Caught in the frontline: examining the introduction of a new national data collection system for students with disability in Australia

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ABSTRACT
In Australia, a new system of collecting data on school-aged students with disability is in the early phases of implementation. The nationally consistent collection of data on school-age students with disability (NCCD) establishes a mandatory data collection process in which teachers categorise and report on individual students’ level of additional educational needs. This data is used to determine funding allocations for students with disability. Under this policy, teachers are responsible for assessing students’ needs, and for documenting their own teaching practice. This paper reports on the early phases of policy implementation. It presents data from teachers at two schools to make visible the new work teachers must undertake. Drawing on Dorothy E. Smith’s sociological contributions, we show how the NCCD reorients teachers’ work towards documentation and the production of evidence. After exploring teachers’ work, we analyse how the NCCD is being taken up in ways that do not contribute to policy aims of ensuring teachers are better able to understand and meet student requirements. Our aim is to understand how the everyday realities of how teachers’ work intersects with NCCD goals, and whether this new national policy is likely to make sustained inroads into achieving broader inclusive education ideals.

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Introduction
Recent decades have seen policy makers grapple with understanding how teachers’ everyday work might bring inclusive education ideals into being; and how this work should be funded. Writing after the first International Inclusive Education Colloquium, Clark, Dyson, and Millward (1995, 224) suggested with a sense of hopefulness that the time was right for a movement away from special education; yet within a short period of time, they reflected on the theoretical and pragmatic challenges of bringing about such change (Clark, Dyson, and Millward 1998). Slee (1995) provided an Australian perspective on the issue:

Unless we are pressed to define our terms of reference, we frequently talk at cross purposes. New policy language is easily learned and accommodated, but it is more problematic for this
to penetrate the fine-grain realities of organisation, curriculum and pedagogy of school culture (31).

Reflecting on the events of the following decade, Slee (2002, 2006, 2011) concluded that rather than acquiring new languages, special education language was adapted, subverting the original intent of inclusive education, and ‘continued on largely unimpeded’ (2006, 112). Slee (2007) noted that rather than bringing about a paradigmatic shift, discourses of inclusion (in both policy and practice) had failed to move beyond medical models of difference, and ultimately led to a situation in which ‘all manner of thinking, discourse and activity [could] pass itself off as inclusive’ (Slee 2006, 111). In the Australian state of Queensland, even when Carrington and Robinson (2006) worked towards inclusive education ideals (for example using Booth et al. 2000 Index for Inclusion), policy enactment revealed a series of complexities that led to ‘confusion, frustration and guilt’ from policy makers and practitioners (Bourke 2010, 183).

This paper picks up this ongoing policy discussion by exploring the development and implementation of Australia’s inaugural national policy for funding students with disability. At the time of writing, the policy was known as the nationally consistent collection of data on school-age students with disability (NCCD). The paper begins with a discussion of the background to reform and the enactment of the NCCD; we then present an overview of the NCCD model of categorisation. The paper draws on the sociological contributions of Dorothy E. Smith, in particular her conceptualisations of textually-mediated power relations; and the importance of understanding the everyday realities of work. We then explain the research method of inquiry and introduce the two schools where data was collected. We use Smith’s work to examine teacher’s work and trace how this is connected to the NCCD. This analysis of NCCD implementation provides an early insight into whether this new national policy is likely to achieve deep or sustained pedagogical, curricula or cultural change. Our aim is to understand the everyday realities of teachers in order to examine whether the new work created by the NCCD has the capacity to move inclusive education forward by challenging or shifting the culture or practices of schools in line with the broader goals of inclusive education.

**Background to reform**

Australia’s ‘vertical fiscal imbalance’ (Twomey 2014) refers to the situation in which Australian states and territories have minimal opportunity to raise revenue – despite being responsible for the provision of expensive portfolios including health and education. Because the Commonwealth government retains the ability to ‘grant financial assistance to any state on such terms and conditions as the parliament thinks fit’, states and territories hold an inherently weak bargaining position when it comes to funding for education, including for students with disability.

