

## **Riley-Tillman**

### **Personal Research Agenda**

Over the course of the last three years I have been afforded the opportunity to work in different but complementary roles within the profession of school psychology, both as an academic/trainer and as a practicing school psychologist in a public school district. As a faculty member in the School Psychology Program at Temple University, I have had the opportunity to continue my education and to analyze this profession from an academic standpoint. This position has allowed me to remain current in my training and continue to develop my concept of the profession of school psychology. During that same period, I have consulted on a weekly basis for the Bensalem Township School District. In this position I have been consistently confronted with the reality that what is taught, as “best practice,” in the academic facet of school psychology is something very different than what is actually practiced in the reality of a public school system. Over the past three years, I have become increasingly aware of the gap between the role of practicing school psychologist and academics’ concept of this role.

In an attempt to study the translation of research into practice, I have identified four specific areas of focus:

- 1) Studying the acceptability of empirical research to practicing school psychologists, and incorporating the resulting knowledge into training programs designed to increase practitioners’ acceptance of empirically supported practice.
- 2) Analyzing behavioral consultation in reference to maximizing generalization across target and time.
- 3) Identifying methods of training (or re-training) that allow progress through the instructional hierarchy with minimal resources.

- 4) Analyzing state and district-wide laws and policies regarding school psychology and special education in reference to their impact on the role and function of the school psychologist.

I am currently involved in a number of projects that reflect my interest in each of these areas.

For example, together with Dr. Sandra Chafouleas, a faculty member at the University of Connecticut, I have developed a training program based in part upon information taken from an analysis of the acceptability of brief experimental analysis to practicing school psychologists.

This information was combined with generalization programming strategies to create a workshop and training manual that have been presented to school psychologists in New York and Pennsylvania with the support of a grant from the Society for the Study of School Psychology.

The goal of this ongoing project is to better understand the impact of altering acceptability of empirical intervention on reported use in the natural environment. The results of this and related studies as well as attempts to empirically examine the other issues delineated above, will impact the direction of my ongoing research program. The long-term goal of my overall research agenda is the development of a model to program for the successful implementation of empirically supported work in practice.

I have become convinced that in order for the academic community to continue to meaningfully inform the practice of school psychology, the gap between the two facets of this profession must be bridged. Given the constraints on practicing school psychologists (e.g. legal guidelines, district/school policy) it seems to be the responsibility of the academic community to take lead in developing an understanding of how this gap can be traversed.

## **Collaborative Research Program Proposal**

One specific collaborative research proposal that addresses my research agenda goals related to the acceptability and dissemination of reading assessment information is described below. Dr. T. Sandra M. Chafouleas and I have worked together over the previous year to design this proposal in unison to develop a collaborative, multi-site project involving university staff and personnel in school districts in the Northeast. Although some aspects of this proposal have been initiated over the current year, data collection continues and numerous extensions from this particular project are under development.

Title:           The Acceptability and Use of Brief Functional Analysis in Reading: An  
                  Investigation of the Effects of Training on Practicing School Psychologists

Co-PIs:        T. Chris Riley-Tillman (Temple University), Sandra M. Chafouleas (UCONN)

### *Introduction and Purpose*

To date, relatively little is known about the use of empirically-supported interventions by school psychologists (Stoiber & Kratochwill, 2000), including the area of reading assessment and intervention strategies. One promising reading assessment technique, which involves an efficient and reliable assessment in order to determine potentially successful interventions, is brief experimental analysis (BEA). BEA is characterized by administering brief test conditions, one at a time, by hierarchically ordered treatments (Daly, Martens, Hamler, Dool, & Eckert, 1999). For reading fluency, the hierarchy of treatments is based on empirical support for the intervention as well as ease of implementation (e.g., baseline, reward, repeated readings, listening passage preview, easier materials). Furthermore, BEA provides a process to help school psychologists use rational decision-making rather than a “garbage can model” in which

problems are not clearly identified and solutions are not matched to the problem (Rosenfield, 2000).

While BEA procedures for reading are supported by empirical evidence, information is not currently available regarding acceptability by consumers. Although it certainly is important that BEA for reading is empirically supported, it is equally important that school psychologists, teachers, school administrators and parents perceive the method as acceptable (Wolf, 1976; Kazdin, 1980). Treatment acceptability is a subset of the larger domain of social validity. This subset refers to the perceptions of consumers that the method is fair and reasonable for the intended purpose. While many possible reasons exist as to why that research has not translated into practice, social validity, particularly low treatment acceptability of empirically based practices may be a likely culprit. Simply put, if practicing school psychologists do not perceive a tool to be fair and reasonable manner to address a problem, they will not utilize that tool. The purpose of the proposed project is to examine change in the acceptability and use of an empirically-supported reading assessment procedure (i.e., brief experimental analysis) in school psychology practitioners after implementation of a training program.

### *Participants and Sites*

The goal is to train and monitor approximately 100 school psychologists (employed in New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania). While the use of multiple sites increases the need for communication and organization in order to minimize predicted difficulties (e.g. multiple review committees and district personal), it is viewed as imperative for two reasons. First, using multiple sites increases the likelihood of recruiting a diverse sample of practicing school psychologist. Second, each principal investigator brings individual strengths that produce a successful collaborative team when paired.

### *Project Outline*

The proposed project will consist of 4 phases. In the first phase, participating school psychologists' acceptability of BEA for reading will be assessed along with other background information (e.g., demographics, prior knowledge and use of procedure). The acceptability information will be obtained with an assessment pack, which includes the Assessment Rating Profile-Revised (ARP-R) (Eckert, 1999). The second phase will entail creation and implementation of a training program designed to increase the acceptability and use of BEA for reading. This program will be based on the hypothesis that low treatment acceptability is typically based on either a lack of knowledge or skill, or a perception that the understood tool is not appropriate for use in the daily practice of a school psychologist. In the third phase, treatment acceptability will be assessed upon completion of the training. Approximately two and six months after completion of training, follow-up consultation regarding acceptability and use of the technique will be offered to each participant via phone or email.

The primary long-term impact is that information about these factors may help future researchers design better opportunities for the dissemination of information in other areas of school psychology. Programming to maximize treatment acceptability, and thus maximize the use of "best practices" in the schools, is vital to the interest of modern education.

#### **Estimated Brief Budget**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Salaries	2 graduate assistantships (10-hr/wk)	\$21,675
Supplies	Printed materials, postage, telephone costs	\$ 3,000
Travel	PI meetings and workshop delivery	\$ 7,200
Other (General Management)	Overhead @ 5%	\$ 1,594
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$33,469</b>

## Selected References

- Chafouleas, S.M., Riley-Tillman, T.C., & Eckert, T.L. (2002). A comparison of school psychologists' acceptability of norm-referenced, curriculum-based, and brief experimental analysis methods to assess reading. Manuscript in submission.
- Daly, E.J., III, Martens, B.K., Hamler, K.R., Dool, E.J., & Eckert, T.L. (1999). A brief experimental analysis for identifying instructional components needed to improve oral reading fluency. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 32, 83-94.
- Eckert, T.L. (1999). Development of a scale to measure the acceptability of assessment methods. Unpublished manuscript, Syracuse University.
- Kazdin, A. E. (1980). Acceptability of alternative treatments for deviant child behavior. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 13, 259-273.
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