

# Melissa Spence, Ed.D.

---

[mspence@callutheran.edu](mailto:mspence@callutheran.edu)

**Associate Professor of Education**  
**Assistant Dean of Assessment & Accreditation**  
California Lutheran University  
Graduate School of Education  
60 West Olsen Road, #4100  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360

---

## EDUCATION

- Ed.D.**      **California Lutheran University**  
Educational Leadership (K-12)  
Dissertation: *Promoting Reading Comprehension in Non-Verbal Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*
- M.Ed.**      **Boston College**  
Masters in Education, Boston College  
Concentration: Severe Special Needs  
Thesis: *Developing Expressive Language Skills in a Child with Autism*  
Thesis Distinction Award
- B.A.**      **Occidental College**  
Psychology  
Dean's List  
Psi Chi, the National Honors Society in Psychology

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

|                            |              |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Associate Professor</b> | 2022-present |
| <b>Assistant Professor</b> | 2016-2022    |

*Graduate School of Education, California Lutheran University*

- Teach a variety of courses within the Education Specialist Credential and GSOE's master's programs.
- Assist in the program development of the Educational Specialist program, including reworking syllabi, determining scope and sequence of classes, and alignment to state standards.
- Provide service to the program and Graduate School of Education related to autism and students with disabilities.

- Courses taught:
  - EDLT 500: Foundations of Education
  - EDLT 503: Teaching Exceptional Learners in Inclusive Environments
  
  - EDSP 519: Assessment, Instruction, and Development of the IEP
  - EDSP 523: Planning and Instruction for Content Standards
  - EDSP 525: Positive Behavior Supports and Collaboration
  - EDSP 532: Supporting Students with Mild/Moderate Needs
  - EDSP 534A&B: Field Study/Student Teaching for Mild/Moderate
  - EDSP 537: Supporting Students with Moderate/Severe Disabilities
  - EDSP 542A&B: Field Study/Student Teaching for Moderate/Severe
  
  - EDGN 509: Situating Yourself as a Scholar Practitioner & Teacher Leader
  - EDGN 510: Collaboratories of Practice-Understanding Change Theory

### **Adjunct Lecturer**

2015-2016

*Graduate School of Education, California Lutheran University*

- EDLT 503: Teaching Exceptional Learners in Inclusive Environments
- EDSP 532: Supporting Students with Mild/Moderate Needs
- EDSP 537: Supporting Students with Moderate/Severe Disabilities

### **Autism Support Teacher**

2013-2016

*Los Angeles Unified School District*

- Created and provided professional development and trainings at both school and district levels for teachers, paraprofessional staff, administration, and parents.
- Coached teachers in developing quality curricular, instructional, and behavioral programs, with an emphasis on differentiation, physical environment, visual supports, communicative access, integration opportunities, and social learning.
- Established and trained school site staff in linking curriculum and instruction with a district provided Tech Tub (student and teacher iPads and Apple TV).
- Guided administrators in how to best support their autism programs, including both student and teacher needs.
- Took data on autism program performance throughout the district.

### **Special Education Teacher**

2006-2013

*Los Angeles Unified School District*

- Instructed an elementary school classroom for children with autism spectrum disorders.
- Served on School Site Council for two years.
- Developed and lead staff professional developments in positive behavioral supports and accommodations for special education students in the general education environment.

### UNIVERSITY SERVICE

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <b>Assistant Dean of Assessment &amp; Accreditation</b><br><i>Graduate School of Education</i>                | 2020-present |
| <b>TPA Coordinator</b><br><i>Graduate School of Education</i>   | 2020-present |
| <b>Institutional Review Board</b><br><i>University Committee</i>  | 2019-present |
| <b>Search Committee, Chair</b><br><i>Data Coordinator, Graduate School of Education</i>                       | 2023         |
| <b>Director of Graduate Research</b><br><i>Departments of Learning and Teaching, Counselor Education, CLU</i> | 2019-2020    |
| <b>Search Committee, Chair</b><br><i>Faculty Position, Department of Learning &amp; Teaching</i>              | 2022, 2019   |
| <b>Search Committee, Chair</b><br><i>Lecture Position, Department of Learning &amp; Teaching</i>              | 2019         |
| <b>Graduate and Professionals Students Affairs (GAPSA), Chair</b>   | 2018-2019    |

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Lead Therapist</b><br><i>Verdugo Hills Autism Project</i>  | 2004      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performed and developed programs for play-based therapies, Discrete Trials Training (DTT), and Pivotal Response Training with children with autism.</li> </ul>                             |           |
| <b>Supervisor</b><br><i>Behavioral Health Consultants, INC.</i>   | 2003-2004 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained, supervised, and evaluated behavioral therapists.</li> <li>• Developed behavioral, social, and pre-academic programs for children with autism.</li> </ul>                          |           |
| <b>Behavioral Therapist</b><br><i>Behavioral Health Consultants, INC.</i>   | 2002-2003 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guided parents in behavior modification techniques within the home environment.</li> <li>• Implemented behavioral, social, and pre-academic programs with children with autism.</li> </ul> |           |

**Counselor**  
*Frost Valley YMCA*

2001-2002

- Led the Supportive Training and Employment Program.
- Counseled young adults with developmental disabilities: coordinated schedules, negotiated job positions, supervised working experiences, monitored paychecks.
- Wrote staff training manual on integrated employment.

