

Introduction of Special Issue: Contemporary Trends and Issues in General and Special Education: Nationally and Internationally

This issue, entitled “Contemporary Trends and Issues in General and Special Education: Nationally and Internationally” generated articles that precisely mimic the title of this special issue. Contemporary concepts were discussed and presented that yield current and useful information to scholars, researchers, teacher educators and practitioners in general and special education. This special issue includes articles on the use of Technology, Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Mindfulness, Audio/Visual Media, Autism Spectrum Disorders and Universal Design for Learning.

The lead article entitled “Twenty First Century Skills for Achieving Education, Life, Work Success” presents and discusses the skills needed to be successful in not only education, but in life itself. Five key learning skills/dimensions include (a) Interpersonal and Communication, (b) Personal Leadership, (c) Self-Management, (d) Interpersonal Development, and (e) Recognizing and Reducing Potential Problem Areas. The authors, long-time educators, psychologists and researchers in the field of Transformative Emotional Intelligence, share their model, key concepts and specific 21st century skills needed for educational and personal success. They share documented and world-wide research for their point of view and indeed it is something that has value for all educators regardless of what positions they play in the development of children or adults.

The next two articles focus on technology. The first entitled “Reading, Fluency for the iGeneration: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Impact of MP3 Use and Teacher Experience” is research centered on the use of a specific technological tool, the MP3 player and its effect on reading fluency. In this article, today’s technologically literate students have been identified as the “iGeneration”, meaning iPhone, iPod, or iPad. While no statistically significant improvement was found in the study there were some important educational implications, most notably that research with technology devices as a tool to improve student performance needs to be continued. While use of technology devices to increase academic skills in school age children currently provides mixed results, it stills hold enormous potential for student growth. In fact any study employing student savvy technology devices to impact or improve reading fluency is significant and more research is needed.

The second article, also research based, and entitled “Teacher Candidates and Audio/Visual Media in the Future Classrooms: I Guess I Feel Prepared” attempted to answer the questions of how do future teachers view the role and use of technology, how well prepared are future teachers prepared, and what role does their educator preparation program play?

The key findings focused research suggested that, for this population, teacher candidates felt prepared to include technology in their future classrooms and that teacher preparation programs should provide future teachers with technology rich environments.

While all educators are interested in incorporating new and innovative strategies that assist students in learning, we need information and research on successful concepts and practices. This next article centers on “mindfulness” – the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmental to unfolding experiences.” Mindfulness is a process where an individual seeks multiple points of view about a problem. In this article the authors provide 10 practical guidelines to promote mindfulness as a strategy to be included in an educator preparation program.

The next article discusses the newest and currently a most written about area of special education-Autism Spectrum Disorders. In the article entitled “preparation for Teachers for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A call for Quality and Quantity” the authors cite the shortage of programs and teachers are discuss several reasons that explain the current state of affairs. Components of a successful training and service delivery programs are presented based on current research and include, retention approaches, mentoring and induction for new professionals. The article concludes with a discussion of currently emerging practices from the research literature.

The last article entitled “Universal Design for Learning: Is it for Everyone?” presents the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) – a recent development in special education that incorporates numerous methods to differentiate instruction. The authors contend that it is an approach to learning that holds promise to all students as it addresses diverse learning styles and provides multiple opportunities for students to grasp key concepts. The article provides four useful guidelines for implementing UDL and address representation, expression and engagement.