

In what ways does policy effect practice?
The impact of policy on the ability of general
classroom teachers to teach students with Autism
Spectrum Disorder in New South Wales.

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Abstract

This research aimed to study inclusive practices undertaken by general classroom teachers in NSW with the aim to assess classroom teacher familiarity with inclusive policies nationally and internationally. Policies that apply to current teacher practice were analysed including the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards of Education 2005. The study focused on classroom teacher knowledge of policy texts and the effect this has on teaching students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the general education setting. Overall aims of this research included determining classroom teacher understanding of relevant inclusive policy texts nationally and internationally, and analysing classroom teacher attitudes and methods of meeting learning needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder or students who present with social, communication and behavioural needs, in light of relevant policies.

Four [4] schools were used within the sample of this research. General classroom teachers within each school undertook an Online Survey. Fifty-eight [58] general classroom teachers completed the Online Survey supplying information regarding personal training, professional experience, knowledge and teaching practice. Six [6] interviews were executed with willing staff members from the chosen schools. The interviews provided a further depth of discussion in order to achieve the aims of this research.

Results of this research showed the need for a deeper understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder amongst classroom teachers as well as a need for further professional development for classroom teachers to meet the needs of this student population. The research found that classroom teachers must be encouraged to engage with educational policy freely and to build greater understanding and knowledge of policy within multiple contexts. Great differences were found between education systems and classroom teacher knowledge of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards of Education 2005.

This research exposed future directions for research in understanding the reasons for classroom teacher disengagement with policy and the relationship this has with the professional development that classroom teachers do and should take part in.

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'Effective teachers are our most important resource for supporting high quality educational outcomes of every student, including those with disability'.

- *NSW Department of Education and Communities (2012, p. 13)*

This research sought to understand the degree to which policy is understood by classroom teachers and is evident in classroom teaching practice. The research studied inclusive practices by general classroom teachers in New South Wales (NSW). The aim of this research was to assess classroom teacher familiarity with inclusive policies nationally and internationally and how these apply to their practice in government and non-government primary school settings. The research focused on current policies that apply to classroom teaching practice including the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Disability Standards of Education 2005*. Classroom teacher understanding of these policy texts was analysed in reference to teaching students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the general education setting.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research was to understand the extent to which classroom teachers hold appropriate knowledge and awareness of relevant inclusive policies and the ways in which this is applied to their teaching of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the general education setting.

Specifically, this research aimed to:

- Determine classroom teacher understanding of inclusion and international inclusive policy, theoretically and in practice

- Consider classroom teacher understanding of current NSW inclusive policy texts including the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)* and the Commonwealth *Disability Standards of Education 2005 (the Standards)*
- Identify any existing correlation between pre-service teacher training and knowledge regarding the DDA and the Standards
- Identify any existing correlation between on-going professional development and knowledge regarding the DDA and the Standards
- Compare similarities and differences between classroom teacher knowledge and practice from government schools and non-government schools
- Understand classroom teacher perceptions and attitudes of ASD and teaching students with ASD in the general education setting
- Analyse classroom teacher methods of meeting the needs of students with ASD in light of the DDA and the Standards
- Provide insight and implications for future research and suggestions for education providers

Abbreviations

ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics

AINSW – Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales

APA – American Psychological Association

ASD – Autism Spectrum Disorder

BOSTES – Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards

DDA – Disability Discrimination Act

DEC- Department of Education and Communities

DSM-IV-TR – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision

DSM-IV – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition

DSM-5 – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fifth Edition

EFA – Education For All

ESES – Every Student Every School

MSSD – More Support for Students with Disabilities

NCCDSSD – National Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability

NSW – New South Wales

PDD – Pervasive Developmental Disorder subgroups

Standards – The Disability Standards for Education

Definitions

Data collection within this study was gained using the language 'ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs'. The purpose of this is to ensure participants were aware of the student needs under examination, that is, students that may or may not have a formal diagnosis of ASD. Current education policy has a focus not on diagnosis but on the learning needs of a student. Therefore, to alleviate potential confusion, this language was used to further clarify the specific students under discussion.

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Research Significance

The *Report on the Review of Disability Standards of Education 2005* found that classroom teacher awareness of the Standards was lacking and inadequate (DEEWR, 2012a). Now, more than ever, teachers must be aware of the Standards due to the increasing number of students with ASD in NSW classrooms. Research (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Huws & Jones, 2011; Linton, Germundsson, Heimann & Danermark, 2013; Morrier, Hess & Heflin, 2011; Segall & Campbell, 2012) found that classroom teachers lack knowledge on how to meet the needs of students with ASD and that this can have a negative effect on educational outcomes. Poor educational outcomes for students with ASD are further evident in the Australian Bureau of Statistics data that found 81% of school leavers with ASD had not completed a post-school qualification which is a significantly higher rate than other school leavers with a different disability (52%) or no disability (41%) (ABS, 2014). These findings will be discussed further.

Classroom Teacher Knowledge

The Australian Government stated that classroom teachers were lacking awareness and had minimal understanding of the meaning and purpose of the Standards (DEEWR, 2012a). As a result of this, the NSW Department of Education and Communities [DEC] committed itself to equipping classroom teachers with training to build their knowledge of the Standards. This knowledge is vital, particularly within the current Australian context of educational requirements. As of 2015, it is an annual requirement for Australian schools to participate in the National Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability [NCCDSSD] (DET, 2014a). The NCCDSSD requires classroom teachers to have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and obligations to students under the DDA and the Standards and also to provide data about programs for students with a disability and additional learning needs in their classroom. This data is to be provided to the Australian Government via the school principal (DET, 2014a). Specifically, classroom teachers must use their *informed judgment* to determine which students are being given reasonable adjustments, the level of adjustment that student is provided with and the broad category of disability under which each student best fits (DET, 2014a; ESA, 2014). The NCCDSSD reinforces the existing obligations that schools and classroom teachers have under DDA and the Standards. This requires dependence on classroom teachers

understanding the DDA and the Standards in order to make informed judgments, however, is problematic if teachers are uninformed and unskilled in the use of these policy texts, as this lack of knowledge will undoubtedly affect the context of practice.

Knowledge of and training in the DDA and the Standards is crucial in order to build classroom teacher knowledge of and positive attitudes toward teaching students with ASD in the general education setting. Segall and Campbell (2012) found that classroom teachers had much lower levels of knowledge, lower awareness of practice and lower use of strategies to teach students with ASD compared to special education teachers or school counselors. This is expected but should not be the accepted reality as classroom teachers have the most contact with and are therefore vital to the educational outcomes of students with ASD and additional needs. The NSW government states that the most significant contributor to the education outcomes of students is the general classroom teacher (NSW DEC, 2012).

Since inclusive practices have increased, there is an urgent need to examine classroom teachers' perceptions of students with ASD (Frederickson, Jones & Lang, 2010; Linton et al., 2013). Research (Huws & Jones, 2011; Linton et al., 2013; Segall & Campbell, 2012) stated that classroom teachers demonstrated a lack of knowledge and endorsed inaccurate beliefs, holding serious misconceptions regarding ASD. Such findings are disconcerting as the perceptions and understanding of ASD held by classroom teachers affect the expectations and attainment of educational outcomes (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Emam & Farrell, 2009; Linton et al., 2013). To ensure high quality education and outcomes, classroom teachers must possess considerable knowledge about their students ASD and know the specific practice and strategies to facilitate inclusion for this student (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Morrier et al., 2011; Segall & Campbell, 2012). This increase in knowledge can only occur through classroom teacher training (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Huws & Jones, 2011; Jordan, 2005; Linton et al., 2013; Morrier et al., 2011).

Segall and Campbell (2012) call for an adaptation in classroom teacher training. Historically, early teacher training discussed nothing on inclusion of students with a disability as it was assumed these students would be segregated from general education classrooms (Linton et al., 2013). Moreover, the 'Asperger's Disorder' diagnosis was first introduced in the 1980s and was formally defined in 1994 so classroom teachers who trained prior to this may lack familiarity with this information (APA, 1994; Linton et al., 2013; Segall & Campbell, 2012; Wing, 1981).

The NSW government believes that 'effective teachers are our most important resource for supporting high quality educational outcomes for every student, including those with disability' (NSW

DEC, 2012, p.13). Whilst educational policy in NSW has been evaluated in literature, minimal research has focused on classroom teacher knowledge of policy and policy texts and how this knowledge transpires in the context of practice. In fact, this researcher has found no research on classroom teacher awareness of inclusive policies and how these affect practice in teaching students with ASD in NSW classrooms. This study will therefore address this area of research.

Autism in Australia

This research is significant due to the increasing numbers of students with disability in NSW schools and the concerning statistics regarding entry of students with ASD into the post-school workforce. The prevalence of students with ASD has steadily increased over the past decade both nationally and internationally (ABS, 2014; BOSTES NSW, 2014; Kulage, Smaldon & Cohn, 2014). This increase has included an increase in students receiving the ASD diagnosis as well increased awareness of ASD (Keane, Aldridge, Costley & Clark, 2012; Kulage et al., 2014; Liu, King & Bearman, 2010). Classroom teachers in NSW must now expect to teach a student with ASD at many points throughout their career. Teaching this student population is challenging for a classroom teacher due to the substantial heterogeneity of symptom presentation and array of associated behaviours amongst students with ASD (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Jordan, 2005; Morrier et al., 2011; Segall & Campbell, 2012). Nevertheless, classroom teachers must accept the responsibility of the education of these students within their classroom under national law.

Inclusive theories have permeated education so much so that a noticeable increase of students with ASD requiring low levels of support – also previously known as students with Asperger's Disorder – are being taught in general education settings, rather than in segregated environments (Keane et al., 2012; Segall & Campbell, 2012). The term 'Asperger's Disorder' was introduced to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV)* in 1994. Since this time, there has been great debate as to whether it is indeed a stand-alone condition, or if it a form of high-functioning Autism (Kite, Gullifer & Tyson, 2013; Young & Rodi, 2014). The convergence of ASD diagnostic categories in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition [DSM-5]* has essentially removed the term Asperger's disorder from official diagnostic criteria (Kite et al., 2013; Wing, Gould & Gillberg, 2011).

The DSM-5 was published in 2013 after a fourteen-year revision process. The greatest change from its predecessor was that the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth*

Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) pervasive developmental disorder subgroups (PDD) were combined. The PDD subgroups – Autism Disorder, Asperger's Disorder and PDD-NOS – were combined into one broad diagnosis titled 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' (Kulage et al., 2014; APA, 2013). With the new umbrella term of Autism Spectrum Disorder came the introduction of the severity scale divided into three levels with level 1 requiring support, level 2 requiring substantial support and level 3 requiring very substantial support (Kite et al., 2013; Weitlauf, Gotham, Vehorn & Warren, 2014). Research (Gibbs, Aldridge, Chandler, Witzlsperger, Smith, & Gibbs, 2012; Mandy, Charman & Skuse, D, 2012; McPartland, Reichow & Volkmar, 2012) concedes that the new criteria under DSM-5 have high specificity at the cost of low sensitivity. For example, Mandy and colleagues (2012) found that individuals with high-functioning forms of Autism, such as the previous Asperger's Disorder, did not meet criteria in the social/communication domain. Further literature (Gibbs et al., 2012; McPartland et al., 2012; Young & Rodi, 2014) discovered similar findings as DSM-5 includes only two main behaviour categories – Social Communication and Interaction; and Restrictive, Repetitive Behaviour. Compared to the 2027 possible combinations of criteria under DSM-IV-TR, there is now only 11 possible combinations of criteria under DSM-5 which results in significantly fewer ways to reach a diagnosis for a student (Kulage et al., 2014; McPartland et al., 2012). Kulage and colleagues (2014) respond to this change in criteria and diagnosis by recommending policy makers consider alternatives to the DSM-5 criteria thresholds for students to receive funded services and support, particularly for individuals who previously would have met the criteria under DSM-IV-TR. Regardless of diagnosis and funding, classroom teachers can make a marked difference in the educational experiences of a student with ASD as long as they are equipped to do so.

Increasing numbers of students with ASD in NSW schools and changes to the diagnosis of such students is significant to this study. General classroom teachers may teach a student with ASD or a student without any formal diagnosis but with clear social, communication and behavioural needs. Of arguably greater significance is the statistics surrounding these students after finishing school. The Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] reported that in 2012, of people with ASD who had finished school, 81% had not completed a post-school qualification. This is well above the average rate of the rest of the population with a disability and people with no disability. Furthermore, only 42% of people with ASD participated in the labour force in 2012, compared with 53% labour force participation rate for people with disabilities and 83% rate for people without disabilities (ABS, 2014). These statistics have great implication for the economic security of people with ASD and their contribution to their community. With the hope that 'all young Australians become successful learners, confident and

creative individuals and active and informed citizens' (MCEETYA, 2008, p.7), NSW schools and classroom teachers have a key role in addressing these unfavourable statistics.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed further indicates the significance for this research. Firstly, policy and what policy is will be examined. International policy is then discussed with references to the historical underpinnings of Australian policy and legislation. Policy within the Australian context, and more specifically, the New South Wales context is synthesised. Literature on policy and its relationship to classroom teacher practice is analysed to prepare the course for this research investigation.

Policy

“...Text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended”
(Ball, 1994, p.10).

Policy is often not clearly defined in educational research (Ball, 1993). This is vexing, however unsurprising. Ball (1994) argues that a single explanation of policy is insufficient to deal with the complexities of policy analysis and thus, attempts to define and use the term ‘policy’ can be misleading. To avoid this, it is imperative for this research to assume an approach to policy in this study. At the risk of overgeneralising in a single definition of what policy is, this paper will adopt the view of Stephen J. Ball who theorises policy as a *process* rather than an end product (Ball, 1994). The approach this research study undertakes is that of *policy as a cycle*.

Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) proposed a continuous policy cycle identifying three policy contexts. Firstly, the context of influence, identifies where policy is initiated, established and where policy discourses are constructed (Bowe et al., 1992). Ball (1990) identifies this influence as operational statements of values and prescriptive intent. Influence is often related to the articulation of narrow interests yet are articulated in the language of popular commonsense and general political reason (Bowe et al., 1992). Therefore, policy texts *represent* policy influence, which leads to the second context, the context of policy text production. Policy is not finished at the legislative moment rather it evolves into texts, or Acts. These texts represent legislation and become a working document for stakeholders to use to implement the legislation (Bowe et al., 1992). An Act – the text – is not capable of only one interpretation as various elements may empower individuals in different ways depending on context, concerns and restrictions (Bowe et al., 1992). This involves the third context, the context of practice. This context is the setting in which policy is referred to and within

which it is addressed. In practice policy is received, interpreted, recreated and implemented (Bowe et al., 1992). The reality of policy in practice depends on compromises and accommodations and therefore, policy writers cannot necessarily control the meaning of policy texts as parts may be rejected, exemplified or misunderstood in practice (Bowe et al., 1992).

This conceptualisation of the policy process recognises the plurality of contexts. The three policy contexts were expanded by Ball (1994) to include the *context of outcomes* and the *context of political strategy*. The *context of outcomes* highlights the impact of policies on existing inequalities in society and the *context of political strategy* identifies strategies to tackle those inequalities (Ball, 1994). These extended policy contexts are concerned with political struggle against unjust oppression and stimulate concern over power relations and social justice in a given society (Taylor, 1997).

This approach highlights the complex nature of policy. It asserts that policy is found everywhere in education (Ozga, 2000). Ozga (2000) accepts the engagement with contexts of policy yet warns against missing 'the big picture'. While it is appropriate to delineate policy to inform understanding, it is also important to appreciate policy as an ensemble with collections of related policy as discourses (Ball, 1993).

Adopted from the work of Foucault, Ball (1993) argues that society operates in a variety of discordant, incoherent and contradictory discourses. Discourse is the inter-relationship between power and knowledge and distinguishes what is said, thought, who may speak, when they may speak and under what authority (Ball, 1990). In the context of practice within the policy cycle, possibilities for meaning are pre-empted through social and institutional positions from which a discourse comes, constructing certain possibilities for thought (Ball, 1990). Ball states that 'we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies' (Ball, 1993, p. 14). Policies do not exist in a vacuum but reflect underlying ideologies and assumptions in society (Armstrong, Belmont & Verillon, 2000). Classroom teachers think about, perceive and act towards policy in particular ways in local circumstances – they are policy subjects (Ball, Maguire, Braun & Hoskins, 2011). In this research on classroom teacher practice, this paper holds to a 'policy as discourse' conceptualisation as it pays greater attention to the possible constraint of classroom teachers and classroom teacher practice. Much more can be said about discourse and the predominant discourses creating the discursive framework of set policies, however due to the constraints of this paper these will not be explored. It is important to note, however, that the predominant discourses surrounding Disability policy are inequality and power relations (Liasidou, 2008).

