

Application for the School Psychology

Research Collaboration Conference

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Personal Research Agenda

Based on a myriad of experiences gained during my practice as a school psychologist, I have developed a strong interest in researching two main topic areas. Both areas have recently exploded with interest, and there is a tremendous and urgent need for adequate research documented in the literature. First, I am fascinated by the opportunity to investigate school-based assessment, educational diagnosis and program implementation for children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Current estimates suggest that educational personnel are more likely to encounter children with autism and thus need better methods to identify children requiring autism-specific educational intervention services (Filipek et al., 1999). I recently authored a grant project that was funded and developed in an effort to address the need for improved school-based diagnostic services. The grant provided for the development of a multidisciplinary team of school district professionals specifically trained and supervised in the screening, assessment and educational diagnosis of ASD. Team members are also able to function within the school district as a valuable resource for provision of services and interventions. The Autism team members developed a screening referral process to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all individuals involved in the identification of students believed to potentially manifest an ASD. The team supervisor and I are currently working on a journal manuscript that outlines a model process for school-based team development and is on target for submission in August. Specific questions or topics to be addressed by further research include: 1) how do we continue to develop school-based teams that strive toward clinical best practices in terms of screening and diagnosis, 2) the effect of a secondary school peer assistant program on school-wide student attitudes toward developmentally disabled peers, and 3) reconfiguring the peer assistant program for the elementary school level in order to further examine effects on student attitudes.

A second area of research interest focuses on exploring the adequate assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. When a bilingual professional is unavailable to conduct an assessment, providing a trained interpreter is considered the next best option. “The use of interpreters in assessment and testing is a common practice that has received virtually no attention in research studies, testing standards or the law. There is no empirically validated model for using interpreters and there are no data to substantiate the validity of this procedure” (Valdes & Figueroa, 1994). I have developed a research project that will examine the effects of including an interpreter during testing on student performance. I will conduct this research during the work I currently do with CLD students. I am further interested in conducting research that would address specific details of developing a dual-language testing strategy that considers the student’s knowledge and cognitive functioning during a complete evaluation allowing the use of both language systems. “One way to avoid potential bias based on inappropriate assumptions about a student’s language abilities is for assessment personnel to use a dual-language testing strategy” (Hamayan & Damico, 1991).

The research agenda outlined in this application has potential for impact in the practice of psychology in the schools. This research program will provide the opportunity to address the need for school districts across the country, specifically those in rural areas with few cases of low-incidence disabilities, to develop a basic level of competence in recognizing and servicing students who may have an ASD. School psychologists will be better informed of the potential difficulties and benefits inherent in the utilization of an interpreter and a dual language testing strategy for CLD students.

REFERENCES

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- Hamayan, E. V., & Damico, J. S. (1991). *Limiting bias in the assessment of bilingual students*. Austin, TX: Pro.ed.
- Valdes, G., & Figueroa, R. A. (1994). *Bilingualism and Testing: A Special Case of Bias*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp.

PROPOSAL

This collaborative multi-site research program proposal is an ambitious endeavor that will investigate two distinct topics of interest. One segment will focus on the practice of school psychology in relationship to school-based assessment, educational diagnosis and program implementation for children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Those involved will first work to develop additional multidisciplinary teams similar to the one developed at the Montrose School District. Once teams are developed, they will analyze the effects of a peer assistant program on student attitudes toward developmentally delayed peers and expand the peer assistant program to other schools both elementary and secondary. The other aspect will investigate the use of interpreters and a dual-language testing strategy when assessing culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Inquiries into testing bias of CLD students will provide additional empirical evidence that can be applied toward the development of an empirically validated assessment model.

For the ASD component, it will be necessary to locate other school districts across the country with identified needs related to the identification of and service provision for students with ASD. These districts should have students in need of intervention at both the elementary and secondary levels. The total number of districts participating will remain very small, as team and intervention development are very time-intensive processes. No more than two to three districts that have at least 10 students identified with ASD need to be found to participate with the Montrose school district. All of the districts should be interested in developing a multidisciplinary team as well as developing intervention programs.

The CLD research element will seek both school districts and other clinical settings where testing of CLD students is conducted. These personnel should have an interest in

investigating the effects of various testing situations on student performance, and the current testing strategies used by each site would be expected to vary. The number of subjects included in this portion of the project will be much greater, with data collected from students with a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Students evaluated for each CLD research condition should number over one hundred and the total number of sites will depend greatly upon the number of CLD students routinely evaluated within that setting. For instance, Montrose typically evaluates 40 CLD students within the school year.

Expanding my research agenda beyond the Montrose school district to a multi-site, nation-wide project will enable the project to address the immense need demonstrated by so many school districts. Much of this project serves to provide needed training to professionals and paraprofessional interpreters and the positive effects should be on-going after this project. A pilot for both project segments has already been or will be conducted prior to the initiation of the multi-site project. This experience should increase the ease of implementation. I believe the greatest challenge for staff will be experienced as they balance their full-time positions with their research. Also, funding can be difficult to obtain and the availability of grants may vary between states. Conducting literature reviews in a small town without a university has been an on-going challenge requiring patience and creative solutions. The recent governor veto of public library funding for inter-library loan services will further complicate rural research, and the need for multi-site collaboration is great.

The following estimated budget was developed in order to quantify the financial needs of the proposed project. All figures shown were developed based on actual expenditures by the Montrose school district during implementation of a grant project. All Operating Expenses were calculated as if two additional sites were to be included, and the addition of further sites would

increase the estimate. No funds were indicated for training of Montrose personnel as the district has already participated in training for both segments. The trainer expenses and all incidental expenses have been summarized. Sites added to the project will be expected to assist with procurement of funding as well as providing in-kind matching of funds for testing materials and professional development leave. It is possible that the sites might not employ paraprofessional interpreters, so stipends for attendance were included in the CLD component subtotals. Based on our previous experience, it was estimated that a project of this size would require a secretary one full day per week during a 26-week school year. The individual coordinating the project may also require a salary stipend, but this was not included in the estimate since early-career researchers were reported to obtain financial support as well as mentoring support.

Estimated Budget

Operating Expenses:

ASD component:

Team training	\$ 9, 500
Basic intervention training	\$ 9, 000
Test Materials (1/2 cost)	\$ 3, 000

CLD component:

Interpreter training	\$ 8, 000
Psychologist training (as needed).....	\$ 4, 000

General and administrative expenses:

Office Assistant Support	\$ 5, 000
Office Supplies	\$ 4, 000

Total Operating Expenses \$ 42, 500