Teacher Skill and Stress Levels: Are They Prepared for Response to Intervention?

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Elementary-level general education teachers’ role-related stress and preparedness regarding Response to Intervention (RtI) were examined across 30 Western Wisconsin public school districts and seven counties. The relationship between role-related stress and preparedness, as well as how levels of both variables varied between counties, were examined. One-hundred and thirty-five general education teachers completed the Preparedness & Stress Measure (P & S Measure) online. Higher scores on the preparedness portion of the measure equated with higher levels of preparedness, while higher scores on the role-related stress portion equated with lower levels of stress. Statistical analyses revealed a significant positive correlation between the variables within counties, but did not reveal significant differences in levels of each variable between counties. Results from this study are lacking support from other literature, as this study’s purpose was unique in providing empirical data concerning RtI preparedness and role-related stress. The importance of discussing findings with districts sampled is noted. As such discussion may contribute to improved professional development.
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With the recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) came the introduction of an alternative system to the traditional Discrepancy Model which used the ‘wait-to-fail’ system of eligibility determination, termed Response the Intervention [RtI] (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities [NJCLD], 2005). Although much anticipation surrounds the future nationwide implementation of RtI, researchers recently have reported concerns regarding the preparedness of school districts to implement RtI (Kratochwill, Volpiansky, Clements, & Ball, 2007; Glover & DiPerna, 2007; NJCLD, 2005).

Intertwined with this concern is the fact that RtI will involve the increased involvement of general education teachers in such areas as providing students individualized, evidence-based instruction, as well as the monitoring of students’ progress with integrity, reporting data findings and responding to findings in an effective manner (NJCLD, 2005; Gersten & Dimino, 2006). Increased involvement in the aforementioned areas will require general education teachers to exhibit a strong knowledge and skill level of such aspects of RtI, so as to ensure successful implementation of RtI (NJCLD, 2005; Kratochwill et al, 2007). However, in general, adequate training in such aspects of RtI (e.g., the nationally-recognized training modeled by the St. Croix River Education District (SCRED) in Minnesota) has not been adequately presented to most professionals such as school psychologists, let alone general education teachers (Kratochwill et al., 2007; Windram, Scierka, Silbergi1ltt, 2007). In addition, research findings have demonstrated that teachers already experience higher levels of occupational stress than other professions, without consideration of increased responsibilities associated with RtI (Kyriacou, 2001).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate general education teachers’ preparedness, defined as the level of knowledge and skill of components underlying the system of RtI, to implement RtI at a classroom-level. Furthermore, the current level of role-related stress,
defined as the stress associated with the role teachers’ play and the discrepancy that often exists between teachers’ expectation of what their job entails and the actual experiences involved in their job, experienced by general education teachers was measured, as well as consideration of the relationship between role-related stress and preparedness (Pettegrew & Wolfe, 1981).

**History of RtI and Core Components**

As aforementioned, the formal introduction of RtI occurred with the recent reauthorization of IDEA. However, the actual components underlying the concept of RtI have stemmed from research developments reported over the past three decades (Glover & DiPerna, 2007). These core components, as outlined by Glover and DiPerna (2007) include “multitier implementation, student assessment and decision making, evidence-based intervention provision, maintenance of procedural integrity, and development and sustainability of systems-level capacity” (p. 527). To date, empirical research has primarily focused on the first three core components of RtI service delivery. However, some researchers report that the lack of empirical consideration of the importance of procedural integrity and the development of systems-level capacity could cause unsuccessful and ineffective implementation of RtI (Glover & DiPerna, 2007; Kratochwill et al., 2007; NJCLD, 2005).

**Components of Successful RtI Implementation**

As a result, researchers considering the potential challenges to RtI implementation have showcased the importance of professional development as a foundation to implementation (Kratochwill et al., 2007; Glover & DiPerna, 2007). In order for implementation to be successful, teachers will need to receive adequate preservice training, as well as continued education regarding RtI. Undoubtedly, the implementation of RtI will bring about change on various levels of the school system, with the most significant change impacting the roles of educators that will implement it (Kratochwill et al., 2007; NJCLD, 2005). More specifically, regular education
teachers will be expected to implement evidence-based interventions to students in need of assistance, implement interventions with integrity, monitor the progress of students receiving intervention, evaluate effectiveness of interventions, and work to modify interventions to increase effectiveness (NJCLD, 2005; Glover & DiPerna, 2007).

In order for accurate decision-making to occur following intervention implementation, general education teachers must be competent in practicing procedural integrity, which involves both adherence to the system of RtI service delivery in the teachers’ school district, as well as implementation integrity within each tier of RtI (Glover & DiPerna, 2007). According to Danielson (2007), the most important training will need to involve both “primary and secondary-tier interventions, and in the assessments used for screening and progress monitoring, so that they are able to match interventions with student needs” (p.633).

