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Exploring the school counselor's role in response to intervention (rti) efforts for struggling readers in elementary grades

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EXPLORING THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S ROLE IN RESPONSE TO
INTERVENTION (RtI) EFFORTS FOR STRUGGLING READERS IN
ELEMENTARY GRADES

by

RACHEL MERZ

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Elementary Education
in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
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ABSTRACT

Student success is important for student learning, for parents, and for schools; however, in the last decade standardized test data has shed much light on the need for improved student performance across grade levels. Research findings identify that there are millions of struggling readers in US schools. Using assessment data, schools are implementing various types of intervention systems in an effort to meet all students' needs.

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a method of intervention that provides systematic assistance to students who have learning difficulties and need additional support beyond regular classroom instruction. Results showed that RtI related activities (i.e., academic, behavioral, social) encompassed the majority of the participating school counselors' time and responsibilities. Additional results showed that because of the increased number of struggling learners in schools and the way schools view the school counselor's responsibilities, a shift has occurred in their overall role. Participating counselors reported that they spend a fraction of their time in counseling and the majority of their time in "managing" cases; they deal with countless hours of paperwork and testing.

Study results also raised questions about what RtI is, how the model is implemented in schools, and about a need to revisit the role of the school counselor within the RtI framework. Our students will benefit not only from quality instruction, assessment, support, and services, but they also need the valuable services of a school counselor. School counselors with the collaboration of teachers and parents provide the most beneficial way for student success.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2011) estimates that 69% of all fourth-grade students cannot read at a proficient level with 36% of the fourth grade population unable to read at or above basic levels of understanding. The limited reading proficiency of many students places them at a disadvantage when compared with their international peers. The Nation's Report Card (2011) reported that only 29 of the 50 states had average reading scores, and specific to Florida, 39% of all 4th graders read below average. States and school districts have implemented various intervention models and initiatives in an effort to support the needs of students. A Primary school-based intervention to support students' educational achievement is *Response to Intervention* (RtI), a multi-layered prevention system designed to provide all students with the best conditions to succeed in school and assist with identifying learning (and other) disabilities. RtI includes high quality, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, assessment, and evidence-based intervention (National Center for Response to Intervention, 2012).

A number of educators (classroom teachers, exceptional education teachers, school counselors, speech and language pathologists, etc.) play a primary role in the success of all students. One of those educators is the school counselor. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2011) advocated that school counselors support the academic and behavioral development of all students. The role of a school counselor differs depending on what level of RtI intervention is needed (tier I, II, or III); the higher the level of intervention, the more prevalent a school counselor's role is (ASCA, 2008).

My statement of purpose is to investigate the role of a school counselor in relation to response to intervention (RtI) for elementary school struggling readers. A struggling reader is a student that scores a one or two on his or her reading Florida Comprehension Assessment Test (FCAT), and has trouble with reading comprehension, retention, and/or decoding. This thesis sought to explore the following research question: What is the role and responsibilities of the school counselor in the context of RtI at elementary school grades in Central Florida?

I investigated this research question, over the period of a semester, by collecting data from two sources: (1) a survey to investigate 14 prospective school counselors' (graduate students at a major metropolitan university in central Florida) perspectives about their future role and responsibilities; (2) an interview with three Elementary school counselors from three randomly selected Florida school districts.

My goal was to explore existing literature on this topic; I organized my review of literature in the following sections in this manner:

- a) Struggling Readers in Elementary Grades,
- b) Reading Interventions: Response to Intervention (RtI),
- c) The role of a School Counselor in Response to Intervention (RtI) Efforts.

I became interested in this topic because I myself plan to become a school counselor in the future and I have always been interested in why some students are struggling readers while others are not. According to National Performance Data (2009) and other research on the topic, many US students experience difficulties with reading. It is the duty of a school counselor to continue to find ways to meet the needs of all students and help all students succeed. School

counselors play a primary role in the success of all students (academically, socially, and psychologically). It is my hope that this investigation will:

(a) Better educate (and prepare) me on the role of the school counselor in struggling readers' success;

(b) Inform me about the importance of Response to Intervention (RtI) efforts in elementary schools;

(c) Add to my knowledge about the important role (and challenges associated with it) school counselors play in the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) efforts in elementary schools.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Struggling Readers in Elementary Grades

A struggling reader is defined as a low achiever, a student with unidentified reading difficulties, dyslexia and/or with reading, learning or speech/language disabilities (Wanzek, Wexler, & Vaughn, 2009). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2011) concluded that the main reason why we have so many struggling readers in the United States is because they do not acquire the ability to recognize phonemes; as a result, more than eight million students between grades 4 and 12 are struggling in reading. Also, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education (2003) suggested if the reading skills of student are not developed by the time they get to fourth grade, they risk the chance of not being able to fully grasp mathematics, current events, and science. Reading is an important part of everyone's lives; no one can get through a day without reading. Therefore, it is important that educators help these struggling readers when they are just learning to read so it does not form into something worse later on in life.

