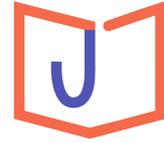


Rethinking Curriculum, Literacy, and Professional Judgement in Special Education



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Dear Readership,

We are pleased to present this issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals*, which centers on rethinking curriculum, literacy, and professional judgment in special education. The manuscripts in this issue collectively examine how long-standing assumptions about what counts as legitimate learning, instruction, and expertise continue to shape practice, preparation, and opportunity for students with disabilities.

While the manuscripts included in this issue were selected and accepted prior to our assuming editorial leadership of JAASEP, we have been intentional in curating this issue to reflect the journal's evolving direction. In organizing these contributions together, we sought to elevate their collective impact by foregrounding shared questions related to curriculum, literacy, and professional judgment, and by presenting the work in a way that aligns with our broader goals of increasing the journal's visibility, coherence, and scholarly rigor.

Across the field, special education professionals are often asked to navigate competing expectations related to academic standards, functional skills, compliance requirements, and inclusive practice. The articles in this issue engage directly with these tensions, offering conceptual, empirical, and practice-based perspectives that challenge narrow or binary constructions of curriculum and learning. Together, they invite readers to reconsider how professional

judgment is exercised, constrained, and supported within contemporary special education systems.

Reaffirming JAASEP's Aims and Scope

To view our updated aims and scope, consult author guidelines, or submit a manuscript for future consideration, please visit our new website: <https://www.aasep.org>. For readers interested in our editorial vision for JAASEP, we encourage you to consult the Fall 2025 *Letter from the Editors*, which outlines our commitments to applied, equity-oriented, and practice-informed scholarship and provides additional context for the journal's trajectory.

The journal continues to welcome a wide range of methodologies and perspectives, but with greater emphasis on:

- Research that is directly relevant to the daily work of special education professionals
- Studies that foreground inclusion, equity, and the lived experiences of students and educators
- Articles that inform practice, preparation, and policy across educational settings
- Work that bridges research and action, especially within underrepresented or under-resourced contexts

We are especially interested in manuscripts that reflect collaboration across disciplines, promote strengths-based approaches to disability, and address structural challenges in the field.

Themes from the Winter 2026 Issue

This issue features five articles that cover a broad range of timely and enduring topics in special education. While each study offers distinct insights, several key themes emerge.

Reexamining Curriculum and Knowledge in Special Education

Several contributions in this issue take up foundational questions about curriculum and knowledge. Hubbard et al., Krishnan, and Borinskoff each interrogate dominant assumptions that have shaped special education practice, including the separation of academic and functional learning, the privileging of technical compliance over instructional meaning, and the ways expertise is defined and operationalized in the field. These papers do not offer prescriptive solutions. Instead, they encourage critical reflection on how deeply embedded frameworks influence decisions about instruction, access, and expectations for students with disabilities.

Krishnan's work, in particular, bridges conceptual critique and instructional consequence by directly addressing how curricular binaries shape opportunities for students with extensive support needs. Taken together, these manuscripts underscore the importance of professional judgment that is informed by theory, ethics, and responsiveness to learners, rather than reliance on simplified or inherited categories.

Literacy, Communication, and Instructional Possibility

Other articles in this issue ground these conceptual conversations in classroom practice, particularly in relation to literacy and communication. Quick and colleagues present a descriptive case study that highlights how interactive shared reading and access to augmentative and alternative communication can expand engagement and expressive communication for students with complex support needs. This work illustrates how instructional approaches that prioritize interaction, meaning-making, and responsiveness can challenge assumptions about who participates in literacy and how.

By foregrounding communication and engagement as central to literacy instruction, this study reinforces the broader message of the issue: that meaningful learning opportunities emerge when educators are supported in exercising professional judgment that honors student strengths and diverse ways of communicating.

Preparing and Supporting Professional Judgement

Finally, Choiseul-Praslin and colleagues examine mentorship within special education preparation programs, drawing attention to how professional judgment is cultivated through relationships, modeling, and guided practice. Their findings highlight the role of mentoring structures in shaping how future educators navigate complexity, uncertainty, and competing demands in their professional roles. This focus on preparation connects directly to the broader themes of the issue, emphasizing that professional judgment is not an individual trait but a capacity developed through intentional support, reflection, and experience.

Looking Ahead

Taken together, the manuscripts in this issue reflect JAASEP's commitment to publishing scholarship that is conceptually rigorous, practice-informed, and attentive to the real conditions of special education work. By engaging questions of curriculum, literacy, and professional judgment, this issue contributes to ongoing conversations about how the field can move beyond reductive frameworks toward more inclusive, responsive, and intellectually honest practice.

Looking ahead, we are excited to continue building on this momentum through forthcoming issues and calls for special issues that invite sustained engagement with critical questions in special education research, preparation, policy, and practice. We hope readers find the work in this issue both challenging and generative, and that it sparks continued dialogue across research, preparation, and practice communities.

JAASEP is also currently calling for papers to be included in a 2026 Special Issue, "Strengthening IEP and IFSP Implementation within State and Local Systems." The special issue seeks to advance dialogue on how individualized planning can move beyond compliance to become a lever for equity and meaningful collaboration among educators, families, and system leaders. Learn more here:

https://media.naset.com/uploads/2025/11/Special-Issue-Call_JAASEP.docx.pdf

Thank you for being part of the JAASEP community. We look forward to your continued engagement as readers, reviewers, and contributors to the field.