In terms of intervention implementation integrity at the classroom level, Elliot and DiPerna (2001) reported three primary factors associated with teachers’ implementation of interventions: acceptability, training, and support, with training provided to the teacher to be most significant in intervention integrity (Glover & DiPerna, 2007). According to Gersten (2006), “a thorough research base is needed, practitioners and administrators must be provided with training in how to use this research effectively in practice, and systems must be put in place to support practitioners and administrators” (p.632).

In order to achieve high levels of integrity, thus leading to appropriate implementations of RtI, a system wide revision will need to be put in place. According to Kovaleski (2007), “achieving these levels will require changes in preservice and in-service training and a clear understanding of who should monitor and facilitate treatment fidelity in schools” (p.641). Procedures need to be followed before the implementation of RtI, as well as during the initial stages of the transition. For maximum success, it has been found that “training efforts need to be
frequent and of sufficient intensity to allow teachers to build the requisite skills. The training also needs to be durable so that initial training is followed up with opportunities for guided practice by expert teachers and/or consultants as well as opportunities for staff to discuss issues with implementation” (Kovaleski, 2007, p.641). Educators need to be given multiple opportunities to gain the appropriate knowledge and skills.

Research suggests that the current systems in place are not generally addressing the professional needs of educators attempting to implement RtI. According to Kratochwill (2007), “preliminary research findings have already documented the lack of pre-service and in-service preparation of school psychologists to conduct evidence-based prevention and intervention” (p.620). In instances where RtI is facing some challenges, the teachers involved may have not received adequate formal training or been provided opportunities for professional development. In order to successfully implement RtI, educators will need to have strong behavior management skills within a classroom setting to address the individual needs of their students. Yet, research has suggested that “teachers are not often trained to identify effective classroom management procedures” to address such needs (Kratochwill, 2007, p.620).

According to Danielson (2007), “there has not been sufficient attention paid to the implications of RtI for the preservice preparation of personnel who will play critical roles in the implementation” (p.633). Ignoring the role of the educator sets the RtI system up for failure. According to Daly (2007), “RtI represents a fundamental shift in how educators respond to and make decisions about students experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties” (p.575). In order for RtI to be implemented with the least amount of resistance, and the least amount of stress involved, educators need to be taught how to implement it appropriately, yet within the limits of available resources.
The Impact of Teacher Stress

Definition of Stress/Conceptualization of Occupational Stress

The concepts of teacher stress and teacher burnout have not been uncommon to literature. In fact, both concepts have been studied since the early to mid-1970s (Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). However, the historic literature concerning the topic of teacher stress has lacked consistency of conceptualization and measurement of the concept (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; Kerlin, 2002). In their review, Guglielmi and Tatrow (1998) state that the term stress is often subjectively defined, in that each researcher defines the term in a slightly different manner. Although many inconsistencies exist in the teacher stress literature, a broadened look at the literature reveals that teacher stress is part of the larger body of research surrounding occupational stress, in which a number of models exist to aid in the conceptualization of teacher stress (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998).

In general, the “stress response” is viewed to result from the interaction between a person and his or her environment. To elaborate, stress involves three major components: the stressor, the psychological or physiological effects of the stressor on the person, and the person’s appraisal of the event (Hansen & Sullivan, 2003). Therefore, the stress response is complex in that it involves an interaction between environmental characteristics, such as stressors and mediating factors, as well as individual characteristics, such as one’s personality traits and coping skills (Brown & Nagel, 2004).

In general, various models of occupational stress present the role of the individual or the environment in different ways (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). One of the most common models associated with occupational stress is the person-environment fit model (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). The person-environment fit model emphasizes the discrepancy between an individual’s perceptions of the demands of his or her job and the actual demands of the job. The focus of this
model is on individual characteristics, as stress is conceptualized to result from the discrepancy between one’s perception and reality (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998).

For the purposes of this study, stress will be conceptualized as an interaction between person and environment and broadly defined as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher” (Kyriacou, 2001, p. 28). More specifically, the stress level of general education teachers will be assessed by measuring factors associated with their role (i.e., stress associated with the discrepancy between perception of individual’s demands or expectations and the actual demands and expectations needed to fulfill do the job), which will be discussed further in the following subsection (Kerlin, 2002; Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982).

Literature Regarding Teacher Stress Level

As previously mentioned, literature has frequently documented that that those in the teaching profession often experience higher levels of stress than persons in other professions (Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982; Brown & Nagel, 2004; Hansen & Sullivan, 2003; Kyriacou, 2001). Stress is not a subject to be taken lightly, as research has shown it can have serious consequences on not just the individual teacher, but also on the functioning of the students, the school, and the entire school system (Brown & Nagel, 2004; Hansen & Sullivan, 2003). More specifically, stress can result in teachers experiencing both physical and psychological problems, which in turn can affect teachers’ attendance, effectiveness in the classroom, and interactions with colleagues (Hansen & Sullivan, 2003; Brown & Nagel, 2004).

