

THE CHANGING ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS
IN SCHOOL-WIDE MODELS OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

BY

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To my family

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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THE CHANGING ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS
IN SCHOOL-WIDE MODELS OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

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The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) allows states the use of a process based on a child's response to scientific, research-based intervention as a means to assist in the determination of a specific learning disability (SLD). As a result, the traditional role of the school psychologist as a test administrator has changed. No longer is SLD required to be determined by the discrepancy between a student's scores on an intellectual assessment and an academic achievement battery. Instead, across the United States, school-wide approaches to determining a student's response to intervention (RTI) are being established. However, these approaches to RTI can be implemented in a variety of ways and this variance in practice has led to role confusion and anxiety among school psychologists.

This descriptive study was designed to examine the perceptions of school psychologists regarding their changing roles and patterns of practice in a large school district in Florida. Qualitative methods were used and sources of data included interviews and reviews of documents and artifacts. A sense-making perspective was used in this analysis to provide information regarding role enactment and strengthening

systems to meet the needs of school psychologists as they engage in implementing school-wide approaches to RTI.

The findings suggest these psychologists made sense of their changing roles by viewing themselves as members of a helping profession. Each person acknowledged their professional roles have changed in recent years, and some were more comfortable than others with these changes. The evidence suggests these school psychologists are redefining their roles by building on personal strengths and speaking up more confidently about their professional concerns. Their readiness and preparedness for adapting to changes in their professional lives appeared to be influenced by prior experience, the focus of their graduate training, and their personal strengths. These practitioners identified district-based professional development targeted to practical and specific needs in schools, and strong and supportive school-based leadership as being crucial to meeting their needs in implementing RTI successfully.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Study

The reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA 2004) allows states the use of a process based on a child's response to scientific, research-based intervention as a means to assist in the determination of a specific learning disability (SLD). As a result, the traditional role of the school psychologist as a test administrator has changed (Canter, 2006). No longer is SLD required to be determined by the discrepancy between a student's scores on an intellectual assessment and an academic achievement battery. Instead, across the United States, school-wide approaches to determining a student's response to intervention (RTI) are being established. However, these approaches to RTI can be implemented in a variety of ways and this variance in practice has led to role confusion and anxiety among school psychologists (Pluymert, 2008).

RTI can be defined as "the systematic use of data-based decision making to most efficiently allocate resources to enhance learning outcomes for all children" (Burns & VanDerHeyden, 2006, p. 3). Specifically, according to IDEA 2004, states were no longer required to consider the existence of a significant discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic achievement and now could utilize information obtained regarding a child's response to research based interventions when determining if a specific learning disability exists (20 U.S.C. § 1414[b][6]).

With regard to quality learning experiences, the goal of an educational system is to provide a safe, caring, rigorous learning environment for a diverse student body that offers multiple opportunities for success and supports student achievement and

development (District School Board of Collier County, 2010). One objective designed to meet this goal is to ensure all students are immersed in data-driven, evidence-based curricular programs that provide diverse learning experiences and multiple opportunities to master state educational standards. Fully implementing RTI through the team-based problem solving method is one strategy that is being utilized. During the problem solving process, the learning and/or behavioral needs of the student are matched with instructional resources. The student's learning and/or behavioral problem is defined by examining the difference between what is expected and what is occurring. The team then uses data to analyze why this discrepancy is occurring. A performance goal is determined and an intervention plan is developed. During this stage, the team decides the specifics related to the monitoring of the student's progress. The resulting data are then used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. This process is continual and ongoing (Florida Response to Intervention, 2011). What remains unclear is how school psychologists will be involved in this process. Specifically, what will be the role of the school psychologist? School psychologists must now transform their role from one of psychometrist to something else. The "what else" is developing at this time.

This descriptive study is designed to examine the perceptions of school psychologists regarding their roles and their patterns of practice in a large school district in Florida. The district is considered advanced in its implementation of RTI due to the fact that it was chosen by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) as a pilot district and, as a result, received extensive training and support. The goal of this study is to provide information regarding role enactment to assist school psychologists in the implementation of RTI and in adaptation to their changing roles. Federal and state

legislation affect the roles of all school personnel, including school psychologists, and RTI represents a significant paradigm shift along with significant legislative changes. This has led to significant changes in the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists.

Background of the Problem

Several federal policies have influenced the adoption of RTI. In 1965, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) became the first major federal legislation to provide funding to public schools. This legislation was reauthorized in 2001 and became known as the *No Child Left Behind Act* or NCLB. The implementation of evidence-based practices and the monitoring of student progress to verify effectiveness were emphasized throughout NCLB. The focus of this act was to improve the performance of all students (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005).

Ten years after the initial enactment of the ESEA, the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EAHCA), or Public Law 94-142, was first passed into law in 1975. The four original purposes of the EAHCA were (a) to guarantee that children with disabilities had a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasized special education and related services available to them, (b) to protect the rights of identified children and their parents, (c) to assist states and local educational agencies in providing an appropriate education, and (d) to assess and ensure the effectiveness of these efforts. In order to identify students with SLD, most states implemented an IQ-achievement discrepancy formula (Smith, 2005), although such a formula was never required by federal law.

Federal special education law is reauthorized on a regular basis, and in 1990, the name of the statute was changed to the IDEA. Components of NCLB were integrated

into the most recent reauthorization of IDEA in 2004. These components included the requirement for scientifically based instruction, an evaluation of the progress of the student, and the use of data in making decisions. IDEA 2004 also allowed school districts to utilize these data when determining eligibility for SLD rather than the previous method of documenting an ability-achievement discrepancy (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). As previously noted, districts may now identify students with learning disabilities based on a child's response to scientific, research-based interventions as part of the special education evaluation procedures. Florida has adopted an RTI process when identifying students with an emotional or behavioral disorder (E/BD) as well as SLD. However, the change in SLD identification for special education eligibility is much more dramatic than the change in the identification criteria for E/BD, and represents a significant change from previous practice. It should be noted that the definition of SLD in federal law and Florida has remained unchanged, but the process by which disabilities are identified has undergone significant revisions.

The definition of SLD in Florida's regulations runs parallel to federal law and reads as follows:

A specific learning disability is defined as a disorder in one or more of the basic learning processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest in significant difficulties affecting the ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematics. Associated conditions may include, but are not limited to, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, or developmental aphasia. A specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of a visual, hearing, motor, intellectual, or emotional/behavioral disability, limited English proficiency, or environmental, cultural, or economic factors. (State Board of Education Rule 6A-6.03018, F.A.C, 2009)

Typically school psychologists have played a prominent role in administering intellectual assessments and determining eligibility for special education services. The

shift in policy to RTI is significant because school psychologists are forced to take on a new and different role within schools. Now it is necessary for these professionals to go beyond individual diagnosis and treatment and emphasize prevention, early intervention, instructional design, mental health services, and family support. Many practicing school psychologists were initially prepared to perform the more traditional role of test administrator and face this change with difficulties and fear (Canter, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Over four decades, legislation established a link between school psychologists and special education programs along with influencing the roles of school psychologists. The use of the RTI model allows for a more expanded role for school psychologists. Possibilities could include treatment of mental health issues, general education interventions, behavior modification procedures, and program evaluation, but few national studies have been completed regarding the actual roles of school psychologists since the passage of IDEA 2004 (Larson & Choi, 2010).

Presently, most states are in some phase of RTI development. As of 2009, 15 states had adopted an RTI model, but 13 of the 15 states were continuing to use both a discrepancy formula and RTI to determine eligibility for a specific learning disability. Twenty-two states were in a development phase, 10 states were providing guidance to schools and districts, and three states had not addressed RTI at that time (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). Florida was one of the states using the combination criteria, but as of 2010, is now only utilizing RTI results when determining SLD eligibility.

School psychologists have many concerns regarding the effect of an RTI approach on the profession. Some are concerned that the lesser emphasis on

intelligence and achievement testing will lead to fewer positions in school systems. Other concerns are related to the skills required to take on other roles and functions. A lack of professional development, a lack of fidelity of intervention implementation, and vagueness of special education eligibility criteria have all been mentioned as concerns when using this model (Allison & Upah, 2006; Sullivan & Long, 2010; Wnek, Klein, & Bracken, 2008). School psychologists across the nation are dealing with these questions and concerns..

Purpose of the Study

Research related to RTI has been growing and the widespread implementation of using RTI to determine eligibility for special services has necessitated school psychologists to re-examine their roles. As their responsibilities shift away from traditional assessment, what will be the roles of school psychologists in an RTI world? The experience of practitioners in a large Florida school district provides a basis for this study. This district received extensive training and support from the state as a pilot district. The purpose of this study is to investigate patterns of practice in this school district to determine what these patterns suggest about the changing roles of contemporary school psychologists.

Research Questions

The overall question guiding this study is this: How do school psychologists describe what they do and what they need as they make sense of their changing roles in schools that have adopted an RTI process? Sub-questions guiding this inquiry include:

1. How do school psychologists describe their professional responsibilities?
2. How do they perceive their current practice within an RTI framework?

3. How do they make sense of their changing roles?
4. How prepared do they feel for enacting their roles and meeting their responsibilities in their current assignments?
5. What do they need to strengthen their practice within the RTI framework?

A sense-making perspective informs this analysis (Dervin, 1998). Sense-making is an approach to studying users and designing systems to meet their needs. This approach suggests that user-centered ideas about a particular situation form the basis for conceptualizing and using data. The underlying assumptions of this perspective are based on perceived gaps between expectations and reality in a given situation and what might help resolve these discrepancies. Similar to Youngs, Jones, and Low's (2011) application of sense-making theory to understanding teachers' roles, this theory can be applied to school psychologists. Sense-making theory can help explain how school psychologists reconcile the student and systemic needs and role expectations of their position as well as their relationships with colleagues, administrators, and other educational personnel. Since the role of school psychologists has not been clearly defined within the framework of RTI, school psychologists themselves must develop their own interpretations of the expectations placed on them and this occurs by placing new information into preexisting cognitive frameworks.

Sense-making occurs when there is a shock to the organizational system that either produces uncertainty or ambiguity (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006). RTI has certainly shocked the educational system and roles of personnel within the system. Sense-making affords a way for school psychologists to return a sense of stability in their work lives. The key to sense-making is the idea that it allows people to make

sense of the disruptions to their lives. Sense-making is an ongoing process and involves both rational and emotional responses.

Overview of Methods

The methodology for this study includes interviews and reviews of assessment documents and artifacts. Participants include school psychologists working in elementary schools in a large district located in Florida, a state that widely uses the problem solving method when identifying students for special education eligibility. The sample includes six school psychologists working in elementary schools and the supervisor of psychological services in a large pilot district. Each research question was addressed separately through the interviews. A detailed description of the methodology and data analysis is described in Chapter 3.

Limitations/Assumptions

The data collection methods used in this study contained certain limitations. First, data collected using interviews were subjected to the perceptions or views of the researcher. Precautions regarding researcher bias are addressed in Chapter 3. Next, this study focused on school psychologists working primarily in elementary schools in one district in Florida. Therefore, readers of the research must make decisions regarding the transferability to other settings and to other participants.

Interviews were conducted with staff members who were selected by their supervisor and volunteered to participate in this study. The supervisor was asked to nominate staff members who, in his opinion, were managing the changes in roles effectively. The school psychologists were purposively selected so the information may not be generalizable to all school psychologists. Another limitation involves the time spent interviewing participants. Due to time constraints, each participant was able to be

interviewed one time. Despite opportunities for member checks through the use of email and telephone, the lack of face-to-face contact may have limited the amount of information obtained.

At the time of this study, the researcher was employed as a school psychologist in a different district within the same state. One reason for exploring this topic was to investigate how personnel in the same positions were managing the changes to their roles and responsibilities. This researcher acknowledges certain biases regarding the role of the school psychologist in RTI and using RTI to determine eligibility for special education services. However, the researcher understands the importance of bracketing subjectivity in the questioning and interpretation of information. Participants were selected from a different region of the state and were unknown to the researcher. Member checks were conducted to limit researcher bias. .

Definitions

DISCREPANCY MODEL.	A discrepancy between a student's intellectual ability and assessed achievement in one or more of the following areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, reading fluency, mathematics calculation, and mathematics reasoning. This model has been used to identify the presence of a specific learning disability.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI).	"The systematic use of data-based decision making to most efficiently allocate resources to enhance learning outcomes for all children" (Burns & VanDerHeyden, 2006, p. 3). RTI involves screening all students, providing evidence-based interventions to students in need, and monitoring progress frequently.
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST.	A type of psychologist that works within school systems to help students with academic, emotional, and behavioral issues. School psychologists collaborate with parents, students, teachers, and administrators and

provide services in assessment, consultation, intervention, and program evaluation.

SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY (SLD). A disorder in one or more of the basic learning processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest in significant difficulties affecting the ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematics. (State Board of Education Rule 6A-6.03018, F.A.C, 2009)

Significance of the Study

School psychologists are being asked to take a role in providing services that link assessment with intervention, instead of identifying students with academic, behavioral, or emotional difficulties (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). The discrepancy method is no longer a required part of federally mandated procedures used for identifying students with SLD. Thus, what has been a major component of most practicing school psychologists' typical job responsibilities is no longer required by law. Florida is now mandated to utilize the results of a student's response to interventions when determining eligibility for special programs. Because school psychologists have been included as one of several qualified professionals involved in special education eligibility decisions, they must have knowledge of a variety of assessment methods, and of effective instruction and intervention methods. This domain of knowledge is necessary in order to make decisions about the appropriateness of prior educational opportunities or to make recommendations regarding intervention required for students. Without this knowledge base, it is challenging for school psychologists to effectively participate in RTI.

School psychologists face a number of challenges about how to approach assessment in general and RTI specifically (Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006). The implementation of evidence-based interventions in schools and the measurement of the

results is becoming one of the major functions of the school psychologist and many school psychologists in the workforce are apprehensive regarding this change in their roles. Given the apparent confusion in the literature on how to implement the law in the context of RTI, and what should be included in a comprehensive evaluation, it is important to examine current patterns of practice among school psychologists.

Overview of the Dissertation

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the problem to be studied, purposes for the study, and need for the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature relevant to historical and current education legislation and presents studies focused on response to intervention, both nationally and locally. Included in the review is an overview of the Florida school-based problem solving model. Chapter 3 contains the methodology including the research design, and procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the results of the analysis and a discussion of the findings. Chapter 5 addresses the conclusions of the study, the implications for practice, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

To examine the changing roles of school psychologists in contemporary schools, studies were selected that generally examined the problem solving method and RTI, along with the role of school psychologist in this process in public schools in the United States. Professional literature was selected that generally examined the problem-solving method, RTI, and also the role of the school psychologist. Using the search terms *problem solving method*, *response to intervention*, *learning disabilities*, *school psychologist*, and *special education*, studies were located in various databases including EBSCO, Academic Search Premier, Professional Development Collection, PsycINFO, and Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection as available through the University of Florida electronic resources.

Traditional Roles and Functions of School Psychologists

School psychologists are unique in that they are trained in both psychology and education and are typically employed in public schools. Children and their parents are the primary clientele. The two predominant roles that emerged for school psychologists since the passage of EAHCA included the “sorter” and “repairer” (Fagan, 2008). The role of “sorter” referred to the practice of completing psychoeducational assessments of children’s abilities to determine eligibility for special education programs. Fagan described the “repairer” role as the provider of academic remediation and short-term counseling.

Within the history of this professional field, the years from 1890-1969 are often referred to as the “hybrid years” since school psychology was a blend of many kinds of practitioners from education and psychology. The dominant role was assessment for

special class placement. The foundations of school psychology were formed from two approaches based on the work of Lightner Witmer and G. Stanley Hall. Lightner Witmer adopted a clinical model, which focused on providing services to individuals. In 1896, he established the first psychological clinic at the University of Pennsylvania and conducted assessments of school-aged children's cognitive abilities using assessment tools such as the cylinder and form board and letter-cancelling tests. Witmer's primary goal was to prevent and intervene in the learning problems of students, which was needed after the passage of compulsory schooling laws beginning in the midnineteenth century (Fagan, 1992).

In contrast to Witmer's focus on the individual, G. Stanley Hall's area of interest was in the area of developing normative characteristics for groups. He believed that psychologists could make educational contributions at the system level and his services were directed more towards administrators, teachers, and parents. Scientists who studied under Whitmer and Hall brought more awareness to the problems in schools and greater identity to the psychologists who practiced in schools (Fagan, 1992).

Some special education services were available in urban and rural communities by 1910. Personnel were needed to assist in the selection and placement of children for these services and the role of school psychologist evolved as a "gatekeeper" for these services. This role can be traced back to 1915 when Arnold Gesell was hired as the first school psychologist in Connecticut. Duties included assessing students and placing them in special programs (Larson & Choi, 2010). The title of school psychologist was now associated with public school systems. It also became associated with providing services to students with mental disabilities and placing them in special education. In

contrast to Hall's system and context focus, Witmer's individual approach was now emphasized. School psychology was a blend of various educational and psychological practitioners and the dominant role was to conduct psycho-educational assessment for special class placement (Braden, DiMarino-Linnen, & Good, 2001).

The testing movement then began in earnest when Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon published the first version of the Binet-Simon Scales in 1905. This test was translated into English by Henry Goddard in 1908 and was administered across the United States. The purpose of this test was to measure mental retardation based on normative developmental data (Braden et al., 2001). According to Sarason (1976), "From the time that the 1916 revision of the Binet test appeared – with its detailed instructions, scoring criteria, classifications, and statistical bases – the school psychologist was doomed to the role of psychometrician" (p. 585).

