

Research in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: An experience from Spain

by Patricia Navas

Over the last years, research has moved toward a more comprehensive understanding of intellectual and developmental disabilities. This understanding has led to a significant increase of assessment instruments in the field, stressing measures such as the Support Intensity Scale (Thompson, Bryant, Campbell, Craig, Hughes, Rotholz et al., 2004). However, during my doctoral studies in Psychology, I realized that in educational and clinical settings, the assessment process of ID has always been a problematic issue for teachers and psychologists. In most cases, this fact leads to an excessive reliance on standardized intelligence measures (Greenspan, 2012) in order to make eligibility decisions. In fact, the measurement of intellectual functioning has sometimes played an exclusive role in the assessment of ID. Consequently, the familiar categories of profound, severe, moderate, and mild intellectual disabilities have become a way to understand and react to the reality of having this condition.

Taking into account this situation, the research institute where I am currently working (Institute on Community Integration, INICO, located in Salamanca, Spain) started to develop the forthcoming AAIDD Diagnostic Adaptive Behavior Scale (DABS) in the Spanish context. The

DABS is focused on identifying significant limitations in adaptive behavior for a diagnosis of ID, assessing those domains of adaptive behavior (i.e., practical, conceptual, and social skills) that have resulted from factor analysis work, and including relevant items related to the concepts of gullibility, vulnerability, and social cognition, which are critical to identify mild intellectual disabilities. Item Response Theory (IRT) has been used through its development to reliably measure individual levels of performance across the continuum of adaptive skills. Also, due to the fact that adaptive behavior increases in complexity with age and then plateaus (Luckasson et al., 2002; Schalock et al., 2010), items are being calibrated, according to IRT models, for different age groups. An instrument with such characteristics would be very helpful in Spain, where there are no measures focused on diagnosis. In fact, the Inventory for Client and Agency Planning, ICAP (Bruininks, Hill, Weatherman, & Woodcock, 1986) is the only measure that clinicians currently have in order to assess adaptive behavior, and their aim is not diagnosis, but rather services planning and program evaluation.

Considering this situation, as a doctoral student, I focused my doctoral

(Continued on page 3)

IDD Research in Spain, cont'd

dissertation on the translation and adaptation of the DABS to the Spanish context.

Following the guidelines proposed by the International Test Commission (Hambleton & Bollwark, 1991), we developed the first version of the DABS in Spanish, which was applied to more than 1,000 children with and without intellectual disabilities. Only 32 children of 500 (all of them already diagnosed with having ID) had an adaptive behavior assessment. So, *How can clinical psychologist avoid false negatives or false positives when diagnosing? Are we sure that our children are receiving all the supports they need when just their IQ is considered?*

This leads us to emphasize the importance of using a multidimensional perspective when diagnosing, leaving behind systems that only include intelligence measures. The adoption of new approaches to the study of intellectual disability has highlighted the

need for multidimensional classification systems based on the particular needs and circumstances of each individual. Although achieving a consensus on diagnostic instruments to be used in daily practice is not easy, it is essential to ensure the existence of instrument validity and reliability for the assessment process (Schalock et al., 2010). The development of the DABS in our context constitutes the first real effort to develop an instrument exclusively focused on the diagnosis of significant limitations in adaptive behavior. The implications of using a diagnostic measure like the DABS are profound given the consideration that it would be used for determining specific programs or service eligibility criteria.

Feel free to contact me for more information:
patricianavas@usal.es

THANK YOU!

The AAIDD Student and Early Career Professional Special Interest Group wants to extend its thanks to **Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.** For the past three years, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. has sponsored the AAIDD Student and Early Career Professional Special Interest Group Happy Hour at the AAIDD Annual Meeting, including at the most recent meeting in Charlotte, NC. By sponsoring the Happy

Hour, which is held at local bar or restaurant near the conference hotel, Brookes has created a unique opportunity for students and early career professionals to gather together, network, and develop lasting and meaningful relationships. Further, by inviting AAIDD Guides, leaders, and members that support students and early career issues, members of the SECP SIG have the chance to get to know leaders in the field in an informal, comfortable atmosphere. The support from Brookes has also created the opportunity for SECP SIG members to get to know editors at Brookes and to learn more about publishing with Brookes and the resources that Brookes offers for professionals in the field. This year approximately 75 students, early career professionals, and AAIDD leaders attended the Happy Hour and benefited from Brookes support. The Happy Hour provides a great opportunity for AAIDD, the SECP SIG, and Brookes to build relationships and support the next generation of leaders in the field. **THANKS BROOKES!**



BROOKES
PUBLISHING CO.
www.brookespublishing.com