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Description automatically generatedMary Lally received funding from the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science for her research entitled “*The effects of defusion and values exercises on special education teacher’s measures of stress and committed actions*.”**

Mary Lally, a third-year doctoral student in the Applied Behavior Analysis Online Department grant-funded project, will determine if training in three ACT processes (committed actions, values, and defusion) increases overt values-driven behaviors while reducing stress levels among special education teachers.

Teaching can be a stressful profession, particularly in special education. The stress experienced among teachers may hamper relationships with students and lead many teachers to leave the field. In particular, special education teachers working with students with emotional and behavioral difficulties report higher occupational stress rates, job-related stress, and attrition. Additionally, special education teachers working with students with emotional and behavioral problems are approximately six times more likely to leave the classroom than other special education teachers. Moreover, teachers report that working with children with Autism and emotional difficulties present the most stress. Therefore, Mary’s proposal recognizes the need for strategies that address student behaviors while decreasing teachers’ stress levels. As such, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) training is one method that has demonstrated high acceptability when addressing private verbal behaviors in a classroom setting. Similarly, Behavioral Skills Training (BST) research has been shown that it is an effective staff training procedure. Yet, there has been little research that examines the effects of BST plus ACT interventions on teachers’ and students’ overt behaviors.

The proposed research objectives will determine if training in three ACT processes (committed actions, values, and defusion) increases overt values-driven behaviors while reducing special education teachers’ stress levels. Additionally, her research will attempt to determine if ACT-based training following BST results in improved treatment fidelity scores for guided compliance procedures implemented in a classroom setting.

Mary’s proposal includes the support of her faculty mentor Dr. Yors Garcia and TCSPP faculty Dr. Amanda Mahoney, and Dr. Tom Szabo, faculty at the Florida Institute of Technology.