The neglected shadow: European perspectives on emotional supports for early school leaving prevention

Paul Downes[1]

St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University, Ireland

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 Issues raised by interviewees for students at risk of early school leaving include supports for withdrawn children, for those at risk of suicide and those being bullied at school affecting their nonattendance.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

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

Introduction

Recent OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) reports (Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007; OECD, 2010) have identified a range of key steps to equity in education. These include limiting early tracking and streaming and postponing academic selection, managing school choice so as to contain the risks to equity, offering second chances to gain from education, as well as provision of systematic help to those who fall behind at school and reducing high rates of school-year repetition. They also emphasise the need to strengthen the links between school and home, and to respond to diversity through provision for the successful inclusion of migrants and minorities within mainstream education. Other issues emphasised by the OECD are related to fair and inclusive resourcing, namely providing strong education for all, giving priority to early childhood provision and basic schooling, and directing resources to students and regions with

---

[1] Corresponding email: paul.downes@spd.dcu.ie

the greatest needs. Their key steps conclude with the need to set concrete targets for more equity, particularly ones related to low school attainment and early school leaving.

It is arguable that while these key steps are important, they neglect the importance of emotional dimensions to early school leaving and the consequent need for system level emotional supports (Downes, 2010). It is well recognised that there is not enough qualitative research on the experience of the education system (Cohen, 2006) and that emotions are difficult to measure (Cohen, 2006; Downes, 2007; Desjardins, 2008). Any exploration of key, often interrelated themes, concerning emotional dimensions to early school leaving, such as mental health, school climate, bullying, and substance abuse, must operate against the backdrop of a recognition that there is not just one early school leaving problem, and not just one set of motivations for leaving school. Even a view of a continuum of risk of early school leaving, requires acknowledgment that sudden traumatic life events (such as rape or bereavement) render a person's risk profile less static along such a continuum (Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science for their study on early school leaving, 2010), while a systemic focus tends to move beyond a framework of static risk and protective factors to an analysis of pathways for systemic change, as part of a prevention focus. It is also to be fully recognized that many other important issues pertaining to early school leaving are not being explored in this article, such as, *inter alia*, the experience of discrimination in school, transport barriers, specific learning difficulties, curricular reform (Warnock 1977; Kelly 1999), community development and voice (Freire, 1972), fear of failure (Glasser, 1969; Kellaghan et al.,1995), fear of success (Ivers and Downes, 2011) and direct effects of social inequalities and poverty upon early school leaving.

This article examines the question as to what gaps in systemic supports constitute a missed opportunity to meet the needs of students at risk of early school leaving in eight European countries. In doing so, it will focus, for current purposes, on a limited range of themes pertaining to emotional supports at a systemic level as part of a wider strategic focus on early school leaving prevention. Sometimes called pedagogical wellbeing (Pyhältö, Soini and Pietarinen, 2010), there is increasing recognition of the need to combine health and education contexts, where 'mental health prevention and promotion meets education reform' (Aber et al., 2011, p.411). Downes (2007a) highlights a need for conceptualisation of early school leaving prevention as an issue pertaining to mental health in a Baltic States context (see also Downes and Gilligan, 2007 on this issue in an Irish context). Similarly, in a US context, Freudenberg and Ruglis (2007) strongly advocate the importance of interpreting early school leaving as a health related issue. Freudenberg and Ruglis (2007) emphasise that although evidence shows that education is an important determinant of health and that changes in school policy can improve educational outcomes, public health professionals have seldom made improving school completion rates a health priority. They observe that, with a few important exceptions, health providers have not developed lasting partnerships with schools in a US context, nor have researchers provided the evidence needed to improve or replicate health programs that can reduce school dropout rates. They argue that simply reframing early school leaving as a health issue has the potential to bring new players into the effort — parents, health institutions, young people, civil rights groups — and to

encourage public officials to think of this problem as central to community health and as a long-term solution beneficial to population health. Freudenberg and Ruglis (2007) cite a range of international studies finding that education helps people to acquire social support, strengthen social networks, and mitigate social stressors (Ross and Mirowsky, 1989; Ross and Wu, 1995; Cutler and Lleras-Muney, 2006).

Mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, disruptive behavior, eating disorders, or post-traumatic stress disorder, can negatively impact on a child's school success, as well as general well-being (World Health Organization, 2003; Kessler, 2009). Children living in low-income families are especially vulnerable to mental health difficulties (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009). The huge socio-economic disparities in levels of illness across the lifespan are well documented (Townsend and Davidson, 1992; Acheson, 1998). Children in the child welfare system, who come primarily from poor families, have a greater prevalence of mental health problems compared with those in the general population (Leslie et al., 2004; Dore, 2005). Graham and Easterbrooks (2000) found that insecurely attached children at higher economic risk had higher levels of depression than insecurely attached children at lower economic risk. Poor and minority children are more likely to report that they experienced or witnessed violence at home (Finkelhor et al., 2005), and children from families in poverty are reported to have greater lifetime exposure to physical abuse, sexual abuse, and witnessing family violence (Turner, Finkelhor and Ormrod, 2006). Social anxiety is associated with school avoidance and refusal, suicidal ideation, substance abuse and conduct problems (Harrington, Rutter, and Fombonne, 1996).

The mental health implications for early school leaving and exclusion from the education system are evident from Kaplan, Damphousse, and Kaplan's (1994) North American study of 4,141 young people tested in 7th grade and once again as young adults. They found a significant damaging effect of dropping out of high school on mental health functioning, including anxiety, depression and coping. This effect was also evident when controls were applied for psychological mental health as measured at 7th grade. Moreover, the significant damaging effect of dropping out of school was also evident even when controls were applied for gender, father's occupational status, and ethnic background. However, it needs also to be acknowledged that early school leaving can have different effects across countries (Van Alphen, 2009).

Bornstein, Hahn, and Haynes (2010) provide a portrait of behaviour adjustment underlining the consensus in the international literature: 'Behavioral adjustment in young children is generally associated with two broadband factors. Externalizing behaviors include problems with attention, self-regulation, and noncompliance, as well as antisocial, aggressive, and other undercontrolled behaviors; internalizing behaviors include depression, withdrawal, and anxiety, as well as feelings of inferiority, self-consciousness, shyness, hypersensitivity, and somatic complaints' (p.718). These are very much a continuum. In the words of the well-known child development psychologists, Rutter and Sroufe (2000), there is a need to 'realize that individuals cannot be subdivided categorically into the vulnerable and invulnerable' (p.266). Such a mental health focus would be cognisant of a range of children in need of support for early school leaving prevention, far beyond those with clinical levels of emotional problems. For instance, there is a correlation between emotional

difficulties and lower school grades (Fergusson and Horwood, 1995), and such difficulties are far from being at a clinical level of being a disorder (cf. Cooper and Jacobs, 2010).

Reinke et al.'s (2009) focus in the US context on combining school and family interventions for the prevention of disruptive behaviour problems also bridges the gap between a public health approach and an educational one. They highlight the need for systemic, multidimensional interventions with regard to disruptive behaviours though not as part of an early school leaving strategy specifically:

> In addition to targeting malleable risk and protective factors, successful programs tend to be multifaceted ecological models aimed at multiple domains changing institutions and environments as well as individuals (p.34).

Emotional supports are protective supporting conditions to potentially counteract risk factors for early school leaving. Emotional support services need to operate not only at the level of the individual student, but also at a systemic level of both the teacher's interaction with students and also at a family support level (Downes, 2004; 2010; 2011a).

Supports require configuration across a range of dimensions of prevention. A preventative focus on early school leaving needs to distinguish between three widely recognized prevention approaches in public health, namely, universal, selected and indicated prevention (Burkhart, 2004; Reinke et al., 2009). Universal prevention applies to school, classroom and community-wide systems for all students. Selective prevention targets specialized group systems for students at risk of early school leaving. Indicated prevention engages in specialized, individualized systems for students with high risk of early school leaving. A preventive focus with regard to equality in education needs to be cognisant of the OECD ten steps to equity in education (Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007), including Step 9: Direct resources to students and regions with the greatest needs.

In their study carried out in the United States, Groninger and Lee (2001) discovered that teacher-based social capital, - the extent to which teachers support pupils' efforts to succeed in school -, helped to reduce the number of early school leavers and proved especially effective in a case of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and those who had experienced academic difficulties in the past. In general, teacher-student relations characterised by control, domination,
managerial rather than pedagogical focus, lack of connection or mutual respect may be perceived by some students as constraining and can lead to disengagement and rebellion against school culture (Lingard et al., 2002; Keddie and Churchill, 2003; Martino and Pallotta- Chiarolli, 2003).