In 1954, the Work Conference on the Qualifications and Training of School Psychologists (better known as the Thayer Conference) was held in New York. This was the first national-level conference organized to discuss problems and issues related to school psychology. Topics such as necessary training, a code of ethics, practitioner-to-student ratios, certification and credentialing requirements, and job requirements were discussed. A formal definition of a school psychologist was also developed, which stated that

a school psychologist is a psychologist with training and experience in education. He uses his specialized knowledge of assessment, learning, and interpersonal relationships to assist school personnel to enrich the experience and growth of all children and to recognize and deal with exceptional children. (Cutts, as cited in Fagan, 2005 p. 232-233)

School psychologists were considered to be a psychologist first rather than an educator and their primary duties were to help teachers, administrators, and other personnel to help all children (Fagan, 2005).

Since that time, universities have developed school psychology programs at the undergraduate and graduate level and the literature has expanded to include many professional journals and books related to school psychology. School psychologists became identified with a professional organization in 1945, when the American Psychological Association (APA) reorganized into a divisional structure that included Division 16 for school psychologists. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) was founded in 1969 as the first national organization specifically for school psychologists .

The years since 1970 have become known as the “thoroughbred years” in the field of school psychology. This was a time of growth in the university programs, practitioners in the field, state and national associations, literature, and regulations, which have all contributed to the existence of school psychology. After EAHCA was passed in 1975, there was an enormous growth in the number of school psychologists across the nation. There were approximately 5000 school psychologists in 1970 and this number grew to 20,000 in 1988. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) began determining educational and professional qualifications and standards and also began working to influence decisions made by outside agencies. However, traditional psycho-educational assessments remained the primary function of school psychologists. Studies indicate that before the passage of IDEA 2004, school psychologists spent half of their time or more conducting traditional psycho-educational

assessments, which typically included the measurement of intellectual, academic, and cognitive processing abilities and about 20% of their time providing direct or indirect interventions (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall, 2002; Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker, 1999; Larson & Choi, 2010; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). These results were then utilized to determine whether or not a student was eligible for special education services (Larson & Choi, 2010). However, Curtis, Lopez, et al. (2008) discovered that the number of evaluations completed by school psychologists has decreased but the percent of work time related to special education activities has substantially increased and represents more than 80% of a school psychologists' overall time.

Current versus Preferred Roles of School Psychologists

School psychologists should be able to conceptualize problems, substantiate their decisions using data, collaborate with others to solve difficulties, and review and examine results (Fagan & Wise, 2007). These researchers identified three traditional roles and accompanying skills that are necessary for this to be accomplished: assessment, intervention, and consultation. The roles of school psychologists have undergone significant changes as they have been asked to perform new and expanding roles built around a problem-solving model, which have reinvented and redefined the profession. The nature of the work within the schools in the future will be defined by areas of professional skill and competence, rather than by title, because school psychologists will continue to be at various levels of role and function development (Ysseldyke et al., 1996).

Assessment

Throughout the development of school psychology's history, the traditional role of the school psychologist has been the assessment of children, which remains a major focus (Fagan & Wise, 2007). Assessment is described as a problem-solving or information-gathering process that enables the school psychologist to understand the difficulties that a child may be experiencing and to develop interventions that will address these difficulties. It is important for assessment to be related to prevention and intervention (Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

The nature of assessment has changed and now emphasizes the problem-solving method and RTI practices in both general and special education. The concept of refer-test-place is no longer considered best practice (Reschly, 2008). The focus of assessments will focus increasingly on interventions, specifically, ways in which the environment can be changed to improve behavior and learning. School psychologists need to gather data on school systems, classroom environments, and should be knowledgeable in addressing the components of the instructional environment that facilitate or interfere with learning, as well as how environmental factors and student characteristics interact to affect outcomes (Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

Intervention

The recommendation and selection of intervention strategies emerge from the assessment phase, and involve creativity, common sense, as well as familiarity with the research literature. The concept of progress monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention is also crucial (Fagan & Wise, 2007). Intervention is defined as a "planned modification of the environment made for the purpose of altering behavior in a

specified way” (Tilly & Flugum, 1995, p. 485). A revised definition includes the intent of closing the gap between a student’s performance and the expectation. The designing, implementing, and evaluating of interventions at all levels is crucial in ensuring improved outcomes for all students (Upah, 2008).

Consultation

Consultation strengthens the chances that appropriate services recommended in the assessment process will be provided. It is a mutual problem-solving process, along with a collaborative relationship, between professionals and can involve working with individuals, groups, or systems. To engage in this process, the school psychologist must have a strong knowledge base, as well as good communication and interpersonal skills. This process allows the school psychologist to improve the functioning of larger groups of students (Fagan & Wise, 2007).

School psychologists have reported that they feel limited in their role at times (Lund, Reschly, & Martin, 1998; Reschly, 2000; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). Legislation demands that schools find children in need of special services, inform and educate parents as to their right to these services, and conduct student evaluations to determine eligibility for these services at the parents' request (Bartlett, Etscheidt, & Weisenstein, 2007; Prasse, 2008). Much of this responsibility has become part of the job description for school psychologists instead of providing psychological services such as counseling or consultation. As the legislation mandates these services, many school psychologists feel overwhelmed by large student caseloads, increased expectations, diminishing resources, and excessive paperwork (Merrell et al., 2006). This discrepancy between what many school psychologists thought the profession was going to be like and the

actual expectations of the profession in many cases may cause anxiety. Literature consistently shows that while school psychologists are providing a variety of functions within the schools, there seems to be more of an emphasis placed on special education-related assessments and less of an emphasis on intervention, consultation, research, and functions that school psychologists are trained in and wish to do (Fagan & Wise, 2007). Studies have found that school psychologists would rather spend a greater amount of time providing interventions and consultative services with all students instead of spending the majority of their time completing evaluations used for special education eligibility determinations (Levinson, 1990; Lund et al., 1998; Reschly, 2000; Reschly & Wilson, 1995).

Miller, Witt, and Finley (1981) interviewed 40 school psychologists in the Rocky Mountain Region to obtain their perceptions of satisfaction regarding aspects of their work. Areas most frequently reported as providing satisfaction included flexibility and freedom when planning their time and activities, helping others, working with competent colleagues, and the challenge, variety, and importance of what they do. Negative aspects were related to time pressures and the stress of high case loads, conducting large numbers of evaluations, and the amount of clerical duties. Other areas of dissatisfaction included the inability to follow through after placement meetings, ambiguous placement guidelines, the length of time between referrals and services, the requirement to sometimes label children inappropriately so that they could receive services, and the feelings of loneliness and isolation due to itinerant status.

Many of these same concerns continue to remain issues within the field of school psychology today (Hosp & Reschly, 2002; VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007;

Wilczynski, Mandal, & Fusilier, 2000). NASP surveyed over 1000 school psychologists and responses were grouped by geographical regions. School psychologists in each of the eight regions spent one half or more of their time in assessment activities. The regions with the most hours spent completing assessments reported the least time providing direct interventions. Overall, school psychologists in each region reported preferring to spend less time than they do on educational assessments and wanting to spend more time providing direct interventions and participating in problem-solving consultations. School psychologists in all regions indicated satisfaction with their duties but were dissatisfied with the lack of opportunity for advancement or promotion (Hosp & Reschly, 2002).

VanVoorhies and Levinson (2006) analyzed the results of two national studies and six state studies totaling 2,116 participants. Results indicated that nearly 85% of school psychologists were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs. The factors that were rated as most satisfying included relationships with coworkers, the opportunity to stay busy on the job, the opportunity to work independently, and the opportunity to be of service to others. Compensation, school policies and practices, and opportunities for advancement were among the least satisfying factors.

VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Gilbertson (2007) examined the effects of using a response to intervention model on the number of students referred for a special education evaluation at five elementary schools in Arizona. Fewer evaluations were conducted and evaluated students were more likely to qualify for services when RTI data were included in the team decision-making process. This reduced time spent on unnecessary eligibility testing and reduced costs to a district. An interesting finding was

that RTI data were not considered in the decision making when a psychologist that was not trained in the RTI model was part of the team, but was when a trained psychologist was part of the decision-making process. This finding provides preliminary evidence that the use of data may require specific training, that the correct use of data may contribute to the decline in number of evaluations and increase in the percentage of children qualifying for services who were evaluated, and school psychologists play an important role in correct use of the data.

Classification and Identification of Specific Learning Disabilities

Discrepancy Model

After EAHCA went into effect in 1975, the lack of clear criteria for determining eligibility for a specific learning disability resulted in inconsistencies in decision making and a high rate of identification. The U.S. Office of Education operationalized this definition in 1977 and this was maintained in IDEA 1992 and 1997. The definition included:

A severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the following areas: (1) oral expression; (2) listening comprehension; (3) written expression; (4) basic reading skill; (5) reading comprehension; (6) mathematics calculation; or (7) mathematic reasoning. The child may not be identified as having a specific learning disability if the discrepancy between ability and achievement is primarily the result of: (1) a visual, hearing, or motor handicap; (2) mental retardation; (3) emotional disturbance, or (4) environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (United States Office of Education, 1977, as cited in Fletcher, Foorman, Boudousquie, Barnes, Schatschneider, & Francis, 2002)

This was consistent with the belief that students with a specific learning disability usually exhibited a profile of strengths and weaknesses. Significant differences lead to learning at or above an obtained IQ score in some areas but with great difficulty in other areas (Mather & Gregg, 2006).

Not much scientific support for this approach has been identified and many organizations and committees have fought for alternative definitions. Some researchers (Fletcher, Francis, et al., 1998; Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Fletcher, & Shaywitz, 1996; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000) claim that the use of this definition results in excessive false negatives and false positives and should not be utilized as the primary basis for identification of a learning disability. In 2003, NASP proposed that Congress “eliminate use of the scientifically unsupported ability-achievement discrepancy requirement” (p. 2).

Wright (2007) discussed the fact that IQ-achievement discrepancies are based on single-session scores collected at one point in time. This one time may not provide an accurate representation of the child’s abilities and difficulties. Wright argued this has also contributed to the issue of overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

Another problem with the reliance on the discrepancy model used to determine eligibility was that students with a disability were often left unidentified and struggled academically well into the upper grades of elementary school until the discrepancy became significant enough to warrant services (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005). In most instances, it is easier to remediate delays if interventions are implemented sooner rather than later. Also, it was argued that this identification process did not provide much valuable information that could be used to make instructional decisions.

Despite the problems associated with the discrepancy model, some researchers do not advocate completely eliminating this model and relying completely on the use of RTI to determine the presence of a specific learning disability (Hale, Naglieri, Kaufman, & Kavale, 2004; Kavale, Kaufman, Naglieri, & Hale, 2005; Mather & Gregg, 2006;

Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2002). They do agree that the use of a simple formula has contributed to the overuse and misuse by school systems, and the use of a single score is not supported by best practice. However, norm-referenced assessments do provide information as to the presence, nature, and severity of a disability, and information regarding strengths that can be used to improve academic functioning (Schrank, Teglassi, Wolf, Miller, Caterino, & Reynolds, 2005). Some researchers (Kavale et al., 2005) believe that comprehensive evaluations of intellectual and cognitive skills are essential after determining a child did not respond to well-designed interventions. As stated in the most recent reauthorization of IDEA, the definition of a specific learning disability includes the presence of “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes” and direct assessment contributes to this determination (Kavale, Holdnack, & Mostert, 2006, p. 115).

Response to Intervention Model

Documented difficulties such as disproportionate representation in special education of students from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds, a lack of connection between evaluation results and instruction, and a delay of services are among the reasons associated with the criticisms of the discrepancy model. RTI has been proposed as an alternative to the discrepancy model when determining eligibility for special services under the classification of SLD (Florida Department of Education, 2006). This approach involves the monitoring of a change in a student’s performance over time that presumably is the result of an intervention.

With regard to the representation of certain groups in special education, African-American and American Indian/Alaskan Native children have represented the highest percentages in all categories of disabilities (NCES, 2004).. In addition, the percentage

of time children spend in general education classes varies by race/ethnicity. During 2004-05, almost 57% of White students spent 80% or more in general education classes in contrast to 41% of African-American students and almost 48% of Hispanic students. Slightly more than 13% of White children spent less than 40% of their day in general education classrooms, compared to slightly over 26% of African-American students and 22% of Hispanic children. Not only do more minority children receive special education services, they spend less of their day in general education classrooms.

Klingner et al. (2005) rejected the idea that culturally and linguistically diverse students are overrepresented in special education because they are more likely to have true disabilities. Instead, these authors discussed many factors as contributing to overrepresentation such as contextual issues. One factor includes the decision-making processes used to determine special education eligibility, As stated by Garcia and Ortiz (2004), when RTI is implemented with culturally and linguistically diverse populations, classroom instruction, interventions, and the referral process must be culturally and linguistically responsive. Without this, the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education will continue.

In order to identify a learning disability, ongoing measurement of academic performance is required before determining that a student has a disability. A positive response is viewed as evidence that the student's difficulties had been the result of a lack of appropriate instruction or environmental difficulties and not a disability within the child. No (or a negative) response becomes the basis for determining the need for a

more intensive level of intervention, which may or may not include special education services (Lichtenstein, 2008).

Lynn Fuchs (2003) examined conceptual and technical issues associated with using RTI to identify learning disabilities. Fuchs summarized research that compared various approaches to measuring responsiveness to intervention. In order to assess responsiveness to intervention, three components were found to be necessary: (a) criteria need to be established to differentiate between students who positively respond to interventions and those who do not; (b) the nature of the intervention should be specified; (c) and the timing of the measurements should be established. Three approaches were used to measure the response and these included the final status (the end result), the growth model (amount of learning), and the dual discrepancy (includes performance level and growth rate). Fuchs concluded that the utilization of the dual discrepancy model to assess responsiveness to the general curriculum resulted in the most accurate identification of students with a learning disability. However, some limitations of this review included the examination of only first and second grade students and only in the area of reading.

Researchers have since conducted studies to examine the validity of this approach. Case, Speece, and Molloy (2003) investigated the results obtained from first and second grade students in Mid-Atlantic States. Curriculum-based assessments were used to determine “at-risk” (below the 25th percentile) and comparison (above the 30th percentile) groups and interventions were designed during consultation meetings. Interventions were conducted for eight weeks and the dual discrepancy model was utilized. Although frequently dually discrepant students had significantly lower scores on

all measures compared to students that were at risk, results did not indicate that the frequently dually discrepant students received poorer instruction nor had lower-skilled peers than students in the other groups. Using this model, the researchers were able to accurately identify a group of students in need of more intensive services and these students differed from other groups of students on a variety of measures. The ability to identify students in need of more intensive supports using the dual discrepancy model has also been demonstrated in studies conducted by Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, and Hickman (2003) and Burns and Senesac (2005a).

Vaughn et al. (2003) examined an RTI model as a means of identifying students with reading/learning disabilities and also concluded that an RTI model should be pursued as an option for identifying students with learning disabilities. Forty-five second-grade students in Texas were identified as at risk using a two-tiered identification process. In the first tier, the classroom teachers nominated students for the intervention and students were informally ranked in the second quartile or below in terms of reading ability as compared to their class peers. In the second tier, all nominated students were assessed using the Texas Primary Reading Inventory.

Supplemental reading instruction was provided to students identified as at risk for having a reading-related learning disability for ten weeks. The authors created a pre-established criterion that a student must meet to exit the intervention. Students who did not meet the criteria were then reassigned to new groups of three and continued to receive the intervention for an additional 10 weeks. Students were placed in categories based on when they exited the intervention. If the students met exit criteria following the first 10 weeks they were classified as “early exit”, if they exited after the second 10-

week period they were “mid exit”, and if they met criteria after the third 10-week period they were “late exit.” If the student did not meet the criteria by the end of the 30th week, they were classified as “no exit” or “nonresponders. Those students who met exit criteria obtained significantly higher scores at pretest than students in the “no exit” group on the fluency, passage comprehension and rapid naming measures. Results indicated that 70% of the students in the early exit group continued to progress in the general education setting, but only 9 of the 14 students in the mid exit group continued on an acceptable trajectory for reading fluency. These results suggested some advantages of using RTI as at least one of the criteria used when determining eligibility for special education, including the fact that it provides supplemental instruction to a large number of at-risk students, it requires on-going progress monitoring, and may reduce biases inherent in the traditional method of referral which includes teacher perception and interpretation.

Another study completed by Burns and Senesac (2005a) examined the dual discrepancy definition in which children score low on a post-intervention reading measure and score below their peers in reading growth rates. Results suggested that using the 25th and 33rd percentile criteria within the dual discrepancy model may provide valid estimates of students requiring more intense intervention. Four definitions of dual discrepancy were compared: student growth below the 25th percentile, 33rd percentile, 50th percentile, and less than one standard deviation below the mean. Participants were 151 children in grades 1 through 3 who were identified as experiencing reading difficulties. All percentile rank models significantly differentiated

the dual discrepancy students from other students based on their reading score, but the standard deviation approach did not.

