What is missing in policy discourses about school exclusions?

Barry Down, Anna Sullivan, Neil Tippett, Bruce Johnson, Jamie Manolev & Janean Robinson

Published online: 13 Feb 2024.

Submit your article to this journal ⬈

Article views: 522

View related articles ⬈

View Crossmark data ⬈

What is missing in policy discourses about school exclusions?

Barry Down [ID], Anna Sullivan [ID], Neil Tippett [ID], Bruce Johnson [ID], Jamie Manolev [ID] and Janean Robinson [ID]

Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion, University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article reports on a critical policy analysis of discourses related to school exclusions. The management of problematic student behaviour is one of the intractable problems facing education systems today. Despite being ineffective, school suspensions and exclusions are commonly used in many countries as a discipline strategy to manage student behaviour. We adopted a critical policy analysis approach in a case in Australia to examine what is missing from policy discourses about school discipline. We identified nine silences in the policy discourses. The aim is to better understand the ways in which common-sense policy discourses construct the problem of disaffected students and in the process make invisible the deep-rooted causes of student exclusions and their effects. These key silences open up new foci for policy discourses, which would enhance a deeper understanding of what is involved in addressing complex social problems like school suspensions and exclusions.

Introduction

This article addresses one of the most persistent and intractable problems facing educators today – the management of school discipline and the ways in which some young people who do not fit conventional forms of schooling are treated. Of particular concern is the continued use of school suspension and exclusion policies to deal with disruptive behaviour when the research provides little support for the efficacy of exclusionary practices.

Formal exclusions from schools (often referred to as suspensions, exclusions or expulsions) are commonly used in many countries as a discipline strategy; however, research suggests that they are largely ineffective in managing challenging student behaviour, and can exacerbate, rather than resolve, existing problems (e.g. Valdebenito et al., 2018). A clear relationship has been identified 'between external school suspension and a range of behaviours detrimental to the health and wellbeing of young people' (Hemphill et al., 2017, p. 9) including alienation from school, involvement with antisocial peers, increased alcohol and tobacco consumption (Hemphill et al., 2013), and a lower quality of school life, which increases the likelihood of dropping out of school and involvement in illegal behaviour (Skiba et al., 2016). In addition, students who are

---

considered vulnerable or disadvantaged in more than one way are at higher risk of being suspended from school (Losen, 2014). Thus, school exclusions are likely both to result from and to contribute to the marginalisation of already vulnerable students.

While suspensions and exclusions have been a mainstay of schools' behaviour management practices for several decades, more developed understandings of student behaviour, combined with a global policy shift towards promoting equity, have reconceptualised how exclusionary practices are used. There is now an uneasy tension between 'inclusive political rhetoric and [the use of] exclusionary mechanisms' (Done & Andrews, 2020, p. 457). A lack of viable alternatives has ensured that suspensions and exclusions continue to be a necessary component of education policy, yet one that appears increasingly incongruent with contemporary agendas.

In recent times, researchers have begun more earnestly to investigate how policies influence the use of exclusionary practices in schools. For example, in England researchers have been investigating if the greater frequency of suspensions and exclusions compared to other countries is due to policy framings (McCluskey et al., 2019; Mills & Thomson, 2022; Power & Taylor, 2021; Tawell & McCluskey, 2022). In the US, researchers have extensively examined zero tolerance policies (e.g. Curran, 2017; Hoffman, 2014) and recently how school discipline policy changes impact on suspensions, especially regarding racial disparity (e.g. Baker-Smith, 2018; Camacho et al., 2022). In Australia, there has been limited research that has mainly focused on legislative changes and their effects on the number of suspensions and exclusions (Graham, 2020). What has not been investigated, though, is the ways in which common-sense policy discourses construct the problem of disaffected students and in the process make invisible the deep-rooted causes of student exclusions and their effects.

So why are school exclusionary practices commonly accepted as part of school discipline in many countries around the world? The dominant discourses espoused by key stakeholders provide an insight into why exclusionary practices are not only accepted but also expected to manage problematic student behaviour. 'Discourse' here should not be understood narrowly as a concept focused exclusively on language (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014), but rather as a complex conceptual framework (Bacchi, 2000) through which attitudes, opinions and beliefs are constructed, with language acting as the primary instrument through which it operates (Johnson & Sullivan, 2016).

We draw on a combination of government, media and advocate perspectives to illustrate the ways in which discourses have been deployed in recent policy developments in New South Wales about exclusionary practices. Examining these discourses is a critical step in understanding how policy issues are represented (Bacchi, 2000), offering insights into which discourses dominate, why some discourses are privileged over others, how some discourses get to frame debates and, most importantly, what is missing from these discourses.

We believe a focus on what is missing provides a helpful way of critiquing and reframing current policy debates around school suspensions and exclusions. It invokes a sense that 'something is absent', 'incomplete', 'desired' or 'missing the mark' (Brennan et al., 2022, pp. 234–236). It can also refer to the notion of silence or silencing (as a verb) 'not only to show what cannot be spoken or thought about . . . but also, at times, how this can be a deliberate political practice' (Grayson, 2010, p. 1005). For example, in England Mills and Thomson's (2022) research evidence ran counter to the dominant narrative

about 'badly behaved' young people 'as the problem for which exclusion was the answer' (p. 195). Department for Education officials deliberately 'washed out' their findings to silence critical talk about the ways in which school exclusion 'is profoundly tangled in the various intersections of . . . gender, socioeconomic background, race/ethnicity and physical and intellectual abilities' (p. 195).

We believe this emphasis on the 'missing' can provide an opportunity to move outside the constraints of dominant discourses of school exclusions by 'reveal[ing] their contingent character' for the purpose of re-imagining contemporary policy landscapes (Grayson, 2010, p. 1014). Specifically, it presents an opportunity to consider 'who's in, who's out, at the heart, on the margins' (Gulson & Symes, 2007, p. 99).

In this article, we examine why many policy makers and school leaders do not interrogate how and why these groups – boys, Indigenous students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students with disabilities – are disproportionately excluded from school. We seek to explain why their circumstances are not understood in conversations about school exclusions. But first, we want to say something about our approach methodologically and theoretically.

Investigating school exclusions through critical policy scholarship

This article draws on the tradition of critical policy scholarship (Bacchi, 2000; Ball, 2006; Diem et al., 2014; Wilkins, 2023) as a way of problematising some of the school discipline policy trajectories operating in the Australian context. At the heart of critical policy scholarship is a desire to examine 'familiar situations in an unfamiliar way' (Shor, 1980, p. 93). As Popkewitz (1987) argues, this kind of critical theorising involves 'moving outside the assumptions and practices of the existing order [to make] categories, assumptions, and practices of everyday life . . . problematic' (p. 350).

