

## Introduction to Volume 19, Issue 1: Welcome

For issue 19(1) we have assembled a distinctive set of 10 papers pertaining to the theme of “innovative approaches” in the field of developmental disabilities. The contributions consist of: five articles; one case report; two original research papers; and two commentaries. Author affiliations include organizations in Australia, the UK, the United States, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, Sioux Lookout and various other regions of Ontario. Author expertises include Aboriginal (First Nations) issues, education, psychology, psychiatry, social work and the basic sciences.

### Articles

In the first article, Elspeth Bradley and Phoebe Caldwell introduce a very important topic in mental health and autism – namely the neuro-atypical aspects of people with autism that result in personal suffering, pain and distress, as well as misdiagnosis and mismanagement. The authors explain how listening to explanations from persons with autism about the emotional experiences underlying their unusual behaviours can provide opportunities for *Promoting an Autism favourable Environment* (denoted as PAVE) in order to reduce their high anxiety levels. The authors’ viewpoint is based upon their experience with hundreds of persons with autism and intellectual disability with behaviours that signify distress, as well as upon their familiarity with the personal accounts by people with autism who have described their experiences during such distress. The authors introduce readers to two different views of challenging behaviours that have been called the *Outside-In* and *Inside-Out* perceptions. (The former term refers to explanations from the neuro-typical for the challenging behaviours; the latter refers to viewpoints provided by people with autism.) The authors also provide possible physiological explanations for the unusual emotional responses that can manifest as challenging behaviours in people with autism. Within the paper are several aids to help the neuro-typical use the PAVE approach when interacting with persons with autism. Two illustrative case studies describe the successful application of PAVE. One summary table lists the atypical neurobiological aspects characteristic of autism and the consequences that these can have on behaviours. A second table provides examples of different factors that result in stress and anxiety in persons with autism, and specific strategies for their alleviation. A third table provides a list of different approaches that careproviders should consider to help persons with autism develop a coherent sense of themselves and others.

The second article by Elspeth Bradley and Sheila the Baroness Hollins introduces *Books Beyond Words* – a series of picture books in colour that tell a story and are designed pri-

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#### Keywords

Aboriginal,  
anxiety,  
art activities,  
attention deficit  
hyperactivity disorder,  
Autism Enigma,  
autism friendly  
environments,  
autism spectrum disorders,  
Books Beyond Words,  
cognitive behaviour  
therapy,  
diary study,  
First Nations,  
gut bacteria,  
Intensive Interaction,  
Playing method,  
post-traumatic stress  
disorder,  
psychotherapy,  
sex offender treatment,  
YouTube

marily for adults with developmental disability. The second author created this book series and the first author has been using them in her practice for many years with considerable therapeutic benefit. This article is in the form of an “E-Interview.” Dr. Bradley sent Dr. Hollins a series of questions to address and prepared a transcription of her e-mail responses. As explained by Dr. Bradley, the article:

describes the development of the current Books Beyond Words series as well as range of circumstances in which the books are helpful in ensuring that people with intellectual disabilities are fully involved in meaningful exchanges with others about their day to day needs. Feedback from people using the books is also shared. (this issue, p. 24)

The article includes representative colour pictures from a number of the books as well as a list of the titles of the 39 books created between 1989 and 2010.

The third article by Phoebe Caldwell introduces a powerful method called *Intensive Interaction* (not to be confused with *Intensive Behavioural Intervention*). As explained by Dr. Caldwell, Intensive Interaction:

uses body language to facilitate positive engagement with non-verbal or semi verbal children and adults with intellectual disabilities and or autism and with whom communication is often difficult. Positive outcomes include a deepening of emotional engagement as measured by increases in eye contact and social responsiveness and a reduction in distress (challenging) behaviours. (this issue, p. 33)

Intensive Interaction is generally not well-known to those in the field of developmental disability in North America, though it is being used in the UK and many other countries worldwide. In her article, Dr. Caldwell discusses the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication and the theory behind Intensive Interaction. She provides two illustrative case studies which document the successful application of Intensive Interaction in her practice. She also has included sections in her paper that explain how Intensive Interaction can be used to construct an “autism-friendly” environment, and how well this form of communication

works. Following the References is a helpful More Resources section with information about Intensive Interaction training courses, training films, and a radio interview with the author.