Although the federal government has provided additional funding for the education of students with disability since the 1970s, until the introduction of the NCCD, state governments maintained authority to determine how this money was distributed (notwithstanding non-government school funding deals). Under this model, states and territories adopted inclusive education options for students with disability, albeit slowly (e.g. see Bourke 2010; Carrington and Robinson 2006; Forlin et al. 2013). When the Australian
Government ratified the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disability (2006), this included the endorsement of Article 24, General Comment 4 (2016) which articulated expectations of inclusive education practices. Recent moves towards the federalisation of funding and policy have placed the education of students with disability on the national reform agenda, underwritten by the NCCD.

**History and early enactment of the NCCD**

When the NCCD was introduced in 2013, the then Federal Minister for Education, the Honourable Peter Garrett, argued it would allow schools to ‘better … meet their responsibility to support students with disability under the Disability Discrimination Act’ (Garrett 2013, 1). The logic behind this statement is that schools would be able to realise their legal responsibilities through a new funding model based on teacher assessments of students with disability (Commonwealth of Australia 2005). In other words, by standardising the assessment of students with disability across the country using common categories of disability and levels of educational adjustment, the Australian Government would be able to determine funding more consistently and equitably (Australian Education Council 2015; PricewaterhouseCoopers 2011). An educational adjustment is defined as a measure of action undertaken by the teacher to minimise potential barriers to opportunities to learn for a student with disability (Davies et al. 2018; Pullin and Haertel 2008). This definition encapsulates terms such as ‘reasonable adjustment’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2005) and ‘reasonable accommodation’ which are used in the CRPD (United Nations 2006). Specifically, teachers make educational adjustments in relation to curriculum, pedagogy, and/or the environment (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2013). Under the NCCD, teachers assess educational adjustments in terms of frequency and intensity to determine a level of adjustment. The determined level of adjustment forms the basis of access to funding. This model is discussed in detail later in the paper.

The NCCD has two key purposes: first, to determine and document a level of adjustment to activate funding for students with disability; and second to collect prevalence data on students with disability under four broad categories: cognitive, sensory, social-emotional, and physical (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2017; Australian Department of Education and Training 2018). In so doing, the NCCD also aims to establish a nationally consistent application of the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) definition of disability (Australian Department of Education and Training 2018). Teachers are required to undertake new forms of work to meet the requirements of each of these two components.

**Dual categorisation for a national funding model**

The work required by teachers under the NCCD is broken into four key steps. First, teachers must determine if an adjustment is being made due to a disability. Second, teachers must assess the frequency and intensity of the adjustment and allocate a specific level of adjustment (see Figure 1). Third, the student must be allocated to a disability category. The final step is the submission of the student data to the Australian Government for processing. Figure 1 is an infographic from the NCCD website (2018) that is provided to assist educators in understanding this decision-making process.
Although access to NCCD funding is based on eligibility criteria for both disability and level of educational adjustment, the funding algorithm is attached to the level of adjustment. Of the four levels of adjustments, only three are funded – supplementary, substantial and extensive (Commonwealth of Australia 2017). Notably, the lowest level, Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP) receives no additional funding. Funding is scaled, based on increasing levels of intensity, frequency and specialisation of supports.

**Teachers assessing categories of disability**

While the categorisation of disability is not new, the NCCD marks the inauguration of a nationally standardised approach to the assessment of disability in order to activate federal funding. The four categories of disability within the NCCD are aligned with the Australian Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1992) definition of disability (Australian Department of Education and Training 2018a; Commonwealth of Australia 1992). Given state governments’ funding history of students with disability, Australian teachers are familiar with students with additional educational needs being labelled and/or categorised for specific types of intervention or instruction, and for the purpose of extra funding (Forlin et al. 2013; Tomlinson 2017). However, NCCD requirements mean schools must now undertake a range of new work based on the need to determine levels of adjustment and categories of disability for students. For teachers, this work occurs in addition to meeting existing accountability demands, and the very real educational needs of students in their classes.

**Teachers assessing their own work to determine a level of educational adjustment**

The criterion for each level of adjustment is published in the NCCD guidelines and is outlined in Table 1 (current on the 7 August 2018).

