

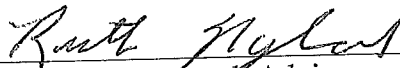
The Perceptions of School Psychologists in a Southern District Regarding Response
to Intervention's Possible Impact on the Disproportionate Representation
of African American Student in Special Education

by

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ABSTRACT

The disproportionate representation of African Americans in Special Education is a significant issue. Flaws in the referral process, identification procedures, and ineffective intervention and instruction, are cited as the contributing factors affecting disproportionate representation. The changes apparent in the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), suggest, implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) as a method of addressing some of these issues. This study assessed the perceptions of School Psychologist from a small southern school district regarding the possible impacts RTI may have on disproportionate representation. A total of 32 school psychologists were asked to voluntarily participate in a 14 question survey entitled "RTI and Disproportionate Representation". Informed consents were collected after the purpose of the study was explained and surveys completed. Data was analyzed using

SPSS software. Results revealed that some school psychologists perceived that RTI may impact early intervention, individualized interventions, and decrease formal testing.

However, many others also commented that RTI's reliable implementation was important in producing positive outcomes.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Many of the issues facing African American students in public schools have been enduring unaddressed tribulations, specifically the issue of the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. The placement of African American students in special education has been a constant concern that has affected children, families, schools and communities on a national level (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Arnold & Lessmann, 2003; Daniels 1998; Dunn, 1968; Hernandez, Ramannathan, Harr, & Socias, 2008; Patton, 1998; Reschly, 2003; Valles, 1998; Zhang, & Katsiyannis, 2002). Lloyd M. Dunn, a former president of The Council for Exceptional Children wrote a controversial article, published in 1968 discussing identification, placement procedures, and disproportionate representation in special education. This article is cited in numerous studies, most of which argue that; overrepresentation has continued to progress in the schools for more than 30 years (Coutinho, Oswald & Best, 2002; Daniels, 1998; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002).

Despite the recognition of disproportionate representation in schools, African-American student's presence in special education still remains an apparent and consistent challenge (Hernandez, Ramannathan, Harr, & Socias, 2008). According to the 2005 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) report, 12.54% of the African American population between the ages of 6 through 21 was served under IDEA with a disability, in comparison to only 8.72% of the Caucasian population (n.d.). More specifically a 2005 IDEA report concluded that 5.57% of the African American students attending elementary or secondary schools were identified as Learning Disabled (LD) in comparison to only 3.74% of Caucasian students identified (2007). Many consider the

1.83% difference a minor statistic. However, when comparing the overall African American population 12.3%, to that of Caucasians 75.1 %, the overwhelming representation of African American students in special education is apparent. (Gravios, & Rosenfield, 2006)

Some may argue that overrepresentation while a concern, is not necessarily a disadvantage to the African American population. However, the success of African American students is a significant issue in education (Arnold, & Lassmann, 2003; Artiles & Bal, 2008). According to Zang and Benz (2006) “individuals with disabilities from minority groups continue to be at high risk for poor school performance, high unemployment, low wages, (and) limited access to postsecondary education and training... (p.2)” According to the 2004 census report the graduation rate for African American students in 2004 was 50%, the lowest graduating class in America. “Within three to five years after leaving high school, the arrest rate for African Americans with disabilities is 40%, as compared to 27% for whites” (Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2001, ¶ 5). These disturbing facts raise concerns regarding the equality of education for minorities and the future success for African American students who are served in special education (Artiles & Bal, 2008).

As the culturally diverse student population continues to rise in the United States public school system, it is increasingly important to become accountable for high stakes decisions associated with special education identification and placement procedures. The overwhelming issues faced by African American student’s calls for a clear educational plan of action, to decrease the occurrences of these issues (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002). Programs that promote early, educational, and crisis intervention that is culturally

sensitive may assist in addressing the many conflicting issues impacting the success rate of African American students. Response to intervention (RTI) as defined by Gresham (2005) is a problem solving approach that works to change specific behaviors and performance through interventions. This problem- solving model is designed to provide scientifically based research interventions and culturally sensitive evaluations. By promoting early intervention, restricting the use of diagnostic labels, rethinking the steps of comprehensive and inclusive evaluations, and providing a wide variety of interventions, RTI may assist in addressing many of the disproportionate and educational concerns that African American students face. Implementing such a program in schools may have many benefits for African American students (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006).

In regards to RTI it is important to consider the new roles of a school psychologist under this new policy (Powers, Hagans, & Busse, 2008). School psychologists will have increased consultative responsibilities and intervention centered experiences under RTI (Decker, Bolt, & Triezenberg 2006; Powers, Hagans, & Busse, 2008). They will also be in the position to make decisions regarding eligibility for special education (Artiles & Bal, 2008). Therefore, it is this researcher's opinion school psychologist's perceptions of RTI and disproportionate representation is invaluable. Therefore, it is extremely important to gain their perspective on ways that RTI may impact overrepresentation and its possible contributing factors. According to Canter (2006) "School psychologists are among the best- trained professionals in the school district to help develop, implement, and evaluate new models of service delivery" (p.3).

Statement of the Problem

There is a disproportionate representation of African American students being placed in the United States Special Education program. This is particularly true for African American students identified as Learning Disabled. Because school psychologist's play a significant role in the identification of special education students, it is imperative to obtain their perspectives regarding new procedures and identification policies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review the contributing factors of disproportionate representation, and the possible impact RTI may have on these factors as expressed through current literature. The study will also gain the perspectives of school psychologists' in regards to disproportionate representation and RTI's impact on overrepresentation concerns.

Research Questions

This study will focus on answering the following five questions:

1. What historic trends and policies have impacted African Americans in America's public schools, and special education programs?
2. What factors contribute to the disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education identified as LD?
3. What is RTI, and how does it differ from the Discrepancy model in the identification of African American students with poor achievement and LD?

4. What roles will school psychologist's play in RTI as expressed through current literature?
5. What are school psychologist's perceptions of RTI on the contributing factors of overrepresentation concerns?

Assumptions of the Study

This study assumes, school psychologist's will perceive Response to Intervention and other problem solving approaches to be helpful in addressing many of the factors contributing to the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are relevant to this Literature review:

Discrepancy Model - U. S. Office of Educations' (USOE) formula, used to verify the presence of a severe discrepancy between ability and achievement; and is determined "when achievement in one or more of the [academic] areas falls at or below 50% of the child's expected achievement level, when age and previous experiences are taken into account" (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002, p. 33).

Disproportionate Placement - "...the representation of a group in a category that exceeds our expectations for that group, or differs substantially from the representation of others in that category." (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch, Cuadrado, & Chung, 2008, p. 266)

Learning Disability (LD) IDEA 2004 defines a learning disability as a "disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to

listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. . . .” (Public Law 108-446 108th Congress, n.d.)

Minority- “...the smaller in number of two groups: a group having less than the number of votes necessary for control: a part of a population differing from others (as in race)...” (Mish, & Morse, 1997, p.471)

Response to Intervention (RTI) – According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, RTI is best defined as “an assessment and intervention process for systematically monitoring student progress and making decisions about the need for instructional modifications or increasingly intensified services using progress monitoring data” (National Center for Learning Disabilities, n.d., ¶ 1).

Special Education – “specially designated instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (Dean, Burnes, Grialou, & Varro, 2006, p.157)

Limitations of the Study

Skiba et al., (2008), expressed that there are many contributing factors of disproportionate representation mentioned in the literature. However, research regarding which factors hold more weight in the actual cause of disproportionate representation is inconsistent and speculative. We may know some causes and factors but it is difficult to determine in which districts, these factors are more significant. (Skiba et al., 2008) This is a limitation for the study because each school district contains unique policies, and assessment procedures which may demonstrate alternative factors contributing to disproportionate representation.

According to Arnold and Lassmann (2003) there is limited research on programs proven to decrease disproportionate representation. They suggest “much of what has been written, simply states that inappropriate placement exists, and that inappropriate placement leads to unfavorable outcomes for students and their families” (Arnold, & Lassmann, 2003, p.234). In regards to this study, the perceptions of school psychologists are mainly based on assumptions regarding the RTI process. Because RTI was not implemented in the school district in question, the volunteers provided their perceptions based on professional opinion and not actual facts or experience with the RTI process. Therefore, this study only assumes that based on some perceptions RTI may address some overrepresentation concerns.

