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Candidate

Debra Shilkin

Title

Why we suspend: teachers' and administrators' perspectives on student suspensions

Supervisors

Associate Professor Marnie O'Neill Dr Elaine Chapman

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Abstract

'Suspension' is a sanction used by schools whereby a student who has contravened the rules is not allowed to attend school for a specified number of days. Contextually, there are many reasons why suspension is used in Western Australian schools today, including the influence of the abolition of corporal punishment, discipline policies from the other countries (primarily the United States of America) and society's view of the delinquent youth. Empirical research tends to indicate that suspension is ineffective, punitive and an indicator of further social problems such as substance abuse and crime. This research can be divided into studies that look at the profiles of suspended students, the effectiveness and effects of suspension, students' perception of suspension and discipline and the alternatives to suspension.

The proposed study will use qualitative methods to discover the beliefs of teachers and administrators regarding the rationale for and the impact of suspension in Western Australian secondary schools. Case studies will be completed on three schools, two of which are currently trialing different programs to assist in both reducing suspensions and making them more effective. The third school will be selected for its more traditional ways of dealing with students and will have been identified by District Education Office staff as a school with a high suspension rate.

One-on-one interviews will be conducted with a variety of teachers from different Learning Areas at each school, pastoral care staff, the Deputy Principal in charge of Student Services and the Principal. After analysis of this data (using the Miles and Huberman (1994) method) the themes will be presented to the participants in focus groups for them to verify or refute. It is hoped that by examining the reasons why school staff suspend students, viable alternatives and suggestions to improve practice will be able to be created that will have full school support.

Research Proposal

Introduction

Schools have increasingly reported concern in disruptive behaviour in class (Dettman, 1972: White, Algozzine, Audette, Marr and Ellis, 2001: Metzler, Biglan, Rusby and Sprague, 2001: Mukuria, 2002: Uchitelle, Bartz and Hillman, 1989) as it is seen as a major impediment to classroom learning (Slee, 1988). Along with this, safety, violence, drugs and weapon use have also been uppermost in the problems schools face (White, 2002: Skiba, 2000: Mendez, Knoff and Ferron, 2002). Events such as the shooting of staff and students by students in Columbine in the United States (US), coupled with the media presenting incidences of school violence on a regular basis (Vavrus and Cole, 2002: Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001: Christie, Petrie and Christie, 1999) have contributed to schools feeling the need to increase the severity and intensity of their disciplinary practices (Fields, 2002).

In countries such as the US, zero tolerance policies have been adopted to try to decrease the incidences of the aforementioned behaviours (Skiba, 2000: Skiba and Peterson, 1999: Sughrue, 2003). Mandatory suspension – and in some cases, expulsion – exists for behaviours such as bringing a weapon to school and gang related activity (Skiba and Peterson, 1999). Some states have chosen to take these policies further and mandatory suspension has also been implemented for students who show open, on-going defiance and continued disorderly or disruptive conduct (Sughrue, 2003). Suspension has also been used as a consequences for behaviours such as truancy, lateness, disrespect and non-compliance (Skiba, 2000).

The abolition of corporal punishment has increased the use of suspension as part of standard disciplinary practice and has been cause for much debate among educationalists, human-rights activists, parents and the general community (Parker-Jenkins, 1999: Slee. 1992: Seymour, 1992: Johnson, 1992: Hocking and Murphy, 1992). In Australia, state educators were encouraged to give more weight to suspension (Beazley, 1984: Louden, 1985). Consequently, suspension became the preferred method of dealing with disruptive behaviour (Hyde, 1992).

These events form the background to this study as they support the evidence that there has been an increase in the use of suspension as the preferred sanction for both severe and lesser behaviours (Slee, 1992: Beazley, 1984: Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001: Atkins. McKay, Frazier, Jakobsons, Arvantis, Cunningham, Brown and Lambrecht, 2002). In turn, suspension has been shown to be a moderate to strong predictor of a student's likelihood to become disengaged in their schooling (Skiba and Peterson, 1999). The implications academically, socially and psychologically of students who are disconnected from the school environment through suspension could result in them becoming involved with substance abuse and other activities that could lead to juvenile offending (Kilpatrick, 1998). Similarly, there have been questions as to the efficacy of suspension in causing behavioural change (Costenbader and Markson, 1998: Partington, 2001: Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001: Kilpatrick, 1998: Atkins et al 2002: Bock, Tapscott and Savner, 1998: Vavrus and Cole, 2002). Nonetheless, suspension continues to be used as a sanction for inappropriate behaviour throughout schools in the US, the United Kingdom (UK) and in all states of Australia, including Western Australia (WA).

By examining the perspectives of teachers and school administrators on suspension, this study aims to provide answers to some of the questions implied by previous research that ask why suspension continues to be used when there appears to be little evidence of its efficacy.

Terminology.

