A Conceptual Framework for Researching the Risks to NEEThood

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Theorising the risks to NEEThood

When policymakers speak of young people at risk of young people becoming NEET, this is often framed in terms of individual competencies, values and orientations, while the sociological literature points to a number of socio-cultural groups or demographic characteristics, associated with young people's disenfranchisement from society and the labour market. Such work has identified the following groups of young people as being particularly susceptible; young parents (especially mothers) (Maguire 2015); Traveller/Roma/Gypsy communities (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018) and other disadvantaged minorities such as ethnic minorities (Van Praag et al. 2018); children, adolescents and young adults among refugees and asylum applicants, immigrant and migrant children and youth (Koehler and Schneider 2019); young offenders (Bäckman et al. 2014); young people with some types of special educational needs and disabilities (Batini et al. 2017), including those with social, emotional and mental health difficulties (Rodwell et al., 2018); children identified for child protection, as well as those in care (Dickens and Marx 2020); young carers (Sempik and Becker 2014); children from service families; or children in poverty (Schoon 2014). While not an exhaustive list, the range of young people at risk situates an at risk of NEET profile as conflating with more general indicators of vulnerability; taking into consideration the complexity of this concept that should be understood within a holistic, social-relational and social-ecological perspective (Olmos 2011).

Vulnerability is a multidimensional and multifactorial concept and the condition of vulnerability — as a product of interrelated dimensions and factors — can upset individuals, social groups or communities (leading them to problems developing their personal well-being and participating in social, economic, political, educational and cultural contexts) determining their sense of belonging and integration in the society (Gairín and Suárez 2010; Olmos 2011).

Consequently, one of the central challenges in developing a comprehensive approach to studying NEEThood is that it requires a framework capable of capturing the broad spectrum of complexity for a near intractable issue. Though the last few decades of educational research into educational achievement for disadvantaged children have highlighted the cumulative nature of risk factors, there is limited work in relation to holistically theorising these risks. Whilst research has attempted to theorise the risks of Early school Leaving (Cedefop 2016; European Commission 2015, "Assessment", 2019; González-Rodríguez, Vieira, and Vidal, 2019; Olmos 2014; Salvà-Mut, Tugores-Ques, and Quintana-Murci 2018; Van Praag et al., "Comparative Perspectives", 2018), what is still missing is a theoretical perspective which can account for the social structuring of disadvantage across the key domains that inform school-work transitions. To address this gap in knowledge, we sought to develop a conceptual schema in which to map the multiple

levels of human existence, including the; psychological, socio-cultural, material, environmental, structural and political arenas. By combining Bronfenbrenner's 'ecological' model with Brown's 'binds of poverty' model, we devised a 5-tier typology which captures the discrete barriers or opportunities young people face in their pursuit of securing good life chances.

In this introduction, we begin by outlining Bronfenbrenner's 'ecological' model and its strengths in relation to theorising the external forces that shape young people's development. We then introduce Brown's 'binds of poverty' model, which complements (and addresses a limitation in) Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (f by capturing the individual barriers disadvantaged young people face. From here, we integrate these two models into our 5-tier typology of risk for NEET, unpacking the dimensions of personal challenges, family circumstances, social relationships, institutional features, and structural factors. We conclude with an outline and structure for this Special Issue.

A contextual analysis of child and young people development: Bronfenbrenner's

ecological system's theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's work has attempted to theorise how the different aspects in children's lives affect their development by adopting an ecological approach. As a Russian-born psychologist raised in America, he was arguably the first to integrate the complex layers of contextual influences; 'from immediate through to social policy and culture—and the nature of their interactions with each other in the context of human development' (Grace et al. 2017, 5-6). In the late 1970s (1977; 1979) Bronfenbrenner termed his developmental model, 'ecological systems theory', which he later developed over the period of three decades. In reaction to the dominance of developmental psychology and its emphasis upon the biological and universal stages of children's development (e.g. Piaget 1934, Kolhberg 1984), Bronfenbrenner sought to incorporate a theorization of the environmental and interpersonal impacts upon the child in directing the locus of attention to the child's surrounding in which s/he is raised. It is dynamic in the sense that the ecological approach aims to conceptualise the constantly shifting social, physical and psychological terrain that the child concurrently navigates (Tudge, Gray, and Hogan 1997). As a holistic framework for directing a social science approach to childhood, the ecological system's model has been applied across a number of fields of practice including Health (Aber et al. 1997), Social Work (Ungar 2002) and Youth Criminal Justice (Steiberg et al. 2007) and education (reference).