A literature review was conducted to research possible factors impacting overrepresentation, Response to intervention, and school psychologist’s role in the RTI process. School psychologists from a Sothern school district were then asked to volunteer for the study. Consent forms and surveys were given to all volunteers. The data was collected and results analyzed.

Chapter II

Introduction

Overrepresentation is not a new concern in the field of education (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Harry, & Klinger, 2008; Hernandez, Ramannathan, Harr, & Socias, 2008; Hosp, & Reschly, 2002). “Although some progress has been made to reduce the overrepresentation issues; there is continued concern for the overall achievement of minority students with disabilities” (Zhang, & Benz, 2006). The treatment of African Americans in America’s public schools particularly, in special education, has been an ongoing issue since integration. There is a long and disturbing history of African Americans in America’s schools. Court cases such as *Brown vs. Board of Education* or *Larry P vs. Wilson Riles*, have significantly impacted current educational policies and created legal precedent for the appropriate treatment of students in need of extra support. However, despite the ever-changing policies and approaches to special education, the issue of disproportionate representation continues to be a concern. (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch, Cuadrado, & Chung, 2008)

Many professionals writing on the contributing factors of disproportionate representation in special education discuss bias assessment practices (Gravois, & Rosenfield, 2006; Hernandez, Ramanathan, Harr, & Socias, 2008). However, there are varied contributing factors discussed in the literature regarding the disproportionate representation of minority students. Much of the literature specifically addresses a plethora of the issues faced by African- American, Hispanic, and Native American students in special education. Among bias assessments, bias referrals, social disadvantage, factors affecting achievement, and the effectiveness of interventions, are

cited as the leading factors contributing to disproportionate representation concerns. (Skiba, et. al., 2008) The contributing factors effecting disproportionate representation need an effective system implemented in the schools to address the major issues. It is not until the contributing factors are addressed that there will be a decline in the current representation of African Americans in special education. (Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2001) Dunn's article written in 1968, on disproportionate representation of African Americans in Public schools is often cited as the earliest article addressing the contributing factors of disproportionate representation when the U.S was still ironing out integration. As new policies are implemented, assessing the mistakes made with previous approaches is key in ensuring that history does not continue to repeat itself.

Response to intervention (RTI) is a new method adopted for an alternative identification of students needing extra support or exhibiting a disability. According to Koltz (2008) "the use of an RTI process is often described as having the potential benefit of reducing the disproportionate referral and placement of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in special education programs" (pg. 17). This model is inclusive and considers a variety of factors that affect student achievement. RTI avoids the use of a single criterion in the identification procedure. RTI works to create the direct link between student's needs and individualized interventions. (Brown-Chidsey, & Steege, 2005)

RTI is not meant to become a replacement for special education evaluations (Reschly, 2003). Comprehensive evaluations do provide a great deal of valuable information about the child's overall level of abilities (Prasse, 2006). Dismissing its benefits would decrease the amount of academic, behavioral, and cognitive information

that school psychologists are able to obtain from students. However, school psychologists will be able to participate in a team centered approach aimed at consultative interventions to decrease low academic achievement. The RTI team approach will allow school psychologists to obtain data and monitor progress while implementing research based interventions. (Powers, Hagans, & Busse, 2008) These approaches may increase the chances that cultural, environmental, and social aspects of achievement are considered during the intervention process (Skiba, et al., 2008)

The History of African Americans in Special Education

Dunn's 1968 article was instrumental in surfacing the disproportionate representation issues faced by minorities in special education. Many of Dunn's arguments focused on the grouping and placement of students by area of disability. Dunn's article, suggested that "we do away with many existing disability labels and the present practice of grouping children homogeneously by these labels into special education" (Dunn, 1968, p. 11). "Perhaps the reason special education research has failed to consistently show positive results is the reliance on categorical disability labels instead of the unique needs of children" (Dean, Burns, Grialou, & Varro, 2006, p. 157). Dunn reported that special education policies often labeled children and promoted the formation of segregated classes that housed children with similar educational diagnosis. He predicted that disproportionate representation of minority students would continue to rise as the racial issues in the country continued to change and add to the complexity of special education services for minority students. Dunn based these findings on integration regulations, policies being implemented that called for more special education classes, the steady hiring of special education professionals and, the estimated fact that 60-80% of all

students being referred for special education classes were minority students. (Dunn, 1968)

This separation was considered acceptable to educational professionals at the time because, many felt that although the environments were separated, they provided equal education in a more appropriate class to students with disabilities (Dunn, 1968). Alternative settings are currently practiced in education (Kashi, 2008). Many continue to argue that African Americans who are placed in special education classes for a significant portion of the school day are not provided with equal exposure and experiences in the educational system (Patton, 1998). Controversy over separate but equal exposure to education for African Americans is dated as far back as the Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court case of 1896 (Skiba et al., 2008). The rulings from Plessy vs. Ferguson, concluded, separation according to racial background was constitutional, as long as all things considered were equal and proportionate. (Ciment, 2001) This instrumental case clearly suggested that separation of schools by ethnicity was justified by the constitution. According to Kids Rights, one court stated, “the most common instance of this is connected with the establishment of separate schools for white and colored children, which has been held to be a valid exercise of the legislative power even by courts of States where the political rights of the colored race have been longest and most earnestly enforced” (n.d., ¶ 1). Suggesting, as long as African Americans received equal access to education, the State had the right to separate schools based on race. This case was later nullified by the Supreme Court case Brown v. Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education in 1954 (McGill, 2009).

The *Brown v. Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education* case reached its final conclusion in May, 1954. The arguments provided by Brown's legal team, supported by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), had provided valuable evidence on the destructive effects of segregation on the educational performance, and psychological health of African American children. They argued that issues such as illiteracy, and feelings of inferiority, apparent in school age children followed individuals into adulthood and later resulted in educational and social conflict for many African- American communities. (Keogh, 2007) The final court ruling concluded that the separation of schools by race and ethnicity did in fact go against the 14th Amendment clause of Equal Protection, and was therefore considered unconstitutional. This ruling determined that America's schools would be required to integrate. (McGill, 2009; Klein, 2004) Integration policies increased the varied concerns of education for African American children with below average achievement (Dunn, 1968).

Dunn's article appeared after several Supreme Court cases impacted the segregation policies of America's schools. The referral and identification procedures for enrolling minority students in special education programs, added to the segregation of countless African American students from their Caucasian peers during the height of integration. Many minority students were identified with disabilities usually associated with alternative placement, resulting in a justified assessing and removing of African American students from integrated environments based on disability.

Larry P. v Wilson Riles, a case regarding the inappropriate placement of African American children in separate class settings was originally filed in 1971. It was filed by

the parents of six African American students attending public schools in San Francisco diagnosed as educable mentally retarded (E.M.R.). They argued that their placement was based on biased assessments that yielded invalid Intelligence Quotients (IQ), and inappropriate identification policies that violated the equal protection clauses. (Larry P v. Riles, n.d.).

The children's intellectual abilities were being measured through Intelligence Tests. However, research suggested that different racial groups demonstrated varied performances on standardized intelligence tests. In fact, current research also suggests that all children regardless of race learn differently which impacts the way they interpret and utilize information. (Kashi, 2008; Skiba et al., 2008) Intelligence is defined by Merriam Webster Dictionary as "the ability to learn, understand or deal with trying situations" (Mish & Morse, 1997, p. 392). However, intelligence tests are developed and founded from various theories. Each theory differs in its view on what intelligence truly is, and how best to measure it. (Flanagan & Kaufman, 2004)

Bias development and the bias use of intelligence tests, were the initial concerns in the Larry P case. By 1978, the case expanded to include all African American students attending schools in the San Francisco school district that may be assessed in the future using similar criteria. The final ruling concluded that IQ assessments used in determining the placement of African American children in specific educational settings, dishonored the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the equal protection clause of the federal and state constitutions, and the Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Larry P v. Riles, n.d.). This case continues to be cited in the literature as an instrumental example of the bias and disproportionate

diagnosis and placement of African American children in special education (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002; Green, 2005; Skiba et al., 2009; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002;).