A positive school climate has been associated with fewer behavioural and emotional problems for students (Kuperminc et al., 1997). Additionally, specific research on school climate in high-risk urban environments indicates that a positive, supportive, and culturally conscious school climate can significantly impact upon the degree of academic success experienced by urban students (Haynes and Comer, 1993). American 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; Hodgson, 2007; McIntyre-Mills, 2010). Power (2006) and Meier (1992) cite personalised, caring relationships with teachers as a prerequisite for high school-level reform, to avoid students becoming 'eased out' (Smyth and Hattam, 2004) of school.

In their longitudinal study of 14-15 year old Irish students, Smyth et al. (2006) observed the importance of the informal school climate and the nature of teacher-student interactions. Being given out to frequently was associated with negative attitudes to school, both of which in turn were more commonplace among boys (Smyth et al., 2004, 2006). Child-centred research in Irish primary and postprimary schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas also highlights that authoritarian teaching alienates students and heightens the risk of early school leaving (Downes, 2004; Downes, Maunsell and Ivers, 2006; Downes and Maunsell, 2007). Hodgson (2007) calls this process 'winnowing', a process of heightened alienation which ultimately leads to early school leaving.

The need for emotional support services in education for the prevention of suicide at selected and indicated levels, particularly in contexts of high stress associated with poverty and social exclusion, has been highlighted in an Irish context for those at risk of early school leaving; sleep disturbance related to anxiety was also reported by a sample of students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (Downes and Maunsell, 2007). Lack of availability of such emotional support services are a clear strategic gap in Irish post-primary school provision (Downes, 2008), while students at risk of early school leaving explicitly drew a link in qualitative research between their nonattendance at school and being the victims of bullying (Downes, 2004).

The key role of school principals in contributing to the school climate and organisational culture of the learning institution must also be recognised (Gilligan, 2002; Downes, 2004). Furthermore, researchers have found that positive school climate perceptions are protective for boys and may supply students at high risk of early school leaving with a supportive learning environment promoting healthy development and preventing antisocial behaviour (Kuperminc et al., 1997). Downes (2009) highlights the need for continuity between school and community subsystems with regard to the promotion of a positive school climate, as community level stresses will impact upon school climate unless a holistic approach to intervention occurs in contexts of social-economic disadvantage.

Pyhältö, Soini and Pietarinen's (2010) research in six schools in Finland of 518 students in 9th grade highlights the importance of a peer interaction focus for factors associated with early school leaving, such as bullying prevention and a sense of belonging and satisfaction in school:

Collaborative investment in developing pupils' peer interactions within the class and school community is likely not only to promote the pupils' sense of belonging and satisfaction, but it may also provide a tool to promote more functional pupil–teacher relationships, hence facilitating teachers' work-related well-being as well…Functional relationships with peers were reported to be a major source of satisfaction, while destructive friction in peer groups were considered a core source of anxiety and distress by the pupils (p.217-218).

The interrelated nature of learning and well-being is referred to as experienced pedagogical well-being. Results showed that critical incidents for pedagogical well-being reported by the pupils were situated all along their school career. Pyhältö, Soini and Pietarinen (2010) observe that

pedagogical well-being could be seen as a crucial aspect of pupil's resilience and coping with various kinds of developmental ruptures during their school career. On the other hand, in negative cases the action orientation and coping strategies adopted by the pupil, such as avoidance or defensive strategies, may gradually cause an inability to connect with the school community, resulting in exclusion from the learning and the protective social-psychological well-being generated in class (p.210).

Significantly, Swearer et al.'s (2010) review of international research on bullying highlights that studies have demonstrated that children who are bullied are more likely to avoid school (e.g. Olweus, 1993; Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1996) or even leave school early (Fried and Fried, 1996). Evidence also suggests that the effects of bullying are exacerbated for those already at risk of early school leaving. Beran (2008) concluded that preadolescents who are bullied are at some risk for demonstrating poor achievement, although this risk increases substantially if the child also receives little support from parents and is already disengaged from school. Surveying 3,530 students in Grades 3 to 5, Glew et al. (2005) found that victims of bullying and bully-victims were less likely to be high achievers in school than students who were bystanders. In a study of 930 sixth graders, Nansel, Haynie, and Simons-Morton (2003) found significantly poorer school adjustment (e.g., doing well on schoolwork, getting along with classmates, following rules, doing homework) among students who were bullies, victims, or bully-victims, as compared with students who were not involved. Swearer et al.'s (2010) review also observes that 'bullies' and 'victims' are at risk for short-term and long-term adjustment difficulties such as academic problems (Batsche and Knoff, 1994; Fonagy et al., 2005), and psychological difficulties (Kumpulainen, Räsänen and Henttonen , 1998; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000; Swearer et al., 2001).

In the European Commission public consultation 'Schools for the 21st century', tackling bullying, violence and intolerance in schools was an emerging theme. Moreover, van der Wal, de Wit and Hirasing's (2003) large scale research on 4811 children aged 9 to 13 in schools in Amsterdam, observed that depression

and suicidal ideation are common outcomes of being bullied in both boys and girls. It is a significant step forward that the European Commission proposal for a European Council Recommendation on early school leaving (2011) observes the need for 'developing anti-violence and anti-bullying approaches'. However, it is of concern that of the sixteen cross-curricular themes examined in 27 European countries by Maes et al. (2001) at secondary school level (and cited in a Commission staff working document 2008, p.16), none of these engaged explicitly with emotional and personal awareness. This important institutional space for engaging with emotions has only been partly opened through Key Competences Framework at EU level which includes social and civic competences, and cultural awareness and expression. The European Commission Communication on Early School Leaving (2011) highlights that only few Member States follow a consistent and comprehensive strategy to reduce early school leaving. It now recognises the issue of mental health dimensions to early school leaving:

> Networking with actors outside school enables schools to support pupils better   and tackle a range of problems that put children in difficulty, which can include drug or alcohol use, sleep deficits, physical abuse and trauma.

Experiences of Member States, comparative data and analytical research suggest that the key issues for successful policies include the cross-sectoral nature of   collaboration and the comprehensiveness of the approach. 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.

It is important to incorporate a focus on substance abuse related issues as a key dimension to the prevention of early school leaving (Downes, 2003; EMCDDA, 2003; Burkhart, 2004). O'Connell and Sheikh's (2009) analysis of a large US sample of over 25,000 eighth grade students from over 1,000 US schools, observed the relative importance of daily school preparation and smoking, *inter alia,* as variables associated with early school leaving. Daily school preparation was a composite measure based on with coming to school with necessary equipment and having home-work completed.

Burkhart's (2004) EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction) review of selective prevention programmes in the pre-enlargement EU,   examined family intervention programmes for truancy, social exclusion and drug prevention (not simply with an explicit drugs intervention focus). Burkhart's (2004) report made the following comments on outreach difficulties in Greece and Luxembourg:

- *Greece:* Although prevention professionals report that they have difficulties in approaching parents, universal family-based prevention is quite widespread in prevention practice in Greece. As the emphasis is put on the implementation of universal family interventions and there is little experience regarding targeted interventions, it suggested that the needs of families at risk must be assessed in order for targeted interventions to be gradually developed.

*- **Luxembourg:*** Parents who come to the parents' meeting are glad to have an exchange. Parents have mostly the feeling of being alone with family conflicts or decisions concerning juveniles. In the exchange with the others, they get the understanding, that these conflicts are normal developments and concern also other families. The most difficult point is to motivate parents to come to a parents' meeting. Therefore meetings with low thresholds concerning the topic and duration are needed at first to get them.

Burkhart's (2004) review also observed that in Germany, compared to school intervention programmes, the family as a place for preventive measures is neglected, underlining the need for research and practice in this area. Burkhart's account of selective prevention in Denmark and the UK implies again the need for improved outreach support for marginalised families and for early intervention to engage children with school attendance:

*- **Denmark:*** It seems that the knowledge and intervention from nursery teachers and school teachers at the earliest stage possible is crucial. These professionals often see very early signs of things starting to go wrong and have good knowledge of the abuse situations. Giving these professionals better possibilities for taking action might save some children from getting into serious trouble later in life.

*- **UK:*** Parents should be considered as a target group in their own right...There are some examples of successful work with families which is already taking place within UK, but more needs to be done to ensure that the development of family-based interventions is taken seriously.

The European Commission (2011) advocates the establishment of national early school leaving strategies in every member state by 2012:

> It is proposed that the Recommendation should set a common European framework for effective and efficient policies against early school leaving and that Member States should adopt comprehensive national strategies against early school leaving by 2012, in line with their national targets.

