Behavior Support of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Contemporary Research Applications

Introduction to the Special Issue

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The discipline of applied behavior analysis (ABA) has been instrumental in improving the lives of people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD). Many effective strategies have been validated for teaching adaptive skills, reducing challenging behaviors, and promoting a meaningful quality of life. Concerning assessment and evaluation methods, ABA contributions include functional behavioral assessment (FBA), functional analysis (FA), and single-case research designs. More recently, greater attention has been paid to “systems” level intervention focusing on large scale behavior-change within schools, habilitation settings, and human services organizations.

This special issue of the *Journal of Physical and Developmental Disabilities* concerns contemporary ABA research applications with people who have ID/DD, highlighting the breadth of topics, procedures, and outcomes that characterize current-day practices. The individuals participating in this research were children and adults with autism, mental retardation, traumatic brain injury, physical disabilities, and co-morbid mental illness. The research emphasizes implementation within diverse settings such as school, home, clinic, and extended-care facilities.

Four of the 9 articles describe assessment procedures. The study by Richman, Belmont, Kim, Slavin, and Hayner assessed self-reported stress, challenging behavior, and characteristics of autism among children and adults with Cornelia de Lange and Down syndrome. Kleinmann, Luiselli, DiGennaro, Pace, Langone, and Cochran describe a systems approach for assessing interobserver agreement among staff implementing protective holding (therapeutic restraint) within a behavioral

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healthcare setting. The other 2 assessment studies concern functional assessment and analysis: Tarbox, Wilke, Najdowski, Findel-Pyles, Balasanyan, Caveny, Chilingaryan, King, Niehoff, Slease, and Tia compared indirect, descriptive, and experimental functional assessments with children's problem behavior, and Reed, Pace, and Luiselli focused on the influence of choice within the tangible condition of a functional analysis.

The remaining 5 articles have an intervention focus. Harding, Wacker, Berg, Winborn-Kemmerer, and Lee evaluated choice allocation between positive and negative reinforcement when implementing functional communication training. The study by Davis, O'Reilly, Kang, Rispoli, Lang, Machalicek, Sigafoos, and Lancioni, also featured functional communication relative to pre-session access to reinforcers. Teaching self-control (Benedick and Dixon), fire safety skills (Knudson, Miltenberger, Bosch, Gross, Brower-Breitwieser), and mouth cleaning for saliva control (Lancioni, Singh, O'Reilly, Sigafoos, Didden, Oliva, Campodonico, Pichierri, and Zotti) round out the intervention research examples.

My thanks go to Dr. Michel Hersen for supporting this special issue and to Carole Londeree for helping me navigate the way. I'm grateful to the authors, who conducted meaningful studies and wrote such informative manuscripts. Hopefully, these empirical demonstrations of established and innovative methods will spawn additional research that will enhance the lives of people who have learning, socialization, communication, and behavior challenges.