Burns, Appleton, and Stehouwer (2005b) completed a meta-analysis of RTI research. Twenty-one studies were examined and 24 total effect sizes were computed. Studies focused on the use of the most common models of RTI, including the Heartland model, the intervention-based assessment, the instructional-support team, and the Minneapolis problem-solving model. Heartland's multilevel approach provides teachers with repeated opportunities and increasing levels of support to help students improve their academic abilities. Students who are determined to be unresponsive to interventions are eligible for special education. The intervention-based assessment began in Ohio and combines a behavioral problem-solving approach with collaborative consultation. Its problem-solving components include defining the problem, collecting baseline data, and setting explicit goals setting. A hypothesized reason for the problem is developed and an intervention plan is implemented. Evidence of fidelity of implementation, data indicating student responsiveness to the intervention; and the comparison of the student's performance to baseline are considered when determining eligibility and these activities are conducted by multidisciplinary teams that may include the principal, school psychologist, special education teacher, and classroom teacher. Similar to Ohio's model, the instructional-support teams in Pennsylvania engage in collaborative problem solving while providing interventions but the team includes a support teacher whose primary responsibility is to assist in the implementation of the interventions. This instructional support is limited to 50 school days, after which the team meets to review the student's progress and determine whether further evaluation

is necessary. Students making little progress are evaluated for possible special education placement. Minneapolis' problem-solving model replaces the psychometric model with RTI as its means of identifying students for special education and utilizes a four-level, behavioral problem-solving model. Standardized test scores are not used and the team considers information from a variety of sources when determining eligibility.

All of the models use RTI to provide support and to identify students in need of special education services. The Minneapolis and Heartland models use a noncategorical model to determine special education eligibility and students are identified as "students in need of special education services". Teams using the Ohio and Pennsylvania models refer students for formal evaluations after they determine a lack of adequate progress with interventions (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003).

Inclusion criteria included studies that implemented an intervention, provided measures of student learning or systemic outcomes, and included individual student or building data. Sites that implemented an RTI model demonstrated both improved systemic and student outcomes with unbiased estimate of effects of 1.54 and 1.02, respectively. Results indicated a reduction in children referred to and found eligible for special education services, higher achievement test scores, and reduced behavioral difficulties (increased time on task, increased task completion, and improved comprehension during instruction). Students also received support earlier in their academic careers since there was no longer a need to wait for an ability-achievement discrepancy to appear. Based on this meta-analysis, less than 2% of students were determined to have a learning disability when an RTI approach was implemented. It

must be noted that the research surrounding the effectiveness of RTI and its appropriateness in determining eligibility for special services is just beginning.

Consistent across all models of RTI is the idea of differing levels of intensity in interventions that are matched to student need. There are usually 3 or 4 tiers of instruction, with special education being reserved for students who do not respond positively to the more intensive interventions. Tier 1 consists of a scientifically based core curriculum, quality instruction, and universal screening for all students. Tier 2 consists of supplemental instruction for struggling students and can be thought of as the school's line of defense for reducing the number of low performing students or students inappropriately referred for special education. The goal of Tier 2 instruction is to provide timely and evidence-based instructional strategies to struggling students with the hope that these students will "close the gap" and only require the core curriculum in order to succeed. Tier 2 instruction is delivered in small groups, usually no more than five or six students at one time. It is recommended that this instruction is provided three to four times a week, with each session lasting 30 to 60 minutes. This supplemental instruction typically has a 9-12 week duration with weekly or bi-weekly progress monitoring and can be implemented by a variety of personnel, including general and special education staff (Mellard & Johnson, 2008).

There are generally two approaches to structuring Tier 2 instruction. One is described as a problem solving model and the other is a standard protocol model. Some schools incorporate a combination of the two approaches, such as a standard protocol approach within Tier 2 and a problem-solving approach within Tier 3 instruction. Using a problem solving approach, school-based teams design interventions based on student

data and a continuing system of evaluation. Performance data are analyzed and used to develop a hypothesis regarding the cause of the difficulties and evidence-based interventions are designed to remedy the difficulties (Mellard & Johnson, 2008). Limitations of this approach include a lack of a strong evidence base for the use of problem-solving among professionals. Studies have typically involved small or undefined samples and offered minimal information regarding the interventions implemented and the effectiveness. The time that students received interventions before deciding the response was not adequate was not reported. In order to claim that RTI is a preventative approach, it must be able to distinguish between students struggling because of disabilities and students because of inappropriate instruction (Fuchs et al., 2003).

In contrast, the standard protocol utilizes interventions that researchers have validated as effective through empirical studies. These are instructional programs designed to remediate specific skill deficits, such as math computation or reading comprehension. According to Fuchs et al. (2003), the conditions under which the intervention has proven successful must be specified and followed. These include the number of minutes, the number of days a week, and the number of weeks required for instruction. The intervention should also describe the specific skill address, where the instruction should be provided, who should provide it, and the materials used for instruction and assessment.

If students do not demonstrate a positive response to Tier 2 interventions, intensive Tier 3 interventions may be delivered on a more individual basis. According to most estimates (Burns & Gibbons, 2008), approximately 5% of the student population

will require this level of intensive instruction. The problem-solving approach, which includes problem identification, problem analysis, hypothesis development, plan development, plan implementation, and plan evaluation, is recommended for addressing the needs of these students. Special education may or may not be considered at this time, depending on the state model, and instruction can be delivered by general and/or special education staff.

Of the 15 states that had adopted an RTI model in the Berkeley et al. (2009) study, three states were implementing a problem-solving method exclusively. Two states implemented the standard protocol method and the remaining states, including Florida, were implementing a hybrid combination approach. A hybrid approach usually consists of using a standard protocol during supplemental Tier 2 instruction and a problem-solving approach for the more targeted and intensive Tier 3 interventions.

The cited advantages surrounding RTI focus on the early identification and remediation of struggling students, the use of more effective instruction, the use of assessment methods that are linked to instruction, and the reduction of bias in identifying students for special education. But debate surrounds the issue of using RTI to identify disabilities (Kavale, 2005; Kavale, Holdnack, & Mostert, 2005, Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005). Mastropieri and Scruggs (2005) reported that school personnel do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to implement this model. Other concerns included the fidelity of implementation, implementation in secondary schools, and consistency of decision making. According to Reynolds and Shaywitz (2009), “the research that does support RTI for the most part is based on small-scale studies that have intensive oversight of intervention or treatment fidelity through university research

and training programs” (p. 131). Without some standardized assessment, few clues are provided as to what to do after a student fails to respond. If an evaluation of cognitive abilities and psychological processes are eliminated, then it is assumed that all students fail for the same reason. Across this background of confusion and controversy, RTI is unfolding across the nation.

Expanding Roles, Competency, and Building Capacity

As a result of legislation, there are implications for the professional roles of school psychologists. With the reauthorization of IDEA, Berninger (2006), in a professional commentary, views school psychologists as problem-solving consultants. She described the role of the school psychologist as an intervention specialist rather than an assessment specialist. To fulfill this role, it is essential to keep up with current research and evidence-based practices. This will allow school psychologists to assist teams in planning, conducting, and evaluating early intervention plans along with developing interventions for students who continue to struggle (Berninger et al., 2006).

In 2008, in a professional commentary, Feifer described a variety of roles for school psychologists within an RTI system, along with the skills and knowledge needed. Roles centered on consulting with personnel regarding effective interventions, the importance of individual differences, and the impact of home factors such as second languages and culture. School psychologists were also viewed as experts on progress monitoring and data interpretation. To function in that role, several things are required such as knowledge of instructional programs, how emotional and behavioral variables can influence learning, and how to interpret both formative and summative data.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (2008) described the expertise of school psychologists as crucial within RTI systems. NASP stressed the

importance of consultation and collaboration in developing effective academic and behavioral interventions. School psychologists can provide unique and valuable expertise in assisting with appropriate decision-making about individual children and advocating for effective policies at a systems level and it is crucial for school psychologists to continually upgrade their knowledge and skills.

Powers, Hagans, and Busse (2008) surveyed 249 school psychologists in California to examine their current practices. The surveys focused on the percentage of time school psychologists were involved in instructional consultative roles. Results indicated that most school psychologists (79%) administered a cognitive assessment at least once a week and only 2% administered a curriculum-based assessment as frequently. The majority of the school psychologists surveyed reported they never engaged in assessment activities associated with instructional consultation and the major reason cited was lack of knowledge. Forty-one percent engaged in consultation activities with teachers on a regular basis but 10% reported knowing very little about academic interventions and only 7% frequently provided academic interventions. Results of the study indicated that successful RTI implementation will require in-depth knowledge of the principles of effective instruction, tiered assessment and instructional methodologies, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making. An overall finding discovered that the potential for school psychologists to function as instructional consultants remains underutilized.

Professional development appears to be necessary for school psychologists to gain knowledge and be comfortable in their new roles. Larson and Choi (2010) surveyed 189 practicing school psychologists across 42 states in order to examine the

effect of university training, training standards, and educational legislation on their roles and functions. These school psychologists perceived themselves as being somewhat or adequately prepared to perform tasks related to RTI such as intervention, preventative services, consultation, team collaboration, program evaluation, and systems/organizational consultation. Another area surveyed involved additional training needs. Almost 70% of the school psychologists felt a need for additional training in the areas of progress monitoring of intervention fidelity and various models of RTI.

Feifer (2008) stated that school psychologists should develop their skills in consultation and data-based decision making, including the ability to implement appropriate target-driven assessments. School psychologists are often seen as special education “gatekeepers,” with evaluations to determine eligibility for special education services being one of their primary job responsibilities. With the emphasis on RTI, school psychologists will need to expand their role.

Lau et al. (2006) examined the use of the problem solving method in the Minneapolis Public School System. The role of school psychologists transformed to more of a consultant. School psychologists were provided more opportunities to facilitate system-wide change and address a variety of barriers to learning and the number of school psychologists in this district increased from 24 positions to 43 positions in 2004. The researchers theorized that the problem-solving model “could possibly expand the primary role of school psychologists from eligibility evaluators to classroom consultants, mental health service providers, home-school liaisons, and system-change facilitators. Our aspiration is to help individual students achieve their

highest potential and to create and maintain a school environment that benefits all children, including those who are at risk or have disabilities” (p. 119).

In 2010, NASP published its Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services which summarized the role of the school psychologist.

According to this publication, school psychologists:

provide effective services to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. School psychologists provide direct educational and mental health services for children and youth, as well as work with parents, educators, and other professionals to create supportive learning and social environments for all children. School psychologists apply their knowledge of both psychology and education during consultation and collaboration with others. They conduct effective decision making using a foundation of assessment and data collection. School psychologist engage in specific services for students, such as direct and indirect interventions that focus on academic skills, learning, socialization, and mental health. School psychologists provide services to schools and families that enhance the competence and well-being of children, including promotion of effective and safe learning environments, prevention of academic and behavior problems, response to crises, and improvement of family–school collaboration. (p. 1)

The fact that IDEA 2004 no longer requires the use of an IQ-achievement discrepancy and includes the use of RTI and scientific, research-based interventions as part of the evaluation presents challenges and opportunities for school psychologists (Canter, 2006). While comprehensive evaluations continue to be required as part of the law (Hale, 2006), a student’s evaluation should also incorporate RTI results. Fagan (2007) reported:

With an opportunity for role expansion, RTI offers a challenge to the field of school psychology. Almost from the origins of school psychological services there have been pleas for less time spent in assessment and more time with interventions. RTI is an opportunity for directing our services toward alternative assessments, more interventions, and recognizing the complementary contributions of curriculum-based

and normative assessments. Will we embrace the opportunity to demonstrate the importance of the intervention aspects of RTI? Or will RTI for the practitioner be renamed “Resistance to Innovation?” (p.6)

Summary

As a systematic problem-solving process, RTI with its multi-tiered intervention approach has been seen by many as a solution to both the problems associated with the discrepancy model of SLD identification and closing the achievement gap of at-risk, struggling students within the general education classroom. There appears to be some agreement among the research community on the use of RTI as a way of delivering effective instruction, but there are opposing camps about the viability of using RTI in SLD identification. While there are positive results for individual components of RTI, including a tiered-intervention system, progress monitoring, assessment that informs instructional decisions, and professional development there is limited research on the role of school psychologists within the RTI model.

School districts are struggling with the practical implementation and sustainability of the RTI process. Literature about RTI predominantly focuses on the definitions of RTI, models of RTI, purposes of RTI, implementation of RTI, but not much on the personnel's roles in the implementation of RTI. Although several studies have been conducted to explore the implementation of RTI (Berninger et al., 2006; Burns et al., 2005; Burns & Senesac, 2005a; Case et al., 2003; Fuchs, 2003; VanDerHeyden et al., 2007; Vaughn et al., 2003; Velluntino et al., 2000), continued research is needed to explore the changing roles of personnel involved in the implementation and the practical issues that arise.

Not many published articles and/or dissertations focusing solely on the role of school psychologists in an RTI framework were able to be located. The majority of articles mention the importance of the school psychologist as part of the problem solving team, as the expert in data analysis, and as an instructional consultant (Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006; Bursuck & Blanks, 2010; Feifer, 2008; Gelzheiser, 2009; Powers et al., 2008; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). Some surveys of practicing school psychologists were conducted to discover how their responsibilities have changed since RTI implementation and the most common finding was that time spent conducting assessments decreased and time spent consulting with teachers increased. Other common themes were the lack of preparedness felt by school psychologists with providing instructional interventions and the anxiety felt regarding the lesser dependence on standardized assessments. No qualitative studies examining what school psychologists actually do and how their professional lives have changed with RTI implementation were located. The review of the literature pointed out the need for research in this area.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design, the population and selected sample, the procedures for data collection and data analysis, and ethical considerations for this study. When considering the research design, it is essential to consider the research questions to be addressed in order to select a particular methodology. After identifying the research problem, it is important to develop a systematic plan for collecting and reporting data with the end result being a credible study. There are three design models for educational research studies: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method designs. Quantitative studies test objective theories by examining the relationships between variables. Qualitative studies explore the meaning given to an issue and are more focused on an inductive style of reasoning. A mixed methods design combines the two approaches (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative approach has been selected for this inquiry into the changing role of the school psychologist.

Overview of the Methods

Qualitative methods best match the purpose of this study, which is to discover and describe the perceptions of school psychologists toward their emerging patterns of professional practice in school districts implementing RTI. This purpose is aligned with the description Merriam (1998) supplies in that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). Yin (2009) recognizes the case study as the ideal approach for descriptive or explanatory questions that are intended to investigate a phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context.

In this collective case study, the issue of the changing roles of the school psychologist in an RTI framework was explored by examining the perspectives of 6 school psychologists and one supervisor of psychological services in one large Florida school district. This district was selected by the Florida Department of Education to pilot the implementation of RTI during the 2007-08 school year. As a result of participating in the pilot process, the school psychologists in this district had more years of experience practicing within an RTI context along with extensive professional development. The overall question guiding this study is this: How do school psychologists describe what they do and what supports they need as they make sense of their changing roles in schools that have adopted an RTI process? Sub-questions guiding this inquiry include:

1. How do school psychologists describe their professional responsibilities?
2. How do they perceive their current practice within an RTI framework?
3. How do they make sense of their changing roles?
4. How prepared do they feel for enacting their roles and meeting their responsibilities in their current assignments?
5. What do they need to strengthen their practice within the RTI framework?

As with all educators, the role of school psychologists has not been clearly defined within the framework of RTI, and consequently practitioners themselves are developing their own interpretations of the expectations placed on them, and this occurs by placing new information into preexisting cognitive frameworks. A sense-making perspective is used to inform this analysis as an approach to studying users and designing systems to meet their needs (Dervin, 1998). A constructivist stance (Bruner, 1990) is taken in this approach, which suggests that user-centered ideas about a situation form the basis for conceptualizing and using data. The underlying assumptions

of sense-making are based on perceived gaps between expectations and reality in a given situation and what might help resolve these discrepancies. In this case, it is assumed that a sense-making perspective can help explain how school psychologists reconcile the student and systemic needs and role expectations of their position as well as their relationships with colleagues, administrators, and other educational personnel.

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Qualitative methods are used in research designed to explore and describe a specific practice or program. This study required data rich in detail that would allow interpretation of the perceptions of the participants involved in the study. Due to the fact that this research study focused on the emergence of patterns of practice in the context of an educational framework, a qualitative method was determined to be most appropriate (Creswell, 2009).

Type of Design

Merriam (1998) noted that descriptive case studies can be advantageous when “presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted. Innovative programs and practices are often the focus of descriptive case studies in education. Such studies often form a database for future comparison and theory building” (p. 38). This qualitative case study explored the changing roles of school psychologists within an RTI framework. Yin (2009) defined case study as it related to the research process. “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 19). According to Yin, the case study method is most likely to be appropriate for “how” and “why” questions. In

order to truly understand how the role of school psychologists has changed, it seemed important to investigate the work in a manner that allowed for this type of research.

The Researcher's Role

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the “primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 20) and the role of the researcher “can be compared to that of a detective” (p. 21). Qualitative researchers collect data in the natural setting of the participants and include the voices of the participants in the final result; they gather the data themselves and build the patterns and themes by organizing the data. The focus of the analysis, however, is on the meaning that the participants, not the researcher, have about the issue (Creswell, 2007).

As the researcher conducting this study, I have 20 years of experience as a school psychologist within several public school systems. I earned my master's degree in the spring of 1992, and in the late 1980s and early 1990s, training in school psychology consisted mostly of learning to give tests to students. There were occasional courses in areas such as consultation, counseling, and intervention development, but it was not the focus of professional preparation.. Once I began working, my main job responsibility was to administer tests. My experiences included working with students in elementary, middle, and high schools. I have worked in two states, with each utilizing a different type of discrepancy formula for identifying students with SLD. I am now working in a district that requires the use of RTI when identifying a student as eligible for special education. This has led to changes in my own role and how I would describe changes in my responsibilities. There are some aspects of my new role that I am more comfortable with and some areas that I feel I need more training. These professional experiences provided me with a deep understanding of the

contexts in which these participants practice. At the same time, these experiences also created the potential for researcher bias. Therefore, efforts to reduce my own subjectivity were considered in the design and implementation of this study, and these are described more fully in subsequent sections in addressing the ethics of conducting research. As suggested by Creswell (2009), I examined different data sources and used member checking to determine accuracy. I also presented any discrepant information that ran counter to the themes resulting from my analysis. Questions were also developed in a manner using language designed not to anticipate findings (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007).