Therefore, researchers have noted the importance of investigating factors that can play a role in the development of teacher stress and have reported factors such as: workload and the pressure of deadlines, instructing students who are unmotivated to learn, poor interactions with colleagues, being evaluated by others, poor salary, inadequate resources, large class sizes, status

In the field of education, it is well-known that changes are frequently made in legislation regarding the practices of schools. However, Kyriacou (2001) reports that even though change is a commonplace occurrence in the education system, it still remains to be a stressful experience for teachers. Although research has given little consideration to how such frequent changes in legislation impacts the stress level of teachers, it is known that legislative changes often result in the modification of curriculum, increased workload and responsibilities, and changes in the roles of persons working in the education system, and these changes are purported to come with the future implementation of RtI (Brown & Nagel, 2004; NJCLD, 2005). In fact, as aforementioned, the most significant changes will occur in the roles of educators implementing RtI (Kratochwill et al., 2007; NJCLD, 2005).

Researchers have considered the stress associated with teachers’ role for a number of decades (Pettegrew & Wolfe, 1981). Encompassed under the term role stress are such factors as: role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, and role preparedness (Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982). With the significant changes in the roles of general education teachers purported to occur with the implementation of RtI, researchers have questioned the need for research to consider how such role changes will affect the general education teacher (NJCLD, 2005). Research has demonstrated how the concept of role ambiguity, which addresses teachers’ feeling as if the expectations placed on them are vague, as well as the information concerning the expectations and information regarding how to meet expectations, is associated with teacher stress (Hansen & Sullivan, 2003; Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981).

In addition, role-related stress has also been associated with teachers’ feeling as if they are expected to fulfill conflicting roles (i.e., role conflict), are expected to accomplish more than they can handle in their role (i.e., role overload), and are unprepared, whether in preservice or in-
service training, to fulfill what is expected of them (i.e., role preparedness) (Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982; Kerlin 2002; Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981). Therefore, with knowledge that those in the teaching profession are already under a significant amount of stress, there is concern that the implementation of RtI will only increase the stress level of teachers, especially if general education teachers are unprepared or are lacking the knowledge and skills to implement the concepts underlying RtI and already are experiencing a significant amount of role stress.

**Research Questions**

Therefore, to address the purpose of the study, the following questions and hypotheses were formulated:

*Research Question 1.* What is the current knowledge and skill level of general education elementary teachers (i.e., preparedness) in Western Wisconsin public schools in regards to the components underlying RtI, as measured by the P & S Measure (created by authors), and are there significant differences in such levels across various Western Wisconsin counties? It is hypothesized that descriptive statistics will reveal that general education teachers, as a group, have little to no knowledge and skill of the components underlying RtI (i.e, less than or equal to a total score of 16 on the preparedness portion of the P & S Measure), which would translate to a lack of preparedness. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that significant differences in preparedness will exist between various counties, as school districts within each county are hypothesized to be at different stages of RtI implementation.

*Research Question 2.* What is the current role-related stress level of general education elementary teachers in Western Wisconsin public schools, as measured by a modified version of the Teacher Stress Measure (Pettegrew & Wolfe, 1981), and are there significant differences in such levels across various Western Wisconsin counties? It is hypothesized that descriptive statistics will reveal that general education teachers experience moderate to high levels of role-
related stress (i.e., less than or equal to a total score of 20 on the role-related stress portion of the P & S Measure). Furthermore, it is hypothesized that significant differences in role-related stress will exist between various counties, as school districts within each county are hypothesized to be at different stages of RtI implementation.

Research Question 3. What is the relationship between the knowledge and skill level of general education elementary teachers regarding the components of RtI (i.e., preparedness) and the levels of role-related stress they experience? It is hypothesized that inferential statistics will reveal a significant relationship between teacher preparedness and role-related stress level.

Method

Participants

One-hundred and thirty-five licensed general education elementary teachers from 17 school districts in seven Western Wisconsin counties served as participants in this study. From the overall sample, 43 participants (31.9%) chose not to respond to this demographic item. Within the sample, 85.2 \% of participants were female (n=115), 11.9 \% were male (n=16), and 3.0\% chose not to respond (n=4). In addition, 5.2\% of respondents (n=7) were between the ages of 21-24, while the majority of the sample (n=111) was over the age of 30.

In addition, 56 participants held an undergraduate degree (41.5\%), 74 reported holding a master’s degree (54.8\%), one reported holding other degrees (e.g., education specialist degree; 0.7\%), and four chose not to respond (3.0\%). The majority of the sample reported having worked 15 or more years in the education field (n = 71; 52.6\%). Percentages of grade levels taught were as follows: 3.0\% reported teaching pre-k (n=4), 14.1\% kindergarten (n=19), 15.6\% first grade (n=21), 16.3\% second grade (n=22), 16.3\% third grade (n=22), 10.4\% fourth grade (n=14), 11.1\% fifth grade (n=15), 0.7\% sixth grade (n=1), and 9.6\% multi-grade (n=13), while 3.0\% chose not to respond (n=4).
Moreover, the majority of the sample had heard of Response to Intervention (RtI) \((n=129; 95.6\%)\), and had heard of RtI through one source (e.g., news, research, conferences, and professionals in their district) \((n=74; 54.8\%)\). Participants that reported having heard of RtI from professionals in their school district reported primarily acquiring such knowledge from multiple professionals (e.g., school psychologist, curriculum department, special education department, guidance counselor, general education teacher(s), other administration) \((n=82; 60.7\%)\), and having had such knowledge for one year or more \((n=71; 52.6\%)\)

