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Introduction to Part 2 of the Special Issue: Helping Relevant Stakeholders Promote Behavioral Outcomes in Early Childhood

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Introduction to Special Focus: Helping Stakeholders Promote Behavioral Outcomes in Early Childhood

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Impact Statement: *Readers will gain information and insight into ten articles featured in PECPE's special issue dedicated to behavioral outcomes within early childhood settings.*

Abstract

Early childhood is often referred to as a sensitive period of development due to the critical nature of skills a young child is expected to acquire across a short period of time. It is a time when foundational social-emotional and academic skills can set the trajectory for later successful outcomes. It is also a time when the lack of critical skill development can increase a child's risk for future mental health and other long-term negative outcomes. Therefore, it is always pressing that early childhood institutions and stakeholders are abreast of evidence-based practices that promote the healthy development of a child's social-emotional and academic well-being. The focus of the second volume of this two-part special issue in *Perspectives on Early Childhood Psychology and Education* is aimed at providing effective practices to help relevant stakeholders promote positive pro-social outcomes throughout early childhood. This article will introduce volume two of the special issue. In addition, an overview of published manuscripts will provide readers with content-specific insight.

Keywords: *Early childhood; early childhood education; behavioral interventions; behavioral outcomes; early childhood academics*

Across the country, numerous programs (e.g., early childhood education, community-based programs, clinics, primary care, and ABA clinics) exist for early childhood learners. While these programs differ in design, structure, theoretical orientation, and other nuances, the basic goal of each of these programs is simple: increase foundational academic and social-emotional skills (Bakken et al., 2017; Gullo, 2013). What, in practice, might appear as a simplistic end goal is an incredible undertaking, with many early childhood educators struggling to meet the diverse needs of their students (McLeod et al., 2017). Considering early childhood is a period marked by rapid development, it is not surprising that research has indicated this as a sensitive period in which a number of critical skills are expected to develop (Juel, 1988; Scanlon & Vellutino, 1996; Willson & Hughes, 2009). Examples include academic, social-emotional, and behavioral skill acquisition. The development of these skills often marks the likelihood of success or failure across future outcome domains (Koller et al., 2022). This highlights the importance of additional training and support for our early childhood educators. This need was further amplified due to COVID-19. As we enter the post-pandemic era, the focal point of early childhood services should be to address children's limited opportunities to develop and practice certain social-emotional, behavioral, and academic skills (Ford et al., 2021; Gayatri 2020). Additionally, it is a time to address the critical needs of personnel responsible for providing vital services to these children (McCoy et al., 2021).

This special issue will highlight a number of the early childhood institutions and stakeholders that are addressing behavioral outcomes across young children ages 3-9 years old. From a reflection on clinical practice during COVID-19 to consultation practices in schools to academic interventions, each article addresses a critical need for additional evidence-based practice across behavioral domains.

The issue will open with conceptual and empirical articles about consultation and training techniques to improve

early childhood educators' use of evidence-based classroom management practices. Smith et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of consultation studies that examined the extent to which intervention implementation supports resulted in early childhood educators' generalized use of evidence-based practices. This study demonstrated the critical need for additional research in this area, with suggestions for future research. Additionally, this study provided practical recommendations for early childhood education consultants. In a conceptual article, LaBrot et al. (2022) describe a novel, data-based consultation model for early childhood educators. The existing literature base, recommendations for future research, implementation guidelines, and a case study are provided and thoroughly described. Beacham et al. (2022) continue this topic through an article dedicated to promoting the need for additional consultation training opportunities within infant and toddler settings. Specifically, the article describes an evidence-based consultation model validated in K-12 settings and discusses modifications that can be made to apply the method within early childhood settings to promote school readiness for infants and toddlers. Finally, Kemp and Whitcomb (2022) conducted a single-case design study at a Head Start investigating how to best align and integrate classroom management strategies and weekly social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. The findings suggest that through the use of professional development and weekly performance feedback, educators increased in their alignment with classroom management strategies to the weekly SEL lesson. The researchers also found strong levels of social validity reported through this consultation framework.

Academic skill acquisition is often overlooked as a behavioral outcome, but one most early childhood experts would argue is a key predictor of student success (Koller et al., 2022). The special issue will highlight three articles that evaluate early education academic support and interventions. Harry and colleagues (2022) discuss a summer academic intervention designed to reduce the risk of the

“summer slide” for low SES students through a Tier 1 and Tier 2 model. Although mixed results were found across participants, most students exhibited some improvement with oral reading fluency through weekly intervention to help reduce the learning losses that typically occur over the summer break. The study discusses some limitations to summer remediation support (e.g., attendance) and future directions for further support in this pivotal academic area. Similarly, Billingsley-Ring (2022) and colleagues evaluated effective reading interventions, including listening passage preview and repeated reading in a group format. This study sought to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of each intervention in relation to student gains in reading fluency. Finally, Dillon et al. (2022) assessed the intervention fidelity for dialogic reading, which targets early academic skills of oral language, vocabulary, and print concepts. Two studies are highlighted in this manuscript, both using single-case design research methodology. The first study utilized an alternating treatment design comparing the use of scripts and checklists for fidelity, while the second study utilized a multiple baseline design looking at the effects from the supports and the subsequent impact on intervention fidelity.

To round out the second volume of this special issue, specific attention was given to additional stakeholders across early childhood. Kupzyk et al. (2022) discuss the importance of interdisciplinary practices within early childhood settings. Specifically, Kupzyk and colleagues describe a university-based training program in which school psychology, applied behavior analysis, and special education graduate students were provided interdisciplinary collaboration training across multiple facets of service provision to young children. Our final article featured how a state-run applied behavior analysis center adapted treatment during COVID-19 to ensure continuity of care for early learners with autism (Furrow et al., 2022). Taken together, this special issue offers significant insight into consultation practices, academic interventions, and behavioral support across multidisciplinary

teams that intend to bridge the gap between evidence-based practice and early childhood stakeholders.

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*Denotes articles included in Part II of the special issue

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