Procedures

The following sections of the chapter describe the over-all plan for conducting this study. These procedures include selection of the research setting, the selection of the participants, my plans for assuring confidentiality, and addressing issues of entry, reciprocity, and ethical concerns. Specific procedures for data collection and analysis are described in greater depth in subsequent sections.

Selecting the Setting

In case studies, researchers are interested in settings where the phenomenon of interest is likely to be found. As the primary participants were school psychologists working in elementary schools that used an RTI framework to identify students eligible for special education, it was important to locate settings in which these professionals work. Therefore, the setting of this study was selected based upon specific selection criteria.

The student services department in a large district in the southeastern United States served as the site for the collection of data in this study. A pseudonym was

assigned to the district. This district was known as Gator County. Gator County consists of 74 typical public schools and serves approximately 67,000 students. There are 46 elementary schools, 15 middle schools, and 13 high schools. Of the 74 schools, 34 receive Title 1 funds due to the numbers of students at those schools who receive free or reduced price lunch. There are also 4 educational centers and 5 charter schools, which will not be selected for participation. According to 2011 data, approximately 53% of students qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch. Close to 19% are identified as being of Hispanic origin, although fewer than 5% of students are considered English language learners. More than two-thirds of the students are White and the African American population is small at 5.7%. Demographic data for the district are illustrated in Table 3-1.

Gator County was selected for this study because of its participation as one of eight districts that agreed to pilot the implementation of RTI in 2007. Because it was a pilot district, the Florida State Department of Education provided assistance to seven pilot elementary schools in Gator County. There were five Problem Solving/RTI coaches for the district and one Problem Solving/RTI coach was assigned to every three schools. All coaches completed five days of training in July, 2007, and additional training, as well as mentoring and support by a regional supervisor was provided throughout the year. The district received 5 days of training during the 2007-2008 school year and training was targeted specifically to the needs of each of the pilot schools. Training was conducted by the regional supervisors and the site-based coaches. Technical assistance was also provided to the pilot site coaches and the pilot site administrators by the regional supervisors. This assistance included face-to-face, web-based, and

telephone/email communication. Monthly sessions were scheduled with pilot site coaches and regularly scheduled meetings were utilized to assist and support pilot site administrators. (Florida PS/RTI Project, 2011).

Selecting the Participants

The primary participants in this study were selected through purposeful sampling. According to Merriam (1998), a sample must be selected that allows the most to be learned. The participants “can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Information about the participants is illustrated in Table 3-2

Gator County employs 42 school psychologists. Of these, 36 are female and 6 are male. All 6 males are White; 28 of the female school psychologists are White; 5 are African-American, and 3 are Hispanic. The supervisor was asked to nominate school psychologists who, in his opinion, appeared to be coping well with the changes in their roles and who would be able to participate in this study. He then contacted school psychologists fitting this description and arranged the interviews. Six school psychologists were selected to participate in this study based on the nomination of the supervisor and their availability. After obtaining permission to conduct research in this county by the Research and Evaluation Department, the supervisor of psychological services in the district was contacted by telephone and email to explain the purpose of this research. The supervisor was also interviewed in order to obtain district perspectives and overviews of the RTI process in the district. Participation was voluntary and only psychologists who were willing to be interviewed were part of the study.

Assurances of Confidentiality

Prior to the beginning of each interview, each participant signed an informed consent statement, which provided information on the purpose of the study, proposed procedures, and the University of Florida Institutional Review Board-approved consent form prior to use in this study (see Appendix B). A pseudonym was assigned to all participants.

Interviews were the primary methods for obtaining data. These interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. The interviews and audiofiles were stored in my home office at all times. The audiofiles will be destroyed one year following completion of the study.

Issues of Entry

As the researcher I contacted the department of research in the district and completed the required paperwork in order to obtain permission to interview the district employees. The supervisor of psychological services in the district provided the entry point for this study. An email explaining the purpose of the study and proposed data collection methods was sent to the supervisor of psychological services in the district. This was followed by phone contact to the supervisor. He was asked to nominate school psychologists who, in his opinion, had handled the change in roles effectively. The supervisor contacted school psychologists who fit the criteria and were willing to participate in the study. He then arranged the interviews and emailed the appointment times to me

Reciprocity

Reciprocity must exist between the researcher and those being researched (Creswell, 2005). According to Glesne (2006), the interviewing process can provide

reciprocity. Participants can be given a sense of importance by having the researcher listening carefully and seriously. The participants were given the opportunity to reflect on and answer questions. These questions were related to their careers and professional experiences and the final product is intended to provide useful information to inform the participants' professional field.

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues in qualitative inquiry are “likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 213). Many of the ethical issues in a qualitative design such as communicating the purpose of the study, risk to the participants, reciprocity, and confidentiality were addressed in the informed consent statement that participants signed when they agreed to participate in this study. Merriam (1998) also stated that since the researcher is deciding what is important, opportunities exist to exclude data that is contradictory to the researcher's views. Efforts to address these issues are essential to qualitative research. To address researcher subjectivity and bias, I used methods suggested by Merriam and Creswell (2009), such as checking interpretations with participants, spending sufficient time in the field, asking for peer comments, involving the participants in all aspects of the research, and clarifying my biases and assumptions. I also described in detail how the study was conducted and how findings were obtained. Questions were developed in a manner using language designed not to anticipate findings (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007). These measures addressed the potential for researcher bias and allowed for an illustration of the work lives of the six school psychologists and their current patterns of practice.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process consisted of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Interviews were considered as the primary source of data and documents provided further data related to the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists in the district. Data was collected from March, 2012 to June, 2012.

Interviews

Semi structured interviews were conducted and each interview lasted 60 minutes. Individual taped interviews were conducted with each of the six school psychologists. Interviews occurred in a vacant office at the Student Services department. The supervisor of psychological services in the district was also interviewed to obtain district perspectives and an overview of the RTI process in the district. (See Appendix D for the interview protocol). By the time interviews were scheduled, it was the last day of the psychologists' contract year. Member checking using email and other electronic media was conducted to confirm the accuracy of information and interpretation. The participants were emailed copies of their transcribed interviews and individual case analyses for review and opportunities for revisions or clarifications were made available.

Field Notes

As the researcher I took notes during the interviews, recording key words, phrases and actions. Immediately following each contact with a participant, comments were written regarding any problems with data collection as well as general observations about the mood and the tone of the session. The field notes also included insights, interpretations, beginning analyses, and working hypotheses and what they might mean. Immediately following the interviews, the I listened to the recorded

sessions. These notes supplemented the interview notes and hopefully captured nuances not always spoken.

Document Data Collection and Review

Examples of documents in this study included the district-level job description for school psychologists and district RTI manuals. These documents were used to corroborate and augment evidence from the interviews. Despite the fact that the job description of the school psychologist was last revised in 1997, many of the responsibilities reported in interviews continue to fit within the job description. After the year-long state pilot project was completed, extensive training was provided by the district that was specific to the needs of the various schools. The implementation of RTI was designed to occur in phases and schools began the phases of implementation at varying times. Job descriptions and the district's RTI implementation plan are provided in Appendix E.

Data Analysis and Management Procedures

According to Merriam (1998), a case study "is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit. Conveying an understanding of the case is the paramount consideration in analyzing the data" (p. 193). Data collected from interviews and documents contained a tremendous amount of information. Therefore, it was necessary to manage and organize data in a manner that facilitated analysis. Data analysis followed the constant comparative methods as described by Creswell (2007). The following sections describe how data were managed and analyzed, and how issues of quality in the research design were addressed.

Basic Operations in Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the researcher knows what the issue is at the onset and has selected a sample to collect relevant data. The data are analyzed while being collected and the analysis is an ongoing process throughout the research. A process called coding is used to identify and interpret collected information by organizing it into segments or themes (Merriam, 1998).

The first step in analysis was to code the data into major categories of information and data was grouped together on similar dimensions. Categories were named based upon the data and how they reflected the purpose of the research. This method continued until all of the data were categorized into a meaningful category or a miscellaneous pile. This analysis started at the beginning of data collection and continued throughout the process. This approach allowed me to become familiar with the data and to recognize the emerging themes. It also assisted me in staying focused on the main purpose of the study.

This study was a case study of the perceptions of six school psychologists regarding their patterns of practice within an RTI framework. Each case was analyzed individually in order to gain an understanding of their work from a micro-level perspective. A cross-case analysis was then conducted to develop a general explanation that reflected data in the individual cases, but also illuminated themes across cases, that allowed an understanding of participants' roles and needs from a macro-level perspective (Merriam, 1998).

Data Management

Each recorded and transcribed interview and set of documents was coded for source and filed for analysis consisting of numbers and letters. No personally identifiable information was linked to the transcripts

Addressing Quality

As the researcher I attempted to reflect the school psychologists' experiences by using their words in order to retain their intended meanings. By juxtaposition of quotes from the transcripts and the data that took the form of explanations and description, the intent was to clearly represent the school psychologists who volunteered to share their stories. In crafting their stories, every effort was made to keep researcher bias out of the data collection, coding processes, and analysis of the data through a constant reflexive process. Credibility, transferability, and dependability are qualities used in judging the trustworthiness of qualitative research and are described in the following sections.

Credibility is "the criterion in qualitative research that parallels internal validity in positivist research" (Guba & Lincoln, as cited in Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004, p. 105). Mertens and McLaughlin acknowledged that several research strategies can be used to enhance credibility, such as substantial engagement with the participants, peer debriefing, and negative case analysis when faced with a case that does not fit with a hypothesis. Developing constructions and the change process should be documented from the beginning to the end of the study and member checks need to occur with the participants. Triangulation, which is the checking of information across sources of data, also enhances credibility. Merriam (1998) recommended member checks as a method for enhancing researcher credibility. Member checks are the notion of "taking data and

tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible” (p. 204).

In this study, transcripts of the interviews and individual case analyses were shared with some of the participants to ensure that conversations were accurately captured and portrayed and interpretations were plausible. Member checks were conducted by email and other electronic media. My goal as the researcher was to understand the world of these participants through their own perspectives. Peers in another district examined transcripts and interpretations to enhance credibility and assist me in becoming aware of personal views.

The provision of a thick, rich description of the participants and settings under study allows readers to determine how closely their situations match the research situation and whether findings can be transferred and applied to other selected situations (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, I documented impressions of the settings and participants in detail using a research journal. These notes were transcribed and analyzed along with other collected data, and used in providing descriptive details, which allow readers to make decisions regarding the transferability of the findings to their situation.

The dependability of a qualitative study is the parallel of reliability, meaning the stability of observed changes over time (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). However, in qualitative research, there is no benchmark by which to take repeated measures and establish reliability in the conventional sense of the word. When applied to qualitative research, dependability refers to the fact that the results make sense given the data; the results are dependable and consistent. To ensure this, the researcher explained the

reasoning for selecting the participants, utilized multiple methods of data collection, described in detail how data was collected, how categories were developed, and how decisions were made (Merriam, 1998).

The Qualitative Narrative

The data for each participant was analyzed individually to provide an illustration of how each school psychologist made sense of his or her responsibilities and patterns of practice, and what was needed to strengthen that practice. This allowed for an understanding of that work from a micro-level perspective. A cross-case analysis allowed a macro level perspective that led to “categories, themes, or typologies that conceptualize the data from all the cases or it can result in building substantive theory offering an integrated framework covering multiple cases” (Merriam, 1998, p. 195). In Chapter 4, the findings from this study are presented through individual profiles of the participants, and categories and things resulting from the cross-case analysis of the data. The findings are also discussed in relation to previous research and professional literature. In Chapter 5, the findings are discussed with regard to the questions guiding this research. The final chapter also provides a discussion of major conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Table 3-1. District demographics

# of students	# of schools	% of students on free/reduced lunch	% of Caucasian Students	% of African-American students	% of Hispanic students	% of other	% of English language learner students
67,000	74	53	68.83	5.7	18.97	6.5	4.3

Table 3-2. Participant Demographics

Participant	Position	Sex	Race	Years experience	Years in the district	Highest Degree Earned
Adam	Supervisor of school psychologists	M	White	3	25 years; 3 as supervisor	M.Ed. + 45
Betty	School psychologist	F	White	7	7	Psy.S.
Carol	School psychologist	F	White	4	4	Ed.S.
David	School psychologist on special assignment as RTI coach	M	White	9	9	Ed.S.
Erin	School psychologist	F	White	10	5	Ed.S.
Fran	School psychologist	F	Hispanic	7	6	Ed.S.
Gail	School psychologist	F	White	5	5	Ed.S.

CHAPTER 4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

School psychologists have been taken out of the narrow role of testers and are allowed to use discretion and judgment when it comes to testing and assessment. There is confusion and anxiety about being part of a team and not just giving scores. Some know where they fit and some are still in the process of figuring it out and all are dealing with the difficulties with role identity, communication, and working together.

—Adam, Supervisor of psychological services

As the words of Adam, a supervisor of psychological services, suggest, the role of school psychologist has changed and is not well-defined. In order to explore this issue, this descriptive study was designed to examine the perceptions of school psychologists regarding their changing roles and patterns of practice in a large school district in Florida. The overall question guiding this study is this: How do school psychologists describe what they do and what they need as they make sense of their changing roles in schools that have adopted an RTI process? Sub-questions guiding this inquiry include: (a) How do school psychologists describe their professional responsibilities? (b) How do they perceive their current practice within an RTI framework? (c) How do they make sense of their changing roles? (d) How prepared do they feel for enacting their roles and meeting their responsibilities in their current assignments? (e) What do they need to strengthen their practice within the RTI framework?

In this study, a cross-case methodology was used to address research questions utilizing interviews with school psychologists and a supervisor of psychological services, and a review of pertinent documents and materials. A researcher's journal was used to record thoughts, beginning analysis, and other information. A sense-making perspective (Dervin, 1998) provided the conceptual framework to explore how school psychologists

reconcile student and systemic needs and role expectations of their position; their relationships with colleagues, administrators, and other educational personnel; and what they need to strengthen their professional practice. The role of the school psychologist is not typically well- defined within the implementation of RTI, and these professionals are constructing their own interpretations of the expectations placed on them and making sense of their roles by placing new information into preexisting cognitive frameworks. This chapter begins with a summary of the overall findings followed by individual case profiles of the participating school psychologists, The chapter concludes with the presentation and discussion of the findings based on categories and themes derived from an analysis across the individual cases.

Overall Findings

The findings suggest these psychologists made sense of their changing roles by viewing themselves as members of a helping profession. Each person acknowledged their professional roles have changed in recent years, and some were more comfortable than others with these changes. The evidence suggests these school psychologists are redefining their roles by building on personal strengths and speaking up more confidently about their professional concerns. Their readiness and preparedness for adapting to changes in their professional lives appeared to be influenced by prior experience, the focus of their graduate training, and their personal strengths. These practitioners identified district-based professional development targeted to practical and specific needs in schools, and strong and supportive school-based leadership as being crucial to meeting their needs in implementing RTI successfully.

Profiles of the Participants

The following profiles of participants provide individual illustrations of the work

lives of the six school psychologists and each case is illustrated using a basic premise of sense-making theory. Data are reported through general and particular description. Data sources used in the study are referenced by codes that identify the type of source (I—interview transcript; D—document) followed by letters and numbers that identify the participant. Participants are identified using the following codes: SSP – supervisor of school psychologists and SP – school psychologist. Finally, the page and line numbers of the transcript are listed.

Data analysis resulted in the emergence of central themes that contributed to the understanding of how the participating school psychologists made sense of his or her responsibilities and patterns of practice. Answers to the research questions are embedded in themes as the school psychologists discussed (a) influences and background, (b) values, culture, and perceptions of their roles, (c) responsibilities as school psychologists, and (d) what they needed to strengthen their practice.

There were a total of seven participants in this study. The supervisor of psychological services was interviewed first in order to explore the district context of this educational initiative and to nominate school psychologists who have been successful in managing their roles. Six school psychologists were interviewed to describe what they do and what they need as they make sense of their changing roles in schools that adopted an RTI process.

Supervisor of School Psychologists

Adam, the supervisor of school psychologists, was responsible for the supervision of five of the school psychologists who participated in this study. The sixth participant, David, was trained as a school psychologist and worked for 7 ½ years in a traditional role in Gator County. He has worked as an RTI coach under the supervision

of the district RTI supervisor for the past 1 ½ years. Adam welcomed the opportunity to participate in this study and arranged for all participants to meet with me in the Student Services building on their final contract day of the 2011-12 school year.

Adam was interviewed in order to establish the district context and what led to the decision to become a pilot district for the RTI initiative. The district had a different supervisor of school psychologists at that time and “she wanted to stay ahead of what was going on” (SSP.I.7.1.6). The previous supervisor had a relationship with a local university and “saw years in advance how things were going” and wanted to be “proactive and aggressive” (SSP.I.7.1.7). All school psychologists were oriented in the basics of RTI but efforts were concentrated in kindergarten and first grades across the district. The goal was to establish a “preventive, early intervention model” (SSP.I.7.1.12) and to “build capacity in the schools by spreading out support” (SSP.I.7.1.13). It was planned that schools would get differing levels of support each year and the school psychologists would “observe and facilitate problem solving sessions with school administration and leadership teams” (SSP.I.7.1.14). During the summer of 2009, the supervisor of school psychologists assumed a new position to the district’s central office administration called the Supervisor of RTI, which was placed under the Curriculum and Instruction department, and some of the school psychologists were placed on special assignments as RTI coaches. This administrative position was eliminated during the summer of 2012 and the supervisor has since left the district. At the time interviews were conducted, the RTI coaches were not sure of their positions for the 2012-13 school year.