Teachers deal with student difficulties on a daily basis and focus their efforts on providing quality instruction that meets students' needs; they implement and continue to learn about, effective strategies and interventions to assist struggling readers. Teachers use a number of assessments to determine a student's reading level (e.g., the Developmental Reading Assessment [DRA], the Qualitative Reading Inventory [QRI], and other statewide assessments). Teachers assess students throughout the year formally and informally in an effort to monitor student progress and design instruction to meet their needs. Once teachers identify students'

reading skill and competency levels, they can embed strategies and/or interventions into their lesson plans. Two examples of reading components especially for younger readers are phonological awareness, and word recognition. Phonological awareness activities enhance children's writing and language abilities and if a student is struggling in reading using these activities in an intervention are crucial. These instructions need to be explicit, effective, and ongoing in order for students to develop good phonemic awareness skills; they should include phonemes that are hard to read and focus on those. Another strategy teachers employ to support students' learning is scaffolded instruction, which involves scaffolding educational content to (a) provide clear and concrete directions, reducing students' confusion; (b) clarify purpose; (c) keep students on task; (d) clarify expectations and incorporate assessment and feedback; (e) direct students to worthy sources; and (f) reduce the students' level of uncertainty (Lambie, Leva, & Orht, 2012). This method involves teachers providing a significant amount of reading instruction in the beginning with decreasing amounts as time goes by such that by the end the student is reading on their own (Vaughn, 2012).

A reading intervention includes fluency, comprehension, word study, vocabulary, or a combination of any of those as part of a school program (Wanzek, Wexler, Vaughn, & Ciullo, 2009). Educational interventions regarding reading comprehension are beneficial if teachers instruct the students as to how to think about what they already know about the topic, what they want to learn about the topic, and to also think about the authors' purpose (Ryan, Kaffenberger & Carroll, 2011). Specifically, students receiving educational intervention for struggling readers score significantly higher on the reading FCAT and other reading assessments as compared to students not receiving the identified intervention.

Reading Interventions: Response to Intervention (RtI)

Research on RtI dates back 30 years in areas of behavior analyses, direct instruction, measurement and evaluation, effective teaching, precision teaching and curriculum based assessment (Newell, & Kratochwill, 2007). Reading interventions were created to help struggling readers in reading and math to maximize their academic success. After President Bush signed the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA, 2004), RtI was implemented across the nation and various assessments, models, and systems of support have been implemented since. Once students are assessed and results provided, it is the job of the teacher to continuously teach, interview and progress monitor their students in regards to RtI and to also collaborate with other educators in making appropriate decisions about instruction, support, and services. RtI has two primary approaches involving intervention: (a) problem-solving approaches, and (b) standard protocol approaches (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003). Some of the core concepts are that students receive high-quality instruction, school staff conducts universal screening with continual monitoring of their students' progress, and school staff implements research based interventions with the fidelity of the interventions assessed (National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, 2002). RtI integrates assessment and intervention with a multilevel prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems (Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino & Lathrop, 2007).

RtI consists of four components: (a) screening; (b) data-based decision making for instruction; (c) a school wide, multi-level behavioral and instructional system to prevent school failure; and (d) progress monitoring. The three tiers of intervention within RtI are primary, secondary, and tertiary, and correspond to the amount of instruction and/or intervention students

receive based upon their needs. Primary prevention (Tier I) meets most students' needs, whereas, secondary prevention (Tier II) deals with evidence-based interventions and addresses the behavioral or learning challenges of the majority of at-risk students. Finally, tertiary prevention (Tier III) is an intervention that is designed with a specific student in mind who shows limited response to the secondary or primary preventions/interventions.

Identifying a struggling reader is done by a two-stage screening process. The first stage being a universal screening which is an assessment that all students take once a year, usually in the beginning of the school year; Tier II or III intervention schools assess their students throughout the school year along with the assessment in the beginning of the year. If the student assessment scores are below a certain number, a second assessment is performed to better predict where the student is struggling and determine the level of risk of the student.

Struggling readers are continually monitored to assess their performance over time and to make sure their reading is improving. If the student is in the tertiary intervention level, which is the most intense level (Tier III), teachers use progress monitoring to compare the actual rates of learning to the students' expected rate. If students are not performing at their expected rate, the teacher understands that they have to experiment with different components to help improve the students' rate of learning. Continually monitoring struggling readers help improve their reading; therefore, providing the teacher with appropriate professional development so they can help their students improve in reading is important (Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011).

The Role of the School Counselor in Response to Intervention Efforts

Many educators such as the classroom teacher, literacy coach, school psychologist, school counselor, speech and language pathologist, special services teachers, and others collaborate in the development, assessment, monitoring, and reflection of school interventions and student progress. A school counselor is defined as a certified educator with specialized training who is qualified to address all students' academic, personal/social and career development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing the ability for a student to succeed (ASCA, 2009). School counselors identify struggling readers by assessing the students and implementing research-based intervention strategies to help them, evaluate their progress, revise intervention strategies if needed, and collaborate with teachers, other educators, and administrators about how to best implement the RtI strategy for the overall benefit of the student (Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2011).