At the heart of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model is the child as an individual in terms of his/her physiological and cognitive profile. Surrounding the individual are four key 'levels' that Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified as nested layers of concentric circles indicating discrete contexts through which to construe the environmental developmental interaction, upon the child (see figure 1). Each of these is located at a proximal range of distances from the young person's daily lived experiences, and are termed respectively, the micro, meso, exo and macro systems.

Figure 1. A visual model of the four levels to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system's theory
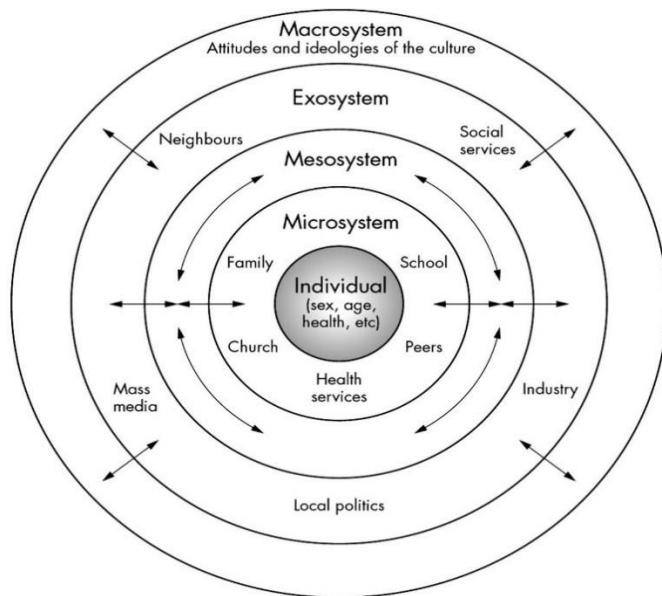
The sphere representing the settings which are situated at the closest proximal distance to the individual child, Bronfenbrenner defines as the 'micro system'. The describes this level as;

> 'a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person [child] in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics' (22).

Analysis of the micro level refers to the local-level physical and material settings in which the child participates in their routinised daily lives such as; the family home, school, the homes of friends and extended family, and, community based religious or youth groups. Through the norms, values, routines and interpersonal relationships encountered in these core settings, the contextual impact of the micro level draws attention to the key institutions in which the young person is raised as instrumental in constructing psychological, ethical, and ideological dispositions and ontologies. For those at risk of NEEThood this could include the forming or pro-or anti-schooling values, education and labour market aspirations.

The second sphere of Bronfenbrenner's model, he names the 'meso- level'. While the Micro-level refers to singular settings, Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines the mesosystem as;

> 'the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school and the neighbourhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work and social life)'. (p25)

This recognises the child as a fundamentally social being, and therefore the importance of considering values, practices and relationships that occur within the multiple social spheres that the young person participates. This contextual lens recognises that

values, norms and relationships are not constructed in a vacuum, and the interaction between different micro-settings can lead to both inclusion and exclusion in an educational sense, particularly through the alignment or discordance of values, norms, routines and practices between adults across the different settings. For example, the routinised and regulatory systems of schooling, such as rigid timetables, listening and engaging in didactic teaching, limited movement in the classroom and individualised working may be experienced variously by children of different home backgrounds. For the young carer used to significant autonomy and physical activity, schooling rhythms may be experienced as alien and discordant to their home life, while for the middle class child used to set family mealtimes, a scheduled homework hour and structured extra-curricular activities, school is experienced as a familiar setting and values aligned environment, contributing to a sense of belonging and participation in schooling.

