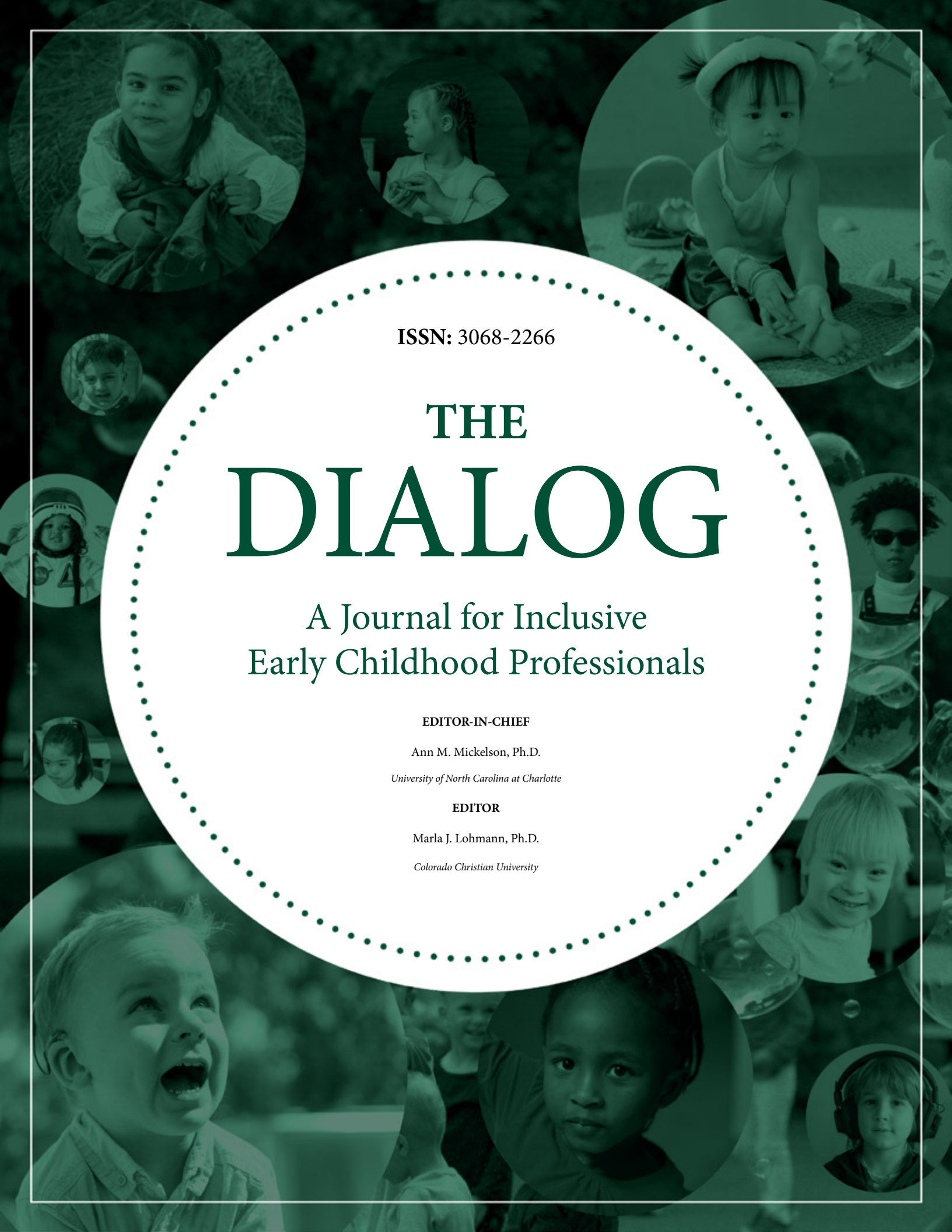




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THE DIALOG

A Journal for Inclusive
Early Childhood Professionals

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Ann M. Mickelson, Ph.D.

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

EDITOR

Marla J. Lohmann, Ph.D.

Colorado Christian University



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THE DIALOG

A Journal for Inclusive
Early Childhood Professionals

Writing, Reviewing, and Actualizing Research: Your Guide to Engaging with *The Dialog*

Ann M Mickelson Ph.D.
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Hello Dialog Community!

It is with great pleasure that we bring you this first issue not only of 2026, but as the revitalized *Dialog*. What better way to close out summer and kick off the new academic year!

This year has seen huge changes at *The Dialog* starting with the appointment of your new Editorial Board. This incredible team, which includes five dedicated associate editors and many new Editorial Board members, has been hard at work updating processes and dreaming about the future of our beloved journal. It may seem like it's been quiet...but so much has been going on behind the scenes at *The Dialog*! If you haven't met the new team, please check us out [HERE](#).

2026 has also brought exciting collaborations! First, *The Dialog* announced our sponsorship from the Teacher Education Division (TED) and TED's Early Childhood Faculty Special Interest Group (TeDeC)! This exciting new partnership is a direct result of collaboration between TeDeC and *The Dialog* in response to a critical need for dissemination outlets for early childhood research, especially scholarship aimed at supporting personnel development. TED, one of 17 divisions of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), is a diverse community of professionals who lead and support teacher education on behalf of students with disabilities and their families. [Learn more about TED here](#).

As one of TED's Special Interest Groups (SIGs), TeDeC provides a forum to communicate and connect with colleagues around issues related specifically to preparation in early childhood special education. [Learn more about TeDeC, the TED Early Childhood Faculty SIG here!](#)

Recently, *The Dialog* was also thrilled to announce its partnership with [The Alliance of Open Access Special Education Journals](#). We are honored to be an inaugural member of *The Alliance* and look forward to the impact this initiative will undoubtedly have. Guided by the motto "Free to Publish - Free to Read," *The Alliance* brings together open-access journals dedicated to advancing special education. Member journals believe knowledge should be accessible to everyone and not hidden behind paywalls. By connecting researchers, practitioners, and families with freely available scholarship, we can strengthen the bridge between research and practice. [Learn more about The Alliance](#) and get to know the other member journals! Be sure to read our white paper and let us know what you think!

Introducing the Future of The Dialog

Concurrently, our new Editorial team has been hard at work examining the journal's mission, aim, and processes as we continue our work to revitalize the journal. As a result, we have updated the Mission, Focus, and Scope. [Please take a look!](#)

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Contact: Ann M Mickelson - amickels@charlotte.edu

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Our reflective work also illuminated the need to connect with our community in pursuit of our new and improved mission. Hence, the intent of this special issue is to bolster the enactment of our revised mission in collaboration with you - our community of readers, authors, and reviewers!

This special issue brings you a collection of articles specifically designed to illustrate what enacting our mission means for our authors, reviewers, and our entire community as we collaborate together to actualize research in support of early childhood inclusion. In our first article, Editor-in-Chief Ann Mickelson, Associate Editor Lori Meyer, and Managing Editor Fuyan Shi share details as to how authors in *The Dialog* can foster dialogue in pursuit of bridging research to practice. Next, Marla Lohmann, Editor, and Rachel Schachter, Associate Editor, detail how reviewers can further nurture said dialogue through the article review process. Finally, Johanna Higgins, Hsiu-Wen Yang, and Deborah Rooks-Ellis, Associate Editors, introduce *The Dialog*'s framework to support our community members to use *The Dialog* to actualize research in support of early childhood inclusion across preparation, practice, and policy.

But Wait...There's More Yet to Come!

Our amazing editorial team is still hard at work developing even more supportive tools to support our authors, reviewers, AND readers! Stay tuned!- Further, additional 2026 issues are in the works and our editorial board is currently reviewing a number of excellent submissions. We are excited to bring the voices of the field forward!

Please consider submitting YOUR work and encouraging others to do so as well. *The Dialog* welcomes many types of manuscripts from authors representing all aspects of the early childhood field. Academics, researchers, practitioners, parents - we want to hear your voice! Again, the first article in this special issue provides guidance. Plus, check out information [about the journal here](#) and our [submission/author guidelines here](#). Click here if you are ready to [SUBMIT](#) your work for consideration in an upcoming issue.

Do you want to stay informed of what's happening with the journal or suggest a topic for an upcoming special issue? Please register as a user by

using this [REGISTRATION LINK](#). Then watch for an email invitation - please check your spam! Are you interested in applying to serve as a REVIEWER? Let us know through this [INTEREST FORM](#).

We can't wait to welcome your voice, contributions, and engagement with the journal!

Questions?! Ideas? Feedback?? Don't hesitate to reach out!

Ann Mickelson, Editor-in-Chief



Fostering Dialogue: Bridging Research and Practice by Writing for *The Dialog*

Ann M. Mickelson, Ph.D.

*University of North Carolina at
Charlotte*

Lori E. Meyer, Ph.D.

University of Vermont

Fuyanan Shi, M.S.E.