For the purposes of this proposal, the following descriptions of terms will apply:

* 'Suspension' refers to a disciplinary procedure whereby the student is denied entry to the school grounds for a set number of days. According to the Department of Education and Training, WA,

Suspension removes the student from the school environment, reduces the opportunity for reinforcement for their behaviour and provides a period of respite between the incident and the resolution process.

(Department of Education and Training, 2004, p 8) Schools in the US use this term in the same way.

- * 'Exclusion' is used in the UK to refer to the same disciplinary procedure (Gordon, 2001).
- * 'Exclusion' in WA schools refers to the process by which a student is denied entry to a particular school for the remainder of their schooling career. (Department of Education and Training, 2004). As previously, schools in the US use this term in the same way.
- * 'Expulsion' is interchangeable with 'exclusion' when referring to the process as described above.
- * 'Administration' and 'administrators' refer to the team in a school that includes the principal, deputies and other key personnel who are responsible for the running of the school.

Statement of purpose.

As has been discussed in the "Introduction" section, the question of the efficacy of suspension has been the subject of much research. In order to ascertain this, researchers have used quantitative methods to collect data about suspension in schools (Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001: Costenbader and Markson, 1998: Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson, 2002: Wu, Pink, Crain and Moles, 1982:) using a variety of methods from examining school discipline records (Skiba et al, 2002) to having students self-report by way of a survey (Costenbader and Markson, 1998). Wu et al (1982) also asked teachers to complete surveys concerning their disciplinary practices.

Research conducted in WA has been concerned primarily with the perspectives of students and their parents on suspension (Partington, 2001). However, as yet there have been no studies concerning the beliefs of teachers and administrators in WA secondary schools. Given that administrators must be able to justify their suspensions (Department of Education and Training, 2004) and that teachers have to manage the students in their classes, it seems logical that any change in this process would require the support of these personnel. The proposed study aims to collate the beliefs of teachers and administrators in regards to suspension and to discover themes that could enable schools to make better use of this disciplinary practice and improve the outcomes of the students concerned.

Research Questions

Central.

The central question that will be addressed by this study is as follows: "What do teachers and administrative staff believe is the rationale for and impact of the suspension of students in secondary schools in Western Australia?"

Guiding.

There are five guiding questions that will shape the study. These are:

- 1. What are the perspectives of teachers and administrative staff on the use of suspension as a behaviour modification tool? Why?
- 2. What are the behaviours that are identified in the research schools that lead to suspension? Why? (The existing questions is an interview question)
- 3. What do teachers and administrative staff believe are the students' perceptions of suspension? Why?
- 4. What do teachers and administrative staff believe is the parents'/community's perception of suspension? Why?
- 5. What impact do teachers and administrative staff believe suspension has on student behaviour? Why?

Conceptual framework

Theoretical Perspective.

As the aim of the proposed research is to understand how teachers and administrators make meaning pertaining to suspension, the type of inquiry needed lens itself to a qualitative approach that is aligned with interpretive theory. The interpretivist looks to understand the meanings that constitute the actions (Schwandt, 1994) and this is the core of the proposed research. When using this approach the emphasis is on the

...importance of the processes which lie between social structure and behaviour. The central character in these processes is the person...who is active in the construction of social reality.

(Reid, 1986, p. 31)

It is anticipated that by utilising this theoretical perspective more relevant themes will emerge that both address the central research question and give light to alternative or improved suspension practices in WA secondary schools.

Current Suspension Policy in Western Australian State Schools.

The current suspension criteria in WA state schools are outlined in the Behaviour Management in Schools Policy (Department of Education and Training, 2004). Students can be suspended if they have contravened the school's rules based on the following categories:

Category 1: Physical assault or intimidation of staff.

Category 2: Verbal abuse or harassment of staff.

Category 3: Physical assault or intimidation of students.

Category 4: Verbal abuse or harassment of students.

Category 5: Wilful offence against property.

Category 6: Violation of school Code of Conduct, behaviour management plan,

classroom or school rules.

Category 7: Substance misuse.

Category 8: Illegal substance offences.

Category 9: Other.

(Department of Education and Training, 2004, Appendix A)

The policy also offers a perspective on suspending students from school, which justifies the use of this practice in Western Australian government schools.

Suspension can be an effective behaviour management strategy when it is reserved for serious or persistent breaches of the school's code of conduct.

Suspension removes the student from the school environment, reduces the opportunity for reinforcement of their behaviour and provides a period of respite between the incident and the resolution process. The processes for imposing a suspension are the same for all students.

Suspension provides and opportunity for the student, parents, and school staff to reflect on the incident and behaviour enabling a considered, positive resolution and re-entry plan. Suspension can, however, break down the relationships between the student, parents and school staff unless the resolution process is effectively managed.