**Apparatus’**

**Teacher Preparedness.** Teacher preparedness, defined in this study as the level of knowledge and skill of components underlying the system of RtI, was measured using a survey created by the authors, which was included in the Preparedness & Stress Measure (P & S Measure). Based on past literature concerning the key underlying components of RtI, an eight-item survey was designed to assess participants’ level of knowledge and training in the following areas: curriculum-based measurement, universal screening, student progress monitoring, differentiated instruction, evidence-based interventions, research-supported teaching strategies, data-based decision making, and intervention integrity (NJCLD, 2005; Glover & DiPerma, 2007; Kratochwill, et al., 2007). Reliance on past literature for instrument design demonstrates content validity. In addition, an analysis of internal reliability revealed a coefficient alpha of 0.91, suggesting excellent levels of internal consistency on the preparedness portion of the P & S Measure.

Participants were asked to rate, using a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 6 (“Strongly Agree”), their response to the following statement: “I have adequate knowledge and training to feel comfortable...Using Curriculum-Based Measurement” (Item 1) or “Using Universal Screening Procedures” (Item 2), for example. A higher level of preparedness is
revealed by higher ratings on the preparedness portion of the P & S Measure, while a lower level of preparedness is reflected by lower ratings on the preparedness portion of the P & S Measure. The entire P & S Measure can be seen in Appendix A.

*Role-Related Stress.* Role-related stress, as defined in this study as the stress associated with the role teachers play and the discrepancy that often exists between teachers’ expectation of what their job entails and the actual experiences involved in their job, was measured using a modified version of the Teacher Stress Measure [TSM] (Pettegrew & Wolfe, 1981). The original Teacher Stress Measure is a 67-item multivariate measure that assesses the level of role-related, task-related, and environmental teacher stress using a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement (Kerlin, 2002; Pettegrew & Wolfe, 1981). Pettegrew and Wolfe (1981) reported the overall adequate reliability and validity of the TSM.

Because of the focus of this study, only items concerning role-related stress were considered. In addition, the 25-item role-related stress section of the TSM was scaled down to include only 10-items in an attempt to maintain the brevity of the measure used in this study. Therefore, the authors selected two items from each subsection of Pettegrew & Wolfe’s (1981) original role-related stress section (i.e. Role Ambiguity, Role Overload, Role Conflict, Nonparticipation, and Role Preparedness) to result in the role-related stress items of the P & S Measure used for this study. Items were chosen based on their applicability to the new roles presumed to be associated with the future implementation of RtI (NJCLD, 2005; Kratochwill et al., 2007). Based on the overall validity reported on the TSM, the role-related stress portion of the P & S Measure exhibits content validity, as well. Moreover, an analysis of internal reliability revealed a coefficient alpha of 0.85, suggesting levels of internal consistency within the good to excellent range for the role-related stress portion of the P & S Measure.

Participants were asked to rate their response to items such as “The scope of
responsibilities involved in my position is clear to me” (Item 3) and “I am informed of important events that are occurring in my school (e.g. in-services, meetings)” (Item 7) using a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 6 (“Strongly Agree). A higher level of role-related stress is revealed by lower ratings on the stress portion of the P & S Measure, while a lower level of role-related stress is reflected by higher ratings on the stress portion of the P & S Measure. As aforementioned, the P & S Measure is available in its entirety in Appendix A.

Finally, participants were asked to provide demographical information regarding their sex, age, county and school district of employment, grade level(s) they teach, highest level of education attained, years of experience in the field of education, and general knowledge of the term RtI (see Appendix B).

Procedure

Prior to administration of the online questionnaire, the researchers established the geographic parameters of their sample. ‘Western Wisconsin’ was defined by researchers to include seven different counties: Buffalo County, Chippewa County, Dunn County, Eau Claire County, Pepin County, Pierce County, and St. Croix County. Within the seven counties, a total of 32 school districts were considered for the sample. The researchers compiled a list of email addresses of all elementary-level general education teachers in the seven aforementioned counties through school district websites. This information was inaccessible in two school districts (Colfax and New Richmond); therefore, a total of 30 school districts were sampled.

Selected teachers were emailed informed consents and the P & S Measure to school email addresses using the online program Survey Monkey. The primary email contained the informed consent, as well as a link to the P & S measure (see Appendix C). Participants were instructed to follow the link if they agreed to participate, that anonymity of responses was ensured, and to complete the measure within two weeks. Following completion of the measure, participants
emailed their responses back to the Survey Monkey account holder. Anonymity was ensured for the participants as Survey Monkey does not display any identifying information of the email sender, including email address.

