Student Suspensions

A Research Review

Stage One

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Acting Commissioner for Children
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Preface

In order to examine issues concerning suspensions and exclusions a national and international literature review was undertaken. One subsequent finding was that very little research has been conducted giving voice to students' views about suspensions and exclusions.

It was also found that suspension, exclusion and expulsion from school is not effective in changing a student's behaviour because it does not address the underlying issues that lead to challenging behaviour. Further, the research literature shows that certain groups of students are more likely to be suspended, based on their socio-economic background, race, gender or other characteristics, such as learning or other developmental impairments.

Suspension, exclusion and expulsion from school can have serious, unintended and often cumulative effects on children and young people. These forms of discipline are highly correlated with youth offending and involvement in the youth justice system.

School suspension, exclusion or expulsion also may be indicators of a range of social and emotional issues facing the student, including child abuse and neglect, mental health issues, disability, bullying, and difficulties at home. Students who are suspended or excluded from school are at a substantially greater risk of early school leaving.

As a signatory to the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) and other international treaties, Australia recognises the right of everyone to education. Article 13(1) of the ICESCR provides that

> The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Education has been described by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the Committee) as 'an indispensable means of realising other human rights'.[1] In other words, in addition to being a human right in itself, it is an enabling or an empowering right.

Suspending or excluding students from school classes is treated within most, if not all, schools as an action that falls within a spectrum or continuum of school disciplinary measures. However, student suspensions can also be seen as being part of an engagement-disengagement continuum and this in turn also directly relates to behaviour/classroom management.

There is a range of in-school and out-of-school factors that affect the incidence of suspensions, not to mention individual factors concerning the student (eg, gender, age) and the teacher (eg, gender, age/experience). The 'risk factors' associated with student suspensions can be differentiated according to three levels:

Level 1) School factors: include school location in terms of level of disadvantage of its community, school environment and 'culture'.

Level 2) Student factors: include social and demographic factors including social and economic location, gender, age and cognitive/developmental factors.

Level 3) Interactional factors: include factors such as student-student relationships and student/teacher relationships (including teachers' perceptions/ expectations of students and students' perceptions/ expectations of teachers).

Rather than simply addressing student suspensions as a disciplinary matter concerning unacceptable, disruptive or unproductive behaviour this literature review will take a macro level to micro level approach – from broader school factors associated with the management of such behaviour through to micro factors such as student-teacher and student-student interactions.

Request by the Minister for Children

In Tasmania, the authority to discipline state school students is derived from the *Education Act 1994.* Tasmania's Department of Education has published Discipline Guidelines to provide guidance and procedures in relation to the application of the above legislated sanction. The Guidelines are to be read in the context of the *Education Act* and individual school discipline policies.[2] For general purposes the following definitions are used in Tasmania.

- Detention is when a student is detained at school during recess, lunch time or after school, or excluded from regular classes.
- Suspension is the temporary, full-time or part-time withdrawal of a student's right to attend school for a period of two weeks or less, on the authority of the principal.
- Exclusion is the temporary full-time or part-time withdrawal of a student's right to attend school for a period of greater than two weeks, on the authority of the Secretary (delegated to Learning Services General Manager).
- Expulsion is the full-time withdrawal of a student's right to attend a particular school, on the authority of the Secretary. Expulsion from one school does not prohibit the enrolment of the student in another school.
- Exemption is the formal approval, by the Secretary, for a child to withdraw from compulsory education. A student can be exempted on a full-time or part-time basis. Exemptions are not meant to be used as disciplinary sanctions. They are intended to cater for a variety of special circumstances, where a student's interests are considered to be best served by full-time or part-time alternative arrangements.

- Prohibition refers to full-time permanent withdrawal of a student's right to attend any Tasmanian government school.

In June 2012 the Minister for Children asked the (then) Commissioner for Children, Aileen Ashford, to:

> *Inquire generally into, and report on the practice of school expulsion and/or exclusion in Tasmania, evidence of its impact on the health, welfare, care protection and education of children and young people generally and for the population of children in care, and that this include an assessment of, and recommendations for alternative strategies.*

After further discussion on the project it was decided that a positive way forward would be to work with key stakeholders in ways that would be mutually beneficial, thus improving outcomes for children, and to proceed the project in two stages. In response, I am pleased to enclose a copy of the report on Stage One of this project.

Stage One

This document comprises Stage One of the Project. The main objective of Stage One is to provide the Minister for Children with advice about:

- the key characteristics or factors that contribute to suspensions, exclusions and expulsions in Tasmania and elsewhere;
- recommendations for future research and action to reduce the rates of suspensions, exclusions and expulsions in Tasmania.

Stage One comprises a literature review considering national and international research on student or school suspensions, with the focus on the key 'risk factors' associated with the likelihood of being suspended. There is a brief overview of some of the consequences of suspensions.

Stage Two

It is clear from the literature review that there is very little, if any, research on the views of children and young people around suspensions from school and disciplinary procedures. There is certainly no Tasmania or Australia specific research of this sort.

Therefore, it is proposed that Stage Two be made up of an exploratory research project focussing on the views of children and young people in Tasmania about school disciplinary policies and suspensions and other exclusions.

The primary aim of the exploratory project would be to ensure that the views of children and young people are heard in the development and implementation of policy relating to

suspensions and expulsions in Tasmanian schools. Teachers and principals would also be asked about suspensions and expulsions in the context of disciplinary strategies.

The secondary aims include a decrease in suspensions and exclusions and an increase in student engagement in education.

Stage Two will also include a summary of the legal/policy framework and context within which students in Tasmania are suspended or otherwise excluded from Government schools, including from the perspective of rights acknowledged in the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and in other relevant international instruments.

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STUDENT SUSPENSIONS LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Auguste Comte is famous for saying progress cannot follow without order ("*L'amour pour principe et l'ordre pour base; le progrès pour but*"[3] (Love as a principle and order as the foundation; progress as the goal). The same could be said for schooling – order within the school and classroom is the basis for learning and progress. Children begin to learn about the importance of order within the family (primary socialisation) and then in the school (secondary socialisation). However, some children and young people have great difficulties in acknowledging or internalizing the social norms associated with 'orderly' behaviour. There are particular individual, social and situational characteristics that tend to predispose such students to 'disorderly' or 'unproductive' behaviour within the school and classroom.

Despite training in classroom management and positive school environments sometimes schools have to invoke sanctions – including detentions, suspensions (in-school and out-of-school), exclusions and prohibitions. Primary and secondary socialisation concepts are important as teachers tend to attribute problems with the behavioral management of students to family (primary socialisation) or out-of-school factors, rather than to school or pedagogical factors.

What will be included in this literature review:
In this literature review mainly out-of-school suspensions will be examined, with the focus on the key 'risk factors' associated with the likelihood of being suspended. Also, within the disciplinary continuum, expulsions and exclusions (both of which are quite infrequent) will be briefly touched on and there will be brief overview of some of the consequences of suspensions.

What will be excluded from this part of the literature review:
The following areas will not be included in this literature review:
- Detentions, exemptions and prohibitions
- 'informal' or 'illegal' suspensions/exclusions
- any other sanctions within the disciplinary continuum that may be available to schools for addressing 'unproductive' behaviour
- 'self-selected' suspensions, unexplained absences or non-attendance and truancy.