Under the NCCD, teachers must collect evidence of adjustments/s for accountability purposes (Education Services Australia 2018). Documentation must demonstrate that adjustments occurred for a minimum of 10 weeks of school education. This evidence is high-stakes, as it has significant and direct funding implications. In determining levels of adjustment and documentation requirements, teachers must make a range of complex decisions such as how to best facilitate and document individual student access to learning opportunities; and how to determine NCCD adjustment level (category) based on the intensity and frequency of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and environmental adjustments (Davies,
Table 1. Levels of educational adjustment.

| Level of adjustment               | Explanation                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Quality differentiated teaching practice | Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP) is responsive to the differential needs of all students. Some students with disability may not need educational adjustments beyond those that are reasonably expected as part of quality teaching or school practice to address disability related needs |
| Supplementary adjustment          | Supplementary Adjustments are provided when there is an assessed need at specific times to complement the strategies and resources already available (for all students) within the school. These Adjustments are designed to address the nature and impact of the student’s disability and any associated barriers to their learning, physical, communication or participatory needs |
| Substantial adjustment            | Substantial Adjustments are provided to address the specific nature and significant impact of the student’s disability. These Adjustments are designed to address the more significant barriers to their engagement, learning, participation, and achievement |
| Extensive adjustment              | Extensive Adjustments are provided when essential specific measures are required at all times to address the individual nature and acute impact of the student’s disability and the associated barriers to their learning and participation. These Adjustments are highly individualised, comprehensive and ongoing |

Note: Australian Department of Education and Training (2018b).

Elliott, and Cumming 2016; Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2013). While the complex work of making adjustments is not new for teachers in Australia or internationally, what is different is that the NCCD seeks to standardise assessment and documentation processes at the national level in ways that impact on funding, and, we contend, teachers’ work. The NCCD has thus instituted new accountabilities that require teachers to undertake new assessment practices, including an assessment of their own work (in terms of on-going levels of adjustments provided).

Institutional ethnography and understanding new forms of work

In understanding the potential impacts of the NCCD on teachers’ work, we draw on the work of Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. Smith, who pioneered the method of inquiry known as institutional ethnography. Smith’s work is grounded in the notion that people are experts in their own lives, and that this embodied knowledge should be the starting point for sociological inquiry. Smith pioneered her approach during the 1970s and 80s as she wrote her doctoral thesis and began working as a faculty member. Here she became aware of the differences between her work as a mother, wife and then single parent. Smith (1997) recalls being struck by the differences in how these different areas of her life and work were organised. At home, life revolved around children, shopping, playgrounds, school and other local doings. However, at university, work was ‘organised by an entirely different mode of consciousness, connected beyond the local setting, based in texts and defined by concepts and categories claiming universality’ (114). It was here that Smith understood how lives are ‘hitched into’ wider power relations. She describes this experience as a kind of ‘bifurcated consciousness’ in which ‘two modes of subjectivity and activity coexisted’ in her life (Smith 2005, 21). She contends that switching between these realms requires a daily ‘reorganisation of subjectivity’, because we do not ‘cease to be present and active in the everyday world when [we go] to work’ (21).

Smith (1987) has argued that the techniques used by institutions create a problematic gap between objectified ways of knowing the world, and our lived realities of it. Consider a
teacher in a classroom – arranging for a student to have assistance and appropriate access
to bathrooms; arranging for a student to be seated where she can actively participate in
learning. To understand the coordination of these everyday realities, Smith (2005)
argues, there is a need to understand how the activities of people are coordinated from
beyond the local, with texts such as policy documents being used to authorise particular
courses of action. Smith (2005) describes this organisation of consciousness and activity
as ‘ruling relations’:

The concept of the ruling relations directs attention to the distinctive translocal forms of
social organisation and social relations mediated by texts of all kinds (print, film, television,
computer, and so on) that have emerged and become dominant in the last two hundred years.
They are objectified forms of consciousness and organisation, constituted externally to par-
ticular people and places, creating and relying on textually based realities (227).

These ruling relations orchestrate the everyday lives of people such as teachers working
with children with disability – changing the focus from a relation that exists between indi-
viduals towards relations that are mediated by organisations and institutions. Our interest
is in understanding these multiple forms of consciousness, and the capacity of texts to
coordinate the everyday goings-on in schools. In addition to their everyday work with stu-
dents, teachers are required to undertake two distinct forms of work for NCCD purposes:
first, they must categorise their own work (educational adjustments), and second, they
must determine how students fit within NCCD categories. This work occurs alongside
the emotional and physical labour of working with students with disability; caring for stu-
dents’ immediate, embodied, local needs. Institutional ethnography affords great a poten-
tial for exploring this bifurcated consciousness as it is experienced by teachers across
Australia: How do they negotiate the everyday realities of working with students with dis-
ability, alongside meeting institutional demands that require categorised, standardised
versions of reality about students and teachers’ work to be assembled under the NCCD.

