

FOCUS on Research

Newsletter of the



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Newsletter Editor

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CEC-DR Public Policy News

CEC-DR's Public Policy Committee has grown by leaps and bounds! We are thrilled to announce the following committee members:

Chair:

Elizabeth Talbott, *William & Mary*

Faculty/Senior Researchers:

Carlin Conner, *University of Virginia*

Michelle Cumming, *Florida International University*

Robin Ennis, *University of Alabama at Birmingham*

Thomas Farmer, *University of Pittsburgh*

Angela Prince, *Iowa State University*

Adai Tefera, *University of Arizona*

Student Members:

Susan Aigotti, *University of Virginia*

Aniva Lumpkins, *Florida International University*

Danielle Waterfield, *University of Virginia*

Nathan Welker, *University of Virginia*

Elizabeth Zagata, *University of Connecticut*

Recent Public Policy Presentations Featuring DR Members

- Bettini, E., Kolbe, T., McCray, E., Talbott, E., & Weiss, M. (2023, March). *Interpreting and researching special education policy: Implications for the future*. Panel presentation at the Council for Exceptional Children Annual Conference, Louisville, KY (co-sponsored by CEC-DR and CEC-Teacher Education Division [TED]).

- Bettini, E., Gilmour, A., Jones, N., McCray, E., Talbott, E., & Tefera, A. (2022, November). *Interpreting and researching teacher workforce policy: Implications for the future*. Keynote panel presentation at the Council for Exceptional Children-Teacher Education Division Annual Conference, Richmond, VA.

News From the Hill

The U.S. Senate HELP committee (Chair, Bernie Sanders, I-VT) and Bill Cassidy (Ranking Member, R-LA) is reaching out to education constituents for their response to 11 questions as the committee considers reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA). ESRA was originally authorized in 2002. This bill established the Institute of Education Sciences. DR will be responding to the 11 questions and **stands strong for the National Center for Special Education Research!** Here's a [link to the HELP committee's request](#). ■

Announcing CEC-DR's Membership in COSSA

The CEC-DR executive board is pleased to announce that DR has joined COSSA, the Consortium of Social Science Associations. DR's COSSA membership means that we will increase our research visibility by partnering with social science researchers around the country to advocate for federal funding for children and youth with disabilities.

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CDC-DR's Membership in COSSA (continued from page 1)

COSSA membership is a DR member benefit—for you! Sign up through the COSSA website to receive members-only emails with timely updates on news for the social and behavioral sciences, analysis of pending legislation and agency policies, time-sensitive action alerts, and access to members-only resources, such as webinars, training, and opportunities to engage with policymakers.

The DR public policy committee is planning future engagement with COSSA to elevate our shared advocacy for the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER). Stay tuned for more in the next CEC-DR newsletter.

Don't forget to contribute your research story to the **DR Research Matters** series. Your story may be featured on the COSSA website! ■



Making First Impressions of Your Research Count

Candace Schell, PhD, BCBA-D; Rebecca Hartzell, PhD, BCBA-D; Christian Sabey, PhD, BCBA-D; Cade Charlton, PhD, BCBA; Leonard Troughton, PhD; and Steve Powell, PhD, BCBA-D

Collaborative for Research and Evaluation in Emotional Disorders (CREED)

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. First impressions have power; we form judgments and use them to influence future interactions. While this concept is typically applied to social situations, we can assume the same principles apply to judgments of our *written* work. The abstract is the “first impression” of your research study and will likely determine how others will judge the content of the article.

An *abstract* is a brief, comprehensive summary of a manuscript. This “first impression” determines whether we will not only consume the contents of the paper but also potentially cite the research therein. In the process of conducting a literature search for the purpose of research-to-practice consumption, systematic literature reviews, or meta-analyses, readers scour hundreds—sometimes thousands—of abstracts in hopes of identify-

ing work that meets the parameters of the project. It is estimated that scholars read only one half of the articles whose abstracts were read in detail (Mabe & Amin, 2002). An abstract, therefore, must sufficiently describe the project to allow the reader to determine if the project is relevant enough to read, use, and/or cite in their own publication. According to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA; 2020), the abstract should contain up to 250 words—roughly the number of words contained in this manuscript thus far. A lot can be said in 250 words! However, as researchers, we rarely use this allotted space to effectively summarize our work and convey the content of our research.