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Suspending or excluding students from school classes is treated within most, if not all, schools as an action that falls within a spectrum or continuum of school disciplinary measures. However, student suspensions can also be seen as being part of an engagement-disengagement continuum, and this also directly relates to behaviour/classroom management.

There is a range of in-school and out-of-school factors that affect the incidence of suspensions, not to mention individual factors concerning the student (eg, gender, age) and the teacher (e.g., gender, age/experience).

Rather than simply addressing student suspensions as a disciplinary matter concerning unacceptable, disruptive or unproductive behaviour, this literature review will take a macro level to micro level approach – from broader school factors associated with the management of such behaviour through to micro factors such as student-teacher and student-student interactions.

All of the 'risk factors' associated with student[4] suspensions can be differentiated according to three levels:

Level 1) School factors: including school location in terms of level of disadvantage of its community, school environment and 'culture'.

Level 2) Student factors: including social and demographic factors including social and economic location, gender, age and cognitive/developmental factors.

Level 3) Interactional factors: including factors such as student-student relationships and student/teacher relationships (including teachers' perceptions/ expectations of students and students' perceptions/expectations of teachers).

All research on student suspensions suggests that "any decision to suspend a student is the end point of a tremendously complex process that cannot be described as a straight line leading from misbehaviour to an invariant consequence delivered by the school administration".[5]

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Level 1: School factors

Americans think of themselves as a child-loving people. This is a myth.
Children's Defence Fund, *Children out of school in America* (1974)

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Introduction

In 1975, the Children's Defence Fund (CDF) published their second report in two years, called *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?* in which they concluded:

> [Suspensions] harm the children involved and jeopardize their prospects for securing a decent education… They have become a crutch enabling school people to avoid the tougher issues of ineffective and inflexible school programs; poor communications with students, parents, and community; and a lack of understanding about and commitment to serving children from many different backgrounds and with many different needs in our public schools.[6]

More specifically, CDF researchers found that suspension and other forms of exclusionary discipline were associated with decreased student academic success and an increased risk of juvenile delinquency, and that exclusionary discipline was used disproportionately against poor, minority and special education students.[7]

Nearly 40 years later, with volumes of research[8] in the US since the CDF's reports, exclusionary discipline is still excessively relied upon for school control and classroom management, and is applied disproportionately to selected, disadvantaged groups. The rates of suspension for some groups in the US have doubled since the 1970s; only Asian student suspensions have declined.[9]

The Harvard University Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles (CRP) is one of the main research institutions that has undertaken much of the research since the Children's Defence Fund's initial reports.

As suggested by Daniel Losen, the Director of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at CRP, one of the first steps to addressing high suspension rates is to collect and publish data on student suspensions – and with demographic details, so that policies, procedures and classroom and school management issues can be addressed, particularly where suspensions are applied discriminately against certain groupings of students (Aboriginal students, students with disabilities, boys, students in foster care, etc).[10]

Recent US research, sampling across six states, found that the use of suspensions does not vary according to the severity of the behaviour *ie* suspensions are used equally for minor and serious (mis)behaviours. This research also finds that removing students from school

does not remediate or correct behaviour, but puts students at risk of engaging in, or becoming victims of crime. No significant variation in suspension rates has been found between urban and rural schools.[11]

Noguera, writing about the school-to-prison pipeline, believes that a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' guides many schools' policies and practices which lead to the disciplining of students with the most needs. In other words, those students who are disadvantaged challenge the school environment, which can result in a controlling response by teachers and the school. Further, Noguera points out that this is antithetical to the original educational ideals espoused by Rousseau and Dewey,

> …who envisioned schools that would instil values that result in enlightenment, intellectual growth, compassion, and appreciation for human dignity … the possibility that education can serve as a means to empower and open doors of opportunity to those who have been disadvantaged by poverty, racism, and injustice.[12]

Noguera argues that "those most frequently targeted for punishment in school often look – in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic status – a lot like smaller versions of the adults who are most likely to be targeted for incarceration in society"[13] – hence, the 'school to prison pipeline'. Instead of punishing them, students' needs should be identified and remedial action and support implemented at the school level.

Through analyses of classroom dynamics, Monroe suggests that the answer to this dilemma of 'disproportionality' and cultural stereotyping lies with understanding teacher-student interaction, viz.,

> Situating the discipline gap within the intersection of teachers' and students' cultural norms may shed insight into both the persistence and prevalence of the problem.[14]

Monroe argues that the discipline gap (disproportionality) has three levels:
1. On one level, the overwhelmingly middle-class White presence in the teaching corps has caused K-12 institutions to be heavily Eurocentric;
2. On a second level, teachers who neglect to question why and how their disciplinary practices and beliefs are culturally based run the risk of misinterpreting student behaviors that are incompatible with their expectations; and
3. On a final level, teachers who overlook the salience of culture in relation to behaviour may be likely to attribute forms of perceived misbehavior to negative intrinsic qualities among students or poor parenting practices. Examples include low levels of motivation and self-control, and inadequate home supervision.[15]

The problem of 'disproportionality'

In the case of African-American students research shows that not only are such students three times more likely to be referred to the principal's office as Caucasian students but, subsequently, were five times more likely to be suspended. These results have been consistent across many US studies.[16] [17] Also of note is that African-American students are

much less likely to seek help than their Caucasian peers from teachers and adults for any personal problems. Consequently, such students are more prone to act out their issues, be more defiant and misbehave. They are also less obedient and accepting of authority figures.[18]

National US data show that 17%, or 1 out of every 6 Black school-children enrolled in K-12, were suspended at least once – as compared with 1 in 13 (8%) of Native Americans, 1 in 14 (7%) for Latinos, 1 in 20 (5%) for Whites, and 1 in 50 (2%) for Asian Americans, and 13% for all students with disabilities (which rises to 1 in 4 for Black children with disabilities). But these figures vary a great deal from state to state – from 2.2% for all students in North Dakota to 12.7% in South Carolina. In Montana the suspension rate for Whites (3.8%) was greater than for Blacks (3.4%).[19] It is notable that suspensions of Black students are more than twice as likely for minor or 'discretionary' offenses, including cell phone use (30%), dress code (36%), disruptive behaviour (38%) and displays of affection (40%) [percentages shown are for first offences, Black students in North Carolina].[20]

Hispanic students - with and without disabilities:

Recent US research, which details disciplinary exclusions in one state of the US, finds that Hispanic students are much more over-represented than any other racial/ethnic groupings, including African-American and American Indian/Alaskan Native students in terms of truancy, in-school suspensions (ISS) and expulsions (but not for out-of-school suspensions - OSS). This is also true for the same racial-ethnic groups where the student has a disability, except for out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. The sample for this research consisted of 64,088 unique students for the year 2009-10.[21] Ergo, there appears to be a differentiation of disciplinary practice when it comes to Hispanic students – the ISS rate, at least in one state, is about seven times higher for Hispanic than for African Americans students, but about half the rate of African-American students for OSS. In other words, Hispanic students are disciplined differently. There are very few studies that differentiate ISS and OSS, so the generalizability of this finding cannot be determined. However, there are other studies that confirm over-representations of Latino students – for example, Rafaelle-Mendez and Knoff.[22] [23] Also, Skiba et el found at the grade 6-9 level that Latino students were over-represented in office referrals.[24] So both types of behaviour and school level variations affect suspensions.