When RtI gained national attention in 2004, the school counselor's job description changed to include RtI responsibilities (ASCA, 2008). Overall, when it comes to RtI implementation efforts, the school counselor plays a key role; he or she develops personalized student prevention and intervention ideas to help each student succeed. A school counselor should be knowledgeable about the overall RtI program at their school and are in charge of informing the teachers, students, and parents about the findings of their assessments. School counselors should know the student, and their needs and development, so they can properly evaluate what intervention will best fit each student's needs.

According to the ASCA (2005) National Model, interventions need to directly serve students, in terms of guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive, and/or group-

based services. Each school has students at Tier I, Tier II, or Tier III intervention levels. School counselors that are involved with Tier I students provide school wide interventions, which include a large group intervention and guidance curriculum. School counselors that are involved with Tier II students provide small group interventions, which focus on skill building interventions with increased intensity. Finally, school counselors working with Tier III students are involved in one-on-one interventions with the student. Tier III students require high intensified interventions and focus and their interventions should change over time based on school progress data. The role of the school counselor involves using the following five core functions in order to be effective (see Table 1): (a) leadership; (b) advocacy; (c) teaming and collaboration; (d) counseling and coordination; (e) assessing and using data (Goodnough & Perusse, 2001; Sears, 1999).

Table 1

Role of the Professional School Counselor in the RtI Process

RtI Process.	Role of the Professional School Counselor
Tier I: Universal Core Instructional Interventions: All Students, Preventative and Proactive	1. Standards and Competencies (Foundation) 2. Guidance Curriculum (Delivery System) 3. Individual Student Planning (Delivery) 4. Curriculum Action Plan (Management) 5. Curriculum Results Report (Accountability)
Tier II: Supplemental/Strategic Interventions: Students at Some Risk	1. Standards and Competencies (Foundation) 2. Individual Student Planning (Delivery) a. Small group appraisal b. Small group advisement 3. Responsive Services (Delivery) a. Consultation b. Individual counseling c. Small group counseling 4. Closing the Gap Action Plan (Management) 5. Closing the Gap Results Report (Accountability)
Tier III: Intensive, Individual Interventions: Students at High Risk	1. Standards and Competencies (Foundation) 2. Responsive Services (Delivery) a. Consultation b. Individual counseling c. Small group counseling d. Referral to school or community services 3. Closing the Gap Action Plan (Management) 4. Closing the Gap Results Report (Accountability)

Note: Adopted from American School Counselors Association, 2008.

In regards to RtI, school counselors are required to serve in a proactive and accountable manner to provide needed intervention based on school improvements goals (ASCA, 2005). A school counselor plays a leading role when it comes to RtI. After students are assessed, the school counselor is in charge of informing the team members and all other audiences (i.e., students, parents) of their finding. The team consists of the principal, any teacher that is involved with the student, parents and any other faculty involved with the student (i.e., reading coach, special needs instructor) (Ryan et al. 2011). An important task for school counselors to perform is the establishment of a baseline pre-test so they can better prepare themselves on what assessments and interventions will need to be administered to student(s). Formative and summative assessments allow school counselors to collect valuable data and monitor student progress on an ongoing basis; this information is helpful to classroom teachers who can utilize it to make data-based instructional accommodations to meet students' needs. School counselors are trained on how to assess students regarding RtI along with many other assessments; it is the job of a school counselor to look out for their students and to do whatever is necessary to ensure their academic success.

Because of the demands of an RtI model implementation and its significance for meeting struggling readers' needs, it is imperative that school counselors receive the appropriate training they need to properly assess, monitor, and provide appropriate intervention services to struggling readers. In addition, because school counselors provide counseling services to students, they are positioned well within a school setting to discuss, address, and meet students' social, emotional, psychological, and academic needs. The school counselor is a facilitator for student success and learning.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study was to explore the role of the school counselor in Response to Intervention (RtI) efforts for elementary school struggling readers. This study used a mixed methods design (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Survey data was used along with interviews and observation notes to explore the role of the elementary grade school counselor within the RtI context. Research steps included the following: (a) Obtaining University of Central Florida, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct this study; (b) Identification and selection of three elementary grade school counselors to interview. These school counselors were chosen randomly from different counties around Florida, therefore, this study was a convenient sample; (c) Obtaining permission to conduct research at each school with the school counselor, which entailed both obtaining their informed consent for participating in the study as well as preparing for and directly conducting the on-site interview. The research focus was conducted through the examination of two independent data sources.

First, by interviewing three practicing school counselors, one from Orange County, one from Seminole County, and one from Pinellas County. Interviewing school counselors from different counties is one way to see if each county has different roles and requirements or if the roles and requirements are the same throughout the schools interviewed for this study. For each of these interviews, a time was set up that was convenient for the three school counselors and they were each asked a set of prepared questions. The interview protocol focused on their role in the RtI process, challenges associated with the RtI process, and suggestions to future school counselors (i.e., about how to best prepare to meet the needs of struggling readers). Using literature review evidence, an interview protocol was developed that included pertinent questions

about the role of the school counselor in the RtI process in elementary schools. Most questions were RtI related, but a few were just general questions. After interviewing the school counselors, the field notes were analyzed and the response transcripts interpreted and examined for: patterns in how they utilized RtI in their school; issues associated with their role in the RtI process; and their thoughts and ideas about how to best meet the needs of struggling readers in elementary grades.

