Educational Disadvantage Centre's Submission to Teaching Council on its Consultation Paper, Draft Framework for Teachers' Learning 2015

Submission: Dr. Paul Downes
              Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre,
              Senior Lecturer in Education (Psychology),
              St. Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra, A College of Dublin City University
              Member of European Commission Network of Experts on the Social Aspects of Education and Training (NESET I & II) (2011-2015)
              paul.downes@dcu.ie

The emphasis in this submission is on an acceleration of focus on early school leaving prevention at CPD level, *via* a renewed scrutiny of teacher conflict resolution skills, diversity awareness and cultural competence, capacity to provide social and emotional support, skills in working interprofessionally with a view to playing a key role in referral processes for vulnerable and marginalised children and youth, abilities to foster democratic classroom environments centred on voices of children and young people, including through the arts, and bullying prevention approaches[1].

Section 1. Introduction

The lifelong learning focus is to be greatly welcomed. This section would be strengthened through situating it in terms of the EU Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (2009 /C 119/02):
"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 fulfilment of all citizens
(b) Sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic

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[1] Much of this text is based on Downes, P. (2014). Prevention of early school leaving through teacher education: Some European perspectives. In P-M. Rabinsteiner & G. Rabinsteiner, Eds., *Internationalization in Teacher Education* (pp.17-31). Hohengehren, Germany: Schneider Verlag.

values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue"

This would give further recognition to the role of lifelong learning in contributing to teachers' active citizenship, facilitating their further contribution to democratic and intercultural dialogue, as well as social cohesion and personal and professional fulfilment.

2.1 Legislative and Policy Background

This section would be greatly strengthened by stronger recognition of EU Policy contexts, including for social inclusion with regard to the *headline* EU2020 targets for education of which there are only two – early school leaving prevention and participation in tertiary education. Against this backdrop of early school leaving prevention being an EU headline target of 10% across the EU (8% for Ireland) by 2020, a number of EU Policy documents with relevance to teacher's professional development need to be acknowledged:

Teachers' conflict resolution skills and diversity awareness for early school leaving prevention

The EU Council Recommendation (2011) on early school leaving proposes the following actions:

> Supporting and empowering teachers in their work with pupils at risk, which is a pre-requisite for successful measures at school level. Initial teacher education and continuous professional development for teachers and school leaders help them to deal with diversity in the classroom, to support pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and to solve difficult teaching situations.

The Commission Communication (2011) on early school leaving incorporates a whole school focus on this issue, referring to the need for 'Whole school measures aim at improving the school climate and the creation of supportive learning environments'.

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). Teacher consultation across participating TALIS countries raised the following priorities:

> The aspect of their work for which teachers most frequently say they require professional development is 'Teaching special learning needs students', followed by 'ICT teaching skills' and 'Student discipline and behaviour' (p.48). Student discipline issues is raised by 21% of teacher responses (OECD 2009, p.61).

It is notable also that professional development of teachers regarding student discipline and special needs students are both, in particular, central to early school leaving prevention. The OECD (2009) recognises 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 (p. 122).

> Several studies have shown that the classroom disciplinary climate affects student learning and achievement. TALIS supports this view by showing that disciplinary issues in the classroom limit the amount of students' learning opportunities. The classroom climate is also associated with individual teachers' job satisfaction. Thus a positive learning environment is not only important for students, as is often emphasised, but also for teachers. Across all participating countries it therefore seems advisable to work on enhancing teachers' classroom management techniques. The results suggest that in most schools at least some teachers need extra support, through interventions that consider teachers' individual characteristics and competences and the features of individual classes (OECD 2009, p.122-123).

This wider vision for professional development than simply classroom or behavioural management is given expression through the OECD's (2009) recognition that school climate of positive relation is also a key dimension:

> In addition to the environment at the classroom level, *school climate* is used as an indicator for the school environment. Here, school climate is defined as the quality of social relations between students and teachers (including the quality of support teachers give to students), which is known to have a direct influence on motivational factors, such as student commitment to school, learning motivation and student satisfaction, and perhaps a more indirect influence on student achievement (see Cohen, 2006, for a review of related research) (OECD 2009: 91).

> The EU Commission Staff Working Paper on early school leaving (2011) echoes this theme of the need for development of teachers' relational and diversity approaches:

> School-wide strategies focus on improving the overall school climate and making schools places where young people feel comfortable, respected and responsible…While these schools usually rely on a handful of dedicated and committed teachers who choose to stay despite the difficulties, it is essential that teacher education prepares future teachers to deal with diversity in the classroom, with pupils from disadvantaged social backgrounds and with difficult teaching situations. It is also essential to improve school climate and working conditions - especially in disadvantaged areas - in order to have a more stable teaching force (p. 23).