As a small research group composed of scholars from five universities, we have been conducting a large, systematic literature review of publications from the past 20 years covering issues in emotional and behavioral disorders. As such, we have painstakingly attempted to identify these articles based on titles and abstracts alone, a task we have come to realize is more difficult than expected. We are not experts in writing abstracts; however, we have found that the lack of detail in published abstracts can be a roadblock to accurately organizing the research for this project. The purpose of this paper is to share what we have found to be effective writing practices for empirical studies' abstracts based upon recommendations in the seventh edition of the APA *Publication Manual* and supported by others.

The IMRaD Format

An abstract should be accurate, nonevaluative, coherent, readable, and concise. Cook and Bordage (2016) provide several tips for writing effective abstracts. They recommend writing the abstract when the article is nearly complete. This will allow authors to cut and paste directly from the main text, then organize for structure and readability. Use a detailed structured format, such as IMRaD, even if the journal does not require or allow it. Using the IMRaD structure to compose an abstract follows the general format of papers written in educational sciences: **I**ntroduction, **M**ethod, **R**esults, and **D**iscussion (Cook & Bordage, 2016; The George Mason University Writing Center, 2020).

Introduction

The abstract should begin with the purpose of the study. The purpose of the study includes the problem

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Making First Impressions... (continued from page 2)

or question that will be investigated through the paper. Clearly explain how the purpose of the paper is different from what has been done previously or how it adds to the body of work in the field. The purpose and importance of the research (introduction) should take up 25% of the allotted space in your abstract (The George Mason University Writing Center, 2020).

Method

The method should be another 25% of the abstract (The George Mason University Writing Center, 2020). The method describes what was done in the study and how it was executed. This section of the abstract should provide concise details that describe the study participants, research design (e.g., qualitative, single-subject, experimental, mixed-methods), procedures (i.e., materials or measures, specific intervention, theory tested), main outcome measures (e.g., statistical method, visual analysis), and methods for data collection and analysis (Andrade, 2011; Cook & Bordage, 2016).

In the field of special education, information about the participants with whom the study was conducted is vitally important to the relevance and applicability of the study for the readers. While the participants involved in the study should be described in greater detail within the body of the paper, it is essential to provide basic detail on the participants within the abstract (e.g., age, grade level, gender, educational classification, disability, medical or mental health diagnoses). Selection and indexing of research articles require a reader to be able to code articles with participants of similar ages and diagnoses.

The setting of the study is also an important distinction within our field of study. A reader needs to understand if the study took place in a school, clinic, home, or other location. The absence of this important information may result in an important body of knowledge being excluded from a literature review or meta-analysis because the information was not made available during the initial review process (e.g., review of title and abstracts).

Results

The results of the paper should be summarized to such a degree that it consists of 35% of the abstract (The George Mason University Writing Center, 2020).

According to Cook and Bordage (2016), “Reporting detailed results is the *second most important factor* in getting people to read and cite your work, second only to an informative, indicative title” (p. 1103). The results section of the abstract should provide the unbiased findings of the study, including, but not limited to, visual analysis, statistical analysis, effect size, confidence intervals, means, and standard deviations. Results should be reported in a precise form (i.e., numerical values), with vague terms such as “increased” or “statistically significant difference” avoided (Cook & Bordage, 2016). This allows the reader to independently evaluate the article to determine its application to the topic being studied.

Discussion

Abstracts often include a sentence to indicate that conclusions, implications for future research, and limitations will be discussed in the article. However, the American Psychological Association (2020), as well as authors across multiple fields of study, recommend the abstract include a concise statement that “highlights defensible bottom-line messages” (Andrade, 2011; Cook & Bordage, 2016, p. 1103). Often overlooked, the discussion may be one of the most important sentences in the abstract. It offers the reader an unbiased, nonevaluative indication of the findings and the implications for the field. This section can provide the most impactful assessment of the study and should be precise in the assertions made. The authors should not claim more than what the results demonstrate. The discussion of the research, or what the reader can do with the information, should be detailed but concise, to account for the final 15% of the abstract space allotted (The George Mason University Writing Center, 2020).