These instrumental court cases are only a few of the numerous decisions made by the Supreme Court regarding the treatment of African American students in this country's education system (Skiba et al., 2008). Others include "Diana v. California State Board of Education (1970), Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia (1972), and Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972)" (Daniels, 1998, p.41).

Current Policies & Procedures in Special Education

All of these cases and their decisions have helped to pave the way for the current policies and regulations that govern special education (Coutinho, Oswald & Best, 2002; Skiba et al. 2009; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). One of the earliest policies created to monitor and enforce the equal treatment of students diagnosed with disabilities was the 1975 Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA) also referred to as Public Law 94-142 (P.L 94-142. n.d.; Keogh, 2007; Skibba et al., 2008). Signed by President Gerald R. Ford, this act worked to provide every student with a free and appropriate public education. Meaning, students and their parents had the legal right to be provided with an individualized educational plan, as well as state and federally funded special education programs (Faircloth, 2004; Keogh, 2007; Prasse, 2006). The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was designed to provide a written document of the student's specific educational needs. The plan was required to include the child's level of performance prior to implementation, a detailed description of the services that were to be provided, the

goals that the student would work toward, and an effective method of evaluating student progress. (Capizzi, 2008; Public Law 94-142, n.d.)

EHA set definitions and criteria for specific qualifications based on disability and needs. Many of these qualification criteria included exclusionary clauses. Exclusionary clauses expressed what each disability could not be. For example, originally the act's definition of a Learning Disability (LD) clearly eliminated persons who had motor, visual, hearing, emotional, or mental retardation diagnosis. In addition, the definition clearly stated that LD diagnosis could not be considered if cultural, economic disadvantage or, environmental influences were considered to cause the inability to perform. EHA also never required or promoted the classification of students by their disability, instead it simply required that all students met qualification criteria for the services they received (Prasse, 2006). However, as "programs evolved, a student's program was often synonymous with his or her eligibility label, the label and the program became one in the same" (Prasse, 2006, p.8).

The Education for all Handicapped Children Act later developed into the current Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and is still used to guide the legal regulations present in today's public school system. Although IDEA has gone through several reforms each considering new methods of approaching special education, the act address the same general concern as the original, a free and appropriate public education for all students. (Skiba et al., 2008) Nevertheless, the 1997 IDEA reform challenged educational professionals to view special education as a variety of services provided to students, and not a specific placement. It also encouraged the use of early intervention prior to labeling and mentioned the benefits of utilizing the problem- solving approach to special

education services. According to Prasse (2006), the 1997 IDEA reform provided incentives and benefits for considering the problem solving model. One insensitive was allowing schools to use 5% of federal IDEA funds to pilot problem solving programs. IDEA 1997 also stressed the importance of considering individual needs and not specific disability labels (Prasse, 2006).

According to Daly, Burke, Hare, Mills, Owens, Moore, and Weist (2006), The Bush administration was responsible for passing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) P.L. 107-110 in 2001. NCLB is derived from the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 P.L. 89-10. Written by President Johnson this act attempted to provide better educational advantages for children from low social-economic (SES) families, and decrease the achievement gap based on income. The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, NCLB was originally designed to increase the success rate of all children and ensure that Accurate Yearly Progress (AYP) was obtained by all public and federally funded schools. (Daly et al., 2006) The act enforced policies that ensured, all children be provided teachers who met the highly qualified criteria set forth by NCLB. This criterion was made for all teachers regardless of the subjects taught. The highly qualified professionals' requirement was also an attempt to ensure all students were exposed to high quality instruction regardless of the school they attended. However, the 2009 State and Local Implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* report indicated that in majority minority schools, and schools with high poverty rates there was a higher percentage of teachers whom were not considered highly qualified (U.S Department of Education, 2009).

The concerns apparent in NCLB and the Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Families report had a significant impact on many decisions made in IDEA 2004 reauthorization. Numerous modifications occurred in IDEA 2004, many of which included more demands to move education toward a Response to Intervention (RTI), and concerns regarding disproportionate representation were also noted (Skiba et al., 2008). Although there were no immediate regulations to implement RTI, IDEA 2004's Committee Conference Report (CCR) clearly emphasizes the need for early intervention as implemented through RTI programs. IDEA gives schools the opportunity to use 15% of federal funds to assist in the development of programs specifically designed to ensure fewer students are ever classified or meet the criteria for a diagnosis (James, 2004).

Current Factors Affecting African American in Special Education

Despite the numerous policies that protect all students with disabilities, minorities particularly African American students, continue to be disproportionately identified and serviced in special education. It has been confirmed by research and legal policies that overrepresentation of minority students is an increasing concern (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Harry & Klingler, 2007; Hernandez, Ramanathan, Harr, & Socias, 2008; Kashi, 2008; Skiba et al., 2008;) IDEA 2004 and NCLB identify disproportionate representation as a past and present concern in the field of education (Skiba et al., 2008). Several theories have been addressed in the literature regarding the contributing factors of disproportionate representation. However, many have found that the reasons vary greatly and, no proven explanations exist, only theoretical rationalization (Skiba et al., 2008). According to Oswald, Coutinho, and Best, (2001), "a critical gap exists between what is now known and what is needed to improve the experiences of minority students" (¶. 11).

Consistent theories present in literature suggest, overrepresentation is effected by “discriminatory professional practice, problematic eligibility practices, sociopolitical factors” (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002, p.50), disregarded mental health identification (Voisin, 2007), “effectiveness of instruction and intervention” (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006, p. 43), and “the special education referral, identification, and placement process itself” (Hernandez et al., 2008, p. 64). Generally the literature suggests that the crisis associated with overrepresentation of minorities in special education needs to be researched through data collection and addressed through culturally sensitive interventions (Skiba et al., 2008). In addition to addressing and defining the situation there is a need for the creation and implementation of interventions proven to specifically assist in the instruction of minority students (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

Gravois and Rosenfield, (2006) argue, that cultural factors affecting teacher referrals is a main factor affecting overrepresentation. According to Gravois and Osenfield (2006), culture plays a role in behavior, education, and learning. Therefore, there is a need for culturally responsive classrooms and teachers that are able to incorporate culture into the information being presented in the classrooms. Students who are exposed to these culturally responsive environments may increase their academic progress (Brown, 2007). Teachers who fail to acknowledge that culture is imperative to learning, and teacher certification programs who fail to teach that fact, develop preconceived ideas of average. Many of these teachers are referring students at increased rates because they are unable, or unwilling to deal with the factors associated with teaching students from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

“Very often, biased teachers predict an ominous cloud of doom for African American students who fail to conform to their individual standards” (Obiakor & Ford, 2002, p.7).

Crawford (2007) argued that many teachers are unprepared and unwilling to challenge their personal view about teaching students of color, particularly those from under served communities. She reported that many referrals for special education are due to the lack of knowledge and preparedness of teaching minority students. Teacher’s expectations for behavior and academic knowledge are rarely assessed, nor do many of them challenge their perspectives and social stigma beliefs regarding minority students. Crawford conducted a review of special education teachers and found that the four Caucasian teachers involved in the study felt their minority students were better suited for vocational tasks than gaining academic knowledge. She also found differences in their beliefs about student capability between their Caucasian and African American students. Were as Caucasian special education students, were often more academically capable than their minority peers. Overall, Crawford found that Caucasian teachers had lower expectations for their minority students (Crawford, 2007). General research suggest research suggests that teacher’s bias perceptions of African American student’s often impacts the referral process (Arnold & Lessmann, 2003; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Meyer, 2000).

Bias assessments have been discussed in literature as early as 1970’s (Skiba et al., 2008). A 1989 study on a Weschsler intelligence scale found, some factors such as vocabulary and comprehension “heavily weighed toward acquired learning” (as cited in Meyer, 2000, p. 327). These research findings suggest some IQ assessments measure acquired knowledge. Acquired knowledge is significantly impacted by experience and

exposure to items being assessed on IQ tests. (Meyer, 2000) However, contradictory research has been reported throughout the years suggesting that the actual assessments themselves contain insignificant differences between scores based on ethnicity. Despite these results, researchers conducting these studies did not rule out the bias use of intelligence tests and examiner bias as concerns during the assessment process (Skiba et al., 2008).