Suspensions are differentiated according to types of behaviour. African-American students tend to be suspended for inappropriate language, defiance, non-compliance and disruption, whereas Latino students tend to be suspended for minor misbehaviours, particularly non-compliance. White students tend to be suspended for abusive language, bullying, lying and cheating, and tardiness and truancy.[25]

In the UK, research conducted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner found the issue of disproportionality occurs across many different ethnic backgrounds. In 2010-11, for students from minority ethnic origins:

- Black Caribbean students were more than three times more likely to be permanently excluded from than the school population as a whole.
- Gypsy and Roma Traveller and Irish Traveller children were four times more likely to be permanently excluded than the school population as a whole.
- In terms of fixed-term exclusions, the rate for Irish Traveller children was 17%; for Gypsy and Roma Traveller children it was 15%; and for Black Caribbean children it was 11%. These percentages compare with less than 5% of children as a whole.
- Boys had the highest rates of exclusion: Black Caribbean boys were 11 times more likely to be permanently excluded than White girls of the same age in similar schools. The same boys were 37 times more likely to be permanently excluded than Indian girls, who had the lowest rate of exclusion in the entire system.[26]

Finally, it should be noted that most students misbehave 'occasionally' or 'sometimes' – a large-scale longitudinal study, the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions, involving 4,300 young people, found that 60% of students reported that their peers 'messed around most days in school'[27] – hence teachers' main concern and stressor being classroom management.

Despite this concern, students from schools across different socio-economic levels, with both high and low levels of suspensions, express high levels of dissatisfaction with school systems of discipline and methods of dealing with disruption (at least in the UK).[28]

School socio-economic background

Studies have shown consistently higher rates of suspensions for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Following a large-scale study, covering 30 communities across three Australian states with surveys of primary and high schools with nearly 10,000 respondents, Hemphill et al have demonstrated a clear association between students living in lower SES level communities and high suspension rates. This association was independent of gender, age, antisocial behaviour, family owning or buying their own home, academic failure and interaction with antisocial peers. Relative to schools in the lowest SES quartile (average 8.7% annual suspension rate) students in mid-level SES communities had one-third lower suspension rates and in high SES communities the reduction in suspension rates was two-thirds. The researchers conclude that

> Schools located in low SES communities are often stretched by the number of students whose educational progress is influenced by the burden of adversity and social problems that they bring to school. In such circumstances, schools may resort to counterproductive 'get tough' policies to maintain control.[29]

While this result cannot be generalized across the population, because the sampling method set out to equalise the representation of SES quartiles and rurality and the type of suspension was not specified (internal/external suspensions), the link between socio-economic disadvantage and student suspension is clear. At a policy level it is important that such schools are encouraged to implement non-exclusionary strategies for maximising student engagement. Such policies

> fit with the broader role of schools in promoting the health and wellbeing of their students and will impact on the key social determinants of health including education, social exclusion and income and its distribution.[30]

There is also an inverse relationship between rates of suspensions and academic achievement.[31] Suspensions, while often invoked in order to reduce antisocial behaviour, actually may have the reverse effect.[32]

In the UK, research conducted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner found that students in low income families were much more likely to be excluded from school. Using the proxy measure of eligibility for free school meals to estimate the numbers of students in low-income families the UK data show that such students were around four times more likely to be permanently excluded, and around three times more likely to be excluded for a fixed term, than students in their cohort who were not eligible for free school meals.[33]

School culture

Research conducted in the US in 2004, using comparative, purposive samples of schools with high suspension rates (HSS) and schools with low suspension rates (LSS), using three different instruments (administrator survey, staff interviews and direct observation), found that:

1. Staff from HSS did not communicate well and with confidence with their administrators, as compared with staff from LSS. [This finding is confirmed by Ohlson, 2009.[34]]
2. Staff from HSS were observed yelling at students, whereas there were no instances of this among staff observed in LSS, inferring more caring and respectful relationships between staff and students in LSS.
3. LSS were cleaner, brighter and had a more relaxed décor than HSS.
4. LSS teachers were consistent in challenging students academically and having high expectations of the students.
5. LSS focused on positive, proactive disciplinary measures rather than reactive, punitive strategies as used in HSS.
6. Schools in LSS group spent less on average per student than HSS.[35]

More recent research (Gregory et al, 2011) confirms that in schools where teachers have high academic expectations and have caring and respectful relationships with students

(both as perceived by students) there are lower suspension rates - in contrast schools that can be characterized as 'indifferent' to students have higher suspension rates.[36]

School disciplinary strategies/policies

School responses to 'unacceptable' or 'unproductive' or 'challenging' behaviour can be categorised in terms of four approaches: punitive, academic, therapeutic and tailored approaches. The following summaries have been taken from Michail[37]:

Punitive strategies:

>Punitive strategies involve blanket rules around what is and isn't acceptable behaviour within a school environment. They do not take into account any individual personal, educational, developmental, social or other circumstances and apply the consequences to any breach of the rules as stated. These policies can be administered in different ways but are generally founded on the belief that this sort of response to challenging behaviours fosters a sense of disciplinary equity and consistency within the school community. It's aimed at sending a clear message to all members about what behaviour will and will not be tolerated, thus setting clear boundaries.

Academic strategies:

>A number of school responses to challenging behaviours seek to address the underlying academic concerns in an effort to reduce the difficult behaviour… [and are] geared towards providing additional educational instruction and support as a response to students who are perceived to misbehave. It may be useful to students as it takes account of some of their unique traits and learning styles within the learning environment.

Therapeutic approaches:

>Another type of approach to addressing students' challenging behaviour is that of identifying other external motivations or conflicts within the individual student that need resolution. Using this approach, the school and its staff understand that there is an underlying problem that a student needs to address in order to modify a challenging behaviour. Morris and Howard (2003) discuss programs using this approach that aspire to support students to acknowledge their struggle and reflect on and accept responsibility for their actions. Once again, this approach may have merit for students living in low socioeconomic status neighbourhoods where a number of social circumstances can affect their ability to engage well with their schooling. The rationale is that this approach takes an ecological perspective of the student, where they are positioned centrally whilst accounting for students as a heterogeneous group with differing capacities, capabilities, contexts and needs.

Tailored approaches:

>The final approach consists of strategies that are consistent across the school and the home environment. They address the learning and individual social wellbeing of students and are considered the most adept at reducing challenging behaviours. Those programs that are both academic and therapeutic in nature, but also tailored to individual students, tend to provide a suite of options which cater for the range of circumstances in which students find themselves at risk of exclusion. In the UK, McCluskey et al (2008) indicate how tailored approaches

conceptualise children's needs much more broadly and see barriers to children's learning as being pedagogical, institutional, social and/or individual. This has allowed provision to be made for life events that can affect children such as family bereavement, trauma, illness, giftedness and being talented. Within the context of disadvantage, this is a positive step towards an ecological and holistic approach to the provision of learning.

Teacher perceptions of students:

A sub-set of these strategies, or perhaps over-riding them, is teachers' perceptions of their students and expectations of their behaviour given school location and the neighbourhoods within which students live. Schools in low socioeconomic areas tend to have more punitive policies and formal administrative structures (Michail, page 7). While the extent to which stereotyping may be an issue, there is a clear association between student suspension rates and school location in disadvantaged communities. This is discussed further in the Level 3 section.