*University of North Carolina at
Charlotte*

ABSTRACT

As a dedicated open-access research-to-practice journal, *The Dialog: A Journal for Inclusive Early Childhood Professionals* promotes the translation of research-to-practice in pursuit of meaningful inclusion across early childhood personnel preparation, practice, and policy. *The Dialog* solicits manuscripts that aim to produce positive outcomes for young children and their families in ways that reflect lived experiences and varied perspectives from across the early childhood context. Recognizing the centrality of interdisciplinary practice to effective inclusion, the journal welcomes manuscripts from various fields and those that explore a wide range of topics. In this article, we seek to provide support and encouragement to prospective authors by detailing why and how one writes for *The Dialog*.

KEYWORDS

Open-access; Inclusion; Scholarship; Academic publishing; Early Childhood; Research-to-practice

Meaningful inclusion for young children and their families is a central tenant of early childhood education spanning the fields of early intervention (EI), early childhood education (ECE), and early childhood special education (ECSE). Decades of research have contributed to the development of recommended and evidence-based practices as well as professional development standards and guidelines for the field in pursuit of inclusion (Division of Early Childhood, 2014; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020; U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, 2023). Yet, research can only make meaningful inclusion a reality if findings are translated into actionable strategies that are enacted in practice by the professionals working with and on behalf of young children and their families every day. Significant barriers to such enactment exist however as research is often inaccessible to practitioners, preservice professionals, families, and others. This “research-to-practice gap” exists for a variety of reasons including publication

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Contact: Ann M. Mickelson - amickels@charlotte.edu

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paywalls and academic formats. A central goal of educational research has long been to improve practice (Dunst & Trivette, 2009) but the translation into effective practice remains challenging even for early childhood educators employed in settings rich with resources and supports (Kemp, 2020; McLean et al., 2024).

Open-access and research-to-practice journals strive to break down barriers by increasing access to evidence-based and research supported resources and supports in order to equip practitioners to implement what research has shown to be effective. Open-access journals are scholarly publication outlets that allow free online access to their published content [Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA) & Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), 2023]. While still scholarly in nature, articles in a research-to-practice journal differ from those in traditional academic publication outlets in structure, format, and content in pursuit of producing digestible and usable content to support practitioners' application in practice (Sayeski, 2017).

In this article we provide an overview of *The Dialog*'s history, community, and overarching purpose to illuminate the research-to-practice mindset that informs why authors write for the journal. We then describe the various submission types solicited by the journal and provide guidance for authors interested in submitting their work. We hope to receive yours soon!

The History of *The Dialog*: A Journal for Inclusive Early Childhood Professionals

As an open-access, peer-reviewed journal with a dedicated research-to-practice focus, *The Dialog*'s current mission is to "promote the translation of research-to-practice in pursuit of meaningful inclusion for young children and their families across early childhood personnel preparation, practice, and policy." *The Dialog* fulfills its mission by:

- Disseminating high-quality research that is accessible to all members of the early childhood community who support young children (prenatal through age eight) and their families,
- Ensuring research is translated into actionable strategies in support of preservice

and ongoing personnel preparation, inclusive practice, and policy,

- Centering the lived experiences of children, families, practitioners, and faculty trainers, and
- Providing an open forum to cultivate authentic partnerships across home, school, and community contexts by connecting families, researchers, preservice and ongoing professional development providers, students, and practitioners.

The Dialog has a long and valued history as a research-to-practice journal for the early childhood field. Initiated in 1997 by the director of the Research and Evaluation Division of the National Head Start Association (NHSA), the journal was originally known as the *NHSA Research Quarterly*. In 1999, the journal was renamed the *NHSA Dialog: A Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Intervention Field*. Up until 2005, the journal was largely an in-house production administered by various editors through their home institutions (i.e., Columbia University, University of Kentucky) with support of the NHSA. In 2006, the NHSA Research and Evaluation Director obtained a multi-year publication agreement with Taylor & Francis, LLC which helped reduce production costs and broaden readership.

When the Taylor & Francis agreement and NHSA sponsorship concluded in 2012, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) took responsibility for the journal and began publishing it as an independent, open-access publication hosted by UNCC's J. Murrey Atkins Library Digital Publishing. Since that time, the administration of the journal has again been an in-house production sponsored by UNCC's Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation (CEME). In 2022, the name of the journal changed to, *The Head Start Dialog: The Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Childhood Field*. For more information on the journal's history, please see [About the Journal](#) on the journal's website and Figure 1.

Figure 1
Historical Events Since the Inception of The Dialog



Note. Figure 1 depicts significant historical events of *The Dialog* since its inception in 1997.

Responding to a Growing Need in the Field

The Dialog has recently undergone a revitalization process in response to the increasing need for publication outlets focused on research-to-practice and spaces for researchers, faculty, and practitioners to share information regarding the early childhood landscape and early childhood teacher preparation practices. Evidence of this need has been mounting. A 2024 special issue on early childhood special educator preparation of the *Journal of Special Education Preparation* (JOSEP), a publication of the Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), received a robust response (32 submissions). Due to publication limits coupled with the desire to showcase as much related scholarship as possible, the guest editors employed innovative strategies to include as many author voices as possible across an array of topics. Consequently, teams of authors who had submitted manuscripts on similar topics were invited to collaboratively write topical manuscripts. The final special issue included over 50 author voices across seven articles. Yet, it was still not possible to include all eligible submissions!

In response, JOSEP and the guest editors of that special issue collaborated with *The Dialog* editor, Dr. Ann Mickelson, who developed a call for a special issue of *The Dialog* on the same topic and invited several author teams who were not accepted for the JOSEP special issue to submit their work. The response to *The Dialog*'s call was also robust, further underscoring the need for more outlets for research-to-practice publications for the early childhood field. See the [JOSEP special issue](#) and [The Dialog special issue](#) for more details.

Concurrently, Dr. Mickelson, who joined *The Dialog* as an editor in 2023 and assumed the role of Editor-in-Chief in 2025, initiated the revitalization and rebranding of the journal. As part of the revitalization process, the journal was renamed, *The Dialog: A Journal for Inclusive Early Childhood Professionals* in 2025. This new name was chosen to both honor the history of the journal and pave a path for the journal's future aim of supporting preservice and ongoing early childhood personnel preparation. Dr. Mickelson also invited Dr. Marla Lohmann, current chair of TED's early childhood special interest group, TeDeC, to serve as editor in recognition of the growing partnership between the journal, TED, and TeDeC.

Change and evolution for The Dialog Continues!

In 2026, TED's early childhood special interest group (TeDeC) agreed to sponsor the journal, lending further support. This sponsorship was made possible through ongoing partnership and collaboration between *The Dialog* and the TeDeC in response to the growing need for publication outlets focused on early childhood special education and teacher preparation. Additional developments stemming from this partnership will provide opportunities to support authors, reviewers, students, researchers, and other members of our community.

The Dialog is also pleased to announce we have joined the Open Access Special Education Alliance as one of eight inaugural members. Guided by the motto "Free to Publish - Free to Read," The Alliance brings together open-access journals dedicated to advancing special education. The members of the Alliance believe knowledge should be accessible to everyone and not hidden behind paywalls. By connecting researchers, practitioners, and families with freely available scholarship, we can strengthen the bridge between research and practice. See <https://openseajournals.com/about/> for more information.

The Dialog continues to be sponsored by CEME and published by the J. Murrey Atkins Library at UNCC. Going forward, the journal will publish three issues per calendar year with online-first publication of individual articles in development. Similar to other open access journals, *The Dialog* will provide immediate open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater exchange of knowledge.

***By connecting researchers,
practitioners, and families with
freely available scholarship, we
can strengthen the bridge between
research and practice.***

Who is The Dialog Community?

The Dialog community is a diverse population made up of the editorial team, authors, and readers. If you are interested in joining our community in any of these roles, please complete this [registration form](#) to be registered with the journal's online platform. The system will generate an email invitation for you that will include initial user credentials. Please check SPAM folders if you do not see your invitation within 2 working days. If you still do not see an invitation, please don't hesitate to contact the journal. See our website for more information.

The Editorial Team. *The Dialog* is led by Dr. Ann Mickelson, Editor-in-Chief, with the support of a diverse and dedicated editorial team. Dr. Marla Lohman serves as Editor and Fuyanan Shi currently serves as managing editor. Dr. Matthew Taylor, copyeditor, lends further support to the publication process. In 2026, five Associate Editors and nine Editorial Board Members were named to bolster the administrative support of the journal and the ongoing revitalization process. See the journal's [About the Editorial Team](#) website for our current team. The comprehensive editorial team represents diverse perspectives and areas of expertise. Team members include academic researchers, teacher educators, parents, practitioners, and students. Knowledge of various content and topic areas as well as age ranges from the early childhood context is also present. *The Dialog* also benefits from a cadre of reviewers who support the double-anonymized peer review process. For more information on reviewing for *The Dialog*, see the second article in this special issue.