While the first two levels emphasise the environmental influences of the people and places in which the child interacts, the exo-system points to the influence of arenas that indirectly affect development. This includes;

‘settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect or are affected by what happens in the settings containing the developing person’ (25)

The exo-level developmental context also applies to physical and material ‘local’ and bounded places, the key difference is that exo-level settings indicate those in which the child is *not* directly present as a social actor. Bronfenbrenner points towards, ‘the parent’s place of work [or job centre] a school class attended by another sibling, parents’ networks of friends [and] the activities of a local school board’ (p25). For the young person from a low-income family parental job loss could thwart their plans to enter higher education on leaving school in place of securing employment to contribute to the family income — studies as Cedefop (2016) evidences this risk factor.

The final level of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system’s theory refers to ideological context in the form of socio-cultural systems;

‘The macrosystem refers to consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso, and exo-) that exist or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies’ (p26).

In expanding on this he points to the broad difference in educational settings,- such as the school,- that exist between two nations (France and the US), which he refers to as a ‘set of blueprints’ (ibid) that organise and govern society. For young people at risk of NEET the macro level includes educational, economic and labour market policy on a national level. However, the macro level also applies to sub-national units of socio-cultural organisation, what he refers to as ‘intrasocietal contrasts… [delineated by]…socio-economic, ethnic, religious, and other sub-cultural groups, reflecting contrasting belief systems and lifestyles, which in turn help to perpetuate the ecological environments specific to each group’ (p26). For example, national attitudes towards Traveller and Roma communities can frame a schooling ethos that fails to recognise Traveller culture, leading Traveller children to feel excluded and even experience bullying and persecution in school, therefore affecting

the child's educational outcomes and any aspirations to continue into higher or further education.

The strength of Bronfenbrenner's theory for informing a framework to conceptualise the risk factors to NEET, is in foregrounding the various contextual arenas that frame structural, social and cultural barriers for young people. However, it is important to recognise that the influence of the various micro, meso, exo and macro level contexts in creating barriers and opportunities for children are not absolute. Here Bronfenbrenner (1979): is careful to situate the child as an active mediator of these environmental influences;

> 'A critical term in the definition of the micro system is *experienced*. The term is used to indicate that the scientifically relevant features of any environment include not only its objective properties but also the way in which these properties are perceived by the persons in that environment'' (p22)

For example, a child with special educational needs and disability (SEND) such as profound significant physical or sensory impairment, will impact upon parents' decisions about schooling and school's provision for post-schooling options. Similarly, the child can challenge and direct environmental influence, as reflected in the English SEND code of practice (2014) which puts an emphasis upon the child's choice and wishes over their educational provision. Furthermore, through his concept of the 'developmental niche' (reference) Bronfenbrenner acknowledges that the child will orientate towards those settings, which chime with their own characteristics and ontological approach, and therefore influence, particularly their own social settings.

In conclusion, Bronfenner's work recognises the personal, while emphasising the environmental, political and relational barriers and opportunities for development. However, as we suggested earlier in this paper, Bronfenbrenner's theorising is limited as a universal model for children's and young people's development, because it arguably misses the specific barriers or binds experienced by educationally disadvantaged children and young people. It is necessary to consider the disadvantages that these particular children and young people face (Gairín and Suárez 2012) because barriers or binds experience by educationally disadvantaged children could explain the problems that young people lived through or are avoiding/navigating. In order to focus our conceptual model more squarely upon the circumstances and challenges related NEET status (e.g., schooling, educational and training for key groups of young people), we sought to integrate Bronfenbrenner's insights with the theoretical insights from research into the schooling experiences of children facing material and economic hardship: Brown's 'binds' of poverty. This is particularly pertinent in view of recent work that has highlighted that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely to be NEET (Gadsby 2019).

The educational binds of poverty

While Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model recognises the psychological impacts of contextual forces upon the child's development, the onus of his framework is upon the external social and structural forces. In contrast to Bronfenbrenner's model, Brown's framework was informed by a child-centred lens in following children over the course of five years including

their transition from primary to secondary school. Considering children's experiences of school as viewed through their own eyes enabled a close analysis of the actions and narratives children employed in attempt to make their school life meaningful. Drawing from over thirty years of qualitative research into the experience of school life for children in poverty,- including her own empirical research, -Brown (2014) developed the 'educational binds of poverty' as a heuristic to analyse and explain children's educational challenges. The concept of a 'bind', points to a particular form of barrier or challenge that obstructs educational success. In contrast to the policy assumption that children are unaware of or passive to such challenges, the 'bind' concept signals children's agency in confronting and wrestling with the challenges they face, often through employing creative and ingenious strategies. Children's efforts to break free of the bind serve only to make it more constrictive, in provoking tensions and trade-off in children's experiences of school, such that while they may find ways of navigating social and inter-personal trajectories, this often comes at the expense of success in formal educational outcomes. Brown's early work identifies four binds in particular as the most difficult to circumnavigate, while more recent work has reflected on the prevalence of a fifth bind (Brown and Dixon 2019). Each of these four binds will now be reviewed.