Conclusion

Using the IMRaD structure to format an abstract ensures the writer conveys the important “first impression” to the reader. If the editor/journal will not accept a structured abstract (re: headings), the author should write the abstract using the headings to prevent them from omitting key details, then remove headings prior to submission to follow the traditional block format. Following these guidelines increases the likelihood that a database search will identify your article, increasing the potential

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Making First Impressions... (continued from page 3)

for citations. Beyond setting up readers for a more favorable read, the abstract is essential for helping readers and researchers alike identify studies that address their needs. This first impression is essential for helping your work make the impact you intend, which is especially true for busy practitioners anxious to find resources that will make a difference in the lives of their students. ■

References

- Andrade, C. (2011). How to write a good abstract for a scientific paper or conference presentation. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 53(2), 172–175.
- Cook, D. A., & Bordage, G. (2016). Twelve tips on writing abstracts and titles: How to get people to use and cite your work. *Medical Teacher*, 31(11), 1100–1104.
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- American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Author.



CEC-DR Diversity Committee Spotlight



Federico Waitoller, PhD
University of Illinois at Chicago

Extra! Extra! The CEC Division for Research is launching a new podcast! Led the by the Diversity Committee, DR is launching *DiveIn: A Podcast About Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*

in Special Education Research. Our first episode will be released in May and will feature Dr. Alfredo Artiles, who will discuss the recent report from the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine on the future of education research. The report provides guidance for the National Center for Education Research and the National Center for Special Education Research and has the potential to shape future funding opportunities for educational researchers.

Stay tuned and alert for announcements about the first episode of *DiveIn!* ■



CEC-DR Families Research Spotlight



Tracy Gershwin PhD, BCBA-D
University of Northern Colorado



Kathleen Kyzar, PhD
Texas Christian University

The CEC Division for Research Families Committee proudly co-presented with the Kentucky Parent Training Information Center (PTI), KY-SPIN, at the 2023 CEC conference in Kentucky on March 3, 2023. The presentation, “*Directions in Family Partnership Research and Practice*,” provided information about how PTIs can serve educators and families, including providing relevant information and resources. Next, research was presented on family–professional partnerships, including family, educator, and student outcomes. Session information consistently bridged PTIs with research and practice for families and educators. This discussion included information relevant to the development of ongoing partnerships between PTIs and researchers, departments of education, school districts, advocacy organizations, and community organizations. Finally, the session ended with a discussion among attendees for future research and practice opportunities that include PTIs.

Throughout the planning for this CEC presentation, the Division of Research Families Committee was met with incredible ongoing support and collaboration from both KY-SPIN Executive Director Rhonda Logsdon and Assistant Director Kellie Smith. The committee hopes to continue to collaborate and co-present with other PTIs for future CEC presentations. ■

Student Spotlight

Building Your Research Community

Megumi Takada, *PhD Student, Stanford Graduate School of Education*

Katie Lane, *PhD Student, University of Connecticut*

Cassidi Richmond, *PhD Student, University of Virginia*

Tracey Easley-Card, *PhD Student, University of Texas*

During graduate studies, students often find themselves learning a lot about a specific topic. This experience can feel isolating at times, especially when they do not have any peers or mentors interested in the same areas. Fortunately, we are all part of a bigger research community. Finding scholars with similar interests to support you and respectfully push your work forward is an important part of pursuing a research career and building your network. Here are some ways you might consider starting to build your research community as a graduate student or early career scholar.