Second, a survey was administered to the class of SDS 6620: *Coordination of Comprehensive Professional School Counseling Programs* at the University of Central Florida, College of Education, which met every Wednesday night at 6:00 pm. Permission was first obtained from the University of South Florida (USF) Graduate program of School Psychology to use their RtI Belief Survey (see Appendix D). Each question within the Belief Survey was regarding RtI. The survey contained 26 questions with answers ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The students were instructed to bubble in the number that corresponds to their feelings about each topic; the scale was one strongly disagree, two disagree, three neutral, four agree, and five strongly agree. The class was comprised of primarily women; the ratio was 12 women to two men, and the majority of the students were in their second year of the school counseling program. The survey answer sheets were then collected from the graduate students and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to see what they knew about RtI, how they planned to use it when they become school counselors, and their perception and knowledge about RtI.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Interview with Three School Counselors

After interviewing all three school counselors and analyzing the data, it was clear that overall the roles and responsibilities for the participating school counselors were the same throughout the three schools that participated. All counselors interviewed reported that they had their masters in school counseling and they were zoned or assigned to one school. They explained that usually one school counselor is assigned per school and that school counselors are also referred to as guidance counselors. All three school counselors stated that part of their roles involved completing student paperwork, spending time with students in crisis, and testing the students to see if they were gifted or exceptional student education (ESE); they all reported that each were primarily in charge of RtI. The Orange county school counselors stated “RtI is the bulk at what you do as a school counselor; you can relate the majority of what you do to RtI.” In regards to RtI, they all stated that they deal with the students that are in Tier III. Tier III is the lowest tier and those students need a one-on-one intervention. The school counselors stated they are in charge of keeping a record of what students are tier III and making sure that they are getting the appropriate assistance. They have meetings once a month where they re-evaluate all students in tier III to make sure they are making progress.

However, one difference between the school counselors’ answers was in regards to counseling itself. The school counselors from Orange and Seminole County explained that they themselves do not do any counseling with the students. The only part of counseling they are involved in is referring students out to mental health counselors or psychiatrists if they believe

they need counseling. In Pinellas County, the school counselor indicated that she meets with each class monthly, meets with different small groups for six week sessions, and individually meets with students if need be.

All school counselors' responses about RtI were identical. Some of the questions asked about RtI pertained to how many hours a day was spent on RtI, what was their role in regards to RtI, how RtI was implemented in their school, etc. All said that they dedicate the majority of the day to RtI or RtI related material, and all school counselors responded in the same way about how much time they spend interacting with students, parents, and teacher involving RtI. They all said that regarding RtI, they spend an hour a day with students, an hour a day with teachers, and for parents it depends, some days they spend multiple hours with parents and some days they do not see any parents. They all also had one day out of the week that was dedicated to RtI where all they did during that day was have meetings with teachers and/or parents regarding RtI, and doing the paperwork for all the students regarding RtI. The school counselor at Seminole county stated "the day that I spend solely on RtI is Wednesday, I do it on Wednesday because it is in the middle of the week, if I waited to do it on a Friday I would be bombarded with paperwork, and on Mondays' there isn't that much to do yet, therefore I have found that Wednesday is the best day for me." Furthermore, in regards to how much time is spent with students regarding things other than RtI the answers drastically differed. The Pinellas County school counselor said she spends about three to five hours with students, while the Seminole County school counselor said she spends a few hours a day with students, and the Orange County school counselor stated "In regards to things other than RtI, I spend only 15 to 20 minutes; in my school I can pretty much relate anything and everything to RtI."

They all agreed that one of the biggest challenges they faced with RtI was finding the time, and finding the right approach for each student. They each explained that each student is different; therefore, each approach needs to be different. Each school counselor stated that they first have to get to know the student and then try to understand them before they can find an approach that will work for them; this can take a very long time with lots of trial and error. Furthermore, in regards to RtI, the Seminole county school counselor stated “finding the time for RtI is very hard, coming up with the interventions for each students takes countless hours and lots of trial and error.” For the question asking to describe a struggling reader, all school counselors’ answers were different, but they all described a struggling reader in one way or another. The Pinellas County school counselor stated that a struggling reader is “a student, who is at least one grade level behind his or her peers;” the Seminole County school counselor stated that a struggling reader is “any student that is not on benchmark, also meaning they are in Tier II or III.” Finally, the Orange County school counselor stated that a struggling reader is “a student who is not reading a certain number of words per minute.” She went on to explain that everything in school involves reading; therefore, if a student is struggling in reading consequently the student is struggling in school overall.

According to the three interviewed school counselors, their students are tested in reading three times a year in the beginning, middle, and end of the year. Pinellas and Orange County use the Florida Assessment for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) testing while Seminole County uses Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) testing. In addition to testing the students three times a year, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade have monthly mini benchmarks to progress

monitor all students. Each school counselor explained she was in charge of collecting all this data and keeping tabs on the students that performed below grade level on these assessments.