The research study

The research sites for this study were two Queensland primary schools located in a
middle-class area of a metropolitan city. The data presented in this paper were collected
as part of a wider doctoral project that explores the impact of NCCD implementation on
teachers’ work. For the larger project, ethnographic data collection included multiple
interviews and conversations with teachers of students in years 3–6, school leaders and
education support staff (such as guidance counsellors and learning support teachers)
and education authority representatives. These year levels were selected due to the devel-
opmental age of the students, and the increased likelihood of identifying teachers with at
least one student with disability in their class. In total, there were 26 research participants.

Data collection and analysis

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators over a period of six
months, at a time and location convenient to each participant. Prior to the initial discus-
sion, a set of semi-structured conversation prompts was sent to each participant. Educa-
tors were also invited to share documentation as they talked through the work that they
were undertaking to meet NCCD requirements. Interview questions were designed to
encourage teachers to talk about their work and decision-making processes. Additional ethnographic work was conducted such as attending professional meetings and curriculum planning days.

Data analysis was iterative and occurred prior to, during and post-transcription. After each interview, the interviewer recorded field notes, noting key documents that the participant indicated was a central organiser of their work. During transcription, analytic notes were recorded (for example transcription choices such as recording sarcasm, changes in tone of voice and so on). This follows the work of Ochs (1979) who argued that the transcription process is central to the analytic process. Once completed, transcripts, field notes and analytic notes were organised into electronic tables. These tables included demographic data (such as school, year level) as well as a column that identified work that participants were undertaking (such as creating templates to record adjustments). Tables also included a column that recorded the key documents that were being used or discussed by teachers (and a note as to whether this document had been provided and was part of the data set). This column noted where the document was produced, how it entered into teachers’ everyday work, and where it went once teachers had completed their work. For example, early analysis revealed that a key text, known as ‘the list’, was used by the vast majority of participants at both schools. As will be discussed below, ‘the list’, was a list of students with disability included in the count for NCCD. At both schools, students on the list were assigned to NCCD categories, and this list drove significant portions of teachers’ work. Analysing data in this way made visible how teachers’ work was being coordinated through their engagement with their school ‘list’. This analytic work revealed the importance of ‘the list’, as it was repeatedly used to frame teachers’ explanations of their work.

Organising and analysing the data in this way revealed potential gaps in the data. For example, after the first round of interviews, it was not clear who generated ‘the list’ at each school, or why, given that the list was not a formally sanctioned part of NCCD processes. NCCD documentation was also analysed iteratively, alongside repeated transcript analysis. Carefully checking NCCD policy expectations with participant accounts was significant, and revealed what Smith (in an interview with DeVault and McCoy 2006, 24) describes as the discovery process in which ‘[you have] a sense of what you are after, although sometimes you don’t know what you’re after until you hear people telling you things …. Discovering what you don’t know … is an important aspect of the process’.

This analysis informed subsequent discussions with participants. These discussions allowed time for participants to clarify their thinking, share new insights and elaborate on important points. Returning to each participant afforded an opportunity to discover more about the processes adopted at both schools to assign students to NCCD categories. We note not all teachers elected to participate in more than one interview. This iterative approach, alongside triangulation of documentary evidence, field notes and teachers’ descriptions of their work provided a fine-grained picture of how teachers’ work was being undertaken.

The data presented in this paper are drawn from three teachers from School A (Aliyah, Wendy and Lauren) and one teacher from School B (Beth). Although there was an inevitable variance in individual accounts, we have selected these four participants for this paper as their experiences illustrate the operation of ruling relations and explore how new forms of work are being generated and organised under the NCCD. As Nichols
and Griffith (2009) describe, the focus in institutional ethnography is not on individual accounts, but rather on ‘the coordination between an individual’s experience and the institutional relations with which they engage. The institutional relations of education are constructed to generalize across sites, times and individual experience’ (245). Thus, while the experiences of Aliyah, Lauren, Wendy and Beth appear in this paper, the analytic focus was on the coordination of individual teachers’ work and institutional relations, as orchestrated by the NCCD. This approach is typical of institutional ethnographic research, which uses data differently to traditional forms of qualitative research (such as case study or thematic analysis).

