

ABSTRACT

Two areas of practice that are in critical need of additional research include: 1) alternate assessment practices for students with severe disabilities and, 2) violence prevention and crisis management within the schools. The present abstract provides an overview for a research agenda in both lines of research.

First, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 stipulated that students with disabilities be fully included in statewide testing and accountability systems. In response, states have adopted various testing practices, including alternate assessment formats for student with severe disabilities in order to comply with this mandate. As this is a pioneering area of practice, additional research is needed regarding the validity of various alternate assessment practices that are being implemented. For instance, the criterion related validity of alternate measures (such as the alternate portfolio) has yet to be consistently established. A critical question is whether or not scores on such assessments reflect a student's actual skills and are predictive of postsecondary outcomes. Additional research is also needed regarding whether or not students participating in alternate assessments actually meet the state's criteria for inclusion in the program. A final question related to alternate assessments is the extent to which the alternate assessment methods represent a student's work, regardless of severity of disability. Overall, this line of research has implications for school psychology's role in advocacy and educational planning for students with disabilities, as well as program planning and intervention. Research regarding valid assessment methods for students with severe disabilities is crucial, particularly in the

current era of high stakes testing where student performance is tied to school's rewards and sanctions.

Second, the issue of school violence has been the subject of a significant amount of research in recent years, which is paralleled by school staff's heightened awareness of the problem. Furthermore, the focus on prevention is reflected by the amount of support provided to schools through the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act. However, there is relatively little research regarding safe physical management procedures and outcomes for students who present with violent behavior in the schools. While most hospitals and clinics have detailed guidelines for managing aggressive behavior, there appears to be a lack of uniform standards and training in safe physical management for school staff. Several researchers have highlighted the need for and importance of such training, research, and practice. This is particularly relevant for those special education teachers and support staff who regularly work with students who have severe behavior disorders. Specific research topics include the impact of a special education teacher's physical management training on: 1) amount of student aggression and/or disruptive behavior, 2) referral rates to outside agencies (such as day treatment programs), 3) suspension and expulsion rates, and 4) teacher ratings of the amount of their perceived control in the classroom. Safe physical management is pertinent to school psychology practice, as psychologists are often consulted when teachers and school staff are presented with such issues. Likewise, inclusion of specific physical management/restraint plans in students' behavior intervention plans could be instrumental in ensuring the safety of students and staff. However there is a crucial need for more research regarding training and implementation.

Multi-site collaboration would provide several advantages in the investigation of alternate assessment practices and outcomes of safe physical management training. These include: a larger number of participants in related studies (especially due to the fact that severe disabilities occur at a relatively low occurrence); ability to identify discrepancies in implementation of related programs between states; and improved ability to generalize findings to a larger population. Overall, additional research in these two areas of study will provide guidance in the practical application of programs to improve educational services for all students.

RESEARCH PLAN

The following is an overview of methodology for investigating both lines of research (alternate assessment practices and safe physical management) outlined in my personal research agenda.

Alternate assessment practices for students with disabilities:

1. *Do alternate assessment scores have criterion related validity? Namely, do they reflect a student's actual skills and do they predict postsecondary outcomes?*

This question would involve a longitudinal design in which students' alternate portfolio scores (and results of other alternate assessment methods which vary by state) are correlated with measures of their subsequent performance in activities of daily living as an adult. For instance, scores would be used to predict employment rates, social skills, involvement in community activities, participation in leisure, and level of self-care and independence.

2. *Do students participating in alternate assessment meet the criteria for the program? (Note: in practice it came to my attention that there are incentives for identifying students, and during our study we observed several students who did not seem to meet the criteria).*

Students' existing school records, including psychological reports, individualized education plans, and special education eligibility documentation would be cross-referenced with the respective state standards and requirements for qualifying for alternate assessments. Rates of questionable placements would be identified, which

would permit comparisons by state and disability. A qualitative approach may also prove beneficial, in which state eligibility requirements for participation in alternate assessments and potential problem areas are investigated.

3. *Although alternate assessments (such as the alternate portfolio) are designed to represent the student's work regardless of severity of disability, do higher functioning students generally score better on alternate assessments than lower functioning students?*

Students' most recent psychological assessment would provide information regarding intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Scores from these measures would be used to predict student performance on alternate assessments (such as scores on an alternate portfolio).