Finally, the last question asked of them was if they had any suggestions for future school counselors in regards to RtI and in general. The Pinellas County school counselor stated that it is important to help the students find the joy in reading, the Seminole County school counselor said to learn your ESE and RtI information because this is the majority of what you will be doing as an elementary school counselor and the school counselor from Orange County said to take as many behavioral courses as possible, especially classes that are offered to ESE teachers. This being because behavioral classes deal with social skills and it is important to learn how to deal with a plethora of behavior; being a school counselor means interacting with a vast variety of students and behaviors. She provided another suggestion; she suggested pursuing a mental health license so one can work in the school system but still have options outside of the school system, allowing one to have more employability options beyond the school system.

Survey Results

Overall, survey results identified similarities across participants; there were a few questions that resulted in diverse answers. The participants answered the majority of the questions in this survey with either an agree or strongly agree answer, some of those questions were if they believed in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB), core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80 percent of students reaching benchmarks in both reading and math. The main function of supplemental instruction is to ensure that: students meet grade-level

benchmarks in both reading and math; teachers should implement a variety of instructional practices to address the needs of the students: teachers would be able to implement more intervention strategies if they had additional staff in the classroom; and using student-based data is more effective than using teacher only judgment in regards to intervention effectiveness.

In other questions, the participants all either agreed or strongly agreed on where early intervention and prevention activities would result in less referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education. Furthermore, students' behavioral problems are determined by how quickly the student responds to intervention and not how behind they are in regards to grade level expectations. Additional time and resources should be provided to the students that are below grade level, this will greatly impact their ability to achieve grade level scores. A student's parents or guardians should be involved in the problem-solving process from the beginning, and that students respond better to the intervention when their parents or guardians are involved in every stage of the interventions. Finally, everyone agreed that the goal of assessments is to measure the effectiveness of intervention and instruction.

From the data collected the participants as a majority also disagreed with some of the questions asked; those regarding students with learning disabilities. They disagreed with the survey when it asked if they believe that the majority of students with learning disabilities reach grade level benchmarks in reading and math, and that the results of an IQ or achievement test can be used to identify specific interventions for students with either learning or behavioral problems. Furthermore, one of the questions from the survey was answered neutral by the participants, meaning that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the information provided. Specifically, 87% of the participants answered neutral to the question asked if they believe that

the majority of students with behavioral problems will achieve grade-level scores on their reading and math benchmarks.

Finally, a few questions within the results were scattered without a majority percentage, some participants agreed or strongly agreed while other disagreed or strongly disagreed and others were neutral. These questions were that all students could achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have enough support and that the severity of a student's behavioral problem is determined by how fast a student responds to a specific intervention not by how inappropriate their behavior is. For the question that asked if all students can achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have enough support, 35.7 % of participants agreed while 28.6 % of the participants were neutral and 14.3 % strongly agreed. Furthermore, for the question that asked if students with behavioral problems achieve grade-level benchmarks, 21.4 % of the participants disagreed, while 35.7 % were neutral, 28.6 % agreed, and 14.3 % strongly agreed. Overall, the participants in this survey had similar thoughts on the majority of topics asked in this survey.

According to Figure 1 and Table 2 questions 1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 19, 20, 22 received a four or above. If you refer to the survey contained in Appendix D, a four represents agree, therefore for those questions the majority of the students at least agreed with the questions being asked. Moreover, according to Figure 1 and Table 2 questions 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, and 13 received between a two and three, meaning the participants disagreed with the questions being asked.