**Teachers’ understandings of NCCD and new forms of work**

Our analysis commences with a discussion of professional development provided to teachers to explain the NCCD, its purposes and implications for teachers. Being a new policy, both schools delivered school-based professional development led by learning support teachers during the first school term. After these professional learning sessions, teachers expressed concern about the work that would be required to meet the NCCD demands, in particular the need to carefully document the adjustments they were making for students with disability. Teachers and school leaders were highly aware that their work would have implications for school funding and were concerned to ensure that their school communities were not disadvantaged by their decision-making. Conversations between classroom teachers continued throughout the year, and in both schools, teachers were released from class to meet with learning support teachers. In-school meetings and discussions were often focussed around the need to get data ‘right’ for funding purposes. As Aliyah, an experienced classroom and learning support teacher said:

> The main reference that [is] made to NCCD [in meetings is that] … it’s very very, very important that you get it right, more information will follow, that was the key take home, this has implications for your funding … so, there’s that message, don’t put the wrong students into your list, don’t put your students in the wrong category, think really carefully about this …

This account reveals the focused attention to the policy requirement of the NCCD. This reference to ‘the list’ occurred at both schools and by education authority representatives. Here, the importance of textually-coordinated work becomes evident. Notably, students identified through the Education Adjustment Program (the Queensland Government procedure for identifying students with disability) were automatically placed on the ‘the list’ at both schools, with minimal discussion as to how this document was assembled, or the relevance of this action. Eventually, ‘the list’ was expanded to include other students who met criteria of receiving an educational adjustment due to either an imputed or formally diagnosed disability. The use of data walls that documented students’ achievement in literacy and numeracy also informed this process. According to the officially sanctioned process, the list of students should be assembled at the end of a series of educational support processes (see Figure 1). Returning to Smith’s notion of bifurcated consciousness, it is also evident that Aliyah’s work is ‘hitched into’ wider power relations, as evidenced by her focus on producing evidence to meet policy requirements, rather than being ‘present and active in the everyday world’ (Smith 1997, 21). While her account introduces new textually-driven professional responsibilities such as making sure ‘[you] don’t put the wrong
students into your list’ and so on, there is no talk about the students themselves, or on the nature of educational adjustments. Instead, the power relations operating through the NCCD reveal the focus on assembling a list (and later, documentary evidence for the decisions on the list) that is driven by NCCD categories.

This perceived pressure to ‘get it right’ according to NCCD categories underpinned teachers’ decisions to collect extensive records of adjustments, with some teachers collecting ‘anything that the child produced’ in addition to their records of planning. As Wendy, an experienced class teacher and curriculum leader said:

I think [when NCCD was introduced] some people were a little bit overwhelmed by the whole order … ‘oh my goodness, this is another thing I’ve got to do’, and while they were making the adjustments, [they] found it difficult to be able to come up with a way of recording that.

The change for most teachers is in the representation of their work, and the production of textual accounts that serve as evidence of adjustments. We draw attention to Wendy’s use of the word ‘order’ which demonstrates her sense of the requirement to document as a textually-driven demand on her work. This work brings her everyday work in line with institutional imperatives. As Ball (2003) describes, this ‘fabrication’ of evidence is something ‘produced purposefully in order to be accountable’ (224). The impost on teacher time was significant, particularly given the NCCD places the onus of demonstrating evidence of adjustment on teachers. Lauren, an early career classroom teacher, said:

… Trying to work out what I need, what it is I need to do, because it was, it was a bit confusing … I’ve got 5 [students], I’ve got one of the most in the school … they thought they were going to have to have a different checklist for each, every single child, and I just realised I can’t, I can’t manage that, that’s just not going to be possible …

The demand for collecting sufficient evidence to ‘prove’ levels of adjustment, and the responsibility for getting the ‘right’ students into the ‘right’ category fell onto teachers. These accountability pressures meant teachers’ workloads increased, not because of professional judgements around the needs of students, but rather, because of externally mandated demands. This work reveals a new performative pressure in working with students with disability in which teachers’ educational adjustments are now performances that ‘serve as measures of productivity or output or displays of quality’ (Ball 2003, 216).

