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‘Grey’ exclusions matter: Mapping illegal exclusionary practices and the implications for children with disabilities in England and Australia

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Abstract

This paper provides an outline of, and rationale for, an international research project that will identify commonalities and disparities in illegal school exclusionary practices in Australia and England. The aims here are to situate such practices within a global context and to map the events and processes through which children and young people, particularly those with ‘special’ educational needs and disabilities, are removed from school in Australia and England. The research we advocate is premised on evidence that inequitable and illegal exclusionary practices are endemic in education systems globally; hence, ‘pushout syndrome’ in the USA, ‘off rolling’ in England, facilitated ‘dropout’ in Italy and ‘grey exclusions’ in Australia. The authors argue that the repeated commissioning of research by national governments and school inspectorates, intended to accurately ascertain the scale of this problem and its impact on the life trajectories of the excluded, serves to defer meaningful action to prevent its occurrence. School exclusion, whether legal or illegal, can be conceptualised as a process rather than an event, and this paper discusses a descriptive continuum through which exclusionary practices in Australia and England can be mapped. An experiential continuum is proposed that facilitates a thematic mapping of contributory factors, identified from a relevant literature, as a preliminary analytical framework for future research.

Key words: school exclusion; disproportionality; continuum thinking.

Introduction

This paper responds to developments in educational policy, discourse and practice that can be described as ironic, and that have culminated in wide recognition that children with ‘special’ educational needs and disabilities (SEND and other identifiable demographic groups, are

subject to varied exclusionary pressures and practices within ostensibly inclusive education systems (Done & Knowler, 2020a, 2020b; Knowler & Done, 2020; Done et al., 2021). Shared cultural assumptions can be viewed as ironic since they are understood as true but, in reality, as assumptions, they are contestable or reversible (Foucault, 2002). Cultural beliefs about the role of discipline in education have become so ingrained, historically, that they operate as unchallengeable common-sense presuppositions in professional, political and policymaking discourse. The shift towards 'inclusive' education globally has brought this particular 'truth' into sharp relief (Armstrong, 2018) given the irony that inclusion is coincident with the routinised exclusion of many students from school (Done & Knowler, 2020a). Counter-discourses highlight the potentially profound adverse effects of school exclusion on young people (Daniels et al., 2003). For example, the concept of the pipeline is mobilised to illustrate a correlation between school exclusion and criminality in later life (Institute for Public Policy Research [IPPR], 2017) and to underline the social cost of this trajectory. This descriptive linear continuum is, however, open to misinterpretation and misuse (Perera, 2020). It can be understood to imply an inevitable movement between two discrete events rather than a complex web of contingent processes and experiences. It also implicitly binarises the formally excluded and those not excluded, thereby obscuring many practices that can be considered as exclusionary.

This paper aims to explore the relevance of 'continuum thinking' (Boyle, 2019) in the mapping of exclusionary practices in schools. It is argued that multiple continuums are required to elucidate structural inequities and the aforementioned complexity, and to avoid the type of binary thinking that risks reinforcing unhelpful assumptions and inviting inadequate policy responses. The familiar binary of 'good' and 'poor' teacher is a case in point (Done, Knowler & Murphy, 2015). Some years ago, England's national school inspectorate – the Office for Standards in Education, suggested that it was poor teaching that was hindering the realisation of the political objective of inclusive education (Ofsted, 2010). Numerous policy documents have subsequently called for the upskilling of teachers to ensure, for instance, the early identification of diagnosable conditions (Done & Andrews, 2018). It can be argued, however, that what is most urgently required is a fundamental shift in the values evidenced in policymaking such that teachers are enabled to strive for more inclusive school cultures and behaviour policies that reflect the diversity of school populations (Armstrong, 2018).