As stated, this research paper will approach policy as a cycle and will adopt the various contexts in its discussion. This research is focused on the policy texts DDA and the Standards. Ball and colleagues (2011) refer to these as exhortative or developmental policies as they enable an active policy subject – the classroom teacher – to bring judgment and originality to bear upon the policy process. These more writerly policies are productions rather than products in that the classroom teacher may act as a producer within the policy process (Ball et al., 2011). Whilst traditionally, classroom teachers are not engaged in policy production, Gale and Densmore (2003) make the case for classroom teachers as policy producers. Approaching policy as a process contends that policy influence, policy production, practice, policy effects and outcomes are not completely discrete but are interconnected in a cycle of pervading meaning and power relations. This research sought to find if and how classroom teachers in NSW enter into this policy cycle. This will be discussed later in this paper.

International Policy and the Australian context

At the end of WWII and with the creation of the United Nations [UN], the world community vowed to never allow such atrocities as those in WWII to occur again (UN, 2012). Consequently, world leaders and the UN Charter sought to guarantee the rights of every individual everywhere in the world (UN, 2012). At this time, persons with a disability were viewed under a welfare perspective in which the focus was for prevention and rehabilitation (Peters, 2007). Children with a disability were thought to be uneducable, and so educational authorities felt justified in avoiding responsibility for the education of these children (Runswick-Cole, 2011). As these children were deemed incapable of learning, they were not accepted into the Australian public education system. It was not until the 1960s that educational segregation was debated under the civil rights movement (Hodkinson, 2010). The questioning of the current policies heralded the birth of an integrated education system and, in the 1970s, Australian state governments accepted the full responsibility for the education of all Australian children, including those with a disability (Foreman, 2008; Hodkinson, 2010).

The *Warnock Report* (1978) marked a key policy shift internationally. This UK Report advocated that categories of educational handicap be replaced by the identification of individual educational needs (Warnock Committee, 1978). The abolishment of disability categories in education systems promoted international action. Based off the recommendations of the *Warnock Report*, the 1981

Education Act promoted policy change and acted as the measure on how to implement the Warnock Report (Hannon, 2008). The *1981 Education Act* made a major contribution to raising the status of parents in the process of assessment and intervention for their child with special education needs (Hannon, 2008).

With the arrival of the *Warnock Report* and the *1981 Education Act*, the drift toward inclusion was underway (Hodkinson, 2010). The 1980s saw the *International Year of Disabled Persons* and the *Sundberg Declaration* which both recognised the positive attributes of people with disabilities, enabling them to take the same opportunities as people without disabilities than they ever had previously (Foreman, 2008; Peters, 2007). In 1982, the *World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons* represented the first worldwide international long-term policy in relation to people with disabilities (UN, 1983). In the most recent review of this document, an obvious shift is evident in that the focus has moved away from the individual with the disability and toward systematic targets such as socioeconomic factors and equity factors (UN, 2008).

In the 1990s the *Salamanca Statement* set the policy agenda for inclusive education on a global basis, affirming the use of 'inclusion' rather than 'integration' as global descriptors (Peters, 2007). It asserts that *all* children have unique abilities, interests and learning needs (UNESCO, 1994). This statement has been used as a basis for policy development in Australia (Foreman, 2008; UNESCO, 1994). The *Education For All [EFA] Framework for Action* further emphasised that inclusive education was a key strategy and fundamental philosophy to ensuring the basic human needs of all (Peters, 2007). The *EFA Framework for Action* established goals and priority areas which included identifying and enriching students with special needs through innovative measures and focusing on funding for education to improve learning conditions (UNESCO, 2002).

With the new century came the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]*. This act saw a considerable increase in the amount of students with a disability educated in regular schools and classrooms (Dempsey, 2008). Notably, the *IDEA* ensured individualised education programs be provided for students and that appropriate public education be provided to all students with a disability in the least restrictive environment (Dempsey, 2008, Foreman, 2008). This act had a great influence on the Australian policy and classroom teachers as students with disabilities were now to be placed in the least restrictive environment, that is, within a setting as close to the regular classroom as appropriate for that individual child (Dempsey, 2008; Graham, 2013).

'The argument over whether inclusion works has ended' (Dempsey, 2008, p. 59). The historical development of international policy has realised the inclusive concept of social equity in that schools

around the world must provide for the learning needs of all students (Foreman, 2008; UNESCO, 1994). Today, there exists a current debate over the efficacy of this inclusion ideal. Whilst inclusion has been embraced globally, an argument in literature states that barriers to effective inclusion are located within current state and national governments, policy initiatives and established practice that render inclusive education as a mere aspiration (Graham, 2013; Hodgkinson, 2012). Crawford (2009) supports this arguing that inclusive education is an elusive ideal rather than a normative understanding in schools today. Due to the focus and restrictive nature of this research, this debate will not be explored however an awareness of this contention is noteworthy.

The shift toward inclusive practices within Australian and NSW classrooms has occurred for many years, albeit slowly (Arthur-Kelly, Sutherland, Lyons, Macfarlane & Forman, 2013). Australia followed international trends, being heavily influenced by the *IDEA* from the US and the *Warnock Report* from the UK particularly (Graham, 2013).

Australian School Education

Australia has been strongly influenced by international policy and has adopted the changed views toward disability evident in the historical underpinnings of inclusion (Dempsey, 2008; Graham, 2013). The key underpinnings of education for students with a disability in Australia is found in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* and evident in the policies of focus in this research, the *DDA* and the *Standards*.

Education in Australia is predominantly a state or territory responsibility (Stephenson, Carter & O'Neill, 2013). Each Australian State and Territory manages education through providing regulations and funding through state or territory education departments (Stephenson et al., 2013). The current implementation of the Australian Curriculum required the establishment of state and federal agreements on a national curriculum, accreditation and national assessment and reporting procedures (AITSL, 2012; Drabsch, 2013). The Australian Curriculum will be fully implemented by 2016 where all students, including those with a disability, will be expected to meet nationwide educational outcomes (NSW DEC, 2012).

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* [MDEGYA] states that all Australian governments and school sectors must 'Provide all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location'

and that this schooling must 'Reduce the effect of other sources of disadvantage, such as disability, homelessness, refugee status and remoteness' (MCEETYA, 2008, p 7). The DDA and the Standards supports these goals.

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 – (DDA)

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* [DDA] emerged two years after the *Salamanca Statement*. As discussed, the Salamanca Statement affirmed the use of 'inclusion' rather than 'integration' as a global descriptor (Peters, 2007; Vislie, 2003). The statement asserted that children have unique abilities and learning needs that expand from physical and intellectual disabilities to social and emotional learning needs (Peters, 2007). The Salamanca Statement, which reinforced regular school availability as a first option for all students, has been the base for the development of Australian policy evident in the DDA.

The DDA ensures that educational services are provided to Australian students with a disability (NSW DEC, 2011). According to the DDA, disability may include traditional impairments that are physical or intellectual in nature as well as disorders affecting a persons ability to learn, think, process, perceive and make appropriate judgments (NSWDEC, 2011). It acknowledges disability that previously, presently or may exist in the future.

The objectives of the DDA are to:

- Eliminate discrimination against persons on the ground of disability
- Ensure that persons with a disability have the same rights to equality before the law as other members of the community
- Promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that persons with a disability have the same fundamental rights as other community members (NSW DEC, 2011).

The DDA led to the development of the Standards.

Disability Standards for Education 2005 – (the Standards)

The *Disability Standards of Education* [the Standards] provide a framework to ensure that a student with a disability has access to and can participate in education on the same basis as any other student (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). The Standards were developed by representatives from state and territory governments, disability sector groups, non-government education providers and universities to demonstrate the 'Australian Government's ongoing commitment to overcoming discrimination against people with disability' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006, p. iii). The Standards

address enrolment; participation; curriculum development, accreditation and delivery; student support services; and elimination of harassment and victimization. Overall, the Standards have ensured that students with a disability are supported to access the learning experiences that their non-disable peers access (NSW DEC, 2012).

The DDA and Standards will be discussed further in association with this research results and discussion.

New South Wales policy and implementation

The *DDA*, *Standards* and *Melbourne Declaration* exert influence over all NSW education providers which includes non-government and government schools. The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales (AISNSW) coordinates the non-government primary school sector of NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Communities coordinates the government primary school sector.

The AISNSW enrolled 186,730 students in 2013 equating to 16.1% of students across NSW (AISNSW, 2014). Across Australia, 13,479 students with a disability were enrolled in non-government schools (ISCA, 2014). The AISNSW works with the ISCA to address the needs of students with a disability. Special education consultants work within NSW non-government schools that enroll students with a disability (AISNSW, 2015). Information regarding the structure of learning support services in non-government schools was perplexing in this study. This researcher argues that the reason for this is due to varying autonomy and governance of the many non-government schools within NSW. Nevertheless, the AISNSW does acknowledge its partnership with NSW DEC and compliance with NSW Government initiatives (AISNSW, 2014). Furthermore, in the 2014 Annual Report (2014), AISNSW acknowledges responsibilities under the DDA and the Standards as well as its commitment to the NCCDSSD.

The NSW Department of Education and Communities [DEC] is one of the largest public education and training systems in the world and has committed itself to delivering high quality education and training services. In 2012, there were more than 740,000 students in NSW public schools and of these, 90,000 students had a disability or additional learning need (Australian Government DET, 2014b; NSW DEC, 2012). This is a large increase in students requiring additional

support from previous years (NSW DEC, 2012). A similar increase is also evident in non-government schools (AISNSW, 2014; ISCA, 2014).

Programs and strategies have been in place to support students with a disability in NSW government schools. The Learning Assistance Program [LAP] established in 2004 saw the implementation of the Support Teacher Learning Assistance [STLA] role in classrooms (NSW Government, 2010). The STLA assisted the classroom teacher to provide effective support to students and was considered the backbone of LAP. A major issue regarding this role, however, was that a large number of STLA staff were untrained in special education (NSW DET, 2006). Nevertheless, the LAP continued beyond 2009 coinciding with state plans and strategies including the *Disability Action Plan 2011-2015*, the *NSW 2012 Plan* and the *National Disability Strategy 2010-2020*. These documents affirm that NSW government seeks to 'improve education and learning outcomes for all students' (NSW Government, 2013, p. 1) and desires to build an 'inclusive high quality education system that is responsive to student needs' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p. 53).

Despite LAP, state plans and strategies, concerns still remained over limitations in the education of students with a disability. Such concerns included:

- The seemingly 'one-size-fits-all' approach to supporting students with disability. This is problematic as many students with similar types of disabilities have vastly different learning needs.
- Classroom teachers feeling increasingly challenged and overwhelmed when teaching students with additional learning needs, especially when these students do not meet disability criteria for targeted services
- The limited and varying expertise of classroom teachers to understand and support diverse learning needs in the classroom
- The complex and convoluted support services as reported by classroom teachers

(NSW DEC, 2012).

In 2012, the Australian Government created the *National Partnership – More Support for Students with Disabilities* [MSSWD] with intent to build the capacity and capabilities of schools and classroom teachers to support and meet the additional needs of students with a disability (NSW DEC, 2012). The Australian Government provided \$300 million of additional funding to government and non-government education authorities for the 2012, 2013 and 2014 school years (DET, 2014b). In NSW government schools, the Learning and Support Framework prompted from the National Partnership: MSSWD was implemented through the reform strategy known as *Every Student Every School*.

Every Student Every School [ESES] is the current learning and support framework to improve learning and support for students with a disability in the NSW public school system (Australian Government Department of Education, 2013). ESES seeks to provide high quality learning and support to every Australian student through the delivery of effective resources that assist teachers in making local decisions that best assist their students (NSW DEC, 2012). To achieve this, the NSW Government constructed five areas of interrelated activity:

1. Professional learning for skilled and knowledgeable teachers
2. Support for students with disability in regular classrooms
3. Special schools as centres of expertise
4. Understanding and assessing the learning and support needs.
5. Access to information and expert support (NSW DEC, 2012).

In the formulation of ESES it was found that the Standards are a specific priority area for increased teacher professional development (NSW DEC, 2012). As previously stated, the *Report on the Review of Disability Standards of Education 2005* found that general awareness of the Standards across education sectors was extremely low, patchy and that classroom teachers had 'little understanding of what the Standards mean' (DEEWR, 2012a, p. 5). This unfamiliarity with the Standards is not an isolated drawback. Research (Aspland, Datta & Talukdar, 2012; Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Linton et al., 2013; Morrier et al., 2011) calls attention to an overarching issue of misalignment between policies in general and classroom teacher practice.

Policy in the context of practice

Every Australian student has the legal right to learn. Therefore, the classroom teacher has the legal *responsibility* to provide a quality and equitable educational experience for *all* students in accordance with policy (Dempsey, 2008). To fulfill this legal responsibility, classroom teacher must be familiar with policy, the contexts of policy and the way they as a classroom teacher, engage with policy. Literature ascertains a serious disengagement of classroom teachers with policy (Aspland et al., 2012; Gale & Densmore, 2003). This disengagement leads to greater misalignment between the contexts of policy (Ball, 1994). This incongruity is due to several factors. Misunderstood language, extemporary implementation and inadequate training are three key elements contributing to this policy and practice incongruity.

Policy texts and language

As discussed, the *Report on the Review of Disability Standards of Education 2005* found that teachers had unsatisfactory knowledge of the Standards. In her research, Graham (2013) discovered that classroom teachers and principals also lacked knowledge regarding the DDA. Whitburn (2015) argues that this lack of knowledge is due to linguistic impasses. The Standards and DDA encompass convoluted terms and language and thus can be interpreted in ways that are adverse to the inclusion of students with a disability (Graham, 2013; Whitburn, 2015). Russell and Bray (2013) argue that this policy incoherence has strained the capacity of classroom teachers to coordinate and implement inclusive programs. Lawson and colleagues (2013) believe that this difficulty is inevitable. Government policy is formed on a general level based on broad data and patterns and so understanding conceptualisations from general government policy to specific local practice in schools is a great challenge (Boyask, Carter, Lawson & Waite, 2009; Lawson, Boyask & Waite, 2013). Policy is not easily translated to specific examples and as a result, policy does not always make the difference it intends (Bowe et al., 1992; Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Lawson et al., 2013). As discussed previously, Bowe and colleagues (1992) confer that policy texts are not simply received and implemented but are subject to interpretation and are recreated.

Nevertheless, it is essential for classroom teachers to understand the nature of significant policy texts (Hardy & Woodcock, 2014). The classroom teacher's interpretation of a policy will always determine whether he or she engages with or resists the policy in the context of practice (Ball, 1994; Burch, Theoharis & Rauscher, 2010; Russell & Bray, 2013; Seashore Louis, Febey & Schroeder, 2005). Policy contains 'worthy ideals that are not always matched in practice' (Graham, 2013, p. 6). Policy writers cannot control the meaning of policy texts because the interpretation of these is influenced by personal histories, values, experiences, purposes and vested interests (Ball, 2004; Bowe et al., 1992; Gale & Densmore, 2003).

Effort must therefore be made to comprehend and discern policy language in order to ensure successful, albeit varied, implementation. This is best achieved through engaging the classroom teachers in all contexts of the policy cycle and empowering them to be policy producers (Bowe et al., 1992; Ball, 1994, Gale & Densore, 2003). This will be further discussed.

Implementation of policy

Upon comprehension of policy within its various contexts, classroom teachers must then implement action within the classroom. The way in which this is done varies between Australian states and territories (Dempsey, 2002). Moreover, this varies from school to school and classroom to classroom. To implement a single policy, the process occurs in which classroom teachers interpret that policy text, make sense of the policy demands, appropriate the demands within their own context and then implement change (Russell & Bray, 2013; Seashore Louis et al., 2005). McBride (2013) affirms that valid policies exist yet identifies a lacking awareness of how these are implemented and the degree to which the practices are having the desired effect. Researchers (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Cumming, Dickson & Webster, 2013; Ozga, 1990) have found that practice of inclusive policy was *ad hoc* from classroom to classroom and that classroom teachers require processes through which to review and respond to policy. Bourke (2010) identifies the urgent need to review inclusive policy in terms of how it influences actual practice. While the philosophical ideal of inclusion may serve the cause of justice and equity, at the practice level, policies of inclusion may not (McMenamin, 2013). This, again, highlights a disruption in the policy cycle, particularly in the link between the context of policy text production and the context of practice, and yet the other contexts of the process will undoubtedly be impacted (Bowe et al., 1992). Classroom teachers are responsible for implementing policy and so must be provided specific direction on implementation procedures (Scott, Hauerwas & Brown, 2014). Current policies are introduced without classroom teachers having time and support to not only examine the policy, but more importantly to examine their own assumptions regarding difference and inclusion (Bourke, 2010; Seashore Louis et al., 2005; Varcoe & Boyle, 2013). Ball and colleagues (2011) addressed the context of overload and time poverty in which classroom teachers must work. Sheer numbers and diversity of policies amidst the demands of the working day contribute to the reality that 'teachers do not 'do policy' – policy 'does them'' (Ball et al., 2011, p. 616). Policy 'does' teachers, in that classroom teachers have become passive subjects as they seek to cope with and keep up with policy action with little time to actively engage with policy personally and professionally (Ball et al., 2011).

In an ideal world, classroom teacher will be granted time to develop their own inclusive thinking in order to implement inclusive policy in the context of practice.