In this research, we are mindful that school discipline presents very real concerns for teachers, students and parents, with profound effects on individual lives. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the educational policy landscape is strewn with legislation, policies, rules, regulations, interventions and evaluations, often inspired by sensationalised media commentary (Beaman & Wheldall, 1997). As Baroutsis and Lingard (2023) point out, media in all its contemporary forms has an increasing influence on policy and policy makers and the ways in which they implement and think about policy (Barnes et al., 2023). In this contested space, we believe it is timely to pause and critically reflect on the various ways in which school discipline policies have been constructed, interpreted and enacted, and with what effects (Sullivan et al., 2016).

While we have concerns about the limitations of behaviourist approaches to school discipline and classroom management strategies, we are sensitive to the daily challenges facing practitioners and students and what might be done (Slee, 1995). These challenges have intensified due to macro factors linked to increased social and economic inequalities, and changed expectations of teachers, and micro factors at the school level that have led to greater accountability and work intensification (Heffernan et al., 2022). These were exacerbated recently during the COVID pandemic as teachers had to quickly transition from classroom-based teaching and learning to online and remote schooling. We are careful, therefore, not to underplay the challenges teachers face when dealing with

difficult student behaviours, particularly when they involve acts of violence against students and teachers.

We do not believe it is helpful, however, simply to continue with the same old thinking and strategies and expect different results. Here, we mean approaches that utilise or reconfigure behaviourist techniques which emphasise the use of external stimuli, like reinforcement and punishment, to shape human behaviour (Brophy, 2006; Murtonen et al., 2017). Behaviourist techniques have a long history of use within school discipline and continue to be popular in the United Kingdom (Oxley, 2023) as well as the United States (Knestrict, 2019), Japan (Otsui et al., 2022) and Australia (Manolev et al., 2019). Behaviourist approaches are both functionalist (Garrison, 2018) and reductive (Wrigley, 2019) in nature due to the narrow conception of learning and knowledge, and over-emphasis on outcomes over process, they promote. Therefore, if we seek to expand on the ways in which school suspensions and exclusions are thought about, it is necessary to understand how existing discourses function to foreclose possibilities for thinking differently.

Working in the tradition of critical policy scholarship, Bacchi (2000) explains how policy-as-discourse theorists attempt to define discourse 'in ways that accomplish goals they/we deem worthwhile', which involves 'an agenda for change' (p. 47). Like Bacchi, we want to better understand how discourses connected with social institutions like schools impose meaning on reality by defining its nature, purpose and practice (Donald, 1985, p. 216). Discourses are ways of constituting knowledge, social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations, which constitute the individual's mind, body and emotions (Weeden, 1987, p. 108). In this way, every society constructs its own 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980). Furthermore, we combine this Foucauldian understanding of discourses with a more traditional 'critical discourse analysis' approach by examining the relationships between discourses and societal structures, in this case, education (Wooffitt, 2005).

Finally, policies are developed in different contexts, one of which Bowe et al. (1992) call the 'context of influence'. The context of influence is:

> where public policy is normally initiated. It is here that policy discourses are constructed. It is here that interested parties struggle to influence the definition and social purposes of education, what it means to be educated. (p. 15)

In this article, we examine the 'context of influence' in relation to school exclusion policies by highlighting the ways in which discourses around school suspensions and exclusions represent the 'taken-for-granted and implicit knowledge and assumptions about the world and ourselves' (Ball, 2015, p. 311). Taking the development of the New South Wales (NSW) Student Behaviour Strategy as an example, we examine stakeholder discourses to illustrate how they construct certain 'ways of seeing' school suspensions and exclusions and focus on what is missing to understand how these dominant discourses foreclose alternative possibilities. To do this, we analysed existing publicly available sources related to the NSW Student Behaviour Strategy (e.g. written policy statements, press releases, public addresses and media reports) between 2019 and 2022. Of particular interest is the policy outcomes and associated rationales or what Diem et al. (2014, p. 1072) describe as 'rhetorical devices' that have framed school discipline and exclusions

policies over the past five years. These devices not only amplify what is dominant but also help us to clarify what is missing.

The case of the NSW student behaviour strategy

The state of New South Wales (NSW) recently changed its discipline policy, thus providing a unique opportunity to examine related discourses. A number of inquiries (Crawford, 2016; McMillan, 2017; NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 3, 2017) found that the NSW Department of Education could be doing more to 'strengthen support for student behaviour to NSW public schools' (Pearce et al., 2019, p. 7). In responding to these inquiries, the NSW Department of Education commissioned a report on the 'evidence that describes what works to address student behaviour needs, and how best to provide system-level implementation support to schools' (Pearce et al., 2019, p. i), and undertook a review of its school discipline policies and practices. A draft 'Behaviour Strategy' was released for consultation in 2020, and in 2021 a final 'Student Behaviour Strategy' which aims to 'build an inclusive education system in which every student has the opportunity to access high-quality education and to fulfil their potential' (NSW Department of Education, 2021b, p. 6). This new policy shifts the emphasis away from punitive disciplinary practices to focus on 'behaviour support and management', putting forward a 'strategic, integrated whole-school approach' (NSW Department of Education, 2021b, p. 11). While suspensions and expulsions remain disciplinary options due to 'safety' concerns, they are portrayed as undesirable and linked to 'adverse effects' (p. 7).

Throughout this process, the media played an important role in constructing public understandings of the policy by conveying various discourses on managing student behaviour in NSW public schools. For example, an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Baker, 2022) quoted the NSW Education Minister as saying:

> Behaviour management in our schools is one of the most important aspects of providing quality education, and we need to get it right. We know that what is currently happening is not working as too many students, particularly those with learning difficulties or from low socio-economic families, are suspended and do not receive the support they need.

Parents' groups and other advocates for children were reported to be pleased with the changes. However, teachers showed strong resistance to the new strategy, with the Deputy President of the NSW Teachers Federation arguing: 'It will constrain the ability of schools to manage and address appropriate student behaviour, denying the vast majority of students a safe and settled learning environment' (Baker, 2022). Additional media reports indicated that teachers were 'furious' and they 'demanded the state government back down on a planned overhaul of suspension and expulsion policies in public schools, threatening industrial action if forced to implement the changes' (Fellner & Baker, 2022).

What is missing in these policy discourses?

In addressing what is missing, we have organised the discussion around three levels of analysis – problems with the current use of exclusions, individual and interpersonal

factors, and societal and structural context – to describe nine aspects that have been overlooked within discourses surrounding the 2021 NSW Student Behaviour Strategy that we believe require closer scrutiny in policy formation processes.

