



Position Statement

PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION RESEARCH IN THE SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recognizes the need for evidence-based prevention and intervention practices to address student learning, social–emotional development, behavioral performance, instructional methodology, school practices, classroom management, and other areas salient to school-based services and improving student outcomes. At the same time, NASP recognizes the challenges of implementing evidence-based practices, given the contextual factors that are likely to influence their selection and effective use. Moreover, the lack of correspondence between conditions of highly controlled randomized studies and real-life educational settings have contributed to the often-cited gap between research and practice.

To address the difficulties in translating research to practice, NASP recognizes the need for well-controlled experimental studies in natural settings such as schools. These studies need to address issues such as systemic, cultural, and contextual variations across individuals, classrooms, and schools. Understanding the myriad factors that can impact the implementation and effectiveness of school-based interventions requires reconsideration of the questions and methods employed in school-based research.

Intervention and prevention research needs to address a range of questions related not only to efficacy and effectiveness, but also to feasibility given resources (e.g., time, money, staffing), acceptability (e.g., teacher, student, and community attitudes toward intervention strategies), social validity (the relevance of targeted outcomes to everyday life of students), integrity or fidelity (the extent to which individuals responsible for implementing an intervention can do so as intended by its designers), and sustainability (the extent to which school staff can maintain the intervention over time, without support from external agents). Addressing these questions precludes the use of any single research method, and calls for school psychology researchers and practitioners to recognize and use relevant and broad-based strategies to assess, evaluate, and monitor intervention services and programs.

Furthermore, given the potential challenges in translating research into practice, NASP recognizes the need for systematic monitoring and evaluation of interventions in schools for purposes of determining effectiveness across settings and individuals, as well as accountability in the delivery of evidence-based practices. Consequently, the research repertoire of school psychologists needs to include strategies for ongoing evaluation and monitoring of school-based practice.

Finally, research that addresses questions related to implementation of evidence-based practices in real-life school settings requires partnerships between school psychology researchers and practitioners and the involvement of key stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, community leaders, parents, and students. Together, these partners can more effectively address questions related to feasibility, acceptability, social validity, and sustainability.

THE NEED FOR SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION RESEARCH

The challenge for school psychology is to conduct systematic and rigorous research in natural contexts that address questions of effectiveness, acceptability, feasibility, social validity, integrity/fidelity, and sustainability. In addition, there is a need for systematic and rigorous research to determine the effects of school organizational and contextual variables on implementation of evidence-based practices. Addressing these challenges requires selecting research designs and methods based on specific questions related to school-based interventions.

The range of questions posed by research in real-life settings necessitates that school psychology expand its repertoire of accepted research designs to include randomized control, quasi-experimental, single participant, ethnographic case study, and participatory action research. In addition, questions posed by implementation in natural settings require the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods and consideration of mixed-method (quantitative–qualitative) approaches. Furthermore, translating research to practice requires reliable and valid methods for routine monitoring and evaluation of prevention and intervention programs to document effectiveness, acceptability, feasibility, social validity, integrity/fidelity, and sustainability. To meet these challenges, NASP calls for efforts to conceptualize and to advance research as a process that incorporates design, implementation, evaluation, and analysis in ways that are sensitive to specific contexts of practice.

THE ROLES OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION RESEARCH

School psychologists, as researchers and practitioners, can make important contributions to the development and implementation of scientifically based intervention and prevention programs to address learning and behavioral needs of students. School psychologists have unique, practical expertise in evidence-based interventions, data-based decision making, and research and evaluation. Furthermore, they have first-hand knowledge and experience related to critical questions and issues facing practitioners in field settings. This unique vantage point provides opportunities for school psychologists to shape intervention-based research questions and agendas. Furthermore, school psychologists can make important contributions related to the identification of critical systemic and contextual features of school settings that influence the acceptability, use, and effectiveness of scientifically based prevention and intervention strategies.

Given the Significant Need for School-Based Intervention and Prevention Research:

- NASP advocates for the application of a range of valid research methods selected on the basis of research questions.

- NASP advocates that school psychology researchers and practitioners recognize the unique organizational and contextual features of school-based intervention and prevention practice.
- NASP advocates for scientifically competent research and evaluation practices developed through partnerships between practitioners and researchers.
- NASP advocates for the formation of partnerships between school psychology researchers and practitioners in broadening and advancing the methodology of field-based research to promote the application of evidence-based practice and to facilitate the translation of research to practice.
- NASP advocates for partnerships among school psychology researchers and other psychology researchers, as well as partnerships among school psychology researchers and investigators from other disciplines.
- NASP advocates for the involvement of key stakeholders—parents, students, teachers, administrators, mental health specialists, community professionals, citizens—as partners in addressing critical questions related to development, implementation, and evaluation of acceptable, effective, socially valid, and sustainable intervention and prevention programs.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Research – a systematic investigation designed to develop or to contribute to generalizable scientific knowledge.

Evaluation – the systematic assessment of the value of a program or intervention that provides feedback or useful information to stakeholders.

Efficacy – the determination of intervention effects under highly controlled conditions using systematic procedures and multiple measures to evaluate outcomes.

Effectiveness – the determination of intervention effects in natural school or community contexts.

Randomized control experiments – studies wherein participants are assigned randomly to a treatment and a comparison condition prior to the introduction of an intervention, and in which comparisons are made in relation to their response to the manipulated variable.

Quasi-experimental research – studies wherein participants are not randomly assigned to treatment and comparison groups prior to the introduction of an intervention, and in which comparisons are made in relation to their response to the manipulated variable.

Single participant designs – studies involving a small number of participants subjected to continuous and objective assessments over different treatment conditions (treatment/no treatment, or alternative treatments) to determine the effects of an intervention on a specified outcome of interest.

Ethnographic case study – research conducted in natural settings that yields an idiographic, in-depth portrayal of individual, group, or organizational experiences from the perspective of participants. This method involves the use of participatory observation, in-depth interviewing, and collecting artifacts or permanent products.

Participatory action research – research wherein key stakeholders (e.g., parents, school personnel) are involved in a recursive process that links theory, research, and practice for the purpose of promoting individual or social–cultural change.

Quantitative methods – research methods that are concerned with collecting objective, precise, systematic, and quantifiable data to examine questions of interest, measure outcomes, and test existing theories.

Qualitative methods – research methods that are concerned with examining phenomena (e.g., interventions) with a focus on depth and context, often by collecting large amounts of information in an exploratory manner to test emerging theories or models.

Mixed-method approaches – studies that use multiple approaches, such as a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, to determine the effects of an intervention and to address a range of research questions.

Feasibility – the degree to which intervention components are able to be implemented in naturalistic contexts or settings of interest.

Acceptability – consumer attitudes toward intervention strategies; the degree to which consumers find the procedures and outcomes acceptable in their daily lives.

Social validity – the relevance of the targeted outcomes to the everyday life of consumers.

Treatment integrity or fidelity – the extent to which individuals responsible for implementing an intervention can do so as intended by its designers.

Sustainability – the extent to which school staff or consumers can maintain the intervention over time without support from external agents.

RESOURCES

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