

PREFACE

This is the first of two *Seminars in Speech and Language* issues that assesses the reciprocal relationships between communicative impairment in children and the nature of parent-child interaction. Both issues recognize that speech and language impairments can substantially affect how children and their parents behave with and talk to each other. Further, because speech-language clinicians often scrutinize a child's home environment and make suggestions for adjustments in parental behaviors, it is especially critical that we continue to improve our understanding of the dynamics that govern interaction between adults and their communicatively delayed or disordered children.

In this issue, interaction between fluency-disordered children and their parents is the specific focus. For half a century, parental attitudes and behaviors have been the targets of both basic research and therapeutic recommendations for early stuttering. The articles that follow synthesize our current understanding of what role parents play in the etiology and treatment of stuttering in children.

In compiling these articles, I was extremely fortunate to enlist the services of a number of my colleagues who have particular interest and expertise in the nature of parental interaction with stuttering children. Martin Adams sets the stage for the discussions that follow by examining whether the home environment of children who stutter somehow distinguishes them from those children who do not stutter. He finds little data to suggest that parental attitudes or behaviors create or maintain stuttering in children. Patricia Zebrowski next examines whether parents of stuttering and normally fluent children have different expectations of their child's

speech. She concludes that parents of stuttering children are not more likely than parents of nonstuttering children to judge speech disfluencies to be stuttered or pathological, thus arguing against Johnson's (1959) hypothesis that parental misdiagnosis of disfluencies as stuttering plays a role in the etiology of stuttering.

Although parental speech rate probably plays little role in the development of stuttering, manipulation of parent-child conversational speech rate and turn-taking is a common component of therapy programs to reduce stuttering in young children. Ellen Kelly reviews data that suggest that changes in parental speech rate and conversational turn-taking can indeed be facilitating for children's fluency. She explores possible reasons for this relationship and emphasizes the bidirectionality of parent-child interactions: parental speech rate and turn-taking appear to be strongly influenced by children's fluency. Next, Amy Weiss places children's fluency within a larger conversational framework as she analyzes the effects of certain pragmatic demands on children's fluency and then reassesses some conventional therapeutic recommendations that are frequently made to the parents of stuttering children.

No matter how spirited the debate about what role, if any, parents may play in the etiology of stuttering in children, it is clear that parental support may facilitate the therapeutic process. Peter Ramig discusses the parent-child-clinician partnership in fluency therapy. His article provides guidance to clinicians seeking to help parents maximize their child's therapeutic progress and minimize their feelings of frustration and anxiety.

In the final contribution to this issue, I try to place the literature that has exam-

ined patterns of interaction between stuttering children and their parents within the broader context of the role that parents play in children's communicative development in general. Most studies have found it difficult to link parental styles of interaction with either positive or negative gains in children's communicative abilities. I explore some of the reasons for these diffi-

culties in verifying the effects of parental speech styles on children's speech behaviors. When taken as a whole, this issue reminds us that the relationship between parents and their children, fluent or not, is complex and in need of further research.

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