Problems with the current use of exclusions

The reliability of statistical data

Data play a critical role in shaping how exclusionary practices are used. In explaining which factors guided the development of the new student behaviour strategy, the Secretary of the NSW Department of Education stated: 'We are looking at our behaviour policy, we are looking at what our data shows us, we are also looking to learn from schools that seem to be doing this very well' (Baker, 2019). In this sense, data were used as the evidence upon which the policy was founded; however, to what extent do these data provide an accurate and holistic portrayal of how exclusionary practices are being used? Official statistics, namely those provided by education departments or government agencies, provide a public-facing account of how successful schools have been in responding to student behaviour, while school-based data, accrued through research conducted in-situ, allow for a deeper, more contextualised understanding of how student behaviour is managed. Often, these statistics do not align (Slee, 1995, p. 53).

Much of our understanding of exclusionary practices hinges upon data that are ambiguous and incomplete. Differences in definitions and measurements, as well as school-level variations in the extent to which data are recorded, can all hide the ways in which exclusionary practices are applied. Thus, statistics may only provide a partial picture because 'students may be experiencing unreported school exclusion as teachers and school personnel game a broken system' (Welsh & Little, 2018, p. 783).

Furthermore, a range of options are available through which schools can manage student behaviour and, as Slee (1995) argues, some may provide a way of removing students while allowing the school to 'maintain statistical respectability' (p. 53). In NSW, alternative schools, behaviour schools and other flexible learning options are available for 'disaffected students' (Graham et al., 2015). In South Australia, Graham et al. (2020) note a direct inverse relationship between a reduction in suspensions and exclusions and enrolments in Flexible Learning Options within government schools. While the authors caution that this observation was based on limited data, the suggestion that schools may be able to manipulate their suspension statistics by using alternative options raises questions about the reliability of the data. What is missing from debates about school exclusions then, is not only access to consistent data across state jurisdictions and between schools but also a willingness to question the reliability, relevance and usefulness of data in addressing the problem of school suspensions and exclusions in context.

Addressing the causes of disproportionality and social inequality

Despite the limitations of school exclusionary data, it is evident that exclusionary practices are inconsistently and disparately applied. The NSW Student Behaviour Strategy (2021b) acknowledges that exclusionary discipline, such as suspension rates are disproportionality high 'for students with disability, Aboriginal students, students in rural and remote areas, students in home care and students experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage' (p. 7). For example, 2019 data from NSW shows that

'of all short and long suspensions approximately 25% were for Aboriginal students, despite this group representing just 8% of all student enrolments' and approximately 'three quarters of all short and long suspensions in 2019 were for males (75.3% and 73.9% respectively)' (Sullivan et al., 2020, p. 2), despite males representing 51% of total enrolments. Recent research that examined trends over time of suspensions and exclusions from schools in Queensland found that there has been a consistent over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Graham et al., 2022).

A review of US research by Skiba et al. (2016) found that exclusionary practices are used inequitably, with higher rates of suspensions and exclusions occurring among males, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or gender non-conforming students, students with a disability and black students.

The overrepresentation of vulnerable groups of students within the exclusion statistics is not limited to individual schools, sectors or systems, but is a persistent and enduring reality which underlies the use of exclusionary practices. Given the negative impact that exclusions can have on children's educational and social outcomes, the disproportionate way in which they are targeted towards marginalised or vulnerable groups raises concerns that they are contributing towards 'deep exclusion' (Levitas et al., 2007).

While the issue of vulnerability arises repeatedly within discourses about 'challenging behaviour' (NSW, 2021b, p. 16), we believe there is a significant blind spot about how the practice of school suspensions and exclusions perpetuates wider social inequalities. For this reason, policy processes need to be more open and honest about how different forms of disadvantage – social class, race and gender – intersect to produce forms of discrimination either consciously or unconsciously (Rhodes et al., 2023). Such an acknowledgement would address a major shortcoming in exclusionary policies and open possibilities for much needed structural reform.

The limitations of deficit thinking

How key stakeholders perceive students has an impact on their views about student behaviour and exclusions (e.g. Nemer et al., 2019). For example, the NSW Student Behaviour Strategy Public Consultation outcomes report noted that 'teachers and principals, parents and carers and community members expressed concern that the complex, challenging and unsafe behaviours had the potential to adversely affect the learning, safety, health and wellbeing of other students', and that employing such 'an equitable and inclusive approach to education would result in the needs and interests of a minority of students being unfairly prioritised over others' (NSW Department of Education, 2021a, p. 13). In these discourses, students who display complex, challenging, and unsafe behaviours are positioned as a direct threat to their peers and teachers, attracting a disproportionate and unfair level of support, which disadvantages the remainder of the school community. Underpinning such views is a deficit perspective which continues to sit at the forefront of educational policy.

As Valencia (2010) writes, 'Deficit thinking typically offers a description of behaviour in pathological or dysfunctional ways – referring to deficits, deficiencies, limitations or shortcomings in individuals, families, and cultures' (p. 14). Recent manifestations of deficit thinking about student behaviour involve 'medical and psychological diagnoses of "conditions" like oppositional defiant disorder . . .

conduct disorder … and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder that serve to reinforce teachers' attributional theories that ignore the impact of systemic factors on behaviour' (Johnson & Sullivan, 2016, p. 38). The medicalisation of student behaviour justifies the exclusion of students with a growing number of behavioural disorders that are perceived to be beyond the capacity of schools to address. Exclusion is then seen to be a sensible and safe response to an intractable problem.

We believe exclusionary policy discourses need to move beyond these forms of deficit thinking (Johnson & Sullivan, 2016). Kennedy and Soutullo (2018, p. 11) urge a more radical intervention that calls for 'a dismantling of the beliefs that support current practices, which first requires sufficient understanding of those beliefs, particularly those that position students as deficient and unworthy'. Naming the problem of deficit thinking is a key first step in this process.

Individual and interpersonal factors

The relational dimension of education

The NSW Student Behaviour Strategy promotes supporting positive student behaviour and creating effective and engaging classrooms to meet the diverse learning and well-being needs of students. The aim is to create 'inclusive, proactive, prevention-focused approaches' (NSW Department of Education, 2021b, p. 13) designed to reduce the incidence of challenging and unsafe behaviours which will lead to fewer suspensions and suspensions of shorter duration (p. 14). This aspirational goal will be achieved in two main ways, firstly by focusing on 'explicit teaching of behaviour skills' (p. 15) and secondly, by exploring 'a range of evidence-based changes and options for how suspensions are issued and managed' (p. 16).

