

Position Statement on Personnel Standards in Early Childhood Special Education



Division for
Early
Childhood

of the Council for Exceptional Children





Personnel Standards in Early Childhood Special Education

Division for Early Childhood (DEC)
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Introduction




The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) considers high quality personnel preparation to be essential to positive outcomes for young children, birth-through-eight years, at risk for or with developmental delays/disabilities and their families. The professionals who work with or on behalf of young children and their families represent diverse disciplines including, but not limited to, early interventionists, early childhood special educators, general early childhood educators, service coordinators, psychologists, therapists (e.g., speech-language, occupational, and physical), Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA), health care professionals, social workers, paraprofessionals, childcare providers, and those in leadership roles.

While DEC recognizes and supports the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of work with young children and their families, this position statement provides guidance specifically for the personnel preparation of educators who work with children birth-through-two years in Early Intervention (EI) and children from three-through-five and six-through-eight years in Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE). Throughout this position statement, the term ECSE will refer to both EI and ECSE educators who possess a state license/certificate in one or more of the above age categories or state equivalent. These educators encompass a range of roles and assume varying responsibilities related to the provision of IDEA Part B special education, and/or Part C special instruction across a wide variety of settings and services. Indeed, the context for delivering ECSE services is highly variable and includes settings such as private childcare centers, home-based settings, Head Start, state-funded pre-K, and public and private school early childhood special education programs (Kagan, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2008). The primary professional roles related to ECSE licensure include, but are not limited to: educators working within Part C early intervention programs; special educators serving preschool children in community and school district systems under Part B, Section 619; special educators working in public and private primary grades; and early childhood special education consultants.

This position statement provides direction for individuals in a variety of professional roles related to ECSE personnel preparation including, but not limited to, preparation as faculty and staff at Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs); professional development (PD) and technical assistance providers at local, regional, state, and national levels; and state level certification/licensure and policy administrators for ECSE. Specifically, this position statement:

1. explores the requirements and options for ECSE personnel preparation;
2. offers an overview of a Theory of Change guiding ECSE personnel preparation;
3. provides key concepts that guide the development of personnel preparation standards;
4. discusses the relevance of the CEC Professional Standards (CEC, 2016), the DEC Initial and Advanced Specialty Sets (DEC, 2017), and the DEC Recommended Practices



(2014) in the development and implementation of initial and advanced preparation and professional development curricula for ECSE educators; and
5. culminates with DEC's recommendations for the content and structure of ECSE personnel preparation and certification/licensure programs.

As noted, this statement pertains specifically to ECSE personnel preparation. However, DEC recognizes and supports the relevance and use of the guidance provided here for personnel preparation within and across related disciplines who work collaboratively with ECSE educators.

Requirements and Options for ECSE Personnel Preparation



Requirements and options related to degree, education, and licensure for ECSE educators have historically varied widely and great dissimilarity continues to be observed (Geiger, Mickelson, McKeown, Barton, Kleinhammer-Tramill, & Steinbrecher, 2013; Stayton, Dietrich, Smith, Bruder, Mogro-Wilson, & Swigart, 2009; Stayton, Smith, Dietrich, & Bruder, 2012). Personnel preparation includes pre-service education for initial certification/licensure at the baccalaureate or master's level, advanced preparation at post baccalaureate levels, and in-service professional development during employment. Guidance for programs providing ECSE personnel preparation is derived from state and national professional standards as well as state level certification/licensure requirements.

Initial personnel preparation exists in multiple forms, including traditional stand-alone ECSE preparation programs and blended or unified programs where candidates earn a degree and certification/licensure to work with young children with and without disabilities (Stayton & McCollum, 2002; Stayton et al., 2009). Post-baccalaureate programs specific to ECSE also exist, offering advanced degrees with or without initial certification/licensure. Personnel preparation, of course, continues after initial certification/licensure in the form of in-service trainings, coaching and mentoring, and other various learning opportunities. Such continuing education is considered indispensable to building the capacity of ECSE educators to increase proficiency and sustain expertise (Guskey, 2014). Ongoing in-service professional development is a critical component of a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD). While no longer a mandate for Part B, CSPD is still a statutory requirement for Part C systems under IDEA (ECPC, 2017).

