



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED AND REVIEWED BY
Geoff Anthony Lindsay,
University of Warwick, United Kingdom

*CORRESPONDENCE
John J. Hoover
✉ john.hoover@colorado.edu

RECEIVED 16 May 2024
ACCEPTED 27 May 2024
PUBLISHED 05 July 2024

CITATION
Hoover JJ, Patton JR and Sacco DM (2024)
Editorial: Evidence-informed practice for
creating meaningful individual special
education programs for diverse students with
learning disabilities. *Front. Educ.* 9:1434020.
doi: 10.3389/educ.2024.1434020

COPYRIGHT
© 2024 Hoover, Patton and Sacco. This is an
open-access article distributed under the
terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution
License \(CC BY\)](#). The use, distribution or
reproduction in other forums is permitted,
provided the original author(s) and the
copyright owner(s) are credited and that the
original publication in this journal is cited, in
accordance with accepted academic practice.
No use, distribution or reproduction is
permitted which does not comply with these
terms.

Editorial: Evidence-informed practice for creating meaningful individual special education programs for diverse students with learning disabilities

John J. Hoover^{1*}, James R. Patton² and Donna M. Sacco³

¹University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, CO, United States, ²The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, United States, ³American Institutes for Research, Washington, DC, United States

KEYWORDS

editorial, special education, learning disabilities, IEP, diversity

Editorial on the Research Topic

[Evidence-informed practice for creating meaningful individual special education programs for diverse students with learning disabilities](#)

In today's US schools and classrooms, students with learning disabilities often bring considerable cultural and linguistic diversity to the instructional setting. Specifically, the delivery of effective special education to English learners (ELs) identified with a learning disability begins with educators developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that incorporates three interrelated features:

1. Attention to Cultural Sustainability.
2. Consideration of English language proficiency.
3. Knowing the interaction between exceptionality and diversity.

The three essential features of cultural sustainability, language proficiency, and the interaction between culture, language, and disability must be sufficiently addressed in an IEP for diverse learners with a learning disability. Unfortunately, recent research shows that individualized education programs (IEPs) for diverse learners often do not incorporate important language and cultural features (e.g., language objectives, funds of knowledge, culturally preferred teaching practices, etc.), thereby limiting the value of the IEP as an essential blueprint used to provide quality special education. More specifically, "effective education of English learners (ELs) with learning disabilities requires special educators to deliver culturally/linguistically responsive instruction within the context of special services, embracing the interaction between exceptionality and diversity" (Hoover et al., 2019, p. 14). The collection of research articles in this topical Research Topic provides a representative sample of ways educators may use research-based findings to strengthen IEPs for diverse learners. An overview of the six exceptional contributions is provided within the three categories of *Conceptual Analysis*, *Methods*, and *Perspective*, with each providing recommendations for IEP development for culturally and linguistically diverse learners with learning disabilities.

Spies presents a *Conceptual Analysis* article examining listening comprehension relative to students with learning disabilities engaged in second language acquisition. The author examines various components of listening comprehension including relevant linguistic skills (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, etc.) and needed cognitive abilities (e.g., working memory, background knowledge, etc.) leading to a framework

for listening comprehension appropriate for multilingual learners with learning disabilities. Recommendations for developing effective individualized special education programming with attention to several of the legally mandated IEP components include suggestions for improving (a) present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, (b) access to general education curricula, (c) measurable annual goals, and special/supplemental services. Attention to the numerous listening comprehension ideas presented in this article leads to effective instructional planning and programming for multilingual students with learning disabilities.

Moore and Wright present a *Conceptual Analysis* article that examines practices for developing science discipline literacy for culturally and linguistically diverse students with learning disabilities. The authors describe the importance of having students generate written scientific explanations along with select features that shape scientific explanations. They also describe writing challenges often experienced by diverse and exceptional learners that educators should consider when teaching this student population. Based on their conceptual analysis, the authors provide some IEP development recommendations for three of the mandated components (a) present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, (b) measurable annual goals, and (c) accommodation/modification supports. Attention to the numerous written science explanation features presented in this article provides educators with effective special education instructional planning and programming ideas for diverse students with learning disabilities.

Ferrell et al. also present a *Conceptual Analysis* article examining the importance of English centrality in reading. Specifically, issues of biased assessment, special education disproportionality, and inadequate educator preparation related to reading education of Emerging Bilingual (EB) students with disabilities continue to exist in our schools and classrooms. The authors suggest that increased attention to more broad-based conceptions of language is necessary to improve a student's linguistic repertoire necessary to advance reading achievement. Guiding principles presented by the authors for developing effective IEPs for EBs with disabilities include addressing language proficiency and language programming in each IEP component with specific attention to (a) present levels of English proficiency, (b) academic achievement and functional performance in both languages, (c) measurable annual goals, (d) service delivery decisions, and (e) accommodations.

Tran and Schepers summarize their research in a *Methods* article examining mathematics education for culturally and linguistically diverse students who have a specific learning disability. The authors identify and examine four essential features that shape effective mathematics instruction for diverse learners with disabilities: (1) cultural funds of knowledge, (2) language development, (3) gestures, and (4) multiple representations. Specific implications for developing three of the mandated IEP components for a learner with a mathematics disability include suggestions when developing (a) present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, (b) measurable annual goals, and (c) accommodation/modification supports. Application of the various mathematics ideas presented in this article leads to effective instructional planning and programming for diverse students with learning disabilities.

O'Brien et al. share their *Perspective* about the critical importance of providing adolescent students with learning disabilities, including culturally and linguistically diverse learners, with intensive and extensive intervention related to learning loss resulting from instructional disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their perspective includes examination of the strengths and challenges of various tutoring structures, showing that effective tutoring includes several indicators including delivery by highly trained educators during the school day. The authors further describe the effectiveness of learning strategy and explicit instruction models and curricula to improve adolescent achievement. Implications from their perspective are aligned with two of the IEP development mandated components of (a) measurable goals, and (b) related services.

Boardman et al. describe their *Perspective* about ways to strengthen elementary undergraduate teacher preparation programs for educating students with disabilities, including culturally and linguistically diverse students with learning disabilities. The authors suggest that an increased focus on equity, social justice, and cultural and linguistic diversity is necessary to best meet the needs of learners with disabilities in today's classrooms. The authors' perspective includes attention to several key features that facilitate high-quality teacher education including (a) examining ableism, (b) incorporating Universal Design for Learning, and (c) explicitly addressing disabilities in education. In reference to development of culturally/linguistically sustaining IEPs, adhering to the key features addressed in this article will be prepare educators to incorporate relevant cultural, linguistic, and special education factors into each of the mandated IEP components.

Collectively, these articles provide contemporary research-based suggestions for educators to draw upon when developing culturally/linguistically sustaining IEPs for diverse learners with learning disabilities in today's schools.

Note: Though the articles in this Research Topic reflect the US educational system, the recommendations are highly appropriate for educating culturally/linguistically diverse students with a learning disability in international educational systems worldwide.

Author contributions

JH: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JP: Writing – review & editing. DS: Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated

organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

- Hoover, J. J., Erickson, J. R., Patton, J. R., Sacco, D. M., and Tran, L. M. (2019). Examining IEPs of English learners with learning disabilities for cultural and linguistic responsiveness. *Learn. Disab. Res. Pract.* 34, 14–22.