Less visible, though, is a discussion of the cultural conditions in which relationships based on trust, care and respect can flourish (Rudduck, 2002). As Bingham and Sidorkin's (2004) argue, there can be 'no education without relation', a point largely missing from policy discourses. Consequently, the relational dimension of education is subverted by the machinery of schooling, which demands 'pragmatic solutions to the control of institutional chaos' (Gatto, 2001, p. 305).

When considering the disproportionate impact of school suspensions and exclusions on marginalised students, relationality takes on profound significance (Hickey et al., 2022). For this reason, Smyth et al. (2010) argue that there should be a shift away from 'deficits', 'bundles of pathologies' and 'at risk' discourses towards the language of possibility organised around relational power, trust, respect, capabilities, ownership, dialogue, negotiation and humanising relationships. These are the kinds of relational prerequisites that are largely missing from controlling discourses about student behaviour currently informing school exclusion policies.

Emotionality

One of the guiding principles identified in the NSW Student Behaviour Strategy is the explicit teaching of 'social and emotional skills behaviour expectations' (NSW Department of Education, 2021b, p. 9) to help students build their 'social, emotional, relationship and behaviour management and self-regulation skills' (p. 26). Given some of

the complex and challenging student behaviour facing schools there is much to be gained by focusing on emotionality. But this will require a more expansive understanding of emotionality that takes us beyond narrowly conceived skills training and psychologised approaches (Wetherell, 2012; Wilkins, 2013).

The problem with psychological and neurobiology approaches, according to Wilkins (2013), is that they 'typically generate [false] binaries to classify and counterpose the emotional and rational' (p. 401). Wilkins (2013) argues that 'emotion is not simply the reflex of cognitively impaired subjects, but sometimes reflects active and inventive attempts to generate alternative forms of reasoning, judgment and evaluation' (p. 404). Wetherell (2012) elaborates by arguing that the best approach to understanding affect is through the concept of practice (p. 11) as well as power because 'it leads to investigations of the unevenness of affective practices' (p. 17). This turn to affect in education is important because it provides a space to engage in new ways 'that both problematise and reach beyond the denial of emotion and "emotional rationality" in education' (Kenway & Youdell, 2011, p. 131). As Furlong (1991) explains:

> Children who challenge their teachers are often emotionally distressed especially when the injuries of school overlay difficult experiences at home. Children who reject school are often very vulnerable, but perhaps they are most vulnerable to those who would write off their emotional responses as evidence of individual maladjustment. (p. 305)

Furlong (1991) argues that the emotions generated by the experience of being excluded and devalued can be repressed, thus 'disruption and truancy involves giving vent to those repressed feelings' (p. 304). Thus, Slee (2015) believes a stronger focus should be given to the emotional experience of students to better understand 'a range of contradictory emotions . . . ignited by or at school' (p. 7).

This is relevant, according to Gillies (2011, p. 191), where behaviour management policies are deployed to control student behaviour that leads to suspensions and expulsions. Many schools incorporate concepts like 'emotional literacy', 'emotional intelligence' and 'emotional skills' in the school curriculum (p. 188). Wilkins (2013) argues that these new modes of governmentality or 'soft forms of state power' are designed 'to "nudge" citizens into behaving responsibly and rationally' (p. 395). While these approaches to behaviour management and student wellbeing are supported by many professional educators and parents, Gillies (2011) believes they are 'notoriously slippery and ill defined . . . [and have] a weak evidence base and oversimplistic logic' (p. 188).

While therapeutic approaches have a positive appeal, they encourage schools to identify individual deficits or pathologies in which emotions are viewed as 'personal cognitive functions' detached from their wider social and political context (Gillies, 2011, p. 198). Hence, emotional responses like anger, frustration, boredom, fear, indignation and jealousy (p. 191) 'become detached from the circumstances that provoked them' (p. 195).

As a result, the existential realities of young people's lives are erased from what Gillies (2011) calls the 'fraught, impassioned reality of everyday school life' (p. 186). Viewed in this way, there is 'little space for pupils' own accounts of false accusations, misunderstandings or unreasonable teacher behaviour' (p. 195). This leads to an erosion of

relationships, a central principle of the NSW Student Behaviour Strategy. What is required, therefore, is a concerted commitment to policies that place relationships at the centre of teaching and learning.

Using student voice to inform policy processes

While the NSW Student Behaviour Strategy, like many similar documents, aims to support positive behaviour and create effective and engaging classrooms for diverse learning needs, it is less clear what this looks like from the point of view of young people themselves. For this reason, we believe it is helpful to look at the problem of school exclusions afresh, by listening to the voices of students (Baroutsis et al., 2016) to gain a deeper understanding of the sense of 'alienation, embarrassment, self-doubt, intellectual excitement, struggle, compromise and grieving' (MacKenzie, 1998, p. 96) that they experience (Te Riele, 2006).

Rather than 'building behavioural armouries to quell disruption' (Slee, 2016, p. 73), advocates of school renewal believe the focus should be on making 'the very system which too often contributes to these problems more accountable and more responsive to the needs of such challenged and often marginalized individuals and families' (Swadener, 1995, p. 33). For this reason, any attempt to improve student behaviour must be supported by what Fielding and Moss (2011) describe as a 'pedagogy of listening' which involves 'a genuine openness . . . [and] a reciprocity that is attentive' to students' experiences (p. 79). This argument sits alongside broader issues around children's rights and the belief that young people should have an opportunity to 'define their own autonomy, spheres of agency and types of action' (Arnot & Swartz, 2012, p. 5).

Societal and structural context

A deeper understanding of social exclusion

The NSW Student Behaviour Strategy is premised on the idea of building a more inclusive education system in which

> all students can access and fully participate in learning alongside their similar-aged peers, and be supported by reasonable adjustments and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs, regardless of disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, nationality, language, gender, sexual orientation or faith. (NSW Department of Education, 2021b, p. 13)

While social inclusion discourses like this are helpful at one level, they fail to address systematically the wider structural inequalities that are causing school exclusions, for example, the widening poverty gap, distribution of wealth, unemployment, race, ethnicity, gender, class and shifts in the global economy (Alexiadou, 2005). In the English context, Mills and Thomson (2022) identify two competing perspectives, firstly, big E Exclusion policies which focus on formal school administrative practices to deal with bad behaviour, and secondly, little e exclusion which is interested in the broader social relations of society and the school. The emphasis on big E Exclusion is reflected in the NSW Student Behaviour Policy to address disruptive classroom behaviour. The NSW Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Early Learning said, 'It's important all students have a classroom environment that minimises disruptions, and maximises teacher instruction time and enhances learning' (NSW Government, 2023). Inclusive

discourses like this, assume that school exclusions are rooted in bad behaviour and individual choices divorced from structural issues. What is missing, therefore, is a deeper understanding of social exclusion as a structural problem that disproportionally impacts some of the most marginalised students.