Participants were given two weeks following the first email to complete the measures and email their responses. A final follow-up email was sent after the second week to encourage a higher response rate, and participants were given another two weeks to respond. Concluding the 4-week data collection period, participant responses were transferred from Survey Monkey to Microsoft Excel. Finally, the spreadsheet information was entered into SPSS Version 15.0 for Windows, a statistical data program, for further analysis of these primary data.

Data Analysis Procedure

Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed using SPSS Version 15.0 for Windows – Student Version. More specifically, a Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to reveal if there was a relationship between various demographical items (e.g., length of time RtI had been discussed in district and what county teachers are employed in). Moreover, responses from each county were analyzed to gather the mean responses of each measure, as well as the standard deviations of responses. Using one non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis and a single one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure, such means were compared across counties to determine the differences between RtI preparedness and role-related stress across various Western Wisconsin counties, respectively. In addition, a bivariate correlation was conducted to analyze the relationship between preparedness and role-related stress of elementary-level general education teachers.

Results

One thousand one hundred and seventy five general education teachers were contacted for this study. Twenty one surveys were returned, via email, in error, leaving 1,154 total emails sent.
One hundred and thirty eight completed surveys were returned to Survey Monkey. Three surveys were not included in the statistical analysis, as those participants reported not to be general education teachers. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 135 participants.

A cross tabulation was conducted between two separate pairs of variables (i.e., Teaching Location: County and Heard About RtI; Teaching Location: County and How Long Have Heard About RtI) to gather preliminary evidence of the independence of such variables. A cursory look at the output suggested that Teaching Location: County was independent of Heard About RtI, while the length of time RtI had been discussed in a school district seemed to be influenced or related to what county the teachers reported teaching in. A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted for further analysis and revealed that the length of time RtI had been discussed in a district was marginally significantly influenced by what county teachers were employed in ($\chi^2=48.8; p=.06$).

Teacher Preparedness: What is the current knowledge and skill level of general education elementary teachers (i.e., preparedness) in Western Wisconsin public schools in regards to the components underlying RtI, as measured by the P & S Measure (created by authors), and are there significant differences in such levels across various Western Wisconsin counties?

Descriptive statistics were first collected on the teacher preparedness variable. Analysis of the preparedness variable ($N=135$) revealed: $M=37.29$, $SD=8.193$. This variable was reported to have a moderate negative skew (-1.504) and less than adequate positive kurtosis (2.324), meaning that the majority of the sample had high preparedness scale totals that clustered around a few scores (see Chart 1). This could suggest that participants reported high, overall, levels of preparedness to implement components of RtI. This will be discussed further in the Discussion subsection.

Due to the high level of kurtosis, a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to
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examine whether or not various Western Wisconsin counties were significantly different in terms of their mean rank-levels of RtI preparedness. The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed an insignificant statistical difference between expected and observed levels of RtI preparedness across various counties ($\chi^2=4.63; p>0.05$).

Role-Related Stress: What is the current role-related stress level of general education elementary teachers in Western Wisconsin public schools, as measured by a modified version of the Teacher Stress Measure (Pettegrew & Wolfe, 1981), and are there significant differences in such levels across various Western Wisconsin counties?

In addition, descriptive statistical analysis of stress scale totals ($n=133$) revealed: $M=42.75$, $SD=8.583$. Two participants were excluded from statistical analysis on this variable because they failed to respond to role-related stress items; however, they were included in the statistical analysis of the preparedness variable, as they fully responded to preparedness items.

The role-related stress variable was reported to have a minimal negative skew (-0.518) and very small negative kurtosis (-.056), suggesting the distribution of total stress scale scores resembled more of a normal curve and implied that participants’ responses were more equally distributed than for the preparedness scale.

In terms of inferential statistics for the role-related stress variable, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether or not various Western Wisconsin counties were significantly different in terms of their mean levels of role-related stress. The ANOVA revealed insignificant statistical overall variation between various counties on levels of role-related stress ($F=0.448$, $p>0.05$).

Relationship Between Teacher Preparedness and Role-Related Stress: What is the relationship between the knowledge and skill level of general education elementary teachers regarding the components of RtI (i.e., preparedness) and the levels of role-related stress they experience?
A Spearman’s Rho bivariate correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between teacher preparedness and role-related stress. The analysis revealed a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between teacher preparedness and role-related stress \((r=0.358, p<0.001)\), meaning that participants who scored high on the preparedness portion of the P & S Measure (i.e., demonstrating higher levels of preparedness) were more likely to respond higher on the role-related stress portion of the P & S Measure (i.e., demonstrating lower levels of stress). In terms of practical significance, \(r^2\) equaled 0.13, suggesting that 13% of the variation in the teacher preparedness variable was explained by the role-related stress variable, or vice versa, as directionality was unconfirmed (see Table 1).

