

## Producing policy evidence: Cases of big and little 'e' exclusion<sup>1</sup>

### Why does it matter?

In Australia, all states and territories have their own legislation and associated policies guiding the use of suspensions, exclusions and expulsions. Research suggests that the way in which such policies are framed influence what schools do in relation to exclusionary practices. Thus, ensuring that policies are informed through research is critical in supporting education systems to:

- Keep students engaged in schooling
- Guide schools on how to support students
- Support the health, wellbeing and attainment of students
- Provide alternatives to suspension and expulsion
- Avoid disproportionately punishing students

### What does the research tell us?

It seems uncontentious that policy development should be informed by evidence, and that researchers should be engaged to assess the available evidence. In this seminar, Professor Pat Thomson and Professor Martin Mills will tell the story of a Rapid Evidence Review about school exclusion, a task intended to inform a "root and branch" policy review. They use the project brief and the changing texts that they wrote to show that, while they began reviewing literature with a generous definition of exclusion, their focus progressively narrowed to encompass only the literatures that fitted with the existing policy definition of exclusion.

They argue:

- there is a need to focus on Exclusion (policy) eliminated insights about exclusion (research),
- there is a particular need to consider how wider social relations and school administration, curriculum and pedagogy are implicated,
- the Rapid Evidence Review was by, and through, definition a practice which limited at the very outset what evidence was included, and this in turn limited possibilities for policy change.

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We then turn to South Australian regulations about exclusion and ask whether the double 'e' exclusion argument also applies, and if so, what does this mean for policy, practice and research?



**Pat Thomson** is Professor of Education at The University of Nottingham, a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences (UK) and Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. She is an Adjunct member of the Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion, University of South Australia. Her research is primarily focused on social justice pedagogies, with a particular focus on the arts in schools, alternative education provision and education policy. She has published 25 books, including, *School scandals: Blowing the whistle on the corruption of our education system* (2020, Policy Press). More details available [here](#).



**Martin Mills** is a Research Professor in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at QUT. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia and a former President of the Australian Association for Research in Education. He has held multiple ARC research grants, including an ARC Future Fellowship (2012-2016). His research focuses on social justice issues in education, and areas of interest include: teachers' work and pedagogical practice, alternative education, and gender and education. He is an editor in chief of *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*. More details available [here](#).

### Further reading

IFF Research Ltd, Mills, M. & Thomson, P. (2018). *Investigative Research into Alternative Education Research Report*. London: DfE. Available [here](#)

Mills, M., Riddell, S., & Hjörne, E. (2015). After exclusion what? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(6), 561–567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.961674>

Pennacchia, J., Thomson, P., McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2016) Editors Special Issue Alternative programmes, alternative schools and social justice, *Critical Studies in Education*, 57(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2015.1132972>

Thomson, P., & Pennacchia, J. (2016) Hugs and behaviour points: Alternative education and the regulation of 'excluded' youth, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 20(6), 622-640, DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2015.1102340](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2015.1102340)

Timpson, E. (2019) *Timpson Review of School Exclusion*, London, DfE. Available [here](#).

### The Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion

The Centre for Educational and Social Inclusion (CESI) is based at the University of South Australia. Educational inclusion is a global issue. The impact of social circumstances on access to education and quality of education is profound. The Centre for Educational and Social Inclusion undertakes research to advance an understanding of the barriers and enablers to successful educational inclusion. For further information please see the CESI [website](#).