Levitas (1998) expresses concern about the way in which the term social exclusion is commonly used in a 'minimalist' sense, where the solution involves 'a transition across the boundary to become an insider rather than an outsider in a society whose structural inequalities remain largely uninterrogated' (p. 7). What sustains exclusionary policies, according to Levitas (1998), is the belief in meritocracy, which seeks to 'achieve equality of opportunity without reducing inequality itself' (p. 230). Levitas (1998) favours a redistributionist discourse, which shifts the focus from the excluded – that is, 'naughty' boys – to poverty, exploitation and social class divisions.

Macrae et al. (2003) expand this line of argument by distinguishing between 'weak' and 'strong' versions of social exclusion. Drawing on Veit-Wilson (1998), they argue that a 'weak' version simply attempts to include the excluded and frame policy around a 'safer, top-down version of inclusion', whereas a 'strong' version 'addresses the mechanisms through which the powerful constituencies exercise their capacity to exclude' (Macrae et al., 2003, p. 90). For example, 'strong' social exclusion would prompt us to explore the role of 'gatekeepers' or those who are in positions of relative power, like principals and governing bodies, 'who can dispense or withdraw support; those who can sponsor or reject those deemed excluded' (p. 90). We believe that this shift in emphasis from a 'weak' to 'strong' version of social exclusion creates opportunities for alternative policy debates and action around school expulsions.

Protecting children's rights in the context of school exclusions

Internationally, most countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), which outlines the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. However, rights-informed discourses about student behaviour at school are often missing at a policy level, and this is particularly evident within the discourses around the new behaviour strategy in NSW. Exclusionary practices to 'regulate' student behaviour, we argue, violate at least four of the articles of the UNCRC (Hemphill & Schneider, 2013, p. 93).

Connolly (2020) asserts that 'the State is failing in its international obligations under the UNCRC, in particular, Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC' (p. 12) relating to the right to an education that helps the development of a child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities. The way in which 'particular groups of students are over-represented in the number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions they receive relative to their size in the general student population' (Sullivan et al., 2020, p. 1) is in contravention of Article 2 of the UNCRC relating to all rights outlined in the convention applying 'without discrimination of any kind' including age, race, religion, gender, wealth or birthplace. Additionally, the well-documented harm caused by exclusionary policies and practices (see Connolly, 2020; Hemphill et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2016) shows that removing children and young people from school is rarely in their best interests. This failure to work towards 'the best interests of the child [which] shall be a primary consideration' contravenes Article 3 of the UNCRC.

Discourses about student behaviour at school are rarely rights-informed due to 'a reluctance to adopt children's rights thinking' (Quennerstedt, 2015, p. 210). Covell et al. (2010) attribute this to a lack of awareness among teachers and school leaders of how children's rights can be operationalised in practice. This, then, becomes the challenge confronting those who wish to promote children's rights to ensure that school discipline policies and practices respect students' human dignity and do not exclude them from the education process.

The impact of neoliberalism on education

The NSW Student Behaviour Strategy (2021b) invokes the language of inclusion, equity, and care for all students regardless of their background or circumstances (pp. 12–13) to recommend a range of additional support for schools including 'a specialist workforce' to provide advice and guidance (p. 20), enhanced communication with parents and community (pp. 20–21) and implementation of 'effective evidence-based interventions' (pp. 22–23). To this end, the strategy relies solely on 'a whole school, whole system approach to growing inclusive practice' (p. 12). While these strategies offer some helpful guidance and support to schools and teachers, they are insufficient in addressing the 'root causes' of school exclusions. We agree with Bacchi (2000) when she argues 'that issues [like school exclusions] get represented in ways that mystify power relations and often create individuals responsible for their own "failures", drawing attention away from the structures that create unequal outcomes' (p. 46). For this reason, we argue that any discussion of school exclusions policy is best located in the context of wider structural and institutional forces impacting on students' lives.

This kind of policy reclamation allows us to turn attention to neoliberalism and the ways in which it is de/re/forming schools and those who inhabit them. As Apple (2004) explains, neoliberalism attempts to reconstitute schooling through a 'discourse of competition, markets, and choice on one hand and accountability, performance objectives, standards, national testing and national curriculum on the other' (p. 15). In this context, new modes of governmentality – individualism, atomisation and responsibilisation – comprise the 'constitutive effects of neoliberalism [and] its discourses and practices' which are not only manifested in the ways individual subjects talk about themselves but also 'through public texts produced by educational institutions or their representatives, and by news media' (Davies & Bansel, 2007, pp. 247–248).

It is easy to blame the problems of schooling on the personal situation and character of individuals, which is to say, on 'disruptive' students, 'dud' teachers and/or 'negligent' parents, rather than on social systems. While this line of argument is self-evident at one level, many people act as though the causes of individual conduct and feelings are somehow divorced from the wider structural and institutional arrangements of society.

In essence, this means being cognisant of how schools are absorbed into a particular economic logic in which 'all conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics' (Brown, 2015, p. 10; see also Ball, 2016). As a result, schools are caught up in a process of 'rationing education' and producing 'ever widening inequalities associated with gender, ethnic origin and social class' (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000, p. 1).

Addressing these broader structural arrangements and their implications for school exclusions will require 'an alternative discourse of purposes' (Sinclair, 1996, p. 241). Lipman (2004) provides some clues about what this alternative might look like when she imagines 'talk of humanity, difference, democracy, culture, thinking, personal meaning, ethical deliberation, intellectual rigor, social responsibility, and joy in education' (p. 181). We believe that by reframing school discipline discourses around these kinds of values, which are currently 'missing' from neoliberal constructions of schooling, we are better placed to create new possibilities for thinking and action.

Conclusion

In this article we identified what is missing from existing official discourses related to student suspensions and exclusions in Australian education policy. Drawing on the illustrative case of NSW, we have endeavoured to provide a critique of dominant discourses shaping the ways in which education systems and schools respond to challenging student behaviours leading to school suspensions and expulsions. While not underestimating the complexity, challenges and frustration educators face daily in managing student behaviour, we contend that persistent and intractable problems require different 'discourses of purpose' (Sinclair, 1996) based on the ethical, democratic, and educative purposes of schooling.