Classroom teacher training

Classroom teachers' concepts of inclusion are generally accorded to rhetoric based on government policy, however, their personal experiences of inclusion are not (Sikes, Lawson & Parker, 2007). They may grasp policy text but are unable to correlate it to their day-to-day teaching. As classroom teachers are responsible for this daily implementation of inclusive policies, they require inclusive attitudes and the ability to morph inclusive policy into inclusive practice. In their research, Graham and Spandagou (2011) found that perceptions of what constitutes inclusive action changed dramatically depending on the classroom teacher's experiences and training. For classroom teachers to be adequately prepared to teach in the inclusive classroom, knowledge of how to do this must be embedded from the beginning of their own education (Graham, 2013; Varcoe & Boyle, 2013). Research (Hodgson, 2012; Forlin, 2006; Kim, 2013; Lancaster & Bain, 2007; Varcoe & Boyle, 2013) affirms that classroom teacher training is integral to the full implementation of inclusive education. Within the NSW context, Graham (2013) argues that classroom teachers must know policy texts, especially the DDA, and what this looks like within the context of practice. Limited knowledge, capabilities and noncompliance with the Standards and DDA can cause diminished provisions of effective adjustments for students (Cumming et al., 2013; Graham, 2013).

In conclusion, literature affirms that there are multiple levels of misalignment amongst policy, classroom teachers and students (Aspland, Datta & Talukdar, 2012). Rectifying these ongoing deficiencies is challenging (Fawcett, 2014). However, it is not impossible.

State level policy influence and school level practice must be integrated (Ball, 1994; Bowe et al., 1992; Scott et al., 2014). The who of policy production must not be removed from practice (Ball, 1993; Gale & Densmore, 2003). Those who implement policy within the context of practice, that is, classroom teachers, must be repositioned as policy producers given the opportunity to develop theoretical and political understanding in order to develop inclusive thinking and action (Gale & Densmore, 2003; Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). Classroom teachers must not immerse themselves in the 'way we do things' thought but embrace the questioning of and revision of policies and the contexts of policies (Walton, 2015). This research paper seeks to empower them to do so.

Research Methodology

Research paradigm

The research paradigm utilised to address the research question is an interpretive paradigm. The overarching purpose of this research is to focus on the interaction between the knowledge and practice of classroom teachers in relation to inclusive policies and furthermore, how this interaction impacts the ability to teach students with ASD in the general education setting. With this purpose, the researcher seeks to understand and assess classroom teacher perspectives, attitudes and self-proclaimed capability regarding realistic and current experiences. The use of the interpretive paradigm enables the consideration of the way in which classroom teachers relate and interact with social context (Burton & Barlett, 2009; Walter, 2010) and is therefore sufficient for this research.

Research design

In accordance with the aims of this research, a mixed-method approach is selected as the research design. Mixed-method research involves the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in multiple phases of the research process with the premise that the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches in combination will provide better understanding of the research question (Creswell, 2003). Research that explores people's experiences, meaning, values and relationships generally takes the qualitative approach (Burton & Barlett, 2009). The qualitative method of research enables the researcher to develop understanding of particular individual participant experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morisson, 2007, O'Toole & Beckett, 2010). Due to the nature of this research, the qualitative method will be predominate but not exclusive. A mixed-method approach is needed as the data collection and analysis involves numerical rating scales and calculations in order to find recurring themes and perspectives.

Quantitative methods are utilised within interpretive paradigms in this way, and data analysis and results will be more clearly displayed with the assistance of numerical coding to demonstrate concise findings (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011).

Research setting

The participants of this study were a sample of classroom teachers in selected NSW primary schools. Four (4) primary schools were selected within the Sydney region. These schools were selected due to

close geographical proximity and due to the type of school, that is government or non-government, to allow depth and diversity of data. Two (2) primary schools were government co-educational schools. One (1) primary school was a non-government girls school and one (1) primary school was a non-government boys school.

Sampling method

This research used the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling was utilised as this allowed the researcher to hand pick cases to be included to build an appropriate sample that would satisfy the specific needs of the research (Cohen et al., 2007; Wallen & Fraenkal, 2001). The four (4) primary schools were specifically chosen by the researcher based on geographical location and suitability for the research.

All practicing classroom teachers within these schools were invited to participate in the online survey aspect of the research. Criteria of participants included holding a recognised classroom teacher pre-service training qualification and currently practicing as a classroom teacher within the chosen schools. In total, fifty-eight (58) classroom teachers completed the online survey. Five (5) online surveys were incomplete and therefore not used in the data analysis of the research.

Two (2) classroom teachers from each of the schools were invited to participate in the interview aspect of the research. In total, six (6) classroom teachers from three (3) schools participated in the face-to-face interviews. One school was unable to provide interviewees due to time commitments of the staff.

Purposive sampling was an effective sampling method, providing detailed data of classroom teachers ranging in age, training and experience.

Sampling recruitment method

Fifty-eight (58) classroom teachers participated in the online survey. All participants were provided with an incentive. The incentive entailed online survey participants entering the draw to win a monetary voucher. Four (4) incentives were funded by Macquarie University, one (1) incentive was given to each participating school and cohort of participants. The incentive draw was drawn after all participants had completed the online survey by a member of the staff of that school.

Six (6) classroom teachers participated in the face-to-face interviews with the researcher.

School A was a non-government girl primary school with sixteen (16) participants completing the online survey and two (2) interviewee participants.

School B was a government co-educational primary school with twenty-one (21) participants completing the online survey and two (2) interviewee participants.

School C was a government co-educational primary school with ten (10) participants completing the online survey and two (2) interviewee participants.

School D was a non-government boy primary school with ten (10) participants completing the online survey. No participants from School D participated in the face-to-face interview due to time constraints of staff.

Numbers of participants varied from each school due to the overall staff and student population of each school.

Participants represented a range of different characteristics including gender, ethnicity, age, training and experience. Each participant received written information outlining the research and was required to provide consent prior to undertaking the online survey or interview. Prior to participation of classroom teachers, school principals were required to provide consent for the schools participation. See Appendix A. Information for parents was also made available if it were to be requested. See Appendix B.

Data collection

The online survey and interview was used as the method of data collection. The reason for utilizing both online survey and interview was to attempt to address the disadvantages of using only one data collection tool. The online survey was anonymous, time efficient and administered to a large group yet can be considered impersonal and restrictive in responses. The interview allowed the building of rapport with the participant, extended responses and discussion yet was time consuming and had increased associated costs. Utilising both the online survey and interview enabled to researcher to counteract some disadvantages of each type of tool and thus enabled greater breadth and depth of data. The online survey was developed by the researcher using Qualtrics: Online Survey Software. See Appendix C. The online survey contained a series of multiple-choice, short answer and rating-scale questions. This data collection tool was administered to classroom teachers online. The researcher sent to URL link to the online survey to one staff member who was also the contact liaison for that school. That specific staff member then sent the link to all classroom teachers of the school for their participation. The researcher monitored the participation of the online survey using Qualtrics: Online Survey Software. The online survey was open for one (1) week for each

school commencing after the first participant completed the survey, after which the researcher closed the survey and the incentive was drawn.

The online survey was selected as a method of data collection due to the relatively large population sample, varying geographical locations of participants and the short time frame. Furthermore, online surveys were chosen as participants are able to respond with anonymity, in privacy and with time for reflection (Burton, Brundrett & Jones, 2009; Walter, 2010). Informed consent was gained and incentives were utilised to encourage participation and increase the response rate of the data collection.

The online survey did not facilitate direct interaction between the researcher and participant and therefore, interviews were also used as a data collection tool. See Appendix D.

Interviews were undertaken with selected classroom teachers. The researcher created the interview questions in accordance with the research questions and aims. Classroom teachers were interviewed at a time they deemed appropriate. Interviews were audibly recorded and transcribed verbatim by an external company. Interviewee participants were required to consent to taking part in the interview and to having the interview recorded. No incentive was provided for interviewee participants.

Data analysis

Data will be analysed within the approach to policy as a cycle in light of the work of Ball (1994) and policy contexts (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992). Information from online survey participants was analysed and presented to inform recommendations and discussion of the key findings. Multiple choice and rating-scale responses were numerically recorded. In rating scales, analytical induction incorporated the calculation of mean and standard deviation to assist with analysis and to discover trends in the data (Cohen et al., 2007). Short answer responses were thematically coded and numerically recorded. Data was rechecked for accuracy.

Interview responses were coded to discover themes from the varied responses. Responses were compared between participants taking into account participant context, training and experience. The results of the data from online surveys and interviews was discussed through narrative and displayed in tables and diagrams using computer software to provide visual illustration of occurring themes and important findings (O'Toole & Beckett, 2010). Matrix and narrative displays and graphs were utilised to present the results (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011).

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was sought to ensure, as much as possible, that the research does not encounter ethical dilemma (Ryan, Coughlan & Cronin, 2007). Ethical approval arrangements were sought from the appropriate ethical committees (O'Toole & Beckett, 2010; Ryan et al., 2007). Initially, ethical aspects of the research were provided to the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) for review and consideration. After brief consultation, ethical approval from Macquarie University HRECs was obtained [5201500357]. (See Appendix E).

Ethical approval was also required from the NSW Government in order to undertake research in government primary schools. Ethical aspects of the research were provided to the NSW Government State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP). After consultation with SERAP, ethical approval was obtained [SERAP 20151111]. (See Appendix F).

With the ethical aspects of research approved by Macquarie University and the NSW Government, information outlining the research topic, research questions and aims as well as data collection and analysis procedures was sent to school principals. Once school principals had consented to their school participating in the research, participants were invited to be part of the research in the online survey, interview or both. Informed consent from school principals and classroom teachers was paramount (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2003) as was the confidentiality and protection of privacy for schools, school principals and all participants (Ryan et al., 2007).

Researcher bias was minimised through close consultancy with the Macquarie University supervisor. Furthermore, online surveys diminished direct interaction with the researcher and interviews were strictly scripted for the researcher to eliminate potential bias or predisposition.

Results

Results are presented in three clear Parts in relation to the objectives of this research. *Part A* will present results regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder, *Part B* will present results regarding Educational Policy and *Part C* will present results regarding the Disability Discrimination Act and the Disability Standards for Education. See Index of Figures and Tables (Page 7) for list of all result tables and figures.

Part A – Autism Spectrum Disorder

Classroom teacher knowledge of Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD]

Classroom teachers were asked to share knowledge regarding their personal definition and perception of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Table 1 shows classroom teacher responses from the survey.

Table 1: Definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD] (N=54)

Response	Response Rate	Percentage
Affecting a student's social skills and social interactions	54	100%
Affecting a student's communication skills	23	43%
Acknowledgment of a spectrum/wide range/degree to which students are affected	20	37%
Affecting student behaviour	19	35%
Affecting a student's ability to understand and portray emotion	11	20%
A student with a special interests	10	18%
A student with sensory and tactile needs	7	13%
A students demonstrating repetitive habits	6	11%
A student who requires strict routine and cannot cope with change	6	11%
*Other language	5	9%
A student whom is 'gifted' in a certain area	4	7%
A student who does not make eye contact	2	4%

*'Diagnosed'; 'Impaired'; 'Brain doesn't work'; 'Struggling'; 'Hindering'; 'Depression'; 'Anxiety'; 'Triggers'.

All responses [100%] of those who participated in the survey identified that ASD affects a student's social skills and interactions with people. In their definition of ASD, interviewees stated terms including 'social difficulty' (interviewee 2), 'social disability' (interviewee 3), 'slightly strange' (interviewee 4),

'struggled being around other kids' (*interviewee 4*) and 'affecting social function' (*interviewee 6*). Furthermore, interviewees identified that ASD 'impacts kids in different ways' (*interviewee 4*), 'is not just one-diagnosis-fits-all' (*interviewee 6*) and that a child is 'somewhere on a spectrum' (*interviewee 1*). This is a similar finding to the 37% of survey participants who acknowledged the spectrum, wide range and varying degrees of ASD.

Many classroom teachers participating in the survey identified symptoms of ASD within their definition of the disorder (Table 1). An inability to portray emotion (20%), a special interest (18%), sensory and tactile needs (13%), repetitive behaviours (11%), inability to cope with change (11%), 'giftedness' in a certain area (7%) and the avoidance to make eye contact (4%) were all symptoms highlighted by classroom teachers. Overall, rather than stating a general definition, 46 survey participants listed a symptom of ASD equating to 85% of responses. Similarly, *interviewee 2* discussed sensory needs in their definition of ASD with two interviewees also mentioning the need for structure and routine (*interviewee 3*; *interviewee 4*).

After participants of both the survey and interview had stated their personal definition of ASD, the facilitator gave the definition of ASD as stated by Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT) which outlines that 'Autism Spectrum Disorder is a developmental condition that affects the way an individual relates to his or her environment and with other people. The main areas of difficulty evident in students are evident in social, communication and behavioural challenges and learning needs' (Autism Spectrum Australia, 2015). This definition was the basis for the data collection and questions.

Classroom teacher ability to make teacher judgments on students with ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs

Survey respondents were asked to comment on how they make their personal judgements on students with ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs.

Table 2 shows survey responses regarding how classroom teachers formulate these judgments.

Table 2: How do classroom teachers make 'teacher judgments' on students with ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs? (N=45)

Response	Response Rate	Percentage
Discuss with colleagues and other classroom teachers	22	49%
Observe the students within the school setting	17	38%
Rely on instinct, professional experience, professional reflection and past trial-and-error strategies	17	38%
Discuss with specialist staff (Learning Support teacher; School Counselor)	13	29%
Discuss with parents and family members	9	20%
Implement formal assessment tasks	8	18%
Compare the student with other students in the classroom	3	7%
Undertake further professional development	3	7%

Interviewees were asked to comment on the strategies and methods they use in their teaching practice to assist and meet the learning needs of these students. An array of strategies were discussed including social stories (*Interviewee 1*), role play (*Interviewee 2*), the use of visual signs and displays (*Interviewee 1, Interviewee 3, Interviewee 4*), classroom environment alterations (*Interviewee 4*), maintaining strict routines (*Interviewee 3*) and creating social exchanges with other students (*Interviewee 6*).

Classroom teacher ability to teach students with ASD and/or social, communication or behavioural needs

Classroom teachers were asked to measure how challenging it was to teach a student with ASD and/or with social, communication and behavioural needs. Survey participants (N=56) averaged a rating score of 8.5 on a scale with the lowest score: 1 = not challenging and the highest score: 10 = extremely challenging. An average rating of 8.5 suggests that the majority of survey participants believe there is a satisfactory element of challenge to a classroom teacher when teaching a student with ASD and/or with social, communication and behavioural needs.

Survey participants identified what they found to be most challenging in their daily teaching of students with these specific learning needs (Table 3).

Table 3: How have you found it challenging to teach students with ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs? (N=55)

Response	Response Rate	Percentage
Classroom management (managing a class of students when student(s) with ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs)	30	55%
Negative and disruptive behaviours exhibited by the student	20	36%
Lack of time to address the student's specific needs	17	31%
Feeling unsupported as the classroom teacher	11	20%
Difficulties engaging the student in learning tasks	9	16%
Dealing with changes to routines and task transitions	7	13%
Unassisted by lack of learning support staff and teachers aides	5	9%
Feeling unprepared and ill-equipped to meet the learning needs of the student	4	7%

Over half (55%) of survey participants stated that classroom management was challenging. Interviewees stated 'when you are looking after the rest of the class it is very hard to give [the student] what they need exactly when they need it' (*interviewee 2*). Similar interviewee statements included 'it is challenging in the context of a class of twenty-three other children who also have needs' (*interviewee 3*) and 'the fact that they are one child in thirty – great ideas and great plans get forgotten in the mix of teaching so many other kids and then managing your own job and everything else that goes along with teaching' (*interviewee 4*).

Interviewees also discussed student behaviour as a challenge to the classroom teacher. Similar to 36% of survey participants (Table 3), interviewees highlighted negative behaviours such as 'running away' (*interviewee 2*), 'hitting another child' (*interviewee 2; interviewee 6*), 'hitting themselves' (*interviewee 2*) and 'acting out' (*interviewee 6*) as challenges for the teacher.

Assisting classroom teachers in their ability to meet the learning needs of a student with ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs

With an awareness of the challenges stated in Table 3, classroom teachers were asked to reflect on what they have found has assisted them and contributed most to their current practice in teaching a student with ASD and/or with social, communication and behavioural needs (Figure 4a).