(Department of Education and Training, 2004 p. 8)

The Behaviour Management in Schools Policy is part of an ensemble of policies that support its implementation. These are the Advisory Panel Procedures: School Discipline and Disabilities, Disputes and Complaints Policy and Procedures, Dress Code For Students, Enrolment Policy, Retention and Participation Plan, Students At Educational Risk Policy and Students at Educational Risk Successful Practice Guidelines. (Department of Education and Training, 2004).

Background to Western Australian Discipline Policies.

The current Behaviour Management in Schools Policy in WA was evolved from the original 1998 document and complements the material contained in Making The Difference-Behaviour Management In Schools and Behaviour Management in Schools-Implementation Package. Prior to this, the Education Department of WA favoured a "Whole-School Approach" to discipline (Hamilton, 1986). This approach was developed as a result of the abolition of corporal punishment, which occurred in mid-1987 (Hyde, 1992). Having been recommended on a number of occasions (Dettman, 1972: Beazley, 1984: Louden, 1985), there was much trepidation amongst educators regarding what was going to replace corporal punishment to assist in keeping classroom control (Hyde, 1992). Suspension, even though already in use, was to be given greater authority and force (Beazley, 1984) and, as a result,

became the most severe sanction schools were able to dispense in response to inappropriate behaviour.

More recently, the Minister for Education has introduced funding to try to combat the occurrences of both in-class disruption and behaviours that lead to suspension as part of the Behaviour Management in Schools strategy (Department of Education, 2002). By lowering class sizes in Years 8 and 9 and providing funding for alternative programs, strategies and extra staff, there was a 22% decrease in suspensions for the second half of the 2001 school year (Department of Education, 2002).

Social Context of the Research.

Over the past three decades, it has become more apparent that discipline and student behaviour management in general have grown to be central issues in the day-to-day running of schools. In Australia, the rise in youth unemployment (Louden, 1985: Slee 1995: Hyde and Robson, 1984) and emphasis on post-compulsory schooling (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2001) has created a cohort of students who previously would have left school. Furthermore, the provision of Austudy and Abstudy payments (federal government payments to students from disadvantaged families to allow students to participate in post-compulsory schooling) encourage students to continue with their schooling, regardless of their interest or ability (Louden, 1985).

All of the above factors have contributed to a group of students for whom schooling has little meaning, but who must remain at school as they have few viable alternatives. Louden (1985) comments:

In the early 1980s, unemployment for the population as a whole rose steeply. For young people in particular, the increase was almost unprecedented in the nation's history. Between one in four and one in five young adults in the 15- to 19-year age group became part of a pool of long-term unemployed people. As a consequence, the number of youngsters seeking exemptions from schools in Years 9 and 10 (who in the early 1970s represented almost six per cent of the secondary aged cohort) dwindled to approximately one per cent in 1983. Teachers who express the view that 'kids have changed' are right in this respect. Students who, in the part, had recognized that schooling had little to offer them and had sought exemptions and left in Years 9 and 10 are now remaining at school.

(Louden, 1985, p. 6)

These reasons are largely credited with the cause of much of the disruptive behaviour encountered by schools (Louden, 1985), but there have been other influences. Changes in the general tone of society have also had an impact. Galloway, Ball, Comfield and Seyd (1982) state:

Disruptive behaviour in schools is the inevitable manifestation of increased violence, or at least of increased reporting of violence, in the world as a whole.

(Galloway et al., 1982, p. ix)

Other reasons for the increase in suspensions have been attributed to the rise in the "number of children with emotional and behavioural problems and indeed there are more psycho-social disorders in childhood and referral to child guidance services have increased." (Kilpatrick, 1998, Reasons for Increase in Suspensions section) Kilpatrick also goes on to add that rising problems of substance abuse, eating disorders and physical and sexual abuse also contribute to indiscipline. Similarly, students who reside inner-city, low-income areas are

more prone to violence, substance abuse and poverty and rates for disruptive behaviour in schools in these areas are higher than average (Atkins, McKay, Frazier, Jakobsons, Arvanitis, Cunningham, Brown and Lambrecht, 2002: Bagley and Pritchard, 1998).

The social perception of the troublesome adolescent fits well with the above explanations of disruptive behaviour in schools. Recently, there has been much publicity in regards to the frequently-suspended teen being cited as more likely to become involved in criminal behaviour (Kilpatrick 1998: Bagley and Pritchard, 1998: Breunlin, Cimmarusti, Bryant-Edwards, Hetherington, 2002: Skiba and Peterson, 1999: Costenbader and Markson, 1998). In 2003, the Western Australian government implemented a curfew for children entering the capital city's popular nightlife area, which has been received with much controversy (Taylor and Franklin, 2003). Such attitudes towards troublesome youth often overflow into school life (Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001) and schools feel pressure to ensure that disruptive behaviour is dealt with using increasingly stringent penalties – which, under current policy, translates as using suspension (Fields, 1999).

Empirical Literature

Research in the area of suspension can be divided into four categories: the profiles of suspended students; the efficacy of suspension; students' perspectives on discipline and suspension; and alternatives to suspension.