Whilst it is important to research teacher attitudes and to understand what initiatives might assist teachers to revise their practice, research suggests that the school culture dictated by

senior leaders is pivotal. In England, it is school principals that are legally responsible for decisions to formally exclude and, yet, their awareness of what constitutes illegal exclusionary practice appears to be uneven (Done & Knowler, 2021a; Done et al., 2021). Ofsted's (2019a) argument that schools are over-emphasising the importance of school examination data is ironic given its role in creating school cultures where academic performance is seemingly all that matters. In Australia, 'policy borrowings' from England and from the US (Lingard, 2010) have led to the same exclusionary drivers with greater numbers of students across every state experiencing formal inclusion over the last 5 years according to publicly available data (ABC, 2021). As in England, students with disabilities and with mental health conditions are over-represented in these statistics (Graham, 2021). One point of unique difference with England is that in Australia, students from aboriginal or Torres Strait family backgrounds face elevated risk of educational suspension or formal exclusion (Llewellyn *et al.*, 2018)

Despite a political discourse and rhetoric promoting inclusion, children with disabilities and 'special' needs have been, and are being, marginalised within schools (Taylor & Power, 2020) or, indeed, excluded from them (Done & Knowler, 2020a, 2020b; Done et al., 2021). Factors such as budgetary and funding constraints are reducing local government support for students with SEND and compounding this situation (Jayanetti, 2021).

The focus throughout this paper will be on the structural systemic, and contextual features that recur despite differing national contexts that condition the experience of marginalisation, but also on these experiences of exclusionary practices. The former highlights issues within rights-based representational politics, whilst the latter introduces what Kennedy et al. (2013) characterises as an affective politics that refuses to reduce students to their attributes or socially prescribed identities and rejects stereotyping based on familiar demographics such as disability, race, ethnicity. These commonalities in exclusionary outcomes suggest potentially similar system drivers in England and Australia. New scholarship by Armstrong (2021) suggests that neo-liberal policies favouring what is described as the 'performative school' are contradicting official support for educational inclusion, leading to greater educational exclusion of students with disabilities, with mental health conditions and other forms of disadvantage, thereby pushing affected student out into the margins of the education system. Armstrong (2021) describes this trend as one of the most profoundly disruptive forces affecting contemporary education in England, Australia and the US.

Commonalities

Internal exclusions

Regardless of whether school exclusion is permitted or prohibited by law, most countries globally have adopted legislation that regulates formal exclusion. In contrast to England, Australia and the U.S.A., formal school exclusion is illegal in countries such as Italy and Wales. Yet, as Taylor and Power (2020) argue, this legal prohibition serves to mask a variety of entrenched exclusionary practices that involve the removal of students with disabilities or additional needs from the mainstream classroom environment for variable periods. Such practices include the use of isolation rooms whereby students are separated from peers and reliance on remedial programmes and / or units which are intended to address behavioural issues prior to the remediated student's return to the 'inclusive' classroom (Taylor & Power, 2020). Remedial interventions that are led by paraprofessionals away from the classroom are held by Norwich and Lewis (2007, p. 137) to constitute a 'grey area' of inclusive education; and, as Terzi (2005, p.448) argues, they risk stigmatising or 'othering' students. In recent research, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in England provided anecdotal accounts of some of the ways in which mainstream schools 'manage' students with behavioural issues, including part-time timetabling and the incentivising of parents to consent to the transfer of their child to another school (Done & Knowler, 2021b). Several recent Australian educational inquiries have highlighted the existence of the exact same 'gatekeeping' practices and illustrated how disciplinary sanctions are often used to back up them up. In 2020, Hearing 7 of the high-profile Disability Royal Commission (DRC, 2020) focussed explicitly on the suspension and exclusion of students with disabilities and the closing remarks by the Chair, Ronald Sackville QC, highlight how disciplinary sanctions were used to remove 'difficult' students with disabilities commenting:

The long standing attitudes of some educational authorities toward what are perceived to be the challenges presented in teaching children with disability acceding leading to punitive responses to what is seen as "difficult" and "deliberate" behaviour, rather than attempting to ascertain the causes of the behaviour and providing the support the student needs. We have the devastating consequences that can flow from the inappropriate and disproportionate application of disciplinary sanctions to a student with disability (p.3, DRC, 2020)