Adam was a staff school psychologist in Gator County in 2009 and became the

supervisor of school psychologists when the position became available during that summer. According to Adam, some aspects of the adoption of RTI were more successful than others and the roles of school psychologists changed. School psychologists were “taken out of their narrow role as testers and were now allowed to use discretion and judgment with testing and assessment” (SSP.I.7.1.23). Along with this new role, however, came “confusion with regard to their roles and identities” (SSP.I.7.2.1) and “not knowing where they fit in the process” (SSP.I.7.2.2). There was also “anxiety due to now working with a team and not just being the person giving the scores” (SSP.I.7.2.1). Other areas of difficulties included “a lack of decision points when determining eligibility, a lack of standards, and questionable fidelity of the delivery of interventions” (SSP.I.7.2.7). Even with all the changes, some of the psychologists “know where they fit and some are still in the process of figuring that out” (SSP.I.7.2.2). Adam arranged for me to interview six of the school psychologists who seemed to have successfully managed this change in roles.

In the following section, Betty is introduced. Betty is a school psychologist at an elementary, middle, and high school in Gator County.

Case One: Betty

Influences and Background

Betty was very energetic and willing to engage in conversation. Initial questions focused on Betty’s background and what led her to become a school psychologist. It was revealed that Betty started her career as a special education teacher in Gator County and often utilized the psychological reports to help her understand the students and their levels of functioning. After teaching for eight years, Betty had a desire to return to school and a friend who was a school psychologist urged her to go into the field. In

Betty's words, she "wanted a better background to help her understand test scores and what they meant" (SP.I.1.1.8). After completing her coursework and her internship, Betty spent the following six years in Gator County.

Values, Culture, and Perceptions

When asked about what she valued about being a school psychologist, Betty emphasized the relationships with staff and being viewed as someone who is dependable and reliable. According to Betty, she "really enjoys that the staff comes to me for help and for my opinions. Not only do they come to me for their students, but they come to me for personal things" (SP.I.1.1.12). As someone who travels between schools, "I'm part of a school but also somewhat an outsider so they value my opinion a little differently" (SP.I.1.1.13). The role of helper was also mentioned and Betty reported that she enjoyed helping the students and continued to enjoy the more traditional role of administering standardized measures to help better understand the students.

Betty's teaching experience was at an elementary school but she is now serving as a school psychologist at an elementary, middle, and high school. The implementation of RTI seems to be further along at the elementary level and Betty has "seen elementary schools that use RTI, understand RTI and how to implement it and I've seen secondary schools just on the cusp of developing the consensus just as an RTI leadership team and slowly starting to implement that into the school setting" (SP.I.1.1.20). The elementary school was somewhat of an unusual case. It was Betty's second year assigned to that school and the school had received a grade of an F from the state the previous year. As a result, the leadership team at the school was changed and this affected the culture of the school. The understanding of RTI by the principal appeared to have a big influence on the school. The previous administration viewed RTI

as what needs to be done to qualify a student for special education. The current principal and assistant principal both had a background in reading and believed in interventions and finding what worked for the students. This was somewhat difficult for Betty due to the fact that “she was changing things and I always didn’t know because I was only there two days a week” (SP.I.1.2.8).

The culture of the school was described as positive but stressful due to state involvement with the F grade. Personnel from the state department of education were in the school at least once a month, but “the administrators had a vision, were great with curriculum, and knew what to do to improve the school” (SP.I.1.2.12). The principal also used Title 1 funds to allow a school psychologist to be full-time for the 2012-13 school year.

When asked if her job is what she expected, Betty acknowledged that being a special education teacher in an elementary school allowed her to experience some of the process. However, “the integration of RTI in secondary schools is very difficult” (SP.I.1.2.1). Betty’s role as a school psychologist has changed from “assessment to consultant” (SP.I.1.3.3) since beginning her career as a school psychologist and roles vary from school to school.

Roles and Responsibilities

In the role of a consultant, Betty was meeting with teachers and assisting with the development of interventions. She also helped teachers understand that “the intervention had to be tied to the deficit, which was difficult” (SP.I.1.3.8). Data collection also increased significantly for Betty and the responsibility for collecting and graphing data usually fell on her.

Since RTI implementation was just beginning at the secondary level, I asked Betty to focus on the elementary school and describe her days at that school. She was assigned to the elementary school two days per week, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Tuesdays were “100% meetings” (SP.I.1.2.19). This was the day that all students needing interventions or a special education re-evaluation were discussed. The school-based intervention team, which included the administration, met and discussed students and interventions. Occasionally, it was necessary to have meetings on Thursdays. If there were no meetings, this was the day Betty had to fulfill all other responsibilities, including observing students, testing students, collecting data, and writing reports.

Betty was assigned to a middle school one day a week. All eligibility meetings and meetings with the intervention team occurred on Monday mornings. In the afternoon, meetings with the student services team were held. This school was implementing a structured behavioral intervention program and the team, which included Betty, the administration, the behavior specialist, the school social worker, the guidance counselors, and the drop-out prevention teacher, met to discuss the progress of students. This meeting typically lasted 1-2 hours and any testing that was required was done between meetings.

On Wednesdays and Fridays, Betty was assigned to a high school. All meetings were held on Wednesday mornings and Betty and the social worker conducted groups in the afternoon. Fridays were reserved for student observations, testing, and meeting with individual students.

Needs

I then asked Betty about the state RTI training, professional development, and what she felt she needed to strengthen her practice. Professional development with the district had declined due to budget cuts but the department continued to provide training on a monthly basis. There were also three school psychologists on special assignment as RTI coaches and were seen as a resource. The state training consisted more of questionnaires completed by personnel and then using the results to drive professional development. The RTI coaches provided a 4-day training and personnel from various schools attended. Each day focused on a level of intervention intensity. Being a pilot district provided the schools with more personnel and resources, but the most valuable training “has come from the department and previous supervisor” (SP.I.1.4.5), since it was directed to specific needs.

When asked about what was needed, Betty felt that “student service personnel understand RTI, but more training needs to be done in the schools with the practical part” (SP.I.1.5.16). Areas of need included developing interventions tied to the deficit, progress monitoring, and how to implement RTI in secondary settings. As Betty said, “teachers want a book and that does not exist” (SP.I.1.5.9).

Case Two: Carol

Influences and Background

Carol was very pleasant and willing to answer any questions. During the previous school year, she was assigned to two elementary schools. One school was part of the state pilot grant and the other school had finished year 2 of the district-based RTI training. The interview began with inquiring about Carol’s background and what

influenced her to enter the field of school psychology. Carol attended a technical university that did not have a college of education, but there were well-known researchers in psychology. She was able to study with those researchers and began her academic career in health psychology. Carol's internship was with the lab school located at the university, which allowed her to work with children. Carol completed her graduate work at a local university and was encouraged to pursue the field of school psychology "because it integrated lots of interests and was a natural service delivery setting to address health and education issues" (SP.I.2.1.11).

Values, Culture, and Perceptions

When asked about what she valued about being a school psychologist, Carol emphasized the problem-solving process. Carol was assigned to an elementary school that was part of the RTI grant and one that finished the second year of district-based RTI training. She was in a good position to describe her participation in the pilot project. Carol spent four days in schools (two days at each school) and one day at the district office. The problem solving process is still "a work in progress at both schools even though one school has been doing it for a longer time" (SP.I.2.3.9). But the culture at the schools "was more reflective of the administration and their expectations rather than the training the schools received" (SP.I.2.4.13). From Carol's perspective, the teachers at the pilot school were more familiar with data collection and deciding what was important whereas the teachers at the non-pilot school tended to bring all the data they had collected to meetings but were more enthusiastic about the process and implementing interventions.

Carol felt that her role was close to what she expected, but that was due to the RTI emphasis in her graduate training. However, the increase in time spent in meetings was new. Multiple meetings were required for most situations, which affected the time available for direct services and other job responsibilities. She felt that it was important to build consensus and understanding among staff and stakeholders since these are the people actually in the classroom with the students. Carol reported that it is very important that the teachers know how to look at data and engage in problem-solving. This is an ongoing process and sometimes people compartmentalize the problem-solving process and view it as something that is only done during the meeting. The goal is for it to be a way of thinking that is infused throughout the day and applied to all issues and situations.

Roles and Responsibilities

The population at the schools Carol served consisted of students from a high socio-economic status and mostly Caucasian. Both schools had received grades of “A” from the state. Carol’s schools received more parental requests for evaluations than other schools, which consequently necessitated multiple meetings.

I asked Carol to describe her days at the two schools. Each school had a designated student services day and the focus was child-find or problem solving meetings that typically lasted 45 minutes. Meetings were scheduled for the entire day and included Tier 1 problem solving meetings, problem solving meetings that focused on individual students who required additional supports, and special education eligibility or IEP meetings. Carol felt that spending time in Tier 1 meetings and getting involved early when a student struggled was crucial. This enabled problems to be addressed

earlier, with the goal of preventing them from escalating into more serious intractable problems. Carol spent Fridays at the district office assisting Adam with Section 504 issues and other issues related to students with disabilities. All other responsibilities, such as assessments and observations, had to be fulfilled during the remaining days – one day per school.

Needs

Carol described the RTI training provided by the state to the pilot schools, professional development, and what she felt she needed to strengthen her practice. She described the state training as “more of an evaluation model than it was a training with implementation” (SP.I.2.3.11). However, the procedures for technical assistance and the coaching and feedback were helpful. When asked about what was needed to strengthen the practice of school psychology, Carol replied that “parents need to be educated” (SP.I.2.5.4). According to Carol’s experiences, parents asked for their children to be tested without fully understanding the process and not understanding that the test scores do not determine eligibility. A large portion of her time was spent explaining RTI and the process to parents, along with how students are determined eligible for special education.

Case Three: David

Influences and Background

David was friendly with a good sense of humor. David was trained in school psychology and worked in a traditional role for 7 ½ years. However, for the past year and a half, David was one of the three school psychologists working as an RTI coach. David described this as “a good fit” (SP.I.3.1.5). He liked helping children, but also

enjoyed the “nerdiness part with assessment and data” (SP.I.3.1.6). At the end of the interview, David mentioned that he would be relocating to another state and leaving Gator County. This did not appear to be due to dissatisfaction with his role.

Values, Culture, and Perceptions

When asked about what he valued about being a school psychologist, David focused on the investigative process, especially with the more difficult cases. According to David, he enjoys feeling the sense of accomplishment that comes with solving a problem. The assessment and data analysis part of the job was as expected, but he did not expect the “meetings, paperwork, and bureaucracy” (SP.I.3.1.8).

David’s current assignment was different from the other psychologists who were interviewed. He served as an RTI coach at six elementary schools rather than serving in the more traditional role of a school psychologist assigned to two or three schools. This role required “more of a focus on systems” (SP.I.3.1.16) and “working more with school leaders, more as a consultant for the leaders of the schools” (SP.I.3.1.19). One observation that David noted was that, as the psychologist, he had no real power in the school. The culture of the school, which included the acceptance of the problem solving process and RTI, depended on the administration and how they perceived the process.

Roles and Responsibilities

David’s day-to-day responsibilities focused more on groups of students instead of individuals. He was able to meet with the leadership and grade levels approximately every other week and noted that regular meetings were more important in the beginning so the process did not stagnate. The role of the RTI coach was to examine the data for a class, grade, AYP group, etc., rather than an individual student and work with the

school leaders to assist in examining the data and trends. He also helped with recommendations and interventions with teams but his main goal was “to train the team to go through the problem-solving process themselves” (SP.I.3.1.24). Teams were at different levels of expertise and self-reflection and this affected the progress.

The district had developed expectations for schools depending on the year of implementation. During the first year of implementation, the leadership team from the school participated in trainings to learn how to analyze school-wide data. This information was then passed on to the staff. The role of the coach was to assist in setting up the structure and help with buy-in from the staff. Typically, one grade was targeted (usually kindergarten) and the coach met with this team more frequently, analyzed data, and developed common assessments to be used across the grade level. The coach assisted in developing the skills of the leadership team, adding other grade levels, and then “handing the reins over” (SP.I.3.2.20). During the first year of implementation, the school focused on Tier 1, Tier 2 was the focus of the second year, and Tier 3 was emphasized during the third year. The goal was to “start with the big picture instead of focusing on individual students because there would not be enough resources to do anything”. SP.I.3.3.2).

Needs

I next asked David about the state RTI training, professional development, and what he felt he needed to strengthen his practice. David felt that the state training “helped understand the big picture and gave them a starting point” (SP.I.3.4.6). Most of the materials from the state were revised to target the specific issues of Gator County

and since that time, most of the professional development has come from within the department.

When asked about what was needed to strengthen the practice of school psychology, David replied “money and time” (SP.I.3.4.8). According to David’s experiences, meetings and the entire problem-solving process took a lot of time on teachers’ parts and “now a new evaluation system is thrown in which adds to the stress” (SP.I.3.4.9). Administrative support is the most crucial factor – “they need to be involved and make it a priority” (SP.I.3.4.11).

Case Four: Erin

Influences and Background

During the previous school year, Erin was assigned to one middle school and one high school. As with the other interviews, I began by inquiring about her background and what influenced her to enter the field of school psychology. Erin was in graduate school studying to become a special education teacher and had never heard of school psychology. She began to question her choice after multiple practicums and a professor suggested school psychology. The 2011-12 school year was Erin’s tenth year as a school psychologist.

Values, Culture, and Perceptions

When asked about what she valued about being a school psychologist, Erin stated that she enjoys “being a resource for families” (SP.I.4.1.9). She also appreciated the opportunity to work with a range of schools and students. She described her relationships with teachers and administration as “kind of like a middle man” (SP.I.4.1.8)

in that she had an equally good relationship with all stakeholders. Erin also mentioned the opportunities to grow and get into areas of expertise or personal interest.

The culture between Erin's two schools was very different. The culture at the middle school changed due to staff turnover in the last year. The previous staff had opened the school together and was very strong and close the first few years. The staff had participated in a variety of team-building activities. Many of the younger teachers left and the climate changed and the staff was not as cohesive as before. Erin believed that the "principal tried to rebuild a positive culture by making decisions based on the best interest of staff instead of the students" (SP.I.4.2.12).

The high school had only been open for two years and "is still in the phase where the culture is strong and cohesive" (SP.I.4.2.13). The school received a grade of an "F" after the first year and the staff worked together and experienced very little turnover. The school received an "A" the following year "due to the leadership of the principal" (SP.I.4.2.15). The principal believed the grade could be improved and focused on collaboration, building rapport with the students, and emphasized the importance of graduation and a high school diploma.

Erin felt that her role was close to what she expected but that was due to the fact that she had worked in a state that adopted an RTI model several years ago. Due to her experience, Erin was assigned the additional responsibilities of RTI coach in both her schools. According to Erin, this has allowed her to build more rapport with the staff and feel more a part of the faculty. She revealed that she enjoys this role more and found standardized testing "somewhat boring" (SP.I.4.1.33).

Roles and Responsibilities

Erin reported that she spent two to three days per week at each school. Each school had a designated student services day and a variety of meetings were scheduled the entire day. These included meetings with teachers to review interventions and data, RTI meetings with the administrative team, and special education meetings with student services personnel. Meetings related to drop-out prevention were held in the afternoon. On non-meeting days, Erin did paperwork, completed re-evaluations, and performed RTI coach duties. These duties included facilitating weekly to biweekly meetings with the RTI team at the school. She was responsible for preparing the agenda, guiding the problem-solving process, and accessing data. Erin also provided trainings and presentations to the staff. The high school followed a similar schedule – meetings were held on one day and all other responsibilities were addressed on the non-meeting day.

Needs

Erin was next asked to describe what has worked well, identify barriers, and discuss what she felt she needed to strengthen her practice. A “strong administration and RTI multi-disciplinary team” (SP.I.4.2.22) were key to success. Besides lack of administrative support, barriers included staff turnover because of the need to differentiate training. Erin also noted that some teachers felt that psychologists and RTI were preventing students from qualifying for special education by requiring intervention data before determining eligibility.

Case Five: Fran

Influences and Background

Fran received her undergraduate degree in Puerto Rico and her graduate degree in Virginia. She recently completed her sixth year as a school psychologist in Gator County. When asked what influenced her to enter the field of school psychology, Fran acknowledged the influence of a previous professor. She had completed an internship in a daycare and became interested in the fields of both education and psychology and was encouraged to investigate school psychology.

Values, Culture, and Perceptions

When asked about what she valued about being a school psychologist, Fran stated that she enjoys “seeing the end result of her efforts” (SP.I.5.1.9). She also valued the opportunity to work with families. Fran is a native Spanish speaker and reported that “speaking Spanish helps parents feel that they are heard and they have an easier time communicating with school personnel” (SP.I.5.1.8).

During the previous school year, Fran was assigned to two Title 1 elementary schools, but she described two different cultures and attitudes among staff. One school has a more veteran staff that is familiar with the population and has strong behavior management skills. However, the stress due to new teacher evaluations lowered morale among the staff and they appeared more frustrated with the RTI process than the staff at Fran’s second school. The median age of the staff at this school was younger and they seemed more enthusiastic. According to Fran, she had “an easier time getting data and information” (SP.I.5.3.3) from staff at this school.

RTI has necessitated changes in Fran's role in the schools. Testing and assessment have changed and are not Fran's primary duty. There is "more collaboration and conversation" (SP.I.5.2.9). She had to learn things such as using Excel® to assist in making graphs, comparing data with subgroups, and pulling data together to make decisions. Testing is done to test a specific hypothesis and not for determining a learning disability.

