

Experiential Learning: Making It Matter in Early Childhood Preparation

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These guidelines build upon research that recommends ELOs should be carefully structured and sequenced (Leko et al., 2015) and emphasize the implementation of recommended practices, including interactions with children, families, and other professionals (McLeod et al., 2022).

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has put forth recommendations for the field through the development of the Position Statement on Ethical Practice and Personnel Standards in Early Childhood Special Education. Additionally, principles outlined in the Early Childhood Education/Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (ECE/EI/ECSE) Crosswalk and the DEC promote supervised, community-based learning across varied environments and the birth-to-age-8 continuum. This article, which includes four figures, provides support to faculty in developing experiential learning opportunities (ELOs) within their programs of study for EI, ECE, and/or ECSE pre-service professionals.

KEYWORDS

Early childhood special education, early intervention, educator preparation programs, field experience, professional preparation standards

Janessa is an established university faculty member but is new to directing her department's blended early childhood personnel preparation program (Harbin & Purcell, 2024). The program prepares practitioners to earn their state license to teach infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary students (ages birth to 8) with diverse abilities. She is currently reviewing her program to update course content in accordance with new state guidelines. With this in mind, she would also like to consider the practicum placements her program requires and whether or not they reflect best practices for experiential learning. She is excited to get started but is overwhelmed with determining what her program does well and where it needs improvement, especially in supporting meaningful opportunities for experiential learning across the various age ranges for which students will be licensed in the future.

Experiential learning is an approach that views hands-on experiences and reflection on those experiences as a mechanism for student learning (Knapp, 2016; Kolb, 2015). National guidelines emphasize comprehensive, developmentally appropriate, and diverse experiences aligned with ethical and professional standards (Division for Early Childhood [DEC], 2022a, 2022b) in early childhood personnel preparation (encompassing early childhood education [ECE], early intervention [EI], and early childhood special education [ECSE]). These real-world learning opportunities are essential to developing competent, reflective early childhood professionals who can effectively translate theoretical knowledge into evidence-based practice while maintaining ethical standards and cultural responsiveness in their work with young children and their families. Faculty members, such as Janessa, must ensure experiential learning opportunities (ELOs) meet recent guidelines and align with coursework to create high-quality experiences consistent with preparation for a blended license.

Ensuring that ELOs meet national guidelines and align with coursework can be challenging for several reasons. First, as minimal guidance exists about the prepa-

ration of special education doctoral students to become teacher educators (McCorkle et al., 2022b; Smith et al., 2010), faculty may be in need of support to develop and/or revise programs that meet the aforementioned guidelines. For example, navigating different terminology and interpreting guiding documents are persistent barriers in early childhood personnel preparation (Leko et al., 2015; O'Brien et al., 2023). In addition, establishing and maintaining relationships with community partners and determining appropriate ELO duration may present challenges (Kim et al., 2024; Mitsch et al., 2022), especially for faculty such as Janessa who are acclimating to a new role. Further, aligning assignments with coursework requirements can be challenging as faculty may need support in preparing students for their careers (Leko et al., 2015). The purpose of this article is to provide resources and support for early career faculty developing ELOs that prepare students to work across age ranges and settings with children and families participating in EI, ECE, or ECSE programs. In this article, the term “early childhood” will be an umbrella term for EI, ECE, and ECSE.

For faculty developing ELOs, limited empirical or conceptual guidance exists regarding how ELOs are systematically designed, implemented, and evaluated across the full birth-to-age-8 continuum (O'Brien et al., 2023; Szocik et al., 2024). Existing literature largely focuses on preschool and ECSE settings, with minimal attention to EI contexts, interdisciplinary preparation, or faculty-led systems of alignment (McCorkle et al., 2022a; Nichols et al., 2023). Thus, this article contributes by translating dispersed guidance into an explicit, stepwise framework with matrix-based tools that operationalize implementation of ELOs across age ranges and settings.

Faculty, particularly those early in their careers, often assume responsibility

for practicum coordination and supervision (Mitsch et al., 2022). However, researchers report limited preparation for program design, community partnership management, or integration of practicum experiences into coursework (Brownell et al., 2020; Leko et al., 2015). These findings highlight the need for explicit, practice-based guidance (Childress et al., 2025). As the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) Standards R5.3 and R5.4 emphasize the importance of shareholder engagement and continuous improvement, with typical program updates occurring every 3 to 7 years (CAEP, 2022), this knowledge is integral to the creation and maintenance of high-quality programming. Although no fixed schedule is mandated, regular review cycles can ensure alignment with current research, policies, and practices.