Age and experience of teachers

Research conducted in South Australia found that unproductive student behaviour is related to teacher's age and experience. Younger teachers (<30 years) recorded the highest level (mean) of low-level disruptive behaviour and disengaged categories of unproductive behaviour among their students. Conversely, the oldest teachers (60+ years) recorded the lowest level (mean) across all behaviour categories of unproductive behaviour. Teachers in the 50-59 age-group reported the highest level (mean) for addressing aggressive/anti-social behaviours; 20% of teachers in all age groups reported having to manage students verbally abusing other students on a daily basis.[38]

The key issue here is that the youngest age group of teachers (and least experienced) reported the highest incidence of low-level disruptive behaviours – which is the key classroom situation that leads to suspensions.[39]

This raises the question of teacher training (and mentoring support). The recent Senate Inquiry into Teaching and Learning made several, relevant recommendations, including:

> Recommendation 6
> The committee recommends that the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership ensure that university teaching programs provide appropriate practical and theoretical training to pre-service teachers in effective behavioural management.
> Recommendation 7
> The committee recommends that the COAG Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood, and the Catholic and Independent school sectors, consider initiatives to better support teachers and principals to effectively manage behaviour in Australian schools.[40]

Gender of teachers

No significant differences emerged in terms of gender of teachers and their reporting of managing unproductive behaviours in the South Australian research mentioned above. However, significantly more female teachers reported the need to address low-level disruptive behaviours – that is, female teachers appear to experience more low-level disruptive behaviours.[41]

Summary

Apart from the strong inverse relationship between socio-economic status and suspension rates, as discussed earlier, some of the key within-school factors that are associated with higher suspension rates are as follows:[42]

- Administrators who express needs: to reduce suspension rates, to increase family involvement, and to increase resources
- Principals who have more favourable views of suspension
- Negative and hostile student staff relationships (e.g., yelling at students).

The key within-school factors that are associated with lower suspension rates are as follows:

- Administrators who report: no need to reduce suspensions, satisfactory or good family involvement with the school, and few resource needs
- Principals who prefer prevention and alternatives to suspension
- More caring and positive student-teacher relationships
- Teachers who use more varied instructional methods and have high student engagement
- Teachers with consistent, positive, clear, and high behavioural and academic expectations of students
- Teachers who report having a supportive administration
- Teachers and principals in urban schools who perceive that their administration is effective.

Level 2: Student factors

"Everyone has the right to education unless a student misbehaves, or swears at a teacher"[43]

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There is a range of individual characteristics that lead to the systematic suspension of certain groups of students from school. These ascribed characteristics concern two sets of factors:

a)   the student's ability to internalise or meet the behavioural norms of the school or classroom (e.g., impaired or delayed socio-emotional development), and/or
b)   the student's educational learning capacity (e.g., cognitive or intellectual impairments).

The range of background individual factors includes socio-economic status (SES) of the student's family and/or community – lower SES students tend to experience higher rates of suspensions. Males have higher rates of suspensions, largely because of differences in socio-emotional development – as discussed below. The peak period of suspensions is grades 7 to 10 across all jurisdictions – suggesting there are some systemic factors operating here. Most importantly, educationally challenged students or those with cognitive/learning impairments have higher rates of suspensions, especially where there are behavioural issues associated with the impairment.

The consequences of the needs of these students not being identified and addressed earlier by agencies of care and support leads to them being funnelled into agencies of control, i.e., police, juvenile justice, courts, corrections agencies.[44] In other words, the care and support agencies/systems, including the education system, simply fail to identify and address their needs. Also, for those who do not have their needs addressed earlier there are negative long-term consequences in terms of health and wellbeing – for example, ex-prisoners in Australia face a highly elevated risk of death when compared with the general population.[45] [46] [47]

Socio-economic background & family factors

Students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds tend to have lower educational outcomes (and have a greater chance of leaving school at an early age[48]) – and the reasons for this have been much debated for decades in educational research. Similarly, a related but much less researched fact is that low SES students are much more likely to be suspended than their higher SES peers.[49]

Also, compounding low SES are family factors – students from single-parent households are more likely to be suspended – but the principal factor here is low socio-economic circumstances, not family structure.[50]

Gender of students

Overall, males are suspended at a rate three times higher than that of females – and in primary schools, although at relatively low rates of suspension, the difference can be eight times higher for males. This raises an interesting question as, while research has tended to suggest that neurodevelopmental processes are responsible for gender differences in high schools, little research has addressed the question as to why there is a much greater gender difference in primary schools.

However, the major discrepancy between males vis-à-vis females may be related to the greater proportion of males falling below reading benchmarks in primary school, as indicated in a Department of Education submission to a House of Representatives Inquiry into Boys' Education in 2002.[51] As pointed out in the Report from this Inquiry, approximately 80% of students suspended are males (and this was consistent across the three states - South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania - that provided data to this Inquiry). From more recent data (2007), in Victoria 65% of students who were suspended were male[52]; and in New Zealand 61% were male (2012).[53]

Conversely, teachers consistently find much higher rates of females being engaged with, or 'nearly always' enjoying school across all grades - from 72% in year 3 to 52% in year 7, as distinct from 38% and 40% respectively for males. While there are subject variations, females were consistently higher in engagement than males. Much higher proportions of females were more engaged in English (in years 8 and 9 up to nearly 60% of females, as compared with about 38% for males for those years). Female students were also more engaged in maths - with a high of 48% in year 9, to lows of 35% in years 10-11 (males were 27% and 23-25% respectively).[54]

In the Western Australian study above, participating teachers classified unproductive behaviour for both females and males as "inattentiveness, lack of motivation, and disruptive behaviour" and, for females only, irregular attendance at school (both primary and secondary schools). On the other hand, males were more likely than females to be classified as uncooperative – and this same 'uncooperative' group was the lowest performing in NAPLAN assessments.[55]

Gender is also a factor with respect to emotional and behaviour disorders (EBD) in schools. One study, published in 2008, found very little research in this area – just six publications over the period 1997-2006. This is despite the common perception, accurate or otherwise, that teachers and school administrators find female students with EBD much harder to work

with than males with EBD. Female students with EBD tend to: (a) have problems that are less visible (internalising behaviour), (b) act more intensely when they are physical, and (c) have fewer friends.[56] [Internalising behaviour is not typically associated with higher suspension rates because anxiety, shyness, withdrawal, hypersensitivity and depression tend to present less of a classroom behaviour management problem for teachers.[57]]

On a related matter, there is considerable US research suggesting that girls' rates of delinquency and violence are increasing. And while boys' rates of arrest have been declining in the US, girls' rates have remained fairly stable. Factors associated with girls offending include: family 'dysfunction', trauma and sexual abuse, mental health and substance abuse problems, high-risk sexual behaviours, school problems, affiliation with deviant peers, low IQ, family conflict and family criminality.[58] Also, 90% of girls in the juvenile justice system have prior exposure to sexual, physical, or emotional abuse.[59]

However, overall it would seem that while female students report that they are rarely suspended for indiscipline, as McCluskey reports, "they are nonetheless much more disruptive than would be predicted from any in-school, local authority or national records on disruption and disciplinary exclusion".[60] Apart from other research confirming this,[61] Pickering,[62] and Younger and Warrington,[63] report boys often feel that 'girls get away it'.

Age of students

As discussed earlier, the peak age for suspensions is 14-15, then drops down dramatically (see earlier, Table 3 and Figure 1).

