

**Title:** The Importance of Being Evaluative

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### **Abstract**

Evaluating educational programs and interventions is generally considered a normal part of curriculum development and improvement, and published findings are readily accessible through peer-reviewed publications. Recently, however, researchers and practicing educators have identified a lack of evaluative research into autism spectrum disorder (ASD) educational practices in the peer-reviewed literature. This shortage of ASD specific evidence-based education literature is recognised as a factor that is hindering effective implementation of evidence-based education practices in classrooms with students with ASD.

Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) has an established evidence-based, person-centred ASD curriculum that is constantly reviewed and updated to meet the needs of the students in Aspect schools and classes. The systems and structures that are implemented throughout the organisation provide support to the teachers through a methodical, evaluative and continuous improvement process. Under the Aspect curriculum all educational interventions and support processes and devices undergo a series of evidence-based research trials and evaluations before they are implemented into Aspect-wide classes and included in the Aspect Comprehensive Approach for Education (ACAE) curriculum manual.

The educational philosophy of Aspect is to provide the best educational opportunity for children with ASD and to support parents and teachers by providing flexible, responsive and evidence-based services. This presentation will show how Aspect has established organisational strategies to review evidence, evaluate the efficacy, develop and constantly improve the curriculum manual, implement throughout Aspect schools and classes, and disseminate the findings of the evaluations.

Successful implementation of person-centred education requires easily understandable and readily available access to legislative and organisational policy in order for teachers and staff to adhere to the model. Through a workflow model that encompasses a step-by-step process from idea to classroom implementation and community outcome dissemination, teachers can effectively meet the organisational policy and legislative requirements.

Aspect promotes the usability and efficiency of the organisational resources through regular professional development and support for teachers to initiate ethics committee approved research evaluations of their programs. Teachers are encouraged to have input into the design of educational programs and to contribute to the interfaces to the resources (ACAE manual, intranet website, templates) so that other staff can effectively implement the curriculum. Ultimately, these human factor considerations are designed to improve the work environment and educational outcomes for the students.

During the presentation we demonstrate how the workflow model is being implemented to support the systematic processes and structures of ASD specific educational evaluation and how it is improving the educational outcomes of students. The model shows how the gap between research and effective classroom implementation can be closed in a timely and sustainable manner.