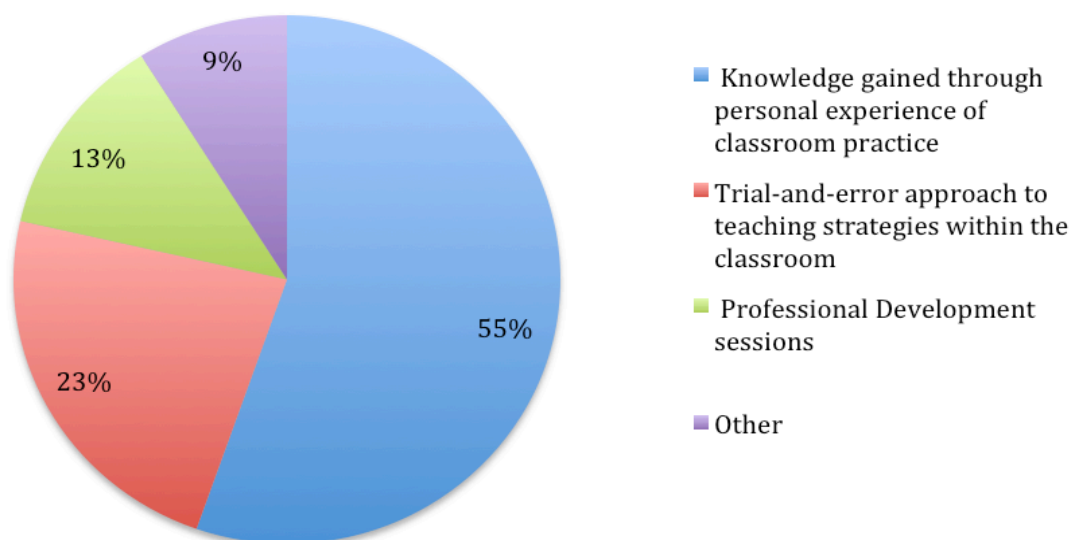


Figure 4a: In teaching a student with ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs, what would you say has contributed most to your practice? (N= 56)

Over half (55%) of survey respondents stated that knowledge from personal experience contributed most to their ability to teach students with ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs with 23% contributing their ability to a trial-and-error approach to teaching strategies within the classroom (Figure 4a).

Interviewees were asked to comment on the strategies and methods utilised when teaching a student with these needs to which they highlighted strategies including role-play and story telling (*interviewee 1; interviewee 2*), use of signs and displays (*interviewee 1; interviewee 3; interviewee 6*), changes to the classroom physical environment (*interviewee 6*), strict and planned routine and daily structures (*interviewee 2; interviewee 3; interviewee 4*) and the support of a teacher's aide in the classroom (*interviewee 3*).

Having established what *had* assisted classroom teachers, survey participants were then asked how they may be *further assisted* and further supported in teaching and meeting the learning needs of students with ASD and/or with social, communication and behavioural needs (Table 4).

Table 4: How can classroom teachers be further assisted in meeting the needs of students with ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs? (N=53)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Increased specialist staff assisting the classroom teacher in the classroom*	27	51%
Increased professional development and training	22	42%
Support from other classroom teachers, more experienced colleagues, school community and/or parents	16	30%
Increase in personal knowledge and awareness through personal research and personal engagement	12	23%
Increased 'time'	12	23%
Increased resources to be used within the classroom	7	13%

*Specialist staff: 'Learning Support Teacher'; 'Teachers Aide'; 'Para-professionals'

Over half (51%) of survey participants stated that they would be further assisted by having specialist staff work within the classroom. Furthermore, 42% of survey participants believe that increased professional development and training would further assist them in their ability to meet student needs. This correlates with only 13% of survey respondents stating that they had previously been assisted by professional development sessions (Figure 4a). In the interviews, no interviewees mentioned professional development or training as an assistive strategy for the classroom.

Part B – Educational Policy

Classroom teacher understanding of educational policy

Table 5: What is 'educational policy?' (N=58)

Response	Response Rate	Percentage
Guidelines	18	31%
Rules	17	29%
A Document	12	21%
Influences teaching practice	12	21%
Laws	10	17%
Enforced by the Government	10	17%
A set of principles	4	7%
*Other terms	6	10%

*'Benchmarks'; 'Frameworks'; 'Procedures'; 'Restrictions'; 'Routines'; 'Standards'

Classroom teachers were questioned on their understanding of educational policy. Of the survey participants, 31% of classroom teachers identified educational policy as a set of guidelines and 29% identified educational policy as a set of rules and regulations (Table 5). There were 21% of classroom teachers who associated educational policy with a formal written document of which 17% stated was enforced by a government authority. Similarly to the 21% of survey respondents who related educational policy with teaching practice, interviewees commented that 'educational policy is under the banner of best practice' (*interviewee 1*) and that educational policy 'governs anything I do as a teacher... in the classroom and with colleagues' (*interviewee 6*).

Furthermore, interviewees highlighted educational policy as a set of guidelines in which they stated such examples as 'emergency policy' (*interviewee 1*), 'discipline policy' (*interviewee 1*), 'excursion policy' (*interviewee 4*) and 'homework policy' (*interviewee 4*).

Classroom teacher training in educational policy

Table 6: What aspects of educational policy did you study in your pre-service training? (N=57)

Response	Response Rate	Percentage
I did study aspects of educational policy	22	39%
I CANNOT REMEMBER the content of my pre-service training	20	35%
I DID NOT study educational policy	15	26%

Survey participants were asked to share their knowledge of educational policy and their pre-service training in educational policy (Table 6). Of the respondents, 35% could not remember the content of their pre-service training and 26% stated that they did not study educational policy in their pre-service training.

Of those participants who could not remember their pre-service training, Figure 6a presents the years they have been teaching.

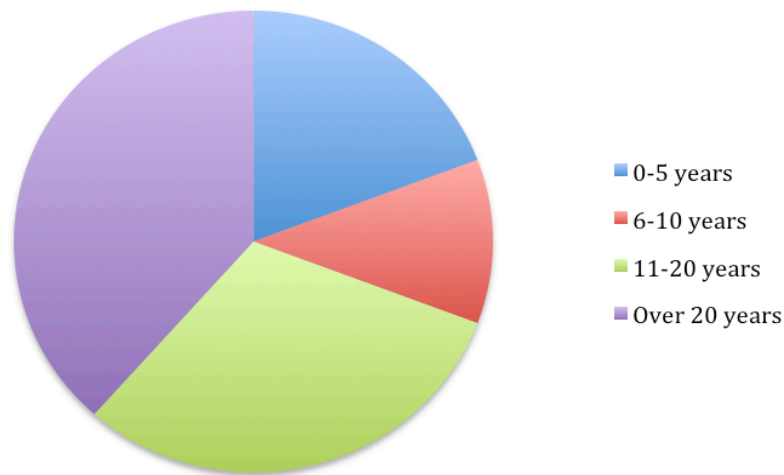


Figure 6a: Years of teaching experience of participants who **CANNOT REMEMBER** the content of my pre-service training.

Figure 6b shows the years of teaching experience for participants stating that they did not undertake any training on educational policy in their pre-service training.

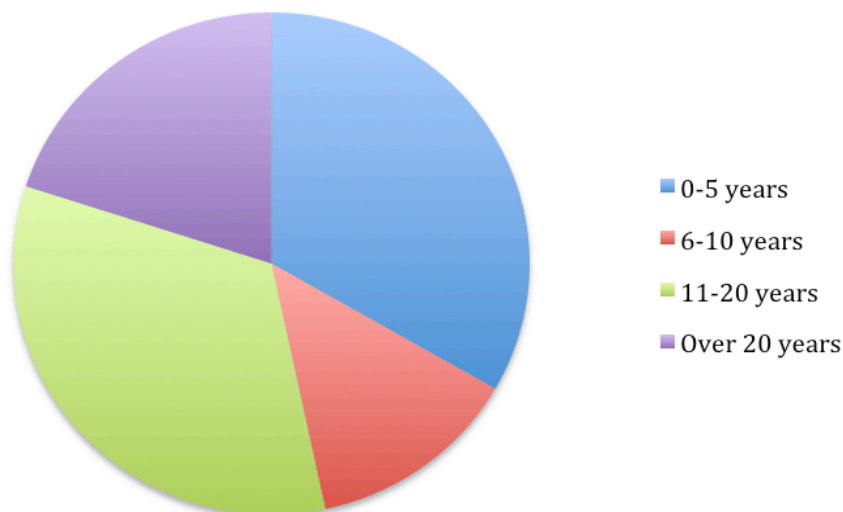


Figure 6b: Years of teaching experience of participants who stated they **DID NOT** study educational policy within their pre-service training.

Interviewees were asked to state the policy or policy texts they were aware of without prompting. The majority of interviewees discussed school-based policies that their 'school had created' (interviewee 4). Two interviewees stated the 'code of conduct' (interviewee 5; interviewee 6), two interviewees mentioned the Disability Discrimination Act (interviewee 3; interviewee 5) and one interviewee stated they were aware of the 'disability standards' (interviewee 6). One interviewee, who had been working for 0-5 years, stated they knew 'no policies from the government' (interviewee 2).

Of the 39% of survey participants who did study educational policy, the most common aspects of educational policy identified were stated in terms such as 'child protection', 'special needs' and school-based policy that relate to discipline, excursions and homework. This was similar to responses from the interview participants.

Engagement and translation of policy into teaching practice

Interviewees were asked to comment on their engagement with educational policy on a practical level. Table 7 outlines a lack of engagement with policy and policy texts on a practical level.

Table 7: How often do you engage with educational policy on a practical level?

	Response
Interviewee 1	'In terms of governmental policy, I wouldn't interact with it at all. I would assume that that is being filtrated down from our leadership in what they are expecting of our practice.'
Interviewee 2	'Very rarely.'
Interviewee 3	'Not an awful lot... I am not thinking about educational policy when I am in my classroom.'
Interviewee 4	'I don't sit down and refer to policies as I am doing things...'
Interviewee 5	'At the beginning of the school term and on staff development days'
Interviewee 6	'During teacher learning sessions, once a term... But it probably wouldn't extend much further than that.'

Survey participants were asked how they may be equipped to translate policy into teaching practice (Table 8).

Table 8: How can classroom teachers be better equipped to translate policy into teaching practice? (N=57)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Time	28	49%
Professional development	26	46%
Collaboration and discussion with colleagues	21	37%
Clarity of language	11	19%
Examples and modeling	11	19%
Specificity and relevance to context and classroom	7	12%
Notice of changes and updates	5	9%
Involvement in policy development	4	7%

49% of classroom teachers believe that they require more time to read and understand policy documents in order to ensure effective implementation takes place within the classroom. Time may be used for collaboration and discussion with colleagues, stated by 37% of respondents. Further training and professional development was recommended by 46% of respondents. Professional development was also discussed by *Interviewee 5* and *Interviewee 6* (Table 7).

Classroom teacher ability to implement policy into their teaching practice

Based on the 49% of classroom teachers who stated they may be better equipped to implement policy if given more time (Table 8), survey participants were asked whether they personally felt that during their career they had appropriate time to read and implement policy documents into their teaching practice (Table 9).

Table 9: Have you been given appropriate time to read policy documents and plan how you will implement the policy in your classroom (N=58)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	20	34%
No	38	66%

Over half (66%) of survey participants felt they were not given appropriate time to read policy documents and to plan how to implement these in the classroom. Figure 9a presents this data comparing the responses of participants from the non-government school system (N=26) to the government school system (N=32).

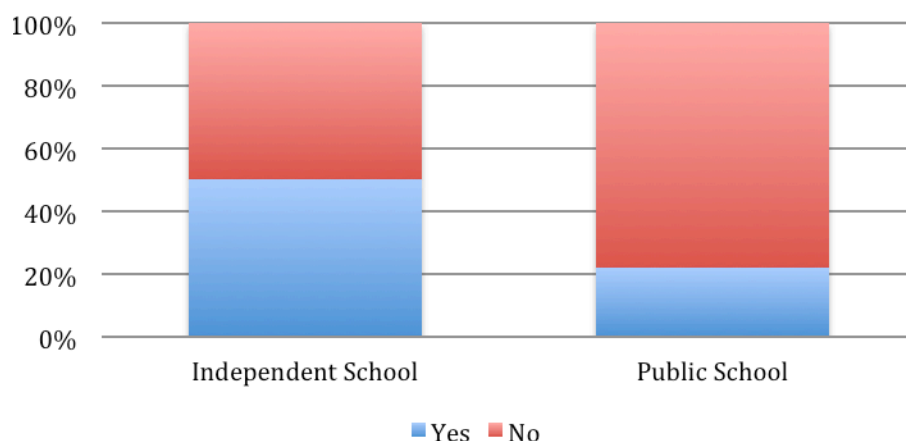


Figure 9a: Classroom teacher response on whether they have received appropriate time to read policy documents and to plan the implementation of such policies in the classroom – Comparison of participants from non-government and government schools.

Interviewees further highlighted this detachment of classroom teachers with the implementation of policy texts (Table 10).

Table 10: How would you describe the relationship between policy texts and teaching practice in the classroom?

	Response
Interviewee 1	'I have not interacted with them [governmental policy texts]'
Interviewee 2	'[Policy texts] never really seem to be that applicable... We don't use it in a day-to-day way'
Interviewee 3	'Policy probably doesn't influence me a lot'
Interviewee 4	'Explicitly there probably isn't much of a relationship because I don't actually know what the policies are'
Interviewee 5	'The relationship I personally have is more in the beginning of the year, when we need to, and then it kind of slips down to not a very big relationship at all, unfortunately.'
Interviewee 6	'I find it difficult to see what actually applies to me and what I really need to take away as really vital parts of the policy'

The majority of interviewees stated that their relationship with policy texts was lacking and that policy did not apply to their day-to-day practice.

Classroom teacher awareness of educational policy that applies to students with a disability or an additional need

Table 11: Are you aware of policy/policies that apply to students with a disability/additional need? (N=58)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	47	81%
No	11	19%

Table 11 presents the responses of classroom teachers regarding their awareness of educational policy that applies to teaching a student with a disability or an additional need. Of the responses, 81% of participants stated they were aware of such policies and 19% of participants stated they were unaware.

Interviewees were asked about their knowledge of specific policy texts and documents regarding classroom teacher responsibility for teaching students with a disability or with an additional need. No interviewee participants were aware of 'People with Disability: Statement of Commitment' or the 'National Education Agreement'. One participant had minimal knowledge regarding the 'National Disability Strategy 2010-2020' (*interviewee 5*), two participants were somewhat aware of the 'Assisting Students with Learning Difficulties' policy (*interviewee 4; interviewee 5*) and half of the interviewees had an awareness of the 'NSW Disability Action Plan' (*interviewee 4; interviewee 5; interviewee 6*).

Classroom teacher awareness of specific educational policies applicable to the government school system – Department of Education and Community staff

Classroom teacher respondents were asked about their awareness and understanding of policy documents relevant to their school context. Participants (N = 32) working within the government school system, that is, staff of the Department of Education and Communities, were asked about their awareness of two relevant policies. The *'People with Disabilities – Statement of Commitment'* policy and the *'Assisting Students with Learning Difficulties'* policy were highlighted. These two policy documents apply to all staff employed in NSW government schools and classroom teachers have responsibilities under these policies.

Figure 11a demonstrates classroom teacher awareness of the two policy documents.

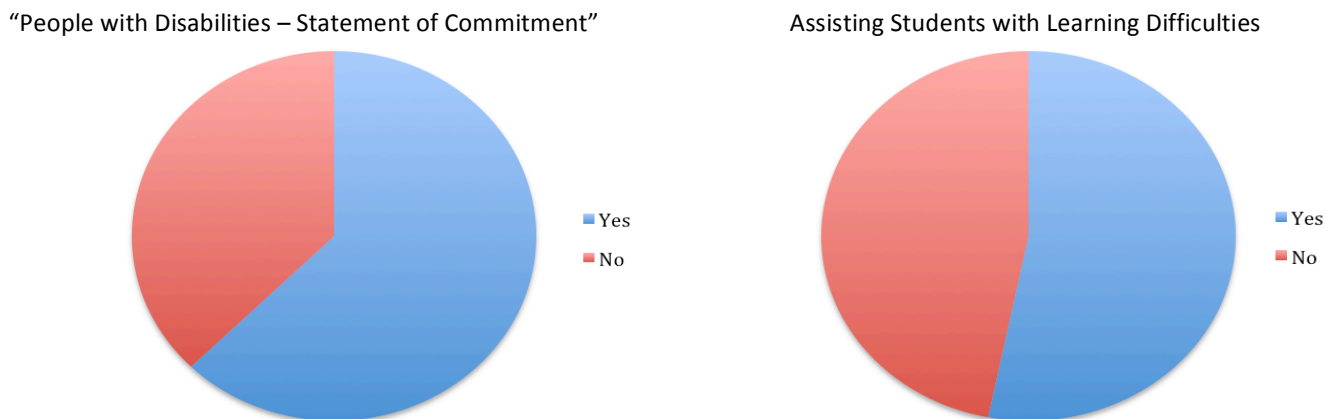


Figure 11a: Classroom teacher respondents to 'Have you read and understood the following policy documents:

Policy 1: "People with Disabilities – Statement of Commitment" and
Policy 2: "Assisting Students with Learning Difficulties"

Participants were asked to comment on their understanding of 'inclusion' (Figure 11b).

Approximately 45% of participants defined this term as involving the classroom teacher 'including'

the student. Approximately 24% of participants used the term 'catering' or similar ('accommodating' and 'adjusting'). 22% of participants identified inclusion as 'providing access' to learning experiences within the school context. Overall, classroom teachers from government and non-government schools demonstrated a broad understanding of inclusion.