Profiles of Suspended Students

One approach researchers have taken is to identify the types of students who are more likely to be suspended in order to determine any patterns or peculiarities. Consistently, researchers have established that ethnicity, age (early adolescence), socio-economic standing and academic ability have some bearing on the suspension rates (Mendez and Knoff, 2003: Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson, 2002: Partington, 1998: Gordon, 2001: Mendez, Knoff and Ferron, 2002: Hayden and Lawrence, 1995). These findings are consistent with those reported by the Department of Education and Training in WA, which has resulted in the implementation of both the aforementioned programs and strategies that target Indigenous and other groups of alienated students in an effort to improve retention and participation (Department of Education and Training, 2004).

Much of the research completed in the US has revealed that African-American students are disproportionately represented in suspension statistics (Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson, 2002) as are those who receive free lunches, which is indicative of low socioeconomic status (Mendez, Knoff and Ferron, 2002). Researchers have, in the main, used quantitative data-collection and analysis methods, including the use of school disciplinary records (Skiba et al, 2002), academic performance through standardised tests (Mendez, Knoff and Ferron, 2002) and school discipline surveys (Mendez and Knoff, 2003). Mendez, Knoff and Ferron (2002) did include interviews in their study and used this data to support the conclusions they had drawn from the quantitative data.

In WA, Partington (1998) examined the narratives of Indigenous students who had been disciplined with the purpose of discerning whether or not the understandings of the students and the management issues of the teachers were at odds and could account for the over-representation of Indigenous students in disciplinary practices. Through interviewing the students and studying three cases in-depth (interviewing both the students and teachers concerned), Partington concluded that the cultural differences between the teachers and the students may be contributing to the disproportionate number of Indigenous students who are suspended.

The Efficacy of Suspension

As mentioned previously in this proposal, researchers have cited little evidence to support the efficacy of suspension (Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001: Kilpatrick, 1998: Costenbader and Markson, 1997: Vavrus and Cole, 2002). The purpose of suspension, especially in the US, is to provide a sanction for major disciplinary problems, such as weapons, drugs and gang fighting (Sughrue, 2003). Research has revealed, however, that suspension is being applied most often for lesser infractions, such as lateness to class, noncompliance and disrespect (Skiba, 2000). School suspension has become the most commonly used sanction for inappropriate behaviour (Skiba and Knesting, 2002) since the inception of zero tolerance policies (Brooks, Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2000).

Despite the increase in the use of suspension, research has as yet not been able to establish whether this sanction is serving as a punishment for all students – that is, that suspension reduces the frequency of the misconduct. Atkins et al (2002) found that suspension proved to be an ineffective punishment in curtailing inappropriate behaviour. In addition, other research examined the effects of suspension and found that there are higher rates of dropping out of school, engaging in drug abuse and delinquency for those students who have been suspended (Kilpatrick, 1998: Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2001).

Students' Perspectives on Discipline and Suspension

How students perceive classroom management and suspension gives insight into how disciplinary practices directly affect them and their behaviour. Researchers have used these beliefs as a starting point when discussing the efficacy of suspension and discipline practices (Partington, 2001: Gordon, 2001: Coslin, 1997: Lewis, 2001).

Students are more likely to accept discipline and feel that are being treated fairly if they have perceive that they have a positive relationship with their teachers (Partington, 2001: Wu et al, 1982: Bru, Stephens and Torsheim, 2002: Partington, 1998). Students who were suspended for minor infractions – sometimes after a session where each individual act of misconduct was minor but the accumulative effect was perceived as major by the teacher - felt singled out and that the suspension was unfair and unjust (Vavrus and Cole, 2002). Further to this, it was found that common responses by students in one study conducted by Costenbader and Markson (1998) indicated that students were "angry at the person who sent me to suspension" or "happy to get out of the situation" (p 76). As far as the actual suspension as concerned, responses included "(It's) a good excuse to stay at home" and "It's just a vacation." (p 76).

Alternatives to Suspension

Strategies that aim at reducing out of school suspensions are of particular interest to the proposed study. The success of these approaches appears to be dependent on a number of factors, including parental involvement and school willingness to explore and accept alternatives as fair consequences for misconduct. (Breunlin, D.C., Cimmarusti, R.A., Bryant-Edwards, T.L., & Hetherington, J.S., 2002). The most common alternatives to out of school suspension utilised by schools are variations of the same basic premise – that is, in-school suspension, detention and time-out rooms (Morgan-D'Atrio, Northup, LaFleur and Spera,

1995). These in effect still isolate the student from the learning experience and thus could limit their academic potential (Hallam and Castle, 2004).

