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Principal Leadership and Reading Specialist Role Understanding in the Era of Test-Based Accountability Policies

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Abstract This study investigates how the role of the reading specialist (RS) is defined and communicated by principals, and examines to what degree a common understanding of this role exists among teachers, building administrators and reading specialists. The principal's responsibility in defining and communicating role, and the effect these efforts have on job satisfaction and specialists' perceived effectiveness is also studied. Eight elementary schools in the western part of New York State (USA) are studied. Based on interviews with principals and reading specialists and surveys completed by principals, reading specialists, and teachers, the following themes emerge: a) Principal leadership was essential in defining the RS role; b) A clearly defined RS role was associated with greater RS satisfaction and perceptions of effectiveness as well as greater teacher compliance; c) Greater teacher compliance with a school's literacy program did not affect beliefs about the proper role of RSs; d) Lack of a clearly defined role in a school was associated with role conflict and role ambiguity for reading specialists; e) Reading specialists, even without coaching responsibilities, served as a resource to teachers, although no time was allocated in their schedule to do so; f) Reading specialists faced challenges due to increased accountability and assessment demands affected by policy, demographics, and accountability requirements. It is concluded that principals must assume responsibility for defining and communicating the reading specialist role within their schools to strengthen literacy programming.

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Introduction

When everyone understands the role it just works better. You're more effective.
It's just cut and dry what I need to do.
I mean quite honestly, I think they think my role is to take their kids and fix them …

These statements illustrate some of the current challenges faced by reading specialists (RSs). Reading specialists traditionally provided only direct instruction to struggling readers, but today, they are often asked to perform assessment and leadership functions as well. Consequently, the success of the RS is not only dependent upon knowledge of literacy, but also turns on an understanding of adult learning theory and effective communication strategies. As role expectations have both changed and multiplied as a result of intensified testing requirements, establishing clarity of the RS role is an essential but underexplored challenge for those who lead them.

This study analyzed how leadership of the elementary school principal affected role definition of the RS and how that definition was communicated to classroom teachers (referred to as teachers throughout the article). The case for this study is built on the basis of role theory and its articulation of the importance of role clarity for organizational effectiveness, an understanding of the evolution of the RS role, and research examining the effect of principal leadership on role understanding. Using surveys and interviews, the degree of agreement of role understanding among principals, RSs, and teachers in eight schools was investigated; how role understanding influenced role satisfaction and reading specialists' perceived effectiveness was also studied.

Role expectations, testing, and accountability

Role theory

Role theory postulates that an individual's understanding of their workplace role will affect their behavior within an organization. Role theory highlights the importance of role clarity for effective performance. Specifically, the interactions between supervisor and employee are critical for the development of role clarity (Biddle, 1986; Schuler, Aldag, & Brief, 1977).

The absence of role clarity leads to role conflict. Conflict is caused by ambiguity of duties or expectations incompatible with existing schedules; this ambiguity and incompatibility cause stress that can result in ineffectiveness, low job satisfaction, workplace tension, and indecisiveness (Miller, 2009; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). In the case of the RS, conflict and ambiguity may specifically result when directives from principals or pressures from teachers are not consistent with professional standards developed to guide the work of RSs.

The evolution of the reading specialist role

Legislation and media attention have intensified the accountability placed on literacy instruction in schools. From the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which created Title 1 reading instruction, through ESEA's reauthorization in 2001 and its funding of literacy coaches, the role of the RS has evolved from a teacher of struggling readers to one with adult professional development responsibilities (Bean, Swan, & Kraub, 2003; Dole, 2004). Due to the increasing complexity of the role, the International Reading Association (IRA) published a position statement in 2000 and established standards in 2010 that outlined the instruction, assessment, and leadership roles of the RS as a change-agent of classroom practice to improve the achievement of all readers (International Reading Association [IRA], 2000, 2010; since 2015 IRA is known as the International Literacy Association). This leadership role emphasizes the need for RSs to serve as a resource within their school through activities such as:

> suggesting ideas, strategies, or materials that can enhance instruction … supporting individual teachers—especially new teachers—and administrators in becoming more knowledgeable about the teaching of reading … lead professional development workshops, model strategies or techniques for teachers, and conduct demonstration or collaborative lessons … serve as a resource to other specialized personnel by serving on instructional support or student personnel teams … providing instructional guidance to aides, volunteer tutors, or paraprofessionals … (IRA, 2000, pp. 3–4)

Although literacy coaches perform many of these duties, RSs often have responsibilities for professional development, assessment, and data analysis in schools without literacy coach designations (Elish-Piper, L'Allier, & Zwart, 2009). A review of more than a decade's worth of RS research by Galloway and Lesaux (2014) confirmed that RS responsibility for direct instruction of students remained while additional expectations involving professional development and data analysis had been added to RS duties. This awareness of mushrooming demands on RSs has led to an emphasis on the role of the principal in clarifying and communicating appropriate expectations for RSs to enhance their effectiveness (Bean et al., 2003; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008; Shanklin, 2007).

