

# Practice Guidelines in school psychology: Issues and directions for evidence-based interventions in practice and training

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## Abstract

Practice Guidelines have become increasingly popular at the national and international level. Practice Guidelines are a natural extension of the “evidence-based intervention” movement, and could be a mechanism to promote the use of evidence-based interventions within the field of school psychology practice and training. In this paper we review the use of Practice Guidelines in other fields and the promise and potential pitfalls associated with the development and application of Practice Guidelines within the field of school psychology. Recommendations for how to avert some of the difficulties faced by other disciplines in the development and application of Practice Guidelines are discussed. Suggestions for next steps in the profession and future research are noted.

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The development and implementation of evidence-based interventions (EBIs) is well underway in psychology and education. This initiative towards an empirical basis for the use of interventions is an extension of the scientist–practitioner

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model<sup>1</sup> (Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2003; Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2000, 2002; Stoiber & Kratochwill, 2000, 2002). The development of Practice Guidelines is a natural extension of the international movement towards “evidence-based” practice (Rowland & Gross, 2000) and has been recommended as a “next step” in the use of EBIs in practice (see Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2003; Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2002). Practice Guidelines have a long history of application in medicine and psychiatry but, have received less attention in the field of psychology and education. The application of Practice Guidelines is an important innovation in that it has implications for how EBIs are implemented in schools and other applied settings. The purpose of this paper is to review the development of Practice Guidelines among related disciplines of professional practice, with a special emphasis on the issues surrounding the development and application of Practice Guidelines for the profession of school psychology.

### Clarification of terminology

Within the EBI initiative, a number of different terms have been used to refer to overlapping constructs and phenomena. In this section we briefly outline the meaning of relevant terms to assist the reader in understanding the context for references to Practice Guidelines in this paper and in the professional literature.

#### *Empirically validated treatment/intervention (EVT)*

EVT was an early term used by the Task Force on Promotion and Dissemination of Psychological Procedures (1995) to refer to a treatment validated by experimental research (see Chambless & Ollendick, 2001). The term has fallen out of favor because it is increasingly recognized that a treatment is never completely validated. Therefore, the term evidence-based or scientifically supported in research has been used more recently in psychology and education (see below).

#### *Evidence-based treatment/intervention (EBI)*

The term EBI is current and used in both the clinical and school psychology literatures to refer to an intervention that meets criteria of a task force for support on a wide range of methodological and statistical features (e.g., Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2002; Weisz & Hawley, 2002). Typically, experimental (group and single-participant) methodologies are the corner-stone of this approach to designation of an intervention as evidence-based. The

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<sup>1</sup> However, not all have embraced the Boulder Model, and some have argued that the time has come for psychologists to “abandon the monolithic scientist–practitioner model” and instead focus attention on training psychologists to function in its three discrete sub-components: (a) The clinical scientist, responsible for generating exploratory research on efficacy, (b) The evaluative scientist, conducting practical research on the development and implementation of issues, and (c) the empirical clinician, who consumes and applies research (Milne & Paxton, 1998). This breakdown of roles is based on the assumption that all psychologists will function as empirical clinicians, a large proportion of psychologists will participate at least occasionally as evaluative scientists, but only a small number of psychologists would be expected to participate in exploratory research.

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