There is evidence that persons with developmental disability experience abuse three to four times more often than those without a disability. As a consequence, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common outcome in those with developmental disability. Although people with developmental disability often are treated with pharmacotherapy and behavioural therapy, psychotherapy also is a practical option. In the fourth article in this series, Cheryl Bedard discusses the application of psychotherapy to persons with developmental disability and describes some of the modifications that she has used in the treatment of PTSD during 25 years of clinical practice. Modifications include: scheduling appointment times that are convenient; making efforts to improve communication; and making adaptations to cognitive behavioural therapy, solution focused brief therapy, psychoeducation, pharmacology, symbolic interactive therapy as well as relapse prevention. The paper contains vivid anecdotes which explain the modification(s) that were made and provide insight about why these worked. The author points out that the variations she has outlined are not intended to be prescriptive, but ideas to consider when a therapist (and/or their client) is/are feeling “stuck.” She also advises that the application of psychotherapy to people with developmental disability is an ongoing effort that will continually require modification “to meet the needs of those we are servicing” (this issue, p. 47).

When faced with the challenge of becoming involved in the rehabilitation of a person with mild developmental disability who was a multiple sexual offender, Mark Larin developed a solution. In the fifth article in this special issue, Larin describes the approach he created and applied – the “Sex Offender Freeze Frame Treatment Technique” denoted by the acronym “SOFFTT.” The first application of SOFFTT was successful in the sense that the person who was counselled committed no further offenses during two years of treatment. The SOFFTT:

utilizes pictures and symbols that the client creates in order to depict actions, feelings, thoughts

and motivation. In this way, it can be used with people who are in the mild range of intellectual impairment as well as anyone with higher cognitive abilities. The technique lends itself well to the analysis of either singular or multiple offences. (this issue, p. 49)

The article provides a brief history of the SOFFTT and explains how to use this technique to help an individual “depict and explore the series of actions, thoughts, feelings and motivations that have occurred – surrounding the instance of touching someone without their consent” (this issue, p. 49). The article also contains sections on dealing with guilt during a counselling session, and dealing with regressions.

## Case Report

Anxiety is a common co-morbidity of persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Modified cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is emerging as an intervention for children and adults with ASD who have at least average intellectual functioning. The *Coping Cat* behaviour therapy program is one of the most commonly evaluated, manualized CBT interventions. The case report by Megan Ames and Jonathan Weiss explains how this program was modified for the treatment of anxiety in a 9-year-old boy with ASD, verbal impairment, aggressive behaviour and mild intellectual impairment. In the report, the authors detail the changes made to the Coping Cat program and explain how this program was administered. They mention a number of qualitative gains apparent in child’s behaviour after program implementation, but demonstrate that quantitative evaluation did not support such gains. Nevertheless, the study is an important contribution to the CBT literature. It underscores the need for further work “to adapt CBT programs for children with ASD, aggressive behaviour and impaired verbal abilities” (this issue, p. 68). As well, it “highlights the importance of incorporating even more play/activity based and visually based materials to surmount the typically language loaded cognitive tasks required in CBT” (this issue, p. 68)

## Original Research Papers

Measuring adaptive daily living skills (ADLS) of persons with developmental disability who live in communities located far from large cities can be problematic. In their original research paper, Valerie Tenple, Dawn Brown and Christine Sawanas postulated that use of existing standardized ADLS questionnaires would be problematic in First Nations communities in northern Ontario because these asked for feedback about certain activities which had not been learned (e.g., use of banks and public transportation). In order to gather information about novel aspects of daily life in these communities, they used a research approach called a *diary study*. Analysis of the diaries revealed that activities unique to these communities included fishing, hunting, and attending community feasts. Services available for persons with intellectual disability in large urban centres that were not available in these communities included provision of group homes, respite services, day programs, and other supports. What was important for such persons were family support and dependence on community members for assistance. The authors explain that the study results “will be used to create a new standardized questionnaire to more validly and effectively measure ADLS in northern Ontario First Nations communities” (this issue, p. 70).