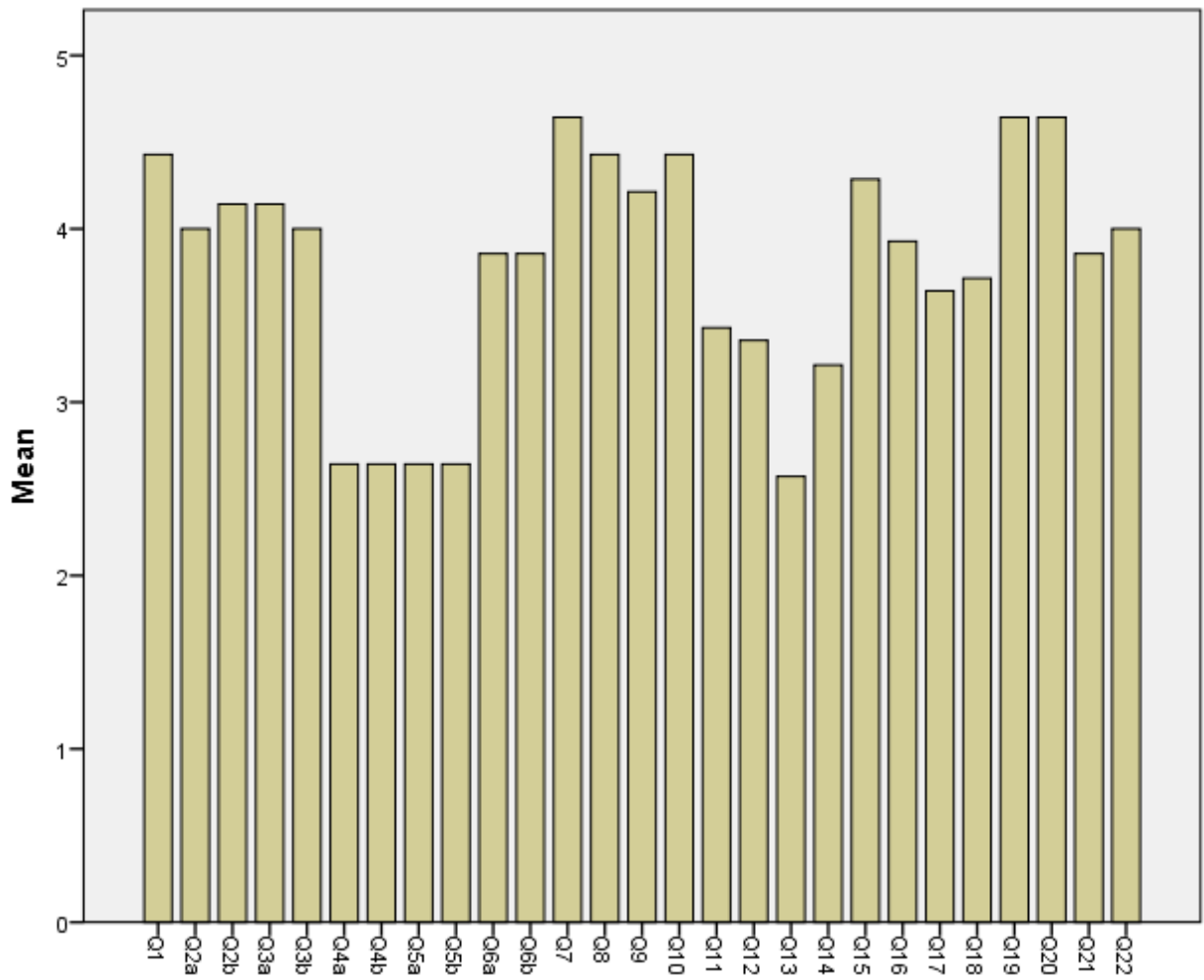


Figure 1. Average Mean of Each Survey Question.

Table 1

Average Mean of Each Survey Question

	N	Mean
Q1	14	4.4286
Q2a	14	4.0000
Q2b	14	4.1429
Q3a	14	4.1429
Q3b	14	4.0000
Q4a	14	2.6429
Q4b	14	2.6429
Q5a	14	2.6429
Q5b	14	2.6429
Q6a	14	3.8571
Q6b	14	3.8571
Q7	14	4.6429
Q8	14	4.4286
Q9	14	4.2143
Q10	14	4.4286
Q11	14	3.4286
Q12	14	3.3571
Q13	14	2.5714
Q14	14	3.2143
Q15	14	4.2857
Q16	14	3.9286
Q17	14	3.6429
Q18	14	3.7143
Q19	14	4.6429
Q20	14	4.6429
Q21	14	3.8571
Q22	14	4.0000

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

School counselors play an important role in a struggling reader's academic career but they also play an important role in student's social and emotional well-being. School counselors' deal with behavioral issues, ESOL students, group meetings, individual meeting, case managers, and they deal with referrals to psychologists or psychiatrists for students that need them. A typical day for the school counselors interviewed has little to do with counseling students, in fact in some counties they are not allowed to counselor students anymore; the job involves bus duty in the beginning of the day, and paperwork and meetings during the day.

RtI covers a broad generalization of topics. RtI refers to reading, math, behavioral and social aspects in a student schooling; therefore, school counselors deal with RtI continually throughout their entire day. RtI is also the basis for assessment and instructional decisions in elementary schools. RtI is used in prevention and intervention for students; therefore, based on test grades teachers and principals use different variations of RtI to help their students improve if necessary. The main challenges with RtI are how time consuming RtI is, the gray areas with its implementation, the required support and collaboration from many, and finding the right approach for each student. Every student learns differently so finding the right intervention for each student takes countless hours of planning by many educators and intense decision-making. School counselors are in charge of coming up with all the interventions used on the students, referring the information to the teachers and keeping tabs on all the students who are in need of an intervention.

After asking the questions to "describe a struggling reader," the findings were similar in saying that a struggling reader is a student that is performing below grade level, the answers

varied in how below grade level they have to be to be considered a “struggling reader.” Students are assessed three times a year to make sure they are on grade level and if the tests show that they are below grade level the students are labeled Tier II or Tier III. Tier II students work in small groups with the teachers or a reading coach and Tier III students work one on one with the teacher or reading coach. School counselors organize these groups and make sure that the students that are labeled as Tier II or Tier III are continuously progress monitored and are continuously improving with the help of the reading coach or other individuals helping the struggling students. The findings from these interviews were similar to the findings from the literature review conducted in regards to what RtI is, why it is crucial for teachers, parents, and themselves to all work as a team for the benefit of the students, and in accordance with the definition of a school counselor.