Intelligence Quotients (IQ), as used in special education, also bring into question the correlation between ability and achievement. Nisbett (2005) argues IQ and achievement assessments are highly correlated. Because of the high correlation, measuring student's ability and achievement is a reliable predictor of a learning disability. Meyer (2000) disagrees he argues that many assessment procedures fail to consider the cultural and environmental exclusionary factors required for a learning disability. These clear exclusions are apparently disregarded, and at times completely ignored when assessing students from minority backgrounds (Meyer, 2000). Place punctuation after the parentheses.

Another flaw in Nisbett's research is that the correlation found between achievement and ability tells us little about what effects achievement. The overall view of the discrepancy model is, children's "failure to learn was both unexpected and unexplained" (Meyer, 2000, p. 317). It is significant to assess the unexplained view of the LD definition. Student's access to education and their motivation among many other factors, may impact poor achievement. Student's environments and quality of instruction may also significantly impact their achievement level (Hernandez et al., 2008).

According to Meyer if exclusionary factors are not addressed as accurately as other

behaviors that do meet criteria, then only half of the assessment is truly conducted (Meyer, 2000).

Some literature suggests economic status and poverty impact disproportionate representation of African American students in special education (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002; Daniels, 1998; Hernandez et al., 2008; Soobader, & Leclere, 2000).

However, Skiba et al. (2008) argued that research on the correlation between poverty and disproportionate representation is inconsistent. Some studies suggest that poverty impacts academic success which is significant to disproportionately because of the overwhelming minority students living in poverty. However, Skibba et al. point out that low academic performance is not or should not be directly linked to disproportionately statistics. IDEA criteria were designed to consider all environmental factors including economic status when determining eligibility for a specific disability. Meaning if a student is found to have low academic success due to environmental factors such as poverty, lack of nutrition, lack of appropriate instruction, and lack of adequate health care; then their achievement should not necessarily be linked to a disability (Skiba et al., 2008). If a direct link is found between poverty and students diagnosed with Learning Disabilities than the reliability of the assessment process should be evaluated. Examiners and teams need to consider environmental, cultural, and medical concerns prior to labeling children with a disability.

A similar study conducted by sociology professionals Soobader and Leclere (2000) concluded, income inequality had indirect relationships on children with LD. They argued that poverty in itself was not the basis of the problem, but the “residential segregation by income” (p. 3) that, affects student’s ability to gain access to equal

resources (2000). This argument like many others suggests that students in poverty exhibit behaviors similar to LD and that economic status maybe an indicator of diagnosis. However, as stated in Coutinho, Oswald, and Best “students whose learning or behavioral problems are due primarily to environmental causes are not to be identified as LD” (2002, p. 57).

Another factor that may impact African Americans achievement is their exposure to violence. According to Voisin (2007), student’s exposure to violence can significantly impact academic performance. The motivation to learn is decreased when the desire to survive is heightened by past and present experiences. According to Voisin (2007), the number one cause of death for African American youth is homicide. African Americans exposure to violence in their neighborhoods is constant and frequent. Research shows that out of 203 teens in Chicago, 61% witnessed stabbings, and 45% had seen someone killed. Voisin (2007) argues that children’s exposure to violence can increase chances of developmental, cognitive, and language delays. These factors significantly impact the reasons that “African American youth are also at greater risk for academic problems compared to white youth” (Voisin, 2007, p.55). However, this cause does not justify the overrepresentation issues. There needs to be an increase in detecting and assessing a child’s exposure to violence prior to special education identification. There is also an increased need to implement “evidenced based interventions” for student exposed to violence” (Voisin, 2007, p. 56).

It is important to address as many of the contributing factors mentioned above if there is to be any improvement in the current state of education for African American children. There are a variety of contributing factors expressed in the literature, and just as

many suggestions on how best to address each one. All seem to suggest a need for increased cultural sensitivity and awareness. (Artiles, & Bal, 2008; Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2001; Skiba et al., 2008;) However, Green (2005) suggests, if a culturally sensitive RTI was developed it may impact some of the factors affecting African American students in special education.

Current Identification Procedures Impacting Disproportionate Representation

“The Response to Intervention (RTI) process has been available for application in education for several decades” (Kashi 2008). However the discrepancy model is the most widely used method for identifying students with learning disabilities. The U.S. Office of Education’s (USOE) first adoption of a formula to determine a severe discrepancy was in 1977. The “public response to the notion of a formula was overwhelmingly negative” (Bradely, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002, p. 33). Yet, even today the discrepancy model continues to be highly associated with LD identification.

According to Dykeman (2006), the discrepancy model measures the difference between a child’s ability level and their level of achievement. It is assumed that achievement and ability are highly correlated. Therefore, an average ability should yield average performance. If unknown factors create a significant gap or discrepancy in a child’s ability and their achievement levels, it is assumed that something is impacting their ability to learn. Dykeman (2006) suggests, for those specific reasons, a learning disability is often determined by measuring the discrepancy between achievement and ability. Since the definition clearly states that a learning disability manifests itself as an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical

calculations, the discrepancy model is considered as one form of identification (Dykeman, 2006).

Many professionals argue, there are many disadvantages to the discrepancy model especially in regards to disproportionately concerns. (Arnold, & Lessmann, 2003; Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002; Dykeman, 2006; Harry & Klinger, 2007). Bradley, Danielson, and Hallahan (2002) suggest, while the discrepancy model may provide some level of information concerning the child's current level of ability, it fails to provide the intervention. "The most serious flaw in the current process is the absence of a direct link between assessment procedures used for identification and the subsequent interventions that might be prescribed based on these assessment procedures" (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002, p. 472).

Response to Intervention increases the opportunity to close the gap between identification and intervention (Brown-Chidsey, & Steege, 2005). Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) suggest "RTI is an objective examination of the cause and effect relationships between academic or behavioral intervention and the student's response to the intervention" (Brown-Chidsey, & Steege, 2005, p.2). The purpose of RTI is to provide an immediate response to students exhibiting academic or behavioral difficulties through researched based interventions, and to guarantee that data on student's progress is monitored and assessed to determine their response to interventions implemented. (Kashi, 2008)

This three or more step approach provides various stages of evidence-based intervention to provide individualized support to at-risk students. According to Glover, and DiPerna (2007) RTI consists of several key components which include "multitier

implementation, student assessment and decision making, evidence based intervention, maintenance and procedural integrity, and the development and sustainability of systems-level capacity” (p. 527). RTI has the capability to provide assistance to all students because of its early intervention and research based implications. Classroom wide interventions can be implemented, which can assist students who are identified as at risk, as well as students performing at grade level. This method also stresses prevention through early intervention at times system wide initiatives. (Glover & DiPerna, 2007) Interventions are implemented at every level or tier. However, they differ in the level of intensity and frequency in which the interventions are implemented (Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bryant, 2006). RTI’s goal is to identify the specific area of need and implement various levels of interventions throughout a three tier process. This procedure is used to determine the most effective method of providing assistance. (Reschly, 2003)

RTI’s impact on the identification of African American Students

The RTI model holds promise for preventing academic failure. It also provides support for culturally and linguistically diverse students before they underachieve” (Harry, & Klinger, 2007, p. 21). “RTI is a potential method for ensuring students are provided with instruction that is responsive to their educational progress [or] lack there of” (Glover & Diperna, 2007, p. 526). Overall, RTI provides a reasonable alternative to the current discrepancy model particularly for the identification of students with learning disabilities. The 2005 Joint Committee report also concluded that RTI is beneficial in addressing and decreasing the disproportionate representation of minority students. (Kashi, 2008)

According to Harry and Klingler (2007) assessment procedures under RTI may be another area that positively impacts disproportionate representation concerns. “Culturally responsive assessment can also help to ensure that African American children are assessed on the basis of nondiscriminatory testing and evaluation procedures, which may help to reduce and prevent overrepresentation in special education” (Greene, 2005, p. 39) Assessments, should include a variety of data sources in order to be reliable and valid. No one assessment measure should be conducted if all contributing factors of achievement are to truly be assessed. (Harry, & Klingler, 2007) Again, IDEA 2004 regulations require that the identification procedures adopted by the state, “must not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, as defined in 34 CFR 300.8(c)(10).