Indigenous students

Overall, the Indigenous rate of suspensions is about three times higher than the non-Indigenous rate (the actual rate varies according to whether FTE or percentage of persons is used in calculating the rates).

Queensland research, using a comparative methodology and a path-analytic model, shows the influence of family structure and behavioural factors with respect to low academic achievement or at-risk status. For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, suspensions are a stronger predictor of low achievement than socio-economic or family factors.[64] This, in turn, affects school retention figures – in Australia in 2004, the apparent retention rate (from year 7/8 to 12) was 75.7%, while Indigenous retention was only 39.5%.[65] In 2012, the apparent Indigenous retention rate had risen about 10% (for Indigenous males it was 49.2%, and for Indigenous females it was 52.9%); with the apparent retention rate for all students rising only 4% overall at 79.9% (the female rate of 84.3% being 8.5 percentage points higher than the male rate of 75.8%).[66]

The differences in retention rates and academic achievement can be predicted from suspension rates, and suspension rates can be partly explained by challenging behaviours. Challenging behaviours are broadly divided into two types: externalising, where behaviour is directed outward to others, and internalising, where behaviour is turned inwards towards self. Internalising behaviour is associated with student withdrawal (including absenteeism) while externalising behaviour involves acting out, uncooperative, impulsive or disturbing behaviour – and it is this latter type of behaviour that leads to suspensions.

Queensland research has identified two quite distinct pathway models for students being at-risk (as measured by low academic achievement). **While socio-economic predictors are significant, suspensions are the greatest predictor of being at-risk for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students**. However, there are some key differences. In the case of Indigenous students the family status (biological intact/non-intact family) was twice as strong as a factor for non-Indigenous students. A higher proportion of Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous students live in blended or 'non-intact' families. Lower parental (maternal/paternal) education was significantly linked to academic risk for the non-Indigenous group, but only paternal education in the case of the Indigenous group.[67]

Disadvantaged or educationally challenged groups

Current research does not answer the question as to whether the higher risk of suspensions[68] for disadvantaged students (including minority groups) is due to higher levels of disruptive behaviour in the school or classroom within such groups or due to disparities in the application of disciplinary procedures.[69]

However, there is growing evidence that early (first – third grade) acquisition of cognitive skills and maths/reading achievement and internalisation of classroom/school norms are highly predictive of later outcomes and behaviour.[70] In other words, disruptive and aggressive behaviour can be identified very early in the educational careers of students. Such behaviour tends to remain consistent through to at least the seventh grade and increases the likelihood of being suspended from school. Most behaviour that leads to referrals to office and suspensions has to do with low-level behaviours that create some classroom disruption, which are:

> …more threatening by their frequency than by their intensity. Examples include talking-out, not finishing classroom tasks, using cellular phones and arriving late to class.[71]

Munn et al refer to low-level, persistent misbehaviour as the 'drip-drip' effect.[72]

Lopes makes the caveat that the main goal of much of this disruptive behaviour is

> … avoiding academic tasks and are perpetrated by students with no mental health problems but who feel that their competence is far behind the classroom flow.[73]

As some schools are more successful than others in keeping suspension rates very low while other schools are not, despite students having the same demographic characteristics, there is a need to examine within classroom and within school practices and interactions between teachers and students. It has been said that

> Because teachers rather than administrators assign the majority of discipline consequences (Skiba et al, 2002), it is possible that the explanation for the association lies in the response of teachers to the behavioral context of the classroom as well as to the behavior of individual students. There is good empirical literature emphasizing that teacher behavior can set the stage for disciplinary problems as well as influence teacher-student interactions (Osher, Cartledge, Oswald, Artiles & Coutinho, 2004; Osher, Van Aker, 2004). There is also evidence for greater variability in teacher use of disciplinary actions such as school removal.[74]

Morrison et al go even further and suggest that, despite school-wide or district-wide policies that are designed to create consistent protocols, there is "capriciousness" in the disciplinary process,[75] which is largely due to "unwritten practices that consider the characteristics and previous offences of students as part of the decision-making about who gets what disciplinary consequences" and "students who had previous discipline problems were 'watched' very closely by school administrators".[76]

Therefore, there is a need to examine classroom management and sanction practices, both positive (acknowledgement/praise) and negative (low levels of praise etc, and discriminatory disciplinary practices).

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities have higher rates of suspensions. In Victoria it has been found that there are instances of 'informal suspensions' or students with disabilities being sent home without formal suspension.[77]

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Recent research conducted in Australia shows that teachers have mixed knowledge about ADHD, its characteristics, causes and treatments. In-service teachers, in particular, hold ambivalent attitudes toward teaching children with ADHD, and this ambivalence appears to develop with increasing teaching experience. Children with ADHD are very challenging to teach as they cause disruption, are unpredictable in their behaviour and have problems interacting with their peers. Also, ADHD often interacts with other problems such as learning disorders, anxiety, depression and other developmental disorders. Every classroom is likely to have at least one student with ADHD.[78]

Given the above, it is likely that teachers have mixed understandings and attitudes to other forms of disability/learning and behavioural disorders. There is extensive research on

teachers' attitudes to other forms of disability, but this is hard to encapsulate in a simple summary as the research is as varied as the different disabilities. Suffice to say that mutual expectations in the classroom and school about appropriate behaviour usually have to be negotiated between individual teacher and student, according to circumstance.   One mechanism that is used, according to anecdotes, is that of partial 'suspension' or agreement for students to attend school on a part-time basis.

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Students with SLD form the largest group of students with learning/teaching challenges in inclusive classrooms.[79] SLD is defined as "significant difficulties in acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical skills … intrinsic to the individual, presumed due to central nervous system dysfunction".[80] Teacher attitudes tend to be more positive to students with learning difficulties than students with behavioural disorders (such as ADHD).   Also, teachers have become increasingly positive towards students with disabilities over recent years, but more so for students with mild disabilities.[81]

Teacher beliefs and behaviours in the classroom are linked to their personal beliefs, values and principles and this affects pedagogy.[82] The more exposure and experience teachers have with disabilities, plus the degree of training they have, the more positive their attitudes towards students with disabilities.[83] [84] In Australian research Woodcock found that primary school trainee teachers had more positive attitudes (and held higher expectations) towards students with SLDs than high school teachers. The amount of experience with students with SLDs had no effect on attitudes.[85]

Other disabilities

There are too many types of disabilities to be covered in this brief literature review, including Down syndrome (see Gilmore et al and Campbell et al)[86], intellectual disability, hearing impaired, psychiatric disability, vision impairment – and all with varying degrees of severity.

To generalise to some extent, teachers welcome students with medical and physical disabilities into the classroom (as long as integrating such students does not require significant additional skills or time) but tend to resist inclusion of those with more severe disabilities or behavioural issues.   Teachers are also concerned about the potential marginalisation of such students or non-acceptance by their peers, and what it means for other students in the classroom. Older teachers could find it more difficult as they may not have been trained for inclusion practices. Overall, few teachers in Australia have adequate training in the management of challenging behaviours.[87]

Addressing the needs of students with disabilities would not be an issue in the context of this literature review except for the fact that they experience higher rates of suspension, particularly students with autism,[88] perhaps even three times the rate of students without disabilities.[89]

Cognitive impairments and learning difficulties

Students with cognitive (including low IQ) or learning difficulties are much more likely to become disengaged and suspended from school.[90] Similarly, students with different abilities, such as Asperger's Syndrome, may require special consideration. Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder are often withdrawn from school because the school environment is not suitable for them; this is particularly the case when such children move from primary school on to high school.

