

# Special Issue Preview: Introducing the Next Generation of Quality Indicators for Research in Special Education

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The Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Research (CEC-DR) is pleased to introduce a special issue designed to update and advance quality indicators for research in special education, advancing work originally published in a 2005 special issue of *Exceptional Children* (Volume 71, Issue 2). Then, as now, special education research has been characterized by a "long and cherished tradition" of diverse research methods (Graham, 2005, p. 135).

Research methods in each area have advanced considerably since 2005. Thus, the articles in this 2023 special issue provide guidance for researchers who are conducting research that will continue to move the field of special education forward. The issue includes articles focused on quality indicators for group-design research, single-case-design research, secondary data analysis, systematic literature reviews, mixed-methods research (MMR), qualitative research, and evidence-based assessment. Moreover, these seven articles foreshadow how research methods will continue to evolve over the next decade, particularly in deepening understanding of equity and open-science practices.

First in the issue is an article focused on quality indicators for group-design research. Jessica Toste, Jessica Logan, Karrie Shogren, and Brian Boyd provide an expanded set of indicators designed to advance knowledge about for whom and under what conditions interventions, programs, and practices are more or less effective for students with disabilities. The authors introduce new quality indicators to guide decisions related to the design, implementation, and analysis of research of groups of people in special education.

Next, to advance quality indicators for single-case-design research, Jennifer Ledford, Joseph Lambert, James Pustejovsky, Nicole Hollins, and Erin Barton extend previous standards by providing guiding principles and recommendations that advance rigor in internal validity, generality and acceptability, and reporting. They also promote considerations for single-case synthesis, which has grown substantially since the 2005 quality indicators were published, and discuss how the field can assess accumulated evidence for certain practices or intervention approaches.

The topic of the third article is new to this special issue. It introduces a series of recommendations for secondary data analysis. Allison Lombardi, Graham Rifenbark, and Ashley Taconet highlight preregistration as a tool for researchers to share innovative questions and analytic approaches as well as increase transparency. To that end, they describe quality indicators for secondary data analysis using applied examples from published studies based on two iterations of the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS2 and NLTS2012).

Michelle Cumming, Elizabeth Bettini, and Jason Chow propose four core principles to guide scholars in conducting high-quality systematic literature reviews: coherence, contextualization, generativity, and transparency. The authors described the application of these principles to each stage of the review process and best practices for enhancing the rigor, relevance, and credibility of meta-analyses, systematic narrative reviews, and qualitative meta-syntheses. They also describe considerations for advancing equity and connecting research findings to practice and policy.

The fifth article, a topic also new to this special issue, focuses on best practices in

MMR. Melinda Leko, John Hitchcock, Hailey Love, David Houchins, and Maureen Conroy discuss the promise of MMR for investigating empirical questions in special education research and expanding awareness of issues related to diversity and equity in the field. The authors introduce quality indicators for conducting MMR studies and reporting research results.

To expand capacity of purpose- and equity-driven qualitative research in special education, the Qualitative Research Collective (which includes Joy Banks, Taucia González, Carlyn Mueller, Mariana Pacheco, LaRon A. Scott, and Audrey A. Trainor) provide a new set of quality criteria that are focused on enhancing researcher reflexivity. The authors hope that this article will serve as a companion—complementing and extending—the existing quality indicators that have predominantly focused on credibility and trustworthiness (e.g., Brantlinger et al., 2005).

In the final article, also new to this special issue, Elizabeth Talbott, Andres De Los Reyes, Devin Kearns, Jeannette Mancilla-Martinez, and Mo Wang describe an empirically grounded framework, the operations triad model, to advance evidence-based assessment in special education research, including hypothesis generation and testing, study design, instrument selec-

tion, and measurement validation. They propose quality indicators for measurement validation and provide open data sources to advance this work.

As representatives of CEC-DR, we hope this collection of articles will help promote advances in research quality. We are confident that the articles in will spur ongoing dialogue and critical discussions related to the ways scholars conduct, report, and review research in the field of special education.

## References

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