Skiba et al. (2008) and Kashi (2008) argue that early intervention and system wide screening is a critical factor in decreasing the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. The RTI model’s association with early intervention addresses many of the educational problems with the wait to fail approach apparent with the current discrepancy model. (Bradely, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007) System wide screening is also a key component of RTI, which acts as both a preventive measure and early intervention orientated approach. According to Steele (2004), early intervention may hold the key to increasing the success of students who exhibit LD characteristics. Research suggests that early intervention has the ability to decrease anxiety and low motivation generally associated with poor achievement. (Steele, 2004) If students who exhibit learning difficulties do not receive early intervention the “learning problems continue and could lead to more students dropping out of school, exhibiting

behavior problems, and developing greater academic deficiencies” (Steele, 2004, p.76) RTI has the benefit of obtaining “data for more effective and earlier identification of students with LD, and a systematic way to ensure that students experiencing educational difficulties receive more timely and effective support” (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2005, p.249).

One reason that RTI was a welcome alternative to the traditional discrepancy approach is, teachers no longer would have to wait for students to fail before the students could receive services” (Brabley, Danielson, Doolittle 2007, p.8). RTI decreases the chances of leaving out students who are not failing, but still not reaching their full potential. (Kashi, 2008; Klingler, 2007) Because, there is a need for early intervention to decrease overrepresentation of African Americans in Special education, (Green, 2005); RTI may be beneficial to African Americans because it promotes early intervention (Harris- Muri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006).

In addition to early intervention, bias referrals are often cited as a contributing factor of overrepresentation (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006; Hernandez et al. 2008; Kashi, 2008; Skiba et al., 2008;). However, interventions in the first tier are often implemented in the general education class (Arnold, & Lassmann, 2003). According to Brown-Chidsey, and Steege (2005) the general education teacher plays an active role in implementing interventions and monitoring students’ response. The general education teacher is often held accountable for implementing in class interventions. Brown-Chidsey, and Steege (2005) suggest, when teachers ask that the student be moved to the second tier of RTI, the teacher is also responsible for being an active member of the team that, provides that data reflecting the students’ inability to exhibit progress. Skiba et al.,

2008, Hernandez et al. 2008, Kashi, 2008, and Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006 suggest, if enforced these expectations may affect the bias referrals associated with disproportionate representation.

When measuring a student's response to the interventions implemented it is important to consider all areas that may affect their response. This includes cultural and linguistic considerations. Dykeman (2006) mentions several methods of measurement in assessing students' response in the tiers of RTI. He argues, regardless of the specific method used, they all have to be capable of assessing both functional development and academic performance. Dykeman (2006) suggests, it is important to assess both areas so that data on why students are responding a particular way is understood. Students receiving extra support in developmental areas, such as language may simultaneously receive support in reading. However, monitoring their progress in reading without considering their language progress sends a false picture of their response to the interventions being implemented. A student's reading performance in such a case, may academically reflect their progress or lack thereof in their communication skills. (Dykeman, 2006)

African American students should have instruction relative to their culture to assist with educational motivation (Kashi, 2008). CampbellJones and CampbellJones (2002) argue, many African Americans "define themselves by their color" (p. 145). The inability to associate themselves with positive aspects of their identity, especially through instruction or school interactions, may decrease overall motivation. CampbellJones & CampbellJones, (2002) and Harris-Murri, King, and Rostenberg, (2006), call for a "culturally responsive classroom" (p.785). They also caution that old policies and views

should not be carried into the RTI model. There should not be an assumption by educational professionals that all interventions work well across cultures. (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006)

According to Brown (2008), minority students, especially those at risk benefit from curriculum that includes multicultural concepts. Research indicates that students who are exposed to instruction that address the cultural aspects of the individual, show improvement in academic achievement. Student's interest increases when they are exposed to instruction that is directly related to them. For African American students considered at risk their motivation to improve academically is even more difficult when the instruction is so foreign. (Brown, 2007) Green (2005) suggests, multicultural instructional interventions be implemented to assist in improving the achievement of at risk African American students. She argues that improving achievement is key to decreasing the referral of African American students for special education. (Green, 2005) RTI in many ways has the ability to address the lack of culturally sensitive instructional techniques. Kashi (2008) argues that "RTI provides a more flexible, mainstream approach that adapts well to the different cognitive and cultural learning styles inherent to minority students whether or not underperforming" (p. 38).

African Americans, in "certain special education categories typically receive their special education in segregated classrooms or buildings" (Patton, 1998, p. 26). IDEA requires the least restrictive environment (LRE) always be considered when deciding to remove a student from the general education environment for any portion of the school day. However, According to Patton all too often special education placements such as a resource room for learning disabled students are used as an intervention and not

a resource. Patton (1998 suggests), “while these students are in special education programs they miss essential general education, academic, and social curricula” (p. 25). Students with mild disabilities being in segregated classes can have negative effects on overall motivation, academic performance and potentially increases their chances of dropping out. (Patton, 1998) RTI’s implementation of in class interventions may impact the view that services and interventions are best served in separate environments. (Brown- Chidsey, & Steege, 2005)

Overall, the “scientifically based school wide instructional interventions” (Bradley, Danielson, Doolittle, 2007, p.8), associated with RTI are specifically important to students with specific learning disabilities (Bradley, Danielson, Doolittle, 2007). Bradley, Danielson, Doolittle (2007) suggest, the history of Specific Learning Disabilities was so focused on the process and identification of the exact problem within the child, that interventions were often neglected. If RTI considers the culturally sensitive approaches to the identification, and services for African American students, it may impact the factors contributing to disproportionate representation (Green, 2005; Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006).

RTI and the School Psychologist’s Role

As policies move from a test and place model to the evidence based intervention process, the role of school psychologists will also shift. School Psychologists will be expected to take on a more consultative role in the identification of at- risk students. Instead of the within child deficit approach, professionals in the field will be challenged to explore both within child as well as environmental factors impacting a child’s performance. Meaning, prior to assuming a child has a deficit or disability, interventions

such as instruction, behavior plans, and individual programs that are proven to increase academic success have to be implemented. This is significant to the concerns of disproportionate representation because research has already suggested that an intervention model may help decrease disproportionate concerns. (Powers, Hagens, & Busse, 2008)

In the field of school psychology reports and psychometric skills are still needed. However, the way in which this knowledge is applied may sift under the RTI process. School Psychologists will be expected to increase their consultation with teachers, parents, and school personnel to implement interventions focused on improving the academic skills of children at risk. Progress monitoring will be used to determine growth, progress and responsiveness to intervention. Curriculum Based Measures (CMB's) will hold just as much significance as standardized assessments. Data collection will still be a significant process of the school Psychologists job. However, it will be used to guide interventions as apposed to identifying students with disabilities. (Powers, Hagens, & Busse, 2008)

Freeman (2007) expressed that school psychologists not only play a role in data collection and consultation, but contribute significantly to the actual system design of RTI. School Psychologists expertise allows them to train other RTI team members in effective intervention implementation and progress monitoring. In addition to trainings, School Psychologists are essential in the development of local norms for assessing CBM's invaluable to the progress monitoring process.

RTI emphasizes scientifically based research or research involving detailed studies on the effectiveness of interventions and educational programs. Ensuring that

scientifically based interventions are implemented is key in ensuring the proven success of students. It also allows for consistency in the delivery of interventions across districts. (Zirkel, & Rose, 2009) In regards to school psychologist's the profession under RTI calls for an ability to evaluate these scientifically based research interventions and assist the team, or district in implementing them appropriately. (Powers, Hagans, & Busse, 2008)

According to Dr. Cash, school psychologists should not merely be data interpreters for RTI, but "mental health professionals who use RTI to help students..." (2009, p.2). Many School Psychologists are concerned with the role of the profession under RTI. However, under RTI school psychologists can assist all students opposed to those who just meet special education qualifications. Dr. Cash warns the profession that caution should be taken in the development of the school psychologist's role under RTI. He argues that school psychologists should use RTI to enhance professional services to include a broader spectrum of students in need of extra support. However, the field should not allow RTI to lead the profession to a technical data interpretation position. (Cash, 2009)

Chapter III: Methodology

As stated in the literature review portion of this study, school psychologists play a key role in the RTI process (Powers, Hagans, & Busse, 2008). Due to their key role in RTI this study will seek to gain the perspectives of school psychologists on the possible impact RTI may have on disproportionate concern. The following chapter provided details on the subjects asked to volunteer in the study, the instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Limitations to the study are also discussed in the following chapter.