## PUBLICATIONS

### *Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles*

**Spence, M.,** Ma, T-L., Nguyen, A., & Tseng, A. (2021). Project for the advancement of gifted and exceptional students: How are secondary teachers infusing SEL and executive functioning into instruction? *DADD Online Journal*, 8(1), 93-106.

\***Spence, M.,** Ma, T-L., Tseng, A., Nguyen, A. (2019). Project for the advancement of gifted and exceptional students. In A. Markelz, (Ed.), *TED 2019 Conference Proceedings: Unmask Your Potential* (pp 14-18). Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children, New Orleans, LA.

**Spence, M.** & Wesley, T. (2019). Preparing teacher candidates for diverse learners: Are we doing enough? *Allies for Education (A4E)*, California State University, Channel Islands, 2(2).

**Spence, M.** & Tseng, A. (2018). Integrating social and emotional learning instruction into core academic instruction for students with ASD. *DADD Online Journal*, 5(1), 62-72.

### *Journal Articles*

\***Spence, M.** (2017). Instructional strategies for promoting reading comprehension in non-verbal students with autism spectrum disorders. *DADD Express*, 28(2), 1-6.

\*Invited publications

### *Book Chapters*

**Spence, M.** & Peña, E.V. (2015). Intersections of autism, race, and class: A social justice agenda for inclusive leadership practices. In A. Normore & K. Esposito (Eds.), *Inclusive practices for special populations in urban settings: The moral imperative for social justice leadership*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing INC.

**Spence, M.** (2010). Using a communication game to improve the expressive language skills of a boy with autism. In S.M. Bruce & G.J. Pine (Eds.), *Action research in special education: An inquiry approach for effective teaching and learning* (pp.80-97). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- Spence, M., & Nguyen, A., & Tseng, A. Ma, T-L.** (2023). *PAGES: Project for the Advancement of Gifted and Exceptional Students: The Final Year*. Lecture presented at the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALICON 200). Online.
- Spence, M., & Nguyen, A., & Tseng, A.** (2023). *PAGES: Project for the Advancement of Gifted and Exceptional Students: Years 4-5*. Lecture presented at CEC Division on Teacher Education (TED) Conference. Long Beach, CA.
- Spence, M., & Nguyen, A., & Tseng, A.** (2021). *PAGES: Project for the Advancement of Gifted and Exceptional Students: Years 1-3*. Lecture presented at CEC Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and Developmental Disabilities. Online.
- Spence, M., Ma, T-L., Tseng, A., & Nguyen, A.** (2020). *PAGES: Project for the Advancement of Gifted and Exceptional Students: Years 1-3*. Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) 2020 Convention. Online.
- Spence, M., & Nguyen, A., & Tseng, A.** (2020). *PAGES: Project for the Advancement of Gifted and Exceptional Students: Years 1-3*. Lecture presented at the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALICON 2020). Columbus, OH. Online.
- Spence, M., Ma, T-L., Tseng, A., & Nguyen, A.** (2019). *PAGES: Project for the Advancement of Gifted and Exceptional Students*. Lecture presented at CEC Division on Teacher Education (TED) Conference. New Orleans, LA.
- Spence, M., & Nguyen, A., & Tseng, A.** (2019). *PAGES: Project for the Advancement of Gifted and Exceptional Students*. Lecture presented at CEC Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and Developmental Disabilities. Maui, HI.
- Spence, M., & Nguyen, A., & Tseng, A.** (2018). *PAGES: Project for the Advancement of Gifted and Exceptional Students*. Lecture presented at the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALICON 2018). Columbus, OH.
- Tseng, A. & **Spence, M.** (2018). *Using the ASD Program Quality Indicator to Develop Successful Educational Programs*. Lecture presented at Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) 2016 Convention. Tampa, FL.
- Tseng, A. & **Spence, M.** (2018). *Integrating Social Emotional Learning Instruction into Core Academic Instruction*. Workshop presented at CEC Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and Developmental Disabilities. Clearwater Beach, FL.
- Tseng, A., **Spence, M., & Nguyen, A.** (2017). *Integrating Social Emotional Learning Instruction into Core Academic Instruction*. Workshop presented at the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALICON 2017). Columbus, OH.