The Commission's Thematic Working Group report (2013) on early school leaving develops this point:

> Teachers should be capable of identifying different learning styles and pupils' needs and be equipped with the skills to adopt inclusive and student-focused methods, including conflict resolution skills to promote a positive classroom climate. Teachers should be supported in dealing with diversity in terms of the social and ethnic background of pupils as well as supporting individuals with special learning needs and/or learning disabilities. They need to understand ESL, its different triggers and early warning signs and be highly aware of their role in preventing it.

This report continues (2013):

> Schools should be a place where pupils feel comfortable and supported, feel ownership of their own learning and can engage in the life of their school community. This is important both for the emotional, social and educational development of the pupil and for the overall governance of the institution. As a condition of successful learning, teachers need to strengthen their role as facilitators of learning. They need autonomy, time, and space for innovation, teamwork, feedback, self-reflection and evaluation. They need access to enhanced opportunities for continued professional development.

A particular need existing at postprimary level for school climate and teacher conflict resolution skills emerges from an Irish survey (Downes *et al*., 2006) of students in 4 primary (n=230) and 2 secondary schools (n=162) in Blanchardstown, Dublin which contrasted students' experiences in the last year of primary (6th class) and 1st year secondary in the same area. Approximately 74% of pupils at primary level (6th class) and 55% at secondary level (first year) stated that they were treated fairly by teachers in school. Approximately 15% of pupils at primary level (6th class) stated that they were not treated fairly by teachers in school, whereas 25% of students at secondary level (first year) stated that they were not treated fairly by teachers in school. These differences between 6th class primary and 1st year secondary are statistically significant.

Moreover, in this study there was a sharp increase, after only one term, in 1st year secondary compared to 6th class primary responses in those students who were not willing or were not sure if they would tell a teacher about an academic problem — from 8% (Primary) to more than 20% (Secondary). Moreover, there was a sharp decrease in 1st year compared to 6th class responses in those students who are willing to tell a teacher about an academic problem — from approximately 91% (Primary) to 75% (Secondary). Again, these differences between primary and secondary level are statistically significant ones to illustrate the jolt in climate between primary and secondary school in these Irish contexts (see also Downes & Maunsell 2007; Downes 2013). The issue of system mismatch in communicative cultures between primary and postprimary is a neglected feature of transition issues, a transition issue that the Commission Communication (2011) recognises as central to early school leaving prevention, 'Transitions between schools and between different educational levels are particularly difficult for pupils at risk of dropping out'.

The World Health Organisation (WHO 2012) propose the following developments of school institutional culture with regard to student wellbeing:
• establishing a caring atmosphere that promotes autonomy;
• providing positive feedback;
• not publicly humiliating students who perform poorly;
• identifying and promoting young people's special interests and skills to acknowledge that schools value the diversity they bring.

The EU Council Recommendation (2011) explicitly refers to ethnic dimensions associated with higher risks of early school leaving, such as 'migrant or Roma background'. Conflict resolution skills as part of a communicative classroom and whole school climate strategy, allied with diversity awareness, are part of what can be characterised as 'cultural competence' (Moule 2012) of teachers. As Moule (2012) highlights, most efforts to promote cultural competence in teachers requires development of self-awareness in the teacher. The Commission's TWG report (2013) recommends the need to 'Promote a better understanding of ESL in initial education and continuous professional development for all school staff, especially teachers'.

Emotional supports in relation to the school system for early school leaving prevention

Another key issue for early school leaving prevention, highlighted in EU Council and Commission documents, is that of emotional supports for students at risk of early school leaving as a protective factor in a system that meets their needs. This issue is one that tends to be neglected as it requires bridges between health and education domains (Downes 2010).

The Irish Teaching Council is now a member of the European Network of Education Councils (EUNEC). Following on from its Lithuanian EU Presidency Conference on Early School Leaving in November 2013, the European Network of Education Councils (EUNEC) has issued an agreed position statement on early school leaving. Key aspects of this EUNEC statement include:

> 'The statement considers early school leaving from a holistic perspective... recognizing the need to 'improve school climate, class climate' and to 'support pupils to deal with social problems, emotional and mental health'. It acknowledges the need for 'a warm and supportive relationship between teachers and pupils', as well as 'collaboration' between schools and 'family and social services' which recognize the respective boundaries between each'.

This requires substantive recognition in the framework for teachers' learning.

The EU Council Recommendation (2011) on early school leaving acknowledges the need for:

> Targeted individual support, which integrates social, financial, educational and psychological support for young people in difficulties. It is especially important for young people in situations of serious social or emotional distress which hinders them from continuing education or training.

The Commission Communication (2011) on early school leaving recognises that 'Education and training systems often do not provide sufficient targeted support for pupils to cope with emotional, social or educational difficulties'. It continues:

> networking with actors outside the school and access to local support networks tends to be highly efficient in providing relevant support... Early school leaving is not just a school issue and its causes need to be addressed across a range of social, youth, family, health, local community, employment, as well as education policies.

> The Commission Thematic Working Group (2013) on early school leaving explicitly reiterate 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.