The first bind that Brown identifies concerns the 'the material necessities conducive to health and happiness [which are] are so compromised' (p23) for children in poverty such as 'poor health, poor housing, and fear and anxiety over unemployment, crime, and family income material' (ibid). These influences have a direct impact on children's readiness to learn in that children are more likely to start their day tired, hungry and anxious. There is also an indirect impact of material hardship. Examples may include: the perceived shame or embarrassment triggered by wearing ill-fitting or broken school uniforms; lacking the resources and commodities such as fashion, music and sport prized in youth culture across first world nations of Europe; and self-imposed exclusion from not participating in paid for school trips, residentials, or other social and extra-curricular activities.

Bind two refers to the 'the reasons as to why, and ways in which, schooling pedagogies are alienating for children in poverty' (Brown 2018, 28) such that there is a disjuncture between children's experience of home and schooling cultures such as 'the norms, routines, language used and expectations of children and adults in school, and to what extent these mirror or are in contrast with those out of school' (ibid). This bind is well illustrated through the work of Annette Lareau (2000) who found that the cultural advantage of participation in extra curricular activities transferred into the social and interpersonal resources to achieve in school for middle class children; '

> [Middle class children] spent a great deal of time 'performing' in situations similar to school; as for example, at soccer practice, they lined up, followed directions, performed tasks upon the request of adults and demonstrated their skill in a public setting (p168)

In contrast, she found that those from low-income families were more likely to spend their free time caring for family members, carrying out domestic duties or participating in solitary unstructured leisure time, leading them to find the rigidity of school routines to be stifling to their autonomy.

Bind three refers to the social impact of poverty in its effects in constraining and promoting friendship cultures that vary in their orientation to schooling values. This

indicates in that while finding harder to access pro-schooling peer groups, many children in poverty are particularly reliant on their in-school friendships in order to generate a sense of self-value and inclusion in being largely socially, culturally or emotionally disenfranchised due to associated aspects of their vulnerability (i.e. being in-care, young carers, young offenders, young parents).

Bind four is particularly relevant for as it signals the educational, social and emotional impacts of irregular school transitions. Children from low-income backgrounds have been found to be twice as likely to experience turbulence due to labour market insecurity, rising house prices, austerity welfare measures, and policy impositions (i.e. availability of foster care, land rights for Traveller communities). Recent research has indicated that the impact on educational outcomes face is cumulative with subsequent school moves (RSA 2013).

In recent work Brown has also speculated on the rising emergence of a fifth bind- the mental health bind of poverty in acknowledging the growing prevalence of mental health issues among school children in nations of the global north (Brown and Dixon 2019). Statistical evidence has suggested that approximately one in four children now experience mental health difficulties, while policy analysis has suggested that one of the reasons for this may be the institutional factors of schooling such as the impact of performative pressures and budget cuts on instructional mechanisms and children's sense of anxiety and stress in school.

In summary, these five binds capture a range of barriers and hardships young people in schooling and education can face. As such, Brown's 'binds of poverty' provide a suitable framework which can focus on the individual challenges young people at risk fo NEET contend with as viewed through young peoples' own experiential and conceptual lenses. In the following section, we integrate this more ontological perspective alongside Bronfenbrenner's broader ecological perspective to develop a holistic typology of the risks of NEEThood.