Other alternatives that aim to keep the students in school include the employment of social workers to work with both the students and their families, using an holistic approach to manage not only misconduct and inappropriate behaviour in schools, but also to link disadvantaged families to other services that could improve the home-life of the students. (Bagley and Pritchard, 1998). Researchers have also investigated improving the relationships between teachers and students, particularly in the areas of cultural understanding, relevant curriculum, building rapport and improving classroom management techniques (Partington, 1998: Townsend, 2000: Uchitelle, Bartz and Hillman, 1989). Conflict resolution skills also play an important part, with one program up-skilling teachers so that conflicts could be dealt with at a lower-level (Garibaldi, Blanchard and Brooks, 1996).

This Study

The proposed research will take a different direction from those mentioned in the above sections. By investigating the perspectives of teachers and administrators in regards to how suspension is implemented in their schools and why they believe it is part of the discipline litany available, this research will emphasise the professional knowledge of educators in the context they are most familiar with. Thus far, no other research located has taken this trend, either overseas or in Australia.

Methods

Design.

To maximise richness and accuracy of data, as well as transferability of the findings, case studies will be carried out at three different school sites. Case studies are an excellent method to use when endeavouring to understand the phenomenon being studied in depth. They allow the researcher to become familiar with the data in its natural setting and fully appreciate the context (Punch, 1998). In regard to this study, a school does not operate as a group of isolated variables: rather, especially in the case of behaviour management and whole-school approaches, all acts impact on each other, from the classroom to the administration. Suspension may be an "end of the road" consequence, but the student would have had contact with many people on his/her travels down this road and each of these contacts could potentially have impacted on behaviour. Similarly, the beliefs of all these people would influence how they related to the student. Finally, the beliefs of these people are affected by the context in which they are formed. Thus to understand why suspension is used, it is necessary to understand the viewpoint of the school as a whole and how it fits within the context of discipline in that school.

Each school site will be approached as a separate case study with the following characteristics, consistent with Punch (1998):

1. The boundaries of the case will be defined as the schools themselves and the teaching and administrative staff who work there. Even though the wider community (such as parents) have some influence on how schools operate and students are obviously central to the school environment, only teachers' and administrators' beliefs will be examined throughout this study. This boundary has been created for two reasons. Firstly, there is a dearth of research in the area of teachers' and administrators' perspectives on suspension and secondly, to assist in creating finite boundaries to make the research manageable.

2. Each case is about the beliefs held by teachers and administrators within that particular school. All phenomena that either influence or reflect these beliefs that are controlled will be examined, such as each school's behaviour management policy, classroom management policies, alternatives to suspension and allocation of staff to pastoral care.

- 3. In order to preserve the unity of the case, the data from each school will be analysed with the unique context of the school in mind, including location, socio-economic factors, rates of suspension and alternative programs. Cross-case analysis will formally occur only after the individual site analyses are complete.
- 4. Multiple sources of data will be accessed, not the least of which is the interviewing of staff with different duties at the school, from classroom teachers to principals. In addition, school records pertaining to suspension rates, socio-economic standing and general discipline records will be collected in order to gain an overall perspective of the suspension and behaviour management in the school.

Secondary schools have been chosen due to the fact that the majority of students who are suspended are in the early years of secondary school (Skiba et al, 2002: Kilpatrick, 1998: Partington, 1998).

Sample and sampling

The West Coast and Swan Education Districts each have secondary schools that are piloting programs concerning suspension. These schools are implementing programs that are regarded as innovative and, as such, can be considered special cases (Punch, 1998).

One school in the Swan Education District is incorporating the aims of restorative justice into its approach to behaviour management. Restorative justice includes techniques such as victim/offender mediation and conferencing. The aim is that those who have been most affected by the behaviour have an opportunity to air how they feel (Restorative Justice, 1999). Restorative conferencing has its origins in Maori tradition and is being used by juvenile justice teams in WA for juvenile offenders (Strang, 2004). The program began in the school in 2004 and the beliefs of the teachers and administrators at this school would be insightful, especially regarding any changes in opinion that have been a direct result of this program.

The other school piloting a program to reduce suspension is located in the West Coast Education District. There are a number of schools looking at counselling as an alternative to suspension. The program is called Saturday Alternatives to Suspension and involves students attending counselling sessions on Saturdays to deal with the problems that led to the behaviour that caused the suspension. This program is in its infancy, therefore the opinions and beliefs of the staff would be interesting to examine, especially considering the changes to discipline that have evolved in the school due to the program's implementation.

The third school will be selected from either of the two aforementioned education districts and will exhibit high rates of suspension (as identified by the respective District Education Offices). This school will not be undergoing any drastic changes in its behaviour management and will serve as a direct contrast to the other two schools. The beliefs of this school's staff will be interesting to compare with the schools that are undergoing changes in their disciplinary practices.

Participants.

Teachers from different learning areas will be interviewed from each site so as to maximise variation. It is anticipated that at least five will be interviewed, as this will

hopefully enable "option" learning areas (Technology and Enterprise, Languages Other Than English, The Arts, Health and Physical Education) to be included as well as the core learning areas. Teachers who are team leaders or are involved directly in the pastoral care of students but also carry a teaching role will make up the second group of participants. It is anticipated that there will be at least two of this type of participant from each school. These people are involved with the students at the most base level – in the classroom – and must contend with disciplining as well.