Navigating Terminology and Guiding Documents

In reviewing programming needs, faculty will need to consider ways to connect course content with ELOs. Through her review of literature, Janessa learns that many different terms are commonly used to describe these learning experiences, including coursework-based practicum, practice-based learning opportunity, internship, student teaching, and experiential learning (O'Brien et al., 2023; Reagan et al., 2021; Sciuchetti et al., 2018; Szocik et al., 2024). As emerging policy and practice frameworks evolve, they increasingly advocate for intentional, inclusive, and context-specific experiences over generic “fieldwork” concepts (Council for Exceptional Children/Division for Early Childhood [CEC/DEC], 2020; Early Childhood Personnel Center [ECPC], 2023a, 2023b). Consistent terminology and clear definitions of these experiences are critical for advancing research synthesis and ensuring that teacher candidates receive targeted,

meaningful opportunities to develop the competencies necessary for effective ECE/EI/ECSE practices (O'Brien et al., 2023; Szocik et al., 2024).

The development of meaningful ELOs is critical to personnel preparation. Principles outlined in the ECE/EI/ECSE crosswalk (ECPC, 2020) and by DEC (2022a) promote supervised, community-based learning across varied environments and the birth-to-age-8 continuum. Together, these resources outline expectations for ELOs across early childhood settings (e.g., home, community, center-based environments), emphasizing inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive experiences. These guidelines build upon research that recommends ELOs should be carefully structured and sequenced (Leko et al., 2015) and emphasize the implementation of recommended practices, including interactions with children, families, and other professionals (McLeod et al., 2022). Along with the DEC position statements and ECE/EI/ECSE crosswalk, faculty may use the ECPC Field Experiences Guide (2023a) and Initial Practice-Based Professional Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators (CEC/DEC, 2020) to develop ELOs within their programs. These guidelines emphasize connecting research and theory to practice through scaffolded experiences with progressively increasing responsibilities (ECPC, 2023a).

To inform her decisions, Janessa reviews the Field Experiences Guide and the Initial Practice-Based Professional Standards. She revisits documents she has read before, such as the DEC position statements on ethical practice, inclusion, personnel preparation, and special instruction. Janessa knows she wants ELOs to demonstrate recommended practices for her students, so she uses the DEC Recommended Practices (2014) and the CEC (2024)

FIGURE 1: Experiential Learning Opportunity Evaluation Matrix

	Meets	Does Not Meet	Comments
Program/School			
1.1. Provides inclusive opportunities for children that promote access and participation in meaningful activities and engage families as equal team members in their child's intervention/instruction. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7			
1.2. Follows local, state/territory, and national laws and policies related to early intervention/early childhood special education (EI/ECSE). 3, 4			
1.3. Follows EI/ECSE field and discipline-specific guidance from professional standards, position statements, codes of ethics, etc. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7			
1.4. Uses a developmentally appropriate and adaptable early childhood curriculum framework in preschool and early elementary settings. 1, 2, 3, 6			
1.5. Encourages teaming and collaboration among professionals from various backgrounds to coordinate intervention/instruction, problem-solve, share ideas, and maximize learning. 2, 3, 6, 7			
Student Mentor			
2.1. Uses recommended practices and strengths-based approaches to child assessment and development of intervention or instructional plans. 1, 3, 4, 6			
2.2. Uses evidence-based practices and data-informed decision-making to design and implement intervention/instruction with individual and (as appropriate) groups of children. 1, 2, 3, 4			
2.3. Implements culturally and linguistically responsive and affirming practices that respect the backgrounds, experiences, and ways of being of all families. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6			
2.4. Uses or facilitates the use of routine-based instruction embedded in daily routines in family, childcare, and/or classroom settings. 1, 4, 5, 6			
2.5. Uses explicit instruction within responsive, well-organized environments that foster positive relationships and provide accessible opportunities for children to learn, move, participate, and communicate in preschool and early elementary settings. 2, 3, 4, 6			
2.6. Uses family capacity-building practices, including coaching and consultation, when partnering with caregivers to help them support their children's development in daily activities and routines. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6			
Students			
3.1. Are paired with qualified mentors with knowledge, experience, expertise, and licensure (as appropriate) in EI/ECSE or related fields. 1, 6, 7, 8			
3.2. Gain experience with child assessment, eligibility determination, individualized planning and intervention/instruction, and progress monitoring in the environments that match the requirements of state licensure. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8			
3.3. Experience graduated increases in responsibility during the ELO to observe and/or apply what was learned in aligned coursework via shadowing, co-teaching, and solo teaching. 1, 7, 8			
3.4. Use systematic intervention/instructional strategies to maximize child (and caregiver as appropriate) learning and inclusion. 2, 4, 5			
3.5. Have opportunities to engage families and observe practitioners using responsive interactional practices with caregivers. 1, 2, 3, 4			
3.6. Engage in self-reflection on interactions and practices used with children, families, and other professionals, guided by their mentor. 3, 5, 8			