Integrating 'ecological systems' & 'binds' theory in developing a typography of risk

to EL

While an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 79) can help to isolate the various contextual arenas through which risks are produced, a more focused lens upon children's experiences of educational advantage can enable a more nuanced analysis of the processes through which the various contextual settings create these risks. Taken in conjunction, these theories led us towards an understanding of the various material, cultural, social, institutional and policy factors that frame distinct albeit inter-related risk factors to NEEThood. In integrating the insights from these two theoretical perspectives we strived to develop a typography in which to categorise and organise the various risks t, which was sufficiently comprehensive to the empirical literature, while amenable to conceptual distinction in a way that practitioners could engage with and apply. It was, therefore, important to avoid esoteric labels (i.e. micro, meso, exo level). As such we developed a framework of five distinct categories of risk factor; personal challenges, family circumstances, social relationships, institutional features of school and work, and structural factors of economic disadvantage, national policy, and the educational system.

Following Bronfenbrenner, we understood the various spheres to be nested and inter-dependent. We have organised each of these levels in terms of their proximal and temporal influence on the young person (see fig 2). We are earnest to emphasise that in line with Bronfenbrenner and Brown, we recognise the social, structural and external constraints that each sphere exerts on the young person. However, we also recognise the agency with which young people will negotiate and navigate the risks presented in each of these spheres. We follow the 'bind' allegory (Brown 2014) in recognising the young person as invariably cognisant of the challenges they face in the pursuit of good life chances, and far from passive in their engagement with them. This enables us to consider the personal and agential risks to EL from a position that avoids a deficit model judgement on young peoples' thoughts, beliefs and behaviours, as well as those of their families, peers and teachers and professionals. In contrast, we view the ontological dimension to these effects as both trade-offs and buffers which enable young people and those around them to 'get by' within very challenging circumstances. To illustrate this point, we may consider the 'personal' risk of 'low aspirations' which policymakers frequently point to as both the cause and solution to good life chances for young people. The policy view of 'limited aspirations' or low-expectations as inherently problematic his fails to respect its function in buffering the disappointment, injustice and impact to self-worth, where compounding evidence highlights the uncertainty by which aspirations to succeed in higher education or the labour market can be realised.

Figure 2. a model for conceptualising the categories of risk factors to NEEThood g
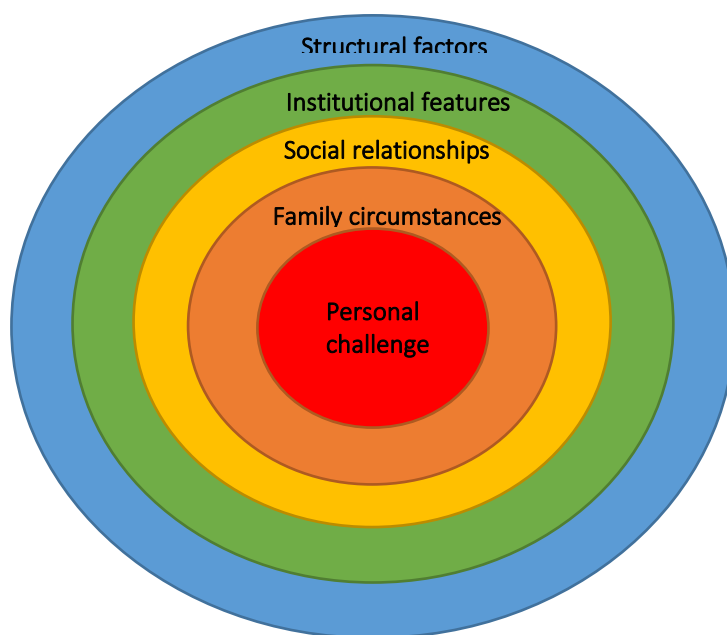
Personal challenges
The first category of risk factors we label 'personal challenges'. In being positioned at the centre of the model this dimension of risk reflects the individual aspects of the child Bronfenbrenner's points to, as unique to the physiological, phycological, emotional and cognitive characteristics of the child. As a category of risk, 'personal challenges' refers to the

challenges related to the child's personal circumstances that present barriers to educational and labour market trajectories. This include a number of aspects including:

a) *health and ability* (e.g. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Mental Health difficulties (SEMH);
b) *emotional and existential aspects* leading to a negative impact upon self-concept (e.g. low self-esteem and self-confidence, low aspirations, motivation and expectations, negative academic perception, fear of failure, stress and anxiety, low resilience);
c) aspects related to significant *experiences or events* (irregular school transitions, childhood abuse or neglect, trauma, denial of personal agency, isolation,)
d) *behavioural aspects* related to the young person's responses to experiential challenges (e.g. absenteeism, communication difficulties, difficulty in trusting others, disengagement, school exclusion, young offending).