Find an Intellectual Home

Most fields of study have specific professional organizations for individuals studying common areas or carrying out work with specific populations. Such professional organizations are often broken up into even smaller special interest groups or divisions that may be of particular interest to you. For example, CEC offers 18 special interest groups based on members' roles, interests, and what groups of students they work with. Just about everyone invested in special education can find a specialized subgroup that speaks to them within these groups or the organization at large. If you are just beginning the search, find some professional organizations that you may want to be a part of. Browse their websites, read their mission statements, and see who is affiliated with these organizations. You can even start by looking at the CVs of your advisors, mentors, and other scholars whose career paths inspire you to get a sense of the organizations they are a part of. Once you have identified a few organizations, try attending virtual and in-person events to see if the organization is a good fit for you. In-person

events at conferences such as sessions sponsored by a division or interest group, business meetings, and socials are great opportunities for learning how the group operates. Virtual events—including live webinars, panel discussions, and recorded sessions—are more accessible than traveling to conferences and can give you an idea of the type of research or dissemination work the group is prioritizing. Every group will have their own norms and interaction style, which may or may not meet your needs. Once you find a good fit, make an effort to keep attending events, reach out to other members, and volunteer for service opportunities to get even more involved.

Cross Borders

In addition to finding your primary research community, it can be valuable to be aware of other disciplines and organizations that intersect with your work. This work requires a little more effort, as you will need to venture out of the area of your primary research community. However, it may also feel fulfilling, if you feel that your work does not fully fit into the borders of a single organization. If you have not engaged in this work already, you will likely be surprised how much overlap there is across different organizations. Crossing borders can be helpful in broadening your perspectives and getting a more comprehensive understanding of your research. You might even find connections that push your work forward. Deciding how much you want to stay connected to these other organizations is up to you.

Identify Key Journals

Most senior researchers can quickly tell you which journals they prefer to publish in for a variety of reasons. Finding journals about your key areas can help you keep up to date on current research, find scholars with common interests, and lead to opportunities for conducting peer reviews or even joining an editorial board down the road. When finding your fit, consider the mission statement, subject matter, population of interest, methods, target audience, and degree of accessibility. For mission statements, you should make sure that you feel aligned to the broader values and goals of the journal. For subject matter, you should see what topics or student populations are commonly covered in this journal and evaluate how well this aligns with your own research in-

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Student Spotlight (continued from page 5)

terests. Then consider the study designs and data analyses commonly published in the journal and determine if it aligns with your research. For example, some journals focus on single-subject designs, while journals at the opposite end of the spectrum may strongly prefer large, randomized controlled trials. You should also consider the intended audience of a journal. Many are oriented towards researchers, while others are focused on sharing out research findings with practitioners. You may have a preferred research journal and a preferred practitioner journal and try to share the same findings in different ways in each one. In both cases, you should consider the accessibility of each journal. If your article is going to be behind a paywall, will your intended audience be able to access it? If you choose an open access journal, do you have a way to cover publishing costs? These logistical considerations are crucial for you to have your intended impact.

Decide Who You Read and Cite

Behind the words of an article you read are authors with specific values, interests, and orientations to their research. As you read, you will likely resonate with the work of specific authors. As you identify these scholars, try to be up to date with their work. One easy way to do this is by having Google Scholar notify you when they publish new work. Try to read during lighter times of the semester and during breaks, and keep a record of what you read using a citation manager. Additionally, it is important to be intentional about whose work you are reading and to be aware of their positionality. Consider being intentional of reading work coming directly from scholars of historically marginalized communities. You can further elevate their voices by reflecting on their work and integrating it into the work you cite.

Join a Writing Group

Writing groups established by your school, professional organizations, cohort, and related mentoring groups provide a great opportunity to find a sense of community and create shared accountability. All groups have different norms and activities for their meetings. Some may allow for talking and collaborating, while others may be strictly quiet writing time. Some groups meet weekly, or

even multiple times a week, to sit together for dedicated writing time. Other groups meet less often. Some writing groups meet only once or twice every month to share out progress and get feedback with more mentorship opportunities. There is no “one size fits all” approach to writing groups. Of course, you should be respectful with any invitations you receive, but you should be picky as to what group(s) you join based on your own needs and preferences. If you would get distracted sitting with friends to write, you may need to seek out a quiet group or check-in group for accountability and support. Additionally, you should consider the time you have to devote to a writing group so you can show up consistently and build your community.

