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JOSEA Editorial:

Bridging Gaps: Collaboration, Leadership, and Technology for an Inclusive Special Education Future

Paul Luelmo

In this first edition of the year—and my first as editor of the Journal of Special Education Apprenticeship (JOSEA)—we showcase advancements in inclusion and technology. At a time when anti-inclusion policies are emerging in the United States, the four studies featured in this edition highlight the dynamic interplay between research, policy, and practice in broadening inclusion for students with disabilities. In contrast to the current political climate in the U.S., it is both refreshing and encouraging to see researchers and professionals promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities through varied research methodologies and educational practices.. This is important as it shows how the field of special education continues to evolve, promoting greater inclusion for students with disabilities and neurodivergent individuals. These developments have important implications for special education professionals and practitioners, particularly in an era increasingly marked by anti-inclusion policies in the U.S.

Case Study: Inclusive Practices in an Elementary School

Chiappe et al. (2025) examine the evolution of inclusive education by analyzing how a segregated special education center and an elementary school merged to form an inclusive learning environment. The authors, colleagues within the California State University system, employ a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the critical role of teacher preparation, professional development, and school leadership in fostering inclusive practices. The authors show that by removing physical and conceptual barriers, students with extensive support needs can engage meaningfully with the general education curriculum. Importantly, Chiappe and colleagues demonstrate that achieving authentic inclusion for students with extensive support needs requires systemic change and strong school leadership.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication Technology and Collaboration

Love et al. (2025) analyze the complexities of interpersonal collaboration between educators and specialists working with students who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices. Their study reveals that working in silos hinders effective collaboration among professionals. Instead, educators and clinicians must be better prepared to collaborate in order to improve student outcomes. The authors call for collaboration summits and professional training specifically designed to enhance interdisciplinary teamwork. This study highlights how interpersonal relationships are essential for effective collaboration in advancing inclusion of students with disabilities.

Tangible Worth in Virtual Worlds: Leveraging Video Games for Play, Empowerment, and Community

Yoho (2025) investigates how digital gaming environments—a mainstream form of entertainment—can foster inclusive settings for youth with disabilities. The study emphasizes the critical role of virtual worlds and realities in the lives of young people with disabilities, noting that an estimated 20% of gamers identify as having a disability. These digital spaces provide opportunities for social interaction, skill development, empowerment, and community-building. This study offers promising new pathways for inclusion, highlighting an area of special education with potential for further exploration.

Virtual Reality for Teacher Candidates

Similarly, Marelle et al. (2025) explores how virtual reality (VR) can enhance teacher preparation. Using mixed-reality environments such as TeachLivETM, the study demonstrates how virtual classrooms can improve teacher candidates' behavior management skills. Key strategies—such as opportunities to respond (OTRs), behavior-specific praise (BSP), and token reward systems (TRS)—were effectively practiced in VR settings by teaching candidates. This research shows promise, illustrating how VR-based training can prepare future teachers in controlled, risk-free environments. By leveraging technology, this study supports inclusion by addressing one of the greatest challenges for educators: classroom management and behavior support.

Conclusion

These four studies contribute in an important way to the field of special education. They show how much promise technology can hold for promoting inclusion of students with disabilities and preparing future educators. However, they also emphasize the necessity of interpersonal collaboration and school leadership to drive systemic change. While technology plays a crucial role in fostering inclusive settings, the human element remains indispensable in ensuring its success. This is particularly important when emerging policies in the U.S. aim to dismantle the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in education and beyond.

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