The EU Commission Staff Working Paper (2010) on early school leaving similarly adopts a holistic approach to early school leaving, giving cognisance to the need for emotional supports:

> Difficulties at school often have their roots outside. Solving problems at school cannot be done effectively without tackling the range of problems that put children in difficulty, which can include drug or alcohol use, sleep deficits, physical abuse and trauma. Some of the most successful measures have been those which provide a holistic solution by networking different actors and so support the whole person. Partnerships at the local level seem to be highly effective ways of doing this.

It is notable that the Working Paper explicitly recognises that early school leaving 'can be part of a

situation of serious social, academic and/or emotional distress'. Significantly, this is reiterated in the Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation (2011) on early school leaving:

> Targeted individual support 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 current study involves qualitative research interviews with government officials and post-primary school management representatives across eight European countries. Participating countries for this research are Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Russia, and Slovenia. Consistent with the key underlying goal of social inclusion, the overall aim of this research project is to analyse the role of education institutions in promoting access to education, particularly of students coming from backgrounds of social marginalisation. The focus of this research is on the post-primary educational institutions and government policy rather than accounts of individual motivation. For the purposes of this paper, more focus is placed on the responses from senior management at post-primary schools, government officials and teachers with regards to school climate and emotional support issues.

Methodology

Participants

The in-depth qualitative research interviews involved a sample selected according to convenience sampling in relation to the post-primary school. It also adopted a criterion sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994) based on the position of the interviewee in the school or government department.

All school institutions included an interview with a senior school management official, typically a school principal or member of the board of management (see Table 1). Each post-primary school institution examined involved interviews with two different school representatives. The second interviews in the school were with a teacher selected by the school. Some post-primary schools also offered classes for adults returning to education. At least one government official interviewed in each country was directly working in that country's Ministry of Education.

The timeframe for the interviews for the national reports was between April and September 2009. All national reports were completed in 2010. The interviews were semi-structured in scope, organized under key thematic headings. This provided flexibility for interviewers to add relevant follow-up questions or to omit factual questions already answered elsewhere. When two representatives from one institution were being interviewed, the answers from the first interview might also have influenced the emphasis within the second interview. All of the interviews were part of a wider European Commission Sixth Framework Programme study on access to lifelong learning (Downes, 2011) that involved a wider number of countries.

Table 1: Interviews conducted regarding post-primary education

Country	Number of Institutions	Number of Interviews
Austria		
Formal 2nd Level	1	2
Government Officials		3
Bulgaria		2
Formal 2nd Level		2
Government Officials	1	
Estonia		4
Formal 2nd Level		3
Government Officials	4	
Hungary		2
Formal 2nd Level		2
Government Officials	1	
Lithuania		2
Formal 2nd Level		2
Government Officials	1	
Norway		4
Formal 2nd Level		1
Government Officials	2	
Russia		4
Formal 2nd Level		2
Government Officials	2	
Slovenia		2
Formal 2nd Level		3
Government Officials	1	

Measures

The interview templates were structured through a range of key themes agreed by the participating research teams for the national reports. These interview templates were part of a number of other interview templates carried out for each of the national reports, all explicitly within a social inclusion, lifelong learning and access to education framework.

The thematic headings for the post-primary school interviews were: Supports for students to enable them to stay on at school, Alternatives to suspension/expulsion, School climate and Inservice/Preservice training for teachers. The thematic headings for the government officials interviews were: Structural issues, Strategic issues. These thematic headings informed presentation of the results for the relevant national reports.

The interview schedules contained a mixture of questions on (a) factual information, (b) factual information about plans/intentions, (c) perceptions of leading organisational figures. Whereas the post-primary school interview questions directly addressed the issue of emotional supports, the government officials' interviews were focused more directly on access to education issues, though there was potential for emotional support issues and themes to emerge in the course of the interviews.

Data analysis: A hermeneutic approach

Some background frame or 'horizon of understanding' (Heidegger 1927) for an empirical observation is inevitable. This scope for interpretation of empirical data is aptly described as 'the hermeneutic surplus of interpretation' (Teo, 2008, p.51). Feyerabend (1988) states:

> Scientific education...simplifies science by simplifying its participants: first, a domain of research is defined. The domain is separated from the rest of history...and given a 'logic' of its own. A thorough training in such a 'logic' then conditions those working in the domain; it makes their actions more uniform and it freezes large parts of the historical process as well. Stable 'facts' arise.... (p. 11).

This account highlights, not only the need for interpretation of data, but also that a domain of relevance is inevitably constructed, within which interpretation of observations and data takes place, to select certain aspects as being more pertinent than others. This similarly occurs in this analysis of the national reports. It is not being claimed that the selection process to prioritise a range of issues for early school leaving is the only possible one to emerge from a review of these reports. However, it is being argued that the selection process engaged in, does identify domains of relevant issues concerning emotional needs and supports for early school leaving prevention.

Another related point with regard to the identification of domains of relevance is that the accounts being provided for current purposes are intended to be illustrative of relevant issues and practices rather than being complete and exhaustive. These illustrative examples from the qualitative research interviews and national reports are neither intended to summarise, nor comprehensively describe, the current situation in every participating country, nor to give a quantitative account of the frequency and prevalence of such practices across a given country. Rather they are to identify key problems and gaps pertaining to early school leaving and emotional support systems to inform future system level reform.

Elsewhere, this dynamic balancing of principles and perspectives is recognised as being the hermeneutic circle of interpretation (e.g., Heidegger, 1927). In cognitive psychology, van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) describe such textual interpretation as being *both* a top-down 'macrostructure' process influenced by a prior theoretical framework, and a bottom-up 'microstructure' process based on the detail of the texts

produced. It is a dynamic balanced interplay between both approaches. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1991) similarly discuss this interaction between abstract strategies and concrete context in their research on expertise in cognitive psychology:

> What goes on at the most general level in expert functioning is an interaction between domain knowledge and immediate cases…domain knowledge is used to interpret or deal with the immediate case. In turn, the immediate case yields information that may be used to modify domain knowledge, sometimes in a major way. We call the process 'dialectical' because of this two-way influence. Note that the process may go through a number of cycles. One may do something with the immediate case that leads to reformulating the domain knowledge, which in turn results in a different idea about what to do with the immediate case and so forth (p.175).

Interpretation of narrative texts is a dialectical interplay requiring contextual sensitivity.

A consistent focus was held throughout on the provision of a critical analysis that would highlight the gaps in current practice and policy in each country in relation to early school leaving prevention and emotional supports, while affirming positive examples, where possible. This critical approach gives cognisance to Gergen's (1994) words, 'In specifying *what is the case*, other accounts are suppressed' (p.xiv). It was considered important to adopt a scrutiny on systemic gaps as part of both the national report accounts and the comparative report in their accounts of emotional support issues for students at risk of early school leaving. Further hermeneutic principles include the need to highlight key points of significant contrast between institutions or countries.

Results

Availability and Gaps in Provision of Emotional Supports

The Slovenian national report provides a notable example of systemic emotional support for students in schools. The school has established a school counselling service which is funded by the Ministry of Education and Sport and regulated by the law on Organisation and Financing of Education. It makes provision for:

- vocational guidance and counselling before enrolment in school, at the time of enrolment and before enrolment in tertiary education;
- analysing enrolment and following progress of pupils;
- dealing with pupils of foreigners and organising Slovene language courses for these pupils;
- various prevention activities related to drug abuse, aggressive behaviour, workshops on questions regarding sexuality;

- workshops on independent learning and learning how to learn;
- counselling on personal and social development;
- dealing with social issues of pupils and with other problems related to learning, discipline (Ivančič, Mohorčič Špolar and Radovan, 2010).

This is evidence of a combined selected, indicated and universal intervention approach. The following Russian educational system example and quote from an interviewed teacher, concerning a student at risk of early school leaving, illustrates an important commitment to emotional support provision. Direct quotes from interviewees are in italics. The other quotes are from the relevant national report based on a summary of interviewee responses and/or national policy documents.

First it's necessary to pay attention not to... the gaps in the knowledge but to prove that he CAN do something – and since he can, then he's a personality.

This work is conducted by the Support Service: they organize art-therapy and psychological training aimed at the realization of the creativity potential, development of personal responsibility and to some extent to the promotion of active citizenship position…Art-therapy classes presume organizing drama performances: interested students take part in the production of drama performances based on the scripts written by the head of this studio. The performances are devoted to the "issues topical for students (e.g. drug addiction, game addiction, suicide). During the production of the performances the participants and the head of the studio also discuss these topics; discussions are continued inside classes after the first show (Kozlovskiy, Khokhlova and Veits, 2010).

A different secondary school in Russia, a vocational school, however, does not offer any emotional support service as such:

There are 15 orphan students studying at the school at the moment. However, the school does not have its own Support Service for the students that would provide psychological help and consultations. Special measures, aimed at the adaptation of students who belong to traditionally disadvantaged groups to the educational process and the student community, are also not undertaken (Ibid.).