Readers. Similar to the author population, the readers of *The Dialog* have traditionally included researchers and practitioners, but the journal has also sought to connect with families, administrators, policy makers, and others who make up the early childhood community as it has sought to provide explicit guidance to the field with a focus on practitioners. Accordingly, *The Dialog* is proud of its tradition of requiring authors of accepted research articles to provide supplemental research-to-practice (RtP) summaries of their work which implicitly supported readers to implement research findings with young children and families. This tradition continues in the revitalization, but these supplementary products have been expanded and modernized. First, while historically the RtP summaries

were only solicited for reports of original research, the editorial team embraces the potential benefit of including some form of research to practice supplement for any type of article. Second, the editorial team has expanded the acceptable format of RtP summaries to increase accessibility and utility. Previously, RtP summaries took the form of secondary articles that served as brief summaries focused on application. As we move into the future, a wider variety of formats will be welcomed and encouraged. The aim is to evolve beyond the traditional RtP article to offer even more accessible, digestible, and usable formats such as digital presentations, infographics, implementation tools, and more. To differentiate between the historical RtP summaries and this reconceptualized concept, the term Research to Practice (R2P) products will be used. R2P products will be described in further detail later in this article.

The Dialog aspires to publish content that attracts all members of the early childhood community in pursuit of quality inclusive practice for all young children and their families. The journal also seeks to provide a virtual space for ongoing dialog

***The aim is to evolve beyond the
traditional RTP article to offer even
more accessible, digestible, and
usable formats.***

among researchers, practitioners, families, individuals with disabilities, policy makers, administrators, and others to support continual collaboration and progress. Follow the journal through our website and social media outlets to stay informed!

Authors who seek to join *The Dialog*'s community by publishing their work are encouraged to keep this diverse audience in mind. Recent issues of *The Dialog* have explored topics such as multilingual learners and families, STEM in early childhood, inclusive teacher preparation, family engagement, transitions, intervention practices, and educator well-being. They represent the journal's ongoing commitment to inclusion and research-to-practice connections in the early childhood years.

To support this process and the mission of the journal, we next provide guidance as to why *The Dialog* may be a meaningful outlet for sharing scholarly and professional work. We first describe the research-to-practice mindset that distinguishes the journal and shapes how authors can contribute to meaningful early childhood inclusion through their writing. Afterwards, we outline the manuscript types solicited by the journal and provide guidance related to the submission and publication processes.

The Research-to-Practice Mindset - Why Write for The Dialog?

Beyond providing a venue for publication, *The Dialog* offers authors an opportunity to expand the reach and influence of their work. As an open-access journal dedicated to translating research into practice, the journal makes articles accessible not only to researchers, but also to practitioners, families, administrators, policy makers, personnel preparation and professional development providers, and more! Authors can therefore share ideas with audiences positioned to apply, adapt, and extend that knowledge in real-world contexts. Publishing in *The Dialog* can increase the visibility of scholarship, amplify the practical impact of evidence-based, research-supported practices, and add to ongoing conversations that shape the future of inclusive early childhood education. In this way, authors are not simply disseminating knowledge; they are helping ensure that knowledge is used in service of children, families, and the professionals who support them.

Given our dedication to a research-to-practice mindset and purpose, *The Dialog* seeks to shift readers' ways of thinking about the role of academic writing and how an academic journal can and should serve communities of learners as they strive to grow, thrive, and move closer towards meaningful inclusion for each and every young child and the important adults in their lives. At every point, we want our authors to consider how their work is translational, dialogic, and usable for members of the early childhood community including researchers, families, practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and others.

Writing for *The Dialog* requires a Research-to-Practice (R2P) mindset. An R2P mindset shifts one's orientation from simply reporting what is known or discovered through scholarship to illuminating what can be done for readers who might find themselves in a variety of inclusive early childhood settings, systems, and roles. Authors are not only contributors to scholarly knowledge but translators, connectors, and collaborators in its use. This mindset asks writers to center real-world problems and salient topics, foreground context, and make the movement between research and action visible, accessible, and meaningful.

Collectively, *The Dialog* provides a home for authors who want to contribute new knowledge that can address the complex, evolving needs of children, families, and the professionals who support them. Thus, ensuring that *The Dialog's* readers are met with articles and resources that are accessible, actionable, and responsive to the moment. To develop and apply an R2P mindset, we recommend 1) starting with use, not just knowledge; 2) adopting a dialogic tone; 3) including actions along with implications; and 4) writing for accessibility.

Starting With Use, Not Just Knowledge

The traditional mindset in writing research articles is to answer the question, "What did we find?" However, the R2P mindset asks authors to answer the question, "What can someone do with this information tomorrow?" We encourage authors to adopt a "Monday Morning Mindset." That is, how would we want this knowledge to show up in classrooms, organizations, and community spaces the day after *The Dialog* is read? What decisions or actions might this knowledge inform or inspire? One approach that might support authors in their effort to adopt this feature of an R2P mindset is to take a backward design approach. Consider the decisions or actions that might be informed or inspired by the knowledge presented in the manuscript and what would need to be present in both the manuscript and R2P product to bring readers to that point.

Adopting a Dialogic Tone

Given the journal's title and ethos, this is especially important. We encourage authors to write with a feeling of inviting readers into conversation rather than a one-directional report that is characteristic of most academic writing. The goal is to inform readers' adoption, adaptation, and use of the information being presented. As such, authors can feel empowered to write directly to the reader, albeit sparingly, but purposefully in a tone that is thoughtful and open to promote generative reflections. With an R2P mindset, imagine the reader as an active interpreter of the information being presented. What can be written or presented through the R2P product that invites readers to consider how the knowledge can be applied in their unique setting? What processes, resources, or techniques need to be considered or discussed?

Including Actions along with Implications

Including implications for practice, policy, and/or preparation are important components of an article from *The Dialog*. Even more significant is making sure that the implications mentioned help readers to explicitly see how they can take action. With an R2P mindset, we encourage authors to include specific strategies, methods, frameworks, suggestions for pathways moving forward, reflective questions for practitioners, self, students, or small groups. For authors seeking to make their writing more actionable, we encourage them to reflect on the messages presented in the "Implications" section and ask themselves, "After someone reads this section, would they know what they could do differently, within their circle of influence, based on it?"

Writing for Accessibility

We aspire for all articles and products published in *The Dialog* to represent the highest-quality writing while also being widely accessible. We do not view these two things to be mutually exclusive. Using an R2P mindset, authors can position their articles and products to be completely and clearly understood, which we hope will further support dissemination in multiple and diverse communi-

ty circles. We encourage authors to apply an R2P mindset by writing for accessibility. This includes, and is not limited to, using a clear structure that is organized and presented to the reader at the onset. It also includes using shorter sentences, when applicable, and defining terms or technical information when necessary. We encourage authors to prioritize readability of their work as part of their scholarly responsibility and to avoid overly theoretical or abstract writing.

Writing for accessibility is about helping readers move from ideas to action. As such, authors are encouraged to approach their writing not only as contributors to scholarly discussions but also as translators who help readers apply knowledge in authentic early childhood contexts. Although this expectation applies across all submissions, the ways in which authors translate knowledge into practice vary by manuscript type. The following section introduces the article types published in *The Dialog* and highlights how each contributes to the journal's research-to-practice mission.

Manuscript Types and the Research-To-Practice Mindset

The Dialog was created with the intention and promise of being a meaningful resource for early childhood inclusive professionals inclusive of all adults who care for young children (e.g., families, guardians, caregivers) and for those who advocate and support them (e.g., policy makers, administrators). As previously discussed, there is a well-known gap between knowledge generated through research, and commonly reported within scholarly publications, and the day-to-day, real world implementation of evidence-based knowledge (Fixsen et al., 2005; Kemp, 2020). *The Dialog* aims to bridge this gap by translating research into actionable change. That is, producing articles and R2P products that lead to behaviors and actions that help young children and families thrive in inclusive ways.

As such, *The Dialog* welcomes multiple forms of scholarship that collectively advance early childhood research, practice, policy, and personnel preparation. There are four distinct types of manuscripts welcomed by *The Dialog*: 1) Research

Articles, 2) Conceptual Articles, 3) Literature Reviews, and 4) Dialogs from the Field. While these manuscript types differ in structure and emphasis, they share a common orientation: Each invites authors to make knowledge usable, interpretable, and meaningful for those working across early childhood systems, including practitioners, families, policymakers, and preparation providers. Therefore, authors should attend to the ways their work informs inclusive practice, training program development, professional learning, and/or policy regardless of the type of article they submit.

Research Articles

Research articles report original empirical investigations that address issues of importance in inclusive early childhood settings. These manuscripts reflect strong alignment with salient topics facing the field of inclusive early childhood education, problems of practice, and current high-quality research practices. Researchers may draw on a wide range of approaches, including experimental, quasi-experimental, descriptive, qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods designs.

Typically organized using a conventional structure (e.g., introduction, methods, results/findings, and discussion), research articles should do more than present findings. Authors are expected to interpret results in ways that illuminate implications for practice, policy, research, and personnel preparation. This includes explicitly connecting findings to the varied contexts in which early childhood professionals work and learn. A R2P mindset when writing Research Articles includes considering:

- How the findings might inform instructional, programmatic, or leadership decisions
- The conditions under which the findings are most applicable
- What practitioners or preparation providers might do differently as a result

Conceptual Articles

Conceptual articles are non-empirical, scholarly works that advance, refine, or challenge existing frameworks, theories, or models relevant to inclusive early childhood education. Rather than report-

ing data, these manuscripts engage in analytic and generative thinking to shape how the field understands key issues, practices, or systems. Conceptual contributions may take several forms, including but not limited to:

- Theory synthesis or integration
- Theory adaptation or extension
- Development of typologies or taxonomies
- Conceptual models or frameworks
- Advocacy-oriented or position-based arguments
- Reflective or theoretical analyses

In *The Dialog*, conceptual work is not abstracted from practice, but rather, it is expected to inform it. Authors should make explicit how their proposed ideas, frameworks, or arguments could guide decision-making within inclusive early childhood settings, influence program development, or shape approaches to preservice and ongoing professional learning.