A Theory of Change Guiding ECSE Personnel Preparation



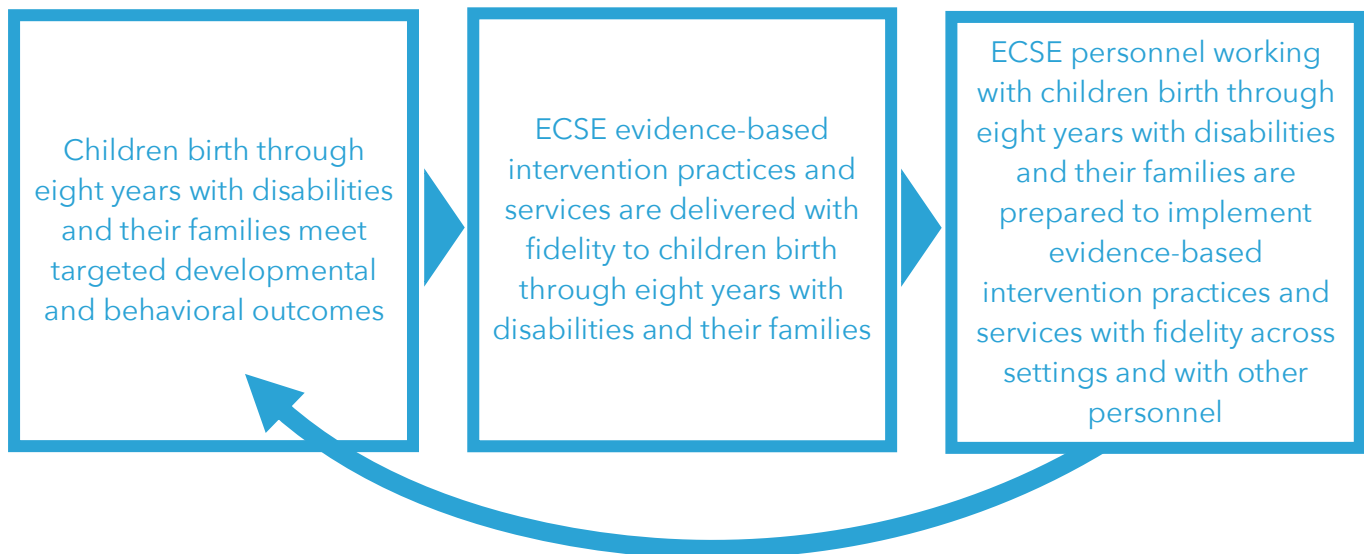
In 2003, Thomas Guskey suggested the designers of professional development should begin their planning in what was then a non-traditional fashion. That is, they should start with desired learning outcomes for children and map backwards to approaches to professional development (2003). His premise led to a Theory of Change for early childhood professional development proposed by Winton & McCollum (2008) that suggested starting with child and family outcomes, mapping back to teaching and intervention practices with the strongest evidence for supporting those outcomes, and then mapping back once more to professional development that targets those practices. This alternative approach provided a roadmap for educator personnel preparation programs (Winton, 2008; 2010) at a time when they were being critiqued for an over-emphasis on theory and research and a lack of attention to practices (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). Since that time, the proposed Theory of Change model for personnel preparation has been adopted and more fully described within the ECE, EI, and ECSE literature (Bruder, 2016; Diamond & Powell, 2011; Dunst, 2015; Winton, Snyder, &



Goffin, 2016). The Theory of Change guiding ECSE personnel preparation is depicted in Figure 1.

For example, a traditional approach in teaching a course in a personnel preparation program on working with children with disabilities might be to focus on theory, research, and legislation with the idea that practices would be taught in field-based placements. Conversely, using a backward mapping approach would mean starting with the end in mind, which would be the desired outcomes for children and families. These outcomes would come from a child’s IFSP or IEP and be informed by state early learning guidelines and evidence-based practices, such as those identified in the DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (DEC, 2014). A scope and sequence can then be designed for professional development with those practices being the center piece rather than an afterthought.