Struggling readers face many challenges within reading, but also during their day-to-day activities. In regards to reading, not being able to comprehend or even read the material asked can result in failure in finishing tests, bad grades, failing classes, or unable to read the board. Nowadays, reading is incorporated into every subject in school; math problems are becoming more and more word problems wherein the students have to read a sentence and answer questions; science has experiments which you have to be able to read and understand the instructions and procedures, and social studies you have to be able to read city, states, and policies. If a student is struggling in reading they are struggling in every other subject and in school overall. This can take a toll on their self-esteem and may cause the student to act out, become depressed, and develop feeling of worthlessness. It is important for teachers to know this and be aware of this to be able to get the students the help they need so they will never have

to feel this way. The school counselor from Pinellas County stated that she has self-esteem groups for struggling readers for this exact reason. She understood that this serious issue can impact student success in their academic career. She stated “a lot of people do not think about how being a struggling reader can take a toll on a student’s emotional well-being. It is important to address that as well as what it doing to a student academically.”

Data analysis from this study showed that students preparing to become school counselors have heard of RtI but do not really know much about it. Participants have the same believe system when it comes to specific topics, and disagree on similar topics as well. This is important to know because it shows that the upcoming school counselors have the same ethics and beliefs. That is important because when they become school counselors they will be facing many complex responsibilities and will be involved in critical decision-making about students’ learning and success.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Some of the limitations for this study were the sample size for the survey, the interviews, the research design, researcher bias, duration of the study, and that this study used a convenient sample. The first limitation was the sample size for the interview; the sample size was only three school counselors. If there were more school counselors interviewed the answers to the questions might have been different. This would have given the study a better understanding on what aspects of being a school counselor is similar and different throughout states, or even counties within states. Also, this study was based on self-reports and counselors’ perceptions of

their role, which also creates certain methodological limitations. Another limitation was that the sample size for the survey administered was only one graduate level class. If the survey was administered to various graduate level classes, all at different stages in their academic career the results may have been scattered. Another limitation was the duration of the study. Because of time restraints and deadlines this study had to be done quickly, if there was more time this study could have gone more in-depth and the results could have been different. Since this sample was a convenient sample, the people that participated were people that were available at the time; this could also play a part in the results. Finally, anytime a study uses open-ended questions, research bias comes into play. Because researchers interpret things differently, they interpret the responses of the participants differently. If this study were to be done again with more time, larger sample sizes, and with the examination of more counselors' perspectives in a variety of schools, the results might differ somewhat.

If this study was to be duplicated in the future, some suggestions would be to further investigate the role of a school counselor in terms of RtI. The role of a school counselor is always evolving and changing and it is important that the school counselors understand exactly what RtI is and what they are being asked to do. Another suggestion would be to further investigate the interventions that school counselors are providing the students. This would be to make sure that the RtI strategies are successfully working for the students and that their overall reading scores are improving. Finally, another suggestion is to research RtI and its effectiveness; the more RtI awareness, the better-prepared school counselors will be on what it is and how to successfully incorporate it in hopes of helping all their struggling readers.

**APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL
COUNSELORS**



EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: **Exploring the School Counselor's Role in Response to Intervention (Rtl) Efforts for Struggling Readers in Elementary Grades**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Vicky Zygouris -Coe

Other Investigators: Rachel Merz

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

- The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of school counselors in relation to response to intervention (Rtl) for elementary school struggling readers.
- If you agree to participate in this study you will be agreeing to be interviewed. In this interview you will be answering questions about Rtl and what a school counselor's role is in Rtl. The study will be conducted at various Elementary Schools around the greater Orlando area in the offices of the School Counselor.
- This study will take no longer than 2 hours to conduct.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints please contact Dr. Zygouris-Coe, PI, School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership at vassiliki.zygouris-coe@ucf.edu or Rachel Merz, College of Education and Psychology at merz_r_ucf@knights.ucf.edu or (727) 324-8528.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS



EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: **Exploring the School Counselor's Role in Response to Intervention (RtI) Efforts for Struggling Readers in Elementary Grades**

Principal Investigator: *Dr. Vicky Zygouris -Coe*

Other Investigators: Rachel Merz

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

- The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of school counselors in relation to response to intervention (RtI) for elementary school struggling readers.
- If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a survey in regards to RtI. The survey is designed to see how much students in a School Counseling graduate level class know about RtI. This particular study will be administered to Graduate students in SDS 6620- Coordination of Comprehensive Professional School Counseling Programs on Wednesday October 24th, at 6:00 pm in the Psychology Building Room 111.
- This study will take no longer than 30 minutes to conduct.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints please contact Dr. Zygouris-Coe, PI, School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership at vassiliki.zygouris-coe@ucf.edu or Rachel Merz, College of Education and Psychology at merz_r_ucf@knights.ucf.edu or (727) 324-8528.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONS PROVIDED TO SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Name:

Gender:

How long have you been working as a school counselor?

What training have you had?

Could you please share some information about your school? Do you cover more than one schools?

Please describe your role as a school counselor. What are your major responsibilities?

Has your role/responsibilities change as a result of state policies?

What does a typical day look like for you?

How is RtI implemented at your school? Is there a particular model that you adhere to? FL state's model or other?