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a common neurodevelopmental disorder that affects a substantial proportion of the general population and may interfere with development of thinking and behavioural skills. ADHD can be co-morbid with developmental disabilities and pervasive developmental disorder. In their education research paper, Ahmed Al Hariri and Eman Faisal explain that ADHD may affect 13% of children in Saudi Arabia but that little has been done to address the problem in their country. To address this gap, the authors proposed that participating in art activities using the *Playing method* might help preschool children with ADHD to improve their thinking and behavioural skills. Accordingly, they conducted a case/control study in which one group of children took part in the art program, and a control group (matched to the experimental group with respect to several variables including age and gender as well as time of skills test-

ing) which did not. Information about different thinking and behavioural skills before and after program completion was collected using observation cards with measured validity and reliability that were developed specifically for the study. Results were interpreted after application of appropriate statistical methodology. Importantly, some beneficial and significant effects of the program on thinking and behavioural skills were demonstrated in the experimental group, leading to a recommendation that art activities using the Playing method could be included in the Saudi preschool curriculum.

## Commentaries

YouTube provides an opportunity to many to broadcast their own ideas and concepts to an international audience. In their insightful and scholarly commentary, Charlotte Brownlow, Lindsay O'Dell and Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist discuss the possibilities of YouTube for self-presentation especially by persons with autism. They point out that autism has been "presented in traditional literature through reference to an individual's 'impairments'" (this issue, p. 90), but postulate that alternative representations and new understandings of autism might be made possible and widely disseminated through the use of YouTube broadcasting. The authors discuss these themes in a systematic way with reference to the published literature. They first explain how YouTube can offer the user possibilities for self-presentation in a far reaching way. They next consider use of YouTube by persons with autism. They highlight the fact that YouTube not only enables broadcasting in a visual form but also facilitates research that "seeks to examine the view of YouTube as a social network and one that plays a key role in the development and crafting of communities" (this issue, p. 92). Finally, they discuss various possibilities for shaping new understandings of autism through self-broadcasting. In a helpful More Resources section, the authors provide links to several YouTube channels that are focused on broadcasting the self.

Two decades ago, autism was considered to be rare. Currently, however, it is the most commonly identified disorder in the developing

world. Previously regarded as a disorder of the brain, autism now is known to be associated with abnormalities of the gut, as well as of immune, hepatic (liver) and endocrine function. As a consequence, searches for the causes of autism are considering involvement of environmental as well as of genetic factors. In the last paper of this special issue, Julia Kitaygorodsky, Maire Percy, Ann Fudge Schormans and Ivan Brown, introduce readers to an online CBC documentary, called the *Autism Enigma*, which features the hypothesis that there is a relationship between bacteria in the gut (which outnumber the cells in our body by a factor close to 100) and autism. The authors highlight key topics in the *Autism Enigma* documentary that support a gut-brain connection in autism. One of the highpoints deals with the fact that several species of bacteria isolated from the stools of children with autism produce a metabolic product called *propionic acid*. Although propionic acid is considered to be a "waste" product, it has a profound effect on behaviour. When injected into the brains of rats, documentary viewers see for themselves how administration of propionic acid causes temporary behavioural changes resembling those observed in persons with autism. To help readers acquire a balanced perspective, the authors supplement the documentary overview with referenced background material and critical discussion. Readers of the commentary and viewers of the documentary should be aware that a gut-brain connection is not only a research frontier in the autism field. Medical researchers also are investigating involvement of gut bacteria in obesity, diabetes and allergies, as well as in mental disorders including depression, anxiety and other mood disorders.

## Acknowledgements

The assistance of Uko Abara (Lakehead University) as JoDD Assistant Copy Editor is much appreciated.