As is evident from this description personal challenges include individual factors the child is born with (e.g. abilities), or acquires (mental health difficulties), but they also refer to the young person's ontological outlook. The young person's view of the world may be internally held, but it is also a product of the multiple contextual circumstances imposed or mediated by the other four contextual risk categories around the child.

Family Circumstances

The second category of risk applies to the family circumstances pertaining to the young person. We position this level next to the personal one in representing the first external sphere of challenge the child must navigate, in recognising the family as the primary social institutional the child experiences and the influence of which will extend through the lifespan. Following Brown's (2014), family circumstances includes:
a) *material circumstances* (e.g. being raised in a low-income or workless household, young person having to support the family through caring or economic means);
b) *cultural factors* (e.g. family aspirations and expectations, parental value of education,)
c) *social circumstances* (e.g. dysfunctional family relationships, parenting difficulty,
d) *physical, mental and emotional needs and availability of family members:* (low family support, experience of alcohol/substance abuse in the family)

In being careful to avoid judging parents and families, we also recognise that risks that fall- under 'family circumstances' do not confer blame or responsibility on young people's circumstances. In contrast, the complexity of these challenges recognises the difficult circumstances in which parents are raising their children, and take the perspective that the significant majority of parents care about their children and want the best for them. We therefore highlight the nature of this risk category as being shaped by the other categories (for example parents' aspirations for their child may be affected by the personal risk categories of the child's SEND and SEMH needs).

Social relationships

The third category of risk we term 'social relationships', that we position at the second layer of separation from the young person. The influence of social relationships are particularly marked during adolescence (Sacks date) as a period in the life span where the young person is looking outside of the institution of the family in defining themselves as independent social actors. In playing a central role within both Bronfenbrenner's and Brown's theory the social and emotional dimensions of children's lives are seen to be as underpinned by their relationships with those around them. For Bronfenbrenner, it was the through the child's emotional attachments with other people that the microsystem wields its influence on the developing child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For Brown (2014) each of the four binds exerted a negative impact on children's friendships and peer groups. The 'Social relationships' category of risk refers to relational challenges brought about through all types of relationships outside of the family including;

a) *adults in a position of authority* in school, work and training (e.g. not feeling cared about by teachers, low expectations from professionals and teachers, being shouted at);

b) *the influence of the peer group* (e.g. bullying, gang intimidation, peer pressure to take drugs, alcohol and smoke, low peer group expectations for the future)

c) friendships (not having friends, friendship culture, poor friendship management skills, losing or difficulty retaining friends)

d) *adults working in a support capacity* (poor relationships with mentor, tutors, and learning support advisors). This category also included further aspects that cut across these the different types of relationships including

e) *threats from engagement in technology and social-media platforms* (e.g. cyber bullying, online gaming, vulnerability to grooming, social media pressure).

As with the previous categories' risks produced within 'social relationships' are interrelated with the other risk categories. For example, familial interactions with the school can impact on how teachers and other educators can perceive and engage with the young person, which are also shaped by personal factors such as the child's ability and aptitude in school. Furthermore, the early friendships the child makes may be influenced by the friends of parents, as well as the school or neighbourhood in which the family home in situated. This category recognises that while we may be able to 'choose our friends' where we 'can't' choose our families', young people's friendship choices and relational orientations are not unconstrained and must be reciprocated. As Brown's (2014) theory highlights, the friendship groups that children in poverty are able to gain access to are less likely to be pro-schooling, and are subject to gender and poverty mediated processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Institutional features of the school and work place

As the fourth sphere of our model (figure 2) 'institutional features of school and work' recognise the school (college, VET or non-formal educational setting) and work place as micro-level cultural and social systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that provide structure and meaning to the daily life worlds that young people inhabit. Risks that fall under this category include:

a) *Material or environmental aspects* (e.g. classroom layout not inclusive, building too hot or cold, class or team size too big, absence of 'safe spaces' to access when needed.)
b) *Organisational policies:* (e.g. poor behaviour management or wellbeing systems, exclusion and attendance policies, isolation rooms)
c) *Norms regarding* unofficial' social regulatory systems on expectations and behaviour ('low teacher or employer expectations, institutional rigidity, relegated to the corridors to work during lessons).
d) *Level and nature of support available (*e.g. limited teacher resources or time, lack of career, personal, or academic guidance, lack of identification mechanisms for targeting support).