Note. The following resources were used to develop this matrix: (1) Initial Practice-Based Professional Preparation Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators (EI/ECSE), (Initial birth through age 8; 2020); (2) CEC High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities (2024); (3) DEC Position Statement on Ethical Practice (2022); (4) DEC Recommended Practices (2014); (5) DEC/NAEYC Position Statement on Early Childhood Inclusion (2009); (6) DEC Position Statement: Role of Special Instruction in Early Intervention (2024); (7) DEC Position Statement on Personnel Preparation for Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (2022); and (8) ECPC Field Experiences Guide (2023a) and ECPC Student Teaching Experiences Guide (2023b). Numbers under each matrix item correspond to the resources that support that item.

FIGURE 2: Practical Placement Matrix**STUDENT NAME:****PROGRAM ADVISOR/SUPERVISION COORDINATOR:**

	Classroom-Based Settings	Community-Based Settings	Combination/ Blended Settings	Home-Based Settings	Medical/ Clinic-Based Settings
Birth to Three					
Three to Five					
Five to Eight					

Note. Classroom-based settings may include classrooms for children ranging in age from infancy to early elementary; community-based settings may involve programs such as parent education programs and resource agencies; combination/blended settings may involve programs that provide services in homes and classrooms (e.g., Early Head Start, Head Start); home-based settings may include programs such as Part C services; and medical/clinic-based settings may include doctor's offices, diagnostic centers, and/or NICU's.

High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities to help her organize her thinking. She also wants to identify placements that use culturally appropriate practices to meet the needs of the variety of students and families in her community. Taking all this information into consideration, Janessa notices overlapping recommendations across resources. She creates an Experiential Learning Opportunity Evaluation Matrix (Figure 1), which she envisions using to review placement options, both to learn what is available in her community across age groups and settings, and to ensure high-quality opportunities for her students.

Bridging Research and Practice

Research examining early childhood teacher preparation programs reveals considerable variability in the structure, duration, and instructional focus of ELOs, underscoring the need for intentional design that aligns with program coursework (Kim et al., 2024; Simsar & Jones, 2021; Szocik et al., 2024). The DEC (2022a) position statement on

ethical practices supports these priorities by emphasizing the importance of ethical, culturally responsive, and collaborative practice across diverse settings. These values are also reflected in the CEC/DEC (2020) Initial Practice-Based Preparation Standards, particularly Standard 8, which emphasizes scaffolded, supervised experiential learning across various service contexts and age groups.

Recent research highlights the importance of intentional design and diversity in experiential settings. Nichols et al. (2023) and Szocik et al. (2024) cautioned that the predominance of preschool and general education placements may constrain preparation across the birth-to-age-8 continuum. Similarly, O'Brien et al. (2023) identified 12 articles in their literature review that focused on experiences in ECE or ECSE classrooms; however, none addressed field experiences in EI settings. Thus, faculty should develop learning experiences across a range of settings with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary-aged children (Childress et

al., 2025; McCorkle et al., 2022a) and locations (e.g., urban, rural, suburban). Identifying opportunities for students to observe and learn from co-teachers, paraprofessionals, and related service providers can also enrich these experiences (McLeod et al., 2022).