Communication competence

Critical to both relationships (student-student and student-teacher) and learning is communication skill, especially oral language competence. It is also critical for social and emotional wellbeing. Unfortunately, it is not well acknowledged that a proportion of students has low oral competence skills and are developmentally unprepared for the school and classroom. Oral language competence forms the basis of the transition to literacy in the first three years of school and around Year 3 (the fourth year of formal schooling), there is a subtle but critical shift in emphasis in the classroom from learning to read to reading to learn.[91]

As Snow has also demonstrated, a high proportion of young people in the youth justice system (school-to-prison pipeline) have communication skill deficits.[92] [93]

Social and emotional development

Social and emotional development is very much related to socialisation and the internalisation of norms of behaviour. Given that males are consistently suspended at much higher rates than females, then varying rates in socio-emotional development may offer a part explanation.

Rates of socio-emotional development vary between males and females, with the latter achieving higher levels of development earlier than males, and greater aggression appearing in males with the onset of puberty. Patton argues that one of the drivers in adolescent antisocial behaviour is the mismatch between biological and psycho-social transitions – exacerbated in recent times with earlier onset of puberty, with a corresponding mismatch between the development of the limbic regions and prefrontal cortex of the adolescent

brain.[94] The earlier onset of puberty is best documented for girls (menarche), having reduced from an average age of 17 years for late 18th century girls to 12 years of age today.[95]

However, neuropsychological deficits can be identified well before puberty, even as young as three to five years of age. There is evidence that children who become persistently antisocial have poor verbal and executive functions. The verbal deficits affect learning, listening, reading, problem solving and expressive speech and writing. The executive functions produce what is sometimes referred to as 'comportmental learning disability', which includes symptoms such as attention disorder and impulsivity.[96]

Australian research using a nationally representative cohort of nearly 5,000 children (Longitudinal Study of Australian Children) reveals that where puberty occurs early (i.e., 8-9 years of age) there are greater behavioural difficulties and poorer psychosocial health, especially for males - for females early onset of puberty only affects psychosocial health, not behavioural difficulties.[97]

Behaviours such as aggression, crime, reckless driving and drug use are often called 'risky' as they not only harm individuals who engage in them and others around them, but also challenge prevailing societal norms. Adolescents are more likely to engage in such behaviours than in any other stage of the life cycle.[98] Ellis et al argue that, rather than see the risky adolescent behaviour as maladaptive or disturbed behaviour brought about by stressful lives and disadvantaged backgrounds, such behaviour should be seen as part of a period of normal adaptive development.[99]

The guiding assumption of this evolutionary model of adolescent development is the focus on function, rather than form (as in the 'developmental psychopathology model'[100]), thus providing a framework for explaining why adolescents engage in risk-taking behaviour. From this perspective successful intervention strategies require working with, instead of against, adolescent goals and motivations,[101] sometimes called Positive Behaviour Support (PBS).

Emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD)

While research has identified how children with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) can benefit from appropriate educational and mental health services, improving their quality of life and reducing delinquency and entry into youth justice systems, the application of such supports is sporadic/inconsistent and suffers from limitations in identifying the disorders in the first place.[102] Intellectual disability is a case in point – students below 70 IQ points receive extra educational supports across Australia - but students between 70 and 90 IQ, that is below average intelligence, despite their greater likelihood of presenting behavioural issues, usually receive no extra supports or interventions.

Students with EBD (or sometimes simply referred to as ED – Emotional Disturbance[103]) can be identified by the following characteristics:

1. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory of health factors
2. An inability to build or maintain interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers
3. Inappropriate types of behaviour or feelings under normal circumstances
4. A general, pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains or fears associated with personal or school problems.[104]

Arguably, there are racial issues associated with EBD labelling – for example, African American students are at least twice as likely to be identified as having EBD as their Caucasian peers.[105] Part of the problem here may be the ambiguities associated with the identifying characteristics shown above.

Teacher-student interaction is the key site for examining the process of labelling or discriminating against students with EBD. Research shows that EBD students receive:

- Fewer instances of praise,
- Fewer opportunities to respond in class, and
- Receive more reprimands.

And, as a consequence, they are more likely to be engaged in ongoing, disruptive behaviours that increase in both frequency and intensity over time – which then becomes a cycle of behavioural exchanges.[106] These students are much more likely to have reading and arithmetic deficits – ranging from 25% to 97%.[107]

> Clearly, as teachers' responsibilities increase in the face of these challenging students, their moment-to-moment instructional behaviors must become more precise. In the absence of effective teacher intervention practices, both the teacher and the student with EBD tend to experience failures that often result in burnout and attrition for teachers (Zabel & Zabel, 2002), and school failure for the student (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005).[108]

In response to this situation Scott et al, writing in 2011, claim that (despite the obvious need) "…there is no universally accepted methodology by which to assess or evaluate classroom or teaching practice"[109] (for the purpose of improving teaching quality and teacher responsiveness to student needs, such as those with EBD).

Given that children with emotional and behavioural difficulties are under-identified in schools, "which partially results from the use of a traditional wait-to-fail (e.g., ability-achievement discrepancy) identification approach", Gresham et al argue that students should be universally screened to help identify those who may be struggling, and then treated accordingly, using evidence-based interventions, especially given the high proportion of children who are deemed to have mental health needs.[110]

In 2004, the American Academy of Pediatrics estimated that 20% of school-age children had mental health needs. One in ten children had a mental illness so severe that it impeded their emotional, behavioural and developmental needs – and this shows up in a range of emotional and behavioural issues, learning and performance, social relationships and social interaction issues in the school and classroom. **Students who are suspended are the very children who should be provided with supports to address their mental health needs – not rejected from the school.** As Stanley et al suggest, referrals to the (principal's) office should be used as an early warning screening process for intervention programs to begin.[111]

> …the students who act out, or disrupt the social order, are likely those with unmet social, emotional or academic needs, and punitive responses for the sake of achieving order leave these needs unaddressed and these students perpetually underserved. In an institution that prioritizes order above all else, an action that jeopardizes order is punished without regard for cause of behaviour. Thus, the most vulnerable students are sanctioned at higher rates and left without supports and services they need.[112]

Child protection/out-of-home care

Children with child protection/out-of-home care history have much higher suspension rates than for other students. In Queensland, over half (57%) the children and young people in foster care reported that they had been excluded (suspended) from school at least once.[113]

School mobility

In Australia, and the US, it has been estimated that 30% of families with children move at least once every three years – and for a variety of reasons.[114] While not all children who have high school mobility are likely to have behaviour problems, such mobility is associated with challenging behaviour and high suspension rates[115] – especially in the case of students in foster care or those of Indigenous identity. Sorin and Lloste linked mobility to challenging behaviour in Queensland.[116] Note that the relationship – whether challenging behaviour precedes mobility or the relationship is the reverse, is not known. High school mobility is disruptive socially and educationally for all children, and lower academic performance is the almost inevitable consequence. However, it is not mobility per se that creates negative outcomes - it depends on: (a) the reasons for moving and whether it is by choice and (b) the student's adaptive coping strategies, including supports from family and school.[117]

