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Introduction to Volume 13

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Welcome to Volume 13 of Assistive Technology Outcomes and Benefits (ATOB). It showcases articles that address the theme of "The Role of Research in Influencing Assistive Technology Products, Policy, and Practices." ATOB editors invited authors to submit articles that (a) address the ways that research, either internally within an organization or externally through successful private and/or public partnerships, has resulted in new assistive technology (AT) innovations, practices, and policies that help people with disabilities achieve their goals; or (b) highlight research findings that should inform product development, practice, and/or policy, helping to shape emerging and future technologies, strategies, and programs. In either case, manuscripts were required to draw conclusions about how research has been or can be used by other stakeholders to effect positive change for people who use AT. The editorial board had the good fortune to be able to offer our readers three thought-provoking examples of how research is informing the development of AT products, policies, and practices.

One of these pieces offers the perspective of the researcher. Its authors Kevin Pitt, Jonathan Brumberg, and Adrienne Pitt are from the Department of Speech-Language-Hearing: Sciences & Disorders at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. Entitled "Considering Augmentative and Alternative Communication Research for Brain-Computer Interface Practice," it considers how research within the field of brain-computer interface (BCI) could be fruitfully incorporated into augmentative and alternative communicative (AAC) research and practice. This topic will engage researchers, practitioners, individuals who use AAC, and their caregivers, who are all instrumental to ensuring successful use of resulting products.

Another article brings a practitioner voice into the discussion about public school policy governing the provision of AT, where staff and students are using an increasingly broad array of technology. Aply

summarized in its title “School Technology: Moving Beyond Assistive,” the article was contributed by Carol Michels of the Northern Suburban Special Education District in Highland Park, Illinois. The work shares Michels’ insights regarding the need for AT departments and services to move away from policies that encourage referral-based deficit models for individual student remediation. Instead, she proposes developing a proactive framework that engages practitioners as “thought leaders, partners in programming, and experts in technology.” Her piece will be of high interest to AT providers, district- and school-based administrators and practitioners, students, and their families.

To understand the role research can play in the AT industry, turn to the article “Accessibility User Research Collective: Engaging Consumers in Ongoing Technology Evaluation.” John Morris, Nicole Thompson, and Ben Lippincott of the Shepherd Center joined forces with Megan Lawrence of Microsoft to summarize the development, current status, and impact of the Accessibility User Research Collective (AURC). AURC is a national network of people with all kinds of disabilities, who provide project-by-project formal customer feedback for Microsoft as it develops its products and services. The article offers an excellent example of collaboration between representatives from a tech company and accessibility researchers who work for a non-profit. Such interactions provide industry with valuable input from those who understand the needs of targeted product users. Like Microsoft, other companies could adopt this model to gather feedback to develop and refine their products and services, so that more customers might benefit from tech industry offerings.

In sum, Volume 13 dedicates itself to the theme of exploring how research can move the AT field in new directions. The theme of this issue is consistent with the editors’ goal that ATOB promotes effective knowledge transfer, highlighting new information on the outcomes and benefits of AT for persons with disabilities. Across the three articles, we see specific examples of how research can influence the AT industry. Extant research, in this case about BCI, can find new applications when shared with those in the AAC field. Findings from the study Michels conducted inform how AT policy is—and should be—developed within school districts, an especially topical issue given the ever-wider relevance of all kinds of technology to assistive functions. The essential role of stakeholder input in product research and development is highlighted in the value Microsoft places upon the AURC.

The exponential growth of technology in virtually all lives across the globe testifies to the crucial role that the Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) itself plays. Given its broad mission, ATIA strongly supports a wide and diverse set of voices and perspectives in the research it seeks to put before the readers of its journal. Toward that end, please be reminded of its open access policy.

Consider whether you, too, have a role to play in ATOB:

- The journal has open positions available for peer reviewers.
- All readers are invited to share the link to this issue on their social media networks.
- ATOB invites contributions from industry representatives and practitioners, including those who have disabilities, not only researchers.

We all share a common goal of realizing the full potential of AT to improve lives. Echoing our title, let's work together to realize a broad array of AT's "outcomes and benefits."

Declarations

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