After reviewing all program requirements, Janessa realizes that her program has established connections with ECSE and early elementary programs in the local school district. She also has memoranda of agreements with local Head Start and state-funded preschool programs offering inclusive settings for children with and without disabilities. Her program offers students the opportunity to observe the infant/toddler care center on campus; however, their interactions with the local EI programs are minimal. Janessa would like to expand and equalize the variety of settings in which her students gain experience. This leads her to develop a second Practicum Placement matrix that both she and students can use to ensure placements occur across age groups and settings (Figure 2). Using

this matrix, Janessa identifies specific programs with which she would like to develop partnerships.

Identification of Community Partners

As faculty determine the type of placement most appropriate for students (see Figure 1) and ensure that placements are available across age ranges in a variety of settings (see Figure 2), a number of options should be considered. Both faculty and students can use this form to ensure placements take place across age ranges and settings. These placements include but are not limited to (a) hospital settings, (b) EI programs, (c) early Head Start/Head Start, (d) home and/or community settings, (e) family childcare home settings, (f) community-based childcare settings, (g) preschool classrooms, (h) kindergarten classrooms, and (i) early elementary classrooms. Additionally, faculty will need to gather pertinent information about placements, such as the (a) age of children enrolled in a program, (b) type of program, (c) inclusion of children with developmental delays/disabilities, (d) location of the program, (e) accreditation of the program, and (f) Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) rating (Sumrall et al., 2017).

Along with this pertinent information regarding the settings and quality of the program, faculty members, such as Janessa, should partner with program leaders to select student mentors once a placement site has been confirmed. Student mentors are those professionals at a community program who will guide students during the ELO. Knowledge of the professional backgrounds, qualifications, and licensure, as well as how recommended practices are used by student mentors, helps faculty determine a match between the student's needs and the program's requirements. Together, faculty and site supervisors should

consider the following criteria when matching students with mentors: (a) education level, (b) licensure, and (c) years of experience (Sumrall et al., 2017). Furthermore, opportunities for experiential learning with a range of early childhood professionals representing different roles (e.g., audiologist, counselor, physical therapist, occupational therapist, social worker) can promote an interdisciplinary approach to personnel preparation that prepares students for teaming and collaboration that is integral to ECE, EI, and ECSE (Horn et al., 2022). Identifying multiple community partners across various age ranges, settings, and disciplines is a critical component of personnel preparation. These relationships are essential and must be prioritized.

Establishing and Maintaining Relationships with Community Partners

Ongoing collaboration between university faculty and student mentors is essential to the development and completion of successful ELOs. Higher education faculty play a crucial role in facilitating successful experiential learning by actively developing and maintaining partnerships with community organizations, as well as fostering effective communication with student mentors (McCorkle et al., 2022a). In many universities, faculty are supported by a clinical placement office designed to partner with agencies, programs, and school districts for the coordination of placements. Therefore, depending on one's university system, faculty could bear more responsibility for arranging ELOs and developing community partnerships or, conversely, collaborate with the clinical placement office to meet the aforementioned policies and guidelines.

Community partners in these settings are valuable for many reasons, particularly for their ongoing work in connecting research and practice, as well

as the implementation of recommended practices. Additionally, engaging community partners as collaborators permits the creation of authentic, real-world learning environments that enhance students' professional development and identity formation (McCorkle et al., 2022a; Nichols et al., 2023). These collaborative efforts exemplify best practices for community-academic partnerships in EI (Childress et al., 2025) and emphasize the importance of shared responsibility, program-level onboarding clarity, and trust-based faculty-program relationships. Insights gained from these collaborations should inform university programming needs and facilitate a pathway for students to transition from university classrooms to community and educational settings. Therefore, maintaining ongoing dialogue between faculty and student mentors promotes reflective practice, supports individualized learning needs, and strengthens the alignment of learning goals with practical experiences (Girvan et al., 2016).

After identifying the need for partnerships to develop additional ELOs, Janessa reaches out to the EI programs near her university. She schedules meetings with program leaders to invite conversations about how to work together. She finds that program leaders are eager to collaborate, as they see working with universities as a potential source of future interventionists. They are also interested in learning more about the blended early childhood personnel preparation program, understanding how ELOs fit into coursework, and even collaborating on building case studies for use in course assignments.

