



# Introduction to the Special Issue on Communication Assessment and Intervention

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The theme of this special issue is communication assessment and intervention for individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders. This topic covers an area of considerable relevance to many disciplines that aim to improve adaptive behavior functioning and overall quality of life for individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders. These various disciplines include applied behavior analysis, rehabilitation medicine, speech-language pathology, and special education. The present topic was considered a priority for a special issue because communication difficulties are wide ranging and highly prevalent among individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders. In addition, one could argue that there is an ethical imperative to ensure that every human being is enabled to communicate effectively. There are still far too many individuals with various types of neurodevelopmental disorders experiencing significant communication difficulties. Indeed, there are still far too many individuals with neurodevelopmental disorder who are unable to effectively express even their most basic wants and needs. The often complex nature and severity of the communication difficulties experienced by individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities can seriously undermine their opportunities for self-determination and social inclusion. The ultimate goal of this special issue is to redress this situation and advance evidence-based practice in communication assessment and intervention for individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders.

The 11 papers in this special issue include a mix of review articles and original research. These 11 papers cover assessment-oriented work and intervention-oriented work, with many of the included papers having both an assessment component and an intervention component. The papers' respective foci have relevance to the provision of communication

support for individuals with a range of neurodevelopmental disorders and with varying types and degrees of communication difficulties. Overall, this special issue highlights the wide range and scope of research related to communication assessment and intervention for individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders.

In terms of specific content and foci, it is perhaps not surprising that a number of the papers accepted for this special issue address communication intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This is not surprising in light of the increasing number of children being identified with ASD and the fact that communication difficulties are a defining characteristic of the autism spectrum (Kanai, Toth, Kuroda, Miyake, and Itahashi 2017). In the lead article, for example, Peters-Scheffer, Didden, Korzilius, and Verhoeven (2018) examine communication intentionality in 100 children with ASD and intellectual disability using a clever assessment protocol. Several additional papers delve into procedures for enhancing the communication functioning of children with ASD (e.g., Allen, Shane, and Schlosser 2018; Carnett, Waddington, and Bravo 2018; Dimian, Elmquist, Reichle, and Simacek 2018; Hansen, Carnett, and Tullis 2018; Wolfe, Rispoli, Taylor, and Drasgow 2018).

While communication assessment and intervention for children with ASD is well represented in the pages of this special issue, papers covering communication assessment and intervention for individuals with other types of neurodevelopmental disorders are also included. For example, there are papers focused on communication assessment and/or intervention for individuals with Down syndrome (Price, Vizoso, Ellerbee, Roberts, and Sideris 2018), severe/profound and multiple disabilities (Arthur-Kelly, Foreman, Maes, Colyvas and Lyons 2018; Ogletree and Price 2018; Simacek, Pennington, Reichle, and Parker-McGowan 2018), Rett syndrome, and Fragile X syndrome (Roche et al. 2018).

Overall, the present collection of papers covers a range of assessment and intervention issues, a range of disability conditions, and a number of emerging trends in the field. Readers will gain an appreciation of current research that is advancing

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evidence-based practice in communication assessment and intervention for individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders. More specifically, from the five assessment-related papers, readers should gain an appreciation of the value of assessing foundational aspects of communication. The five assessment-related papers contained in this special issue cover a number of cutting-edge issues, such as assessment of early emergent communication skills (Ogletree and Price 2018), assessment of early vocalizations (Roche et al. 2018), communication intentionality (Peters-Scheffer et al. 2018), breakdown and repair strategies (Price et al. 2018), and the social communication of students with profound/multiple disabilities (Arthur-Kelly et al. 2018). The remaining six papers address interventions for enhancing the communication functioning of individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders and developmental delay (Allen et al. 2018; Carnett et al. 2018; Dimian et al. 2018; Hansen et al. 2018; Simacek et al. 2018; Wolf et al. 2018). This intervention work offers practical guidance to clinicians.

In her biography, *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years*, Margaret Mead (1972) was inspired by her father's motto that contributing to the world's store of knowledge was the greatest thing anyone could do. The work published in this special issue certainly contributes to the world's store of knowledge. The included studies and reviews advance research and practice directly related to the provision of communication assessment and intervention for individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders. These advances will no doubt inspire professionals in the field and in the lab. I want to thank these authors for their contributions and for their perseverance through multiple rounds of reviews and revisions. I must also thank the many anonymous peer reviewers whose expert scrutiny has ensured that this special issue includes work of the highest quality.

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