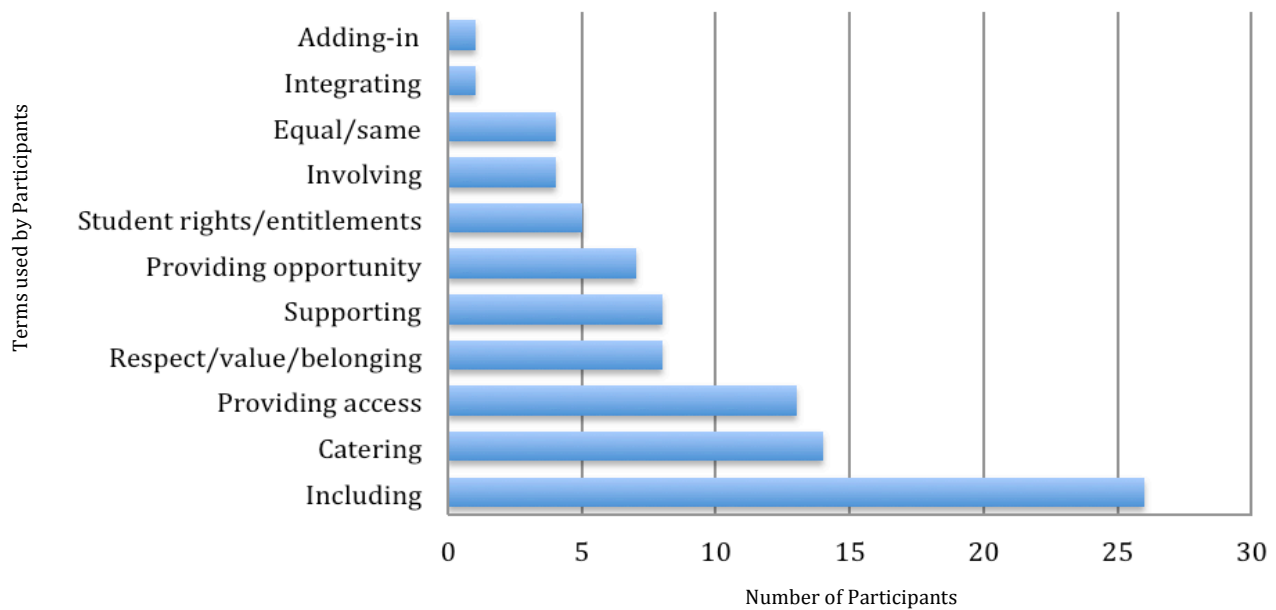


Figure 11b: What is your understanding of Inclusion? (N= 58)

Part C – The Disability Discrimination Act and the Disability Standards for Education

Classroom teacher awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 [DDA]

Table 12: Are you aware of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992? (N=58)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	41	71%
No	17	29%

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) applies to all schools in Australia and holds obligations and responsibilities for all classroom teachers in NSW. 71% of survey participants were aware of the DDA with 29% stating they were unaware of this policy document (Table 12). Figure 12a shows this data with the comparison of responses of classroom teachers who work within a non-government school and of those who work in a government school as a staff member of the Department of Education and Communities.

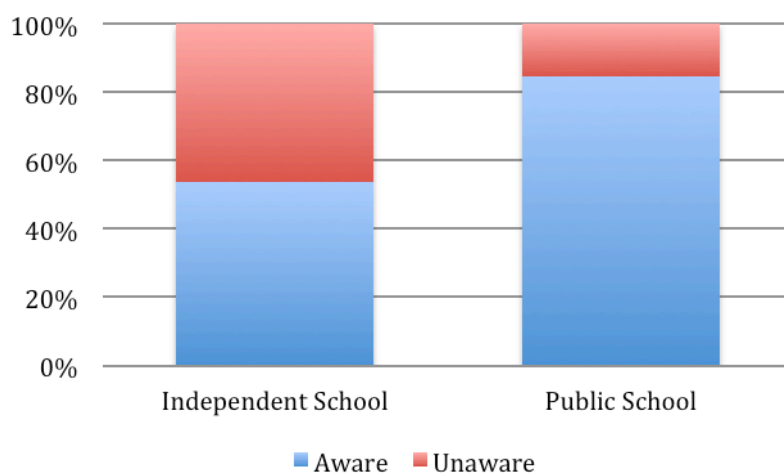


Figure 12a: Classroom teacher awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act [DDA] – Comparison of participants working in non-government schools and government schools.

Classroom teacher awareness of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 [the Standards]

Table 13: Are you aware of the Disability Standards for Education 2005?
(N=58)

Response	Response Rate	Percentage
Yes	31	53%
No	27	47%

All Australian schools must comply with the Standards. The Standards were created to further clarify classroom teacher obligations and responsibilities under the DDA. Table 13 presents the data regarding classroom teacher awareness of the Standards with 47% of respondents stating that they are unaware of this policy document. Furthermore, three interviewee participants (50%) stated they were unaware of the Standards (*interviewee 1; interviewee 2; interviewee 5*).

Figure 13a shows this data with the comparison of responses from participants working within a non-government school and those working within a government school. Figure 13a shows that 85% of staff from non-government schools are unaware of the Standards compared to 16% from government schools.

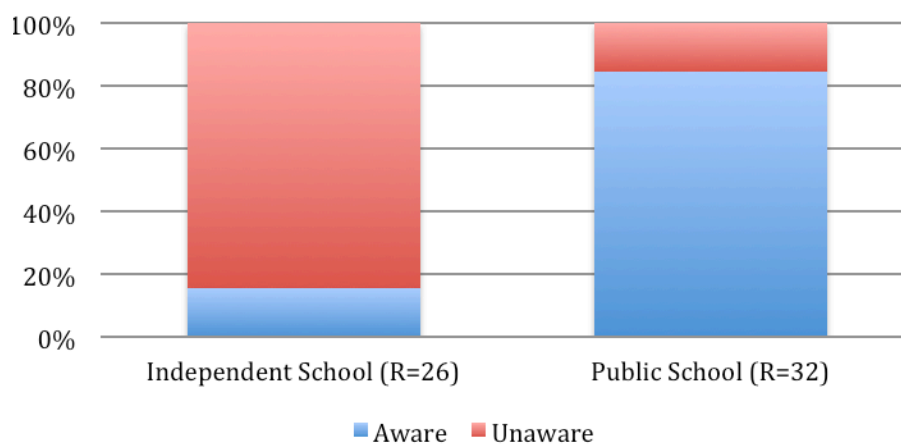


Figure 13a: Classroom teacher awareness of the Standards – Comparison of participants working in non-government schools and in government schools.

Classroom teacher professional development on the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (the Standards)

Participants were asked whether they had undertaken any form of professional development on the DDA and the Standards in the past 5 years. Of the respondents, 50% (N=29) responded that they had undertaken professional development and the other 50% (N=29) stated they had not undertaken professional development on either the DDA or the Standards.

Figure 14a shows these results based on whether the classroom teacher was working within the non-government school system or the government school system.

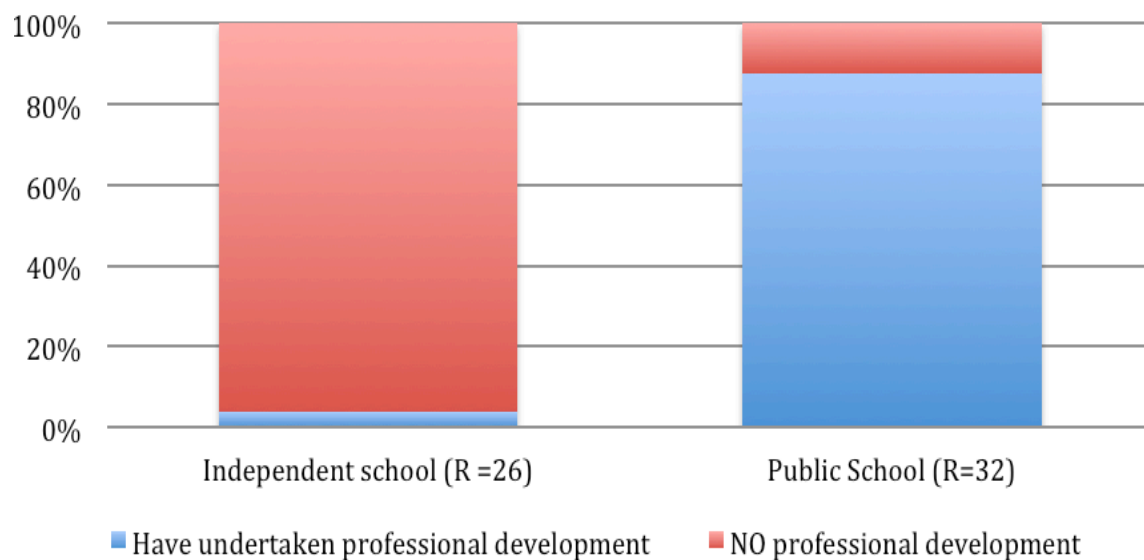


Figure 14a: Classroom teacher participation in professional development on the DDA and/or the Standards in the last 5 years – Comparison of participants working in non-government schools and government schools.

Of the participants working within non-government schools, only one respondent had participated in professional development on the DDA and/or the Standards. This relates to Figure 13a and the low level of awareness of the DDA for staff working within a non-government school.

Classroom teacher knowledge of how the Disability Standards for Education apply to their personal teaching practice.

Table 15: How do the Standards apply to you as a classroom teacher in your classroom?
(N=53)

Response	Response Rate	Percentage
Accommodating/Catering/Providing for students learning need(s)	19	36%
Ensuring access and participation to learning and the curriculum	15	28%
Creating adjustments, alterations and modifications to the:		
a) Environment	6	11%
b) Teaching	13	25%
Creating equal educational experiences	13	25%
Encourage an inclusive environment	13	25%
Differentiation	8	15%
*Unsure	17	32%

*Participants stated they did not know how the Standards applied to their teaching practice.

Table 15 highlights classroom teacher understanding of how the Standards apply to their teaching practice within the classroom. 36% of participants stated that the Standards required them to create accommodations in order to cater for and provide for students learning needs and 15% acknowledged that these students must be given access to participate in learning and the curriculum. This is similar to comments made by interviewees. *Interviewee 3* acknowledged that 'it's not like this child is a problem in my classroom, its more that what can I do now to help give them access, what can I do to help them learn, to give them what they deserve in my room? I find what will help them to get the best education that they can and I try to give that to them.' Similarly, *interviewee 4* stated that the Standards 'gave me options and things that I could do within the classroom to support the student as well as helping me understand where I can get support outside of the classroom if I need it to accommodate for the student.' *Interviewee 6* reiterated such obligations under the Standards in stating 'I have to prove that I am catering for those students needs and that I am changing my program and making amendments. For me, it is about having records of behaviours and communication issues, and showing then how the classroom environment and my lessons are catering for that child.' Survey participants highlighted the Standards obligations of

creating adjustments with 11% of respondents discussing the classroom environment and 25% of respondents focusing on adjusting their teaching.

Assisting classroom teachers in their ability to meet the learning needs of a student with ASD and/or social, communication and behavioural needs – The Disability Standards for Education

Classroom teachers were asked to comment on how they have found the Standards have assisted their knowledge and ability to teach students with ASD and/or social, communication or behavioural needs. Table 16 highlights the responses of the participants.

Table 16: How does the Disability Standards for Education assist you in teaching students with ASD and/or social, communication and/or behavioural needs? (N=47)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Unsure or the Standards have not provided assistance in anyway	25	53%
The Standards provide guidelines, frameworks, insights and suggestions	10	21%
The Standards build awareness of classroom teacher responsibility	8	17%
The Standards outline classroom teacher obligations	6	13%
The Standards assist in identification of student learning needs	2	4%

Over half (53%) of participants stated that the Standards had not provided any assistance in the classroom setting. 17% of survey participants stated that the Standards built their awareness of their responsibility with one interviewee participant commenting that they were 'now much more aware of what the child's rights are' (interviewee 3).

Discussion

The discussion of research is set out in three clear Parts in relation to the objectives and results of the research. Part A will discuss results regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder, Part B will discuss results regarding Educational Policy and Part C will discuss results regarding the Disability Discrimination Act and the Disability Standards for Education.

Part A – Autism Spectrum Disorder

A emerging definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder

The definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has and is continuously evolving (McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014). Initially understood as an early form of childhood schizophrenia (Wolff, 2004), definitions of Autism have become more concerned with a wide range of developmental issues and various distortions of the developmental process. The concept of a wide range of developmental issues was further explored by Lorna Wing who identified a triad of impairments typically manifested in social skills, communication and behavioural inflexibility (Linton, Germundsson, Heimann, & Danermark, 2013; Wing, 1981). Recently in 2013, the American Psychological Association (APA) published the DSM-5 which includes only major behaviour categories – Social, Communication and Interaction criteria and Restrictive, Repetitive Behaviour criteria (Kulage, Smaldone & Cohn, 2014). The APA official definition of Autism denotes that ASD is a range of complex neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by social impairment, communication difficulties and restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour (APA, 2000). This is similar to the definition prescribed by Autism Spectrum Australia (2015), utilised in data collection of this research.

Participants in this research defined ASD (*Table 1*). All participants defined ASD as affecting a student's social skills and interactions. Lower amounts of participants identified ASD as affecting a student's communication skills and a student's behaviour. Interestingly these social skills and interaction, communication and behaviour are similar to Wing's triad of impairments (Wing, 1981). Linton and colleagues (2013) describe Wing's triad of impairments as a medical approach to defining ASD. Jordan (2005) states that Wing's approach to ASD holds 'autistic' symptomology as its common feature. Participants in this study defined ASD based on symptomology with reference to

ASD affecting a student's ability to understand and portray emotion, affecting a student's sensory and tactile needs, such as, avoiding eye contact, contributing to a student a specific special interest, and affecting a student's ability to cope with daily events and change (*Table 1*).

Approximately 85% of participants identified one or more specific symptoms of ASD in their definition. Jordan (2005) warns against such a medicinal approach, as the role of education is not to 'treat' symptoms but to help individual students maximise their potential. Medical classifications of disorders such as ASD that are based on behavioural symptomology are inevitable imprecise (Jordan, 2005).

It is unsurprising that participants defined ASD based upon a symptomatic understanding of the disorder, due to children with ASD being a heterogeneous population of students, in which one student with ASD can have a very different set of learning needs from another students with ASD (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Morrier, Hess & Heflin, 2011). Nevertheless, research (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Huws & Jones, 2011; Jordan, 2005; Linton et al., 2013; Segall & Campbell, 2012) affirms that classroom teachers demonstrate a significant lack of knowledge about ASD and hold incorrect beliefs and misconceptions about ASD. Results as shown in *Table 2* are concerning in that classroom teachers rely on other peer classroom teachers, observation, instinct and personal experience to create their own personal judgment regarding a students with ASD or similar learning needs. A mere 7% acknowledged that professional development would be a valuable tool in assisting their ability to understand these students (*Table 2*).

Classroom teachers must be knowledgeable about the nature ASD (Jordan, 2005). The large range of learning needs and the increase in prevalence of students with ASD in mainstream schools pose great challenges to classroom teachers if they are not well-equipped to understand and address the needs of these student (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012). McGillicuddy and O'Donnell (2014) propose that classroom teachers require a broad understanding of the nature of ASD in order to interpret student's behaviour correctly and to acquire the skills needed to address the complex behaviour and learning needs these students hold. A symptomatic understanding is not without merit, particularly as ASD is a spectrum disorder, however, a deeper understanding of the disorder is needed. Morrier and colleagues (2011) highlighted the fact that one educational practice may be effective for one student with ASD but ineffective for another students with ASD, hence, a symptomatic understanding is inadequate to teach a multitude of students with ASD through a classroom teacher's career. Rather than simply know symptoms of ASD, an adequate understanding of a broad diagnosis of ASD is imperative in enabling a classroom teacher to interpret the individual need of a students (Jordan, 2005).

The need for professional development

Research (Keane, Aldridge, Costley & Clark, 2012; Linton et al., 2013; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014; Segall & Campbell, 2012) states that classroom teachers are the vital factor in the successful inclusion of students, and in facilitating the learning and participation of students with ASD in the general classroom setting. This is a great responsibility and holds many challenges (*Table 3*).

In an attempt to understand how classroom teachers seek to meet the needs of these students, participants were asked to define what has contributed most to their teaching practice (*Figure 4a*). Over 50% of participants relied on the knowledge they had gained through personal experience of classroom teaching and almost a quarter of participants relied on a trial-and-error approach of varied teaching strategies. These results are alarming due to the emphasis placed on personal knowledge regarding ASD which, as discussed, is lacking and insufficient (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Huws & Jones, 2011; Jordan, 2005; Linton et al., 2013; Segall & Campbell, 2012). Research states that this 'eclectic approach' in which classroom teachers draw on a range of interventions and strategies is widely adopted (Guldborg, Parsons, MacLeod, Jones, Prunty & Balfe, 2011).