Roles and Responsibilities

Fran spent three days per week at one school and two days at the other. Each school had a designated student services day and a variety of meetings were scheduled for the entire day. At one school, Fran was also responsible for the clerical part of the meetings, which included scheduling the meetings and sending out meeting notices. She also collected data, graphed data, and facilitated these meetings. These included meetings with teachers to review interventions and data, RTI meetings with the administrative team, and special education meetings with student services personnel. On non-meeting days, Fran completed evaluations, observed students, and conducted counseling groups. The second school followed a similar schedule – meetings were held on one day and all other responsibilities were addressed on the non-meeting day. However, at this school, someone else handled the clerical aspects of scheduling meetings.

Needs

Next, Fran was asked to identify barriers, along with what she felt she needed to strengthen her practice. Besides limited time and resources to develop and implement interventions with fidelity, Fran expressed concerns that "everything is gray and

subjective when it comes to eligibility decisions” (SP.I.5.4.2). She also noted that the time required for meetings is “unbalanced” (SP.I.5.4.9) and can be overwhelming considering all the other responsibilities.

Case Six: Gail

Influences and Background

Gail received both undergraduate and graduate degrees from a university in Florida. She recently completed her fifth year as a school psychologist in Gator County. When asked what influenced her to enter the field of school psychology, Gail revealed that she had always been interested in psychology. She had planned on entering a clinical program, but “life circumstances” (SP.I.6.1.6) made school psychology a better option.

Values, Culture, and Perceptions

When asked about what she valued about being a school psychologist, Gail stated she always wanted to help children. However, her role was much different than what she expected. When Gail first entered graduate school, the focus was more assessment. She then took a break to have a child and then re-entered the field. During that time, many changes in education occurred and Gail did not feel that she had the knowledge base in areas such as RTI and consultation.

During the previous school year, Gail was assigned to three schools, which included an elementary school, a middle school, and a charter school that served a kindergarten to 8th grade population. RTI was implemented more fully at the elementary school and Gail reported that the teachers were more receptive than at the middle school and open to different types of suggestions for interventions. The morale across

the county was described as low due to budget cuts and “the expectation of doing more for less” (SP.I.6.2.20). Gail also observed “more global frustration” (SP.I.6.2.22) and she saw some teachers “tear up when asked to do more” (SP.I.6.2.21).

Roles and Responsibilities

Gail described her days at her assigned schools. She spent three days per week at the elementary school and two days at the middle school. The charter school was on an as-needed basis, but needed more behavioral consultations as the year progressed. As stated by the other psychologists, each school had a designated student services day and all meetings were scheduled for the entire day. The elementary school was considered to be a Title 1 school and the families “were needier than most and wanted someone to listen to them” (SP.I.6.1.22). Until recently training others in Excel®, Gail had been the only one to graph data at the elementary school. Non-meeting days were spent collecting data, administering tests, observing students, and meeting with families.

Knowledge of the RTI process appeared to be somewhat less at the middle school. The teachers had not had much training and the administration had “a varying knowledge” (SP.I.6.2.7) of what was required. Gail met with lots of resistance to change and teachers continued to refer to the discrepancy model when discussing special education. She encountered more reluctance, and defiance and refusal on occasion, in terms of gathering data. After a large number of students were determined to be ineligible for special education due to missing data, “district intervention” (SP.I.6.2.12) was necessary in terms of explaining the process and the necessity of collecting data.

Needs

Gail was asked to identify barriers, along with what she felt she needed to strengthen her practice. She expressed concerns related to the subjectivity of eligibility guidelines, stating that “a student can be determined eligible for special education at one school and not another” (SP.I.6.3.26). Students being referred do not appear to be much different from peers and “are just below grade level” (SP.I.6.3.25) and “no one knows what a disability is anymore” (SP.I.6.3.25). Gail believed that more stringent, concrete guidelines would prevent an emotional decision being made.

Conclusion

In the above section of this chapter, individual profiles were provided for the school psychologists interviewed for this case study. These profiles were provided to supply readers with descriptions of how the participants enact their roles in the educational setting. Detailed descriptions also allow the reader to understand the phenomenon studied and draw interpretations about meaning and significance (Patton, 2002). In the next section of this chapter, an examination of the cross-case analysis is provided, along with a discussion of the findings. In the final chapter, implications and recommendations from the findings are presented.

The Cross-Case Analysis

The results of the cross-case analysis identified the collective actions of these school psychologists in order to gain a better understanding of how they make sense of their roles. Taking into consideration all the data collected, several key themes were identified and these are illustrated in Table 4.1.

Five major themes emerged from the cross-case analysis. First, the role of helper was emphasized. The school psychologists valued the opportunity to help students, teachers, colleagues, administration, and families. Second, the participants themselves coped with their changing roles in different ways. The role of the school psychologists was perceived as having changed significantly from a “tester” to a “consultant” or “coach”. Along with this change, there was anxiety and confusion about role identity and some seemed more comfortable with this change than others. The third theme that emerged was the redefining of roles. The psychologists were beginning to find their voice, both individually and as a group, and were building on their strengths. The school psychologists themselves were at differing levels of expertise and comfort with the change. The fourth theme to emerge was related to the level of readiness and preparedness the psychologists felt they had in order to be successful in their new roles. This varied according to the school site, graduate training, previous work experience, and the strengths and interests of the psychologists. The last theme that surfaced was related to the importance of administrative supports. Targeted district-based training and professional development, along with a strong, supportive school-based administrative team, were both mentioned as crucial to their own role in RTI.

Theme #1: Joining a Helping Profession

When interviewing the school psychologists and asking them what attracted them to the profession, along with what they valued most, all responded with a variation of the role of a helper. Helping was not limited to students. The school psychologists in this study also valued helping teachers, administration, colleagues, and families. As Gail stated, “My home life was tumultuous and school was my outlet. It was something I was

good at and it made me sad that children struggled in this area” (SP.I.6.1.9). Gail also valued helping others in the schools.

I believe it is important to get to know the teachers and students better by being an active member of the school and not just a district employee. This has made the biggest difference with establishing the perception of the school psychologist as a team player. Now I am approached for things besides just my job. I have a mentee, I go into classrooms and give teachers mini-breaks, and I volunteer for things outside of the job. This helps by contributing to a positive climate of a school. (SP.I.6.2.29)

Carol also emphasized the opportunity to help others, but in a more data-oriented method. A main interest of Carol’s is how health and medical conditions interact with student functioning. She is currently a doctoral candidate in this field at a local university.

I enjoy being able to address barriers to people’s functioning and getting able to assist by problem solving, whether the barriers are physical, mental, or emotional. I love both of my schools. I enjoy working directly with people so having the opportunity to interact with families, teachers, and students is very fulfilling to me and I value being able to see children grow and make progress. I help gather and interpret Tier 1 data and assist with problem solving, so I am seeing the growth with large groups, small groups, and individuals. I get the perspective across all three areas. (SP.I.2.1.23)

David also acknowledged being drawn to the helping side of school psychology. In his current role as an RTI coach, he had taken more of a systems approach when assisting school personnel.

I found psychology interesting as an undergraduate, but realized I could not do much with just a bachelor’s degree so I started researching and found it [school psychology] to be a good fit. Besides the obvious of wanting to work with kids and helping them, I enjoyed the nerdiness part with assessment and statistics. I am more comfortable with data than the counseling part. I didn’t expect the meetings, paperwork, and bureaucracy. I like the investigation part, especially with more difficult cases. I feel like I’ve accomplished something. I work more with school leaders and in a different way. Now I look more at systems and help others through the problem solving process and decision-making. (SP.I.3.1.24)

Each participant referred to the personal importance of joining a helping profession, although helpfulness was often characterized in different ways. Some valued opportunities to provide relational support and classroom assistance, others preferred providing school-wide support through the provision and analysis of data to support decision-making. Whatever its form, the opportunity to provide professional assistance appeared to be highly valued.

Theme #2: Coping with Changing Roles

Consistent with research documenting changes in the roles of school psychologists, each participant reported some degree of change in their role and some stated they were more comfortable with the changes than others. Each mentioned a variation on the statement expressed by Adam that the practice of school psychologists “in the narrow role of tester” (SSP.I.7.1.22) no longer exists in their schools. Erin reacted more positively to the change than some others based on her experiences..

I am now considered more a part of the staff and have built rapport with them. They trust me and it works at these two schools. I am happy the discrepancy model went away. I felt like we were gatekeepers using that model to determine eligibility. (SP.I.4.3.11)

Gail, on the other hand, was not quite as comfortable in this new role. Unlike Erin, her professional experiences were different. She had planned to enter a program in clinical psychology, but changed her mind after becoming pregnant and starting a family. Gail felt that school psychology was a better choice for her at the time, but her expectations did not match with the nature of the practice in this school district.

Even though it was not required by the district, during the first couple of years I was combining full evaluations along with the RTI information. Now some kids have no testing to determine a specific learning disability and it's an uncomfortable feeling because I am sitting at the table for eligibility and I don't know the kid. The comfort of a comprehensive report has been taken

away and I almost feel like a seat filler at meetings instead of a worthwhile participant. Students are being brought to the table and they do not look any different from their peers. It feels like it has gone from one extreme to the other. A student can be made eligible for special education at one school and not the other. In some schools, RTI has become a documentation of interventions needed for eligibility purposes rather than a true problem-solving process. But who is supposed to address that? (SP.I.6.3.32)

The reduction in the provision of direct services by school psychologists was also a concern. Fran, who spends two days a week at each of her assigned schools, revealed some frustration about the increase in meetings and clerical duties at the expense of other responsibilities more directly related to students who need support.

One day at each school is strictly set aside for meetings. Each school in the district has an assigned school-based intervention team meeting day, and this is set by the district. All itinerant staff attend these meetings on an as-needed basis. At one school, I set up the master schedule, send reminders to teachers about upcoming meetings, decide what data are needed, graph data if possible, and facilitate the meetings. We have no control or power over teachers and we usually discuss four students each day and spend about 30-45 minutes on each student. The rest of the day usually focuses on meetings for behavior concerns or any other concerns teachers may have. I end up spending another half day setting up meetings and prepping for them, which can be frustrating. Eighty percent of my time is spent in meetings or prepping for meetings and I have other skills. My second school does not require as much prep time. We don't discuss as many students and someone else does the scheduling. I wish I could do more counseling and groups instead of getting pulled for other things. (SP.I.5.4.10)

The psychologists in this study have more responsibilities and perform more duties than testing students to determine eligibility for special education. All reported an increase in meetings and collaborating with others. The traditional testing duty remains but it has changed. Assessment is now completed to test certain hypotheses and the psychologists reported more freedom in selecting assessments to administer. Some of the participants appear to be embracing these changes but some report anxiety and confusion with this role change.

Theme #3: Redefining Roles--Making It work

Each participant referred to how they made sense of their changing patterns of practice by redefining their roles on their own terms. In some cases, they redefined their professional strengths and gained confidence in expressing their professional views. Fran acknowledged that she has become stronger with voicing her opinions and expressed concerns with using RTI to determine learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities. She emphasized her concerns with the subjectivity and vagueness of eligibility determinations, along with how reliance on classroom data based on response to intervention has affected her role in the process of identifying students for special education. Fran is redefining her role by becoming stronger and more confident with her opinions and making more demands that students are correctly identified.

When RTI started, the psychologists were introducing it and considered "experts." Then the legality part of it became more important. Who is responsible for saying the interventions are, or are not, appropriate or done with fidelity? It gets sticky since we have no control or power over teachers and then we use this information to make decisions with long-term consequences. It's a struggle. I don't want to make a teacher's life harder, but I want the best data possible to make eligibility decisions. (SP.I.5.4.7)

Betty drew on her experience as a special education teacher and touched on the difficulties with the actual practice of RTI. She reported that staff often understands the theory, but the actual implementation is much more difficult, especially at the secondary level. Betty is redefining her role by assisting with the actual development and implementation of interventions and progress monitoring.

My role has changed from a person conducting assessments to more of a consultant. My roles are different at different schools and it depends a lot on what the school needs. Overall, I do more data collection. Sometimes I am the one collecting the data and graphing the data. I do a lot of that. I also assist teachers in developing interventions and tweaking them so the

intervention matches the deficit. Teachers, and schools as a whole, still have a difficult time doing this because of limited programs and time. (SP.I.1.3.9)

Carol focused on the importance of team building, culture, and establishing consensus among stakeholders within her two schools. She has redefined her role to include more of those responsibilities.

We're literally in meetings for an entire day, so we have to do all our other responsibilities on the other day, which is hard to balance. It's challenging to figure out how you're going to balance doing evaluations, meet with families, and provide therapeutic services. But I like the fact that RTI can prevent a lot of problems occurring in the future, and at a more intensive level, if they are addressed at the core level. Both of my schools are trying to address problems at the core level so we don't have as many kids being brought up for evaluations. There is less individual problem-solving, so we can use our time more efficiently and effectively. I like to be involved at the very beginning and help to facilitate the Tier 1 meetings and this way I can prioritize my time and I'm not always putting out fires. (SP.I.2.4.22)

The psychologists in this study appear to be re-defining and re-establishing their own roles. There are some non-negotiables related to job responsibilities but each psychologist seems to be carving out their own niches in their schools based on their strengths and interests, as well as the varying needs of the schools in which they work.

Theme #4: Varying Contexts and Perceptions of Readiness

The perceptions of readiness and preparedness appeared to be influenced by prior experience, the focus of graduate training, and personal strengths. In a study completed by Machek and Nelson (2007), it was discovered that school psychologists who rated themselves as knowledgeable about and comfortable with RTI were more likely to endorse the use of it. As Carol stated, "There are differences among involvement with school psychologists depending on their comfort level and where they

were trained” (SP.I.2.2.17). Betty felt that the fact that she had been an ESE teacher helped her understand the implementation of RTI a little better.

Fran was a little more hesitant in her acceptance of RTI. She agreed with the overall premise of providing interventions and support, but had difficulties with using this information to determine eligibility for special education.

I’m concerned that everything is still gray and subjective. A different school may make a different decision. RTI was never made for ESE eligibility. It was a way to make sure to not miss kids who needed support, or make sure kids would not wait for services, but now it’s part of eligibility. Not everyone is comfortable or understands the questions that have to be answered. I want things to be more black and white and concrete.
(SP.I.5.4.7)

Before moving to Florida, Erin had worked in another state that had already adopted an RTI model and her previous experience influenced her comfort level with the model. She also served in the role of RTI coach, as well as school psychologist, in both schools due to this experience.

The state where I previously worked had eliminated the discrepancy model several years ago. I was learning about RTI, curriculum-based measurement, and developing local norms in 2002. I moved to Florida in 2006 and I brought that experience here. The state pilot program began during my second year and I was made a coach due to my experience. Now my role is both school psychologist and RTI coach at two schools.
(SP.I.4.1.19)

Gail seemed the least comfortable with the changes in her role. She stated she was not sure of what position to take or when to take a stand. Should she be the only one questioning the fidelity of the interventions and the decisions made using questionable data?

My work as a school psychologist was different than what I thought it would be. I knew it would be more assessment than counseling, but I wasn’t trained in the consultation part of it. Gator County was further along with RTI and the expectations of the knowledge base of the school

psychologists were different from what I was used to. There was a big learning curve and I was uncomfortable in the beginning. (SP.I.6.1.14)

Theme #5: Needing Support from School and District Administrators

Each participant also mentioned the importance of administrative support. Strong district-based training and professional development, along with a supportive school-based administrative team, was crucial in helping the school psychologist address their new roles and responsibilities within an RTI framework..Carol noted that

The focus of the training provided by the state was more program evaluation than providing skill sets that the schools could use to implement RTI. The district department identified the need for more training and created a step by step plan on how to build consensus among stakeholders. The district plan, funded by Race to the Top grant money, took the state plan and made it more regimented with detailed, specific, and linear guidelines for implementation. A specific plan was developed as to what was required based on the school's year of implementation. There were certain things that personnel would be trained to do if the school was in year 1, year 2, etc. Training provided by the district included school-based activities to identify resources, progress monitoring tools, and data collection needs. It seems that the school personnel that only received the district training and not the state training have a deeper skill set with regard to the practical side of implementation. (SP.I.2.2.4)

This idea of school-based administrative support was reiterated by all participants.

According to Carol, “the culture at one of my elementary schools is due to the expectations of the administration. The teachers are eager to delve in and do interventions” (SP.2.4.14). David reported that

RTI, along with everything else in the school, depends on the involvement of the administration. The school psychologists have no real power to make teachers do something. The relationship between administration and the staff is important and it makes a huge difference if the administration is involved. You can only push so hard if the grade-level team is not taking responsibility or making excuses for data. It all really depends on the involvement of the administration and if the administration will hold teachers accountable. Schools do or do not move along in the process depending on the administration. (SP.3.2.6)

Every participant noted the importance of training based on the needs of the school and a strong school-based administration. This was a theme that ran through each interview. When school leadership teams changed, the effect on the entire RTI implementation, including the roles and responsibilities of personnel, was immediate.

Discussion

The data collected in this study through interviews and document analysis reflect the changing role of the school psychologist within an RTI framework. Several factors influenced this changing role, including the interest, training, and expertise of the individual school psychologist. The participants themselves were at differing levels of comfort and acceptance of the new role. Some were excited and optimistic about the changes in their roles, others were finding their voice and discovering their role, and others were coping with unmet expectations. District-based professional development and a strong school-based administration appeared to be crucial in helping the school psychologist address their new roles and responsibilities. and influenced the roles and responsibilities of the school psychologist within each school.

