Personal Research Agenda

My personal research interests are in personality assessment. A recent survey of early career school psychologists indicates that approximately 70% desire additional training in personality assessment (Fowler & Harrison, 2001). A research agenda resulting in the organization and classification of the array of instruments available would be a means of reducing the complexity of this task in regard to instruction, practice, and research.

Practitioners generally prefer either objective or projective assessment. Research indicates (Mc Clelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989) that neither method of evaluation provides a complete picture of an individual’s functioning primarily because the constructs assessed are typically multi-faceted, with each type of assessment considering different aspects of the same or similar constructs. Cross-method assessment is an ongoing area of investigation for adults (Ganellen, 1996; Meyer, 1996, 1997, 1999); work with the assessment of school-aged populations is beginning (Flanagan, 1997; Flanagan & Primavera, 2001).

While practice has expanded and become more sophisticated in cognitive assessment, practice in personality assessment lags by comparison. A conceptual parallel to Cross- Battery Assessment (Mc Grew & Flanagan, 1998) for personality assessment could result in improved practice. Among the possible benefits are: 1) assessment practice could be made more systematic by developing a means to categorize measures, 2) increased customizing of assessment, 3) a base from which research studies can be systematically compared, 4) a framework for instructional practice, 5) improved assessment for youth, and 6) the evaluation of the treatment validity of our assessment tools/methods.

This personal research agenda includes continuing work investigating the relationship
among instruments. I am interested in investigating hypotheses I have generated regarding the instruments and how these the might be used, based on many years as a practitioner during which time I also taught personality assessment to school psychology students. I am particularly interested in examining the relationships between the TEMAS (Costantino, Malgady, & Rogler, 1988) and the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Murray, 1943) using Teglasi’s (2001) coding and the BASC. I am also interested in investigations of the TEMAS as a measure of social problem-solving and its potential treatment validity in cognitive behavioral practice. A literature using the TAT in performance-based contexts is developing (e.g. Ronan & Gibbs, 1990; Ronan, Colavito, & Hammontree, 1993; Ronan, Date, & Weisbrod, 1995; Ronan, Senn, Date, Maurer, House, Carroll, & Van Horn, 1996; Teglasi, 1998; Teglasi, 2001); one such application is problem-solving, which I consider a key construct. Problem-solving has been conceptualized as intervention target (Nezu, Nezu, & Perri, 1989). The extent and development of problem solving carries implications for treatment and prognosis; treatment will likely be less complicated for an individual possessing adequate problem-solving skills. Irrespective of the type and extent of psychopathology, the individual with stronger problem-solving skills can be ultimately expected to fare better.
References


Abstract

The assessment of child and adolescent personality is often linked to the theoretical orientation of the psychologist, with behavioral practitioners favoring objective measures, and psychodynamic psychologists preferring projectives. The reasons for the preference for objective measures by behaviorally-oriented psychologists appear to be the weak empirical validity of projectives (e.g., Lilienfeld, Wood, & Garb, 2001; Batsche & Peterson, 1983) and their association with psychodynamic theory. This is limiting as data suggest (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989) that objective and projective tests are each effective in assessing different aspects of functioning, with the argument being advanced that both types of assessment are needed to provide a thorough assessment of personality. Objective tests more effectively assess the characteristics that one attributes to oneself, while projective tests more effectively assess long-standing patterns in one’s psychological repertoire (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989).

Some behaviorally- oriented psychologists view projectives positively. Teglasi (1998) views these in a performance-based context to assess problem solving in action. Ronan and Gibbs (2000) used the Thematic Apperception Test (Murray, 1943) to evaluate the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral interventions. This is a potential bridge connecting projective assessment to real world functioning. Flanagan and Di Giuseppe (1999) suggested that the data obtained from an assessment using the TEMAS (Costantino, Malgady, & Rogler, 1988) could be helpful in intervention planning. Such usage of projective tests is consistent with the needs of school psychology practice. The rationale for this research is:
(1) Psychologists generally use either multiple objective or projective assessment devices, which may be limiting. Measures that might be combined are the TEMAS (Costantino, Malgady, & Rogler, 1988) and the Behavior Assessment System for Children, (BASC; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992), as data indicate (Flanagan & Primavera, 2000; Flanagan, 1999) that the TEMAS (a projective measure) and the BASC (an objective measure) assess different constructs, despite subscales with same or similar names. It should be determined whether this is observed for other combinations of instruments.