While there has been extensive research related to educational and behavioural interventions for students with ASD, there is no adequate research that has offered guidelines for providing best practice (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012). In their research, Morrier and colleagues (2011) found that educators rarely use evidence-based strategies with students with ASD and more disconcerting is McGillicuddy and O'Donnell's (2014) findings that classroom teachers were unanimous in agreeing that experience, not training, equipped them to a satisfactory level to teach students with ASD. There is currently little, if any, consensus with regard to what are the most effective practices for teaching students with ASD in general education settings (Morrier et al., 2011). Given this reality, schools and classroom teachers are faced with difficult decisions and a lack of knowledge regarding how to meet the learning needs of these students (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012). It is therefore unsurprising that over 75% of the participants in this study rely on personal knowledge gained through experience and trial-and-error approaches to teach students with ASD and similar learning needs in their classrooms. McGillicuddy and O'Donnell (2014) believe that classroom teachers call upon their experience due to a dearth in specific teacher education training.

While most participants relied on personal knowledge gained through experience and trial-and-error approaches (*Figure 4a*), almost half of participants in this study identified that the major

challenge they faced in teaching a student with ASD was a feeling of not being supported as the classroom teacher, feeling unassisted by a lack of learning support staff and teachers aides and feeling unprepared or ill-equipped to meet the learning needs of students with ASD (*Table 3*). Over half of participants desired an increase in the amount of specialist staff in the classroom (*Table 4*) to assist with challenges such as classroom management, dealing with negative and disruptive behaviour and with difficulties engaging the student (*Table 3*). There is evidently a greater need to support classroom teachers. When asked how they may be further assisted, almost half of the participants asked for an increase in professional development and training. In their research, Segall and Campbell (2012) stated that increased experience and training had a high correlation with more favourable attitudes towards the implementation of empirically supported practices.

In this study, a low number of participants (13%) found professional development had contributed to their current practice (*Figure 4a*) yet almost half of participants called for an increase in professional development and training to further assist their teaching practice (*Table 4*). This relationship shows a need for increased professional development for classroom teachers in meeting the needs of students with ASD. Research (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012; Strieker, Logan & Kuhel, 2012) affirms that effective professional development is the cornerstone for improvement in teaching practice.

Professional development is needed to build specialist knowledge amongst classroom teachers on the specific needs of children with ASD (Guldborg et al., 2011). With the increase of students with ASD enrolling in mainstream school settings, it is paramount that comprehensive training is undertaken by classroom teachers to build knowledge regarding the unique social, communication and academic needs characterized by this population of students (McGee & Morrier, 2005; Morrier et al., 2011). As discussed, the nature of ASD, with each student possessing a unique set of educational needs, makes teacher training for these students fundamentally challenging and complex (Morrier et al., 2011). It is therefore imperative that professional development is on going, student-focused and evidence based. Research (McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014; Segall & Campbell, 2012) advocates for on-going professional development that continues throughout the classroom teachers' career. Classroom teachers are best prepared to work with students with ASD by infusing additional coursework with teaching practice and thereby expanding their knowledge and addressing current attitudes and practices (Segall & Campbell, 2012). Classroom teachers can better implement new professional learning through professional development opportunities that incorporate on-going support at the classroom level that is student-

focused and allows space for classroom teacher feedback (Streiker et al., 2012). Streiker and colleagues (2012) believe that on-going support should translate into in-class observation of classroom teacher practices by consultants as well as providing forums or study groups as professional learning communities. Professional learning communities should provide classroom teachers with a structure for on-going collaboration with colleagues and consultants in a safe and non-evaluative environment consistently through out the school year (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Streiker et al., 2012). Moreover, Morrier and colleagues (2011) argue that this on-going consistent professional development assists teachers in offering hands-on practice of strategies rather than participating in didactic training that is removed from the classroom.

Evidence-based Strategies

In their study, Morrier and colleagues (2011) found minimal consensus regarding the most effective practices and strategies to be utilised in meeting the needs of a student with ASD in the general classroom setting. This is disconcerting as learning outcomes for students may be jeopardized due to a lack of understanding and training in using interventions and strategies within the classroom (Guldborg, 2011, Symes, Remington, Brown & Hastings, 2006). To ensure success for students with ASD and similar learning needs, classroom teachers must be trained in the use of evidence-based practices, that is, they must be equipped with multiple approaches of the use of strategies that have a strong evidence base of effectiveness for students with ASD (Morrier et al., 2011).

Interview participants in this study utilise an array of strategies in meeting the needs of students including role play (*Interviewee 1; interviewee 2*), visual displays (*Interviewee 1; interviewee 3; interviewee 4*), classroom environment alterations (*interviewee 4*), routines (*interviewee 3*) and creating social exchanges with peers (*interviewee 6*). It is unclear whether these participants founded these strategies on evidence or if, as evident in *Figure 4a*, participants relied on personal experience or trial-and-error approaches. Results in *Table 2* suggest that classroom teachers have a lacking reliance on evidence-based knowledge and rather rely on assistance from colleagues, personal observations, personal experience, parental preference, assessment tasks and comparison to other students. There is a great need to ensure practice is not ad hoc, for demonstrated efficacy to establish empirical validation in order to brand a strategy as evidence-based and therefore useful in meeting the needs of a student with ASD (Morrier et al., 2011).

This paper will not discuss the varied strategies founded in research due to the constraints of this study. However, Crosland and Dunlap (2012) argue that some evidence-based strategies for achieving successful inclusion of a student with ASD include antecedent procedures such as priming behaviour, prompting delivery and visual schedules; delayed contingencies such as positive reinforcement; self-management strategies such as student selection of goals or self-observation of behaviour; and peer-mediated interventions that provide social learning opportunities through peer interaction, peer modeling and peer reinforcement. Crosland and Dunlap (2012) advocate Response To Intervention (RtI) and School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SW PBS) as research-based interventions to support the inclusion of and meet the learning needs of students with ASD in a mainstream school setting.

Further research is needed to understand classroom teacher knowledge of strategies and the degree to which there is an awareness of an evidence-base for strategies utilised. Crosland and Dunlap (2012) go further to call for standardized models, such as a model for the inclusion of students with ASD, which include an array of evidence-based strategies and practices. Currently, no Australian or NSW government documents exist to provide classroom teachers with such knowledge or information, rather this is found through external service providers and non-government agencies.

Classroom teachers must develop a clear understanding of what ASD is in its broad sense, and this must occur through ongoing and consistent professional development. Moreover, with this knowledge classroom teachers must develop a repertoire of evidence-based strategies and empirically validated interventions that can be utilised within their classroom and, more favourably, across a whole school setting. This will enable the inclusion of students with ASD in mainstream school settings in NSW. Streiker and colleagues (2012) argue that responsible inclusion provide on-going and on-site professional development that ensures a focus on individual needs of the student and that classroom teachers have the support they require to effectively implement evidence-based practices. In the case of students with ASD, their learning needs must not be viewed as a product of diagnostic symptoms or learning 'difficulties' but also of student strengths and interests and how these individuals may contribute to their community (Jordan, 2005).

Part B – Educational Policy

Knowledge and training in educational policy

Inclusion has increasingly become the ideal standard for education and as a result, legislation and policies are being implemented internationally and nationally in Australia (Sharma, Forlin & Loreman, 2008; Varcoe & Boyle, 2013). *Figure 11b* shows that the participants of this study had a worthy understanding of inclusion. This research did not focus on inclusive education in general, rather current primary teacher understanding and knowledge of inclusive educational policy was explored. Approximately 40% of participants in this study were able to recall studying educational policy in their pre-service teacher training (*Table 6*). The remaining participant stated that they did not study educational policy in their pre-service training or that they could not recall the content of their pre-service training.

In a report on initial teacher preparation, the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards [BOSTES] NSW reported on teacher preparation regarding classroom management and the ability to teach students with special education needs as required by initiatives of the NSW Government (BOSTES NSW, 2014). Since 1994, initial teacher education programs in NSW have been required to include at least a single unit of study in special education that builds 'knowledge of legislative responsibilities and educational policies as they relate to educational settings for students with special needs' (BOSTES NSW, 2014, p. 36). This stipulation had already been recommended in the Warnock Report in 1978 (Hannon, 2008; Warnock Committee, 1978).

Disconcerting findings are evident in *Figure 6b*. Of those participants who stated they *did not* study educational policy in pre-service teacher training, almost 50% had not been teaching for more than ten years. Approximately one third of all participants who stated they *did not* study educational policy had been teaching for less than five years. *Interviewee One*, whom had been a classroom teacher for less than five years, stated they knew no government policies. In accordance with the report on seventeen initial teacher education providers carried out by BOSTES NSW (2014), the mandatory requirement of these providers to include a unit in special or inclusive education programs has occurred since 1994, over twenty years ago. Therefore, these participants, who stated they had not studied educational policy, and who had been teaching for less than ten years, should indeed have done so. In terms of requirements, the initial teacher education programs in NSW are

required to include the equivalent of one semester unit of study in special education (BOSTES NSW). Within this stipulation, one semester of university equates to twelve weeks, with two hours devoted to a unit which then equates to 24 hours of study per unit. This paper will not discuss pre-service training of teachers however it is worth noting that research has found pre-service teachers feel insufficiently trained to teach a diverse range of students with learning needs (Carroll, Forlin & Jobling, 2003; Sharma, Forlin, Loreman & Earle, 2006; Varcoe & Boyle, 2013).

This study found that of the participants who *could not recall* the content of their pre-service training, almost three quarters had been teaching for over eleven years (*Figure 6a*). To state that the cause of this lack of recollection is solely due to the standard of pre-service training is misguided. BOSTES NSW (2014) states that teacher education students require much more information than is possible to acquire within the constraints of pre-service training, rather on-going professional learning and support must be available to classroom teachers to supplement their initial teacher education.

Practice and exposure to knowledge that builds a theoretical, political and practical understanding will enable classroom teachers to develop understanding of inclusive policy (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). In 2012, the NSW Government developed an increased range of opportunities for classroom teachers to access professional learning and training in order that adequate adjustments are made to support individual learning needs of all students in all classrooms through the Every Students Every School Learning Support Framework (NSW DEC, 2012). The anticipated result was to be a better-equipped teacher workforce made up of professionals who were well equipped to meet the learning and support needs of all students. This is imperative due to the legal responsibility classroom teachers have to provide quality and equitable educational experiences for all students in accordance with NSW policy (Dempsey, 2008).

Policy embodies ambitious efforts to change teaching practice and teaching practice often shapes how policy turns out (Cohen, Moffitt & Goldin, 2007). Policy is a continuous process with formation being inseparable from execution (Ball, 1990; Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Cohen et al., 2007). As stipulated under the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, classroom teachers must hold a 'broad knowledge and understanding of policy and legislative requirements', 'access... relevant policy and legislation' and 'ensure compliance with legislative and/or system policies' (BOSTES NSW, 2012, p.9). From these standards, one can surmise that a classroom teacher is unable to fully support participation of students with a disability without knowing relevant policy and legislation. For students with ASD, philosophical practices regarding policy are instrumental in implementing procedures that define identification, assessment and intervention strategies as well as determining the overall extent

of successful inclusion for this student population (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; Strieker, Logan & Kuhel, 2012).

This study has shown that classroom teacher recollection of pre-service training on educational policy is relatively low or non-existent (*Table 6*). For the participants who *did recall* educational policy, these classroom teachers referred to school based policies that stipulated expectations regarding homework, discipline, excursions etc. Participants were asked how they engage with educational policy to which the majority replied they did not (*Table 7*). Reassuringly, research (Cohen et al., 2007; Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010; Seashore Louis, Febey & Schroeder, 2005) concludes that classroom teachers who do not engage with policy should not be viewed as lacking the capacity to do so. Classroom teachers must be empowered to engage with educational policy.

Engagement with educational policy

In this study, interviewees were asked to state any policy or policy texts they were aware of with the majority of participants referring to school-based policy such as homework policies, discipline policies, excursion policies and emergency policies. Similarly, of the approximate 40% of survey participants who stated they *did* study educational policy in their pre-service teacher training, the most common aspects identified were school-based policy that related to discipline, excursions and homework as well as child protection. When participants were asked about their ability to engage with government policies, interviewees' responses were vexatious. *Table 7* shows interviewee responses and attitudes toward educational policy with participants stating they engaged with policy 'very rarely' (*Interviewee 2*), 'not an awful lot' (*Interviewee 3*), 'I wouldn't interact with [educational policy] at all' (*Interviewee 1*) and on a practical level, one interviewee stated 'I don't sit down and refer to policies as I am doing things' (*Interviewee 4*). Of the participants who did engage with policy they stated they engaged 'at the beginning of the school term and on staff development days' (*Interviewee 5*) and 'once a term, but it probably wouldn't extend much further than that' (*Interviewee 6*). This interaction is didactic in nature and does not enable consistent engagement throughout the term.

This research finds that classroom teachers are not engaging with government educational policy to a desirable degree. The classroom teachers in this study used language that implied a detached relationship (*Table 5*) and language referring to compliance rather than willingness. Cohen and colleagues (2007) suggest that this compliance is actively pursued by policy-makers, yet it results

in policy and practice being at conflict with one another as the implementers of such policy are often left with more questions than answers (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). Language of compliance is evident in the BOSTES NSW report on Classroom Management and Students with Special Needs (2014) which states that teacher education providers are committed to 'addressing teaching standards, ensuring teacher education students are aware of their *obligation* under legislation' (p. 24). The term 'obligation' is used in this document five more times.

The sense of obligation may be the result of an allocation of values. Gale and Densmore (2003) draw attention to the centrality of power and control in policy in which the authoritative allocation of values become institutionalised. Classroom teachers feel as though they are being regulated by which policy has become a key contributor to the marketisation of educational institutions (Ball, 2004; Gale & Densmore, 2003). Due to constraints this paper will not enter this discussion but does acknowledge this seeming commodification of educational practice and emphasis on specific values found within policy. There is a detachment between educational policy and classroom teacher practice.

Past research provides insights as to the cause of the detachment of classroom teachers from government educational policy. Cohen and colleagues (2007) describe classroom teachers as problem solvers. Policies aim to solve problems, yet the problem solvers have the problem. Tools prescribed by policies to solve the problem are only effective if the problem solver knows how to use them well (Cohen et al., 2007). Classroom teachers feel inadequate in their ability to address what is prescribed in policy (Sikes, Lawson & Parker, 2007) due to policy makers having a knowledge of political goals, policy instruments and the policy making process, but not of the context of work, the students and day-to-day circumstances (Ball, 1990; Cohen et al., 2007). Moreover, research (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010; Russell & Bray, 2013; Seashore Louis et al., 2005; Sikes, 2007) highlights the problem with language and interpretation. As classroom teachers are confronted with policy documents, their personal interpretation will determine whether they engage in significant change or resistance (Russell & Bray, 2013). The rhetoric and discourse of government educational policy and publications has been, but should not be, described as vague (Sikes, 2007). One interviewee participant commented 'I find it difficult to see what actually applies to me and what I really need to take away as really vital parts of the policy' (*Interviewee 6*).

Classroom teacher personal interpretation and response is inevitably influenced by explicit or subliminal values. For classroom teachers who value social justice, for example, policies that propose otherwise pose a dilemma and as such misconceptions of policies may be based in experiences of

being treated as a policy object (Gale & Densmore, 2003). Classroom teachers can feel as though they are at the sharp end of policy, treated as objects rather than authors (Ball, 1990; Gale & Densmore, 2003). As evident in *Table 5*, classroom teachers invitation to engage in policy is somewhat confined to implementation or forced consumption (Ball, 1990). According to Gale and Densmore (2003), greater engagement in educational policy can only occur with greater participation in the policy-making process, that is, classroom teachers should be involved in the making of educational policy. One interviewee affirms this in their statement 'I find that the policies I have interacted with and even helped written at school mean that I have used them in my practice' (*Interviewee 1*). This issue is further noted by another interviewee, 'I think it depends on the policy, but a lot of them seem to be mandated by other people who aren't in the classroom. Then it's passed down through different chains of command but never really seems to be that applicable' (*Interviewee 2*). It can be inferred that educational policy morphs in an inadvertent game of Chinese whispers. Ball (1994) refers to this as 'gate keeping' in which key mediators of policy relate policy to context and in so doing, only certain voices are heard. Confining classroom teachers' influence to the context of policy practice exposes a theoretical understanding of the policy process as linear and discrete where policy production follows policy implementation (Ball, 1990; Bowe et al., 1993; Gale & Densmore, 2003). Rather, policy should involve translation and negotiation within a continuous cycle of policy contexts (Ball, 1994; Bowe et al., 1992).