Disciplinary (utilitarian) thinking

Drawing on Foucault (1977), the ‘manage-discipline’ model of behaviour management in schools has also been identified as a common feature of ‘inclusive’ education systems (Armstrong, 2018) despite variation in the nature of disciplinary actions across national contexts. When conceived as a continuum, this model can be expanded to read ‘manage-manage / discipline-discipline’ and, conceptually, it implies that behavioural management is only possible where the threat of punitive sanction is ever-present. It can be read as a policy technology linked to governmentality such that populations generally, and potentially unruly sub-populations, are ordered and controlled (Foucault, 1977, 2002). It has been suggested that punishment is inappropriate for children with disabilities that may manifest as ‘disruptive’ behaviour (Macleod, 2010; Armstrong et al., 2016, DRC, 2020). An attendant risk of such arguments, however, is that they indirectly reinforce the differentiation of children with disabilities from their peers whilst implicitly endorsing this model, and the punitive sanctions that it legitimises, for the general school population.

The Timpson Review of school exclusion in England reiterates current legislation, stating that formal exclusion ‘must be on disciplinary grounds’ (Department for Education [DfE], 2019, p.5); and in Australia, for example, the Government of South Australia’s Education and Children’s Services Regulations 2020 specify ‘misbehaviour’ as grounds for exclusion (GSA, 2020, p.11). A report from the Australian Law Reform Commission has noted anecdotal accounts of arbitrary punishment but, nevertheless, argues that a child’s behaviour must not be permitted to ‘jeopardise the learning opportunities of other students’ (ALRC, 2010). As this mobilisation of the concept of the ‘greater good’ suggests, the ‘manage-manage / discipline-discipline’ model relies on utilitarian thinking that shifts the focus away from the potential harms of punishment to an individual towards the purported benefits for the general school population. However, utilitarian ethics are inextricably linked to a utilitarian economic theory that is premised on the assumption that access to the market is free and fair, whereas analysis of school exclusion data reveals patterns that confirm discriminatory disciplinary practices are adversely affecting specific social groups. Access to education for all is clearly not as free and fair as utilitarian thinking suggests.

Stratification

Such patterns demonstrate a further key commonality of education systems globally: the stratification of the disciplined and excluded school sub-population. Similar patterns are discernible in ‘drop out’ rates in countries where formal school exclusion is prohibited and,

yet, it is students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds that are more likely to remove themselves from school (Dovigo, *forthcoming*). In England, specific social groups are statistically over-represented within data detailing disciplinary actions and legal exclusionary practices; hence, data collected under England's Freedom of Information Act (Ministry of Justice, 2000) on exclusions between September 2019 and September 2020 showed that 44.24% of those excluded were on their school's SEND register (No More Exclusions [NME], 2021).

In Victoria, Australia, students with disability funding accounted for 14% of permanent exclusions whilst comprising 4.5% of government school enrolments; and indigenous students accounted for 25% of all suspensions and permanent exclusions in New South Wales and Queensland while comprising 10% and 8% of school enrolments, respectively (Sullivan et al., 2020). Similar disparities or 'longstanding national trends' were found by Timpson (DfE, 2019, p. 31); children classified as having SEND, those from disadvantaged or social care backgrounds, and those from specific racial and ethnic groups are more likely to experience fixed term exclusions (suspensions) and permanent exclusion. In both England and Australia, boys are far more likely to be excluded (DfE, 2019, p.31; Sullivan et al., 2020). Timpson contextualises the finding of disproportionality by emphasising that school exclusion is a 'rare' event in England, although it is acknowledged that 0.1% of 8 million school students is a troubling figure (DfE, 2019, p. 5). IntegratEd (2020) report that 7,894 students were permanently excluded in England while 199,765 received fixed term exclusions or suspensions totalling 438,265 in 2019. Furthermore, publicly available data suggests that the absolute number of educational suspensions has risen since 2014 across all jurisdictions in Australia (ABC, 2020), indicating a wider crisis of inclusion.