A strong conceptual article helps readers see topics of relevance differently and then act differently in ways that promote better outcomes for young children, their families, and professionals who work alongside them. A R2P mindset when writing Conceptual Articles includes considering:

- What the proposed framework or perspective offers that is new or useful
- How it might be operationalized or enacted in real-world contexts
- How it can support the preparation and development of early childhood personnel

Literature Reviews

Literature reviews in *The Dialog* present the results of systematic, rigorous approaches to identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing research related to a specific question or topic area. These manuscripts serve to map, critique, and build knowledge within the field, often identifying gaps, tensions, and directions for future inquiry. Literature Reviews may take multiple forms, including:

- Systematic reviews
- Scoping reviews
- Integrative reviews

FOSTERING DIALOG

- Theoretical or conceptual reviews
- Meta-analyses or qualitative evidence syntheses

Regardless of type, literature reviews should employ a clear methodological approach and a coherent organizational structure. Beyond synthesis, authors are expected to interpret patterns in the literature in ways that inform pedagogy, program design, policy considerations, and personnel preparation. A R2P mindset when writing Literature Reviews includes considering:

- Actionable insights emerging from the synthesis
- The practical and contextual relevance of findings
- How knowledge can inform current practices and preparation efforts

Dialogs from the Field

Dialogs from the Field represent a unique article type not commonly published by academic journals. We feel they represent a particularly salient and effective means to fulfill a research-to-practice mindset. These articles foreground the lived experiences and expertise of those working directly within inclusive early childhood settings and systems. Dialogs from the Field are primarily descriptive in nature with the intention of promoting ‘dialog’ amongst members of the early childhood community in support of implementing evidence-based and research-supported practices. Dialogs from the Field can serve several related purposes and can help provide a road map for other community members interested in similar practice.

Dialogs from the Field represent a particularly salient and effective means to fulfill a research-to-practice mindset as they foreground the lived experiences and expertise of those working directly within inclusive early childhood settings and systems

Dialogs might describe evidence-based or research-supported practices and their implementation, program development efforts, or approaches to preservice preparation and ongoing professional development. A Dialog from the Field might include:

- Descriptions of implemented practices or programs
- Narratives of innovation, adaptation, or improvement efforts
- Perspectives from practitioners, faculty, professional development providers, and/or families
- Reflections on challenges, tensions, and lessons learned

While grounded in practice, these manuscripts are not anecdotal alone. Authors are expected to ground their work in relevant research and theory and to offer a critical perspective on the practices or programs described. This includes considering what worked, what did not, under what conditions, why, and what level of resources were needed. Dialogs from the Field may present a particularly salient format to explore and highlight partnerships across researchers, practitioners, families, and others who may not traditionally enter the academic writing and publishing space. An R2P mindset when writing Dialogs from the Field includes considering:

- Description of detailed, transferable insights for implementation
- The work within broader research and theoretical conversations
- Guidance that others can adapt in their own settings

Research-to-Practice (R2P) Products

The Dialog has long been a leader in moving research into practice through innovative journal features. A historic and beloved feature of *The Dialog* has been the "Research-to-Practice Summary," which has traditionally accompanied each original report of research published as a stand-alone article. In keeping with history, the newest iteration of *The Dialog* will maintain the Research-to-Practice Summary in spirit, but will break free from the

traditional article format. In its place, will be the creation of Research-to-Practice (R2P) products. Keeping with the theme of innovation, on a case-by-case level, editors will invite authors of other types of manuscripts (e.g., conceptual articles, literature reviews, dialogs from the field) to also submit R2P products.

What results is the opportunity, and responsibility, for every author whose article is accepted for publication, to create a R2P product. The accompanying R2P product plays an essential role in summarizing and translating often complex findings into formats that support immediate understanding and use by early childhood practitioners, families/caregivers/guardians, policy makers, personnel preparation providers (e.g., faculty in higher education) and/or those who provide ongoing professional development. We encourage authors to be creative in conceptualizing products that would be useful for readers and not to feel constrained to more traditional publication formats. Indeed, we hope to see R2P products associated with reports of original research take multiple formats and include things such as:

- Practice briefs outlining key strategies into usable guidance
- Short videos explaining implications
- Reflection questions for individual or group professional learning
- Infographics summarizing a study's findings

For other types of articles, these might take some of the same formats already mentioned, and may also include:

- Activities for use in higher education or professional development settings
- Curriculum maps accompanying program descriptions
- Framework summaries that can be applied in practice contexts
- Applications for learning in higher education with explanations (e.g., field-based assignments, syllabi, etc.)
- Lesson plans for working with different age groups and/or settings

The ideas for R2P products are endless when authors consider, "What does this knowledge mean

for those who will use or benefit from it?" We are excited not only by the way R2P products can supplement published articles in *The Dialog*, but also by the opportunity these products have to immediately move research and ideas into practice. We are eager to instill a "Monday Morning Mindset" for readers. That is, staying in dialogue with each other about how articles and R2P products are resonating with the community, given the unique perspectives, roles, and areas of influence in supporting inclusive communities, and how they are being applied to our daily lives and passions for establishing inclusive contexts. We look forward to continuing this dialogue within and outside of the journal.

What results is the opportunity, and responsibility, for every author whose article is accepted for publication, to create a R2P product.

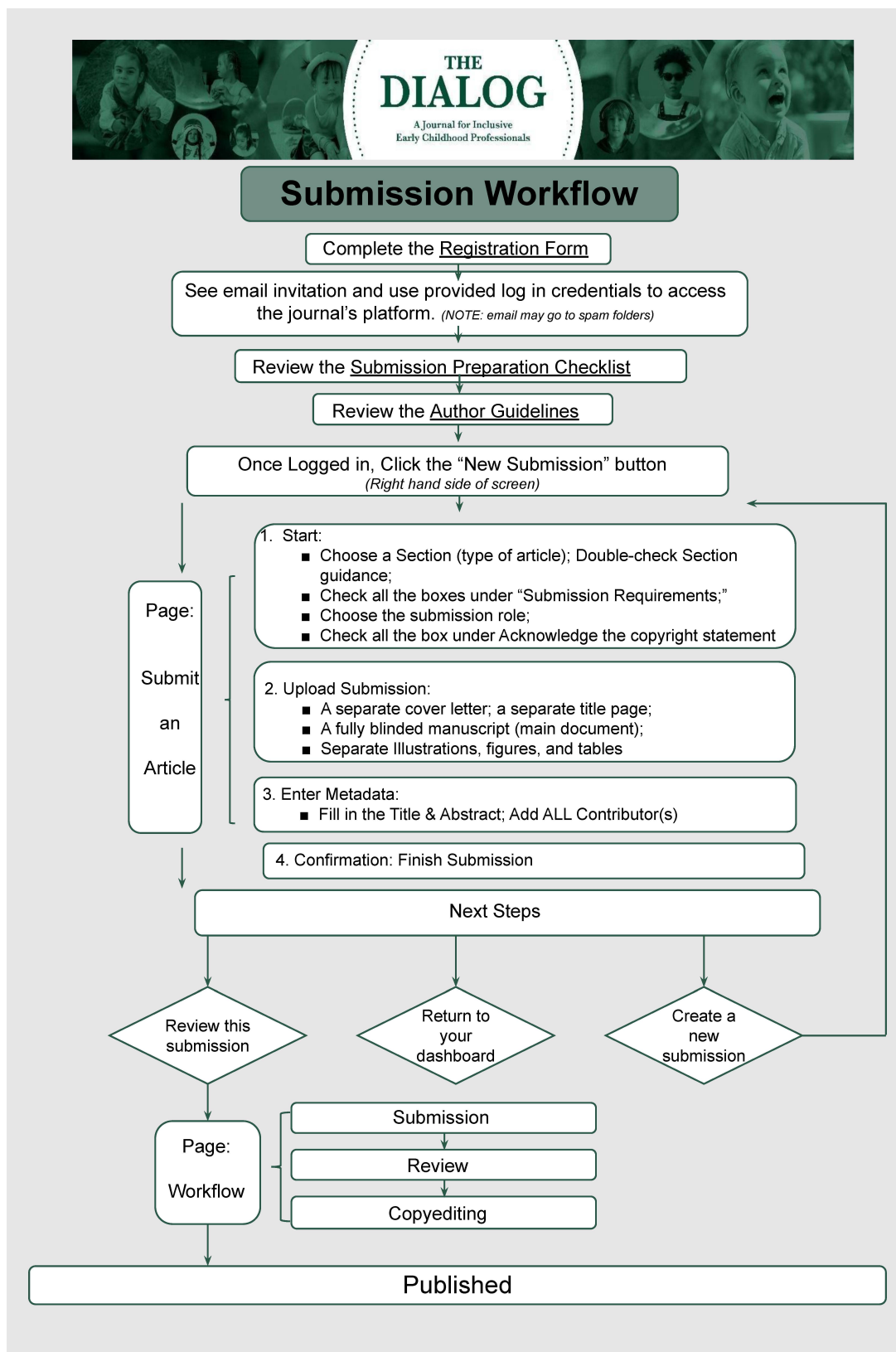
Submission Logistics

Submissions to *The Dialog* are managed through an online platform, Open Journal Systems (OJS), and administered by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's J. Murray Atkins Library. Users of the online platform must be registered with the journal, but access is free and accessible to anyone. To register for the journal, interested parties should complete the [registration form](#) which can be found on the journal's website. The platform has a designated "[Make a Submission](#)" page which includes specific author guidelines for all submissions as well as descriptions of the various submission or article types welcomed by *The Dialog*. Figure 2 provides a workflow of the submission process. Support for authors related to development of manuscripts and logistics of submissions is available by contacting the journal at TheDialog.UNCC@gmail.com.