The first two research questions focused on the professional roles and responsibilities of school psychologists. The participants were asked the reasons they entered the field of school psychology and all reported wanting to help others, whether it was helping students, families, teachers, or systems. Results indicated that these participants are collaborating more with others at a school level and involved more with the development of interventions and progress monitoring. Administration of psycho-educational tests lessened and the school psychologists interviewed often used the word “consultant” to describe their current role.

The next two questions were related to how the school psychologists are making sense and defining their roles. These professionals are taking a more active part in defining their own role, but roles continue to vary depending on the context and culture of the individual school buildings. Their day-to-day responsibilities are partly based on their past experiences, their training, and their personal interests and skills, but continue to fall within the realm of the broad job description adopted by the district.

The last question was related to what was needed to strengthen the practice of these participants. Every participant acknowledged the importance of district-based professional development, local training targeted to the specific needs of the school, and a strong, supportive administrative leadership team. The literature confirms the importance of administrative support, both in the areas of professional development and school-based leadership (Kovaleski, 2007; Putnam, 2008; Stollar et al., 2008).

In summary, identified key issues in managing the new roles of school psychologists were related to the reasons why the participants entered this particular helping profession, how they are coping with the changes, and how the participants themselves are redefining their roles. Two important variables were consistently mentioned by this group of school psychologists: a strong school-based administration and district-based professional development geared to the local needs. These findings are illustrated in Table 4-1. In Chapter 5, I will discuss conclusions and implications and provide recommendations.

Researcher's Self-Reflection

Before this study began, I recognized that that my background and personal experiences were critical to the process and development of this study. All data are

analyzed and reported through the subjective lens of the researcher and the result is a case study that is molded by the researcher's history. Exploring this subjectivity and how to manage it is critical to qualitative research (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1996).

As stated earlier, I have been employed as a school psychologist for over 20 years and have experienced the changes that RTI has had on the field. I felt that the participants were willing to share their stories with me because of a "kinship". I was familiar with the terminology and similar processes and procedures.

Because of the fact that school psychologists are managing these changes, I felt I was able to connect with the participants and noted some similarity with each one. Similar to Betty and Carol, I enjoy being "part of a team" and building relationships with school personnel. I also believe that it is a more efficient use of time to assist with problem solving when issues are first apparent, rather than waiting until later and having to "put out fires". I believe that being proactive enables school psychologists to help more students who have similar difficulties. Like David, I enjoy the investigative process and figuring out how to solve problems, I do see the importance of the graphical representation of progress, but not as comfortable with statistics as David. Erin and Gail seemed the least comfortable with their new roles and responsibilities. I have felt the same stress and anxiety, especially using RTI data to determine eligibility for special education. Gator County does not require a full, comprehensive evaluation to determine SLD, but the district in which I am employed does require this. Similar to what Gail said, this does provide a level of comfort and I was struck by her statement of "feeling like a seat-filler".

I began working in the field when the main responsibility consisted of testing and assessment and this was the focus of my previous graduate study. Like Gail, I experienced a big learning curve when Florida transitioned to this model. As stated by Erin, the number of meetings has increased and can be overwhelming at times. The importance of building leadership and targeted professional development was mentioned by all participants and I can attest to this fact. Working in schools where principals have a knowledge of RTI is very different from working in schools where principals view RTI as the steps to special education. As Betty said, we “understand the theory, but more training needs to be done in schools with the practical part”.

Many of the benefits and challenges that were mentioned by these participants were very familiar to me and my coworkers. I hope I have done justice in telling their stories.

Table 4-1. Categories and Themes

Question	Themes	Sub-Themes
How do school psychologists describe their professional responsibilities?	Joining a helping profession	Helping colleagues Helping students Helping with data
How do they perceive their current practice within an RTI framework?	Coping with changing roles	Positive experiences Unmet expectations
How do they make sense of their changing roles?	Redefining roles	Finding voice Building on strengths
How prepared do they feel for enacting their roles and meeting their responsibilities in their current assignments?	Varying contexts and perceptions of readiness	University training Work experience Personal interest
What do they need to strengthen their practice within the RTI framework?	Needing support from school & district administrators	Relevant professional development Principal leadership

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the issue of the changing roles of the school psychologist in an RTI framework by examining the perspectives of six school psychologists and one supervisor of psychological services in one large Florida school district. Sense-making theory provided the theoretical lens to frame the inquiry. The basic premise of sense-making theory is “who we think we are shapes what we enact and how we interpret information” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

The overall question guiding this study was this: How do school psychologists describe what they do and what they need as they make sense of their changing roles in schools that have adopted an RTI process? Sub-questions guiding this inquiry included:

1. How do school psychologists describe their professional responsibilities?
2. How do they perceive their current practice within an RTI framework?
3. How do they make sense of their changing roles?
4. How prepared do they feel for enacting their roles and meeting their responsibilities in their current assignments?
5. What do they need to strengthen their practice within the RTI framework?

This chapter provides conclusions based upon the findings, a discussion of the implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. Results of this study support the research findings previously reported in the literature review in Chapter 2. This study contributed to the research on the changing role of school psychologists and how these roles are being redefined.

Conclusions

This study included interviews with six school psychologists and one supervisor of psychological services. Results from the cross-case analysis revealed five major themes:

1. When interviewing the school psychologists and asking them what attracted them to the profession, along with what they valued most, all responded with a variation of the role of a helper.
2. The roles of school psychologists have changed and some were more comfortable with the changes than others.
3. School psychologists are redefining their roles for themselves by finding their voice and building on their strengths.
4. The perceptions of readiness and preparedness appeared to be influenced by prior experience, the focus of graduate training, and personal strengths.
5. District-based professional development targeted to specific needs and strong and supportive school-based leadership is crucial in helping the school psychologist address their new roles and responsibilities..

The desire to help others has been documented in the literature as a factor in deciding to enter the field of school psychology (Fagan & Wise, 2007). An interest in education, wanting to help children and families, and a humanitarian philosophy have all been reported as reasons for studying school psychology. Grehan, Flanagan, and Malgady (2011) conducted a study examining characteristics of successful school psychology students. Findings indicated that conscientious students who were able to perceive, understand, and manage emotions would be more successful communicating ideas and empathizing with involved parties. It is also important for school psychologists to have interpersonal and collaborative skills (Conoley, Conoley, & Reese, 2009).

All participants reported a significant change in their day-to-day responsibilities, duties, and roles. These findings appear to be consistent with the current literature in

this area (Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006; Canter, 2006; NASP, 2010). Research indicates an overall decrease in assessment and an increase in direct intervention and problem-solving consultation when an RTI model is implemented (Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006; Larson & Choi, 2010). School psychologists can now focus on how to minimize or solve a student's problem rather than identify it and are now able to expand their role by using their knowledge of learning theory, child development, home-school collaboration, consultation, and other areas of psychology (Lau et al., 2006).

School psychologists do not exist or function in a vacuum and collaboration with teams has become much more important. The role of the individual school psychologist is guided by a combination of factors that influence how the psychologist will fulfill the functions of assessment, intervention, consultation, and research. Fagan and Wise (2007) identified these characteristics as: a) personal factors, b) job-site characteristics, and c) external forces. Personal qualities include demographic variables, type of schooling, life experiences, and professional training factors. In addition, the professional interests, the reasons for choosing school psychology, and expectations are also considered significant personal factors.

Job site characteristics include job descriptions and school system expectations, as well as the number of students the psychologist is expected to serve. This was reflected in the job description and RTI implementation schedule adopted by the district. Other job related factors include the school structure and grade levels of the students, the location of the district, i.e., urban, rural, or suburban; and the administrative organization of the school, including expectations for the psychologist, previous district

experiences with psychological services, and the presence of related personnel (Fagan & Wise, 2007).

Larson and Choi (2010) surveyed 189 practicing school psychologists and discovered that the participants in their study perceived themselves as at least somewhat or adequately prepared to perform all the roles indicated in the study. However, 70% of the participants reported a need for additional training in progress monitoring of intervention fidelity and various models of RTI. This need was reiterated by the participants in the present study. The need for ongoing professional development was stressed by Barnes and Harlacher (2008). According to these researchers, it is crucial that professional development consist of a frequent review of skills and concepts, along with opportunities for frequent consultation. Knowing the “why” of RTI was also identified as an important area for review. A third area identified as a need was learning how to translate research into practice. These ideas were all mentioned in some form by the participants in this study..

According to Putnam (2008), building- and district-level leadership has the greatest impact on the implementation of RTI. Principals are responsible for ensuring that the core curriculum and interventions are implemented consistently and with fidelity (Kovaleski, 2007). Lau et al. (2006) referred to the building administrator as a “change agent” and identified the principal as having the greatest impact of the success or failure on RTI implementation. A common theme endorsed by the participants in this study was the importance of a strong building-level administration for the school psychologist to successfully address their new roles and responsibilities within an RTI framework..

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Fundamental factors of RTI involvement encompass not only daily involvement in the RTI process but also ongoing training in the methods to be utilized. Along with their involvement in RTI is the willingness of school psychologists to be open to changes in their roles along with a willingness to improve and expand their skills if necessary. These skills include progress monitoring, assessing evidence-based interventions, evaluating instructional and program outcomes, and designing and evaluating problem-solving methods.

Successful RTI implementation does not happen without planning, training, and ongoing professional development. Batsche, Curtis, Dorman, Castillo, & Porter (2007) reported that one-time or minimum training is not effective or adequate in ensuring that learning and integration occurs. Instead it is crucial that professional development be ongoing and structured with a conscious focus on the areas to be addressed. These areas should include specific information related to different assessment practices to be used in RTI, high-quality instruction, and assistance with data-based decision making for instruction and intervention recommendations (Harlacher & Siler, 2011).

In considering RTI professional development for school psychologists, it is important to consider that many school psychologists have varying degrees of knowledge and experience with RTI. School psychologists will need different types and levels of professional development depending on where they are on the learning spectrum associated with RTI. Being aware of the changing roles of school psychologists is another important factor in planning for their RTI professional

development. Specific topics for school psychologists' professional development needs should address three major factors; system design expertise, team collaboration, and serving individual students (NASP, 2006). These activities can range from assisting with RTI planning and training needs for districts, collaboration and ongoing consultation with RTI teams regarding interventions and progress-monitoring tools, and providing screening and assessment of students' cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and academic functioning (Crepeau-Hobson & Hobson, 2010). By getting involved with RTI, school psychologists can use their skills with consultation and training with teachers, staff, and parents (Reschly & Ysseldyke, 2002).

School psychologists with more diverse roles have been found to be more satisfied with their jobs (Brown, Holcombe, Bolen, & Thomson, 2006; Proctor & Steadman, 2003). Curtis, Grier, and Hunley (2004) defined an expanded role of the school psychologist as a facilitator who can assist with coordinating resources in order to respond to needs of families, students, classrooms, schools, districts, and communities. These researchers also noted that the various levels of services involve school psychologists in problem-solving and data-based decision making. Brown et al. found that school psychologists who were involved in an expanded role, including more consultation and intervention services, experienced high levels of job satisfaction. The authors found that school psychologists wanted to spend more time involved in direct and indirect interventions. Berninger (2006) found that RTI allows school psychologists greater flexibility to have increased consultation opportunities and more time to spend involved in intervention-related activities.

Implications for Future Research

School psychologists' perceptions are an important factor in the success of any initiatives related to their professional practice within educational settings. Merriam (1998) noted descriptive case studies, such as the present study, can be helpful in illustrating patterns of practices used by educational professionals, and in forming a database "for future comparison and theory building" (p. 38). With that in mind, future research might build on the present analysis by exploring how school psychologists in a variety of other contexts make sense of their changing practices and related needs for support in implementing RTI. Further research is needed to explore the ongoing training needs of school psychologists in light of their changing roles and how specific preparation affects their perceptions of working within an RTI context. Specifically further research is needed on the impact of ongoing training for school psychologists in progress monitoring tools and methods, evidence-based interventions, skills in evaluating instructional and program outcomes, and designing and evaluating problem-solving models. Strengthening professional performance in these areas should have a positive impact on the perceptions and involvement of school psychologists in the RTI process, and on positive outcomes for students (NASP, 2006).

Future research on school psychologists' perceptions of competence, practices, and training related to academic content would also likely be informative. RTI is a comprehensive service delivery model and it is assumed that school psychologists' preparation and perceptions of competence in the assessment and intervention of academic areas such as writing, math, and reading would also provide information that would help in analyzing the concerns and support needs psychologists have in implementing RTI.

Concluding Statements

With the implementation of RTI, the roles of school psychologists have significantly changed. It is critical that school psychologists continue to be open to changes in their role and involvement in the RTI process (Canter, 2006). With the changes that are associated with the RTI process, school psychologists have opportunities to expand their role from one of referral and assessment to one focusing on consultation and intervention for students (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). Evidence suggests that school psychologists who have greater knowledge and comfort with RTI have a higher likelihood of endorsing the use of it (Machek & Nelson, 2007). The changes in the roles of school psychologists prompted by the emphasis on interventions and problem solving provide a unique opportunity for school psychologists to help in defining the future of their field and the role school psychologists play with students in the school setting. RTI implementation provides opportunities for school psychologists to diversify their skills, expand their roles, and become an important part of the process for providing consultation, ongoing training for educators, and improving support for students. School psychologists must move beyond the idea of a “tester” to one of advocacy and working to assist with the development and evaluation of programs to address students’ overall needs (Braden, DiMarino-Linnen, & Good, 2001). The changes associated with RTI activate the need for ongoing research to determine the factors that impact perceptions of RTI and the resulting impact this has on school psychologists’ role in the RTI process.

APPENDIX A
COPY OF UF APPROVAL LETTER

UF Institutional Review Board
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

PO Box 112250
Gainesville, FL 32611-2250
352-392-0433 (Phone)
352-392-9234 (Fax)
irb2@ufl.edu

DATE: May 3, 2012

TO: Dena F. Landry
206 Bennington Drive #1
Naples, FL 34104

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair *ISF*
University of Florida
Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: **Approval of UFIRB # 2012-U-0423**
Managing the Changing Roles of School Psychologists in the Context of Elementary Schools

SPONSOR: None

I am pleased to advise you that the University of Florida Institutional Review Board has recommended approval of this protocol. Based on its review, the UFIRB determined that this research presents no more than minimal risk to participants. Your protocol was approved as an expedited study under category 7: *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Given this status, it is essential that you obtain signed documentation of informed consent from each participant. Enclosed is the dated, IRB-approved informed consent to be used when recruiting participants for the research. If you wish to make any changes to this protocol, *including the need to increase the number of participants authorized*, you must disclose your plans before you implement them so that the Board can assess their impact on your protocol. In addition, you must report to the Board any unexpected complications that affect your participants.

It is essential that each of your participants sign a copy of your approved informed consent that bears the IRB approval stamp and expiration date.

Your approval is valid through May 2, 2013. If you have not completed the protocol by this date, please telephone our office (392-0433), and we will discuss the renewal process with you. Additionally, should you complete the study before the expiration date, please submit the study closure report to our office. The form can be located at http://irb.ufl.edu/irb02/Continuing_Review.html. It is important that you keep your Department Chair informed about the status of this research protocol.

ISF:dl

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT – SUPERVISOR OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Informed Consent

Protocol Title: THE CHANGING ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS
IN SCHOOL-WIDE MODELS OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this study is to examine how school psychologists assigned to elementary schools understand, explain, and manage their roles in schools that have implemented an RTI framework.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

You are asked to participate in one interview. You will be asked to discuss the factors that led to the volunteering of the district to be a pilot district in RTI implementation. You will also be asked to nominate four to six mid-career school psychologists assigned to elementary schools who seem to be successfully managing their roles within the context of RTI. You may also be asked to participate in follow-up conversations or emails.

Time required:

1 hour for interview

Risks and Benefits:

There is no more than minimal risk to you. Some people may experience discomfort at sharing personal information in an interview. There is no direct benefit to you. The findings from this study may add to understanding of the work of school psychologists and what school districts can do to strengthen the roles of school psychologists.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file in my office. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Dena Landry, Doctoral Candidate, School of Special Education, School Psychology, and Early Childhood Studies, University of Florida, 239-248-0285

Jean Crockett, Ph.D., School of Special Education, School Psychology, and Early Childhood Studies, 1403 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:
IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, F 32611-2250
Phone: 352-392-0433.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant:

Date:

Principal Investigator:

Date:

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT - SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Informed Consent

Protocol Title: THE CHANGING ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN SCHOOL-
WIDE MODELS OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this study is to examine how school psychologists understand, explain, and manage their roles in schools that have implemented an RTI framework.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

You are asked to participate in one in-depth interview. You will be asked to discuss your beliefs and attitudes about being a school psychologist. You will also be asked to describe your day to day work as a school psychologist, how you make sense of your role, and what you need to strengthen your patterns of practice, and in turn, the educational system. You may also be asked to participate in follow-up conversations or emails.

Time required:

1 hour for interview

Risks and Benefits:

There is no more than minimal risk to you. Some people may experience discomfort at sharing personal information in an interview. There is no direct benefit to you. Some participants may appreciate the opportunity to reflect upon their work. The findings from this study may add to understanding of the work of school psychologists and what school districts can do to strengthen the roles of school psychologists.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file in my office. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Dena Landry, Doctoral Candidate, School of Special Education, School Psychology, and Early Childhood Studies, University of Florida, 239-248-0285

Jean Crockett, Ph.D., School of Special Education, School Psychology, and Early Childhood Studies, 1403 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, F 32611-2250
Phone: 352-392-0433.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant:

Date:

Principal Investigator:

Date:

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – SUPERVISOR OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Overall Theme: This interview has two objectives: Establishing the school district context in which a change initiative was implemented affecting the roles of school psychologists; and seeking the nomination of participants for the study from a school district administrator.