Principal leadership in supporting role understanding

The need for communication between principal and RSs concerning the RS role has been well documented (Bean et al., 2003; Mraz et al., 2008; Shanklin, 2007). Researchers have also stressed the need for principals to communicate the role of the RS to teachers (Shanklin, 2007; Ippolito, 2009). Principal support was found to be critical in communicating literacy program focus, RS role, and establishing a collaborative climate where the RS could assume greater influence. In fact, in schools with exemplary reading programs, the manner in which the RS position was structured and supported by the principal was found to be critical (Bean et al., 2003). In contrast, Galloway and Lesaux (2014) reviewed three studies in which greater ambiguity of role and diminished leadership capacity for RSs was evident in low performing schools.

Although RSs with the title of literacy coach generally have a more clearly defined role, challenges exist for RSs irrespective of title. A national survey commissioned by the IRA in 1996 found that with or without the title of coach, over 90 percent of the 1,500 RSs surveyed reported that their role included the additional responsibility of serving as a resource to teachers, administrators, and parents (Bean, Cassity, Grumet, Shelton, & Wallis, 2002). Blamey, Meyer and Walpole (2008) studied role definition in a national survey of middle and high school literacy coaches. These coaches were asked if their role was clearly defined. Only 11 percent of respondents felt that their role had been determined through a collaborative process while 74 percent stated that their role continued to be undefined (Blamey et al., 2008). These studies confirm that the RS role is not always clearly communicated by the principal or understood by school staff. Teachers need to understand the RS role and how it can enhance their own classroom experience. Equally important, teachers must understand their own responsibilities in relationship to the RS's work with their students. Ideally, it is the elementary school principal's responsibility to communicate to the faculty the RS role. Galloway and Lesaux (2014) stress the partnership that needs to be built between principals and RSs to implement district literacy goals and reform efforts. This study contributes to this literature by analyzing the complexities of defining the RS role in practice and the influence this understanding had on participating RS's job satisfaction and effectiveness.

Research questions

The following research questions were addressed in the study:

Research question 1: What do principals, RSs, and teachers understand the role of the RS to be?

Research question 2: Is there agreement of understanding of the RS role among principals, RSs, and teachers?

Research question 3: How is the role of the RS communicated to RSs and teachers?

Research question 4: What is the relationship between perceived role clarity and RS role satisfaction and perceived effectiveness?

Method

Setting and participants

Eight elementary schools in western New York State (USA) were studied. The six public schools and two charter schools in the sample varied in configuration from Prekindergarten through eighth grade. Settings of schools included urban, suburban, and rural locations. Principals, RSs, and teachers in each participating school composed the study sample. School characteristics are contained in Table l.

Procedures and data collection

Following IRB approval, data from participating schools was collected between February and April, 2013. Data from interviews, questionnaires, and surveys was triangulated. Principals and RSs were interviewed, completed a questionnaire outlining their experience (prior to the interview), and responded to an online survey.

Table 1: School characteristics

School	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Location	Rural	Suburban	Suburban	Suburban	Urban	Rural	Urban	Urban
County	Erie	Erie	Erie	Erie	Niagara	Chautauqua	Erie	Erie
Governance	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Charter	Charter
Configuration	PreK-2	K-6	K-5	K-5	K-6	PreK-6	K-8	K-8
Enrollment	328	507	658	343	466	279	552	300
F&RL *	23%	30%	5%	60%	31%	41%	92%	43%
ELLs **	.06%	0%	0%	23%	9%	0%	.007%	3%
RSs	2	1	1	3	2.5	1	3	1

* Free and Reduced Lunch; ** English Language Learners

Teachers were also emailed the survey and their participation was requested. Although both male and female principals and RSs participated, all references to individuals are made using female pronouns and referred to by alpha labels as shown in Table 1. Tables 2 and 3 summarize the educational background and experience of the principals and RSs.

Table 2: Principal experience by school

	School Principal							
Experience *	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Leading school in study	7	8	1	11	2	9	2	7
Administrative	7	8	5	16	2	16	10	13
Subjects taught	Gr. 3	Eng. 7-12	Sp. Ed.	Sp.Ed. (H.S.) Gr. 4 & 5	Math Gr. 6	Gr. 4 & 5	Sp. Ed.	Soc. St. & ELA
Teaching	14	4	8	11	7	4	7	14

*Experience is reported as years except for "Subjects taught"

Principals (n = 8) and participating reading specialists (n = 14) in each of the schools were interviewed individually using a structured interview protocol and interviews were audio taped. One RS from School G chose not to be interviewed or complete the survey.