Violence prevention and crisis management:

In addressing the impact of safe physical management training for special educators who work with students with challenging behaviors, a repeated measures design would be used. Baseline data would be collected for students who receive services for severe emotional and behavioral disabilities. This data would include information regarding: student aggression and disruptive behavior; referral rates to outside agencies; suspension and expulsion rates; and teachers' perceived control in their classroom. Teachers would then receive in-service training in safe physical management procedures (including verbal de-escalation and safe physical restraint). Data in the aforementioned areas would then be collected at repeated times during the remainder of the school year. This would provide information regarding the potential benefits of such

training for teachers and would facilitate the identification of problems in implementation of such a program.

Conclusion:

Each line of research would require multiple investigators, in order to obtain permission for record reviews from local education agencies and to collect information from students' records. In addition, research regarding postsecondary outcomes for alternate assessments would involve tracking students after completion of school (at least one year later) in order to collect the necessary information. Finally, when considering a repeated measures design for investigating the impact of safe physical management training, it would be necessary to provide the in-service for teachers. Such training could be provided by the study's investigators in order to minimize cost, if needed. In that case, expenses would include: cost of training several investigators; travel expenses for investigators to visit multiple sites to provide the training; and training materials to be distributed to participants. It is noted that several commercially available training programs in physical restraint and management are available and are readily used in clinics and health care facilities. In developing the training program for teachers, the research investigators could utilize such existing programs to acquire the skills needed prior to providing teacher in-services. Overall, further investigation into alternate assessment practices and safe physical management would benefit from multi-site collaboration, due to the lack of research in these areas, as well as apparent discrepancies in implementation of these programs between states.

PERSONAL RESEARCH AGENDA

I am pleased to have the opportunity to share my research agenda. My current interests fall in two primary areas: 1) alternate assessment practices for students with disabilities and, 2) violence prevention and crisis management within the schools.

Specific research questions in these respective areas are delineated below.

Alternate assessment practices for students with disabilities:

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 stipulated that students with disabilities be fully included in statewide testing and accountability systems. In response, states have adopted various testing practices, including alternate assessment formats for students with severe disabilities in order to comply with this mandate. In a recent study that I co-authored, our results provided preliminary support for the use of the alternate portfolio as a valid measure of instructional effectiveness (Turner, Baldwin, Kleinert, & Kearns, 2000). However, as a result of my research and practical experience with alternate assessment systems in the schools, I have identified several related areas in need of further investigation.

4. Do alternate assessment scores have criterion related validity? Namely, do they reflect a student's actual skills and do they predict postsecondary outcomes?
5. Do students participating in alternate assessment meet the criteria for the program? (Note: in practice it came to my attention that there are incentives for identifying students, and during our study we observed several students who did not seem to meet the criteria)

6. Although alternate assessments (such as the alternate portfolio) are designed to represent the student's work regardless of severity of disability, do higher functioning students generally score better on alternate assessments than lower functioning students?

I am eager to continue this line of research, as it has implications for school psychology's role in advocacy and educational planning for students with disabilities, as well as program planning and evaluation. For instance, school psychologists are in a position to suggest improvements in methods of assessing students with severe disabilities. Advocacy for such students is crucial, particularly in the current era of high stakes testing where student performance is tied to schools' rewards and sanctions.

Violence prevention and crisis management

The issue of school violence has been the subject of a significant amount of research in recent years, which is paralleled by school staff's heightened awareness of the problem. Furthermore, the focus on prevention is reflected by the amount of support provided to schools through the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act. However, there is relatively little research regarding safe physical management procedures and outcomes for students who present with violent behavior in the schools. While most hospitals and clinics have detailed guidelines for managing aggressive behavior, there appears to be a lack of uniform standards and training in safe physical management for school staff. Several researchers have highlighted the need for and importance of such training, research, and practice (Hughes, 1985; Mullen, 2000). This is particularly relevant for those special education teachers and support staff who regularly work with students who

have severe behavior disorders (Ruhl & Hughes, 1985). Specific research topics include the impact of a special education teacher's physical management training on:

1. amount of student aggression and/or disruptive behavior,
2. referral rates to outside agencies (such as day treatment programs),
3. suspension and expulsion rates, and
4. teacher ratings of the amount of their perceived control in the classroom.

Safe physical management is pertinent to school psychology practice, as psychologists are often consulted when teachers and school staff are presented with such issues. Likewise, inclusion of specific physical management/restraint plans in students' behavior intervention plans could be instrumental in ensuring the safety of students and staff. However there is a crucial need for more research regarding training and implementation.

Overall, I am excited about my research prospectus in the areas of alternate assessment and violence prevention and I am eager to advance the knowledge base in these areas of practice within the discipline of school psychology.

References

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