Table 1

| Correlational relationship between RtI Preparedness and Role-Related Variables |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| **Spearman’s rho** | **SP Scale** | **SS Scale** |
| Correlation Coefficient | Sig. (2-tailed) | SP Scale | SS Scale |
| 1.000 | 0.358** | 0.000 |
| N | 135 | 133 |

Note. SP = Sum of Preparedness; SS = Sum of Stress; ** = Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Discussion**

The initial purpose of the current study was to examine the preparedness level of general education teachers in various counties in Western Wisconsin, in terms of the components of Response to Intervention (RtI), as well as to assess levels of stress related to their roles as teachers. Previous literature has highlighted the fact that the emergence of RtI in the educational system could significantly impact and change the roles of general education teachers, as their involvement in such components as universal-screening methods, progress monitoring systems, differentiated
instruction and the like, will most likely add to their daily tasks (Kratochwill et al., 2007; NJCLD, 2005). Furthermore, past literature has frequently noted the high levels of occupational stress often associated with the teaching profession (Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982; Brown & Nagel, 2004; Hansen & Sullivan, 2003; Kyriacou, 2001). Therefore, the authors also sought to explore the relationship between teacher preparedness and existing role-related stress, as it was hypothesized that preparedness to implement RtI would be associated with levels of role-related stress.

In terms of the examination of this relationship, statistical analyses suggested that teacher preparedness and role-related stress are significantly related and that more preparedness coincides with lower levels of stress amongst general education teachers sampled. A moderate effect size also resulted from this analysis and suggested that over 13% of the variance in the variables could be explained by this correlation. This finding supported the original hypothesis stated in Research Question #3. Additional support for this result is lacking from other literature, as our literature review revealed that the current study was one of the first that examined the relationship between job-related stress in general education teachers in conjunction with teacher preparedness, in terms of RtI.

Some may speculate that lower levels of preparedness could coincide with lower levels of stress, suggesting that teachers may still be able to have low levels of role-related stress, especially if they are comfortable with their current teaching methods and maybe not accepting of new RtI practices. However, the significant relationship found in this study could glean additional support from the person-environment fit model previously discussed, as this model emphasized that stress can be conceptualized as a discrepancy between what one perceives as being his or her job demands and what one actually experiences in his or her job (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). More specifically, this model illustrates how lower role-related stress could relate to higher preparedness, as seen in this study, because when one is aware of the expectations involved in his
or her role and has acquired the knowledge and skills to perform such role-related expectations, the discrepancy between perceptions of expectations and actual expectations could diminish because of this awareness and preparedness. This is further supported by this study’s finding that over 97% of the surveyed sample reported having at least heard of RtI, which suggests the respondents are aware, to some degree, of the aspects of RtI and possibly the additional role-related expectations that could ensue with the implementation of RtI. Therefore, preparedness or increased knowledge of the components of RtI could be related to role-related stress levels because preparedness for new or modified roles for general education teachers could be related to perceptions of role clarity, conflict, and overload, all of which were assessed by the stress portion of the P & S Measure in this study.

On the other hand, hypotheses regarding significant differences in role-related stress levels and teacher preparedness levels across various counties in Western Wisconsin were not supported, suggesting that teachers in counties sampled reported similar levels of role-related stress and similar levels of preparedness, in terms of the core components of RtI. This suggests that even though teaching location was found to be significantly related, at a marginal level through a Chi Square Test of Independence, to the length of time RtI had been discussed in a district, counties were similar in their levels of role-related stress and RtI preparedness.

Although many past studies have discussed the components of RtI and what is needed for teachers and other school professionals to be prepared for RtI implementation, no studies from the current literature review provided empirical data to show the current level of preparedness of general education teachers (Glover & DiPerna, 2007; Kratochwill et al., 2007; NJCLD, 2005; Daly et al., 2007; Danielson et al., 2007; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Kovaleski et al., 2007). In addition, past studies have discussed stress, in relation to the teaching profession, and have suggested factors that influence teacher stress levels, but few have empirically measured current
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levels of teacher role-related stress (Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982; Brown & Nagel, 2004; Hansen & Sullivan, 2003; Kyriacou, 2001). Once again, support for these results is lacking from other literature, as this study was unique in its purpose to provide empirical data concerning these variables.

Based on the previous literature review, the current authors hypothesized that general education teachers sampled would report low levels of skill and knowledge regarding components of RtI (i.e., mean scores of 16 or less on preparedness portion of P & S Measure) and high levels of role-related stress (i.e., mean scores of 20 or less on role-related stress portion of P & S Measure). Descriptive data suggested that teachers sampled in Western Wisconsin reported feeling prepared and comfortable to implement the core components of RtI measured (i.e., curriculum-based measurements, universal screening procedures, progress monitoring, differentiated instruction, evidence-based interventions, research-supported teaching strategies, research-based decision-making, intervention implementation integrity). This finding did not support the current authors’ original hypothesis regarding teacher preparedness. Although past literature suggested that general education teachers may not be equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement RtI, this study’s finding suggested that teachers in Western Wisconsin feel prepared to implement the core components of RtI (Danielson et al., 2007; Kratochwill et al., 2007).