Sample Selection

The literature review and the purpose of the study were presented to a staff of School Psychologists in a medium sized southern school district. After the explanation of the research study was presented, staff members were invited to voluntarily participate in the research survey. The school psychologists were reminded that the completion of the survey was not required and that all identifying information could be omitted from the form. School psychologists were asked to voluntarily participate regardless of years of experience, ethnicity, age, or gender. Staff members from Elementary, Middle, and High Schools were asked to voluntarily complete the survey.

Instrumentation

The survey used, "RTI and Disproportionate Representation" (see attached survey), was specifically designed for the purpose of this research paper. It was created to measure the perceptions of School Psychologists toward the possible impact of RTI on the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education. The survey consisted of both positive and negative statements that required all

participants to respond by marking strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. There were a total of 14 questions, 13 of which required the above mentioned responses. The last question presented on the survey was open-ended. The survey was designed with open-ended questions specifically to increase the chances that each participant's unique perceptions toward the research questions would be obtained. The surveys were paper surveys accompanied by consent forms. The statements on the survey were designed to cover the contributing factors of overrepresentation as discussed throughout the Literature review section of this research paper and characteristics of RTI noted to impact disproportionate representation.

Data Collection Procedures

Approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Wisconsin-Stout was sought and obtained prior to any data collection. The director of Student Services and supervisors within the district in question were fully informed of the data collection process, the significance of the study, and the risks to all participants. All required human subjects study procedures within the district were also obtained to ensure that the study was approved by the school district prior to data collection. When required permission was obtained by both the university and the school district, information regarding the Surveys was explained at a general staff meeting. The significance of the study, confidentiality, and informed consent was also discussed prior to asking the staff members to volunteer. School Psychologist's that choose to volunteer were asked to put completed surveys in a box inside the staff mailroom to be collected at the end of the day. All identifying information such as name and specific school serviced were not included

on completed surveys. Therefore at the end of the day when surveys were completed, this ensured the confidentiality of each volunteer.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through The Statistical Program for Social Services SPSS. Results were assessed to determine the frequency of responses for each question. An Independent Sample t-test was also conducted to compare mean responses between participants who had 1-8 years of experience in the profession to those with 9 or more years of experience. The results of this data analysis are discussed further in the following chapter.

Limitations

Many professionals in the school system will be impacted by RTI. The survey created for the purposes of this paper is only designed for school psychologists. A major limitation is that the research does not include the perceptions of case teachers, general education teachers, special education teachers, or any of the other professionals that have valuable and unique perspectives on the impact RTI may have on overrepresentation concerns.

The second limitation of the research is, it will be conducted in a district that has no current overrepresentation concerns. While the school psychology participants have prior experiences in various districts that may have had concerns with overrepresentation, it is not a current concern for the volunteers included in this study. This is a limitation because it may impact their current perceptions on how RTI will impact their district. This also limits the assumptions that can be made about what if any impact RTI will have on an already equally represented special education system.

Chapter IV: Results

As stated in the literature review section of this study, School Psychologists will have an increased consultative role in the field of school psychology under Response to Intervention (Powers, Hagans, & Busse, 2008). Research suggests that School Psychologists may even play a part in the design and implementation of RTI in their districts (Freeman, 2007). For that reason this researcher felt it important to gain the perspective of these professionals in regard to disproportionate concerns and the contributing factors of overrepresentation as reported through research.

This study was conducted to gain the perceptions of School Psychologists regarding Response to Intervention and its possible impact on the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education. A survey was given to a staff of School Psychologists. Each staff member varied in years of experience and previous work locations. However, this examiner felt it important to obtain opinions from a diverse staff in order to truly attain genuine opinions regarding this subject. The following chapter will discuss the results of the 14 question survey completed by a staff of School Psychologists in a southern school district.

Demographic Information

There were a total of 32 School Psychologists on staff at the time of the mini presentation regarding the purpose of the study. Of the 32 staff members, 24 volunteered to complete the survey which constituted a 75% return rate (n=24). The School Psychologists years of experience in the profession ranged from 1 to 36 years of experience with a mean of 9 years of experience. The participants were also asked to report the schools they serviced. Most reported servicing several levels in a given year.

However, two participants did not report their schools serviced or years of experience. Of the schools serviced 87.5% of the participants worked at elementary schools (n=21), 41.6% worked for middle schools (n=10), 25% in high schools (n=6), and 12.5% were assigned to pre- school programs (n=3).

Frequency Results

The first question addressed on the survey was the participants' perception of how familiar they were with the RTI process. Of the 24 participants, 100% reported that they strongly agreed (n=14) or agreed (n=10) that they were familiar with the RTI process. This was imperative toward the study, because a general understanding of the RTI process was necessary to truly give a professional opinion of its possible benefits. Therefore, all surveys were considered for the following results.

The participants were asked if they felt that overrepresentation of minority students was an area of concern. Results from the survey revealed, 58.3% of participants strongly agreed, and 38.3% agreed, and 8.3% neither agreed nor disagreed that the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education was a current concern. However, results revealed, 16.7% of participants strongly agreed (n=4), 25% agreed (n=6), 29.2% neither agreed nor disagreed (n=7), 20.8% disagreed (n= 5), and 4.2% strongly disagreed (n=1) that RTI would require teams to consider the racial and cultural factors of students during the creating of interventions.

The following section will address research question number 5 as expressed in Chapter I of this study. Results are divided according to the survey results corresponding with key contributing factors of disproportionate representation as mentioned in the literature review. In regards to early intervention, several questions (questions 7 and 10)

addressed RTI's ability to provide early intervention for students experiencing delays or academic difficulties. When asked if RTI may provide support to young children experiencing early delays, 50% of participants strongly agreed, 45.8% agreed, 4.2% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 0% of participants strongly disagreed. Survey results also indicated that 87.4% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that RTI may provide "slow learners" with an opportunity to catch up. When asked if RTI may decrease formal testing by providing in-class interventions to increase academics 16.6% of participants indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement, 58.3% agreed, 4.2% neither agreed or disagreed, 12.4% disagreed, and 4.2% strongly disagreed. The survey also addressed issues regarding RTI's impact on providing creative and individualized interventions. Results indicated that 25% of participants strongly agreed, 54.2% agreed, 12.5% neither agreed nor disagreed, 4.2% disagreed and, 4.2% strongly disagreed that RTI may provide students with individually focused interventions. (For detailed item analysis review Appendix D)

Independent Sample t-test

SPSS was used to run an Independent Sample t-test for the analysis of response pattern according to years of experience. Significant differences (.05 level) in response pattern according to years of experience were observed for three questions in the data set. There was a significant difference found ($t = -2.182$) in school psychologists belief that RTI would require teams to consider the racial and cultural factors when creating interventions. Professionals with 1-8 years of experience were more likely to agree that RTI would increase racial consideration during interventions. However, for School Psychologists with 9 or more years of experience the mean perception was that RTI

would not impact this area. There was a significant difference ($t = -2.869$) in School Psychologists perceptions regarding RTI and its ability to provide extra support for children with early delays. Most School Psychologists with 9 or more years of experience reported a minimal or uncertain impact, while professionals with 1-8 years of experience reported a higher positive impact. A prediction as to the reason for this variance may be due to exposure to new topics and research regarding RTI. The last significant difference found in the data set was regarding RTI's ability to provide "slow learners" with the ability to catch up ($t = -2.975$). Similar results were found suggesting that professionals with more years of experience were less inclined to agree with the statement. (See Appendix E for a full chart on *t*-test results)

Question 14 on the survey was open-ended and allowed for qualitative data to be collected. Results indicated that 41.6 % of respondents reported that RTI may assist in decreasing disproportionate representation. However, 16.6% commented that they did not feel RTI would have a positive impact on addressing disproportionate concerns. In fact, a few indicated that it may have an adverse affect identifying students as LD earlier or creating unnecessary delays in providing special education service. Of the 24 participants, 29.1% (n=7) wrote comments regarding RTI's effectiveness only if implemented correctly. One participant indicated that if teachers are not taught appropriate intervention implementation strategies, RTI may not be effective on any level.