Finally, the representatives from the administration team will comprise the final group. These representatives will very much depend on the structure of the school but it is probable that they could include the Principal, the Deputy Principal in charge of Student Services, the Manager of Student Services, Middle School Coordinators and/or Program Coordinators. The only stipulation of these participants is that they have been delegated the power to suspend students. The beliefs of these people will be valuable as they choose the final consequence for the student's behaviour, regardless of the teacher's preferences. They are also primarily responsible for any alternatives to suspension that the school offers.

The school where the researcher has currently been employed has agreed to be a pilot school so as to refine the data gathering process. It may also be possible to include this school in the study, if relatively little modification of the processes has to be made. .

Data Collection.

There will be three stages of data collection. The first stage will involve gathering data from the case schools regarding the number of suspensions that have occurred over one school year, the number of students suspended, the number of students who have been suspended more than once, what they have been suspended for, the socio-economic standing of the school's population, the ethnicity of the students, the alternatives to suspension offered and the school's behaviour management policy (including both sanctions and rewards). How the school operates is a direct product of the perspectives of its staff and thus this information will aid in "painting a picture" of the school.

The second stage will consist of interviewing the participants. Previous studies have concentrated on the perspectives of the students and/or the parents (Partington, 2001: Coslin, 1997: Lewis 2001). As this study aims to develop themes using the knowledge, experience and opinions of those who mete out the consequence on a daily basis and deal with the outcomes, it is imperative to conduct the interviews in such a manner as to encourage truthful replies.

Participants who consent to be interviewed will be given the opportunity to view the basic interview schedule prior to the interview in order to have time to consider their responses, with the explanation that this schedule is a guide for the interview and questions may not necessarily be asked in that order. It is hoped that this will encourage more meaningful replies, which, in turn, will provide richer data. Spontaneous replies will be able to be included by asking clarifying questions. Thus it will be possible to elicit both planned and unplanned responses that will again aid in gathering meaningful data.

It is intended that the interviews take no longer than forty-five minutes and permission will be sought from each participant to use a tape-recorder to record the interview. It is anticipated that most interviews will take place at the participant's place of work and at a time that is most suitable for them. The interview itself, although based around the guiding questions, will be conducted in a more conversational manner in order to place the participant at ease and to aid rapport.

The type of interview technique that will be employed is that of the semi-structured or focused interview. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1995) argue that this style

of interviewing allows researchers to use both a structured approach as well as a more 'conversational' style in order to answer the research questions. This style of in-depth interviewing – "conversations with a purpose" (Burgess, 1984) - is appropriate for this study as the purpose is to glean as much information pertaining to the participants' perspectives on suspensions. The researcher will be familiar with techniques in creating rapport, which is expected to be substantially aided by the fact that the researcher is a member of the teaching profession.

At the conclusion of the interviews at a school, each participants will each receive a written transcript of their interview and will be invited to make any changes they deem to be necessary.

The third stage of data collection will occur once the initial data has been analysed and themes emerged. It is intended that a focus group interview will take place at each site to confirm or refute these themes. Those who had participated in the one-on-one interviews will be invited to take part. The raw data itself will not be discussed but any other information that is revealed during these sessions will also form part of the final analysis.

Data Analysis.

As the purpose of this study is to develop themes regarding the beliefs of school staff, it is necessary to choose the most suitable methods of data analysis to ensure that the data is treated thoroughly and the conclusions drawn can be substantiated. Miles and Huberman (1994) developed a model of data analysis that assists the researcher by providing a visual reference as to how data can be tackled.

Data collection Data display Conclusions: Drawing/verifying (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 12)

Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model

This model presents analysis as a continuous, iterative process that involves four phases that constantly impact upon each other and are carried out simultaneously. These four phases will be integral to this study and their application is outlined as follows:

1. Data collection: As described in the previous section, data for this study will be collected by examining the school's suspension statistics; building a profile of the behaviour management at the schools through examining their processes, procedures and alternatives to suspension; and interviewing those who participate in the teaching, pastoral care or disciplinary roles.

2. Data display: When dealing with the "numbers" data of suspensions from schools, tables will be constructed to facilitate cross-case analysis and, at a glance, to be able to determine the policies and practices regarding behaviour management that a school employs. This will assist in profiling the school and will give context to the beliefs held by the practitioners there.

Interview data and school's behaviour management policies will be transcribed firstly into a Word document with margins down either side for future analysis. Inductive coding techniques will be employed, aimed at discovering the codes from within the data itself. The reasoning behind not creating a database of codes prior to analysis is to eliminate as much researcher bias as possible. As the researcher currently works with at-risk students, it can be assumed that some bias and preconceptions may infiltrate the process so taking precautions is logical. Codes will be written in the left hand margin and memos in the right, in different colours, so as to aid the visual representation of the data.