In terms of the role-related stress hypothesis, findings from the current study also did not support the original hypothesis, in that sampled general education teachers reported low levels of role-related stress, as measured by the stress portion of the P & S Measure. This suggests that stress associated with teachers’ role (i.e., role conflict, role overload, role preparedness, role ambiguity, and nonparticipation) were, at the time of study, not significantly impacting general education teachers sampled, although past literature suggested that teachers often experience significant stress related to their profession (Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982; Brown & Nagel, 2004;
Limitations

As has been aforementioned, the current study is one of the first studies to explore role-related stress and teacher preparedness, in terms of the components of RtI, and, therefore, lacked significant empirical support from past literature. As a result, the current study includes limitations worthy of discussion.

Counties sampled in Western Wisconsin, and the school districts within, could be considered ‘rural’ or ‘suburban’. Therefore, general education teachers may have responded similarly on the preparedness and role-related stress measures because of similar demographic location and similar job-related roles. In addition, the overall sample was predominantly female. Because of the homogeneity of the sample, generalization of our findings to the overall population of general education teachers in Wisconsin and the greater United States is strongly cautioned.

Other limitations centered around the web-based, self-report format of the measure used in the current study to examine teacher preparedness and role-related stress. More specifically, self-report questionnaires run the risk of providing over- or under-inflated results for various reasons. As an illustration, over 90% of sampled general education teachers reported having heard of RtI, which does not seem reflective of anecdotal information provided by various school districts in Western Wisconsin regarding actual implementation and knowledge of RtI. Although empirical data was not available to use as a comparison for this study’s findings, the current authors believe that general education teachers may have been hesitant to completely indulge their true opinions regarding their current skills and knowledge of RtI and current role-related stress.

Email communication from two teachers suggested apprehension regarding participation in the study, as well as confidence in anonymity and confidentiality of results, suggesting hesitancy to provide honest responses. For example, one teacher communicated her disagreement with RtI
and her unwillingness to participate. This apprehension may be related to the time of year in which this study was conducted. For instance, surveys were distributed online around March of 2009, which was near Spring Break vacation for many schools, as well as near teacher contract finalizations and budget reforms. This apprehension could also be reflected in the high percentage of participants who chose not to respond to many of the demographical items included on the survey (e.g., 31.9% of sample chose not to respond to the Teacher Location: County demographic question).

In addition, limitations regarding web-based or online research may have influenced the findings of this study. Although a large number of general education teachers were emailed, only a small percentage of surveys were completed, which may be due, in part, to limitations previously discussed (i.e., apprehension regarding participation). Furthermore, web-based research can limit research samples (demographics and size), as not all participants may have access to email or may infrequently check school email accounts. Moreover, email addresses were acquired from school district websites, which were not always found to be representative of current elementary level staff. Therefore, some staff were emailed in error, while others may not have even received the email containing the link to the survey.

Considerations for Future Research

Considering the findings of the current study and the limitations previously noted, replication of the current study, in the near future, would be beneficial. Attaining more empirical data regarding RtI preparedness and role-related stress levels using the P & S Measure would be helpful, as limited empirical data currently exists regarding these variables. More specifically, future researchers may be interested in exploring differences in RtI preparedness levels across various demographical items such as district budgets/funding, as well continuing to explore the
relationship between role-related stress and RtI preparedness to see if results reported in the current study are reflected elsewhere.

In addition, because of the specific geographic focus (i.e., only Western Wisconsin counties), and limited sample of teachers in urban settings, future replications of this study should strive to include a more diverse sample of general education teachers from the rural, suburban, and urban districts in the state of Wisconsin. Similarly, this study could be extended to other states across the nation to hopefully reflect the most valid and reliable levels of RtI preparedness and role-related stress levels of elementary general education teachers.

It may also be beneficial to consider a different medium through which to distribute the P & S Measure (i.e., hard-copy questionnaire versus online survey). The use of a hard-copy self-report questionnaire may increase respondents’ trust in anonymity and confidentiality more than the online medium and should be considered in an attempt to raise overall response rates and response rates to demographical items such as teaching location. Moreover, future replications may consider using various incentives in an additional effort to increase participant response rate.

Concluding Remarks

The Response to Intervention (RtI) process, as outlined in the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), has been discussed by scholars as a process that will bring about a number of changes in the educational system, one of which is purported to increase the expectations for and expand the role of general education teachers in the special education process (Kratochwill et al., 2007; NJCLD, 2005). Federal legislation regarding special education requires states across the nation to begin implementation of RtI as early as the 2009-2010 school year (IDEA, 2004). Therefore, the current researchers found the study of RtI preparedness to be of great importance, especially in relation to general education teachers.
With expected role expansion as a result of RtI, and the fact that teachers have been reported to already experience higher levels of stress in their profession, this study also sought to explore current levels of stress related to the general education teachers’ role at the elementary level (Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982; Brown & Nagel, 2004; Hansen & Sullivan, 2003; Kyriacou, 2001). Additionally, it was of interest to explore the relationship between RtI preparedness and role-related stress.