Research and theory should be taught as they relate to typical practice-based scenarios faced by early childhood staff working within different types of work contexts (e.g., home-based, center-based). The proposed Theory of Change has been adopted and more fully described within the ECE, EI, and ECSE literature (Bruder, 2016; Diamond & Powell, 2011; Dunst, 2015; Winter, Snyder & Goffin, 2016) and has guided the development of personnel preparation materials for faculty and professional development providers.



*Figure 1. Reverse Model of Change for Personnel Preparation
Adapted from: Bruder, M.B. (2016). Personnel development practices in early childhood intervention. In B. Reichow, B. Boyd, E. Barton, & S. Odom (Eds.), Handbook of early childhood special education (pp. 289-333). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.*

Key Concepts that Guide Development of ECSE Personnel Preparation Standards

In addition to being directed by the Theory of Change described above, the field of ECSE, and therefore of ECSE personnel preparation, evolves with the identification of new evidence-based





practices, the influence of societal trends, and the passage and reauthorization of relevant legislation. These ongoing changes inform key concepts that guide the development and application of professional standards and therefore *ECSE* personnel preparation. The concepts are grounded in contemporary theoretical constructs that form the foundation of the field of early childhood development and learning as well as evidence-based practices associated with early childhood and special education. Therefore, they provide clarity for the enactment of high quality practice. *ECSE* personnel preparation programs should prepare educators who:

- View each child and family as unique, with diverse strengths and needs, integrally linked to a broader social ecology;
- Offer services and supports that enhance each child’s and each family’s informal and formal support networks, and address their concerns, priorities, and needs;
- Partner with and support families and other caregivers to ensure that they become key decision-makers regarding their child’s development and educational services;
- Honor and use culturally-sustaining and culturally-sensitive interactions and practices;
- Recognize the uniqueness of early childhood as a developmental phase;
- Affirm the right and opportunity for each child to receive a continuum of services and supports, based on need, with peers in natural and inclusive environments;
- Maintain ethical conduct in all professional activities;
- Serve as change agents in advocating for young children and their families; and
- Collaborate with other early childhood professionals, paraprofessionals, families, and community agency personnel.

Note: The key concepts above are also discussed in more detail within other DEC position statements. The related DEC position statements are listed at the end of this document.

Relevance of CEC Professional Standards, DEC Specialty Sets, and DEC Recommended Practices

The CEC Special Educator Professional Initial and Advanced Preparation Standards and the DEC Specialty Sets that further inform the CEC standards for *ECSE* professionals also provide foundational elements for the design, implementation, and assessment of *ECSE* personnel preparation programs. Likewise, the DEC Recommended Practices are integral to *ECSE* personnel preparation.

Relationship between CEC Standards and DEC Specialty Sets: Initial and Advanced

Revised most recently in 2012, the CEC Initial Special Educator Professional Preparation Standards (CEC, 2016) are intended to be used by faculty in IHE’s and professional development programs to “guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of curricula to prepare individuals at the entry-level of special education (i.e., those individuals who do not possess a certificate/license in special education)” (DEC, 2017). The standards also direct the review and accreditation of IHE programs in special education under the Council for the Accreditation for Educator Preparation (CAEP). The standards are comprised of 7 CEC Initial Standards and 28 Elements. To further inform these standards for specific populations, 12 CEC Divisions, including DEC, have initial specialty sets. These specialty sets supplement the CEC standards and elements with knowledge and skill statements relevant to professionals within each specific division. The DEC Initial Specialty Set is intended to help ensure that the

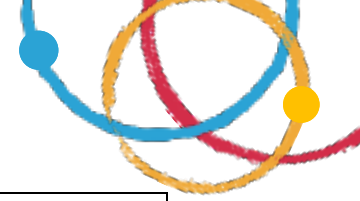
preparation of ECSE professionals includes the candidates' abilities to provide evidence-based services to children and families (DEC, 2017).