Authors of accepted manuscript are highly encouraged to promote their work through their networks. Support for dissemination on social media and other outlets is available.

Figure 2

The Submission Process



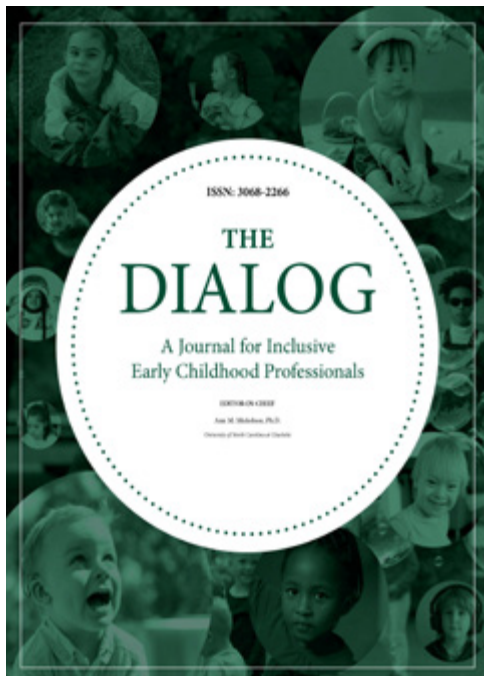
What's Ahead in this Special Issue

This article has introduced *The Dialog*, its mission, community, research-to-practice orientation, and the manuscript types welcomed by the journal. The next two articles in this special issue will share details on reviewing for the journal and practical ways to use *The Dialog's* publications in your daily life and work with young children and families. Collectively, these three articles aim to strengthen *The Dialog's* impact and foster authentic dialogue throughout our community.

An Invitation

We welcome your interest and contributions to *The Dialog* as an author, reader, or reviewer. This Special Issue of *The Dialog* is designed to motivate and inspire you to submit your own work and ideas, so our entire community can benefit. As the revitalization process continues, we invite ongoing feedback from both our longtime and new community members. Stay tuned for more exciting news and opportunities for everyone in *The Dialog* community. To ensure you do not miss future updates, please register with the journal in at least one role (e.g., reader, author, reviewer). To register, please complete this [REGISTRATION FORM](#).

You can also find us on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#)!



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Nurturing Dialogue: A Reviewer's Guide to Advancing Scholarship in The Dialog

Marla J. Lohmann, Ph.D.
Colorado Christian University

Rachel Schachter Ph.D.
University of Illinois Chicago

ABSTRACT

Peer review is a vital part of academic scholarship, but providing high-quality reviews can be challenging and specific expectations for peer reviews may differ from one journal to another. *The Dialog* is an open-access journal focused on early childhood inclusion and welcomes submissions from a variety of authors, including professionals and families outside academia. Reviewing for *The Dialog* requires an understanding of the role of peer review in scholarship, knowledge about specific review expectations for the journal, and an appreciation of the diverse voices represented among journal authors. This article provides practical guidance for reviewers.

KEYWORDS

Peer Review; Open-access; Academic Writing; Publication; Early Childhood; Research-to-practice

Peer review is a form of dialogue about scholarship, including research and practitioner-focused research-to-practice manuscripts. The peer review process is used to ensure high-quality scholarship is accepted and published in academic journals, such as *The Dialog* (Ali & Watson, 2016). Peer review helps distinguish scholarly works from manuscripts published in mainstream publications (Kochetkov, 2026). The role of peer reviews is to identify both strengths and areas for improvement of submitted manuscripts (Hoffman, 2022) and support authors in improving their work before it is published (Ali & Watson, 2016; Sundeen et al., 2025). The use of peer review can also provide an avenue for researchers to engage in meaningful dialogue with other scholars regarding their own work and broader related research in the field (Kochetkov, 2026). This dialogue helps to improve the writing skills of authors over time (Wang & Chen, 2026).

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Contact: Marla Lohmann @ MLohmann@ccu.edu

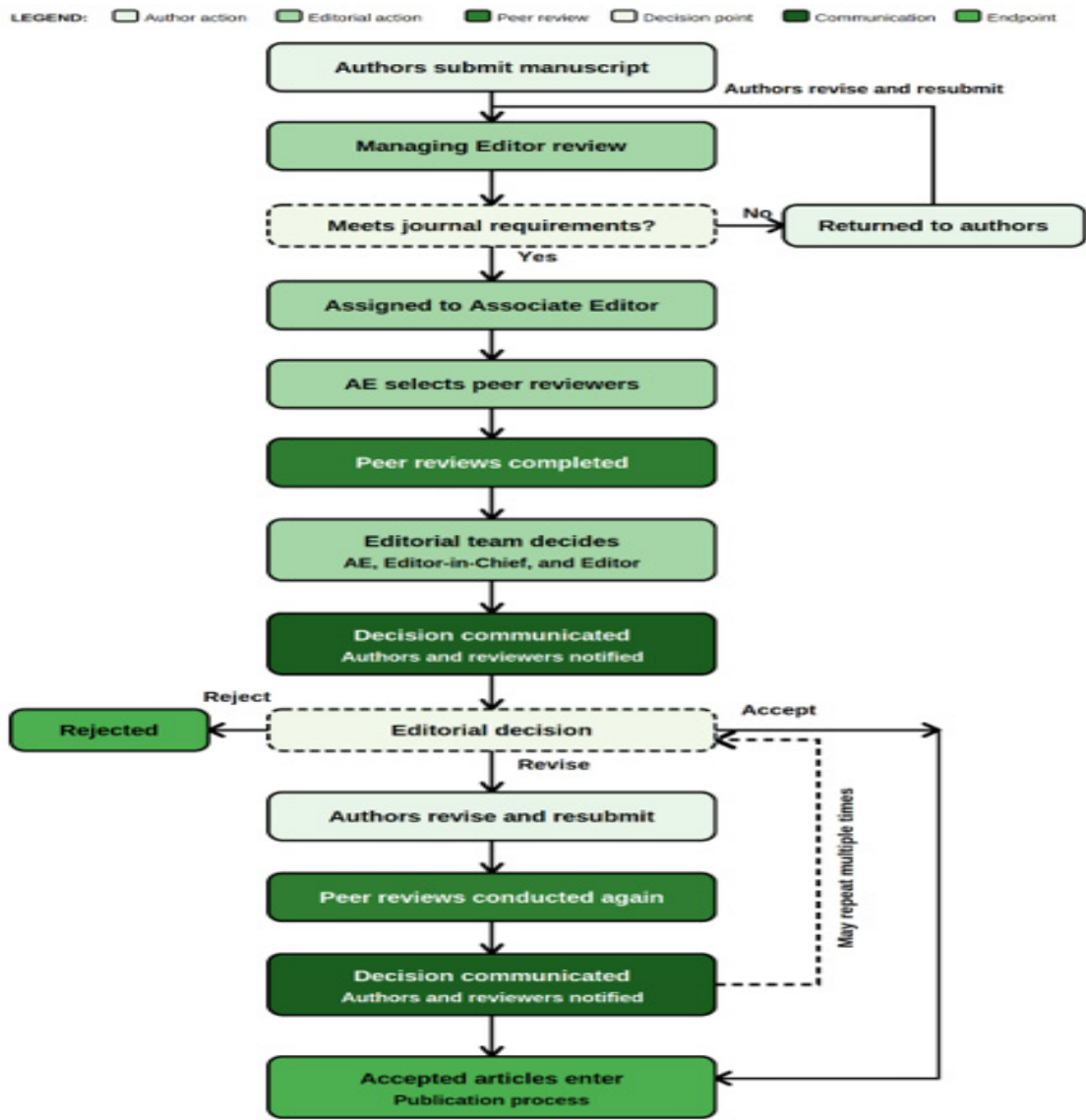
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Following the Dialogue: A Step-by-Step Look at the Review Process

While the peer review process is similar for most journals, it is important to understand the

specific steps for manuscripts submitted to The Dialog. Figure 1 outlines these steps. Please note that some manuscripts require multiple rounds of revision and Steps 8 through 10 may occur more than once.