In sum, school mobility is not just an issue associated with children in foster care but also has a significant effect on <u>all</u> children with high mobility, especially among Indigenous children in Canada, Australia, the US and the UK, and is associated with absenteeism, school suspensions, low retention and low academic achievement.[118] Research in Canada shows that more than one school change can result in dramatic declines in graduation rates among Indigenous children – the rate halving for two school changes (28%), then almost halving again for three school changes (17%).[119]

Level 3: Interactional factors

An essential part of the orderly classroom and school practices alluded to at the beginning of this document and the asymmetrical structure of educational attainment is based on the teacher/student relationship. This interactive relationship is critical in facilitating the educational process, that is, the expectations (norms) of students and teachers. For the educational process to be effective, the norms guiding the relationship have to be mutually reinforcing. Students are expected to acquire certain interactional or social skills, and behave according to a set of written and unwritten rules – the so-called 'hidden curriculum' of the school. The student role differs from family life in that the close, warm, dependent and playful relationship that the child enjoys or aspires to within the family is replaced by the more detached, impersonal, independent and serious relationship within the school.[120]

However, while some students find consistency in the values and orientations between school and home, others find dissonance. For example, some children are exposed to, and encouraged to acquire, beliefs about competition, deferred gratification and symbolic rewards within the home – all values supported by the school, reflecting its institutional location – while other children can be antagonistic to these values, having been exposed to a survival ethic, with a high value on the present rather than the future, immediate rather than deferred gratification, and concrete rather than symbolic rewards.[121]

And some other children simply cannot understand or meet the norms expected in the school and classroom because of cognitive, cultural, emotional or other impairments. These limitations in meeting the social norms of what are expected of the 'good student' (and conversely, student expectations of the 'good teacher') can be addressed to some extent by curriculum modifications and different teaching styles and classroom management strategies, but not always successfully.

Research shows that teachers do not modify their instructional or management techniques for students with socio-economic disadvantage or socio-emotional developmental disorders. Teachers are neither appropriately trained in effective practice nor able to obtain adequate support (such as psychologists, speech therapists, social workers, etc), for managing students with affective, behavioural or learning difficulties. Also, where such supports and services do exist their availability is inconsistent, fragmented and unintegrated (at least in Queensland in 2005).[122]

Some of these issues are explored below in the context of the student/teacher interaction. Student/student interaction, which may have a bearing on suspensions (for example, where there is student/student bullying) will not be addressed here.

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Level 3, Interactional factors tend to be addressed in terms of teaching style/behaviour management/engagement strategies (e.g. see Behaviour at School Study). This area is much less explored in research than other areas, and usually such research is focussed on teaching practices and styles rather than disciplinary practices/suspensions per se. It is important to note that:

- Teachers encounter low-level unproductive behaviours on a daily basis.
- Most such behaviours are relatively trivial, but it is when such behaviour is persistent that it creates the most stress and 'burn out' for teachers.
- Troublesome classroom behaviour is a major concern for teachers, and this has been the case over time.[123]
- Social norms concerning teacher expectations of 'appropriate student behaviour' and student expectations of, in particular, teacher behaviour but also behaviour of other students (this includes student bullying) are critical for educational achievement.

Important variables at this level include:
- Teacher/student relationships
- Attribution of classroom behaviour issues to curriculum and pedagogy (teachers tend to attribute unproductive student behaviour to individual student or out-of-school factors and rarely accept that in-school factors may also be important contributor to student behaviour).[124]

Teacher perceptions of factors that contribute to 'unproductive' student behaviour

Some teachers will have that opinion that if you're poor, then you're going to be naughty – 'so let's treat them that way!' But there'll be some teachers who've grown up in poverty and then say 'Right, I know what to do [here].'[125]

Research undertaken by Zhou et al, using multivariate analysis of variance, causal analysis and modelling techniques, examined the 'Chinese classroom paradox' – the claim that, whereas self-determination theory (SDT) suggests that autonomy facilitates learning, Chinese students perform academically very highly despite their teachers appearing to be very controlling. Chinese children perceive teacher controlling behaviours as not as controlling as do American children and they are more motivated than their American peers. Regardless of culture, children with high socio-emotional relatedness with teachers perceive the behaviours of their teachers as less controlling. This finding reinforces the research that finds teacher/student relations is the key to classroom engagement and educational success.[126]

Whether a teacher is controlling depends on student perceptions and the meanings they attribute to teacher behaviours – social-emotional relatedness between teachers and students is the key factor underlying the perception of controlling behaviour. Social-emotional relatedness refers to feelings of closeness and belongingness. Students reporting

high relatedness have more positive feelings towards school work, finding it fun and meaningful, whereas students reporting low relatedness find school work repetitive, coercive, isolated and irrelevant.[127] Where there is high relatedness students internalise classroom and school norms much more readily, and thus self-regulation of behaviour. Students also experience an internal locus of causality and responsibility (internalisation of norms), thus retaining a high sense of autonomy and motivation.[128]

This research also alerts to the need for cultural sensitivity within the classroom and the school – different controlling behaviours may not be perceived the same, or have the same meanings, not only across different cultures but also for students who have socio-emotional issues or have difficulty in forming caring social relationships (for example, students in out-of-home care, from unstable families, etc).

Teaching is a very stressful profession, largely associated with classroom management. Generally, teachers tend to attribute unproductive student behaviour to factors outside the school rather than within-school factors,[129] and student disengaged behaviour to individual student or family factors.[130] Only a third of teachers see inappropriate curriculum and ineffective school student management policies as in any way accountable for unproductive student behaviour. From recent South Australian research the <u>main</u> factors[131] being attributed to this behaviour are summarised in Table 6.[132] The most difficult of these behaviours to manage is not the severe, high-level aggressive behaviour often reported in the mass media but the low-level, consistently disruptive behaviour which occurs almost on a daily basis.[133] [134]

Table 6: Teachers' attributions of factors contributing to unproductive student behaviour.

	% of all teachers (n=1380)			
	Not at all	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Individual factors				
Lack of self-discipline	1	8	36	55
Negative attitudes	3	11	33	53
Inability to concentrate	4	13	40	44
Poor social skills	10	20	32	38
Lack of perseverance	3	10	36	51
School factors				
Inappropriate curriculum	36	30	26	8
Ineffective teaching methods	35	33	23	9
Class sizes	27	21	27	25
Ineffective school student management policies	36	24	22	18
Poor quality teachers	59	21	13	8
Out-of-school factors				
Lack of parental guidance & management	5	12	23	60
Dysfunctional family structures	13	14	22	51
Low parental expectations	14	18	28	40
Abuse & neglect of students at home	32	16	19	33
Poorly educated parents	23	21	27	29

Source: Behaviour at School Study: Technical Report 1, Punish Them or Engage Them? Page 64, 2012

Teachers vary in their skills, training and experience in managing problematic student behaviour. Only a relatively small proportion of teachers regularly use suspensions as a means of disciplining students. From US research at least, it has been found that "principals are well aware that only a quarter of classroom teachers may be responsible for two thirds or more of office referrals" (for suspensions).[135]

In a recent Western Australian study teachers reported that student behaviour was more of a problem than it used to be (over past ten years), and they attributed this apparent increase to the mass media, the social media and increasingly high levels of drug and alcohol abuse, plus problems within the family (or poor primary socialisation/child rearing practices). In other words, all factors outside of the school. Fundamentally, these factors were seen as contributing to unacceptable social behaviour in the school and classroom.[136]