A systemic approach to CPD is needed to facilitate development of teachers' roles in fostering a positive school climate as part of a relational approach to their teaching – especially at postprimary level. It also requires further support for teachers to engage in multiprofessional team working as part of systems of care and education for marginalised children and young people (Downes 2011; Edwards & Downes 2013). This requires that teachers' develop a relational expertise with other professionals (Edwards and Downes 2013) – and needs explicit development in Section 5.4 'School-based and External'.

> The Commission's TWG report (2013) expressly links these issues to CPD and preservice education:

> Teachers need the skills and ability to work with other professions and partners to prevent ESL. These skills should be developed and strengthened during initial and continuous teacher education.

Again here the role of the teacher is envisaged as a holistic one which clearly goes beyond a Cartesian compartmentalisation between reason and emotion (Downes 2003), so that academic considerations cannot be simply spliced from the relational. A relevant framework to distinguish levels of social and emotional support from teachers, for students on the margins at risk of early school leaving, is that of mental health promotion, stress prevention and therapy (Downes 2003). The teacher plays a key role in promoting the mental health, self-esteem and wellbeing of students, as well as being a supportive figure for relatively minor emotional stresses as part of stress prevention. However, more complex emotional issues, involving delving into past experiences and wider familial issues, moves beyond the ambit of the teacher's role and requires referral to more therapeutic levels of support.

> This recognition of the limits of the role of the teacher in relation to social and emotional support – at the level of therapy – invites bridges between schools and other professionals. A number of examples of multiprofessional teams in and around schools have been observed across diverse European contexts, as a key strategic dimension for early school

leaving prevention (Downes 2011; Edwards & Downes 2013; Day et al., 2013). Relational expertise is a capacity to recognise and work with the expertise of others and to contribute to the expertise that is available within a system (Edwards 2010). The teacher needs to be able to situate him/herself within a collaborative system, that involves a role for the teacher in referring children and young people with more complex emotional needs to the appropriate therapeutic services.

The Council Recommendation (2011) also recognises the importance of an emotionally supportive school environment regarding bullying prevention and intervention, as part of an early school leaving prevention strategy:

> 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 anti-bullying approaches.

This is an important step forward in again challenging a Cartesian division within educational practices and culture, between the academic and emotional-relational, to recognise the need for whole school approaches to bullying prevention.

Section 7 on priority learning areas mentions those of inclusion and wellbeing. While this is to be greatly welcomed, this needs to be fleshed out to explicitly address the issues raised above in relation to social inclusion in education regarding: relational and conflict resolution skills of teachers, cultural competence, awareness of diversity, emotional support roles (within limits as health promotion and stress prevention), bullying prevention and school climate.

A further concern is the limited role of the arts in the current document – the arts play a vital role in engaging marginalised students, to build on strengths, develop multiple intelligences, social and emotional competences, cultural expression, personal fulfilment, concentration and cognitive skills, as well as confidence, leadership and active citizenship. The Arts can engage a wide cohort of students who are otherwise disaffected from the school system.

The Commission Staff Working Paper (2011) recognises that 'Practicing school democracy in daily decisions of school life may help overcome problems of disaffection'. Significantly, the recent Commission TWG report (2013) on early school leaving goes further to recommend:

> Ensure children and young people are at the centre of all policies aimed at reducing ESL. Ensure their voices are taken into account when developing and implementing such policies.

Professional development for democratic school environments needs an explicit focus in this draft document.

An international dimension to CPD generally

An international dimension to CPD generally requires more development in the document. This applies to early school leaving issues as well as elsewhere. The Council Recommendation (2011) on early school leaving focuses on the level of exchange of good practice and peer networking:

Whilst acknowledging the key role played by teachers, school leaders and other educational staff, ensure the involvement in those measures and activities of all relevant
stakeholders to help people who are at risk of early school leaving, including those who
have dropped out already INVITES THE COMMISSION:
To support Member States' strategies through the exchange of experience and good practice, and to facilitate effective peer-learning, networking and experimentation with
innovative approaches among the Member States on measures aimed at reducing early school leaving and improving the educational outcomes of children from groups at risk of
early school leaving.

A Strategic Direction in Relation to CPD and Early School Leaving

Key structural and process indicators for system scrutiny need to be developed in relation to CPD and early school leaving prevention. These indicators would monitor the presence or absence of the following at inservice (and preservice) teacher education levels across the country: a) teacher conflict resolution skills, b) diversity awareness and cultural competence of teachers through school site placements in contexts of high early school leaving and poverty, c) fostering capacity to provide social and emotional support, d) skills in working interprofessionally with a view to teachers playing a key role in referral processes for vulnerable and marginalised children and youth, e) abilities to foster democratic classroom environments centred on voices of children and young people, In setting out these key areas for monitoring, feedback and transparency, a flexibility is retained as to how these strategic areas are precisely to be addressed, being cognisant also of professional autonomy and distinctive cultural features and support services in a given school context.

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