Through ongoing relationship-building activities, university faculty and student mentors should collaboratively develop assignments required for the ELO that align with course learning objectives (Leko et al., 2015; McCorkle et al., 2022a). During the development of

FIGURE 3: Experiential Learning Objectives Form

Student Name:	Community Agency:
Mentor Name:	Email:

Purpose

To define intentional, SMART learning objectives that enrich your EI/ECSE experiential placement. Students and their mentors will evaluate progress on learning objectives at the end of the semester.

Due Date

Please submit this form to your course instructor within the first two weeks of starting your placement.

SMART Objective Guidelines

Objectives must be: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant/Results-oriented, Time-bound. Students and mentors should work together to develop these objectives.

Examples by Setting

- Infant-Toddler Classroom: Lead five routine-based sessions; journal reflections due Oct. 30.
- Home Visiting (Part C Provider): Develop and model three family capacity-building strategies, with feedback from the provider, by December 1.
- Community Agency: Co-facilitate a family workshop on early language by Nov. 15.
- PreK/K Inclusion: Design and implement two literacy activities using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies by Oct. 15.
- Early Elementary: Review five completed IEPs and summarize common goals and service delivery approaches in a one-page brief by October 10.

Your Individual Learning Objectives

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Signatures

Student: _____

Student Mentor: _____

Course Instructor: _____

Date

these assignments, university faculty and community partners should be mindful that ELOs are carefully sequenced in the program of study so that students learn through passive activities such as observation and reflection before taking a more active role in teaching children and collaborating with families and professionals (Love et al., 2022; McCorkle et al., under review). Suggested activities include, but are not limited to (a) observations of teaching and screenings/assessments/evaluations, (b) observations of individualized family service plan

(IFSP) and individualized education program (IEP) meetings, (c) observations of parent-teacher conferences and intervention sessions, (d) family interviews, (e) activity/lesson planning, (f) leading instruction in small/large groups (including center-based instruction), (g) team/staff meetings with professionals, (h) data collection, and/or (i) video recording of lesson plans (McCorkle et al., 2022a, under review; O'Brien et al., 2023; Panse-Barone et al., 2024; Shaffer, 2018; Sumrall et al., 2017). The *Embedded Learning Opportunity Evaluation*

Matrix (Figure 1) can be used to help faculty determine the availability of these types of activities and how they are implemented in programs, so students observe and experience best practices that align with course content during ELOs. This information can then support the development of assignments that connect course content and real practice. When planning assignment activities across a program of study, university faculty will also need to plan for the duration of the ELO, ensuring the number of hours meets program requirements.

FIGURE 4: Experiential Learning Timeline

Thank you for agreeing to host a student this semester! The purpose of this experiential learning opportunity is to provide students with hands-on, authentic experiences that bridge academic coursework and professional practice. Through guided participation in your setting, students will apply their knowledge, develop essential skills, and gain valuable insights into the fields of early intervention and early childhood special education. We value your partnership in supporting future professionals in this meaningful way.

Instructor Name and Email:

Total Placement Hours:

TIMELINE FOR STUDENT AND STUDENT MENTOR

Activity	Date(s)
Students learn about the requirements for experiential learning opportunities (ELOs) during the first day of class.	
Placement decisions are made, and students are notified.	
The student contacts the student mentor to schedule the initial meeting(s) after receiving the email notification.	
Initial meetings between the student and the student mentor are held (in-person or virtually). <i>Initial meetings can count toward internship hours.</i>	
Internship objectives developed jointly by the student and their mentor are due. <i>Students review the course objectives with the instructor and submit the final version.</i>	
The student actively engages with the community partner for the ELO. <i>Approximately X hours weekly.</i>	
Monthly placement hours must be submitted by students by the 5 th of the month for the previous month. <i>The student mentor must sign these.</i>	
Mid-semester — The course instructor meets virtually with the student mentor. <i>The course instructor will schedule the meeting.</i>	
The student completes the Final Project on the placement with a community partner and ELO. <i>Students can share their ELO through a formal presentation or class discussion to reflect on takeaways.</i>	
The student mentor submits the final evaluation form by email to the course instructor on or before this date.	