School leaders were highly aware of the burgeoning teacher workload created by documentation requirements. Both principals attempted to provide teachers with support and guidance on documentation, however, this too was problematic because support officers were also largely unsure of how this might best be achieved. Wendy said:

… I’ve had conversations with [the school leaders about this]. It needs to be workable for staff and not be so overwhelming …. [a learning support teacher] came up with a template …. that she has obviously spent a bit of time looking at, but it was so involved that she was basically wanting teachers to show every adjustment they were making for every one of these children in every lesson, and I said, ‘you know, you’re going to, teachers are going to leave the profession if you are going to ask them to do that. It’s just too much’.

This production of evidence to meet regulatory requirements was a central theme in interviews. Teachers commented frequently that while the adjustments themselves were not new, carefully producing evidence of this practice was a new and significant form of
work. The realities of working in classrooms with students, and meeting their needs were distinct from the work of documenting. Some teachers were concerned that producing accounts of practice as evidence for funding redirected their attention away from student needs. This shift of focus is described by Beth, an experienced teacher:

Yeah, it’s taken a lot of time away from that, we are just so worried about having all these records, that it actually takes it away, our time of being in that moment with the kids, and really having those deep conversations. You know, it’s like I need to write this down and then I lose my train of thought of how I can go forward.

The ‘regulatory frame’ of NCCD coordinates Beth’s embodied experiences of her daily work by inscribing these daily actions into an authoritative text-based representation, the templates used for recording adjustments (Smith 2005). Through multiple interviews, it became clear that new ways of talking about students with disability were being established. This account also reveals teachers’ changed subjectivities as their modes of consciousness were now connected beyond their schools based on the NCCD as a text that governed their work through ‘categories claiming universality’ (Smith 1997, 114). Students included in NCCD were on ‘the list’. This inscription of students also produced ways of knowing about teachers’ work, as described by Wendy:

So, [two members in the school leadership team] had already done some preliminary work together as the guidance and the support teacher … around, which children were going to be put in the list of NCCD, and had already been through, looked at previous data on those children and ahm, at which level that they were going to be entered in, you know, QDTP or whatever it is or the 4 levels.

The work described by Wendy inscribes students into a stable, comparable reality. Once on ‘the list’, students are able to be compared and managed. To take up Rose and Miller’s (1992) notion of inscription, it is clear that ‘information in this sense is not the outcome of a neutral recording function. It is itself a way of acting upon the real; a way of devising techniques for inscribing it in such a way as to make the domain in question susceptible to evaluation, calculation and intervention’ (185). As is evident from Wendy’s description of the how lists are assembled, there is little focus on attempting to reflect reality (if that were possible), but rather, to enable calculation and comparison – and governance from a distance.

The new forms of work required by those at the frontline represent a cycle, ‘in which people are at work producing a textual representation conforming to an authoritative or ‘boss text’, thus enabling a course of institutional action’ (Griffith and Smith 2014, 13). The production of additional documentary evidence (such as providing evidence of at least 10 weeks of teacher adjustments) for students on ‘the list’ increases visibility and accountability. Beth wondered:

Whether that is really needed for them [teachers] to move student learning forward, you know, this evidence, what will they [bureaucrats] do with this.

Here, we return to Slee’s (1995) point that ‘new policy language is easily learned and accommodated, but it is more problematic for this to penetrate the fine-grain realities of organisation, curriculum and pedagogy of school culture’ (31). The early evidence of NCCD implementation presented here demonstrates that new policy language has indeed been acquired in schools, with educators keenly aware of the need to document
evidence of adjustments. Everyday realities have changed, with a reorientation of focus towards the language and practices associated with accountability demands (notably, the fabrication of evidence). However, at this juncture, there is minimal evidence that inclusive education ideals have shifted curriculum, pedagogy or school culture under the NCCD. The effects on both teachers’ work in the classroom with students; and student participation and outcomes are not yet known.