Such contextual variation in support services illustrates the need for a more systemic strategic approach to policy in this area at a national level in Russia. The Estonian national report also quotes a senior government official's account of emotional support provision for students:

Estonian larger schools, including adult secondary schools, have a psychologist on their payroll. We also have counselling centres in counties offering the services of a psychologist and a career councillor (Tamm and Saar, 2010).

A number of other national reports manifest a distinct lack of provision of emotional support for students, a problem which is accentuated for students at risk of early school leaving. Thus, for example, the respective Bulgarian and Hungarian national reports state:

The College does not have a specialized unit that provides emotional support to the students. There is a Career Development Center at SWU, which also renders its services to students from the Technical College… SWU has no institutionalized forms of providing emotional support to students (e.g. a specialized unit, psychologists (Boyadjieva et al., 2010).

Emotional difficulties are treated in an informal way: coordinators in the local secondary schools and educational centers try to encourage students to continue their studies and they often discuss the students' private problems with them. There are some typical difficulties linked to special disadvantaged groups:

There is a very serious problem in case of Roma women: if they start studying, their husbands may not tolerate it and unfortunately I have students who have got divorced or who were beaten because of this, and they suffered from different atrocities and in these cases I feel so helpless, I don't see how I could help them besides listening to them and discussing with them, and I try to give them some advice, something from my own experience (Balogh et al., 2010).

From the account in the Bulgarian national report, it is evident that career guidance is prioritized over emotional support and may tend even to be regarded as emotional support counselling, thereby obscuring the lack of availability of adequate emotional support services for students' complex needs.

It is apparent that gaps in emotional support provision are a systemic feature of the educational system in Lithuania:

There are no emotional support services or staff responsible for this area. Students receive emotional support, according to the management, from the teachers and staff members and their fellow colleagues. This is based on personal relationships.
No, we do not have a psychologist at school. I think s/he is needed. Then it would be easier for us to understand why students behave the way they behave (Taljunaite et al., 2010).

These gaps are corroborated both in the account of the post-primary school management official and that of the interviewed teacher. The Lithuanian national report offers conclusions which paint a stark picture about current practice:

> At the moment there is no unique strategy for solving this problem [of early school leaving].
> The model of how to encourage school leavers to come back to school does not exist:
> - The system of monitoring early school leavers does not exist;
> - There is no data on how many school students do not attend schools and which proportion of them do not have a school leaving certificate;
> - There are no alternative schools for early school leavers and drop-outs;
> - Negative teachers' attitude towards students who do not attend school regularly;
> - Teachers lack of psychological and counselling skills when communication with those students;
> - Psychological support is unavailable. It is difficult to get this support, the quality and efficiency of support is insufficient. (Ibid.).

These problems, highlighted in Lithuania, are not so much a disjunction between policy and practice, but rather a systemic vacuum across both policy and practice levels regarding early school leaving.

There is a clear need for emotional support services emerging in Austria. This is the response of an Austrian Education Ministry official to this issue:

> In another part of our research almost half of the respondents of ISCED 2 level participants stated that personal or emotional problems keep them from pursuing their education. Are there plans on a national level to introduce supportive offers in Austria? In your opinion, how could this situation be improved on a federal level?
> *This brings me back to the working group of federal government and federal provinces' governments and the plans concerning the lower secondary diploma. We have a strictly calculated size of pedagogical support because we said it's not working properly without...It is starting with the "visiting" education work, where we want to approach the target group proactively instead of waiting for them to come by themselves. There must be somebody here for them permanently and a certain amount of time should be calculated for this kind of care* (Rammel and Gottwald, 2010).

The need for provision of emotional supports is reiterated in the Norwegian national report:

> 11 percent of the same group... stated that family related problems were a problem for participating in educational activity. We asked our informant how he thought public policy in

this area could contribute to offer guidance services that go beyond the subjects taught at the institutions. Our informant responded:

Many students have mentally related problems and students have a high suicide rate. For many, being a student is a lonely affair. It goes without saying that the healthcare services must be equipped with a professional staff (Stensen and Ure, 2010).

Integration between Early School Leaving Prevention Strategies and Emotional Support

An explicit link is drawn in the Slovenian national report between emotional counselling services and its role in the prevention of early school leaving:

A counselling service is established at school that deals with problems that may lead to early leaving of the education system but there is a belief that class teacher is the one who is first responsible for dealing with such problems. He/she is the one creating the class climate, recognising early signs of individual problems and being able to react before their full escalation. The school thus heavily invests in class teachers.

I believe the class teacher is a key person contributing to class climate… also other teachers are important but the centre is emotionally stable class teacher who takes care for good climate which significantly contributes to integration of individual pupils in the class environment (Ivančič, Mohorčič Špolar and Radovan, 2010).

The counselling supports are perceived, by the following interviewed teacher, as complementary to the key role of the class teacher as a provider of social and emotional support to help prevent early school leaving:

You see that he needs help, he needs a hand…, a talk…however... If there were any one to talk to. … A single teacher may retain a pupil in school and this often happens (Ibid.).

Yet significantly the Slovenian examples recognise that some emotional problems are sufficiently complex that there is a need to go beyond the role of the class teacher (see Downes, 2003a). In other words, it is important to introduce another layer of referrals, such as counsellors either within the school or externally:

[The] Institution does not have any particular guidance related to emotional or behavioural problems. Most often, their staff in student services office detects those kind of problems and advice students to whom they should turn to, most of the time to an adviser within their institution, sometimes to external experts (Ibid.).

With regards to school referrals, it is important to acknowledge that the emotional support needs of more withdrawn students tend to be missed by teachers compared with students displaying externalizing problems such as aggression (Doll, 1996; Downes, 2004). This interviewee's quote in the Estonian national report illustrates both the need of some students for emotional support and that this can be quite a slow process:

The school is making an effort to include those who have problems but these attempts have not been very successful.

It is difficult to deal with them... it is difficult even to talk to them. They are... they are not open. They are withdrawn and often have communication problems. (....) The psychologist is trying to help such children (Tamm and Saar, 2010).

The Estonian national report also reveals both the need for emotional support for those living in poverty and experiencing personal problems:

Some young learners (who have dropped out of their former school) come from problematic or disadvantaged families or have lost contact with their families and therefore lack elementary life skills, such as managing one's money, etc. They also need support to cope with personal problems – someone to talk to. Such support can be provided by teachers. All schools teach family studies but these are not enough. Such students need extra support and an opportunity to turn to somebody – the school head, a teacher, a psychologist, etc. – outside classes. Such conversations improve students' communication skills and the skill of solving problems. They acquire positive behavioural models from a positive example. An opportunity to live in dormitory increases the sense of security.

Sometimes they simply want to talk to somebody they trust, to pour out their heart. The teacher of family studies is in great demand also outside the curriculum: Sometimes the students come and ask: „Has she come yet? I need to talk to her." Even those who have no classes on that particular day come to school to talk to her.

The school in its turn has tried to compensate for the family studies teacher's extra work. (Ibid.).

School Climate and Relational Skills of Teachers: The Role of Inservice Training

School climate effects on early school leaving are highlighted in the Russian national report:

The interviews showed that each group of students (teenagers and adults) was attracted to the school by different factors. For example, the main reason for teenagers to come to the school

and keep studying was the positive attitude of the teachers to them. The survey conducted at the school demonstrated that teenage students had experienced lack of attention in their former schools, where teachers had shown very little interest in students overall.

Why did children leave a usual school? If you take a questionnaire of the surveys that have been conducted, what was bad? The answer is: Teachers are wicked – they don't need us (Kozlovskiy, Khokhlova and Veits, 2010).

A different secondary school in Russia revealed different attitudes and practices:

The inservice trainings of all teachers including class supervisors are carried out regularly by the vice principal for extracurricular work. Those trainings are aimed at personal development of students, psychological support of students, as well as constructivist teaching methods. The informants state that the amount of the inservice training provided at the school is quite enough and fully meets the needs of both the teachers and the students. Based on the information about their psychological support for students and extracurricular activities aimed at personal development, one may say that the amount of the training is quite sufficient. Besides, both informants say they are always eager to learn more and exchange experience with their colleagues from other city schools (Ibid.).

School climate issues and teaching style also emerge as impacting upon student motivation in secondary school in Lithuania:

The secondary education system in Lithuania, according to the management, lacks the integrity of humanistic and pedagogical ideas.

The attitudes towards students have to change and then they will feel better at schools. [...] at the moment students are selected under the criteria 'good' and 'bad' and those who get the 'bad' label do not want to stay at such school – they leave it (Taljunaite et al., 2010).