Drs. Morris and Boquet
Co-Editors-in-Chief, JAASEP

In Parents' Voices: To What Extent Do Practitioners Need to Treat Stereotypical and Repetitive Behavior of Children Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Author: Evan Borinskoff

Abstract: Stereotypy—restricted and repetitive behaviors characteristic of autism spectrum disorder (ASD)—can influence children's independence and self-determination. Limited research has explored how parents perceive these behaviors and the need for intervention. This qualitative study, conducted in the Midwestern United States, examined the perspectives of nine parents of children with ASD. Semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, revealing four themes: (a) type and topography of stereotypical behaviors; (b) reactions from parents, siblings, teachers, peers, and community members; (c) perceived need for treatment; and (d) behavioral strategies used at home. Parents described stereotypical behaviors as both challenging and beneficial to their child's functioning. Most did not view intervention as necessary except when behaviors created medical or safety concerns. Findings underscore the importance of understanding parent perspectives to inform educators and practitioners in developing compassionate, evidence-based supports that honor both family priorities and neurodiversity.

The Value of Mentorship in Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs

Authors: Belkis Choiseul-Praslin, Brittany Auernig-Roan, Jonathan S. Toccoli, Charlene Starks, Bruce B. Mercado, and Taylor Mestres

Abstract: This study investigates the critical role of mentorship in preparing pre-service special education teachers for the challenges of the classroom. We surveyed pre-service special education teachers before and after engaging in a year-long mentorship experience with a veteran teacher. We also followed up with study participants one year after the mentorship experience ended, during their first year of teaching, to examine longer-term perceptions of mentorship. Findings indicate that participants reported increased readiness in instructional practice, classroom management, and confidence in their teaching abilities. However, participants reported ongoing gaps in preparation, particularly related to case management and working with students from diverse backgrounds. Implications for educator preparation programs and future research are discussed.

The Effectiveness of Self-Management Interventions on the Nonacademic Behaviors of Students with Emotional Disturbance: A Review of the Literature

Authors: Jessica P. Hubbard, James N. Meindl, Laura B. Casey, Diana Delgado, and Thouraya L. Al-Nasser

Abstract: Previous research suggests that self-management interventions are effective across a variety of disabilities, behaviors, and settings to curb maladaptive classroom behaviors. However, based on a recent literature review, there is an overall lack of research focused specifically on interventions for the Emotionally Disturbed (ED) student population and an even greater void of research studies that intervened on non-academic behaviors with his population (Garwood et al., 2021). Thus, this current study sought to expand the 2021 review by 1) focusing on only on intervention studies and 2) going beyond flagship EBD journals to be more inclusive of published peer-review work. As a result, the current study reviewed 34 studies (1990-2021) that implemented self-management interventions on the behaviors of 97 students with ED. Each of these studies were carefully reviewed to investigate the effectiveness of the interventions on the participant's target behavior. Using percentage of nonoverlapping data (PND) and percentage of data exceeding the median (PEM) to calculate effectiveness, findings suggest that self-management interventions were moderately to highly effective across settings, including the general education setting, and across target behaviors. All findings are presented detailing the specific intervention's effectiveness based on behavior targeted. In addition, social validity and limitations are discussed to aid in the continuation of research that delves into strategies that help teachers address the unique behavioral characteristics associated with students with ED.

A Framework for Integrating the Common Core Standards to a Functional Skills Curriculum in High School

Authors: Sudha V. Krishnan

Abstract: A holistic framework that integrates Common Core State Standards (CCSS) with functional skills instruction for high school students with extensive support needs (ESN) is urgently needed for high schools to comply with recent legislation like the California Assembly Bill 181 (2022), that established an alternate diploma pathway that is aligned with alternate academic standards. This paper argues against the false dichotomy between academic and functional curricula and, instead proposes a framework that integrates CCSS into functional activities by isolating specific skills (e.g., literacy, mathematics, collaboration, or technology use) and aligns them with evidence-based practices such as task analysis, video modeling, systematic instruction, prompting, and peer-mediated interventions. Instructional transparency is encouraged through visible classroom standards and academic subject labeling, supporting shared understanding among educators, families, and administrators. Further, the paper posits that functional skills are naturally an authentic context for standards-based instruction, allowing educators to maintain academic rigor while promoting skills needed for post-school readiness. This integrated framework offers a practical approach to

curriculum design and instructional planning for students with extensive support needs to prepare students for meaningful postsecondary education, employment, and community life.

Interactive Shared Reading Case Study with a Student with Complex Support Needs

Authors: Nancy A. Quick, Kathryn E. Dorney, and Karen A. Erickson

Abstract: Shared reading approaches with school-aged students who have complex support needs (CSN) and complex communication needs (CCN) typically focus on increasing the rate and accuracy of student responses to adult prompts and questions. This descriptive mixed method case study focused on the implementation of a shared reading approach designed to increase the engagement and expressive communication of a student with CSN and CCN. Increases in the teacher's use of interactive strategies and demonstration of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) occurred concurrently with increases in student engagement, initiations, and expressive symbolic communication. Implications for teacher practice and teacher preparation programs are discussed.