

Stacy A. S. Williams
State University of New York at Albany
Education 214
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12222
swilliams@uamail.albany.edu
518-442-5150 (office)
518-339-4992 (mobile)
518-442-4953 (office fax)
845-849-2961 (home fax)

Personal Research Agenda

A principal friend once said “they send us their very best.” She was referring to urban parents who send their children to urban schools. Urban schools are often in the news due to low test scores. New mandates and initiatives are often espoused to aid these students. My goal has always been to understand the variables that motivate student success in the urban environment. I have pursued this by examining the differences in social connectedness and performance between high-achieving and low-achieving urban students; examining the fluency rate of urban students when provided with materials from their cultural frame of reference; exploring the literacy preferences of urban students; and exploring parents’ reasoning behind sending students to culturally-aligned summer programs.

With the new initiatives of response to intervention and efforts by local educational agencies to integrate many of these practices into the daily fabric of the school environment, I am interested in how school psychology as a profession can be of service to educators within this setting. What will our role be in the 21st century? Bear (2008) in the October issue of the *Communique* cautions us against diluting the function of the profession. However, besides being assessment specialists, what does the educational environment demand of us? I strongly believe that school psychology should increase collaboration with other disciplines. In many ways, it does take a village/a community to raise and/or educate a child.

The reality in today’s schools is that teachers are expected to move mountains with limited and/or no resources. They are expected to teach a specific curriculum to students who possess limited skills. They are also required to provide students with good instruction, meet diverse student needs by differentiating their instruction, evaluate and monitor student progress, and identify and implement evidence-based interventions. Many teachers are not equipped to

meet these demands due to limited educational preparation and this is where school psychologists have a crucial role to fulfill, as they are well prepared and trained to aid teachers in identifying evidence-based practices, progress monitoring, and interpreting data.

In many schools, the most qualified professional in the areas of assessment and data management is the school psychologist. I am interested in investigating how we can “support” general educators in implementing the tenets of RTI. Specifically, I am interested in answering the following questions: what aspects of our training facilitate effective collaboration with educators; what role do educators perceive the school psychologist should play in RTI implementation; how can school psychologists support educators through the Instructional Support Team (IST) and the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) process; and how can school psychologists revamp the IST process to serve the needs of educators?

Supporting educators in the general education curriculum is a topical issue both domestically and internationally. Currently, I am engaged in seeking funding to continue our international work in Jamaica to support rural educators through professional development workshops. We have found that effective collaboration is both a function of resources and grass roots efforts. In our earlier work, we noted that whereas DIBELS assessment worked well in the US, several language problems emerged during usage in Jamaica. Hence, we would like to further explore educators’ use of DIBELS standardized procedures in Jamaica to identify struggling learners.

Multiple Stakeholders' Perceptions of Support for General Educators: Implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) Initiatives

Recent federal and state guidelines suggest that general educators should be responsible for delivering the intervention branch of RTI. However, limited information about RTI interventions appear in teacher education journals. Thus, Bucholz and Duffy (2008) argue that there exists a discrepancy between the knowledge base and general educators' access to this information. Nevertheless, general educators are expected to play a pivotal role in implementing RTI initiatives (Knotek, 2007). Therefore, it is important to assess multiple stakeholders' perceptions about the types of support most effective in aiding general educators to implement the intervention branch of RTI. The proposed research project address this issue, and also assesses the extent to which perceptions differ as a function of geographic location, training, and/or experience?

The proposed project is multifaceted and involves surveying general educators, members of instructional support teams, school psychology practitioners, and teacher education and school psychology trainers. The following contains specific research questions for each stakeholder: *General educators*---Do general educators' perceptions of support for RTI initiatives differ as a function of teacher preparation, teaching experience, geographical region (i.e., rural, urban), or administrative support?; *Instructional support teams*--- Do ISTs members' perception of support for RTI initiatives differ as a function of education, teaching experience, years of IST membership, geographical region or administrative support?; *Teacher training centers*---What types of support and/or training do teacher training directors identify as essential for general educators implementation of RTI initiatives?; *School psychology trainers*--- What role and/or support should trainers play in supporting general educators as they implement RTI initiatives?

Does support differ as a function of where school psychologists are expected to practice within an educational setting, or training institute focus (academic/behavioral intervention, psychodynamic, behavioral)?; *School psychology practitioners*--- Do practitioners' perception of support of general educators as it pertains to implementing RTI initiatives differ as a function of training, years of experience, geographical region, or administrative support?

Participants

A sample of 200 for each group of general educators practicing at the elementary level, members of IST teams, school psychology practitioners, and directors of training programs would be surveyed in three states to be named. Concerted efforts would be made to identify multiple stakeholders practicing in both rural and urban areas. To further identify the number of participants that are required to produce a significant result, literature on perceived support would be analyzed to determine the required number of participants for each stakeholder.

Project Requirements

The proposed project would require on average 4 to 5 scholars whose primary responsibilities will be to develop surveys for each stakeholder, pilot the surveys, revise the surveys based on feedback, and disseminate the surveys via the internet using survey monkey or by mailing. Stakeholders will be identified by accessing the membership list of primary professional organizations (e.g., National Association of School Psychology, Teacher Education Division of CEC) and by contacting superintendents of schools to gain access to general educators and members of IST teams. In addition, scholars will be responsible for identifying rural and urban school districts. Finally, IRB approval would be sought before distribution of surveys.

Budget

The budget expenditures for this project includes copying paper (\$100); membership on survey monkey for two surveys for a year (\$400); copying cost for 2000 surveys (5 pages @10 cents per page = \$1000); estimated postage cost of sending initial and follow-up surveys (\$3500); estimated long distance charges and transportation (\$500); two face –to--face planning and implementation meetings which would include air travel for 5 research scholars (\$4000) and hotel accommodations if a suite is booked (\$4000). The overall budget for this project would be \$ 13,500.

Advantages and Disadvantages

An obvious advantage is the ability to draw on team members' experiences, knowledge, geographical location, and university resources. In addition, a focused research agenda would further strengthen early career scholars' dossier for tenure. Moreover, by focusing on the important stakeholders responsible for training and supporting general educators, we are able to provide a more thorough understanding of how general educators can be supported in this new era of RTI. A disadvantage would be if scholars' research agendas were not being recognized. In addition, distance may prevent adequate collaboration and communication. However establishing a list serve to encourage participation among members can mitigate this; in addition, online meetings and two face-to-face meetings would facilitate this process.

References

- Bucholz, J. & Duffy, M. L. (2008, November). *RTI as a general education initiative? Maybe not!* Poster session presented at the annual meeting of the Teacher Education Division of CEC, Dallas, TX.
- Knotek, S. E. (2007). Consultation within response to intervention models. In S. R. Jimerson, M. K. Burns, & A. M. VanDerHeyden (Eds.), *Handbook of response to intervention: The science and practice of assessment and intervention*. New York, NY: Springer.