The CEC Advanced Special Educator Professional Preparation Standards (CEC, 2016) are intended to guide faculty in IHE advanced master's, education specialist, and doctoral degree programs as well as professional development programs in the "development, implementation and evaluation of curricula to prepare individuals who already possess a special education certificate/license and who are preparing to be special education specialists" (DEC, 2017). CAEP also recognizes these seven Advanced Standards for the purpose of reviewing and accrediting advanced IHE programs in special education. The DEC Advanced Special Education Early Childhood Specialty Set provides additional knowledge and skill statements specific to ECSE educators (DEC, 2017).

For initial and advanced blended/dual EC/ECSE programs, the NAEYC standards are used in addition to CEC Standards and DEC Specialty Sets. Table 1 provides guidance in the selection of appropriate standards and specialty sets based on type of personnel preparation program.

Table 1. Which Standards and Specialty Set Do I Use?

Type of Program	CEC Standards	DEC Specialty Sets	NAEYC Standards
Preservice ECSE <i>(Initial Licensure at Undergraduate or Graduate Level)</i>	2012 CEC Initial Preparation Standards	DEC Initial (2017) Specialty Set	
Advanced ECSE <i>(Master's, Specialist, or Doctoral)</i>		DEC Advanced (2017) Specialty Set	
Preservice Blended ECE/ECSE <i>(Initial Licensure at Undergraduate or Graduate Level)</i>	2012 CEC Initial Preparation Standards	DEC Initial (2017) Specialty Set	2010 NAEYC Standards for Initial Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs
Advanced Blended ECE/ECSE <i>(Master's, Specialist, or Doctoral)</i>	2012 CEC Advanced Preparation Standards	DEC Advanced (2017) Specialty Set	2010 NAEYC Standards for Advanced Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs
Professional Development (in-service or continuing education) <i>(Non-certified ECSE personnel)</i>	2012 CEC Initial Preparation Standards	DEC Initial (2017) Specialty Set	



<p>Professional Development (in-service or continuing education) <i>(Certified ECSE personnel)</i></p>	<p>2012 CEC Advanced Preparation Standards</p>	<p>DEC Advanced (2017) Specialty Set</p>	
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Note: Direct links to the standards and specialty sets are listed under “Related Resources” at the end of the position statement.

DEC Recommended Practices

The DEC Recommended Practices (RPs), first published in 1993, were most recently revised in 2014. The purpose of the Recommended Practices is:

...to help bridge the gap between research and practice by highlighting those practices that have been shown to result in better outcomes for young children with disabilities, their families, and the personnel who serve them (DEC, 2014, p.2).

Naturally, *ECSE* personnel preparation must be well-grounded in the DEC RPs to ensure such preparation focuses on preparing and supporting educators in the implementation of evidence-based practice with children and families. The eight topical areas in the 2014 DEC Recommended Practices provide a strong set of research-based practices that serve as a linchpin between the desired outcomes for children and families and the in-service and pre-service professional development activities focused on teaching *ECSE* educators to implement those practices with fidelity. The recommended practice areas that are relevant to *ECSE* initial preparation include assessment, environments, family, instruction, interactions, teaming and collaboration, and transitions. In addition to these areas, advanced *ECSE* preparation programs should reflect the practices within the leadership area.

DEC Personnel Preparation Recommendations

Many states have developed requirements for certification/licensure to address the needs of their pre-service, advanced, and in-service personnel preparation programs. Whether the focus of the program is a traditional *ECSE* or a blended/dual program with both general and special education early childhood content, core knowledge and skills need to be addressed. The content and structure for birth-through-two, three-through-five, and six-through eight varies to meet the developmental, behavioral, and academic needs of children and the priorities of families.

Content of Personnel Preparation and Certification/Licensure Programs

The content of *ECSE* personnel preparation curricula, as well as certification/licensure requirements, should reflect the previously articulated key concepts as well as the spirit and the letter of state and federal legislation related to young children with disabilities and their families. Specific content areas that are critical to ensure competency include the following: (a) child development and learning, (b) assessment, (c) natural environments/inclusive settings, (d) partnerships with families, (e) transition, (f) collaboration among professionals, (g) health/medical considerations, and (h) curriculum and instructional strategies. Specific to the content of *ECSE* personnel preparation, DEC recommends the following:



- **Align initial and advanced ECSE personnel preparation programs and state licensure/certification with relevant professional association standards to ensure consistency.** As a division of the CEC, the expectation is that the Initial and Advanced DEC Specialty Sets will be used in conjunction with the CEC Special Educator Professional Preparation Initial and Advanced Standards (CEC, 2016) to inform and expand on the CEC standards with specialization content for *ECSE*. For blended/dual programs, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2011) Initial and Advanced Personnel Standards for Early Education and Early Intervention must be addressed. Additionally, these sets of standards should be employed in the development of state certification/licensure standards. To ensure consistency and reciprocity across the United States and its territories, states and territories are encouraged to identify the relevant sets of professional association standards as their state certification standards. Higher Education programs in states that require CAEP accreditation or those programs that voluntarily seek CAEP accreditation must use the standards as identified above for *ECSE* or dual/blended programs.
- **Utilize current evidence-based recommended practices.** DEC Recommended Practices (2014), DEC Initial and Advanced Specialty Sets, and results of research-based literature are infused into *ECSE* professional development curricula and higher education programs of study/curricula (remove word), both in instruction around pedagogy and through supervised field experiences.
- **Address the dispositions of *ECSE* educators in the expectations of both initial and advanced programs.** Attitudes, beliefs, and professional ethics are critical to the success of individuals who are trained to work with young children and their families. Personnel preparation programs address these qualities in *ECSE* educators and establish an ongoing evaluation process that is incorporated into the program's curricula and field experiences.
- **Incorporate performance- and outcome-based measures of knowledge and skills.** Evaluation of knowledge and skills through field experiences in homes, community-based programs, child care centers, and public and private programs assists to ensure that *ECSE* educators are highly qualified to meet the needs of young children and their families. Demonstration of positive child and family progress facilitates improved quality of life for individual family members as well as the family as a whole.
- **Align field experiences with courses and their required performance- and outcome-based measures in both initial and advanced programs.** Development and learning depends on what happens in educational settings (Ball & Forzani, 2011; McDonald, Kazemi, & Kavanagh, 2013); thus, personnel preparation programs must align field experiences in high quality settings with coursework to prepare pre-service and in-service educators to ensure transfer of research and theory to practice in classrooms and other community settings (Macy, Squires, & Barton, 2009). High quality settings are those that are consistent with the underlying philosophy and practices represented by the DEC Specialty Sets and recommended practices. Field experiences should occur early in the personnel preparation program focusing on observation of and reflection on practices and systematically progressing to implementation of practices with supervision (Grossman et al., 2009).
- **Provide mentoring/coaching that promotes increased understanding, skills, and implementation of practices through self-reflection.** Strategic and systematic supervision of pre-service and in-service *ECSE* educators promotes increased




knowledge and skills as well as self-reflection on the interactions and practices utilized with children, families, and other providers. Opportunities for shared reflection of practices and documentation of the knowledge and skills learned, or yet to be demonstrated, are a priority within *ECSE* personnel preparation programs.

Structure of Personnel Preparation and Certification/Licensure Programs

In addition to the recommendations for content described above, DEC also recognizes particular aspects important to the structure of *ECSE* personnel preparation programs. These aspects reflect the variety of roles fulfilled by *ECSE* educators, the range of personnel preparation goals and their foci, as well as the wide range of contexts in which *ECSE* educators work with and on behalf of young children and families. DEC recommends the following elements to inform the structure of *ECSE* personnel preparation programs.