Risk factors under the 'Institutional features of school and work' category are inter-related with the other risk categories in ways such as; the personal needs of young people mean that they are more or less able to fit in with the social organisational structures of schooling, i.e. children with mental health difficulties may find it difficult to access full-time schooling; bullying from the peer group and exclusion from friends make young people more vulnerable to weakly defined or inconsistent behaviour management systems; a lack of routine or multiple demands on the young people within the family home may make it difficult to comply with highly structured and time-monitored routines of the school or workplace.

Structural factors of economic disadvantage, national policy, and the educational system

The final risk category we identify is that of structural factors of economic disadvantage, national policy and the education system. According to European Commission ("Assessment", 2019), structural factors include political leadership and stability; labour market policies; socio-demographic factors, migration and population change; the legal framework for compulsory education; governance arrangements within education systems; equity and inclusion policies; quality and availability of early childhood education and care; and, quality of teaching and continuing professional development programmes.

As the category most far removed from the individual, 'structural factors' point to the external influences on the child that operate outside of their daily life worlds. This level is akin to Bronfenbrenner's 'macro' level sphere in which he recognises that 'the individual's own development life course is seen as embedded in and powerfully shaped by conditions and events occurring during the historical period through which the person lives' (Brofenbrenner 1995, 641). As the name suggests there are three key dimensions to this category:
a) *Aspects of economic disadvantage at the local, regional or national level* (e.g. crisis in funding to public services, and local authorities and schools, poor regional infrastructure and public transport services,)
b) *The impact of national policies concerning school, education and work* (e.g. raising the age of compulsory education and training to 18; changes in the grading systems of national examinations, requirement for post-16 maths and literacy, availability of mechanisms to track NEET young people)

c) *Aspects of the educational system* (e.g. exam pressure and performance targets, performance pressure on teachers, transition from school to vocational education and training (VET), emphasis on measuring outcomes.

As with the other risk categories in this model 'structural factors' are closely interrelated with each other category. 'Structural factors' are positioned as the sphere furthest from the individual. This is because while they may exert an influence on the risks that fall under institutional, social, familial and personal challenges, this category of risk is the least likely to be impacted *by* the other factors, especially that of personal challenges, given the universal reach, detached from the effects caused on the individual. Accordingly, an example of structural factors shaping institutional factors is that performative and accountability requirements strongly shape school policies and systems, for example concerning the available resources schools have at their disposal and the working conditions of school staff. Structural factors shape social relationships in shaping the nature of the peer groups that children mix with (i.e. regarding the requirement to continue in education and training until the age of 18). Structural factors strongly frame familial circumstances regarding welfare provision, and labour market conditions (i.e. unstable working contracts such as zero hours, causing precarious residential status). Personal challenges are influenced by structural factors in that they are mediated by the resources and requirements specified by the government and policy influencing authorities. For example, support for SEND is dependent upon reaching threshold criteria to be assigned an Education, Health and Care plan.

We argue that our model provides a valuable and enriching contribution to the literature on NEEThood as a holistic framework that captures *both* individual and contextual aspects of young people's lives, in terms that are readily accessible to practitioners. We believe this has value for planning and developing intervention strategies, in that while actions to tackle the risk of NEET may be frequently targeted at single categories of risk (personal, family, social, institutional or structural) it is important to consider the ramifications and limits of such efforts within the context of the other categories of risk as a whole. The close interconnection between the micro categories of risk (family, social, institutional) and in their impact upon the personal challenges that young people face, points to the importance of individual support in the form of guidance, that recognises that young people are concurrently navigating social, familial, and residential trajectories alongside their planned educational, and work journeys. However, efforts to target support at the micro level of family, social and institutional contexts must be considered alongside the overbearing influence of structural factors. This highlights the importance of political will and resourcing as fundamental in complimenting the dedicated work of practitioners who work in the micro settings of the home, school and community.

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