Although counties in Western Wisconsin did not report significant differences in levels of preparedness and role-related stress, it would be beneficial to report the current levels of these variables, as well as the significant relationship noted between these variables, to school districts within the Western Wisconsin counties studied. Such a report could provide administrators and staff with valuable information regarding elementary general education teachers’ knowledge and skills regarding the components of RtI, as well as current levels of stress related to their role as teachers. With this information regarding the relationship between preparedness and role-related stress, school districts could consider ways of maintaining lower levels of role-related stress through continued preparedness to implement important components of RtI. In order to maintain such preparedness, school districts should be encouraged to provide teacher trainings and inservices to build and maintain the skills that have been noted in previous research as such skills needed to successfully implement RtI. Maintaining higher levels of knowledge and skills regarding successful implementation of RtI could, according to the findings of the current study, provide teachers with the continued tools to also maintain lower levels of stress as their role expands with the advent of RtI.
References


academic and career-technical teachers in southwestern Ohio career-technical schools.


implementing and sustaining multitier prevention models: Implications for response to


Update, 45*(6).

Windram, H., Seierka, C., & Silberglitt, B. (2007) Response to intervention at the secondary level:
Two districts’ models of implementation. *NASP Communique, 35*(5).
Appendix A

Using the scale below, please select the number that best describes your response to the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.) I find that the amount of work involved in my position is what is normally expected of someone in my position.

2.) The criteria for evaluating my performance are clear to me.

3.) The scope of responsibilities involved in my position is clear to me.

4.) I feel that my profession does not interfere with my personal time.

5.) I feel that I can satisfy the conflicting demands of students, parents, administration, and other teachers with ease.

6.) When given school-related duties, I am provided with the necessary resources and materials to complete such tasks.

7.) I am informed of important events that are occurring in my school (e.g. in-services, meetings).

8.) I feel that my input is taken into consideration when decisions are made.

9.) I feel that I received adequate teacher training in my undergraduate program, enabling me to effectively perform in my position.

10.) I am able to quickly adapt to the changing pressures and situations associated with my position.

Using the scale below, please select the number that best describes your response to the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have adequate knowledge and training to feel comfortable…

1.) Using Curriculum-Based Measurements to assess my students.

2.) Using Universal Screening procedures (e.g. AIMS, DIBELS, etc.)

3.) Monitoring my students’ progress through charts, graphs, or other measures.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Providing Differentiated Instruction (i.e. different levels or intensity of instruction to different students)</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Implementing Evidence-Based Interventions.</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Using Research-Supported Teaching Strategies.</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Making decisions concerning the instruction of my students based off of data</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>With Implementing Interventions with Integrity.</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Please select the appropriate response to the following demographical items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>35-39</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade-Level Teaching</td>
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<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experience</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>1-5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>11-15</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you heard of Response to Intervention (RtI)?

Yes  No

If YES, how did you hear about RtI?

News  Professionals in your school district

Research  Conferences

Other_________________________________________

Which specific professionals in your school district informed you of RtI (select all that apply)?

Special Education Department  Curriculum Department

General Education Teacher(s)  Guidance Counselor

School Psychologist  Other Administration
If you heard about RtI from persons in your district, how long has RtI been discussed in your district?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1 month</td>
<td>1-3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12 months</td>
<td>&gt; 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Greetings __________ Elementary Teacher!

You have been selected to participate in a very important research project, and we greatly need your assistance to further this research. As current School Psychology students at the UW-River Falls, we are working on a study regarding general education teachers and the Response to Intervention process (RtI). By your participation in the following survey, you will be helping us to better understand the RtI process in your school, including your school’s current stage of RtI implementation.

By filling out this survey, which will take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time, you are giving your consent for your responses to be included in our research. Please note that your responses are anonymous and confidential, and potential risks associated with this study are minimal. Some of the questions included in the survey may make you feel uncomfortable, but your participation is completely voluntary and you may exit the survey at any point. This research has been approved by UW-River Falls’ Institutional Review Board (#H07-124). If you have any additional questions prior to or following your completion of the survey, please feel free to contact the researchers, William Campbell [Director of Grants and Research at UW-RF] at 715-425-3195, or Scott Woitaszewski [School Psychology Program Director at UW-RF] at 715-425-3883.

Please follow the link below to participate in this online survey. If you have any difficulty accessing or taking the survey, please contact one of the researchers via email. Your participation is greatly appreciated and thank you in advance for taking the time to help with our research!

SURVEY MONKEY LINK

Sincerely,

Kelly Ellenberger, M.S.E. Sage Lavant, M.S.E.
kelly.l.ellenberger@uwrf.edu sage.lavant@uwrf.edu