

**Washington State University
College of Education**

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will defend the thesis on

Date: November 19, 2020

Time: 9:30 A.M.

Location: Zoom by Request

Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend

**A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES
TO SUPPORT VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN
PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH AUTISM AND
COMPLEX COMMUNICATION NEEDS**

Chair: Marcus Poppen

This thesis study examines the literature on students who have disabilities, including such conditions as autism, autism spectrum disorder, and intellectual disability, that impact verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Supporting communication skills development in such students is key to ensuring that these children are able to participate in the general education curriculum. It is also critical to promoting their overall social and academic inclusion. However, there are gaps in the knowledge regarding the resources available to support teachers and families in the implementation of appropriate practices and strategies that have been developed to improve the communication skills of these students with complex communication needs, particularly during the preschool and elementary school years. This study examined the literature on effective, evidence-based practices to facilitate the development of communication skills and to improve the academic environment for students with communication challenges. The researcher utilized exploratory systematic literature review procedures that employed the guidelines outlined in Talbott et al. (2017). A

data extraction form was designed and used to systematically compile data from all the studies that met the inclusion criteria. This review reports the participant characteristics, setting characteristics, independent and dependent variables, and results for each of the 11 included studies. The main finding of this thesis is that there are more interventions and strategies designed to improve verbal communication skills than there are that focus on improving nonverbal skill outcomes. This is significant given the importance of nonverbal communication skills in social interactions and the sometimes severe challenges students diagnosed with, for example, autism often face in the area of learning and understanding nonverbal communication. In addition, another important finding of the research was that interventions that incorporate social interaction with typical peers are very useful in improving the communication skills of children with autism and complex communication needs. Implications for practice and research are also discussed.