In the Lithuanian national report, there is not only little evidence of emotional counselling support at secondary school level, there is also a view resisting such supports beyond those provided by the class teacher:

The teacher's and management's views on the availability of a counsellor for students with emotional problems, including bereavement issues diverge. While the management thinks that counsellor-teacher-psychologist should be a three-in-one option, the tutor thinks that a counsellor or psychologist would be needed:

Teachers have to study psychology and be themselves psychologists. It is a nonsense when after the conflict in the classroom the teacher 'sends' the student (the spoilage of their work) to be consulted by psychologist or someone else, be it a counsellor. The teachers have to learn how to deal with students' problems (Ibid.).

Inservice professional development could serve to not only increase teacher self-efficacy regarding their own relational skills but also to clarify the limitations of their role regarding emotional support.

In contrast with Lithuania, the Estonian national report points to the prevalence of inservice courses for teachers regarding emotional supports and conflict resolution skills:

Teachers are offered training on various topics: education, problems of young people (e.g. prevention of drug problems), how to cope with children with behavioural problems. Some courses last for several weeks and are provided in the school by specialists from Tallinn University. Some courses are provided by our own teachers. Teachers have also participated in courses provided by the Ministry of Education and Research, the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre, professional associations. For three years the school participated in an EU project 'School for training'. All teachers participated.

In view of the big number of pupils who drop out of general educational schools we are offering courses for teachers on teaching pupils with special needs. We are also developing a new programme concerning conflict management and coping in a situation of crisis. This course was triggered by increasing school violence, school shootings in other countries. The course is developed in cooperation with the police and social services. We hope to complete the work by next autumn. The Ministry of Education and Research has also made suggestions for teacher training courses and has funded such courses. (Tamm and Saar, 2010).

Alternative Strategies to Suspension

A multidisciplinary team plays a key role in devising alternative strategies to suspension in this example from a Russian school:

The school does not practice expulsion or suspension of students. Instead, the psychological support service team regularly conducts preventive meetings and conversations with students who have discipline or study problems. Each school has a Preventive Council aimed at dealing with 'problem' students and the evening school #5 is no exception. The school police inspector is in charge of young students and deals with their discipline problems. The psychologist and social teacher conduct conversations and meetings with adult students in case their discipline or studying practices are improper. Use of preventive measures as an alternative to expulsion shows that the school staff aims to keep as many students at risk of

early leaving at school as possible, which proves how much they are indeed interested in students and care for them (Kozlovskiy, Khokhlova and Veits, 2010).

The problem of school suspension is, however, acute in Lithuania:

> According to management and the teacher interviewed approximately 10 percent of students are expelled from school in each year. The reasons are usually behaviour problems, bullying, harassment, and aggressiveness i.e. non-academic reasons prevail. The teacher mentioned that there were no expelled students for not attending classes. The statistics, according to the management can be collected, but this will not solve the problem (Taljunaite et al., 2010).

This figure is in addition to their estimates of those who 'drop out' from school which also reaches approximately 10%. The other national reports offer little account of alternative strategies to suspension in their interviewed school.

Interventions to Prevent Bullying

The need for system level interventions and emotional supports, specifically regarding bullying prevention strategies at post-primary school, emerge, in particular, from the Estonian national report:

> Most students come from ordinary secondary schools because they had problems with learning or discipline...The majority of those who have dropped out of or left their previous school are lower secondary students. They had conflicts with teachers or other problems and could not continue in their old school.
> *Lower secondary students are younger than 17 years old. They are referred to us by the Department of Education; we cannot admit such students without the Department's approval. They could not cope in their old school. (...) Some schools (in particular those that have a social worker) refer their problematic students to us. The main problem is bullying. This year we have two such students and they are doing well. Our students are older and bullies cannot dominate* (Tamm and Saar, 2010).

The fact that the theme of bullying in school affecting early school leaving does not emerge in the other national reports does not necessarily mean that it is a lesser problem in their national contexts; it may be that bullying is still a hidden problem in many school contexts.

Substance Abuse

A focus on substance abuse related issues is a key dimension to prevention of early school leaving

(Downes, 2003; EMCDDA, 2003, 2003a). Yet it is given little emphasis by interviewees in the different examples from schools across the national reports. One exception is the Russian national report which observes the following important approach:

> Some students in the School have experience of drug-taking: either once or twice or on a regular basis. In order to help those pupils and prevent them from developing a further addition, the School (and mostly the Support Service) cooperates with a number of organizations such as Crisis Centre, Children's Psychiatry, Institute of Psychology and Social Work. This is a two-way cooperation: the School persuades parents to address to the Crisis Centre and Children's Psychiatry in cases of necessity, and specialists from these organizations come to the School for consultations and discussions. Students consuming drugs and alcohol are considered to be in need of professional help at School.
>
> The main goal of the psychological support service is to provide favorable conditions for all students, build up trustworthy relationships between them and the school and provide psychological help for those students who lack it in their families.

> *They often come here with their spirit broken. They are offended at the world and intimidated, so it's very important for us to help them form a strong, stable and harmonious personality, who is fully aware of his/her desires and ambitions. We want to bring up a person who understands that s/he is not alone in the world and that there will be many problems on his/her life path so we teach them to be ready for those problems and be able to overcome them* (Kozlovskiy, Khokhlova and Veits, 2010).

The need for a family support dimension

It is evident also that a family support dimension may be necessary rather than simply focusing on the individual student. As this Estonian example illustrates, a key role here is for the State to include a family support dimension in an early school leaving prevention strategy:

> The school also tries to work with parents but it is difficult because students often come from problematic families:
>
> *It happens that a student gets a grant and his mother takes the money … What can a child do if his mother takes the money he gets from us? And spends it on booze. How can a child learn if his mother is in prison? What can we do? We talk; we offer them a place in the dormitory. They can study and live here. But they need love and attention of their parents.*

These are social problems that cannot be solved by the school alone. The school cannot concentrate on parents:

This is the state's responsibility. Unfortunately these problems have a huge impact on children and their future... (Tamm and Saar, 2010).

Again, across the national reports, there is little evidence at national policy level of a family support dimension to early school leaving prevention for families most in need.

National prevention structures and strategies

An Austrian Ministry official provides the following account of somewhat informal structures and strategies for early school leaving prevention at national level:

What regards social inclusion, people with disadvantages, we don't have any committees, but it is nevertheless a main focus in our work. We know where the problems are from several research results, experts consulting and evaluations, which have been carried out. We know what needs to be done and discuss this also with other concerned groups (Rammel and Gottwald, 2010).

In contrast, the Hungarian national report reveals that there is a central driving committee at national level focusing on those experiencing disadvantage:

Within the Ministry [of Education and Culture] there is a Directorate of Equal Opportunities with responsibilities of programme planning for highly disadvantaged population. This functions according to The New Hungary Development Plan. This Directorate mainly deals with professional planning of Social Renewal Operational Programmeme, also deals with preparing laws and legal works, and manages the operational tasks of implementation of legislation. (Balogh et al., 2010).

However, there is little evidence that this strategy encompasses a mental health dimension. It would seem that much of the impetus for conceptualisation of socio-economic disadvantage in Hungary has come from EU initiatives. A Hungarian Ministry official outlines that most of the key strategies in the area of social inclusion have been based on EU funding:

There are a lot of strategies in relation to social inclusion: strategy for integration of Gypsies, women and men social equality strategy, and strategy for the elderly. Each strategy displays a variety of training in several relations, on the one hand, professional trainings, on the other

hand trainings for the target group itself.

We want to support the training of disadvantaged people specifically from state and EU funds...For all other strategies the key aspect is the disadvantaged feature (unemployed, woman returns from maternity leave, gipsy, the elderly, disabled, etc.). **And are these programmes mainly realised by EU funds?** *Yes, they are* (Ibid).

The Russian national report points to the need for a coherent set of obligations, strategies and structures at national level to drive reform:

Enhancing access to education for socially disadvantaged groups is a complex problem containing social, cultural and personal aspects. It again shows that the question of improving access to education has to be addressed from different perspectives and on different levels. Such approach presumes:
- Better communication and cooperation between government departments dealing with the issues of education, social policy and employment
- Creating a governmental strategy aimed solely at improvement of access to education for socially underrepresented groups, which will have
- set of determined priorities;
- concrete plan and timeline of implementation;
- each department responsible for conducting its own activities aimed at achievement of the common goal.
- improved communication between the government departments and the educational institutions (Kozlovskiy, Khokhlova and Veits, 2010).