Much research (Gale & Densmore, 2003; Ball, 1990; Bow et al., 1992; Russell & Bray, 2013; Seashore Louis et al., 2005) has made the case for classroom teachers as policy producers. For the policy texts that classroom teachers are already 'obligated' to adhere to, research (Cobb & Jackson, 2012; Russell & Bray, 2013; Seashore Louis, 2005) advocates a 'sensemaking' perspective. Sensemaking emphasises that policy implementation involves active sense making where classroom teachers may build upon their understanding of teaching, students and learning in relation to the policy document (Cobb & Jackson, 2012). It involves mutual adaptation between the policy and the local context which is imperative as legislative policies typically provide guiding principals rather than a developed program of action for implementation (Cobb & Jackson, 2012; Seashore Louis et al., 2005). Seashore Louis and colleagues (2005) argued that the sensemaking perspective is an important tool for understanding the relationship between policy and practice so as to avoid cynicism, frustration and resistance to policy from classroom teachers. In this study, classroom teachers were asked how they may be better equipped to engage with policy, to which participants stated they required time, and clarity (*Table 8*).

Time and educational policy

Table 8 outlines classroom teachers' perceptions of what they would require to assist them to further engage with educational policy and to translate this policy into practice. While professional development was highlighted by many participants, the majority response was an increase in 'time'. It can be deduced that an increase in 'time' would allow for assistance in other areas shown in Table 8 – *more time* to collaborate with colleagues, *more time* to clarify language, *more time* to view examples and *more time* to understand the relevance of policy to the context of the classroom. Such findings are affirmed by Bourke (2008) who found that classroom teachers in Queensland felt time poor and frustrated by education reforms as they added further levels of bureaucracy and managerial responsibility to their already complex and demanding roles as classroom teachers. Similarly, further research (Seashore Louis et al., 2005; Subban & Sharma, 2006; Varcoe & Boyle, 2013) found that classroom teachers expressed concern over increased personal and professional responsibilities in meeting the needs of students with disabilities or additional learning needs. The NSW Government is aware of this within its own context, understanding that classroom teachers feel overwhelmed with the responsibility of meeting students learning needs within a complex curriculum (NSW DEC, 2012). Seashore Louis and colleagues (2005) believe that given more time to devote to making sense of policies, classroom teachers will be enabled to interpret policy as controllable and within their capacity.

Table 9 shows classroom teachers perception of whether they had time to read policy documents and plan how to implement the policy within the classroom. Over 50% of participants in this study stated that they *did not* receive the time they required. This is problematic as time enables classroom teachers to construct interpretations of policies and to draw on implications from professional reflection (Seashore Louis et al., 2005; Varcoe & Boyle, 2013). Figure 9a compared the responses of non-government school classroom teaching staff and government school classroom teaching staff in reference to the time they perceived they received. Interestingly, 50% of non-government school staff found they received adequate time to engage and implement policy while only approximately 20% of government school staff felt this way. A closer inspection of specific policy, that is, the DDA and Standards, relating to disability reveals further information regarding this comparison.

Part C – The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education 2005

The Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) ensures that it is against the law to treat people unfairly due to a disability. The DDA implements human right obligations relating to non-discrimination, defines disability and protects people against harassment in many areas of public life, including education (DET, 2014e). All Australian state and territory education providers must comply with the DDA and the relevant disability discrimination legislation of that state and territory.

Participants of this study were asked whether they were aware of the DDA (*Table 12*). Approximately 55% of staff members working within a non-government school were aware of the DDA while over 80% of staff members working in a government school were aware of this policy text (*Figure 12a*).

Compliance with the DDA is obligatory and all education providers, including government and non-government schools, must also comply with the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (the Standards) (DET, 2014e).

Awareness of the Disability Standards for Education 2005

The Standards were formulated under the DDA to provide a framework to ensure students with a disability are able to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students (DEEWR, 2012b). The key objective of the Standards is to provide clarity and specificity of legal obligations for education providers and to ensure that rights and responsibilities in education are easy to understand (DEEWR, 2012b; DET, 2014d). The Standards apply to government and non-government education providers and therefore NSW government schools and NSW non-government schools are bound by the Standards (DEEWR, 2012b; DET, 2014d). The participants in this study work as staff of these education providers.

This study examined classroom teacher awareness of the DDA and the Standards. Lower levels of awareness were evident regarding the Standards compared to the DDA (*Table 13*). Less than 20% of staff members working within a non-government school were aware of the Standards (*Figure 13a*). In comparison to this low level of awareness from non-government classroom teacher participants, staff members working within a government school showed a very high level of awareness with over 80% of participants stating they knew of the Standards (*Figure 13a*).

Figure 13a shows disconcerting results for non-government school classroom teachers. As discussed, the Standards apply to all education providers, including non-government and government schools (DEEWR, 2012b). Lack of awareness may impact a classroom teacher's ability to comply with responsibilities under the Standards. The DEEWR (2012b) states that if an education provider does not comply with the standards then this is warranted to be acting unlawfully. The obligations within the Standards promote the legal standards with which education providers must comply and, if these are not adhered to, such a breach will generate the right of complaint to the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission* under the relevant provisions of the DDA and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986 (DEEWR, 2012b). Whilst the compliance with the Standards is the responsibility of the education provider, reasonable steps must be taken to ensure employed classroom teachers are informed of their responsibilities under the Standards. A lack of awareness that causes difficulty in preventing or removing harassment and victimisation within the classroom 'is not likely to be able to establish a defense under the Standards and the DDA' (DET, 2014b, p. 3). Education providers must ensure that their staff are proficient in non-discriminatory interaction with students with a disability and to ensure that staff are aware of commitments under the Standards (DEEWR, 2012b).

Professional Development on the Disability Standards for Education 2005

The DEEWR (2012b) recommends 'that timely, relevant and ongoing professional development is provided to staff, to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge, skills and understanding to enable students with disabilities to participate in the full range of educational programmes or services, on the same basis and to the same extent as students with disabilities' (p. 51). Moreover, such professional development must ensure staff are aware of policies, procedures and codes of conduct that address any matter of harassment and victimisation so that staff are trained to detect and deal with such circumstances (DEEWR, 2012b). This research studied classroom teacher's participation in professional development on the Standards.

Participants were asked whether they had undertaken professional development regarding the Standards in the past five years (*Figure 14a*). Only one participant from a non-government school had undertaken professional development on the Standards. Approximately 90% of participants from a government school had undertaken such professional development. A correlation is seen between

Figure 14a and Figure 13a with low levels of awareness relating to a lack of professional knowledge regarding the Standards.

Awareness was a key area for improvement found in the *Report on the Review of Disability Standards for Education 2005*. The report found a need for greater awareness of the Standards to ensure classroom teachers had detailed knowledge and understanding of the Standards and how they operate (DEEWR, 2012b). Australian education ministers agreed to address this and to build awareness in schools due to awareness of the Standards being 'patchy and inconsistent among educators' (DET, 2014e, p. 5). A stocktake of existing activities and resources that aim to promote awareness and provide guidance on the standards was undertaken by the Department of Education and Training. This stocktake outlined the national, state and independent professional development.

National professional development was developed over 2012 and 2014 in the form of an e-learning resource. The purpose of this e-learning resource was to improve participant's capacity to meet their obligations under the DDA and the Standards. In NSW, professional learning modules were created by the NSW Government titled *Every Student Every School: Learning and Support – professional learning modules* (DET, 2014b). These were developed through assistance from the Australian Government's *More Support for Students with Disabilities (MSSD)* initiative and were implemented from 2012-2013 (DET, 2014b). This was compulsory for all classroom teaching staff in NSW government schools. The Association of Independent Schools (AISNSW) provided professional learning opportunities in the form of consultancies, planning meetings and communication documents with the aim to build awareness of responsibilities and obligations under disability legislation (DEC, 2014e). Noteworthy is the emphasis placed on building capacity in school leaders before school educators, or classroom teachers. The compulsory professional development required of staff working within NSW government schools is reflected in Figure 13a and Figure 14a. Not only this, the NSW government provided a range of further professional development opportunities for staff as outlined in the stocktake (DET, 2014e).

Figure 14a reflects disconcerting results regarding non-government school classroom teacher professional development in the Standards. Interestingly, Figure 9a showed that participants from a government school responded with lower levels of 'time' to read policy documents yet had high awareness of the DDA and the Standards than those participants from a non-government school. This research can surmise that non-government school staff may have more time to engage with policy documents however these are not relating to disability or to teaching students with additional learning needs. Regarding disability policy, interviewee participants commented that a lack of

awareness is due to 'a very large learning support team' whom *Interviewee 1* stated 'I guess in my subconscious I leave that [disability policy] all to them' (*Interviewee 1*). Another participant regarded disability policy as 'filtered down into the leadership in my school that have been filtered down to me' and concluded that through this filtering 'there are probably some [policies] but I cant formally name any of them' (*Interviewee 2*). Such statements support research that has found classroom teachers to hold much lower levels of knowledge and awareness compared to special education teachers and school counselors (Linton, Germundsson, Heimann & Danermark, 2013; Segall & Campbell, 2012). The AIS NSW do provide a range of professional learning courses that incorporate building awareness and training classroom teachers in the use of the Standards and the DDA, however this research shows that participants in this study are not accessing such professional development opportunities. From these results, one can surmise that classroom teachers have vacated this knowledge for specialist staff including special education teachers and learning support teams.

The lack of consistency of all participants in this study and the lower levels of awareness and professional development of classroom teachers in non-government schools is problematic for a number of reasons. One particular noteworthy reason is the current National Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCDSSD) affecting *all* schools, both government and non-government schools. The NCCDSSD requires classroom teachers to have a clear 'understanding of their responsibilities under the Standards to ensure that students with disability are able to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students' (DET, 2015, p. 1). The data collected relies on a collaborative process including classroom teachers and in the form of 'judgements made by teachers' (DET, 2015, p.1). Classroom teachers of government and non-government schools must therefore have a deep understanding of the Standards in order to inform these judgements. Further, classroom teachers must be aware of how the Standards apply to the classroom.

Applying the Standards to the classroom

Participants were asked to state how they believed the Standards applied to teaching practice within the classroom (*Table 15*). The majority of participants responded with terms regarding their ability to meet the learning needs of students including 'accommodating', 'catering', 'providing access', 'ensuring participation', creating 'adjustments' and 'modifications'. Such terms relate to the

Standards, specifically in the standards for participation, student support services and harassment and victimisation (DEEWR, 2012b). Approximately half of participants used inclusive terminology such as 'equal' or 'including'. Over 30% of participants were unsure how the Standards applied to classroom teaching practice.

Participants were asked to assess the Standards in how they have assisted their knowledge and ability to teach students with ASD or similar social, communication and behavioural needs. Almost 50% of participants were unsure how the Standards assisted their classroom practice in meeting the needs of this student population (*Figure 16a*).

Submissions outlined in the *Report on the Review of Disability Standards for Education 2005* outlined a concern with the lack of practical application of the Standards. One education provider submission stated that classroom teachers 'are unaware of the Standards and their practical implications' (DEEWR, 2012a, p. 17). The report called for practical examples to support consistent interpretation, application and implementation of the Standards provided through further professional development (DEEWR, 2012a).

Literature highlights that guidance for schools and classroom teachers regarding the Standards in practice is limited (Cumming, Dickson & Webster, 2013). Due to the broad nature of the guidelines for making reasonable adjustments under the Standards, interpretation and implementation is left up to local education providers and their staff (Cumming, 2012). The *Report on the Review of Disability Standards for Education 2005* highlighted such issues by acknowledging the 'limited accessible practical advice and training on implementing the Standards for educators about identifying individual needs, developing individual education plans and providing appropriate support to achieve learning outcomes (DEEWR, 2012a, p. vii). Research (Alchin, 2014; Hunt, 2011; Whitburn, 2015) further highlights problems with language outlined in the Standards. Alchin (2014) argues that language such as 'reasonable adjustments' creates barriers while Whitburn (2015) highlights the sense of 'otherness' via the divergence from the 'norm'. Language contained in the Standards, and all policy documents, defines the overarching possibilities of inclusive practice (Hunt, 2011). Again, the review acknowledged a need for clarity within the Standards. The effectiveness of the Standards was seemingly hindered by how they were applied in practice, the clarity of some key terms and the interpretation and adherence to requirements (DEEWR, 2012a). Specific terms that were found to be unclear were 'consultation', 'reasonable adjustments' and 'unjustifiable hardships (DEEWR, 2012a). To resolve such problems, further professional development for classroom teachers focused specifically on the use of the Standards within the classroom is needed.

Figure 16a shows that participants within this study can benefit from further professional development regarding the use of the Standards within the classroom. The majority of participants found that the Standards did not provide assistance within the classroom, while others stated they simply provided guidelines, built awareness, outlined obligations or assisted with the identification of students. Evidently, the Standards are not being utilised in the way policy-makers and the Australian Government would have them be. More accessible practical advice and training on implementing the Standards for classroom teachers must be made available (DEEWR, 2012a). The Australian Government hopes to achieve this through providing appropriate support documents in the form of guidance materials that include practical examples and case studies (DEEWR, 2012a). The hope is that such materials will develop and assist classroom teacher interpretation and practical application of the Standards. The next review on the Standards is due to be published sometime this year. This researcher hopes for positive results regarding improved use of the Standards in NSW classrooms.

Conclusion

This research endeavoured to understand and address the research question that focused on understanding the extent to which classroom teachers hold appropriate knowledge and awareness of relevant inclusive policies and the ways in which this is applied to their teaching of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the general education setting. The study affirms previous research in educational policy and Autism and also delivers significant findings for future directions.

Classroom teachers at the participating schools in NSW had a generally good acceptance and understanding of inclusion in general (Foreman, 2008; Dempsey, 2008) however this research found that participants lacked the understanding of pertinent disability policy in NSW. Classroom teachers do not consciously engage with disability policy within day-to-day teaching practice and understanding of specific policies and policy texts is inconsistent and variable within and between different schools. Classroom teachers described a detached relationship with policy that denoted forced compliance. This supports previous literature (Ball, 2004; Cohen, et al., 2007; Gale & Densmore, 2003; Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010) of the conflict classroom teachers feel between policy and practice due to their preclusion from the policy process and isolation to the context of practice (Bowe et al., 1992).

This research highlights classroom teacher responsibilities under the DDA and the Standards. Overall, participants within this study had a lower understanding of the Standards compared to the DDA. Classroom teachers working within government schools held a distinctly higher awareness and knowledge of both the DDA and Standards compared to the non-government school classroom teachers. This contrast is due largely to the professional development undertaken by classroom teachers in the different education provider systems.

As a result of the lacking knowledge of disability policy found in classroom teachers, the NSW DEC recently provided required professional development to all classroom teachers working in government schools to improve awareness and provide clarity regarding these policy texts (DEEWR, 2012a; DET 2014). This research found that the high response level of participation in professional development of government school classroom teachers directly correlated with high levels of knowledge and awareness of the DDA and Standards. The AISNSW provided professional development for non-government school employees (DET, 2014) however this research surmises that such professional development is not being accessed or employed by classroom teachers.

The comparison of differences and similarities between classroom teachers working in government and non-government schools was an aim of this research. Similarities were found in several areas including understanding and ability to teach students with ASD, pre-service and in-service training regarding educational policy and the application of the studied policy texts within the classroom. Differences were found in time and professional development. Classroom teachers from non-government schools had more time to understand and implement educational policy into the classroom. Yet, classroom teachers from non-government schools reported much lower understanding of the DDA and Standards as well as lower participation in professional development on these policy texts.

This research did not find a correlation between pre-service teacher training and knowledge regarding the DDA and Standards. However, this research did affirm that pre-service training is inadequate in equipping classroom teachers to consistently understand the DDA and Standards and to employ such policy texts within their classroom teaching practice (BOSTES NSW, 2014). Classroom teachers expressed detachment from the DDA and Standards, believed they required more time to understand and engage with such policy texts and were unaware how these policy texts applied to or assisted their teaching practice, particularly in meeting the needs of students with ASD in the classroom day-to-day.

All classroom teachers in this research defined ASD based on symptomology, adopting a medical approach in their understanding. This is an ample understanding but not necessarily sufficient to understand how to meet the needs of these students in the classroom throughout the course of a classroom teaching career. Most classroom teachers in this study felt ill equipped to teach students with ASD and required more support to enable them to do this successfully. This research has highlighted that classroom teachers rely on personal experience and trial-and-error approaches to meet the needs of a student with ASD without awareness of evidence-based practice. This is problematic and supports previous research findings (Guldborg et al., 2011; Morrier et al., 2011) in that it creates an ad hoc, eclectic approach to the use of strategies between different classrooms and different schools. Participants reported that professional development had not assisted their ability to meet the needs of students with ASD yet requested more professional development to enable them to do so. This research proposes that professional development is essential to classroom teacher ability to effectively understand the nature of ASD and to develop an evidence-based employment of strategies to meet the learning needs of this student population. Furthermore, such professional development must be linked with the Standards in that the Standards

are established throughout understanding of and utilisation of evidence-based strategies. It is not adequate to hold only an awareness of the Standards that is detached from practice, rather, classroom teachers must be aware of how the Standards apply to momentary practice in the classroom.

Future Directions

This paper provides insight into future directions for the relationship between classroom teachers and educational policy, and professional development for classroom teachers.

This research provided evidence that NSW classroom teachers are disengaged from the policy-making process with reference to compliance rather than willingness. It is surmised that issues of policy language, political and personal values and overall power relations are the cause. Further research is needed to understand the grounds for this disconnect.