Figure 1
The Peer Review Process



Note. *Flowchart made by ClaudeAI with steps written into prompt and revisions made by the authors.

Engaging in the Dialogue: Conducting Peer Reviews for *The Dialog*

When reviewing articles, it is important to keep the peer review framework in mind. A review should provide constructive feedback focused on enhancing the manuscript and providing new knowledge to the field. With this in mind, there are several areas for consideration when reviewing a

Table 1

Considerations in Peer Review

Areas for dialogue within a review	Considerations
Research Questions or Research Aims	• In empirical studies, are the questions and aims clearly stated?
Relevance and Contribution	• Is this article relevant for The Dialog audience? • Does the article provide knowledge that can strengthen inclusion, preparation, practice, or policy in early childhood? • Do the authors make this contribution clear within their work?
Methods	• Do the methods address the research questions/aims? • Is sufficient detail provided such that another researcher could replicate the approach? • Are tools and procedures adequately described so that the reader can tell if they address the research questions?
Results	• Were the correct analyses used to address the research question or for the data? • Do the authors provide sufficient data to support their description of the results (for all types of studies)?
Contextualization within the extant literature	• Do the authors adequately synthesize the extant literature to build a rationale for the study or conceptual? • Are key constructs described/defined using the extant literature and applied consistently throughout the manuscript? • Do authors connect their findings to the broader literature demonstrating how their work is situated within current knowledge?
Clarity	• Is writing clear and logically ordered? • Do the authors write coherently for The Dialog audience? • Do the authors use text structures and APA sufficiently to support the readability of the manuscript?

manuscript for *The Dialog*. These include considering the relevance of the manuscript for the journal, the quality of the Methods and Results, and the contextualizing of the study within the extant literature (APA, 2026; Wiley, n.d.). These key areas for dialogue and considerations are presented in Table 1. How these are applied varies based on the type of manuscript that is being reviewed.

The Dialog publishes multiple types of articles relevant for the field. The first are **Research Articles**. These may be the most familiar to reviewers. These are articles that report on original research, reflecting current best practices. For these types of articles reviewers would want to consider the rigor of the methods along with the implications for *The Dialog* audience. Similarly, **Reviews of the Literature** are also empirical articles that include clear methods and procedures for conducting the reviews and analyzing findings. Again, reviewers should consider both the methods and the relevant contribution of the findings for the field. **Conceptual Articles** present theoretical or conceptual frameworks, or perspectives on current issues in the field relevant to *The Dialog* audience. Although not empirical, this type of manuscript should draw heavily from the theoretical and empirical literature. Reviewers should consider the quality of the framework as well as how the work contributes to inclusion, practice, preparation, and policy in early childhood. The final article type is **Dialogs From the Field**. These manuscripts are unique to *The Dialog* and are intended to showcase the lived experiences and practices from the field and therefore embody the research-to-practice mindset of the journal. In sharing innovative or effective practices these articles should connect back to the extant literature to ground described practice in evidence and support claims and recommendations. Reviewers should still consider the relevance and empirical base of the work for *The Dialog* audience.

There are several different ways that reviews can be structured, often varying based on the article types and the key considerations. One convention for opening article reviews is to start by providing a statement summarizing the article (e.g., “This article describes an early childhood coaching intervention”), followed by a statement indicating how ready the manuscript is for publication *without* indicating an accept, revise, or reject decision and the potential contributions of the work to the field (e.g., “With some clarity in the methods, this work can contribute a new model for implementing coaching for inclusive preschool classrooms.”)

There are several different options for organizing the remainder of the review. One common format is to organize the review by the typical manuscript headings (Introduction, Method, Results,

Discussion) providing feedback on each section. Another format is to provide feedback along the categories of consideration provided in Table 1. A third, and similar option is to provide a list of key points of feedback. This approach is often useful when there are a few main areas of concern that are relevant to multiple sections of the manuscript. To a certain extent this is a matter of personal preference in how the reviewer chooses to organize their ideas. Some find it helpful to always use the same template or organizational structure for each review whereas others find it helpful to organize the structure of the review based on the individual manuscript. Reviewers are welcome to seek guidance from journal editors at any time to support their process.

Maintaining the Dialogue: Tips for Successful Reviews

There are several important considerations for preparing the final review document in order to maintain a sense of dialogue rather than a one-sided critique. First and foremost, respect and kindness are key. Within the double-anonymous review process it can be easy to forget the purpose of the review and to neglect to consider the individuals who will receive it and the considerable time and effort they put into writing their manuscript. Be sure to pay attention to your tone and comments throughout while considering how the reader will receive and can use your feedback. Peer review is a critical part academic publishing and should serve as an opportunity to provide constructive feedback that supports the authors in creating a stronger manuscript. This is especially important as many authors are still learning about the journal submission process.

Relatedly, it is important to focus on the big picture feedback. Although it can be helpful to point out needed copyedits and APA issues when they impede the reader’s understanding, that should not be the focus of your review. Rather, the review should focus on clear actionable steps the authors could take to strengthen the article. These can come in the form of direct suggestions or questions that you think the authors should consider/address within their revision in pursuit of improving the manuscript (APA, 2026). Importantly, these

should be aligned with the manuscript and intentions of the authors. Sometimes reviews comment on how they would have conducted the study or request something that is not aligned with the intentions or purposes of the manuscript. This type of feedback does not support a dialogue with the authors and is a missed opportunity to enhance the submitted work in ways that advance the field. Further, reviewers should refrain from suggesting citations of their own work (unless there is a very specific reason for the suggestion).

Collaboration on peer review can be a critical way to continue the dialogue. Faculty mentors are encouraged to include graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the review process. It is customary, however, to notify the Associate Editor in advance of the review to seek permission. The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) is not appropriate for conducting peer reviews. There are several limitations of AI including bias, limitations in the corpus from which AI draws its models, as well as a lack of decision making and critical thinking that can only come from human analyses (Crawford et al., 2024).

Joining the Dialogue Benefits You: What Reviewers Gain from their Service

Providing high-quality peer reviews can be very time-consuming, especially amidst the competing demands of academia, but choosing to serve the field of inclusive early childhood through peer review offers a variety of professional benefits. First, the act of reviewing may increase your knowledge of the field of inclusive education. While this is especially true for early career scholars, engaging in peer review can support established researchers to stay up to date on progress in the field and expose them to new and emerging ideas and research (Ali & Watson, 2016; Chitiyo & Weiss, 2022). Second, peer reviewing may increase your own knowledge of writing scholarly articles (Mayer et al., 2024). Third, university faculty are often expected to engage in service to their field of study. Serving as a peer reviewer is one way in which faculty can meet this requirement (Ali & Watson, 2016; Kang et al., 2023). Finally, by being a peer reviewer and ensuring that high-quality scholarship is published in *The Dialog*, you are supporting the dissemination of best practices in inclusive early childhood ed-

ucation and advancing work in our field (Steer & Ernst, 2021). Peer reviewing for *The Dialog* offers meaningful benefits for reviewers, authors and the broader field.

Thank You for Engaging in Dialogue

The editorial board of *The Dialog* is thankful for the many people who choose to serve the journal and the field of inclusive early childhood education by serving as peer reviewers. We know that each of you has countless demands for your time and other journals that are also requesting your expertise. Thank you for sharing your time and knowledge with us.



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The Dialog Framework: Actualizing Research in Support of Early Childhood Inclusion

Johanna Higgins, PhD
University of Pittsburgh

Hsiu-Wen Yang, PhD
*University of Illinois at Urbana-
Champaign*

Deborah Rooks-Ellis
Coastal Carolina University

ABSTRACT

Connecting research to practice is a critical component of scholarship, yet research often remains confined to academia, rather than reaching the professionals, families, and policymakers who can use it. Translating research into meaningful practice can be especially challenging in early childhood inclusion, where studies are typically conducted in real-world setting with young children with delays or disabilities and their families. As an open-access journal, *The Dialog* serves as a bridge between research and practice by making evidence more accessible and actionable. This article is intended for professionals, faculty instructors in preparation programs, advocates, caregivers, and others seeking to connect research to their work on inclusion with children and families. It highlights how articles published in *The Dialog* connects with three foundational pillars of inclusion (preparation, practice, and policy) and emphasizes Research to Practice (RTP) products authors create to accompany their manuscripts to support immediate use by professionals.

KEYWORDS

Inclusion; Early Childhood; Research-to-practice

Late on a Sunday night, a first-year early childhood teacher searches online for strategies to support a student with autism in her inclusive classroom of twenty children. While she finds numerous studies proving that inclusion works, none offer practical steps for her Monday morning lessons. At the same time, a university faculty member struggles to find research materials that translate cleanly into training higher education students to adapt lesson plans for children with developmental delays. This persistent gap between theoretical research and actionable, day-to-day practices represents a well-documented challenge across the early childhood field (Siller et al., 2021). Advancing high-quality inclusion requires equipping on-the-ground professionals with accessible, evidence-based tools.

