


# *Student Perspectives:* Findings from Qualitative Research


David J. Broderick  
*PhD Candidate*

*Dept. Paediatrics & Dept. Public Health,  
University of Melbourne*

# Presentation Overview

- Why a qualitative project?
  - Methodology or 'Who, what, where, how?'
  - Preliminary patterns from the data
  - How do you young people experience suspension?
  - Excerpts from the interviews
  - My reflections to date
- 

# Why a qualitative project?

- Aims to better understand suspension from the perspective of the *consumer!*
  - Experiences and outcomes of suspension are unique and are difficult to predict
  - The qualitative project delves into themes emerging from survey data
  - Has the potential for hypothesis generation
- 

# Who, what, where?

- In-depth one-to-one interviews with 50 young people sourced from IYDS (30x year 11 & 20x post-secondary)
- Conducted in the young person's home or local library (*away* from school)
- Duration: 30min-120min (med. = 45min)
- Focusing on school discipline and student management, school community, and moral reasoning

# Sampling

	<b>Govt.</b>	<b>Indep.</b>	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>male</b>	18	3	3	24
<b>female</b>	17	4	5	26
<b>TOTAL</b>	35	7	8	50

	<b>YES trouble YES suspend</b>	<b>YES trouble NO suspend</b>	<b>NO trouble NO suspend</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>male</b>	13	7	4	24
<b>female</b>	5	7	14	26
<b>TOTAL</b>	18	14	18	50

# How?

- Asked to describe school discipline and student management practices experienced or witnessed
- How did this come about? Did it come as a surprise? What were your thoughts and feelings re this event? How might it have been handled differently?
- Exploring the rights and responsibilities of teachers, classmates, self

# Suspension Patterns

- Vast majority of suspensions occurred in years 7-10
- Almost all in the 'YES suspension' category had been suspended multiple times
- In many instances most were surprised upon being suspended, although some were expecting this outcome

# Individual Experiences

- Suspension is an *individual* experience
- Suspension was experienced as: shame, relief, regret, elation, frustration, reflection, deserving, boring, attitude-forming, etc.
- Some felt that the experience did them good and allowed them to reflect
- Others felt that this only worsened their situation and acted as a catalyst for early departure from schooling



# Case Study: *Leonie*\*

- 17 yo, outer Northern suburbs, govt. school, working part-time, mother-to-be
- Left school in year 9 following cluster of events including family bereavement and divorce: cites repeated suspensions as the final straw
- Regrets decision to leave but is optimistic and determined to obtain VCE and pursue a career as a journalist

*\*denotes pseudonym*

# Case Study: *Brian*\*

- 19 years old, inner Eastern suburbs, independent school, university student
- Several in-school suspensions relating to group conflicts and 'pranks'
- Strong connection with school community and beliefs concerning academic achievement and career goals

*\*denotes pseudonym*

# Case Study: *Sergei*\*

- 19 years old, Goulburn region, Catholic and govt. school, recently moved to inner West to attend university
- Migrated to Australia as a child, parents currently unemployed due to disability
- Several external suspensions relating to peer conflicts and truancy
- Believed he deserved punishment but objected to use of external suspension

*\*denotes pseudonym*

# Discipline in many forms

- Variety was staggering: hammering in nails, one-minute Saturday detentions, after-school detentions, lunch-time detentions, internal suspensions, 'soccer card' (yellow/red) systems, etc.
- Widely reported that in-school suspension was the 'worst' as the upside of external suspension (freedom from school) was removed

# My Reflections

- Marginalises those that can least afford to be marginalised
- Poorly understood by many with a sense that they are being 'quarantined'
- Many who had received multiple suspensions felt that it did them no harm
- Internal suspension appears as best option, although not always practical