In pursuing this task, we identified nine key aspects of current policy discourses organised around three themes that are missing and deserve closer scrutiny in addressing the complex issue of school suspensions and exclusions: firstly, problems with the current use of exclusions – ambiguous data, disproportionality and social inequality, and deficit thinking; secondly, individual and interpersonal factors – relationships, emotionality and student voice; and finally, societal and structural context – social exclusion, children's rights and neoliberalism. We believe that these nine aspects open new foci for policy discourses, which would enhance understanding of school suspensions and exclusions.

The purpose is to draw attention to the discursive practices in the process of policy formations rather than simply focusing on the implementation of a policy or evaluating a policy after it is regulated. In examining the case of the NSW Behaviour Strategy, we have endeavoured to identify and explain the 'missing' in policy discourse to help unpack 'common sense' assumptions and in the process, generate some new ways of seeing school exclusions policy.

Like Zembylas (2021), we want schools to become places of compassion and hope where people 'engage in an affirmative praxis' (p. 816). In these schools, students and teachers have an opportunity to move beyond victim blaming and deficit discourses and instead focus on 'more emotive, intimate practices and spaces in which democratic modes of feeling would be truly experienced' (Zembylas, 2021, p. 818). Put simply, we cannot afford to keep doing the same old things in the same old ways, expecting different outcomes.

Declaration

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Notes on contributors

Barry Down is Adjunct Professor in the Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion at the University of South Australia and Emeritus Professor, Murdoch University. His research focuses on young people's lives in the context of shifts in the global economy, employment, poverty, and disengagement.

Anna Sullivan is Director of the Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion and Professorial Lead at the University of South Australia. Her research focuses on the ways in which policy and practice include and/or exclude those who are most vulnerable in education.

Neil Tippett is a lecturer and a member of the Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion at the University of South Australia. He is currently a chief investigator on two Australian Research Council Discovery Projects. His research focuses on student behaviour, school bullying, early career teachers and wellbeing.

Bruce Johnson is Emeritus Professor and a member of the Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion at the University of South Australia. His research interests include human resilience, early career teachers, classroom management and sexuality education.

Jamie Manolev is a research fellow at the Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion at the University of South Australia. His research interests include critical studies in education, and understanding the ways in which power operates through educational processes and systems.

Janean Robinson is an Honorary Research Associate at the Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion at the University of South Australia. Her research focuses on the impact of school behaviour and discipline policy on the lives of young people.

ORCID

Barry Down 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4843-0563
Anna Sullivan 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3573-631X
Neil Tippett 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3383-6181
Bruce Johnson 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1724-7096
Jamie Manolev 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5312-4400
Janean Robinson 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0958-4973

References

Alexiadou, N. (2005). Social exclusion, and educational opportunity: The case of British education policies within a European Union context. *Globalisation, Societies & Education*, *3*(1), 101–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767720500046351

Apple, M. W. (2004). Creating difference: Neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and the politics of educational reform. *Educational Policy*, *18*(1), 12–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904803260022

Arnot, M., & Swartz, S. (2012). Youth citizenship and the politics of belonging: Introducing contexts, voices, imaginaries. *Comparative Education*, *48*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2011.637759

Bacchi, C. (2000). Policy as discourse: What does it mean? Where does it get us? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *21*(1), 45–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300050005493

Bacchi, C., & Bonham, J. (2014). Reclaiming discursive practices as an analytic focus: Political implications. *Foucault Studies*, *17*, 173–192. https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i17.4298

Baker, J. (2019, September 4). Kids banned from school: State to review suspension policies. *Sydney Morning Herald*, *32*, 300. https://www.smh.com.au/education/32-300-kids-banned-from-school-state-to-review-suspension-policies-20190904-p52o0y.html

Baker, J. (2022, February 19). Shorter, fewer school suspensions under controversial behaviour policy. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/shorter-fewer-school-suspensions-under-controversial-behaviour-policy-20220218-p59xu4.html

Baker-Smith, C. E. (2018). Suspensions suspended: Do changes to high school suspension policies change suspension rates? *Peabody Journal of Education*, *93*(2), 190–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2018.1435043

Ball, S. J. (2006). *Education policy and social class: The selected works of Stephen J. Ball* (Vol. 5). Routledge.

Ball, S. J. (2015). What is policy? 21 years later: Reflections on the possibilities of policy research. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *36*(3), 306–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1015279

Ball, S. J. (2016). Neoliberal education? Confronting the slouching beast. *Policy Futures in Education*, *14*(8), 1046–1059. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210316664259

Barnes, N., Watson, S., & MacRae, S. (2023). The moral positioning of education policy publics: How social media is used to wedge an issue. *Critical Studies in Education*, *64*(4), 337–354. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2022.2153372

Baroutsis, A., & Lingard, R. (2023). *Exploring education policy through newspapers and social media: The politics of mediatisation*. Routledge.

Baroutsis, A., McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2016). Pedagogic voice: Student voice in teaching and engagement pedagogies. *Pedagogy Culture & Society*, *24*(1), 123–140. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2015.1087044

Beaman, R., & Wheldall, K. (1997). Teacher perceptions of troublesome classroom behaviour: A review of recent research. *Special Education Perspectives*, *6*(2), 49–55.

Bingham, C., & Sidorkin, A. M. (2004). Manifesto of relational pedagogy: Meeting to learn, learning to meet. In C. Bingham & A. M. Sidorkin (Eds.), *No education without relation* (pp. 5–7). Peter Lang.

Bowe, R., Ball, S. J., & Gold, A. (1992). *Reforming education and changing schools: Case studies in policy sociology*. Routledge.

Brennan, M., Carusi, T., Clarke, M., Heck, D., Heimans, S., Reid, J.-A., & Singh, P. (2022). What has been 'missing' or 'missed' over the last 50 years in APJTE? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *50*(3), 233–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2022.2078952

Brophy, J. (2006). History of research on classroom management. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues* (pp. 17–43). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the DEMOS: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution*. MIT Press.

Camacho, K. A., Krezmien, M. P., Duchemin, A. P., Nickerson, A. T., Wallace, R. E., & Mulcahy, C. A. (2022). Out-of-school suspension and school discipline policies: Analyzing change over time in one state. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children & Youth*, *68*(1), 26–36. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2022.2138252

Connolly, H. (2020). *The blame game*. Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Covell, K., Howe, R. B., & McNeil, J. K. (2010). Implementing children's human rights education in schools. *Improving Schools*, *13*(2), 117–132. https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480210378942

Crawford, M. (2016). *Supporting students with disability in NSW public schools: Department of education*. Audit Office of New South Wales.