Chapter V: Discussion

Introduction

The disproportionate number of African-American children being diagnosed with learning disabilities suggests it is time to consider the validity of current identification procedures. (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenburg, 2006) For years, the uses of intelligence and achievement assessments have been considered the ideal method in determining eligibility for a learning disabled diagnosis (Meyer, 2000). However, “research has demonstrated that, the use of this IQ discrepancy model for the determination of SLD contributes to the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in special education” (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenburg, 2006, p.780). Most importantly it fails to truly link the causes of low academic achievement prior to assuming within child deficits. Methods that consider a student’s exposure to education, cultural background, and socio-economic status, are needed to assist professionals in identifying a more appropriate plan or intervention (Skiba et al., 2008).

RTI may benefit low achieving students, particularly African-American low achieving children by providing programs that considers the contributing factors of disproportionate representation during empirical based research implementation. As the profession of school psychology merges into a response to intervention approach to special education, our roles and expectations will also be altered (Cash, 2009). As new designs are implemented, research and perspectives from professionals that deal most closely with RTI should be evaluated to ensure that history does not repeat itself through a new identification procedure.

Discussion of Results

Overall, results from this study revealed some varied perspectives regarding response to intervention and its possible benefits on the contributing factors of disproportionate representation. Most participants indicated that they were knowledgeable about the general concept of RTI. Freeman (2007) suggested that school psychologists will not only play a role in RTI, but they will also be key players in the design of the program in their districts. Therefore, obtaining a general knowledge of RTI is imperative in providing opinions regarding its impact on disproportionate concerns. Overall, the participants of this study reported that they perceived themselves to be knowledgeable in the actual concept of RTI.

There was general agreement among the participants in their belief that disproportionate representation of minority students in special education was a present concern. Their overall view was consistent with general literature, suggesting a long history of and continued concerns in this area. Again, this is a significant finding for this district because Green (2005) argues, one of the contributing factors to overrepresentation is, the "...lack of knowledge that the problem exists" (p. 34).

In regards to the contributing factors of disproportionate representation, results revealed that School Psychologists generally perceived that RTI would provide early intervention, creative interventions, and a delay in formal assessment for low performing students. There were some participants that felt RTI would have minimal impact on parental involvement. While this is not cited as a contributing factor, it is an area for more research regarding RTI.

There were minimal significant differences between years of experience and perceptions toward RTI. However, professionals with 9 or more years of experience were more likely to report that RTI may not increase a team's consideration toward culture when creating interventions. Professionals with 1-8 years of experience were more likely to report that RTI would assist in providing extra support for kids with early academic delays. Again this difference may be impacted by younger professionals exposure to and training of RTI.

The perceptions from School Psychologists in this district appear to suggest that in their professional opinions, RTI may positively impact some of the contributing factors of disproportionate representation as discussed in the literature. However, many commented that the effectiveness of RTI weighs significantly on the valid and reliable implementation of the program. Inconsistency between interventions and lack of team cohesion are factors perceived by participants as negatively impacting the successful implementation of RTI; thereby creating another system with similar flaws and concerns. One particular School Psychologist commented that due to the in-class intervention, teacher training and willingness to truly implement RTI appropriately will determine its future success.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study is the number of participants involved. While adequate representation was achieved in the southern school district in question. The study did little in predicting the future outcomes, and perceptions of school psychologists in similar districts. Another limitation of this study is the fact that there were only a few contributing factors of disproportionate representation addressed by the survey. This also

limits the study in that the perceptions only scratched the surface of the key causes of disproportionate representation. Further more, there is no guarantee that the contributing factors addressed in the survey are consistent with the major issues in the school district in question.

During this study professionals that play a key role in the districts' RTI process were not included as participants. While School Psychologists do play a key role in RTI, this district also has Case teachers which act as a middle ground between teachers and School Psychologists. Their perception of RTI would have been beneficial in assessing the possible benefits to RTI in the southern school district in question. Overall, this study is limited to the professional opinions and perceptions and does little to truly predict the future overrepresentation issues under RTI. While perceptions are invaluable, more needs to be done to determine the impact RTI will have if any on disproportionate representation of minority students in special education.

Response to Intervention, while not a new topic, is still in the beginning stages of development for this generation of students. It was not until 2004, and the IDEA reauthorization requirements, that a system wide RTI implementation was truly mandated. Therefore, the research on the actual benefits is limited. Overall, limited research has been done on a wide scale regarding how RTI may impact the disproportionate representation of minority students. While much empirical research suggests, RTI may decrease the factors contributing to disproportionate representation, there has been little research to confirm hypothesis. The long term effects of RTI are another limitation of this research. Because, RTI is in the beginning stages of implementation there is little information known about long term effects for African

American students. Unfortunately, the true impact of RTI on this historic educational concern will come during the actual implementation process.

Conclusions

All of the above perceptions and concerns regarding the implementation of RTI are viable issues to consider. While perceptions of School Psychologists suggest that RTI may have possible impacts on the contributing factors of disproportionate representation, there is still much to be done (Skiba et al., 2008). Research suggests that if implemented appropriately, RTI may impact the amount of African American students diagnosed with LD (Greene 2005). According to many professionals the ideology of RTI may be effective, but implementation is a different notion entirely.

According to research, RTI assists in constructing a truly individualized method of educating at risk students (Chidsey & Steege, 2005). RTI's focus is on both prevention and progress (Gravois, & Rosenfield, 2006). Students receive individualized interventions that work best for their learning style, are based on their specific area of need, and consider the importance of environmental influences. Bradley, Danielson, and Hallahan (2002) also suggest that RTI works to create the direct link between student's needs and individualized interventions. The interventions provided are monitored to ensure progress or determine alternative strategies. They also suggest that, this method may help to decrease the misdiagnosis and overrepresentation associated with the learning disabled. (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002) However, the cohesion of all educational professionals will be needed to truly make RTI effective in its impact on disproportionate representation concerns.

Recommendations

Despite the uncertainty of some professionals in the field concerning RTI, the most important issue is that something must change. Educational professionals can not continue the use of identification procedures that contribute to the overrepresentation of African American children in special education. Despite research and reports suggesting this has been a historic concern; the issue of disproportionate representation thrives and continues to exist. Overall, minority students experience an educational gap that impacts not only their school performance but their post secondary success. Green (2005) argues that overrepresentation is "...not just a problem for numbers" (p. 34). Instead it is an issue that affects the educational and future success of African Americans. The chances of students diagnosed with disabilities attending college, or even finding a job is much lower in comparison to their Caucasian peers. Greene suggests that early identification, culturally responsive practices, and instructional interventions may help to decrease the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education. (Green, 2006) The factors that contribute most heavily to these disproportionate statistics need to be addressed in the field of education.

Green (2006) recommends that the field needs to implement a culturally responsive, response to intervention. She suggests policies should be put in place to ensure that the transition to the RTI model includes established interventions and strategies that increase the performance of African American students. Assessment methods should be culturally sensitive, and referrals based on students lack of response to appropriate interventions. More research needs to be conducted in the area of effective

instruction techniques for African American students, as well as the impact of RTI on the contributing factors of disproportionate representation. (Green, 2006)

It is recommended by this researcher that continued studies on the impact of RTI and disproportionate representation be considered throughout the RTI design and implementation process. Districts that have already been implementing RTI in their county should be evaluated for progress on decreasing disproportionate representation and the overall impact their design has on the contributing factors discussed in current research. More local data needs to be collected on individual districts contributing factors of disproportionate representation (Hernandez et al., 2008). This is important because each district may have varied factors that contribute to their specific issues with overrepresentation. The more that is known locally, the more effective School Psychologists can be in designing culturally sensitive response to intervention programs.