Questions for the Coordinator of Psychological Services

Your school district was one of the first in the state to adopt school-wide models of Response to Intervention:

- 1) What led to the decision to become a pilot district for this change initiative?
 - a. When did the district join the pilot project; who led the initiative; what was the scope of the initiative; where were the models implemented; how many schools are now involved?

- 2) How has the adoption of RTI affected the roles of school psychologists in your district?
 - b. What has worked well from your perspective?
 - i. What has led to this success?
 - c. What has been less successful?
 - i. What do you see as the barriers?
 - ii. What would help?

- 3) I am interested in interviewing participants for this study who are working in elementary schools in your district. What do you consider to be successful management of the roles? Could you nominate 4 to 6 mid-career school psychologists who are successfully managing their changing roles within an RTI context?

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

1. How do you describe your professional responsibilities?
2. How do you perceive your current practice within an RTI framework?
3. How do you make sense of your changing roles?
4. How prepared do you feel for enacting your roles and meeting your responsibilities in your current assignment?
5. What do you need to strengthen your practice within the RTI framework?

Question 1 includes probing questions that include but are not limited to the following: What does it mean to be a school psychologist? Why did you become a school psychologist? What do you see as the main purpose of this work?

Question 2 includes probing questions that include but are not limited to the following: What is it like now to be a school psychologist in an elementary school today? What kinds of things do you do as part of your practice?

Questions 3, 4, and 5 include probing questions that include but are not limited to the following: How do you negotiate the gaps between your expectations and your current practice? What or who has helped you learn about your new role? How prepared do you feel? How do you decide what to do and what not to do? How do these choices make you feel?

APPENDIX F
DISTRICT JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND EXCERPTS OF DISTRICT MANUALS

JOB TITLE: SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

Revised 9/16/97

JOB DESCRIPTION:

This employee is responsible for the delivery of comprehensive psychological services.

Duties of this position include but are not limited to:

1. Planning and Development:
 - a. Participation in the development of the comprehensive plan at the school and district level.
 - b. Participation in the development of short and long term goals for the school psychological services program.
 - c. Participation on school and district committees.
 - d. Participating as part of a Student Service Team.

2. Services to Students:
 - a. Conducting comprehensive psychological evaluations that include but are not limited to the assessment of intellectual, developmental, academic, social/emotional and behavioral status.
 - b. Assessment and data collection by use of informal or nonstandardized evaluation techniques.
 - c. Interpreting and utilizing assessment data for the purpose of writing psychological reports and developing written intervention plans.
 - d. Counseling students individually and in groups.
 - e. Providing crisis intervention.
 - f. Utilizing the Student Service Team as a resource for students.

3. Service to Parents:
 - a. Providing training on a wide variety of topics including but not limited to child development and effective parenting.
 - b. Assisting parents in locating available educational and mental health resources.
 - c. Consulting with parents regarding psychoeducational information and interventions.

4. Service to Teachers:
 - a. Consulting with teachers and administrators regarding specific students.
 - b. Assisting in the development of teacher implemented interventions.
 - c. Assisting with school wide programs.
 - d. Providing inservice training.

5. Service to Community:
 - a. Participating in the development of educational and community partnerships.
 - b. Working with communities to improve the lives of students.

6. Professional Development:

- a. Attending inservice meetings and conferences to develop professional attitudes and skills.
 - b. Maintaining professional skills through reading of current literature and professional memberships.
7. Program Evaluation:
- a. Participating in program evaluation.
 - b. Assisting in the design and implementation of program evaluation.
8. Other Duties and Responsibilities:
- a. Supervising school psychology interns and practicum students.
 - b. Participation in research.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS

- 1. Master's degree or above
- 2. State Certification in School Psychology
- 3. Initial health examination that includes screening for tuberculosis to assure no significant risk to the health and safety of others.

DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS

- 1. Training in accredited school psychology programs
- 2. Advanced training
- 3. Classroom teaching experience
- 4. Successful experience in like position.

*Pre-K/Head Start only: Current and former parents or guardians of children served by the Prekindergarten/Head Start program must receive preference for employment in vacancies for which they apply.

PS/Rtl Year 1 Expectations

1. School Based Leadership Teams (SBLT)/Additional Teams

1. Representative SBLT is established (Every Ed included, at least two general education teachers with one specific to target grade)
2. Roles of team members are defined (e.g., facilitator, recorder, time keeper, etc.)
3. Team and meeting norms are developed
4. Regular monthly meetings are scheduled
5. Areas of focus and goals for PS/Rtl leadership meetings are developed (creating a guided plan for sequence of meetings, agendas, and action plans)
6. Administration attends all meetings; visibly supports the team and actively communicates and demonstrates the value and importance of the process
7. Gradual release of responsibility: Team identifies at least one additional facilitator for targeted grade early in the year. At the end of the year, internal facilitator facilitates or co-facilitates grade level problem-solving.

2. Consensus/Compelling Why's Are Established

1. School-wide needs are identified: Faculty develops awareness of academic and behavioral needs
2. Rationale for PS/Rtl is established
3. Core Principle Activity is completed if needed
4. Connections with existing systems and initiatives are made
5. Develop/align mission statement, core values/school wide beliefs
6. Rationale for school-wide focus (including PS/Rtl) is communicated to staff through small and large group presentations throughout the year
7. Teams will be able to identify the schools top priorities and understand the rationale for the priorities

3. General PS/Rtl Knowledge

1. Within SBLT, big ideas of Rtl are understood and can be fluently communicated (e.g., four steps of problem-solving, definition of Rtl, school improvement initiative, all students can learn, core principles)
2. Big ideas of Rtl are communicated to other stakeholders through small and large group presentations throughout the year

4. Problem-Solving is Used as a Way of Work

1. Time is designated for team(s) to discuss Tier I issues for at least one grade level/academic area
2. Tier I problem solving occurs at least once after each benchmark assessment period
 - i. Problem ID
 - ii. Problem analysis

- iii. Instruction/intervention development
- iv. Response to instruction/intervention
- 3. Teams engage in strategic planning/small group problem solving to address Tier I issues
- 4. Teams will maintain appropriate documentation of each step of problem-solving including fidelity of instructional practices and student outcomes.

5. Infrastructure

1. Resource inventory is drafted for at least one academic/content/behavior area that includes:
 - i. Assessment
 - ii. Instruction
 - iii. Problem-solving
 - iv. Professional Development

2. By the end of the year,
 - i. Assessment: By the end of the year, schools will have selected at least one common assessment that link to desired outcomes, and an agreed schedule of administration for selected grade level
 - ii. Instruction: By the end of the year schools will use Tier I materials, human resources, instructional routines, and schedules to ensure a guaranteed and viable core instruction for the selected grade level
 - iii. Problem-Solving: Schools will select meeting structures in which Tier I discussions will occur, identify assessments to utilize during meetings, and who will facilitate.
 - iv. Professional Development: The team will complete a professional development matrix/plan matched to the school's top priorities.

3. An early warning system is established in secondary schools to assist with data-based decision making

6. PS/Rtl Professional Development

1. SBLT members attend scheduled PD sessions
2. SBLT members complete skill assessments and practice during PD sessions
3. SBLT members complete homework
4. School-based administration attends all PD sessions; demonstrates support for the team and importance of process
5. Evaluation tools are completed (e.g., P-SAPSI, Problem-Solving Rubrics, PLC Continuum, BoQ)

PS/Rtl Year 2 Expectations

1. School Based Leadership Teams (SBLT)/Additional Teams

1. Representative SBLT is maintained (Every Ed included, at least two general education teachers with one specific to target grades)
2. Roles of team members are defined and updated (e.g., facilitator, recorder, time keeper, etc.)
3. Team and meeting norms are reviewed at least once
4. Regular monthly meetings are scheduled
5. Areas of focus and goals for PS/Rtl leadership meetings are developed (determine what the team should know, understand, do relative to PS/Rtl, creating a guided plan for sequence of meetings, agendas, and action plans)
6. Administration begins to facilitate SBLT meetings with support; visibly supports the team and actively communicates and demonstrates the value and importance of the process
7. As part of the team's gradual release of responsibility, targeted grades will have two trained facilitators that will independently facilitate grade-level meetings (e.g., prepare Tier I and Tier II data, facilitate each step of problem solving, etc.)
8. Grade level teams, departments, committees, and instructional teams are developed as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) aligned and connected with Rtl

2. Consensus/Compelling Why's Are Established

1. School-wide needs are identified/updated based on new data
2. Continue developing faculty awareness of academic and behavioral needs
3. Rationale for PS/Rtl is reiterated and deepened with entire staff. Presentations to communicate Tier I & II data continue, separate meetings occur to discuss academic and behavior data; framework is expanded to additional grade levels/departments when appropriate
4. Connections with existing systems and initiatives are made; integrate new trainings/initiatives into PS/Rtl framework (maintain the focus on Rtl activities rather than moving to the "next new thing")
5. Continue aligning mission statement, core values/school wide beliefs
6. Continue promoting and deepening the rationale for school-wide focus (including PS/Rtl) with staff through small and large group presentations throughout the year
7. Teams will be able to identify the schools top priorities and understand the rationale for the priorities

3. General PS/Rtl Knowledge

1. Within SBLT and targeted grade level teams, big ideas of Rtl are understood and can be fluently communicated (e.g., four steps of problem-solving, definition of Rtl, school improvement initiative, all students can learn, core principles)
2. Big ideas of Rtl are communicated to other stakeholders through small and large group presentations throughout the year

4. Problem-Solving is Used as a Way of Work

1. Time is designated for team(s) to discuss Tier I/Tier II issues (based on data) for multiple grade levels/academic areas
2. Problem solving occurs at least once after each benchmark assessment period. Analysis of data indicates the focus of problem-solving (i.e., Tier I/II)
 - i. Problem ID
 - ii. Problem analysis
 - iii. Instruction/intervention development
 - iv. Response to instruction/intervention
3. Teams engage in strategic planning/small group problem solving to address Tier I/II issues
4. Teams will maintain appropriate documentation of each step of problem-solving including fidelity of instructional practices and student outcome

5. Infrastructure

1. Resource inventories are drafted for multiple academic/content/behavior areas across multiple grade-levels that include:
 - i. Assessment
 - ii. Instruction
 - iii. Problem-solving
 - iv. Professional Development
2. By the end of the year,
 - i. Assessment: By the end of the year, schools will have selected multiple common assessments that link to desired outcomes, and an agreed schedule of administration for selected grade levels
 - ii. Instruction: By the end of the year schools will use Tier I/II materials, human resources, instructional routines, and schedules to ensure a guaranteed and viable core instruction for the selected grade levels
 - iii. Problem-Solving: Schools will select meeting structures in which Tier I/II discussions will occur, identify assessments to utilize during meetings, and who will facilitate.
 - iv. Professional Development: The team will update a professional development matrix/plan matched to the school's top priorities.

6. Professional Development (PD)

1. SBLT members attend scheduled PD sessions
2. SBLT members complete skill assessments and practice during PD sessions
3. SBLT members complete homework
4. School-based administration attends all PD sessions

7. Evaluation

1. Overall Rtl Implementation
 - i. P-SAPSI
 - ii. Behavior evaluations (required if PBS training has been completed)
 1. Benchmarks of Quality
 2. PBS Implementation Checklists
2. Problem Solving
 - i. Problem-Solving Rubric
3. Available optional assessments
 - i. Benchmarks for Advanced Tiers (BAT) - behavior
 - ii. PLC Continuum (from Learning by Doing) - problem solving

PS/Rtl Year 3 Expectations

1. School Based Leadership Teams (SBLT)/Additional Teams

1. Representative SBLT is maintained (Every Ed included, at least two general education teachers with one specific to target grades)
2. Roles of team members are defined and updated (e.g., facilitator, recorder, time keeper, etc.)
3. Professional development and coaching supports are provided to new SBLT members
4. Team and meeting norms are reviewed at least once
5. Regular monthly meetings are scheduled
6. Areas of focus and goals for PS/Rtl leadership meetings are developed (determine what the team should know, understand, do relative to PS/Rtl, creating a guided plan for sequence of meetings, agendas, and action plans)
7. Administration independently facilitates SBLT meetings with support; visibly supports the team and actively communicates and demonstrates the value and importance of the process
8. As part of the team's gradual release of responsibility, targeted grades will have two trained facilitators that will independently facilitate grade-level meetings (e.g., prepare Tier I, Tier II and relevant Tier III data, facilitate each step of problem solving, etc.)
9. Grade level teams, departments, committees, and instructional teams continue developing as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) aligned and connected with Rtl
10. SBITs meet and engage in problem-solving to address the needs of individual students; this team includes general education and special education representation.

2. Consensus/Compelling Why's Are Established

1. School-wide needs are identified/updated based on new data
2. Continue developing faculty awareness of academic and behavioral needs
3. Administration will coordinate and provide presentations providing the rationale for PS/Rtl with entire staff. Presentations to communicate Tier I & II data continue, separate meetings occur to discuss academic and behavior data; framework is expanded to additional grade levels/departments when appropriate
4. Connections with existing systems and initiatives are made; integrate new trainings/initiatives into PS/Rtl framework (maintain the focus on Rtl activities rather than moving to the "next new thing")
5. Continue aligning mission statement, core values/school wide beliefs
6. Continue promoting and deepening the rationale for school-wide focus (including PS/Rtl) with staff through small and large group presentations throughout the year

7. Promote consensus and the rationale for Tier III problem solving and intensive intervention supports for a small amount of high risk students
8. Teams will be able to identify the school's top priorities and understand the rationale for the priorities
9. Opportunities to communicate data in vertical meetings will be provided (including receiving and exit meetings at the beginning and end of the year)

3. General PS/Rtl Knowledge

1. Within SBLT and targeted grade level teams, big ideas of Rtl are understood and can be fluently communicated (e.g., four steps of problem-solving, definition of Rtl, school improvement initiative, all students can learn, core principles)
2. Big ideas of Rtl are communicated to other stakeholders through small and large group presentations throughout the year
3. Problem-solving modules are provided by the SBLT to instructional staff.

4. Problem-Solving is Used as a Way of Work

1. Time is designated for team(s) to discuss Tier I/II/III issues (based on data) for multiple grade levels/academic areas
2. Students are identified for Tier II and Tier III problem-solving based upon level of student risk (i.e. Data Referrals)
3. Problem solving occurs at least once after each benchmark assessment period. Analysis of data indicates the focus of problem-solving (i.e., Tier I/II)
 - i. Problem ID
 - ii. Problem analysis
 - iii. Instruction/intervention development
 - iv. Response to instruction/intervention
4. Problem-solving occurs for at-risk groups of and individual students more frequently
5. Teams will maintain appropriate documentation of each step of problem-solving including fidelity of instructional practices and student outcomes at Tiers I, II and III

5. Infrastructure

1. Resource inventories are drafted for multiple academic/content/behavior areas across multiple grade-levels that include:
 - i. Assessment
 - ii. Instruction
 - iii. Problem-solving
 - iv. Professional Development
2. By the end of the year,
 - i. Assessment
 1. Screening/Benchmarking: Schools will have selected multiple common assessments that link to desired outcomes, and an agreed schedule of administration for selected grade levels

2. Progress-Monitoring: Schools will identify tools to progress monitor groups and individual student performance. Tier II and Tier III data might be either more frequent and/or skill specific.
 3. Diagnostic: Data are collected to confirm/disconfirm research-based hypotheses with an ultimate goal of informing instruction
 4. Treatment Fidelity: Teams will be responsible for identifying multiple methods of collection instruction/intervention fidelity information. Fidelity data will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of response to intervention/instruction.
- ii. By the end of the year schools will use Tier I/II/III materials, human resources, instructional routines, and schedules to ensure a guaranteed and viable core instruction for the selected grade levels
 - iii. Problem-Solving:
 1. Schools will select meeting structures in which Tier I/II/III discussions will occur, identify assessments to utilize during meetings, and who will facilitate
 2. Schools will maintain documentation to ensure problem-solving fidelity
 - iv. Professional Development:
 1. The team will update a professional development matrix/plan matched to the school's top priorities.

6. Professional Development (PD)

1. SBLT members attend scheduled PD sessions
2. SBLT members complete skill assessments and practice during PD sessions
3. SBLT members complete homework
4. School-based administration attends all PD sessions
5. New SBLT members will receive supplemental PD supports as needed

7. Evaluation

1. Overall RtI Implementation
 - i. P-SAPSI
 - ii. Behavior evaluations (required if PBS training has been completed)
 1. Benchmarks of Quality
 2. PBS Implementation Checklists
2. Problem Solving
 - i. Problem-Solving Rubric
3. Available optional assessments
 - i. Benchmarks for Advanced Tiers (BAT) - behavior
 - ii. PLC Continuum (from Learning by Doing) - problem solving

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dena Frances Landry was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1967. She was adopted at birth by Nolan Landry, a social worker, and Charlotte Landry, a teacher, and raised in southwest Louisiana. She attended Louisiana State University and earned a bachelor's degree in December 1988. She immediately began graduate studies in psychology at the now University of Louisiana at Lafayette. After graduation in 1988, she began working as a school psychologist in Vermilion Parish, a small, rural parish west of Lafayette, Louisiana. Dr. Landry moved to Naples, Florida in 2001, and worked with a private psychologist for three years. In January 2004, she re-entered school system practice as a school psychologist in Lee County. In August 2004, she joined the Collier County Public Schools as a school psychologist and is currently employed in this capacity. Dr. Landry received her Ed.D. in Special Education with an emphasis on administration and policy from the University of Florida in December of 2012.