- 3. Further into the analysis, these codes will be displayed without the transcripts in order to group together like-phenomenon and begin to advance the analysis conceptually to the level where themes can be crystallised. Visual displays such as matrices, concept maps and spreadsheets will assist in formulating the concepts as connections are made. Continually re-displaying the data visually will assist in a stronger, more meaningful analysis.
- 4. Conclusions drawing/verifying: As the displays of the data are constantly being refined, it will be possible to begin to draw conclusions. These conclusions will be verified by looking back at earlier stages of the data analysis, including the raw data, and confirming the significance of the suppositions.

During each of these stages, especially as data is being coded, the researcher will check for consistency by taking random pages of the transcripts or policies and re-coding them. In addition, the central and guiding questions will always be displayed so as to reiterate the focus of the study and prevent the analysis from straying.

Limitations and Delimitations.

The most obvious limitation of this study is the transferability of the themes that will emerge to other schools and contexts. Even given that three schools will be considered, the conclusions developed will still only bear relevance to those schools directly involved. However, it is expected that schools experiencing similar circumstances will be able to make their own comparisons. In addition, despite two of the schools being chosen specifically for their piloting of innovative programs, the intention of the study is to compare the beliefs discovered at each school to determine any patterns and themes that may emerge. Thus, this study could be appropriately described as a preliminary look at teachers' and administrators' beliefs about suspension in the Western Australian context, with a view to further research in this area.

This study has very firm boundaries for research. Choosing to examine suspension at the two pilot program schools and one traditional school means that certain variations are being sought. It could exclude transferability to schools that don't fall into either of these categories. It is anticipated that teachers at each of these schools (especially when contrasting the traditional school with the other two) will have very diverse opinions about suspension. This could be seen as a limitation of the study or simply a way of limiting the data to make it manageable and meaningful.

In regards to the selection of the participants, it is possible that, by having them self-select, those who volunteer will have strong opinions about suspension. This can be seen both

as a strength and a weakness of the study. By having representatives of both ends of the spectrum in regards to suspension, all the issues will hopefully be raised and thus add to the richness of the data. However, it could also be that only those who are strongly for or strongly against volunteer at any one case study school. Should this be the case, the principal will be approached to discuss other members of staff who hold opposing opinions and may wish to participate.

Consent, access and human participants' protection

Confidentiality.

Confidentiality will be assured to all participants. All transcripts, notes and audiotapes will be stored in a lockable cabinet at the researcher's home. Names of schools will be disguised, as will names of participants.

Access.

Preliminary contact has already been made with both the Swan and West Coast District Education Offices. Permission will be sought from individual principals, firstly via email and then a follow-up phone call. The researcher will seek to find schools she already has contacts with in order to facilitate access.

When the principals have consented, permission will be sought to address a staff meeting or other gathering to explain the research and ask for volunteer participants. These volunteers will be contacted either via email or phone and interview times will be finalised.

Consent.

Consent will be obtained from all participants in writing. Each participant will receive a letter outlining the research and a consent form for their records, as well as the consent form that the researcher will keep. (See Appendix V and VI).

Avoidance of Duplication of Other Work

All care will be taken to ensure that this study is not an exact duplicate of any other. Literature searches will be carried out during the course of the research and constantly compared to this study to determine any occurrences of duplication. It is thought that this would be highly unlikely, given the Western Australian context of this study and its development of theory only at the local level at one school district in the state. Nonetheless, duplication is still an issue and will be avoided through the literature searches and constant contact with the Department of Education and Training, Student Services branch, who would be aware of any other such study being undertaken at the local level.

Major Scholars
Dr Reece L. Peterson
Professor
Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders.
Lincoln, Nebraska

Dr Russell Skiba

Indiana Education Policy Center Indiana University Bloomington, Indiana

Dr Gary Partington Edith Cowan University Perth, Western Australia

Professor Roger Slee McGill University Montreal, Quebec

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Appendices

Appendix I

$Proposed\ Timeline$

April 2005– defend proposal.

April - December 2005 – begin writing background and literature chapters.

- contact schools to identify case schools and possible participants.
- finalise correspondence

February 2006 – begin data collection and analysis. This is anticipated to take the entire year.

January 2007 – write analysis and discussion chapters.

May 2007 – begin first draft of thesis.

October 2007 - revise first draft and submit second draft

January 2008 – final revisions.

May 2008 – submit thesis.

Appendix II

Proposed Budget

The projected cost for this study is \$1050. It is anticipated that the researcher's workplace will meet these costs. They are as follows:

Photocopying and interlibrary loans - \$200 Cassette tapes - \$100 Cassette recorder - \$200 Computer disks - \$50 Binding (three copies) - \$300 Travel expenses - \$200

Appendix III

Interview Schedule

Note: This is not the copy that will be seen by participants. They will receive Possible Interview Questions, framed to suit the status of the participant, be it teacher or administrator. These questions will be finalised after experimenting with the trial school.