Though there are no national, nor even major city level committees for social inclusion in Russia, there is some evidence of driving committees at more local levels:

Despite the fact that there is no committee in the administration of St. Petersburg that would solely deal with social inclusion, access to education for traditionally underrepresented groups, lifelong learning, literacy, the non-formal education sector, etc, there are special departments at some committees that are in charge of these mentioned aspects. Some of them, such as social inclusion and integration of traditionally underrepresented groups, are dealt with by the Committee for Social Policy. The issues of lifelong learning, access to education and professional orientation are dealt with by the Committee for Education and the Committee for Labor and Employment of the Population of St. Petersburg. The Committee for Education

does not have a special department dealing with access to education of traditionally underrepresented categories (Ibid.).

Financial barriers to such central driving committees at national level are adverted to in the Lithuanian and Estonian national reports. In the words of one Lithuanian official interviewee:

As there is a crisis now, I don't think that we should create new structures; we should coordinate the existing ones better. We don't need one more structure that would help to implement a life long learning strategy that you mentioned. What we need is that each level according to its competence would concretise its activities in this range (Taljunaite et al., *2010*).

An Estonian official interviewee uses finance as a rationale to advocate a laissez-faire approach in this area of socio-economic disadvantage and early school leaving:

What problems have occurred in creating relevant structural units? Is the ministry planning to create any structural units responsible for the above-mentioned areas (Social inclusion, access to education for traditionally underrepresented groups, lifelong learning, functional literacy, non-formal education?
If we wished to create such structural units we should change the present division of work. Greater centralisation means more officials. We cannot afford that at the moment so the answer is no – the creation of such structural units is not on the agenda right now...Speaking about long term development – maybe one day there will be some structural changes as well (Tamm and Saar, 2010).

It is of concern that according to this view, there is to be little state role for stimulating national structures leading to informed decision-making on the needs for socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

Another barrier to a strategic approach to social inclusion in education is the reluctance of some countries to distinguish students on the grounds of ethnicity – sometimes data collection based on ethnicity differences is even prohibited by law. The Bulgarian national report highlights that ethnicity is basically perceived as a confidential private matter of the individual:

no information is officially collected on the ethnic background of individuals… This is considered personal information of confidential character. It is assumed that all ethnic communities have Bulgarian citizenship, the separate groups having their own ethnic, religious and cultural identity or family preferences, which do not fall within the priorities of the state (Boyadjieva et al., 2010).

Discussion

These exploratory qualitative research findings raise a number of issues that require further detailed investigation. The findings underline the need for emotional supports for a number of students experiencing poverty and who are at risk of early school leaving. The interviewees drew attention to the following needs of students at risk of early school leaving: supports for withdrawn children and young people, for children at risk of suicide or who have experienced bullying in school. The suggested supports go far beyond the targeting of those with emotional disorders at a clinical level. Themes such as developing alternatives to suspension and expansion of teacher inservice training to improve their conflict resolution skills, also emerge from the findings. Substance abuse as an issue requiring strategic intervention in educational contexts was explicitly referred to by interviewees only in the Russian national report. Family related and family support needs were observed by interviewees in the Estonian, Hungarian and Russian national reports in relation to students at risk of early school leaving.

Some interviewees explicitly recognise and emphasise that there is a dearth of emotional support services available in their countries. This pervasive policy gap for a mental health and emotional support strategy in educational contexts impacts even further on students at risk of early school leaving. There is a need to move from *ad hoc* examples of supports and practices at local levels to a systemic vision at international, national, regional and local levels that integrates a strategic approach to early school leaving prevention with the provision of emotional support services at selected, indicated and universal prevention levels. From the limited sample interviewed, it is not so much a case of national policy for early school leaving not being implemented in practice, but more a large scale void in policy making for early school leaving prevention. This conclusion applies *a fortiori* to the void in strategic policy-making to integrate early school leaving prevention with emotional supports in Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Norway, and especially, Lithuania, whereas at least some evidence of a strategic approach is in place with the multidisciplinary teams in Slovenia, and with some good practice evident also in the Russian national report.

These examples of the need for engagement with the emotions of students, at least at the level of support services available at the institutional level, offer what Glasser (1969) would call the emotional bridge to relevance in education. In doing so, they challenge a traditional bias in Western culture of compartmentalising reason and emotion in Cartesian fashion. Factoring out emotions from the equation of relevance in the educational system is no longer sustainable or justifiable for the post-primary education of traditionally marginalized groups and individuals. Adopting Marcuse's (1964) somewhat limited distinction between 'high' culture and 'mass' culture, it is arguable that giving a central role to emotions in education imports 'mass' culture into the traditional domain of supposedly 'high' culture in the education system. Emotions of love, grief, sadness, anger and joy are experienced by all. Emotions are a great democratiser across social groups (Downes and Downes, 2007) and are tethered to a democratic institutional culture in education. For post-primary school institutions to engage meaningfully with the experience of marginalized individuals and groups, their emotions must be given a systemic institutional space for potential expression.

This also requires adequate investment by states in systemic emotional supports as part of a strategic approach to early school leaving.

In US national surveys, at least two-thirds of schools reported providing the following services for students' mental health concerns: individual counselling, crisis intervention, assessment/evaluation, behaviour-management consultation, case management, referrals to specialized programs, group counselling, and substance use and/or violence prevention (Brener, Martindale and Weist, 2001; Foster et al., 2005). Suldo, Friedrich and Michalowski (2010) discuss the supports needed for provision of 'a continuum of tiered intervention services, including prevention and universal intervention (e.g., school wide positive behavioral supports, school climate promotion), targeted interventions for students at risk (e.g., social skills and anger management groups, classroom management strategies), and intensive individualized interventions with community support (e.g., therapy, implementation of behavior intervention plans) in schools' (p.354). It is this continuum of care that needs further attention and development across national contexts, with an integrated focus on mental health promotion and early school leaving prevention supports. For this integrated focus to occur, departmental structures at national levels may need substantial reconfiguration to challenge a traditional bifurcation between Ministries of Education and of Health.

A US wide three-tier model for providing a continuum of supports for positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) estimates that 10-15% of students will not respond to universal school-wide interventions, but will benefit from increased structure and contingent feedback (Reinke et al., 2009). The PBIS model across a range of over 6,000 US schools, albeit focusing on disruptive behaviour rather than early school leaving, estimates that 5% of students do not respond favourably to universal or selected interventions and thereby require intensive intervention support, i.e., indicated prevention (Reinke et al., 2009). It is important to acknowledge, however, that given the radical divergence in early school leaving figures across EU member states, the percentages for each target group for selective and indicated prevention to be engaged with, can be expected to differ in a major way across different countries, whether in Europe or beyond. A broadening of scope is also needed to move beyond engagement with students' behaviour to also centrally engage with their experiences. Recognition of the priority need to engage with students' lived experiences, both in and out of school, challenges a reductionism that tends to treat students as mere conglomerations of behaviours.

As the interviews with school and governmental officials involve self-report methods, a concern arises regarding social desirability factors (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960) in their responses. In other words, officials representing a school institution or government department may tell the interviewer what they think he/she wants to hear. Given the qualitative and exploratory aspect of this research and the fact that usually only one school institution was interviewed in each country great caution must be taken in generalizing the responses from the interviewed institutional representatives to other institutions in the same country and beyond. Nevertheless, interviewees were asked to document their perceptions as to the typicality of their institution regarding engagement with marginalized students. A further feature of this qualitative research is that it is

documenting, at times, perceptions as much as facts. Yet this is not a clear cut dichotomy as perceptions of leading institutional officials can affect the factual reality of practices within an institution, while factual accounts are invested with theory-laden assumptions (Popper, 1957; Kuhn, 1962; Feyerabend, 1988; Eiser, 1995).

Across the eight European countries examined here, there is a predominance of countries from Central and Eastern Europe, and apart from Slovenia, no participants from Southern Europe. These findings are further limited as they are not student-centred but point to the need for more detailed engagement with children and young people's voices regarding their emotional and educational needs for early school leaving prevention (Downes, 2004; Downes and Maunsell, 2007). Emancipatory research methods emphasise the importance of treating 'objects' of research as 'subjects', and thereby giving voice to those being studied so that they are centrally involved in generating relevant research questions and hypotheses. In the words of Oliver (1992):

> The issue then for the emancipatory research paradigm is not how to empower people but, once people have decided to empower themselves, precisely what research can then do to facilitate this process. This does then mean that the social relations of research production do have to be fundamentally changed; researchers have to learn how to put their knowledge and skills at the disposal of their research subjects, for them to use in whatever ways they choose (p.111).

This emancipatory focus is on the changing of the social relations of research production - the placing of control in the hands of the researched, not the researcher (Oliver, 2004). Oliver (1992) suggests that there are three key fundamentals on which such a paradigm must be based; reciprocity, gain for and empowerment of the research subjects.