As Janessa develops the ELOs for her program, she also notes substantial variability in duration across these experiences, with some courses requiring short observations while others require semester-long placements. A recent systematic review (Szocik et al., 2024) confirmed Janessa's observations, revealing that while student teaching consistently spans at least one semester, coursework-based practicums range dramatically from just two weeks to a whole semester. Moreover, the duration of the experience may vary depend-

ing on the distinct type of ELO, such as observation, practicum, or internship. As early childhood researchers have not yet reached a consensus on minimum thresholds for meaningful practice (Kim et al., 2024), with some programs quantifying experiences by hours (ranging from 20 to 200+) rather than weeks, and the definitions for the types of ELOs often varying across universities, faculty like Janessa may be challenged in developing ELOs that meet student needs for program and licensure requirements.

Implementation of ELOs

Janessa meets with a small team of EI program leaders to develop an assignment for the course during which the ELO will occur with their programs. This collaboration develops their partnerships and shared investment in student success. It also informs Janessa about two programs that have bilingual staff, which is exciting because she currently has a new student who is interested in working with multicultural families. After creating the assignment, Janessa decides on the duration of the

ELO, which will span the semester. She is then ready to implement the ELO. Before the onset of the semester, she arranges a time for student mentors and program leaders to meet with her students and specifically connects a bilingual mentor with the new student.

Orientations between university faculty and student mentors, as well as program leaders and pre-service professionals, help set the stage for these relationships. To ensure effective communication and a shared understanding of the goals for ELOs, Janessa develops two additional program tools: the *Experiential Learning Objectives Form* (Figure 3) and an *Experiential Learning Timeline* (Figure 4). These tools help operationalize ELO goals by structuring communication, clarifying expectations, and documenting student progress across settings. Such collaborative relationships ensure that mentorship is responsive and contextualized, enabling students to effectively integrate theoretical knowledge with applied skills. This network of partnerships and communication is essential for maximizing the impact of experiential learning and preparing students to meet the complex demands of their future professions (Childress et al., 2025). During the first class of the semester, Janessa reviews the Experiential Learning Objectives Form and Timeline with her students so they are prepared to begin their placements. Throughout the semester, she maintains regular communication with students and their mentors to monitor the learning experience closely. She uses this first semester as the program director of the blended early childhood personnel preparation program as a model for strengthening ELOs across other settings serving children in different age ranges. She continues to utilize her tools and, over time, begins to feel more confident in the variety and quality of ELOs available to her students.

CONCLUSION

The development of ELOs and a program of study for preservice professionals may be daunting for many faculty members. As the number of colleges and universities that hire tenure-line positions decreases, this poses a problem for faculty who will need to allocate more of their time to teaching and supervising their students. Consequently, many faculty members may not be prepared to create or modify a personnel preparation program (Brownell et al., 2020; McCorkle et al., 2022b; Smith et al., 2010), and variations exist in the coordination of practicum experiences (McCorkle & Jennings, in preparation; e.g., full-time or adjunct faculty may supervise students during ELOs). This article incorporates recent guidelines and policies about the development and implementation of ELOs with practical tools and examples that may be helpful to faculty members, such as Janessa. By embedding crosswalks, matrices, and timelines, we move beyond description to provide an actionable model that fills a persistent gap in how early childhood faculty, particularly early career faculty, implement and evaluate ELOs in blended programs across the birth-to-8 continuum.

Faculty may benefit from specific recommendations that connect to literature and current guidance as they seek to improve ELOs, as Janessa did. For instance, when planning ELOs, faculty should regularly review and update program content and ELOs using existing, current guidance documents as well as the matrices and sample forms presented here. They can also sequence ELOs to gradually evolve from observations to collaboration and active instruction. As much as possible, faculty should offer diverse types of placements considering settings, locations, child age levels, a range of socio-economic factors in the community, and student interests. To make this happen, it is essential

that faculty prioritize ongoing relationship-building with community partners. Faculty must also consider incorporating competency-driven ELOs that align with standards into their plans and ensure academic content focuses on partnering with families and professionals, along with child development and instruction.