Teacher stress

It is low-level behaviours that present the biggest challenge for teachers[137], and these behaviours have a great impact on academic performance[138] (although students who are aggressive and do not comply with classroom behaviour norms generally perform at the lowest levels of academic performance[139]). Managing disruptive classroom behaviour is the most anxious task confronting teachers, and often on a daily basis. This, in turn, is partly responsible for the high levels of stress-related illness. Student behaviour is becoming one of the dominant issues in schooling due to (allegedly) increasingly negative and deteriorating student behaviour.[140]

Student discipline ranks as one of the leading sources of role stress among teachers, which can lead to burnout. In a comprehensive study covering nearly 500 teachers and 10,000 students Pas et al found that suspension rates were lower among teachers who reported a high level of burnout. Pas et al suggest that this could be due to withdrawal or decreased engagement with students as a by-product of stress and burnout. Finnish research shows increased burnout is associated with withdrawal from teaching.[141] [The Pas research also showed lower levels of referrals of students to student support teams.] [142]

Recent Australian research shows that 27% of 612 primary and secondary school teachers, who were first surveyed when they enrolled in teacher education at universities in Victoria and NSW in 2002, were on a pathway to becoming burnt out or worn out[143] due to stress. Some estimates put the attrition rate among beginning teachers at 50% in Victoria.[144]

Early teacher attrition is a recognised problem in the UK, USA, Australia and many European countries –

> Persistent sources of teacher stress are student misbehaviour, parent-teacher relationships, interactions with colleagues, student attitudes to learning, work conditions, increased workload, lack of school leadership support, a target-driven culture, and lack of autonomy.[145]

The key stressor is working "with energetic and unpredictable children or adolescents"[146] and teachers' enthusiasm and joy in their work has an important influence on student motivation, engagement and productive behaviour; positive relationships between teachers and students result in higher academic achievement and enjoyment of school life.[147] As mentioned earlier in this literature review (see section on age and experience of teachers), teacher stress is highest among beginning teachers, as also is the highest rate of student suspensions. Lower suspension rates among more experienced teachers may be lower due to greater teaching experience, or due to 'worn out' teachers becoming disengaged. The dynamics of teacher/student interaction are not only key determinants of the use of suspension as a disciplinary measure but also of student engagement and achievement.

In-school suspensions (ISS) and out-of-school suspensions (OSS)

The key issue concerning ISS and OSS is that the latter tends to push away the very students who need the most support from the school –

> Suspension places all the blame on the student, the school rarely evaluates whether it has served all of the student's emotional or academic needs. Often OSS is used to provide relief to teachers, and does not address the issues students have that led to misbehaviour (Bock, Tapscott and Savner, 1998). If OSS is seen from a perspective of learning and learning outcomes, then it rarely functions well. There is little evidence that students learn from their behavior, and that students who are suspended avoid further misbehavior (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). Students most at risk for suspension often have difficult home lives and dangerous peer groups. The act of suspending these students, and leaving them at home in a (typically) unsupervised setting, can actually create more problems for a student (Skiba, 1999).[148]

ISS is an alternative to OSS, and has the advantage of appearing to punish the student for inappropriate behaviour while, at the same time, keeping them at school and maintaining an opportunity for them to continue their education (and to receive counselling).

As pointed out by Skiba and Rausch, "…the word *discipline* comes from the same Latin root as the word *disciple: discipere,* to teach or comprehend".[149] However, suspensions, supposedly well-intentioned, do not appear have any redeeming teaching/learning functions – especially in the case of OSS.

As pointed out by Osher et al, there is a need to periodically examine what suspensions are supposed to be achieving, and for whose benefit, especially as removing students from school does not produce any positive results or benefits for the students concerned.[150]

School Counsellors

One of the key issues with school counselling is that there appears to be very little research that shows any relationship between counselling and academic success or improvement in behaviour, as measured by fewer or no suspensions, or dropping out of school altogether.

One meta-analysis of counsellor interventions, of 325 studies, only concluded that not all school counselling interventions are equally effective but, generally, were found to have an effect on improving students' problem-solving abilities and decrease disciplinary problems (impact, specifically, on suspensions was not examined).[151]

One way that counsellors may affect risk factors is through their connection between school and home, as well as social welfare agencies. Once identified, counsellors could also assist students to address risk factors or barriers to learning and academic achievement.[152]

Commensurate with disproportionality and suspensions, disproportionality also occurs with student referrals to school counsellors. Apart from race- and gender- based referrals, students are also referred to school counsellors on the basis of their teachers' expectations and biases, and these expectations are predictors of referral to school counsellors. Higher teacher expectations resulted in 31% lower odds of English students being referred to school counsellor for disruptive behaviour, and in the case of higher teacher expectations of Maths students the odds of being referred were reduced by 45%.

> …consistent with data from earlier work that showed teachers had more favorable perceptions of students who exhibited behaviors consistent with European middle-class norms (e.g., valuing of individualism, ambition, and future orientation; see McMahon, Paisley, & Molina, 2011) than those who ascribed to more Afrocentric cultural norms, such as communalism and verve (Tyler et al, 2006).[153]

The consequences of interrupted schooling

> *Thus the oft repeated claim that it is necessary to kick out the bad kids so the good kids can learn is shown to be a myth. In fact, research suggests that a relatively lower use of out-of-school suspensions, after controlling for race and poverty, correlates with higher test scores, not lower.[154]*

Suspensions do not reduce disruptive behaviour. As Flanagain notes, there is no evidence that the use of suspensions reduces disruptive classroom behaviour.[155] Rather than deterring disruptive behaviour, the most likely consequence of suspension is additional suspensions – further, students who are suspended or expelled are also more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system.[156]

> Ultimately, the school to prison pipeline can only be truly interrupted by uprooting the racist and classist under-pinning of juvenile and criminal justice, by a return to a separate, less punitive juvenile justice system, and by the re-envisioning of a legal system guided by

reparative justice rather than retribution and mass imprisonment (Justice Policy Institute 2008; Council on Crime and Justice 2008).[157]

The use of suspensions as a disciplinary measure is sometimes perversely argued in the following form: "Suspending students is an effective means of dealing with poor behaviour at school, with 60 per cent of students only ever suspended once" (Western Australia Department of Education and Training Director General Sharyn O'Neill).[158]

Similarly, recently in Queensland it was acknowledged that increasing numbers of students were being excluded from school "because schools were getting tougher on behaviour" – despite acknowledging in the same statement these students were coming from low socio-economic communities and "… may not have had breakfast, they may not have slept at their home the night before".[159] This begs the question, how do suspensions or expulsions help such students?

In summary, notwithstanding this self-justification, research shows that suspending students and interrupted schooling can have quite detrimental consequences, including:
- Increased, rather than decreased, reoccurrence of the problem behaviour[160]
- Increased adolescent anti-social behaviour[161,162]
- Lower scores in academic achievement (impact inversely proportional to socio-economic index of the schools)[163,164,165]
- Lower school retention rates (and hence, employment and career outcomes)[166,167]
- Increased likelihood of involvement with the youth justice system – suspensions are often described as the key component of the 'school-to-prison pipeline'[168,169,170,171,172]
- Poorer long-term health and wellbeing outcomes.[173]

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