Future research in this area needs to extend to more detailed examination of students' voices in relation to their experiences of school and to involve them directly in devising the questions and not only responses informing their experiences. Such a phenomenological research focus would also require exploration of their needs for emotional and mental health supports linked with the education system. The current research is limited to a number of European cultural contexts, and requires expansion to Southern European and wider international contexts. Issues such as teachers' conflict resolution skills and alternatives to suspension require systemic national level strategic responses, as is also the case with development of national level strategies for mental health in education and early school leaving prevention. Further research is also required at national and international levels on the scale of children's and young people's needs for emotional supports in the education system to help sustain their engagement with school. Such research requires recognition of the need to adopt a systems level focus to interrogate multiple levels of description and intervention, such as at the level of the student, group, class, school, family, local community, as well as wider

macro structural societal dimensions. A challenge is to reconcile individual voices and experiences with systemic level analyses, as well as to adopt a dynamic focus on pathways to system level change.

Acknowledgments

References

Acheson, D. (1998). *Great Britain independent enquiry into inequalities in health and adult disease*. London: Ciba Foundation Symposium No. HMSO.

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2009). *2009 Kids count data book: State profiles of wellbeing.* Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Balogh , A., Józan, A., Szöllősi, A and Róbert, P. (2010). *The institutional aspects of adult education in Hungary.* Budapest: TARKI Social Research Centre.

Batsche, G. M., and Knoff, H. M. (1994). Bullies and their victims: Understanding a pervasive problem in the schools. *School Psychology Review,* 23(2), 165-174.

Beran, T. (2008). Consequences of being bullied at school. In D. Pepler and W. Craig (Eds.) *Understanding and addressing bullying: An international perspective* (pp. 44–66). Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse.

Bornstein, MH., Hahn, C-S., Haynes, OM., (2010). Social competence, externalizing, and internalizing behavioral adjustment from early childhood through early adolescence: Developmental cascades. *Development and Psychopathology,* 22, 717–735

Boyadjieva, P., Milenkova, V., Gornev, G., Petkova, K. and Nenkova, D. (2010). *The role of Bulgarian educational institutions for the promotion of access of adults to formal education* Sofia: Institute of Sociology.

Brener, N. D., Martindale, J., and Weist, M. D. (2001). Mental health and social services: Results from the School Health Policies and Programs Study 2000. *Journal of School Health,* 71, 305 – 312.

Burkhart, G. (2004). *Selective prevention: First overview on the European situation.* Lisbon: European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, EMCDDA.

Cohen, J. (2006). Social, emotional, ethical and academic education: Creating a climate for learning, participation in democracy, and well-being. *Harvard Educational Review,* 76 (2), 201-237.

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.

Commission staff working paper {SEC (2010)} *Reducing early school leaving. Accompanying document to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving.*

Communication from the Commission. {SEC(2008) 2177} *Improving competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools.*

Communication from the Commission {COM(2011) 18 final} *Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda. (Proposal for a) Council Recommendation {COM(2011) 19 final} On policies to reduce early school leaving* SEC(2011) 98 final SEC(2011) 97 final SEC(2011) 96 final.

Cooper, P and Jacobs B. (2010). *Models and outcomes in the education of children with emotional disturbances/behavioural difficulties. An international review*. Research report no. 7. Leicester: National Council for Special Education, Ireland.

Crowne, D. P., and Marlowe, D. (1960). A new scale of social desirability independent of psychopathology. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 24, 349-354

Cutler D.M. and Lleras-Muney, A. (2006). *Education and health: evaluating theories and evidence. NBER working paper No. W12352*. Cambridge (MA): National Bureau of Economic Research.

Desjardins, R. (2008). Researching the links between education and well-being, *European Journal of Education*, 43, 1, 23-35.

Doll, B. (1996). Prevalence of psychiatric disorders in children and youth: An agenda for advocacy by school psychology. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 11, 20-47.

Dore, M. (2005). Child and adolescent mental health. In G. Malon and P. Hess (Eds.), *Child welfare for the twenty-first century: A handbook of practices, policies, and programs* (pp. 148–172). New York: Columbia University Press.

Downes, P. (2003). *Living with heroin: HIV, identity and social exclusion among the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia*. Tallinn: Legal Information Centre for Human Rights.

Downes, P. (2003a). The new curriculum of social, personal and health education in Irish primary schools: Self-awareness, introversion and the role of the teacher, *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny [Poland, Journal of Education]* 190, 93-112.

Downes, P. (2004). *Psychological support services for Ballyfermot: Present and future*. Commissioned Research Report. Ballyfermot, Dublin: URBAN.

Downes, P. (2006). Newtonian space: The 'blind spot' in Newell and Simon's information processing paradigm. *Cybernetics and Human Knowing,* 13(3), 25-55.

Downes, P. (2007). Why SMART outcomes ain't always so smart… In P. Downes and A.L. Gilligan (Eds.) *Beyond educational disadvantage* (pp. 57-69). Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Downes, P. (2007a). Intravenous drug use and HIV in Estonia: Socio-economic integration and development of indicators regarding the right to health for its Russian speaking population. *Liverpool Law Review,*

28, 271-317.

Downes, P. (2008). Mental health strategy for deprived children missing from education plan. *Action on Poverty Today*, 21, 4-5.

Downes, P. (2009). Prevention of Bullying at a Systemic Level in Schools: Movement from Cognitive and Spatial Narratives of Diametric Opposition to Concentric Relation. In SR. Jimerson, SM. Swearer, and DL. Espelage (Eds.) (p.517-533) *Handbook of School Bullying* : *An International Perspective.*

Downes, P. (2010). *'It's the heart stupid'. Emerging Priority Issues for Prevention of Early School Leaving: A Solution-Focused Approach*. Presentation at Belgian EU Presidency Conference, Breaking the cycle of disadvantage – Social inclusion in and through education. September 28th and 29th 2010. Ghent, Belgium.

Downes, P. (2011). *A Systems Level Focus on Access to Education for Traditionally Marginalised Groups: Comparing Policy and Practice in Twelve European Countries*. Dublin: Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College.

Downes, P. (2011a). *Multi/Interdisciplinary teams for early school leaving prevention: Developing a European Strategy informed by international evidence and research.* Research paper for European Commission NESET (Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training), University of Cardiff.

Downes, P and Gilligan, A. L. (2007). Beyond disadvantage: Some conclusions. In P. Downes, and A.L. Gilligan (Eds.) *Beyond educational disadvantage* (pp. 463-491). Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Downes, P. and Maunsell, C. (2007). *Count us in: Tackling early school leaving in South West Inner City Dublin, An integrated response.* Dublin: South Inner City Community Development Association (SICCDA) and South Inner City Drugs Task Force.

Downes, P, Maunsell, C. and Ivers, J. (2006). *A Holistic Approach to Early School Leaving and School Retention in Blanchardstown Current Issues and Future Steps for Services and Schools.* Dublin: Blanchardstown Area Partnership.

Downes, T. and Downes, P. (2007). Pedagogy of the Processed. In P. Downes, and A.L. Gilligan (Eds.) *Beyond educational disadvantage* (pp. 24-38). Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2003a). Annual report 2003: *The state of the drugs problem in the acceding and candidate countries to the European Union.* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

European Commission (2007*). Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: European Reference Framework.* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Fergusson, D. M., and Horwood, L. J. (1995). Early disruptive behavior, IQ, and later school achievement and delinquent behavior. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 23(2), 183–199.

Feyerabend, P. (1988). *Against method.* (2nd edition) New York: Verso.

Field, S., Kuczera, M., and Pont, B. (2007). *No more failures: Ten steps to equity in education.* Paris: OECD.

Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., Turner, H., and Hamby, S. L. (2005). The victimization of children and youth: A comprehensive, national survey. *Child Maltreatment*, 10, 5–25.

Fonagy, P., Twemlow, S. W., Vernberg, E., Sacco, F. C., and Little, T. D. (2005). Creating a peaceful school learning environment: The impact of an antibullying program on educational attainment in elementary schools. *Medical Science Monitor*, *11*, 317–325.

Foster, S., Rollefson, M., Doksum, T., Noonan, D., Robinson, G., and Teich, J. (2005). *School mental health services in the United States, 2002-2003*. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin.

Freudenberg N, and Ruglis J. (2007). Reframing school dropout as a public health issue. *Preventing Chronic Disease,* 4(4).

Fried, S., and Fried, P. (1996). *Bullies and victims: Helping your child through the schoolyard battlefield*. New York: M. Evans.

Gergen, K.J. (1994).*Toward transformation in social knowledge.* 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.