Curran, F. C. (2017). The law, policy, and portrayal of zero tolerance school discipline: Examining prevalence and characteristics across levels of governance and school district. *Educational Policy*, *33*(2), 319–349. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904817691840

Davies, B., & Bansel, P. (2007). Neoliberalism and education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *20*(3), 247–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390701281751

Diem, S., Young, M. D., Welton, A. D., Mansfield, K. C., & Lee, P.-L. (2014). The intellectual landscape of critical policy analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *27* (9), 1068–1090. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2014.916007

Donald, J. (1985). Beacons of the future: Schooling, subjection and subjectification. In V. Beechey & J. Donald (Eds.), *Subjectivity and social relations: A reader* (pp. 214–249). Open University Press.

Done, E. J., & Andrews, M. J. (2020). How inclusion became exclusion: Policy, teachers and inclusive education. *Journal of Education Policy*, *35*(4), 447–464. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2018.1552763

Fellner, C., & Baker, J. (2022, February 10). 'Furious' teachers threaten to strike over changes to school suspension policies. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/furious-teachers-threaten-to-strike-over-changes-to-school-suspension-policies-20220219-p59xxy.html

Fielding, M., & Moss, P. (2011). *Radical education and the common school: A democratic alternative*. Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Furlong, V. J. (1991). Disaffected pupils: Reconstructing the sociological perspective. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *12*(3), 293–307. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569910120302

Garrison, M. J. (2018). Resurgent behaviorism and the rise of neoliberal schooling. In K. J. Saltman & A. J. Means (Eds.), *The Wiley handbook of global educational reform* (pp. 323–349). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119082316.ch16

Gatto, J. T. (2001). *The underground history of American education: A schoolteacher's intimate investigation into the problem of modern schooling*. Oxford Village Press.

Gillborn, D., & Youdell, D. (2000). *Rationing education: Policy, practice, reform and equity*. Open University Press.

Gillies, V. (2011). Social and emotional pedagogies: Critiquing the new orthodoxy of emotion in classroom behaviour management. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *32*(2), 185–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2011.547305

Graham, L. J. (2020). Questioning the impacts of legislative change on the use of exclusionary discipline in the context of broader system reforms: A Queensland case-study. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *24*(14), 1473–1493. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1540668

Graham, L. J., Killingly, C., Laurens, K. R., & Sweller, N. (2022). Overrepresentation of indigenous students in school suspension, exclusion, and enrolment cancellation in Queensland: Is there a case for systemic inclusive school reform? *Australian Educational Researcher*, *50*(2), 167–201. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00504-1

Graham, L. J., McCarthy, T., Killingly, C., & Poed, S. (2020). *Inquiry into suspension, exclusion and expulsion processes in South Australian government schools: Final report*. Centre for Inclusive Education, Queensland University of Technology.

Graham, L. J., Van Bergen, P., & Sweller, N. (2015). To educate you to be smart': Disaffected students and the purpose of school in the (not so clever) 'lucky country. *Journal of Education Policy*, *30*(2), 237–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2014.953596

Grayson, K. (2010). Dissidence, Richard K. Ashley, and the politics of silence. *Review of International Studies*, *36*(4), 1005–1019. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001415

Gulson, K., & Symes, C. (2007). Knowing one's place: Space, theory, education. *Critical Studies in Education*, *48*(1), 97–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508480601123750

Heffernan, A., Bright, D., Kim, M., Longmuir, F., & Magyar, B. (2022). 'I cannot sustain the workload and the emotional toll': Reasons behind Australian teachers' intentions to leave the profession. *Australian Journal of Education*, 66(2), 196–209. https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441221086654

Hemphill, S. A., Broderick, D. J., & Heerde, J. A. (2017). *Positive associations between school suspension and student problem behaviour: Recent Australian findings (Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No. 531)*. Australian Institute of Criminology.

Hemphill, S. A., Kotevski, A., Herrenkohl, T. I., Smith, R., Toumbourou, J. W., & Catalano, R. F. (2013). Does school suspension affect subsequent youth non-violent antisocial behaviour? A longitudinal study of students in Victoria, Australia and Washington State, United States. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 65(4), 236–249. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12026

Hemphill, S. A., & Schneider, S. (2013). Excluding students from school: A re-examination from a children's rights perspective. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 21(1), 88–96. https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-55680008

Hickey, A., Riddle, S., Robinson, J., Down, B., Hattam, R., & Wrench, A. (2022). Relational pedagogy and the policy failure of contemporary Australian schooling: Activist teaching and pedagogically driven reform. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 54(3), 291–305. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2021.1872508

Hoffman, S. (2014). Zero benefit: Estimating the effect of zero tolerance discipline polices on racial disparities in school discipline. *Educational Policy*, 28(1), 69–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904812453999

Johnson, B., & Sullivan, A. (2016). Understanding and challenging dominant discourses about student behaviour at school. In A. Sullivan, B. Johnson, & B. Lucas (Eds.), *Challenging dominant views on student behaviour at school* (pp. 27–43). Springer.

Kennedy, B. L., & Soutullo, O. R. (2018). 'We can't fix that': Deficit thinking and the exoneration of educator responsibility for teaching students placed at a disciplinary alternative school. *The Journal of At-Risk Issues*, 21(1), 11–23.

Kenway, J., & Youdell, D. (2011). The emotional geographies of education: Beginning a conversation. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 4(3), 131–136. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2011.07.001

Knestrict, T. D. (2019). *Controlling our children: Hegemony and deconstructing the positive behavioral intervention support model*. Peter Lang.

Levitas, R. A. (1998). *The inclusive society? Social exclusion and new labour*. Macmillan.

Levitas, R. A., Pantazis, C., Fahmy, E., Gordon, D., Lloyd, E., & Patsios, D. (2007). *The multi-dimensional analysis of social exclusion*. University of Bristol.

Lipman, P. (2004). *High stakes education: Inequality, globalization, and urban school reform*. Routledge.

Losen, D. J. (2014). *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. Teachers College Press.

MacKenzie, L. (1998). A pedagogy of respect: Teaching as an ally of working-class college students. In A. Shepard, J. McMillan, & G. Tate (Eds.), *Coming to class: Pedagogy and the social class of teachers* (pp. 94–117). Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Macrae, S., Maguire, M. E. G., & Milbourne, L. (2003). Social exclusion: Exclusion from school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 7(2), 89–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110304785

Manolev, J., Sullivan, A., & Slee, R. (2019). The datafication of discipline: ClassDojo, surveillance and a performative classroom culture. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 44(1), 36–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2018.1558237

McCluskey, G., Cole, T., Daniels, H., Thompson, I., & Tawell, A. (2019). Exclusion from school in Scotland and across the UK: Contrasts and questions. *British Educational Research Journal*, 45(6), 1140–1159. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3555

McMillan, J. (2017). *NSW ombudsman inquiry into behaviour management in schools*. Ombudsman of New South Wales.