- Tseng, A., **Spence, M.**, & Nguyen, A. (2017). *Using the ASD Program Quality Indicator to Develop Successful Educational Programs*. Lecture presented at the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALICON 2017). Columbus, OH.
- Spence, M.** & Tseng, A. (2017). *Strategies to Promote Reading Comprehension in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Lecture presented at Cal-TASH Annual Conference. San Diego, CA.
- Spence, M.** & Peña, E.V. (2017). *Intersections of Autism, Race, and Class: A New Social Justice Agenda for Inclusive Leadership Practices*. Lecture presented at Council for Exceptional Children-Division of Autism and Developmental Disabilities (CEC-DADD) Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and Developmental Disabilities. Clearwater, FL.
- Spence, M.** (2016). *Instructional Methods for Promoting Reading Comprehension in Non-Verbal Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Poster presented at Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) 2016 Convention. St. Louis, MI.
- Spence, M.** & Peña, E. (2016). *Intersections of Autism, Race, and Class: A Social Justice Agenda for Inclusive Leadership Practices*. Panel Discussion conducted at American Education Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting. Washington, D.C.
- Spence, M.** (2016). *Using Visual Supports to Promote Reading Comprehension in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Presented at ONE Conference for Integration. Los Angeles, CA.
- Spence, M.** (2016). *Instructional Methods for Promoting Reading Comprehension in Non-Verbal Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Poster presented at Council for Exceptional Children-Division of Autism and Developmental Disabilities (CEC-DADD) Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and Developmental Disabilities. Waikiki, HI.
- Spence, M.**, Bennett, M., & Tseng, A. (2015). *Promoting Reading Comprehension in Non-Verbal Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Presented at Supported Life Conference. Sacramento, CA.
- Spence, M.**, Bennett, M., & Tseng, A. (2015). *Visual Supports for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Presented at #ADA25 Americans with Disabilities Conference. San Francisco, CA.
- Spence, M.** (2015). *Instructional Methods for Promoting Reading Comprehension in Nonverbal Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Presented at Cal-TASH Annual Conference. Irvine, CA.
- Spence, M.** (2015). *Instructional Methods for Promoting Reading Comprehension in*

*Nonverbal Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Poster presented at University of California Conference for Research in Special Education, Disabilities, and Developmental Risk (UCSPEDDR) Conference. Santa Barbara, CA.

**Spence, M. & Bennett, M.** (2014). *Classroom Strategies for Working with Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)*. Presented at Autism Conferences of America “Back to School and More” Autism/Asperger’s Conference. Los Angeles, CA.

**Spence, M.** (2013). *Instructional Strategies for Promoting Reading Comprehension in Non-Verbal Students with ASD*. Poster presented at California Lutheran University Festival of Scholars- Inquiry, Art, and Knowledge for a Better World: Multidisciplinary Conversations. Thousand Oaks, CA.

### **OTHER PRESENTATIONS**

**Spence, M.** (2023, February 16). *Identification and development of skills for gifted and talented students, including twice exceptional students with ASD, from underrepresented backgrounds* [Presentation]. California Council for Exceptional Children (CACEC) Webinar Series, online.

**Spence, M.** (2022, December). *Project for the advancement of gifted and exceptional students* [Presentation]. Javit’s Program Directors Annual Meeting, online.

### **GRANTS**

- **Principal Investigator** of U.S. Department of Education Javits grant to study educational intervention for twice-exceptional students with ASD and increased identification of minority students (\$737,900) 2017-present
- **Co-Principal Investigator** of BranchEd Transformation Center Grant (\$300,000) 2022-present
- CLU Center for Innovative Learning Mini-Grant Recipient (\$625) 2018, 2017
- Hewlett Grant: California Lutheran University (\$1,000) 2017, 2016

### **AWARDS AND HONORS**

- Tom E.C. Smith Early Career Award, DADD-CEC 2018
- Best Practitioner Research, Council for Exceptional Children 2016

### **SCHOLARLY SERVICE**

- Reviewer for Educational Researcher 2023
- California Reading and Literacy Project-Advisory Member 2016-2021
- Reviewer for OCALI Conference presentation proposals 2018
- Reviewer for DADD Journal: Research to Practice 2018, 2019

### **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

- Program Reviewer, Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) 2020-present
- Site Team Member, CTC 2023

### **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

- Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles, Leader 2017-2022
- Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles, Product Chair 2015-2022
- SUMAC Elementary School, Parent & Faculty Association 2017-2019
- SUMAC Elementary School, School Site Council 2016-2018

### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

- Council for Exceptional Children 2005-present
- Division of Autism and Developmental Disabilities (CEC) 2014-present
- Teacher Education Division (CEC) 2019-present
- American Educational Research Association 2014-2019
- Phi Delta Kappa 2002-2019