'Informal' exclusion

There is another common feature of education systems that is now receiving more attention. Apparent contradictions between, or the ironic juxtaposition of, national policy discourses and political rhetoric around inclusion (as a statutory right and cherished ideal) and national academic standards and school performance raise issues around the equity of educational opportunity and student experience (Done, 2019; Done & Knowler, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Schools that find reconciling these two agendas problematic, or that elect to prioritise the latter, have evolved strategies for illegally removing children from the school roll. In England, these

strategies are known collectively as ‘off rolling’ (Ofsted, 2019a) and in Australia they are referred to as ‘grey exclusions’ or ‘informal expulsions’ In both countries the number of affected children is likely to far exceed official exclusion data. In a highly-critical investigation in 2017 into Victorian government school expulsions, the Victorian Ombudsman (Deborah Glass) comments that: ‘The official number is likely to be only a fraction of the number of children informally expelled, on whom no data is kept. Somewhere between hundreds and thousands of children each year disengage from formal education at least in part as a result of pressure from schools.’ And adds, ‘We simply do not know where they end up.’ (p. 2).

The prevalence of such practices is difficult to gauge precisely given their illegality but also because schools have found ways of engineering legitimacy to obscure the scale of the problem.

Hence, ‘managed moves’; were introduced in England some years ago such that students can be legally transferred to other schools on condition that all parties consent (Done & Knowler, 2020b). Teachers openly describe ‘passing the buck’ (Done & Knowler, 2021b) whilst parents recounting their experience of the consent process describe feeling manipulated and parent-school relationships that had deteriorated over time such that the prospect of removing their child from a toxic school environment was a source of relief (Done et al., 2021). In one case, the parent was given less than twenty-four hours to select a new school and it took several months to rebuild the trust of the child who had repeatedly hidden under a table at school time. When the child had begun to struggle with a new method of reading instruction, this parent had advised her child to approach his teachers but, having done so, his difficulties were ignored, triggering ‘wobbles’, a sense of neglect, and a breakdown in trust between parent and child. Where ‘wobbles’ occurred, this primary-aged child was sent home from school for a three-day period to ‘process’ why the behaviour was inappropriate (Done et al., 2021).

The use of ‘isolation’ facilities ostensibly serves the same purpose or ‘persistent disruptive behaviour’ might invite temporary placement in units, often off-site, where remedial ‘packages’ are designed to assist children in managing their social, emotional, mental health and behavioural issues. Technically, such placements do not constitute ‘off rolling’, however, there is anecdotal evidence of children spending long periods in these units with some never returning to mainstream classes. Chambers & Forlin (2021) report similarly extended periods within specialist units in Western Australia. In areas of high social deprivation in England, approximately 10% of the school population are educated in such units and, rather than

challenge practices in ‘regular’ schools, the UK government is focusing on raising the quality of this alternative provision (IntegratED, 2020, p.8).

Returning to prevalence, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Ofsted (2018, 2019c) developed statistical modelling in order to identify ‘missing’ students and then proceeded to publicly identify schools where ‘off rolling’ was suspected. Ofsted has recently advised that there should be no return to such practices in the post-pandemic era, implying that the issue of ‘off rolling’ has been addressed (Ofsted, 2021). This implication contradicts findings that risk assessments were used during the pandemic-induced partial opening of schools to prevent or discourage the attendance of children with diagnosed conditions and disabilities, despite their legal entitlement to attend (Clarke & Done, 2021). Contrary to Timpson’s (DfE, 2019) suggestion that formal school exclusion is a rare occurrence, the anecdotal evidence that illegal exclusion is endemic in the English and Australian education systems is overwhelming, and it is widely recognised that children with ‘special’ needs or disabilities are disproportionately affected by a wide variety of exclusionary practices (EPI, 2019; NME, 2021).

In England, ‘off rolling’ occurs when, for example, schools wilfully exaggerate reports of inappropriate behaviour in order to justify formal exclusion (YouGov, 2019) or when they advise parents that their children with SEND can no longer be accommodated due to financial pressures or behavioural issues in order to facilitate transfers to other schools (Done et al., 2021). Prevalence is similarly under-estimated when schools pressurise parents to home educate or persuade parents to withdraw their child under threat of formal exclusion (Office for the Schools Adjudicator [OSA], 2017; Done et al., 2021). Illegal ‘push out’ in the U.S.A. includes school failure to provide appropriate support or repeated suspensions or exclusions rather than addressing a behavioural issue (Advocates for Children of New York, ACNY, 2008). The Australian Law Reform Commission (2010) took evidence of students receiving offers of payment from teachers to not attend classes, or being advised by teachers not to bother returning to school. In research involving SENCOs in England, there were references to a local school that regularly incentivised parents to support school transfer by financing the new school uniform (Done & Knowler, 2021b). It is clear that ‘gaming’ the system (Ofsted, 2019a) through the multiplicity of exclusionary school strategies noted here is widespread, and suggestive of the failure of commitment to international declarations around rights to significantly impact national and local practices.

