**The Role of Journal Editors in Implementing Equity-Focused Research**

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**Abstract**

We respond to recommendations by Kover and Abbeduto, *Toward Equity in Research on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, through the discussion of what journal editors should be considering in advancing equitable processes for research with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We provide practical suggestions from our experience as co-editors in promoting diversity in research partnerships with people with IDD.

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We are pleased to have been asked to provide a commentary about the target article, *Toward Equity in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research*, written by Kovar and Abbeduto. These authors challenge our field to make significant changes in the ways that research is conducted, and we congratulate them for articulating concrete steps we can take to increase equity in IDD research. The authors framework for fostering change in IDD research takes us away from the merely identifying the problem to promoting equity-minded changes in the research process.

As co-editors of *Inclusion,* another journal of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, we will respond to a few of these recommendations made by the authors that most directly impact our work as co-editors. Although Kovar and Abbeduto’s call to action is important, further context and expansion is necessary to support researchers in enacting systems changes in research on IDD.

One such recommendation that the authors put forward is that individuals with IDD work as a member of research groups as co-researchers. This recommendation will require systemic changes to how we learn to conduct research or this recommendation can put individuals with IDD in situations where they are co-researchers in name only. While researchers have had multiple courses on various research methodologies, providing one training for co-researchers with IDD, even with materials that are designed following a universal design for learning approach, may not provide sufficient research knowledge and skills to be an equal member of a research team. We know that the relationships among team members as well as sharing a common goal are essential components of collaboration (Friend & Cook, 2003), and that type of collaborative teamwork does not occur overnight. And a one-time research training session will not be sufficient. We recommend that to make this work, that research teams participate in training together, with multiple opportunities to plan together, identify ways that they will communicate throughout the research process, and discuss their separate and mutual goals for conducting research. Yes, materials used and training provided must follow the components of universal design for learning, with multiple opportunities for the research team to build their relationships and articulate their process for moving forward with their study.

Some of the other recommendations are probably easier for the field to implement. The development of Quality indicators for conducting research with individuals with IDD as co-researchers will be important if journal editors and reviewers are going to expect that submitted manuscripts implement such an approach. Those quality indicators will also need to be accessible for those co-researchers with IDD so they can fully participate in the study as well as the writing of the manuscript. Quality indicators should include expectations for what should be included in research reports. How should authors indicate the strengths of members of the research team, as well as individuals with IDD? How is power and privilege understood and negotiated as co-researchers? Is identifying positionality, as typically required in high quality qualitative studies, sufficient? Or should there be additional information included?

If research with individuals with IDD is expected by journal editors, we believe it is important that training for editorial board members and grant reviewers be provided so they are able to judge the quality of these studies, as recommended by Kovar & Abaddubo. For the record, we agree with the authors recommendation, but also challenge journal editors to find individuals with IDD to become members of editorial boards. They should be actively engaged in reviewing manuscripts and applications for grant funding if the field is truly serious about equity in our field. We could follow a procedure that has been used by many journals to build their editorial boards by including doctoral students and/or early career researchers as reviewers which begins with having them work with an experienced reviewer first until that reviewer feels they are ready to conduct reviews independently. At that stage, editors assign them as one of three reviewers, the others with more experience, to balance the review. After that, they become part of the larger reviewer pool. Individuals with IDD might need some additional support to equally participate in reviewing manuscripts, and editors must examine ways of making manuscripts more accessible to them. Not all journal editors would be able to implement this type of support so that individuals with IDD are able to fully participate as members of editorial boards, as we largely perform this work as one of many service activities in which we engage. Therefore, support from the organization sponsoring the journal would be needed to make this a reality.

While special issues like this one are a step in the right direction, it probably doesn’t go far enough. This should be a part of our work, particularly as journal editors in an organization like AAIDD which holds these values. We should work collaboratively with each other, with individuals with IDD and their families, and with the researchers who engage in work in our field. There isn’t a clear roadmap for upholding these values; it will most likely involve some trial and error. But we challenge us to begin this work.

Reference

Friend, M. & Cook, L. (2003). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.