The research discovered that classroom teachers did not have the appropriate time afforded them in order to understand and implement practices based off policy documents. More time to understand the DDA and the Standards was requested. Further research is needed to understand the concept of time within a classroom teachers practice day-to-day and week-to-week – how time is utilised, how much of this time is utilised for the understanding of educational policy, and how the time used to understand educational policy impacts classroom teacher practice, particularly in meeting the needs of students with ASD.

Professional development is inescapably significant for future research. This research uncovered the paramount importance and relationship between professional development and knowledge of the DDA and the Standards, and the ability to ensure this knowledge exerts influence over teaching practice. Future directions must include how classroom teachers engage with consistent professional development regarding such pertinent policy texts and how such professional development informs teaching practice. Accountability regarding professional development should also be explored due to differences between education providers.

Moreover, professional development specific to teaching students with ASD must be explored. With increased inclusion of students with ASD in NSW general education settings, greater accountability for professional development, understanding and use of evidence-based strategies must transpire. Future research into classroom teacher participation in such professional

development with the aim of moving toward a consensus of best practice in strategies on how to teach this student population must be developed.

This research can be utilised as a pilot study for a larger research project.

Limitations

This research study was limited in time and thus a number of foreseen restrictions occurred. The study was carried out in one particular area of Sydney, NSW and as a result, there is homogeneity in the sample group in regards to location and socioeconomic status. The majority of participants were teaching and living in similar social standards and worked only within four specific schools. This sample size and results cannot be generalised to all of NSW. To overcome this limitation, a larger sample size from various locations around NSW should be used, including a large amount of participation government and non-government schools. The responses, views and attitudes expressed in this study were from classroom teachers, excluding other members of staff working within schools with students. Insights from learning support teachers, school counselors, teachers aides, school principals and other paraprofessionals would be helpful to gain a whole-school approach toward educational policy and teaching students with ASD. In regards to policy, policy makers and those working within policy production would have also provided insight for this research. With these limitations acknowledged, this research study stands as a useful foundation for future research in this area.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Principal consent form

Department of Human Sciences
Faculty of Education
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109



Chief Investigator: Dr. David Saltmarsh
Phone: (02) 9850 8798
Email: david.saltmarsh@mq.edu.au

Co-Investigator: Mrs. Michelle Walker
Phone: (+61) 416 052 709
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Principal Information and Consent Form

In what ways does policy effect practice?: The impact of policy on the ability of general classroom teachers to teach students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder in New South Wales.

Classroom teachers of your school are invited to participate in a study of inclusive policies and practice in New South Wales primary classrooms. The purpose of the study is to assess classroom teacher awareness of inclusive policies and how these policies affect teaching practice and ability to teach students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the general education setting.

The study is being undertaken by Mrs Michelle Walker to meet the requirements of Master of Research under the supervision of Dr David Saltmarsh of the Department of Education of Macquarie University.

If you decide to allow classroom teachers within your school to participate, you will be asked to distribute an online survey that will take no longer than 5 minutes for your staff members to complete. This online survey will ask a series of multiple-choice, rating scale and short answer questions regarding your personal training, experience, knowledge and teaching practice. Those who participate in the online survey will go in the draw to receive a \$100 gift voucher to Westfield Shopping Centre. This incentive is funded by Macquarie University.

In addition to this, you will allow the co-investigator, Mrs Michelle Walker, to conduct a short interview with two (2) of your staff members prior to viewing a short lesson in their classroom. This interview will take 5-10 minutes and will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The questions asked will regard your teaching practice and your professional knowledge regarding policy and teaching practices regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder. Participants must consent to undertaken with the online survey or the interview and may elect to end their participation at any stage.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential, except as required by law. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Only the chief investigator, Dr David Saltmarsh, and the co-investigator, Mrs Michelle Walker, will have access to

the data. A summary of the results of the data can be made available to you on request. Please contact Mrs Michelle Walker (michelle.gorman@students.mq.edu.au) if you require a summary of the results of the data. The results of the data will be represented in a research paper submitted to Macquarie University.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your school at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

I, _____ have read and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to allow my school and classroom teachers working within this school to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name: _____
(Block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____
(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics & Integrity (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)

Appendix B – Information for parents form

Department of Human Sciences
Faculty of Education
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109



Chief Investigator: Dr. David Saltmarsh
Phone: (02) 9850 8798
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Co-Investigator: Mrs. Michelle Walker
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Email: michelle.gorman@students.mq.edu.au

Parent Information Form

In what ways does policy effect practice?: The impact of policy on the ability of general classroom teachers to teach students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder in New South Wales.

Classroom teachers of your child's school will be invited to participate in a study of inclusive policies and practice in New South Wales primary classrooms. The purpose of the study is to assess classroom teacher awareness of inclusive policies and how these policies affect teaching practice and ability to teach students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the general education setting.

The study is being undertaken by Mrs Michelle Walker to meet the requirements of Master of Research under the supervision of Dr David Saltmarsh of the Department of Education of Macquarie University.

If the school Principal decides to allow classroom teachers within your child's school to participate, the Principal will be distribute an online survey that will take no longer than 5 minutes for the teaching staff members to complete. This online survey will ask a series of multiple-choice, rating scale and short answer questions regarding personal training, experience, knowledge and teaching practice. Those who participate in the online survey will go in the draw to receive a \$100 gift voucher to Westfield Shopping Centre. This incentive is funded by Macquarie University.

In addition to this, the co-investigator, Mrs Michelle Walker, will conduct a short interview with two (2) teaching staff members. This interview will take 5-10 minutes and will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The questions asked will regard teaching practice and professional knowledge regarding policy and teaching practices regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder. Participants must consent to undertake the online survey or the interview and may elect to end their participation at any stage.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential, except as required by law. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Only the chief investigator, Dr David Saltmarsh, and the co-investigator, Mrs Michelle Walker, will have access to the data. A summary of the results of the data can be made available to you on request. Please contact Mrs Michelle Walker (michelle.gorman@students.mq.edu.au) if you require a summary of the results of the data. The results of the data will be represented in a research paper submitted to Macquarie University.

No children or students will be involved in this research. The chief investigator and co-investigator will have no direct contact with students. This research is focused on NSW teacher quality and thus, your child will not be involved in this research in any way.

Default Question Block

Department of Human Sciences
Faculty of Education
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109



Chief Investigator: Dr. David Saltmarsh
Phone: (02) 9850 8798
Email: david.saltmarsh@mq.edu.au

Co-Investigator: Mrs. Michelle Walker
Phone: (+61) 416 052 709
Email: michelle.gorman@students.mq.edu.au

Participant Information

In what ways does policy effect practice?: The impact of policy on the ability of general classroom teachers to teach students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder in New South Wales.

You are invited to participate in a study of inclusive policies and practice in New South Wales primary classrooms. The purpose of the study is to assess classroom teacher awareness of inclusive policies and how these policies affect teaching practice and ability to teach students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or students with social, behavioural and communication needs in the general education setting.

The study is being undertaken by Mrs Michelle Walker to meet the requirements of Master of Research under the supervision of Dr David Saltmarsh of the Department of Education of Macquarie University.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to undertake an online survey that will take no longer than 5-10 minutes to complete. This online survey will ask a series of multiple-choice, rating scale and short answer questions regarding your personal training, experience, knowledge and teaching practice. If at any stage during your participation in the online survey you feel discomfort, you may elect to end the online survey and your responses will not be used in this study. By participating in this study, you will go in the draw to receive a \$100 gift voucher to Westfield Shopping Centre. This incentive is funded by Macquarie University.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential, except as required by law. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Only the chief investigator, Dr David Saltmarsh, and the co-investigator, Mrs Michelle Walker, will have access to the data. A summary of the results of the data can be made available to you on request. Please contact Mrs Michelle Walker (michelle.gorman@students.mq.edu.au) if you require a summary of the results of the data. The results of the data will be represented in a research paper submitted to Macquarie University.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

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Do you consent to undertaking this survey?

☐ Yes. I have read the information and consent to undertaking this online survey. Please insert your name below. Your identity will be kept confidential.

☐ No

Thank you for participating in this online survey.

Please answer openly and honestly. Answer all questions to the best of your ability.

Your responses will remain strictly confidential.

In what school are you currently working?

In your own words, what does 'educational policy' mean to you?

What aspects of educational policy did you study in your pre-service training

☐ The aspects of educational policy I studied were:

☐ I did not study educational policy

Qualtrics Survey Software
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☐ I cannot remember the content of my pre-service training

Are you aware of inclusive policies that apply to primary classroom teachers in NSW?

☐ Yes. For example:

☐ No.

Are you aware of NSW policy/policies that apply to students with a disability or additional need?

☐ Yes. For example:

☐ No.

On a scale of 1-10, how do NSW education policy documents apply to your day-to-day teaching in the classroom?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Not applicable									Very applicable	
Your rating											

How do you access policy when required?

☐ I consult colleagues

☐ Online

☐ I do not know how to access policy documents

☐ Other:

On a scale of 1-10, how easy is educational policy (and policy language) to understand?

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Difficult to understand

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Easy to understand

Your rating

Have you read and understood the policy titled 'People with Disabilities - Statement of Commitment' accessible on the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) website?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No. I work for an Independent School (not the DEC).

Have you read and understood the policy titled 'Assisting Students with Learning Difficulties' accessible on the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) website?

- Yes No

Are you aware of the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) 'Disability Action Plan'?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Throughout your career, have you been given appropriate time to read policy documents and think through how you will implement the policy in your classroom?

- Yes No

How do you feel NSW classroom teachers can be better equipped to translate policy into teaching practice?

What does the term 'inclusion' mean to you?

Are you aware of nationally consistent approaches to identifying students with a disability as stipulated in the 'National Education Agreement'?

- Yes No

Have you read and understood the Australian 'National Disability Strategy 2010-2020'?

- Yes No

Are you aware of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)?

- ☐ Yes. The Disability Discrimination Act is:

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- Q2

Are you aware of the Disability Standards for Education (the Standards)?

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☐ Yes
☐ No

Briefly outline how the Disability Standards for Education apply to you as a classroom teacher teaching in your classroom.

Have you undertaken Professional Development on the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and/or the Disability Standards for Education in the past 5 years?

☐ Yes
☐ No

In the Australian Curriculum, 'students with disability' can be viewed under 'Student Diversity' across all subject areas. Briefly explain how you believe the Australian Curriculum assists classroom teachers to address 'students with disability'.

Are you aware of NSW Learning Support Frameworks (current or previous)?

☐ Yes. For example:
☐ No

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In your experience, what is 'learning support'?

Have you taught a students with additional learning needs (at any stage in your career)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

What is your own personal definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a developmental Disability causing significant social, behavioural and communication challenges (CDC, 2015)*.

*Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html>

The following questions will use terminology similar to that found in the above definition.

Have you taught a student demonstrating learning needs due to social, behavioural and/or communication challenges?
(Note: This student may or may not have any formal diagnosis).

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- ☐ Yes
☐ No

On a scale of 1-10, how challenging is it to teach a student with a developmental disability causing significant social, behavioural and/or communication learning needs?

Not challenging
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Very challenging
Your rating

In what ways have you found it challenging to meet the needs of a student demonstrating social, behavioural and/or communication learning needs?

On a scale from 1-10, how supported have you been as a classroom teacher teaching a student with social, behavioural and/or communication learning needs?

Not supported
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Very well supported
Your rating

How do you make 'teacher judgements' on students with social, behavioural and/or communication learning needs?

Do you feel that Learning Support services are readily available to assist you in teaching a student with social, behavioural and/or communication learning needs?

- ☐ Yes. The Learning Support services I have accessed are:

- ☐ No

When teaching a student with social, behavioural and/or communication learning needs, what would you say has contributed most to your practice?

- ☐ Knowledge gained through personal experience of classroom practice
☐ Trial-and-error approach to teaching strategies within the classroom
☐ Professional learning sessions
☐ Other:

How does the Disability Standards for Education assist you in teaching students with social, behavioural and/or communication learning needs?

How can you, as a classroom teacher, be further assisted in meeting the needs of students with social, behavioural and/or communication learning needs?

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Do you have any final comments regarding policy, practice, learning support or students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or social, behavioural and/or communication learning needs?

What is your gender?

☐ Male
☐ Female

What is your age?

☐ 20-25 years
☐ 26-35 years
☐ 36-45 years
☐ 46-55 years
☐ 56-65 years
☐ Over 66 years

How long have you been a classroom teacher in NSW?

☐ 0-5 years

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☐ 6-10 years
☐ 11-20 years
☐ Over 20 years

In what year did you begin teaching in classrooms?

Where did you complete your pre-service teacher training?

☐ An Australian university:
☐ An overseas university
☐ Teacher College
☐ Other:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this online survey.

Your identity and responses to questions will be kept strictly confidential.

You are now in the draw to win the \$100 Westfield voucher drawn by your school representative in the coming days.

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Appendix D – Interview questions

In what ways does policy effect practice?: The impact of policy on the ability of general classroom teachers to teach students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder in New South Wales.

Interview Questions

RESEARCHER SCRIPT

I am going to ask you a series of questions regarding your teaching practice and your personal beliefs regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder. Secondly I will be asking you a series of questions regarding educational policy.

You have consented to this interview however, it at any time you are feeling discomfort, you may stop the interview or refuse to answer one of the questions.

[Researcher check for understanding] Does this make sense?

1. What grade do you teach?
2. How many students are there in your class?
3. What does the term 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' mean for you in the context of the classroom?

RESEARCHER SCRIPT

Autism Spectrum Australia states that Autism Spectrum Disorder is a developmental condition that affects the way an individual relates to his or her environment and with other people. The main areas of difficulty evident in students are evident in social, communication and behavioural challenges and learning needs*

The remaining questions will focus on students with social, communication and behavioural learning needs. These students that you have taught may or may not have a formal diagnosis.

[Researcher check for understanding] Does this make sense?

4. What strategies and methods do you use when teaching a student with social, communication and behavioural needs?

5. Why are these effective?
6. What are the challenges you face as a teacher when teaching a student with social, communication and behavioural needs?
7. What does 'educational policy' mean to you?
8. As a classroom teacher, how often do you feel you engage with 'educational policy' on a conscious and practical level?
9. What policies or policy texts are you familiar with?

RESEARCHER SCRIPT

I am going to ask you about specific policies relevant to classroom teachers. If you are aware and understand the policy text, explain what you may know about this policy. If you are unaware or have not heard of the policy I state, simply state that you have not heard or do not know of the policy.

[Researcher check for understanding] Does this make sense?

10. Are you aware of state policy on disability such as:
 - a) 'People with Disability – Statement of Commitment'? [DEC]
 - b) 'Assisting Students with Learning Difficulties' policy? [DEC]What do you currently know about:
 - c) NSW 'Disability Action Plan'? [DEC]What do you currently know about these national policy and policy texts:
 - d) 'National Education Agreement'
 - e) 'National Disability Strategy 2010-2020'
11. How would you describe the relationship between policy texts and teaching practice?
12. In your own terms, what is the Disability Discrimination Act? Does this apply to you?
13. In your own terms, what is the Disability Standards for Education? Does this apply to you?

14. How does the Disability Standards for Education specifically apply to teaching students with social, communication or behavioural learning needs?

RESEARCHER SCRIPT

Thank you for participating. This is the end of the interview questions.

Appendix E – Ethics Approval Macquarie University

Dear Dr Saltmarsh and Mrs Walker,

Re: "Does policy affect practice?: The impact of policy on the ability of general classroom teachers to teach students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder in New South Wales"(5201500357)

Thank you very much for your response. **Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Human Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee and approval has been granted, effective 14th May 2015. This email constitutes ethical approval only.**

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr David Saltmarsh
Mrs Michelle Lee Walker

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 14th May 2016
Progress Report 2 Due: 14th May 2017
Progress Report 3 Due: 14th May 2018
Progress Report 4 Due: 14th May 2019
Final Report Due: 14th May 2020

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/application_resources

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit

on renewal of approvals allows the Sub-Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Sub-Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/managing_approved_research_projects

5. Please notify the Sub-Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy>

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of ethics approval.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Anthony Miller
Chair
Faculty of Human Sciences
Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee

Appendix F – Ethics Approval SERAP



Mrs Michelle Walker
41/10-14 Loch Maree Avenue
THORNLEIGH NSW 2120

CORP15/10255
DOC15/365723
SERAP 2015111

Dear Mrs Walker

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled *Does Policy Affect Practice?* I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved.

You may contact principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. **You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to principals.**

This approval will remain valid until 11-Jun-2016.

The following researchers or research assistants have fulfilled the Working with Children screening requirements to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research for the period indicated:

Researcher name	WWCC	WWCC expires
Michelle Walker	WWC0303854E	09-Mar-2019

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

- The privacy of participants is to be protected as per the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.
- School principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the principal for the specific method of gathering information must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the research approvals officer before publication proceeds.
- All conditions attached to the approval must be complied with.

When your study is completed please email your report to: serap@det.nsw.edu.au
You may also be asked to present on the findings of your research.

I wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Stevens".

Dr Robert Stevens
Manager, Quality Assurance/Research
11 June 2015