Gilligan, A. L. (Ed.) (2002*). Primary education: Ending disadvantage. Proceedings and Action Plan of National Forum.* Dublin: Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College.

Glasser, W. (1969). *Schools without failure*. New York and London: Harper and Row.

Glew, G. M., Fan, M., Katon, W., Rivara, F. P., and Kernic, M. A. (2005). Bullying, psychosocial adjustment, and academic performance in elementary school. *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, *159*, 1026–1031.

Graham, C. A., and Easterbrooks, M. A. (2000). School-aged children's vulnerability to depressive symptomatology: The role of attachment security, maternal depressive symptomatology, and economic risk. *Development and Psychopathology*, 12, 201–213.

Groninger, R. and Lee, R. (2001). Social capital and dropping out of school: benefits to at risk students of teachers' support and guidance. *Teachers College Record,* 103(4), 548–581.

Harrington, R., Rutter, M., and Fombonne, E. (1996). Developmental pathways in depression: Multiple meanings, antecedents and endpoints. *Development and Psychopathology*, 8(4), 601-616.

Haynes, N. M., and Comer, J. P. (1993). The Yale School Development Program process, outcomes, and policy implications, *Urban Education*, 28(2), 166-199.

Heidegger, M. (1927). *Being and time.* Trans. by J. MacQuarrie and E. Robinson (1962). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

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

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.

Ivančič, A., Mohorčič Špolar, V.A. and Radovan, M. (2010). *The case of Slovenia. Access of adults to formal and non-formal education – policies and priorities.* Ljubljana: Slovenian Institute for Adult Education.

Ivers, J. and Downes, P. (2011). A phenomenological reinterpretation of Horner's 'fear of success' in terms of social class. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 26 (4).*

Kaltiala-Heino, R., Rimpelä, M., Rantanen, P., Rimpelä, A. (2000). Bullying at school – an indicator of adolescents at risk for mental disorders. *Journal of Adolescence, 23*, 661-674.

Kaplan, D.D., Damphousse, J.R. and Kaplan, H.B. (1994). Mental health implications of not graduating from high school. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 62, 105-123.

Keddie, A. and Churchill, R. (2003). Power, control and authority: Issues at the centre of boys' relationships with their teachers. *Queensland Journal of Educational Research*, 19(1), 13-27.

Kellaghan, T., Weir, S., O'hUallachain, S. and Morgan, M. (1995). *Educational disadvantage in Ireland.* Dublin: Department of Education; Combat Poverty Agency; Education Research Centre.

Kelly, A.V. (1999). *The curriculum: Theory and practice*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Kessler, R. (2009). Identifying and screening for psychological and comorbid medical and psychological disorders in medical settings. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 65(3), 253–267.

Kochenderfer, R., and Ladd, G. W. (1996). Peer victimization: Cause or consequence of school maladjustment? *Child Development*, *67*, 1305–1317.

Kozlovskiy, V., Khokhlova, A. and Veits, M. (2010). *The role of Russian educational institutions in the promotion of access for adults to formal education* St Petersburg: Department of Sociology, Saint Petersburg State University.

Kuhn, T. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kumpulainen, K., Räsänen, E., and Henttonen, I. (1998). Children involved in bullying: Psychological disturbance and the persistence of the involvement. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, *23*, 1253–1262.

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

Leslie, L. K., Hurlburt, M. S., Landsverk, J., Barth, R., and Slymen, D. J. (2004). Outpatient mental health services for children in foster care: A national perspective. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 28, 699–714.

Lingard, B., Martino, W., Mills, M., and Bahr, M. (2002). *Addressing the educational needs of boys – Strategies for schools.* Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

Marcuse, H. (1964). *One dimensional man.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Martino, W., and Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2003). *So what's a boy? Addressing issues of masculinity and schooling.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

McIntyre-Mills, J. (2010). Participatory design for democracy and wellbeing: Narrowing the gap between *service* outcomes and perceived needs. *Systemic Practice Action Research*, 23:21–45.

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

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods* (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nansel, T. R., Haynie, D. L., and Simons-Morton, B. G. (2003). The association of bullying and victimization with middle school adjustment. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, *19*, 45–61.

O'Connell, M. and Sheikh, H. (2009). Non-cognitive abilities and early school dropout: longitudinal evidence from NELS, *Educational Studies,* 35: 4, 475-479.

OECD (2010). *Overcoming School Failure: Policies that work.* Paris: OECD.

Oireachtas 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.

Oliver, M. (1992). Changing the social relations of research production. *Disability, Handicap and Society,* 7(2), 101-114.

Oliver, M. (2004). Emancipatory Research: Realistic goal or impossible dream? In C. Barnes and G. Mercer. (Eds.). *Doing Disability Research* (pp. 15-31).Leeds: The Disability Press.

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Popper, K. (1957). *The poverty of historicism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

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

Pyhältö, K., Soini, T. and Pietarinen, J. (2010) Pupils' pedagogical well-being in comprehensive school— significant positive and negative school experiences of Finnish ninth graders *European Journal of Psychology of Education,* 25:207–221.

Rammel, S., and Gottwald, R. (2010). *Social inclusion in formal and non formal adult education: Findings from Austrian institutions and government representatives.* Krems: Danube University.

Reinke, W.M., Splett, J.D., Robeson, E.N. and Offutt, C.A. (2009). Combining school and family interventions for the prevention and early intervention of disruptive behavior problems in children: A public health perspective. *Psychology in the Schools,* 46(1), 33-43.

Ross, C. and Wu, C. (1995). The links between education and health. *American Sociological Review,* 60, 719-45.

Ross, C. E. and Mirowsky, J. (1989). Explaining the social patterns of depression: control and problem solving — or support and talking? *Journal of Health Social Behaviour*, 30(2), 209-19.

Rutter, M., and Sroufe, LA. (2000). Developmental psychopathology: Concepts and challenges. *Development and Psychopathology,* 12, 265–296.

Scardamalia, M., and Bereiter, C. (1991). Higher levels of agency for children in knowledge-building: A challenge for the design of new knowledge media. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 1(1), 37-68.

Smyth, E., McCoy, S. and Darmody, M. (2004). *Moving Up: The experiences of first-year students in post-*

primary education. Dublin: Liffey Press/ESRI.

Smyth, E., Dunne, A., McCoy, S., and Darmody, M. (2006). *Pathways through the Junior Cycle: The experiences of second year students.* Dublin: Liffey Press/ESRI.

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

Stensen, O-A., Ure, O-B. (2010). *The access of adults to formal and non-formal education in Norway.* Oslo: Fafo - Institute for Labour and Social Research.

Suldo, S.M., Friedrich A and Michalowski, J. (2010). Personal and systems-level factors that limit and facilitate school psychologists' involvement in school-based mental health services. *Psychology in the Schools* 47(4), 354-373.

Swearer, SM, Espelage, DL., Vaillancourt, T and Hymel, S. (2010). What Can Be Done About School Bullying? Linking Research to Educational Practice. *Educational Researcher*, 39, 38-47.

Taljunaite, M., Labanauskas, L., Terepaite-Butviliene, J . and Blazeviviene, L. (2010). *The access of adults to formal and non-formal adult education.* Vilnius: Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Social Research Institute.

Tamm, A and Saar, E. (2010). *LLL2010 Subproject 5 Estonia Country Report.* Tallinn: Institute   of International and Social Studies / Department of Social Stratification, University of Tallinn.

Teo, T. (2008). From Speculation to Epistemological Violence in Psychology. A Critical- Hermeneutic Reconstruction. *Theory and Psychology,* 18(1), 47–67.

Townsend, P., and Davidson, N. (Eds.). (1992). *Inequalities in health: The Black report*. London: Penguin.

Turner, H. A., Finkelhor, D.,and Ormrod, R. (2006). The effect of lifetime victimization on the mental health of children and adolescents. *Social Science and Medicine*, 62, 13–27.

US Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). *Mental health: Culture, race, and ethnicity—A supplement to mental health: A report of the surgeon general*. Rockville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services.

Van Alphen, S. (2009). The educational quality of early school leavers and the cross national variation of their income disadvantage, *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 15, 543-560.

Van der Wal, M. F., Cees, M., de Wit, A.M. and Hirasing, R. A. (2003). Psychosocial Health Among Young Victims and Offenders of Direct and Indirect Bullying. *Pediatrics,* 111, 1312-1317.

Van Dijk, T.A. and Kintsch, W. (1983). *Strategies of discourse comprehension*. New York-London: Academic Press.

Warnock, M. (1977). *Schools of thought*. London: Faber.

World Health Organization. (2003). *Caring for children and adolescents with mental health disorders: Setting WHO directions*. Switzerland: Geneva.