Complicating discourse(s)

Illegal exclusionary practices have been variously conceived and not only as a ‘gaming’ of academic performance data in the context of a competitive marketised education system (Ofsted, 2019a, 2019b). Given statutory guidance directed towards SENCOs, it can also be conceived as a school leadership issue within professional discourse (Done & Knowler, 2021b). However, where SENCOs are able to exercise ‘advocacy’ leadership (Clarke & Done, 2021) to prevent the exclusion of students with diagnosed conditions and disabilities, this is conditional upon their vision of inclusivity being shared or supported by their school principal (Done & Knowler, 2021b). Many SENCOs are not in senior leadership positions and disputing exclusionary practices carries a professional risk (Clarke & Done, 2021). The finding that teachers in England are seeking support for parents to resist school attempts at ‘off rolling’ (Ofsted, 2019b) is significant. It confirms that school cultures are largely dictated by the most senior school leaders, and introduces the irony that the promotion of leadership skills may not translate into such skills being exercised to ensure more inclusive school cultures. Teachers in England must also contend with governmental policy discourse that positions them as requiring improved understanding of links between behavioural issues and specific conditions or disabilities (DfE, 2019b) whilst, simultaneously, responding to government-commissioned advice around ‘best’ practice in behaviour management that promotes the ‘manage-manage / discipline – discipline’ model. The latter hinges on a concept of ‘regular’ schooling that is inherently discriminatory (Taylor & Power, 2020), and which, as described above, has utilitarian undertones. Future research into what changes teachers would like to see happen in order to ensure inclusivity must go beyond the familiar formulaic research narratives that culminate in demands for more training and that pervade policy discourse (see Shelemy, Harvey & Waite, 2019).

Anecdotal accounts of illegal school exclusionary practices have, to date, failed to coalesce into a powerful or coherent politically affective counter-discourse that promises to influence policymaking given the broader discourses at play. These broader discourses can be characterised as meta-discourses; they shape the wider normative social and political context, and determine which types of evidence will qualify as knowledge. The former describes national and international legal frameworks while the latter describes what Foucault (2002, p. 63, p.70) terms the *episteme* – a ‘network of necessities’ or necessary conditions that must be met in the generation of knowledge or ‘truth’. The power of anecdotal accounts of ‘off rolling’ or ‘grey exclusions’ to dispute arguments that posit the rarity of exclusionary practice as an

event is limited, even though such accounts are acquiring a cumulative weight and appear in published reports.

It is argued that continuum thinking (Boyle, 2019) can be usefully mobilised to facilitate a move away from discourses that focus on exclusionary events, presented as rare, 'isolated', and bound by legally defined parameters or evidential necessities. The following section of this paper shows how continuum thinking can expand the range of activities considered to be exclusionary and increase awareness of how these are related, contingently rather than necessarily, to outcomes such as formal school exclusion and 'off rolling'. The suggestion here is that 'under the radar' exclusionary practices in schools, and their relationship to formal exclusion, must be highlighted and addressed, and this would include exploring how teachers who do appear to be opposed to illegal exclusionary practices (Osfted, 2019b) can be supported.

