



Kansas Association of Teacher Educators

A Letter from the ATE-K President (Spring / Summer 2026)

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As the daylight stretches longer and the Kansas prairies burst with new life, the spring/summer issue of *The Advocate* arrives at a moment of natural renewal. In education, this season beautifully mirrors two vital rhythms: the fresh growth of novice teachers entering the profession and the perennial reblooming of veteran educators who continue to refine their craft year after year. Both require nurturing environments, thoughtful innovation, and sustained support to flourish.

This first issue of Volume 31 explores the theme of cultivating inclusive, collaborative, and evidence-based practices in teacher education. The six featured manuscripts examine how we prepare and sustain educators who create dynamic learning communities where all participants can grow. Together, the authors invite us to move beyond traditional approaches toward more equitable, responsive, and connected forms of teaching and professional development.

Emily George and Joan Singara Briliant open the issue by challenging teacher preparation programs to treat enrichment as a curriculum norm rather than an occasional reward. Their proposed sequence of awareness, stance, practice, and implementation equips future teachers with the dispositions and tools to differentiate instruction and provide challenging, engaging learning for all students. Grounded in equity and motivation research, their work speaks directly to the growth of novice teachers who seek to build inclusive classrooms from the start.

Next, Jerrie Brooks provides a compelling example of innovative practice using NAO (pronounced “now”) humanoid robots to support children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in developing social communication skills. By creating predictable, non-judgmental interactions in a robot the size of a toy, this technological strategy provides a bridge to help students who might otherwise remain on the periphery of general education settings. This article highlights how thoughtful tools can transform theoretical ideas into practical strategies that enhance engagement and inclusion.

In the third manuscript, Miriam Barton explores the pedagogical power of creative nonfiction writing in English language arts education. Drawing on Expressivism, Social Cognitive Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, she argues for restoring creative writing to a central place in both K-12 classrooms and preservice teacher preparation. The framework Barton presents emphasizes autonomy, community, diversity of thought, and freedom of expression—elements essential for both novice and veteran educators seeking to foster authentic student voices.

Shifting focus to faculty development, Donna Zerr, Carissa Gober, and David Wolff share their experiences transitioning from K-12 teaching into higher education. Using Schlossberg's transition model, they examine the isolation and scholarly challenges many new faculty face. Their establishment of a Community of Practice (COP) through a writing camp demonstrates how structured collaboration can reduce imposter syndrome, build accountability, and support sustained professional growth—valuable insights for veteran educators seeking renewed vitality in their roles.

Joan Sinagra Brilliant turns our attention to one of the most fundamental responsibilities of teacher preparation: equipping future educators to teach children how to read. Through a qualitative study of pre-service teachers learning to implement Structured Literacy practices, she demonstrates how hands-on experiences, microteaching opportunities, and authentic classroom applications can transform uncertainty into confidence. Her findings suggest that providing candidates with opportunities to practice evidence-based literacy instruction before entering their own classrooms not only strengthens their pedagogical knowledge but also builds the self-efficacy needed to support beginning readers. This work reinforces the importance of experiential learning in teacher education and highlights how carefully designed preparation programs can lay a strong foundation for future literacy success.

Our final article transitions readers to an empirical piece where researcher Alan English presents study findings on pre-service teachers' perceptions of Learning Styles Theory (LST). His large-scale survey (n=765) reveals the continued prominence of LST, perhaps due to Lortie's theory of the Apprenticeship of Observation, and raises important questions about how teacher education programs can more effectively guide candidates toward research-based alternatives. This article underscores the ongoing need for critical examination in teacher preparation.

I thank the authors for their contributions as well as you, our readers, for your continued engagement with the important work of teacher education. Whether you are training pre-service teachers, mentoring new educators, supporting veteran colleagues, or reflecting on your own practice, I hope these articles inspire fresh thinking and renewed energy. As the season reminds us, growth is both individual and collective and it thrives in environments rich with opportunity, collaboration, and care.

Yours in Education,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Lickteig". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. It is enclosed within a thin, dashed rectangular border.

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