Mills, M., & Thomson, P. (2022). English schooling and little e and big E exclusion: What's equity go to do with it? *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, *27*(3), 185–198. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2022.2092273

Murtonen, M., Gruber, H., & Lehtinen, E. (2017). The return of behaviourist epistemology: A review of learning outcomes studies. *Educational Research Review*, *22*, 114–128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2017.08.001

Nemer, S. L., Sutherland, K. S., Chow, J. C., & Kunemund, R. L. (2019). A systematic literature review identifying dimensions of teacher attributions for challenging student behavior. *Education & Treatment of Children*, *42*(4), 557–578. https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2019.0026

NSW Department of Education. (2021a). *A new Student behaviour strategy: Public consultation outcomes*. https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/student-wellbeing/attendance-behaviour-and-engagement/media/Public_Consultation_Outcomes_Report.pdf

NSW Department of Education. (2021b). *Student Behaviour Strategy*. https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/student-wellbeing/attendance-behaviour-and-engagement/media/Student_Behaviour_Strategy_March_2021.pdf

NSW Government. (2023, August 24). *New Student Behaviour Policy to Address Disruptive Classrooms Available from Next Term [Media Release]*. https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/new-student-behaviour-policy

NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 3. (2017). *Education of students with a disability or special needs in New South Wales* (Report No. 37).

Otsui, K., Niwayama, K., Ohkubo, K., Tanaka, Y., & Noda, W. (2022). Introduction and development of school-wide positive behavioural support in Japan. *International Journal of Positive Behavioural Support*, *12*(2), 19–28.

Oxley, L. (2023). Identifying the barriers to alternative approaches for behaviour management in schools. *The Psychology of Education Review*, *47*(1), 71–78. https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsper.2023.47.1.71

Pearce, N., Cross, D., Epstein, M., Johnstone, R., & Legge, E. (2019). *Strengthening school and system capacity to implement effective interventions to support student behaviour and wellbeing in NSW public schools: An evidence review*. Telethon Kids Institute.

Popkewitz, T. S. (1987). *Critical studies in teacher education: Its folklore, theory and practice*. Falmer Press.

Power, S., & Taylor, C. (2021). School exclusions in Wales: Policy discourse and policy enactment. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, *26*(1), 19–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2021.1898761

Quennerstedt, A. (2015). Education and children's rights. In W. Vandenhole, E. Desmet, D. Reynaert, & S. Lembrechts (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of children's rights studies* (pp. 201–215). Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315769530

Rhodes, C., Pullen, A., & McEwen, C. (2023, January 24). It's not all about gender or ethnicity: A blind spot in diversity programs is holding us back. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/its-not-all-about-gender-or-ethnicity-a-blind-spot-in-diversity-programs-is-holding-equality-back-198237

Rudduck, J. (2002). The sera lecture 2002: The transformative potential of consulting young people about teaching, learning and schooling. *Scottish Educational Review*, *34*(2), 123–137. https://doi.org/10.1163/27730840-03402004

Shor, I. (1980). *Critical teaching and everyday life*. University of Chicago Press.

Sinclair, A. (1996). Leadership in administration: Rediscovering a lost discourse. In P. Weller & G. Davies (Eds.), *New ideas, better government* (pp. 229–244). Allen & Unwin.

Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., Gray, C., & Rausch, M. K. (2016). What do we know about discipline disparities? New and emerging research. In R. J. Skiba, K. Mediratta, & M. K. Rausch (Eds.), *Inequality in school discipline: Research and practice to reduce disparities* (pp. 21–38). Palgrave Macmillan.

Slee, R. (1995). *Changing theories and practices of discipline*. Falmer Press.

Slee, R. (2015). Beyond a psychology of student behaviour. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, *20*(1), 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2014.947100

Slee, R. (2016). Goodbye mr chips, hello dr Phil? In A. Sullivan, B. Johnson, & B. Lucas (Eds.), *Challenging dominant views on student behaviour at school* (pp. 63–76). Springer.

Smyth, J., Down, B., & McInerney, P. (2010). *'Hanging in with kids' in tough times: Engagement in contexts of educational disadvantage in the relational school*. Peter Lang.

Sullivan, A., Johnson, B., & Lucas, B. (Eds.). (2016). *Challenging dominant views on student behaviour at school: Answering back*. Springer.

Sullivan, A., Tippett, N., Johnson, B., & Manolev, J. (2020). *Understanding disproportionality and school exclusions*. University of South Australia.

Swadener, B. B. (1995). Children and families 'at promise': Deconstructing the discourse of risk. In B. B. Swadener & S. Lubeck (Eds.), *Children and families 'at promise': Deconstructing the discourse of risk* (pp. 17–49). State University of New York Press.

Tawell, A., & McCluskey, G. (2022). Utilising Bacchi's what's the problem represented to be? (WPR) approach to analyse national school exclusion policy in England and Scotland: A worked example. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 45(2), 137–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2021.1976750

te Riele, K. (2006). Youth 'at risk': Further marginalizing the marginalized? *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(2), 129–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930500499968

United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/convention-rights-child

Valdebenito, S., Eisner, M., Farrington, D. P., Ttofi, M. M., & Sutherland, A. (2018). School-based interventions for reducing disciplinary school exclusion: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 14(1), i–216. https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2018.1

Valencia, R. R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. Routledge.

Veit-Wilson, J. (1998). *Setting adequacy standards: How governments define minimum incomes*. Policy Press.

Weeden, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Basil Blackwell.

Welsh, R. O., & Little, S. (2018). The school discipline dilemma: A comprehensive review of disparities and alternative approaches. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(5), 752–794. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654318791582

Wetherell, M. (2012). *Affect and emotion: A new social science understanding*. Sage.

Wilkins, A. (2013). Libertarian paternalism: Policy and everyday translations of the rational and the emotional. *Critical Policy Studies*, 7(4), 395–406. https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2013.784622

Wilkins, A. (2023). Mapping the field: Education policy research and theory. In A. Wilkins (Ed.), *Policy foundations of education* (pp. 9–32). Bloomsbury.

Wooffitt, R. (2005). *Conversation analysis and discourse analysis: A comparative introduction*. Sage.

Wrigley, T. (2019). The problem of reductionism in educational theory: Complexity, causality, values. *Power & Education*, 11(2), 145–162. https://doi.org/10.1177/1757743819845121

Zembylas, M. (2021). Adorno on democratic pedagogy and the education of emotions: Pedagogical insights for resisting right-wing extremism. *Policy Futures in Education*, 19(7), 809–825. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210320985378