The active role of faculty in supporting successful ELOs also encompasses the support they provide to students. We encourage faculty to begin by meeting with students and mentors before or early in the semester to provide orientation to the ELO. It is also helpful to establish a timeline for ELO activities so the student (and mentor) has a clear understanding of expectations. During the ELO, faculty should provide ongoing supervision and support throughout the semester. When this support includes embedded opportunities for students to reflect and receive feedback during the ELO, they may be more likely to gain insight into their experiences that will better prepare them for their future roles as early childhood educators. High-quality experiential learning is not just an added benefit to personnel preparation programs; it is central to developing competent, confident professionals who are ready for complex roles, collaborating with families, professionals, and children across various age groups and settings.

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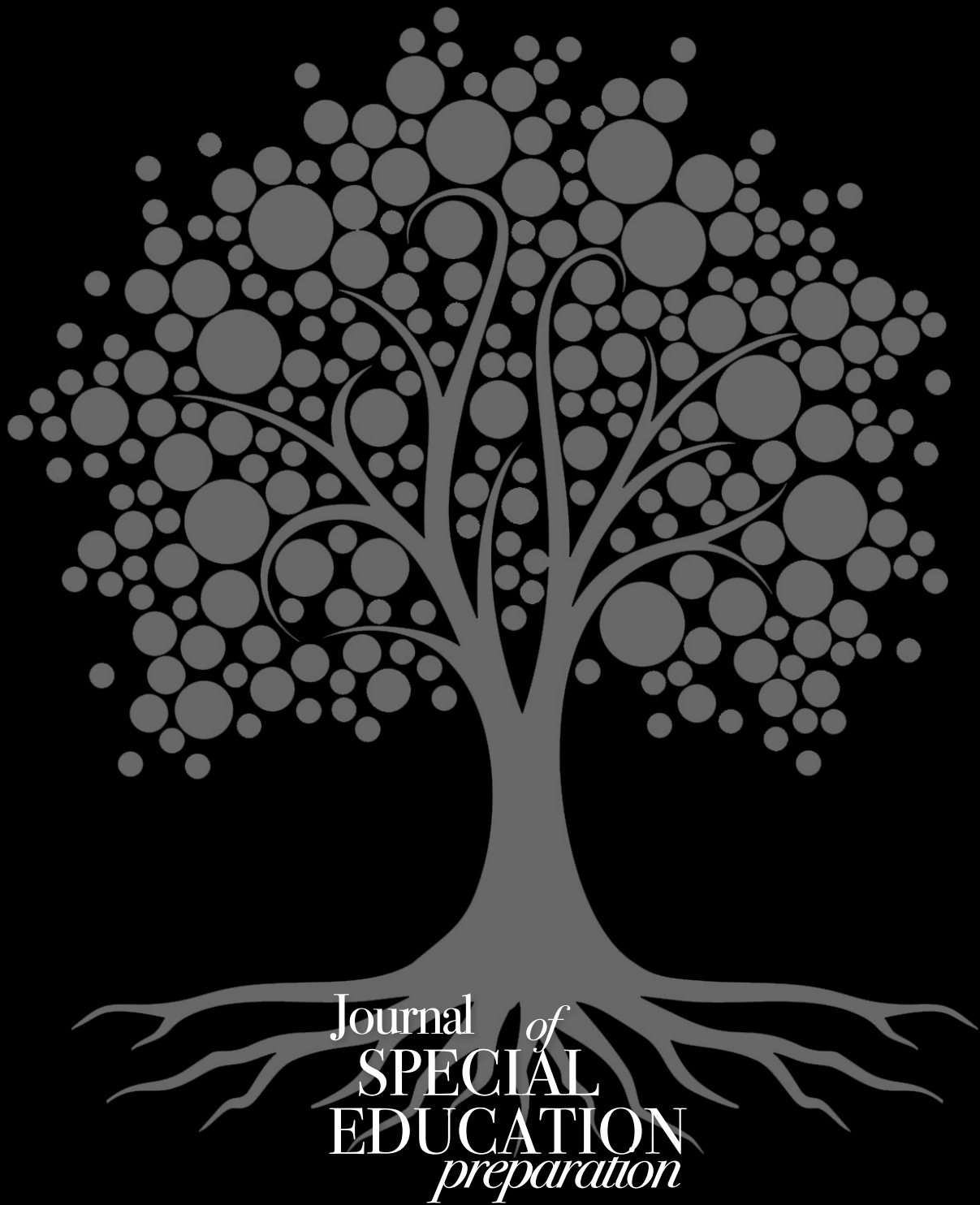
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