Continuum thinking

Continuum thinking is not an entirely new concept in the field of inclusion. Describing historical developments in Australia, Chambers and Forlin (2021, p. 6), for example, state that, 'Inclusion is a focus in policy but in reality it remains an option within a continuum of placements' (regular / mainstream to 'special'). The implicit organising concept here is that of degrees of severity or level of need whereas the type of continuum thinking adopted below is premised on the identification of consistent patterns that signify structural inequities. The disproportionality described earlier, whereby students with disabilities or diagnosed conditions are far more likely to be formally excluded from schools, particularly where they are also from specific ethnic or racial groups (Demie, 2019; Sullivan et al., 2020; NME, 2021), constitutes such a consistent pattern and signifies an inequitable social marginalisation that is reflected in education systems. Following Boyle (2019), reliance on legal frameworks serves to reinforce misconceptions by focusing attention upon more extreme instances of marginalisation (in this case, formal and illegal school exclusion), thereby failing to recognise less extreme examples of marginalisation as such. A descriptive continuum would therefore, certainly locate formal exclusion at one pole but would also include incidents that may transgress professional ethical codes but which fall outside of explicit legal codes at the other pole.

Boyle (2019) argues for multiple continuums for the reason given above yet also because it cannot be predicted how any one individual will be affected by the allegedly milder forms of

marginalising actions or behaviours of schools, teachers, and paraprofessionals. The personal testimonies of young people who have experienced formal school exclusion at NME events in England have included accounts of repeated verbal insults from teachers that are understood as intended to lower self-esteem, and constitute racially-motivated scape-goating or bullying. Historically, the practice of mis-labelling the children of Caribbean immigrants to the UK as ‘educationally sub-normal’ suggests an institutionalised (systematic and sanctioned) discriminatory practice with similar affects (British Broadcasting Corporation, 20 May 2021). The parents of ‘off rolled’ children with disabilities have spoken of episodes of peer bullying being poorly handled by schools, or not handled at all, leading to fearful absenteeism, mental health issues, and damage to a previously satisfactory relationship between school and parent such that school transfer appeared sensible to the latter (Done et al., 2021). Research by ACNY (2008, p. 1, 2, 4) found that students were advised to leave school as their academic grades were not good or good enough, and many had not received the support that they were legally entitled to (including remedial services); the ‘warehousing’ of students involved them spending whole days in an auditorium without receiving any instruction. This is why ‘drop out’ can be ‘facilitated’; in reality, it signals ‘push out’ (ACNY, 2008).

Students may react very differently to the marginalising experiences that risk a self-perpetuating negative dynamic (e.g. angry defiance, lowered self-esteem, indifference) (Armstrong, 2018, p.1001) and that increase the likelihood of formal exclusion; and such reactions might not depend on the frequency of exposure to marginalising practices. Hence, both individual variation in responses to these practices and, where recurring, their cumulative affect, must be recognised. It should also be acknowledged that the affective and behavioural fall out for any one student could be just as profound as that induced by formal or illegal exclusion. Consequently, in addition to a *continuum of events* based on legal definitions of school exclusion, a *continuum of experience* based on a much broader range of exclusionary practice is required (Boyle, 2019).

This doubled or twofold continuum points to the complexity of responses to marginalisation and, when experience is considered, it opens up the possibility that experiences beyond the educational sphere can also condition, compound or complicate student responses to less formal or extreme forms of marginalisation. These experiences would include, for example, incidents of social discrimination related to disability, race and ethnicity, and gender. It can be noted in this context that the so-called exclusion-criminality ‘pipeline’ is, in fact, truncated on this account and should begin with a pole of marginalising experiences in order to be

meaningful. The positivistic interpretation of the ‘pipeline’ assumes stopping points or nodes on an inexorable unilinear trajectory given the identification of a strong correlation between formal exclusion and criminality conceived as variables. Instead, the twofold continuum has explanatory value and challenges assumptions of a necessary relation.

This more nuanced version of continuum thinking is likely to invite an objection that there is a marked qualitative difference between formal school exclusion, and the incidents that legally warrant it, and the more informal marginalising practices described here. This is not, however, a concern since the rationale for the twofold continuum is precisely that it focuses attention on the variable affects and contingent outcomes of all forms of exclusionary and discriminatory practice in education. Crucially, it inverts the emphasis evidenced in utilitarian thinking in its refusal of a concept of the greater good which functions as the routine justification for discriminatory and exclusionary practices.

