

Journal of Online Learning Research



Journal Of Online Learning Research Call for Special Issue Proposals:

Reimagining Online Educational Settings As Accessible, Inclusive Spaces

Children who qualify for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA, 2004) have been one of the largest growing populations of full-time online learners (Molnar, Huerta, Shafer, Barbour, Miron, & Gulosino, 2015). As these students enroll, it is important for schools to prepare for learners with critical challenges and intersecting diversities (Rice, Ortiz, Curry, & Petropoulous, 2019)

Ahn (2011) noted that students' prior educational histories as well as unobserved variables tend to have a profound impact on success in online learning. Thus, it is of critical importance that educators working in online and blended learning environments possess an in-depth awareness of how disability and other learner characteristics affect the learning process. The Academic Communities of Engagement (ACE) framework suggests that consideration of individual student characteristics, personal environment, and course environment offer insight into how to better support all learners (Borup, Graham, West, Archambault, & Spring, 2020). These considerations must include all aspects of accessibility across learner domains (Rice, 2018).

The purpose of this special issue is to showcase studies grounded in conceptualizations of students with disabilities or other students who may need special attention or services that extend beyond what we already know and provide new insights into how disability and other challenges students face are understood, identified, and supported in online and blended learning environments.

Despite low achievement scores for virtual schools overall, Ahn (2011) found that learners who are self-determined, have high GPAs to begin with, and do not require additional academic support, have higher completion rates. Students without these characteristics will need support. For example, Hashey and Stahl (2014) note that teaching aids and devices must be made accessible to all students. Further, both social and course environments should offer students with opportunities to grow in their social competence and self-regulation skills (Center on Online Learning, 2016).

Beyond academic support strategies, several critical issues remain for researchers. These questions include what practices are considered appropriate when individualization, personalization, and differentiation are necessary in online settings. Other research questions remain around teacher preparation experiences, strategies for instructing students who do not fit Ahn's (2011) profile of an ideal online learner, and other issues of general equity in online learning environments disability (Center for Online Learning, 2016).

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Topics

We are seeking empirical work (quantitative or qualitative) on topics related to diversity in online and blended learning environments. Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- Developing and supporting literacies or content area knowledge for all students
- Reimagining concepts such as self-regulation skills that are often referenced in studies of children who do not succeed in online learning environments
- Collaborating with parents or other entities to implement IDEA in online settings
- Taking fresh (non-deficit) perspectives of teachers, parents, and others who work with students who do not traditionally succeed in online learning environments
- Describing important advantages online learning can provide that go beyond entertainment and enjoyment for students
- Using new theoretical frameworks to shed light on issues of access and equity in online learning
- Case studies of promising practices and programs

While we do not intend to publish literature reviews for this issue, we will consider strong conceptual work. However, the focus of the issue is on empirical work.

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research articles are welcome. Research should be grounded in the existing literature and/or theoretical frameworks. Conceptual or theoretical articles will also be considered.

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