- **Recognize the differences between initial and advanced personnel preparation programs.** By following the guidelines in the DEC Specialty Sets for Initial and Advanced training, the content of *ECSE* personnel preparation programs and certification/licensure requirements is clearly outlined. Initial programs may include a bachelor's degree or Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree. Advanced programs may include a master's, education specialist, or doctoral degree and/or continuing education via universities, conferences, or state-supported professional development programs.
- **Consider the variation in the age range of licensure/certification programs.** While DEC supports services for children across the full birth-to-eight age range, it is difficult to ensure that all *ECSE* educators obtain the required knowledge and skills to be proficient in that entire age span. Thus, the sub-specialization age ranges of birth-to-three, three-to-five, and five-through-eight require a concentrated and comprehensive focus on the differences among these age categories of young children and their families. The impact and influence of one developmental level upon another is critical to recognize. Personnel preparation programs ensure that *ECSE* educators are competent in at least two of these three sub-specialization age ranges at the completion of their initial preparation.
- **Consider certification/licensure requirements specific to *ECSE*.** States develop freestanding *ECSE* certification/licensure guidelines for educators working with young children with disabilities in early childhood special education, Part C special instruction, and/or blended/dual early childhood/early childhood special education programs. Further, state and national requirements address and adhere to legislative initiatives, DEC Initial and/or Advanced Specialty Sets, and DEC Recommended Practices.
- **Recognize and support a potential career ladder for paraprofessionals and professionals working in the *ECSE* programs.** A career ladder system is essential to ensure a qualified workforce for the variety of paraprofessional and professional roles in *ECSE* programs and to support the continued professional development of those individuals. This occurs through articulation agreements within and across local education agencies, 2- and 4-year IHEs, and state agencies. For example, a typical scenario may be an individual who has an Associate's degree in Early Childhood and then has the opportunity to earn a Bachelor's degree through the articulation of courses and collaboration between IHEs. Alternately, a person may attend a continuing education program and receive credits for their participation that can be applied to an initial or advanced degree program dependent on the individual's prior formal education.

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- **Recognize the relationship between the preparation and roles of *ECSE* and related services professionals (e.g., speech-language, occupational therapy, physical therapy).** Multiple individuals with credentials in disciplines other than education work with young children with disabilities and their families. *ECSE* personnel preparation programs facilitate professional cooperation and collaboration by recognizing variations in personnel preparation and professional roles and by encouraging cross-disciplinary training whenever possible. Further, both pre-service and in-service personnel preparation programs equip *ECSE* educators with an understanding of the unique expertise and responsibilities of educators as well as related service professionals, and how their expertise relates to one another when serving young children with disabilities and their families.

Conclusion



The Division for Early Childhood believes high quality personnel preparation is critical to ensuring positive outcomes for young children with, or at risk for disabilities. The existing paths to education, degree, and licensure for *ECSE* educators have led to extensive variability among personnel preparation programs. With the aim of providing consistent guidance across this varied landscape, this position statement highlights the Theory of Change upon which *ECSE* personnel preparation has been built to remind those who provide personnel preparation that a focus on positive outcomes for children and families should be the priority. Informed by the ongoing changes in the field and formulated from foundational theoretical constructs and evidence-based practices, key concepts of *ECSE* personnel preparation are identified. Moreover, this document explains how the CEC standards, DEC specialty sets, and the DEC recommended practices support the development of *ECSE* personnel preparation programs. Finally, a set of recommendations for the content and structure of programs are presented to further guide decision making. DEC believes that adherence to the recommendations in this position statement will minimize variability among programs and promote high quality personnel preparation for all *ECSE* educators.





Related Resources

1. Division for Early Childhood (DEC) website for the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards and DEC specialty sets:
<https://www.deccecpersonnelstandards.org/>
2. CEC website for CEC standards and DEC specialty sets:
<https://www.cec.sped.org/Standards/Special-Educator-Professional-Preparation-Standards/CEC-Initial-and-Advanced-Preparation-Standards>
3. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) website for Personnel Preparation Standards: <https://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/ppp>
4. Council for the Accreditation for Educator Preparation (CAEP) website:
<http://www.caepnet.org/>
5. DEC Recommended Practices website:
<http://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices>
6. All DEC Position Statements:
<http://www.dec-sped.org/position-statements>
7. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) website:
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/?src=pr>

Related DEC Position Statements

1. DEC Member Code of Ethics (August 2009)
2. Family Culture, Values, and Language (September 2010)
3. Frameworks for Response to Intervention in Early Childhood: Description and Implications (2013)
4. *Inclusion* (April 2009)
5. Promoting the Health, Safety, and Well-Being of Young Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays (September 2012)
6. Promoting Positive Outcomes for Children with Disabilities: Recommendations for Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation (March 2007)
7. Role of Special Instruction in Early Intervention (June 2014)



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