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Contact: Johanna Higgins @ jhiggins@pitt.edu

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THE DIALOG FRAMEWORK FOR ACTUALIZING RESEARCH

Extensive evidence confirms that high-quality inclusive settings benefit young children with and without disabilities. Inclusive environments improve developmental outcomes, increase peer empathy, encourage positive attitudes toward diversity, and foster a sense of belonging. Beyond promoting positive developmental outcomes for children, inclusion benefits peers and other individuals that support them, by increasing empathy, encouraging positive attitudes towards diversity, and fostering a social environment guided by acceptance and belonging. Importantly, these outcomes are tied to the use of research-based supports, such as embedded learning, curricular adaptations, and other quality practices, delivered by trained professionals who have accepted the philosophy of inclusion and importance of creating a welcoming environment for all children (Barton, Smith & Lochetta, 2025; Kart & Kart, 2021).

Although decades of research have established what works and identified the practices described above, much of this evidence base was generated in contexts that differ from the realities practitioners encounter today. Shifts in educational systems, service delivery models, family priorities, and workforce demands mean that even well-established practices like embedded learning and curricular adaptation must be continually reexamined and re-translated for contemporary early childhood settings. This divide between longstanding evidence and current practice underscores the need for more outlets that illustrate how evidence-based strategies can be implemented effectively, and for materials that help the professionals delivering these supports stay current with the field.

Reflecting the benefits of inclusion, federal policy mandates teams to prioritize the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). Joint guidance from the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education (2015) similarly underscores that all early childhood programs must guarantee high-quality inclusion across learning environments. Together, these highlight the ongoing importance of equipping professionals with accessible, actionable materials to guide inclusive practices. Despite clear legislative and developmental motivations, special education professionals

consistently face a shortage of actionable materials that connect these systemic expectations with daily classroom implementation (Siller et al., 2021). Peer-reviewed research rarely reaches the field in formats that practitioners can apply immediately.

The Dialog: A Journal for Inclusive Early Childhood Professionals was created to target this specific resource deficiency. The journal deliberately translates rigorous scientific studies into accessible, application-oriented articles. By publishing evidence-informed approaches, innovative field strategies, and community voices, the journal advances workforce competencies to improve real-world implementation.

Purpose of this Article

Accordingly, this article provides a comprehensive guide and conceptual framework that explicitly connects *The Dialog* to three foundational pillars of early childhood inclusion – preparation, practice, and policy. By defining each pillar, this paper outlines how published manuscripts translate empirical research into actionable strategies, guide higher education coursework, align with national professional standards, and reshape local and state-level guidelines to support young children with delays or disabilities and their families.

Connecting *The Dialog* to The Pillars of Early Childhood Inclusion

To guide prospective authors in connecting their work to inclusive supports for young children with delays/disabilities and their families, we share a framework that clarifies the role of *The Dialog* in translating knowledge into action. This framework positions published manuscripts as contributing to three foundational pillars: preparation, practice, and policy, each informed by lived experiences, research evidence, and systems-level considerations.

These specific pillars represent the functional requirements needed to sustain high-quality early childhood inclusion. Personnel preparation builds a skilled workforce, direct practice translates that knowledge into daily interventions, and policy provides the structural infrastructure necessary to fund and institutionalize both components. Ad-

THE DIALOG FRAMEWORK FOR ACTUALIZING RESEARCH

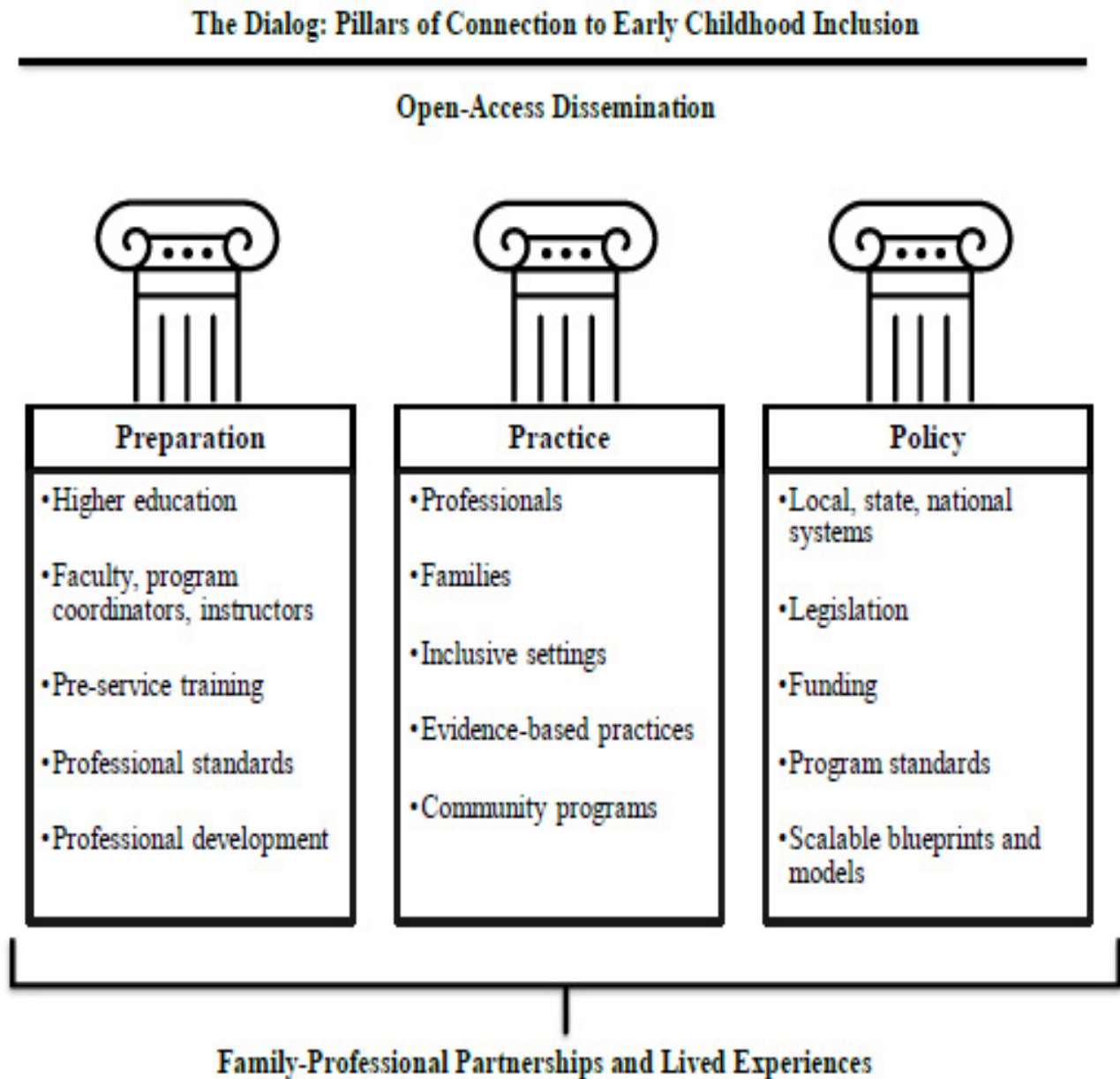
addressing these three areas together accounts for the multi-level nature of translational science and ensures systemic change rather than isolated success.

Accordingly, preparation refers to the education and training of early childhood professionals, both before they enter the field and throughout their careers. Practice refers to the direct service that providers and professionals deliver to children and

families across settings, including home, school, and community. Policy refers to the guidance, systems, and structures that shape inclusive environments, ensuring young children who benefit from additional supports can learn and grow alongside their peers, family members, and communities. See Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Dialog: Pillars of Connection to Early Childhood Inclusion



THE DIALOG FRAMEWORK FOR ACTUALIZING RESEARCH

Pillar 1: Using the Dialog to Strengthen Personnel Preparation

Personnel preparation serves an important role in guiding faculty in shaping knowledge, skills and competence of inclusive early childhood professionals who support children and their families. Preparation is multifaceted and usually includes a range of learning experiences, including university and college-based programs providing pre-service education to professionals before assuming roles, and ongoing training and development designed to strengthen and inform throughout a professional's career (Early Childhood Personnel Center, n.d.).

Using The Dialog in Higher Education

The articles published in *The Dialog* serve as valuable resources for faculty, instructors, and students in higher academia and personnel preparation programs. Students training to be early childhood professionals, such as early intervention providers and early childhood special education teachers, need concrete examples, case studies, and detailed descriptions of how to put evidence-based practices into action. Faculty members and instructors can direct students to The Dialog articles online, integrating both foundational and current research into early childhood and early intervention coursework. For example, in a course teaching developmental assessment, an instructor could assign an article detailing naturalistic observation tools. Students could then use that article's case study to complete a field-based learning assignment, practicing how to document a child's authentic behaviors in an inclusive classroom setting.

Academic programs must align their course content with evidence-based standards set by national early childhood organizations. For programs preparing professionals to support children with delays or disabilities, curriculum alignment should draw directly from the standards and practices established by the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). For professionals working in infant and toddler inclusive settings, these frameworks are complemented by the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators. Faculty can explicitly connect

coursework to these combined benchmarks through core competencies in child development, family partnerships, collaboration, and inclusive instructional planning. Authors of *The Dialog* submissions should clearly articulate how program coordinators and instructors can use their manuscripts to meet these cross-disciplinary professional standards.

