Introduction to Volume 15

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Welcome to Volume 15 of *Assistive Technology Outcomes and Benefits* (ATOB). The theme of this issue is "Assistive Technology for Communication." The ability to communicate is a fundamental aspect of human behavior. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) supports interactions and transmission of ideas for those with complex communication needs. Technology helps them take part in human communion. Articles in this volume showcase the use of assistive technology (AT) for improving all forms of communication through text, graphics, sounds, symbols, etc., and for creating opportunities for people with a wide range of needs in a variety of different settings. Exploring opportunities to enhance communication during academic routines, independent living, and leisure activities, and supporting both younger learners and adults with cognitive, sensory or physical disabilities, this volume offers a nice compilation of strategies and resources that can benefit many professionals.

This volume begins with a very special discussion led by our guest editor, Dr. David McNaughton, around the results of the 2019 survey conducted by the Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA). The online survey was designed to identify training needs of those who assist users of AAC. The respondents included more than 1,000 AT and AAC practitioners. The discussion presents the views of key stakeholders in the world of AAC, including experts, professionals, parents, and AAC users, on a selected number of key survey results: (1) Strategies for improving preservice training for AAC; (2) Methods for continuing education opportunities; (3) Key players in capacity building; and (4) Improving collaboration among professionals. The participants shared their perspectives on the most surprising findings of the AAC survey. In this piece, the ATOB readers can follow an engaging virtual roundtable discussion, and learn more about strategies and resources for person-centered AAC assessment and interventions, ways

to provide culturally and linguistically responsive AAC services, and other important components of the "art" of AAC.

Articles in the *Voices from the Academia* category focus on providing evidence of AAC technology effectiveness. This category begins with an article by Lori Geist, Karen Erickson, Claire Greer, and Penelope Hatch from the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Their participatory action research study explored the implementation of the Project Core Implementation Model for supporting students with significant cognitive disabilities in using aided AAC with core vocabulary. Following the open-source professional development, 15 teachers were able to implement symbolic communication instruction for their 71 students with significant cognitive disabilities and complex communication needs across all grade levels. Teacher behaviors, knowledge, and self-confidence to teach core vocabulary and use AAC improved. In turn, students also demonstrated positive changes in communication skills. The next study in Volume 15 by Ben Satterfield and colleagues from Georgia Institute of Technology explored how AT improved the quality of life for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, many of whom also had complex communication needs. Following a multi-disciplinary, person-centered service delivery of AT and AAC, participants reported improvements in their performance as well as satisfaction and quality of life (surveys used to collect data are available in the Appendix). Many of them felt less lonely, saw themselves as more helpful, and were more involved in self-advocacy following the intervention. A model for serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) through the use of technology chosen based on the skills and goals important to each individual promoted independence and empowered the participants. The *Voices from Academia* category concludes with a case study by Corinne Walker and Jane Wegner from the University of Kansas that examined the use of eye-gaze training programs for teaching an individual with cortical visual impairment and cerebral palsy to operate an AAC device. After a series of intervention sessions, a 14-year-old male participant demonstrated the visual skills necessary to use the eye-gaze and was able to use the communication program.

Articles in the Voices from the Field category offer case studies showcasing the outcomes and benefits of communication technology. The paper by Rachel Santiago, Jessica Gormley, Tami Altschuler, Michelle Howard, Harvey Pressman, and Sarah Blackstone describes the use of AT and AAC in acute care hospitals. The paper first discusses the existing barriers to communication between patients and providers during hospital stays, and then presents recommendations and resources for using AAC interventions. The case studies used throughout the article highlight the importance of this issue, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Communication is also important during leisure activities. The next paper, by Lauren Tucker, shares an example of how a collaboration between a nonprofit theater in Connecticut and a pre-service special education program at the local university resulted in the improved accessibility of performances and events for PK–12 students. Examples of visual supports and communication boards as well as the description of training for staff members showcase the importance of inclusivity in community experiences. Finally, a paper by Kristin Wallock and Shana Cerny focuses on the benefits of Smart Home technology for individuals living with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). The results of a survey are presented to demonstrate how individuals with ALS use technology to support their independence and well-being.

All these articles demonstrate the power of technology for individuals of different ages, ability levels, and areas of need. Each article offers recommendations and resources to improve a variety of outcomes for these individuals. We hope you will find these resources helpful in improving your practices and making the world more accessible and inclusive.

DECLARATIONS

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