What is your role in regards to RtI?

How much time do you dedicate to RtI?

How much time do you spend interacting with children, teachers, and parents, in regards to RtI?

In regards to things other than RtI?

What are some challenges with RtI?

In your view, please describe a struggling reader and some of the challenges they face.

How often are students assessed in reading and what role do you play with working with struggling readers?

Do you have any suggestions for future school counselors on how to prepare to meet the needs of struggling readers?

Any other suggestions?

**APPENDIX D: SURVEY ADMINISTERED TO THE STUDENTS IN THE
CLASS SDS 6620**

RtI Belief Survey

Beliefs Survey

1. **Your PS/RtI Project ID:** _____ →

Your PS/RtI Project ID was designed to assure confidentiality while also providing a method to match an individual's responses across instruments. In the space provided (first row), please write in the last four digits of your Social Security Number and the last two digits of the year you were born. Then, shade in the corresponding circles.

0	0	0	0	0	0
1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9	9

Directions: For items 2-5 below, please shade in the circle next to the response option that best represents your answer.

2. Job Description:

- ☐ PS/RtI Coach ☐ Teacher-General Education ☐ Teacher-Special Education
☐ School Counselor ☐ School Psychologist ☐ School Social Worker
☐ Principal ☐ Assistant Principal

Other (Please specify): _____

3. Years of Experience in Education:

- ☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1 – 4 years ☐ 5-9 years
☐ 10 – 14 years ☐ 15-19 years ☐ 20-24 years
☐ 25 or more years ☐ Not applicable

4. Number of Years in your Current Position:

- ☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1 – 4 years ☐ 5-9 years
☐ 10 – 14 years ☐ 15-19 years ☐ 20 or more years

5. Highest Degree Earned:

- ☐ B.A./B.S. ☐ M.A./M.S. ☐ Ed.S. ☐ Ph.D./Ed.D.

Other (Please specify): _____

Directions: Using the scale below, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements by shading in the circle that best represents your response.

- ① = Strongly Disagree (SD)
 ② = Disagree (D)
 ③ = Neutral (N)
 ④ = Agree (A)
 ⑤ = Strongly Agree (SA)

	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. I believe in the philosophy of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) even if I disagree with some of the requirements.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. Core instruction should be effective enough to result in 80% of the students achieving benchmarks in					
7.a. reading	①	②	③	④	⑤
7.b. math	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. The primary function of supplemental instruction is to ensure that students meet grade-level benchmarks in					
8.a. reading	①	②	③	④	⑤
8.b. math	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. The majority of students with learning disabilities achieve grade-level benchmarks in					
9.a. reading	①	②	③	④	⑤
9.b. math	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. The majority of students with behavioral problems (EH/SED or EBD) achieve grade-level benchmarks in					
10.a. reading	①	②	③	④	⑤
10.b. math	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. Students with high-incidence disabilities (e.g. SLD, EBD) who are receiving special education services are capable of achieving grade-level benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) in					
11.a. reading	①	②	③	④	⑤
11.b. math	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. General education classroom teachers should implement more differentiated and flexible instructional practices to address the needs of a more diverse student body.	①	②	③	④	⑤

	SD	D	N	A	SA
13. General education classroom teachers would be able to implement more differentiated and flexible interventions if they had additional staff support.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. The use of additional interventions in the general education classroom would result in success for more students.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15. Prevention activities and early intervention strategies in schools would result in fewer referrals to problem-solving teams and placements in special education.	①	②	③	④	⑤
16. The “severity” of a student’s academic problem is determined not by how far behind the student is in terms of his/her academic performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	①	②	③	④	⑤
17. The “severity” of a student’s behavioral problem is determined not by how inappropriate a student is in terms of his/her behavioral performance but by how quickly the student responds to intervention.	①	②	③	④	⑤
18. The results of IQ and achievement testing can be used to identify effective interventions for students with learning and behavior problems.	①	②	③	④	⑤
19. Many students currently identified as “LD” do not have a disability, rather they came to school “not ready” to learn or fell too far behind academically for the available interventions to close the gap sufficiently.	①	②	③	④	⑤
20. Using student-based data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using only “teacher judgment.”	①	②	③	④	⑤
21. Evaluating a student’s response to interventions is a more effective way of determining what a student is capable of achieving than using scores from “tests” (e.g., IQ/Achievement test).	①	②	③	④	⑤
22. Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students who are not reaching benchmarks (i.e., general education standards) before significant time and resources are directed to students who are at or above benchmarks.	①	②	③	④	⑤
23. Graphing student data makes it easier for one to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.	①	②	③	④	⑤
24. A student’s parents (guardian) should be involved in the problem-solving process as soon as a teacher has a concern about the student.	①	②	③	④	⑤

	SD	D	N	A	SA
25. Students respond better to interventions when their parent (guardian) is involved in the development and implementation of those interventions.	①	②	③	④	⑤
26. All students can achieve grade-level benchmarks if they have sufficient support.	①	②	③	④	⑤
27. The goal of assessment is to generate and measure effectiveness of instruction/intervention.	①	②	③	④	⑤

THANK YOU!

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