Ultimately, building your research community is individualized like your doctoral journey. The connections you gain and the community you build will grow with you and your career over time. ■



Call for Nominations

2023–2024 CEC-DR Doctoral Student Scholars

Division for Research, Council for Exceptional Children

DUE DATE: SEPTEMBER 30, 2023

The Division for Research invites nominations for outstanding doctoral student scholars to participate in the **2023–2024 Doctoral Seminars in Special Education Research**. Selected student researchers will participate with peers in generative discussions and professional development led by distinguished researchers recognized for making outstanding scientific contributions in special education. Three virtual seminars and forums will be held during this coming academic year along with a colloquium that brings students and researchers together in a session dedicated to graduate student development at the **2024 CEC Convention in San Antonio, Texas**.

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Call for Nominations (continued from page 6)

Nominees

Nominees should be outstanding doctoral students in special education seeking careers in research. *Nominees must have substantially completed their courses and be in the process of formulating a dissertation proposal or conducting dissertation research.* Invitations will be issued to 10 doctoral students, with competition based on the judged quality of the student's research and capacity to gain from and contribute to the seminars.

Nomination Process Summary

Students will be chosen to participate in the doctoral seminar series through a rigorous selection process:

1. Advanced doctoral students are nominated as CEC-DR Doctoral Student Scholars by a faculty member who can attest to the quality of their scholarship.
2. Students submit an abstract and a detailed summary research proposal that outlines relevant features of their study to their nominating faculty member.
3. Faculty members submit the student materials with the letter of nomination.
4. The proposals are blind reviewed by members of the DR-DSS planning committee.

The Nomination Packet

Directions for Students: Email the following 2 items in separate attachments to your nominating faculty member.

1. Abstract of student's research project that is no more than 120 words.
2. Two-page summary statement of student's proposed research. The summary statement should be no more than two (2) single-spaced pages and should outline the problem you are pursuing or plan to pursue in your research, its intended contribution to theory and practice, specific research questions, and study procedures. Follow APA style throughout your submission. **Use 12-point Times New Roman font, single spacing, and 1-inch margins all around your document, and save as a Word file.** Up to 5 additional pages for References, Tables, and Figures may be included and will not count against the 2-page limit. References

should include only works cited. Remove all information about the nominee's name and institution. The statement is forwarded to DR-DSS reviewers during the selection process.

Directions for Faculty Nominators:

1. Please compile the nomination packet (letter of nomination, abstract of student research, and statement of proposed research) for the nominee.
2. Your letter of nomination should be no more than 2 pages (12-point Times New Roman font, single spaced, 1-inch margins). Please explain why this student was selected, with special reference to academic performance and prospects for a career in research. (You might consider informing the committee about why you think this student would benefit from participating; what the student has to share with peers from other universities; or the research projects, publications, or other scholarly activities the student has engaged in during doctoral study.)
3. **Complete the *Nomination Form* and send the letter, abstract, and research summary to jcrockett@coe.ufl.edu no later than September 30, 2023. Attach all three (3) items to one email (i.e., letter of nomination, abstract of student research, statement of proposed research).** Please save items in a **Word format** to facilitate the handling for reviewers.
4. Nominators are cordially invited to attend the colloquium at CEC, usually scheduled on Friday afternoon, and followed by the DR business meeting and reception.

We expect to extend invitations to 10 doctoral student scholars by the end of October. All nominating faculty members will be notified of the outcome for their students at that time.

For questions, contact Dr. Jean Crockett, University of Florida, at jcrockett@coe.ufl.edu; Dr. Mary Theresa Kiely, Queens College, City University of New York, at mary.theresa.kiely@qc.cuny.edu; or Dr. Kristen Merrill O'Brien, George Mason University, at kmerril2@gmu.edu.

NOMINATION PACKETS MUST BE SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY THROUGH THE NOMINATION FORM (see link above) NO LATER THAN SEPTEMBER 30, 2023.