If adaptation is called for, it is not the adaptation of students with disabilities and additional needs but, rather, systemic adaptation required by schools and in classroom practices. As Chambers and Forlin (2021, p. 4) note, utilitarian thinking was evidenced in Western Australia’s Beazley report (1984) when the inclusion of students with disabilities in ‘regular’ classes was made conditional upon their presence not adversely affecting ‘regular’ student learning. However dated such thinking may seem, it persists or, rather, following Deleuze (2004), ‘insists’ in the thinking evidenced in education systems today. There are striking continuities between the language of ‘adaptive behaviour’ found in a Western Australian policy of 1993 (Chambers & Forlin, 2021, p.7) and current practice in schools in England, where failure to conform to normative expectations of behaviour results in the disproportionate exclusion of students with social, emotional and mental health issues (Strand & Fletcher, 2014), disabilities and additional needs (EPI, 2020), and from black Caribbean, mixed white and black Caribbean, and gypsy or Roma traveller backgrounds (DfE, 2019). On this account, the ‘manage-manage/discipline-discipline’ model can be construed, following Foucault (1977) and Deleuze (1992), as a *dispositif*, that is, a spatial and temporal arrangement of elements with the power to organise social identities and structural relations. It is the durability of these relations that resonates with continuum thought (Boyle, 2019) but also the potential for agentic initiatives or ‘lines of flight’ as creative escapes. Hence, for example, the supplementary schools created in England in the 1980s to provide black Caribbean children with some respite from the racial stereotyping experienced in state maintained schools (*British Broadcasting Corporation*, 2021); and the parents of some children in England rejecting demands for docility

or unproblematic compliance (Foucault, 1977) and electing to home educate (Bamsey, 2020) or publicly challenge the excessive use of suspensions and exclusion in schools via the national media (Branley, 2020).

Off-rolling and informal expulsions

The twofold continuum has a further advantage in that it becomes much harder to neglect the discriminatory and marginalising practices that culminate in ‘informal expulsions’ in Australia (Victorian Ombudsman, 2017) or ‘off rolling’ in England. What is so frequently described by parents and students is an insidious process that may, in fact, lead to ostensibly legitimate outcomes such as a legal school transfer or, in other national contexts, to allegedly voluntary withdrawal from school education. Only ‘push out’ conveys both student experience and outcome, whilst ‘informal expulsions’ and ‘off rolling’ highlight the issue of legality rather than the exclusionary processes and practices at play and how they are experienced by children and parents.

Conclusions

Continuum thinking, as discussed by Boyle (2019), generates a useful conceptual framework for the analysis of exclusionary practices (legal and otherwise) in education systems globally since such thinking problematises reliance on a single descriptive continuum and which typically fails to acknowledge varied and contingent individualised experiences and responses. The development of multiple continuums related to exclusionary practices discourages tendencies to view continuums (such as the school exclusion to criminality ‘pipeline’) as inevitable empirical realities and, instead, focuses attention on the practices of, for example, stereotyping, scapegoating and neglect that, in turn, reflect negative social and professional discourses. The twofold continuum developed in this paper thus incorporates both the *experiential* and the *structural* in order to acknowledge that reactions to discriminatory and exclusionary practices can differ between individuals whilst recognising patterns that are indicative of systemic inequities. It is important to avoid reproducing the reduction of children to prescribed identifying characteristics, attributes, and categories based on disability, race or ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender.

Continuum thinking also, crucially, permits a shift in focus away from properties of the child conceived as deficits or behavioural pathologies, and as occurs in medicalised discourse, resisting recurrent and sedimented features of education systems and school cultures that legitimise exclusionary practice. Adherence to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) at international policy level, accompanied by domestic legislation related to inclusion, has given rise to varied exclusionary practices and strategies for ‘gaming’ regulations designed to protect children and their right to education. In England, government policy to ‘professionalise’ the alternative provision sector, whereby children and young people can be isolated from their mainstream peers and ‘remediated’ (IntegratEd, 2020), officially sanctions their segregation and perpetuates the utilitarian thinking described above. As Chambers and Forlin (2020, p.6) suggest, specialist units can function as repositories for those deemed beyond remediation in order to preserve ‘regular’ school cultures characterised by performativity and a questionable utilitarianism.

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