

Introduction to Volume 18, Issue 3: Welcome

This third and final issue of 2012 features four original research articles and three brief reports. As well, the Journal and the Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities (OADD) gratefully acknowledge several individuals who joined the Journal editorial board in 2012, and the panel of individuals who provided in depth reviews of articles published or considered for publication in 2012 issues.

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Research Articles

The first article by Kristen McFee and colleagues (Jessica Schroeder, James Bebko, Marilyn Thompson, Margaret Spoelstra, Layne Berbeek, Karen Manuel and Shona Casoda) introduces readers to Autism Ontario's Realize Community Potential (RCP) Program and provides a preliminary evaluation of this program. The RCP Program was initiated in 2006 with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Youth Services. Its two main goals were to enable families of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to connect with one another and with professionals via participation in workshops, and to enable children with ASD to participate in appropriate leisure activities. The program also provided designated Autism Ontario chapters with a paid staff member – an RCP coordinator. The article describes tools that were developed to track program activities and to evaluate the capacity of the program to meet its stated objectives. It highlights the activities and networking that took place in the program and needs for the future. Identification of effective components of the program will help to guide future program development and allocation of funding resources.

The second article by Ann-Louise Davidson involves the application of collaborative action research to the use of iPods by five adults with intellectual disability. The iPods were used to view instructional videos previously developed by the author to help participants develop skills for independent living, including how to use an alarm clock, an hourglass and a calendar. In colourful narrative, Davidson describes how evaluation of the iPod experiences of the five participants was done in a focus group setting using an action research technique called "The Wheel". The article finishes with a caution that although mobile learning and technologies seem "cool," their use by people with intellectual disability must be accompanied by good pedagogy so that they do not become solely entertainment tools and replacement for a TV set!

Discrete Trial Training (DTT) is a method of teaching that uses simplified steps in a one-on-one basis. It is common-

ly used within Applied Behaviour Analysis and Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention Programs for children with autism spectrum disorder. Because there is high turnover of staff in these programs, there is a pressing need to teach newly-hired staff to conduct DTT. In order to facilitate DTT training, a self-instructional DTT training manual was previously developed by Fazzio and Martin. This manual has now undergone several evaluation/revision cycles. The article by Jade Wightman and colleagues (Ashley Boris, Kendra Thomson, Gerry L. Martin, Daniela Fazzio and C.T. Yu) demonstrates and critically evaluates the effectiveness of the latest version of the manual in combination with video demonstrations and self-practice regimens in training newly-hired tutors to conduct DTT with a “confederate” role-playing a child with autism. It also outlines future research that should be undertaken to improve trainees’ use of self-practice regimens, to generalize the teaching of DTT to children with autism, and to train parents of children with autism to conduct DTT.

A procedure dubbed “Analog Functional Analysis (AFA)” is sometimes used to attempt to identify causes of certain behaviours (e.g., aggression or stereotypy). AFA is labour intensive and involves the manipulation of controlled “environmental factors” in order to identify one (or more) variables that provoke the targeted behaviour. Sometimes AFA is not informative. In the fourth article of this issue, Ashley Greenwald, Holly Seniuk, and W. Larry Williams develop and test the hypothesis that performance in the relatively quick and economical “Assessment of Basic Learning Abilities” (ABLA) test might correlate with performance in the more labour intensive and costly AFA. In this study the authors compared results from both tests in a series of ten individuals (age 7 to 16 years) who had developmental disability. Persons who were unable to make conditional discriminations in the ABLA test (i.e., who scored less than ABLA level 4) were found to be less likely to show differentiated results in the AFA than those with higher scores. Accordingly, the authors propose that ABLA testing should be done before considering AFA. If a child cannot make conditional discrimination in ABLA, then such test findings should aid with selection of a type of behavioural assessment that is more appropriate than AFA.

Brief Reports

Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) is the most empirically supported form of therapy for young children with autism spectrum disorder. How parents perceive their children’s progress is important, because this may influence the nature and quality of interventions they receive, and the latter in turn may affect outcomes in the children. In the first of the three brief reports, Ksusha Blacklock, Odette Weiss, Adrienne Perry and Nancy Freeman have compared information about parents’ perceptions of children’s progress made in one year of IBI training with actual progress the children made using standardized measures. Parents’ perception of progress at this point tended to be strongly positive or positive, but not significantly related to the children’s actual progress. In their report the authors discuss possible reasons for this finding. They also outline some future research initiatives that might be conducted to shed further light on this discrepancy.

A recognized feature of Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) is that although widely applied to children with autism, its outcomes are highly variable. In order to address the hypothesis that quality of intervention may affect IBI outcome, Perry and colleagues previously developed a tool called the York Measure of Quality of IBI (YMQI). This was designed to assess interaction quality provided to children with autism based on videos of one-to-one teaching sessions. It has already undergone several phases of evaluation and revision. In the second brief report, Shauna Whiteford, Ksusha Blacklock and Adrienne Perry describe how they determined that the most recent version of the YMQI provides an acceptably reliable measure of the quality of IBI for children with autism. The authors explain that on the basis of their findings, it should be feasible to include YMQI scores as a potential predictor of outcome along with other variables (e.g., quantity of IBI and child or family characteristics) in large IBI studies.

In the third brief report, Lynn Martin, Melody Ashworth, and Helene-Ouellette-Kuntz, address the important issue of person-centred care for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs). The aim of their

study was to characterize the nature of planning practices in Ontario's developmental services agencies. The objectives were to identify which tools were being used and how they were being used to improve quality of life for persons with IDD and their families. To collect relevant information, the authors designed an online survey that was completed during August 2011 by representatives of 156 developmental services agencies. A key finding was the widespread "grass-roots" nature of the planning. Most agencies used a "blended" approach and used several tools or several aspects of them, or home-grown tools, when planning for individuals. This work is part of a larger study that should help to highlight best practices to support persons with IDD in achieving their goals.