Additionally, undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in early childhood, early intervention, early childhood special education, inclusive, and blended training programs play a critical role in advancing the field through the contribution of new ideas, engaging in research, and translating research into practical actions. *The Dialog* encourages faculty members and instructors to collaborate with students as co-authors, researchers, and presenters, elevating their voices and contributions. Their involvement helps bridge the gap between preparation and practice while fostering the next generation of inclusive professional leaders who can help others provide welcoming, accepting environments.

Using The Dialog in Professional Development

Higher education programs are not the only pathway for preparing early childhood professionals to use inclusive practices; professional development (PD) training and materials play an equally vital role. At its core, PD provides currently employed professionals with learning experiences that advance their careers and build competencies their formal training may not have addressed. Organizations (e.g., DEC, NAEYC, ZERO-TO-THREE) and state-level programs develop these resources to support professionals already working in early childhood settings. We encourage PD professionals to embed articles published in The Dialog within their training materials and resources, strengthening the connection between research and practice.

When writing for *The Dialog*, your manuscript should provide explicit examples of how content, such as key terms, voices from the field, and practical suggestions, can be weaved into course assignments and field activities. This targeted framing enriches training materials and resources, strengthening the connection between research and practice.

Pillar 2: Using The Dialog to Strengthen Practices

While preparing a highly qualified workforce sets a critical foundation, the ultimate success of inclusion depends on how effectively that training translates into daily routines. Moving from personnel preparation to active clinical or classroom execution requires a clear bridge connecting academic knowledge to public implementation. Within this translational process, the dissemination, communication, and implementation of research findings serve as critical components of translational science (Leppin et al., 2019). Effectively sharing evidence with the public is a core responsibility of researchers and must be intentionally integrated into the research and publication process (Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011).

Our audience extends directly beyond academic researchers to include practitioners, program leaders, policymakers, advocates, and families who seek evidence-based information to guide their daily work and decision-making. Recognizing these diverse needs, the journal intentionally incorporates Research-to-Practice (R2P) products to support direct engagement with and application of published data. Please see the first article in this special issue for more information on these unique publications (Mickelson & Meyer, 2026).

Learning from Diverse Experiences and Voices

The impact of early childhood research is maximized when the lived experiences of children, families, and practitioners are explicitly acknowledged and integrated throughout the research cycle. *The Dialog* prioritizes elevating these diverse community perspectives. Readers can use published articles to better understand how empirical findings connect to current real-world dilemmas facing the field. These insights give critical context to the research, helping practitioners determine how findings apply directly to the unique populations they serve and the specific settings in which they practice. This grounding allows professionals to make informed, meaningful decisions that are genuinely responsive to their localized environments.

Bridging Research and Practices

To further bridge the gap between theory and execution, the journal encourages authors to tie

The impact of early childhood research is maximized when the lived experiences of children, families, and practitioners are explicitly acknowledged and integrated throughout the research cycle.

their findings directly to national benchmarks developed by leading organizations, including the DEC, NAEYC, and ZERO TO THREE. Articulating these explicit connections helps clarify the practical, ground-level implications of empirical findings for the broader field.

Recognizing that distinct stakeholders consume information differently, *The Dialog* will move beyond traditional scholarly manuscripts by offering multi-modal R2P products. Readers will be able to access collaborative dissemination materials such as R2P briefs, blogs, instructional videos, and infographics. Rather than acting as mere condensed versions of original papers, these open-access assets will be explicitly designed to translate complex academic content into practical formats that are easy to understand, implement, and share across diverse communities. Through these efforts, the journal facilitates ongoing dialogue and encourages the active application of research findings within programs, organizations, and communities. See Table 1 for resources for connecting *The Dialog* to Personnel Preparation and Ongoing Professional Development.

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Table 1

Resources to Connect The Dialog to Personnel Preparation and Ongoing Professional Development

Resource	Link to Resource
Division for Early Childhood Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education Standards	https://www.dec-sped.org/ei-ecse-standards
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards	https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/professional-standards-competencies
Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices	https://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices
Early Childhood Personnel Center Cross-Disciplinary Competencies	https://ecpcta.org/cross-disciplinary-competencies/
Zero to Three	https://www.zerotothree.org/learn-professional-development/zero-to-three-critical-competencies-for-infant-toddler-educators/

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Pillar 3: Using The Dialog to Inform Policy

Translational science emphasizes that research achieves its maximum impact when it directly informs policy and systemic decision-making (Trivette & Dunst, 2013). Because *The Dialog* is a fully open-access, peer-reviewed journal, it removes the traditional financial barriers that historically blocked local leaders, educators, and community members from accessing rigorous data. This accessibility establishes *The Dialog* into an active tool that early childhood inclusive professionals can strategically use to shape classroom instruction, elevate teacher preparation, and inform institutional and state guidelines. To maximize this impact, prospective authors and readers must consider a dual lens: how to actively use the journal's existing insights to inform policy changes, and how to intentionally frame their own ground-level work to serve as a scalable policy blueprint for others.

Informing Local and Regional Program Policy

For program administrators and local leaders, *The Dialog* provides a mechanism to move beyond compliance and actively advocate for systemic policy updates within their districts or networks. Rather than approaching local school boards or funding agencies with purely anecdotal requests, professionals can leverage open-access articles as authoritative, external validation for necessary policy revisions. For example, when collaborating with institutional decision-makers to rewrite district discipline policies or student placement guidelines, leaders can share peer-reviewed articles from the journal that demonstrate the systemic value of inclusive, supportive frameworks.

Furthermore, administrators can use published empirical data to restructure district budget priorities, justifying the allocation of local funds toward continuous co-teaching resources and classroom paraeducator allocations rather than isolated, short-term professional development events. This evidence base can also be used to systematically reform district-wide inclusion models, replacing outdated self-contained placement frameworks with structural guidelines that actively implement embedded, naturalistic learning opportunities across every neighborhood campus. Using published data provides a strong, evidence-based foundation for strengthening local rules and enriching pro-

gram-wide standards.

From an author's standpoint, when considering writing for *The Dialog* based on your own programmatic successes, your manuscript should explicitly document how local policy shifts allowed those successes to happen. Prospective authors should reflect on how their ground-level data and lessons learned can be packaged so that other administrators can use them to influence their own local boards. By detailing distinct administrative realities, authors prove to decision-makers that inclusive practices are scalable solutions rather than isolated successes.

Shaping Workforce Standards and Higher Education Policy

Faculty members, professional development trainers, and researchers can use the journal to support, operationalize, and reform education policies across multiple systemic tiers. At the national level, *The Dialog* helps ground abstract professional guidelines, such as the DEC Recommended Practices, the NAEYC standards, and the ZERO TO THREE core workforce frameworks, by providing empirical data that demonstrates how these benchmarks operate in real-world environments. At the state level, these peer-reviewed findings can be strategically leveraged when partnering with state certification boards or regional teacher licensing agencies to justify shifting field experience requirements toward structured, hands-on inclusive training models. Finally, at the local and institutional levels, university faculty and technical assistance providers can use published articles to guide internal curriculum committees, reforming campus-wide course structures to align directly with modern workforce readiness standards. Rather than viewing high-level policy as an unyielding mandate, instructors can use the journal to show policymakers at every level how inclusive benchmarks function in day-to-day practice.

Strengthening Policy-Focused Family Partnerships

Effective early childhood systems rely on collaborative relationships between professionals and families to inform and improve educational policies. Practitioners and administrators can use *The Dialog* as a practical resource to strengthen their communication with families, empowering caregivers to participate as essential partners in pro-

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-gram governance and policy initiations. When working to update family engagement guidelines or program-wide transition policies, professionals can pull evidence-based frameworks directly from the journal to share with parents. Sharing these peer-reviewed, open-access frameworks provides a transparent and supportive foundation, helping professionals and families co-construct a shared language to present to school boards or advisory councils.

Conversely, when writing for *The Dialog*, prospective authors should explicitly highlight how they integrated family voices to shift local or institutional policies. Authors should reflect on how their collaborative projects can be packaged to help other educational leaders build stronger, policy-driven partnerships with the families they serve. For example, a manuscript might document how a program successfully redesigned its intake policies or routine communication standards based on direct family feedback and journal research. Ultimately, submissions to *The Dialog* offer an opportunity to connect these ground-level partnership successes to broader educational frameworks, providing readers with adaptable strategies that can help shape family collaboration guidelines and inclusive school models.

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Conclusion

Ultimately, we hope this framework becomes a tool authors return to again and again, using it to ensure every manuscript submitted to *The Dialog* reaches the professionals, students, and families working to make sure all children are welcomed and given every chance to grow in inclusive settings. By bridging the historical divide between empirical research and field reality, we can transform passive knowledge into dynamic, systemic advocacy across preparation programs, classrooms, and policy spaces. True inclusion is not an abstract ideal, but a lived reality that requires continuous coordination across research, classroom practice, and structural policy.

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