Central Question	Guiding Questions	Possible Interview Questions
What do teachers and administrative staff believe is the rationale for and impact of suspension of students in secondary schools in Western Australia?	What are the perspectives of teachers and administrative staff on the use of suspension as a behaviour modification tool? Why?	What role do you think suspension plays in the BMIS policy? Is this reflected in the school's policy? What do you feel makes suspension a good/bad tool to change behaviour?
	What are the behaviours that are identified at each school that lead to suspension? Why?	What is the hierarchy of consequences applied at your school? Do you have any examples of any exceptions to these?
	What do teachers and administrative staff believe are the students' perceptions of suspension? Why?	What is the message suspension give to both the suspended and non-suspended students?
	What do teachers and administrative staff believe is the parents'/community's perception of suspension? Why?	What message does suspension send to the community about the school? Would parents prefer the school take a punitive or pastoral stance? What would possibly change parents' views?
	What impact do teachers and administrative staff believe suspension has on student behaviour? Why?	What are the feelings at school/ in the classroom when someone is suspended? What are the feelings when they return from suspension? What about the behaviour of other students?

Appendix IV

Letter to School Principals after initial contact

Dear

Further to our telephone conversation, I am writing to further explain the research I will be conducting on teachers' and administrators' beliefs about the rationale for and impact of suspension. This research will be submitted as a Doctoral thesis to the Graduate School of Education at The University of Western Australia.

The title of this research will be: "Why we suspend: Teachers' and administrators' beliefs about student suspensions."

The research is designed to explore the beliefs of teachers and administrators, especially in light of changes some schools are making to their Behaviour Management policies.

The research will take place in three stages. Firstly, I would like to collect data from the school regarding the number of suspensions that have occurred over one school year, the number of students suspended, the number of students who have been suspended more than once, what students have been suspended for, the socio-economic standing of the school's population, the ethnicity of the students, the alternatives to suspension offered and finally a copy of the school's behaviour management policy. This will help me build an accurate picture of the school and will allow me to contextualise the findings.

The second stage will involve one-on-one interviews with volunteers from your staff. In particular, I would like to be able to interview a staff member from at least five of the eight learning areas, pastoral care staff (such as team and/or year leaders), Student Services staff and staff who are able to suspend students (such as the Deputy in charge of Student Services). As mentioned in our telephone conversation, I would also like to have the opportunity to interview you.

During the third stage I will invite back interested parties to a focus session where I will present my findings. The participants will then have the opportunity to refute or confirm these as well as give me feedback.

It must be emphasised that no individual or school will be directly identified in the publishing stage.

If you have any questions you wish to discuss, my contact details are:

Regards,

Debra Shilkin (Researcher)

Assoc Prof Marnie O'Neill (Supervisor)

Dr Elaine Chapman (Supervisor)

Appendix V

Letter to volunteer participants after initial contact

Dear

Thank you for volunteering to be a participant in the research. This letter outlines the information regarding the research and your part in it.

The title of this research will be: "Why we suspend: Teachers' and administrators' beliefs about student suspensions."

The research is designed to explore the beliefs of teachers and administrators, especially in light of changes some schools are making in regards to their Behaviour Management policies.

The research will take place in three stages. Firstly, I will collect data from the school regarding the number of suspensions that have occurred over one school year, the number of students suspended, the number of students who have been suspended more than once, what students have been suspended for, the socio-economic standing of the school's population, the ethnicity of the students, the alternatives to suspension offered and finally a copy of the school's behaviour management policy. This will help me build an accurate picture of the school and will allow me to contextualise the findings.

The second stage will involve a one-on-one interviews with you. Before the interview, you will receive the schedule of questions to give you time to prepare, if you would like to do so. There is no obligation at all for you to do any preparation. The interview should take no longer than forty-five minutes and will take place at your school unless you would prefer an alternative. I will contact you within the next few weeks to set up an interview time.

During the third stage I will invite back interested parties to a focus session where I will present my findings. The participants will then have the opportunity to refute or confirm these as well as give me feedback.

It must be emphasised that no individual or school will be directly identified in the publishing stage. The final results will be submitted as a Doctoral thesis at the Graduate School of Education at The University of Western Australia.

If you have any questions you wish to discuss, my contact details are:

Regards,

Debra Shilkin Assoc Prof Marnie O'Neill Dr Elaine Chapman (Researcher) (Supervisor) (Supervisor)

Appendix VI			
Letter of consent for participants.			
I,and any questions I have asked have been answ in this research, understanding that I may with	vered t	o my s	
I agree that the research data gathered for this sidentifying information is not used.	study r	nay be	e published provided my or other
I agree to have my interviews audio – taped.	YES	NO	(Please circle).
Participant / Authorised representative			Date
Investigator: Debra Shilkin			Date