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Appendix A: RTI and Disproportionate Representation Survey

<p>This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.</p>

RTI and Disproportionate Representation Survey

Schools Serviced (Circle all that apply) Pre-School Elementary Middle School High School

Number of Years in the Profession _____

*Please read each statement and provide a **numbered (1-5)** response that best represents your opinion. The following 5 answer options are as follows.....*

(1) Strongly Agree (2) Agree (3) Neither Agree/Disagree (4) Disagree (5) Strongly Disagree

1. I am familiar with the general concept of RTI. _____
 2. I often participate in Student Support Teams. _____
 3. I consider the cultural factors that impact student achievement when planning interventions. _____
 4. The overrepresentation of minority students is an area of concern for special education. _____
 5. RTI will require teams to consider the racial and cultural factors of a student when creating interventions. _____
 6. RTI will allow for more creativity and individualization of interventions prior to formalized testing. _____
 7. If implemented appropriately, RTI may provide extra support to young children experiencing early academic delays. _____
 8. Interventions implemented through RTI will be based on individual need. _____
 9. The RTI process will increase parent involvement prior to student failure. _____
 10. RTI interventions can provide "slow learners" with the extra support needed to catch up. _____
 11. RTI will help to decrease the formal testing of low achievers by giving them the in-class interventions needed for individual success. _____
 12. Most students who are placed in special education under the category of LD in elementary school will test out when they show improvement. _____
 13. RTI can help to use a student's strengths and interests to help improve their performance. _____
 14. (In your own words) What way if any, do you feel that RTI may impact the identification of minority students in the various categories of special education? _____
-

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Consent to Participate In UW-Stout Approved Research

Title: *The Perceptions of School Psychologists in a Southern District Regarding Response to Intervention's Possible Impact on the Disproportionate Representation of African American Student in Special Education*

Investigator:

*Tiffany Williams-McCray
(910)-678-2727
Educational Resource Center
Psychological Services*

Research Sponsor:

*Ruth Nyland
Research Advisor
UW-Stout*

Description:

The disproportionate representation of African Americans in Special Education is a significant issue. Flaws in the referral process, identification procedures, and ineffective intervention and instruction, are cited as the contributing factors affecting disproportionate representation. The changes apparent in the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), suggest, implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) as a method of addressing some of these concerns. This study will assess the perceptions of School Psychologist's from a small southern school district, regarding the possible impacts RTI may have on disproportionate representation.

Risks and Benefits:

This study will be beneficial by providing an informative look at the school psychologist's perceptions of some issues involving RTI. For a school district that is still in the beginning stages of RTI, any information prior to or during implementation may help to guide decisions. While this may not be a ground breaking discovery, and continued research on this subject will be necessary, all perspectives are beneficial. However, the sample size is a small group of school psychologists in a district that is in the beginning stages of RTI. This is an apparent risk because the perceptions are based solely on opinion instead of direct long-term experience with RTI.

Time Commitment and Payment:

The following survey is completely voluntary. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Due to the voluntary nature of the study, participants will not receive any compensation or payments for their participation.

Confidentiality:

Your identity is not required and your name will not be included on the actual survey. While some information regarding your experiences is requested, this information will not be used to identify participants.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it has been turned into the investigator.

IRB Approval:

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

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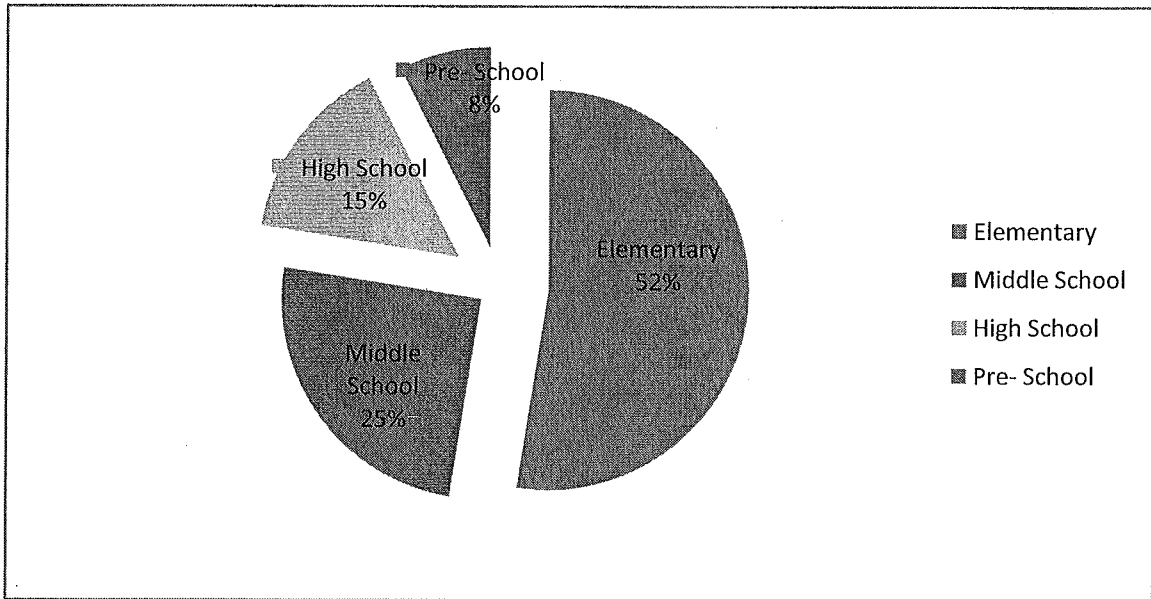
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Statement of Consent:

*This section should include the language, "By signing this consent form you agree to participate in the project entitled, "***The Perceptions of School Psychologists in a Southern District Regarding Response to Intervention's Possible Impact on the Disproportionate Representation of African American Student in Special Education***"*

Signature

Appendix C: Pie Chart for Participants Level of Service



Appendix D: Frequency of Response Chart

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am Familiar with the concept of RTI	58.3	41.6	0	0	0
I Participate In SST teams	62.5	33.3	0	4.2	0
I consider cultural factors during interventions	41.6	54.1	4.2	0	0
Disproportionate Representation is a current concern	58.3	33.3	8.2	0	0
RTI increases teams consideration of culture	16.7	25	29.2	20.8	4.2
RTI provides creative Interventions before testing	25	54.2	12.5	4.2	4.2
RTI may provide support for kids with early delays	50	45.8	4.2	0	0
RTI interventions are based on Individual need	33.3	41.6	20.8	0	0
RTI will increase parental involvement	12.5	29.1	33.3	20.8	4.2
RTI provided "slow learners" with extra support	16.6	70.8	12.5	0	0
RTI decreases testing by providing in-class support	16.6	58.3	4.2	12.5	4.2
LD students will test -out upon improvement	0	37.5	37.5	16.6	8.3
RTI can use strengths to build weaknesses	16.6	75	8.3	0	0

Numbers represent percent response

Appendix E: Response Pattern Based on Years of Experience Chart

Years of Experience								t-test value
Question	1-8 Years of Experience			9+ Years of Experience				
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n		
1	1.23	0.439	13	1.57	0.535	7	-1.537	
2	1.38	0.506	13	1.29	0.488	7	0.422	
3	1.54	0.519	13	1.71	0.756	7	-0.617	
4	1.46	0.66	13	1.43	0.787	7	0.1	
5	2.33	1.371	12	3.29	0.488	7	-2.182*	
6	1.77	0.725	13	2.71	1.38	7	-1.69	
7	1.31	0.48	13	2	0.577	7	-2.869*	
8	1.69	0.751	13	2.57	1.272	7	-1.96	
9	2.38	0.87	13	3.29	1.113	7	-2.007	
10	1.77	0.439	13	2.43	0.535	7	-2.975*	
11	2.15	0.899	13	2.71	1.38	7	-1.104	
12	2.85	0.987	13	3.29	0.951	7	-0.961	
13	1.85	0.555	13	2.14	0.378	7	-1.259	