-71

Hodgson, D. (2007). Towards a more telling way of understanding early school leaving. *Issues in Educational Research*, 17, 40-61.

Hornby, G. (2002). Partnerships for positive change in special education. *Reach: Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland*, 16, 3-14

Institute for Education and Transformation (1992). *Voices from the inside: A report on schooling from inside the classroom – Part I: Naming the problem*. Claremont, CA: Claremont Graduate School

Kagan, D.M. (1990). How schools alienate students at risk: A model for examining proximal classroom variables. *Educational Psychologist*, 25, 105-125

Klieme, E. and K. Rakoczy (2003), “Unterrichtsqualität aus Schülerperspektive: Kulturspezifische Profile, regionale Unterschiede und Zusammenhänge mit Effekten von Unterricht”. In J. Baumert, C. Artelt, E. Klieme, M. Neubrand, M. Prenzel, U. Schiefele, W. Schneider and K.-J. Tillmann, (eds.), *PISA 2000: Ein differenzierter Blick auf die Länder der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (pp. 334-359), Leske & Budrich, Opladen

Kuperminc, G. P., Leadbeater, B. J., Emmons, C., & Blatt, S. J. (1997). Perceived school climate and difficulties in the social adjustment of middle school students. *Applied Developmental Science*, 1(2), 76-88.

McIntyre-Mills, J. (2010). Participatory Design for Democracy and Wellbeing: Narrowing the Gap Between Service Outcomes and Perceived Needs. *Syst Pract Action Res* (2010) 23:21–45

Meier, D. (1992). Reinventing teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 93, 594-609

OECD (2009). *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS*. Paris: OECD

National Children’s Strategy. (2000). *Our Children – Their Lives*. Dublin: Government Publications

Oireachtas (Irish Parliament and Senate) Joint Committee on Education and Science for their study on early school leaving (2010). *Staying in education : A new way forward – School and out-of-school factors protecting against early school leaving*. Dublin: Government Publications

Power, S. (2006). *Policy-relevant review of FP4 and FP5 research projects in the field of Education*, commissioned by DG-Research of the European Commission

Smyth, J. & Hattam, R. (2004). *Dropping out, drifting off, being excluded: Becoming somebody without school*. New York: Peter Lang

Teaching Council (2010). *Draft Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education*

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). Geneva: UNHCHR

Wehlage, G.G & Rutter, R.A. (1986). Dropping out: How much do schools contribute to the problem? *Teachers College Record*, 87, 374-392

Wehlage, G.G., Rutter, R.A., Smith, G.A., Lesko, N., & Fernandez, R.R. (1989). *Reducing the risk: Schools as communities of support*. New York: The Falmer Press