(2) Given the proliferation of new instruments, practitioners have more choices, making it critical to select instruments that maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. Objective measures should be used to determine levels of particular behaviors and affective states. Projective tests can provide the possible contexts in which particular behaviors and affect are expressed, and an opportunity to observe the problem solving skills in action. Projective test data does not provide the level of a particular behavior or affect, only data suggestive of their existence. The development of a classification system to guide practitioners and researchers in instrument selection is indicated.

(3) It is important to train psychologists to integrate data from multiple sources and to link assessment to referral question. An obvious application is in linking functional behavioral assessments to behavior intervention plans. Assessment strategies relying upon a single strategy will be less effective, as are strategies that use a universal format by which to report the data. Integrating assessment with intervention will make it more effective (Teglasi, 1998), which is consistent with cognitive-behavioral practice (e.g., Di Giuseppe (1991)).
References


Issues and Questions

Issues to be addressed are:

1. Developing better ways of assessing child and adolescent personality/social-emotional functioning.
2. Linking assessment and intervention.
3. Increasing the knowledge base in school psychology.

These issues are important because youth have school-related difficulty for an array of reasons. While these difficulties generally become manifest in academic domains, the issues are not necessarily learning difficulty. In addition to linguistic, environmental and social variables, children may perform poorly in school because of interpersonal, motivational and affective concerns. More effective assessment in the personality/social/emotional domain is likely to lead to the development of more effective interventions.

Questions to be asked are:

1. Can the development of a conceptual parallel to cross-battery assessment be developed for personality assessment devices?
2. To what extent can a set of parameters be developed to guide the customizing of personality assessment in a systematic manner?
   a) How might this be made user-friendly?
   b) How might this improve school psychology training in personality assessment?
3. How might better assessment lead to more effective outcomes for youth?
4. Can the treatment validity of personality assessment devices be established?
Context

The proposed study can be conducted in multiple settings, and should be conducted across different types of settings (i.e., public and private schools, special needs schools and clinical settings), so as to obtain data from a broad array of youth. It will also be important to consider racial/cultural/ethnic diversity; thus the setting should vary by region and type of area (urban vs. suburban). This research agenda is such that it may be possible to incorporate archival data into the study, as personality assessment using multiple measures is needed. Of particular interest will be situations in which projective and objective assessments have been given. Ideally, much of the background work (categorizing tests) will take place in a university setting; the data collection (the point of which is to provide corroborating evidence) will take place in the field.

Participants

Participants are school-aged youngsters and their parents and teachers, so as to obtain multiple informants. It may be wiser to conduct multiple studies as part of a larger research agenda. Specific hypotheses regarding the relationships among instruments could be developed based on test manuals/psychometric properties and literature to date. Strong statistical help (available to me) will be needed to assure that there are adequate numbers of participants to detect differences, although the use of effect sizes and confidence intervals rather than statistical significance, could reduce the number of individuals needed. In all, it is reasonable to assume that 500-1000 participants will be needed. For situations in which data are collected specifically for the study, it would be wise to offer some sort of workshop/talk as an incentive for participation. Graduate students and practicing school psychologists will be needed to evaluate the youngsters; some incentive for their work will be needed (individuals who are on assistantships, publication credit, workshops, as well as stipends could be considered). Some individuals may require training in
the administration of the newer projective measures/use of the coding systems; the primary investigator has been involved in collaborative work with the authors, making this a lesser concern.

**Budget**

The main expenses will be expendable items (such as test protocols) and stipends for those who serve as research assistants. Discounts on test materials for research purposes will be investigated. The cost of the project is estimated at $5000-$8000.

**Advantages and Disadvantages**

The primary advantage of conducting this multi-site project will be data that can assist practitioners to broaden their repertoire of assessment skills by using that which may already familiar, and that process of personality assessment can be made more systematic for practitioners and researchers, allowing better evaluation of interventions and comparison across studies. Another advantages will be the possibility of a sample more representative of the population in general; a disadvantage is that the subsamples may not be comparable. A disadvantage is that it will be more difficult to maintain quality of test administration, and more importantly, scoring/coding. Another disadvantage is the amount of training for the experimenters; an advantage, however, is that practitioners may ultimately use a wider variety of instruments. Logistical concerns are possible, with some sites likely to be receptive, but may not fully appreciate the need to conduct the studies under a set of conditions; others may vacillate, resulting in delays. Settings may also question the benefit to their students, which will most obviously impact decisions to participate. Similar to other studies, those who agree to participate will be a self-selected group, again compromising the representativeness of the sample.