**Discussion**

The move towards a national system of data collection can be seen within the context of wider global policy manoeuvres and discourses. Smith (2001) explains how everyday social relations are frequently organised by texts in contemporary times:

> The replicated identical text as utterance activated by participants joins them in a situation which it names and defines, standardizing among them the terms in which they can know, understand, and evaluate it, regardless of how its naming and its terms provide for the utterance of what they are actually experiencing. (176)

The data presented in this paper explicates how teachers’ everyday work with students is named and defined according to NCCD categories. This work was largely based on the central project of creating documentation in a form that enables ruling practice. The organisation of knowledge about teachers’ work and students with disability is thus inextricably bound up with wider ruling relations. The NCCD has unleashed chains of action in schools with principals, teachers and support staff creating templates and processes, documenting everyday practice, assembling evidence, making links to existing documentation (such as lists of students with disability) and so on.

This work has created new performative pressures as teachers worried about how the evidence they assembled about the quality and extent of educational adjustments would impact student funding. The ongoing production of evidence for accountability purposes was seen as an impost on teachers’ time, and a process that had the potential to shift teachers’ focus away from students’ needs. Their accounts instead reveal a focus on making their work institutionally visible, auditable and actionable through new performative work.

This work of documentation creates a disjuncture between teachers’ embodied experiences of teaching with students with disability, and the standardised, objective version of reality that is enshrined in the NCCD. As Nichols and Griffith (2009) put it, ‘noting the disjunctures between participants’ experiential accounts of their work and institutionally-organized texts … [allows the research to] explore the tension-riddled “line of fault” (Smith 1987) where one’s experiential knowledge bumps up against textual realities meant to manage it’ (244). Here, we point out that we are not opposed to the NCCD; but rather are using this historical moment to explore the vast complexities associated with its implementation. In researching the NCCD, our aim was to understand how teachers as frontline workers are caught in a disjuncture between their everyday work with students with disability and the relations of ruling that orchestrate their doings.

In Australia, the NCCD represents a potential ‘de-territorialisation’ (Appadurai 1990) that can allow one to simultaneously close the gap between what happens in different localities while widening the gap between oneself and the local. For example, while the
NCCD means that teachers may now be increasingly more connected to the practices and processes of teachers across the country, this work is oriented towards institutional needs to organise knowledge in a way that enables governance. This institutionally-required work has mushroomed, creating disjunctures between NCCD textual requirements and teachers’ everyday, embodied experiences working with real students and families in real places. The power of institutional ethnographic research is that it begins at the local level, before making connections to wider forces, or as Smith (1987) refers to them ruling relations. This research has demonstrated that the NCCD has created multiple work processes that are useful as a ruling practice (i.e. to allocate funding). However, there has been little evidence that the NCCD has changed teacher practice in ways that align with broader goals of inclusion. In examining the realities of teacher practice, it became evident that difference was constructed through data such as literacy and numeracy tests, verification of disability and so forth. The need to ‘get it [NCCD data] right’ was a focus at both schools; yet there appeared to be little focus on (or evidence of) a reorientation of school cultures, curriculum or pedagogy towards inclusive ideals.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we have mapped conceptualisations of Australia’s new funding model the *nationally consistent collection of data on school-age students with disability* (NCCD). We have outlined some of its complex history and explained how these changes have the potential to create significant implications for teachers’ everyday work. Teachers in Australia are required to assess, document and collect evidence of their own work and their students’ categories of disability for multiple policy purposes. In presenting data from two schools, we have shown how the NCCD reorients teachers’ work towards documenting evidence of educational adjustments, with little evidence of changing practice in the classroom. This data has also shown that despite a policy expectation that teachers’ work should form the basis of decision-making, much of teachers’ work is textually coordinated, for example by using existing lists of students assembled using NCCD categories. Our aim, drawing on the work of Dorothy E. Smith, was to make visible the everyday realities of teachers, and demonstrate how their work is orchestrated by the NCCD. In so doing, we have explicated how this work is creating new performative pressures for teachers so that institutional governance requirements are met. The focus on generating evidence within NCCD categories represents a shift from conceptual consistency in how teachers might work with students with disability, to material similarity across schools nationally. While NCCD funding and longer-term impacts (such as changing school practices and cultures) are not yet apparent, at this juncture, there is little evidence that teachers’ work thus far has been increasingly aligned with inclusive principles since the commencement of the NCCD.

**Note**

1. Underlined text denotes increased emphasis by Beth.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.
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Jeanine Gallagher is a PhD candidate at Queensland University of Technology. Her research interests include teachers’ work, education policy, inclusive education practices and students with disability.

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