Table 3: Reading specialists experience by school

	Reading specialist(s) by school *							
Experience	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Years at school	A1=9	2	4	D1=1	E1=0.6	7.5	G1=3	6
	A2=15			D2=6	E2=6		G2=7	
				D3=17	E3=1			
Years reading specialist	A1=9	8	4	D1=4	E1=6	7.5	G1=9	6
	A2=17			D2=6	E2=2		G1=7	
				D3=21	E3=12			
Masters in literacy	A1=No	Yes	Yes	D1=Yes	E1=Yes	Yes	G1=Yes	Yes
	A2=Yes			D2=Yes	E2=No		G2=Yes	
				D3=Yes	E3=Yes			
Experience as classroom teacher	A1=1	7	17	D1=1	E1=0	15	G1=2	0
	A2=0			D2=0	E2=28		G2=0	
				D3=1	E3=4			
Classrooms served	A1=8	12	15	D1=19	E1-24	12	G1=8	9
	A2=8			D2=9	E2-5		G2=6	
				D3=8	E3-26			

* Alpha labels used for schools with more than one reading specialist

The survey included a sampling of RS instructional, assessment, and leadership responsibilities, as identified by the standards and position statements of the IRA (IRA, 2000; IRA, 2010). In the survey, participants were asked to identify their position as principal, RS, or teacher and were asked to, "Identify how often each RS activity *should* occur during the school year" in response to each responsibility. Frequency served as a measure of respondent's perceived importance regarding each of the responsibilities in the survey. The survey included seven frequency levels (daily, several times per week, weekly, several times per month, monthly, yearly or few times per year, not at all), and a filter (undecided) to limit distortion of responses (Foddy, 1993). For purposes of analysis, frequency level results were sometimes collapsed into the following categories: daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly. Survey completion rates in the eight schools ranged from 55 percent to 80 percent with a completion rate of 65 percent for the total 171 recipients of the survey (see Table 1). Non-respondents included the one RS from School G and classroom teachers. These rates include only respondents who completed at least part of the RS frequency questions on the survey.

Results

Results are reported using the following themes that emerged as interview, questionnaire, and survey responses were analyzed: a) Principal leadership was essential in defining the RS role; b) A clearly defined role by the principal led to greater RS satisfaction and perceptions of effectiveness as well as greater teacher compliance; c) Greater teacher compliance, however, did not affect attitudes towards the RS role;

d) Lack of a clearly defined role led to role conflict and role ambiguity for RSs; e) RSs, even without coaching responsibilities, all served as a resource to teachers, although no time was allocated in their schedule to do so; f) RSs faced challenges due to increased accountability and assessment demands affected by policy, demographics, and accountability requirements.

Principals defining the reading specialist role

Principal leadership was essential in defining the role to insure that RSs and teachers clearly understood the role and purpose of literacy instruction aligned with current IRA standards.

Defining role to reading specialists. Interview responses of principals and RSs did not always indicate shared perceptions regarding efforts at clarifying the RS role. When RSs were asked, "Do opportunities exist to discuss the RS's role or duties with your principal?" only 36 percent stated that role was discussed and 29 percent stated they had input into their role. However, when principals were asked, "Do opportunities exist to discuss the RS's role or duties at meetings with you?" 63 percent indicated believing that the role was defined. RS C stated, "We haven't had a direct conversation about roles and responsibilities." RS E3 stated, "We don't talk about roles." Although RS H had been employed at her school for six years and a discussion of goals occurred during her annual evaluation conference, she stated, "We really don't have a specific job description quite yet. … We don't have a clear 'something' on paper saying what my role is." When asked what action her principal could take to help support her role, she stated, "Meet more often and touch base … It's really a hard job."

Only one principal (D) held regularly scheduled meetings (at two-week intervals) with her RSs. The vast majority of principals and RSs, however, reported that meetings were spontaneous. Topics discussed at meetings involved test data, student concerns, progress monitoring, staff development, program implementation, and scheduling concerns.

Communicating role to teachers. Communication of RS role to teachers appeared to be a natural extension of effective principal and RS collaboration. In Schools A and D principals explicitly communicated the RS role to teachers at faculty meetings. In School D, the literacy coach role was discussed with teachers by the superintendent at the beginning of the school year as well as by the principal at faculty meetings. RSs in two schools (G and H) expressed the need to have their role clearly communicated to teachers.

In School A role was also articulated in the Response to Intervention (RTI) plan that was provided to teachers and reinforced at grade level meetings. Due to the clarity of the RTI model in this school, both the duties of the teacher and the RS were clear. In fact, interviews indicated that RTI had further strengthened the need for communication concerning role and an understanding of levels of intervention (IRA, 2009). The nature of intervention services under RTI also affected teacher acceptance and collaboration since clearer levels of services now existed for both classroom and intervention instruction. RTI's effect on communication was confirmed by an IRA survey on RTI primary grade implementation, which found that 70 percent of RS respondents agreed that RTI resulted in greater collaboration (IRA, 2013–2014).

Where effective communication did not exist RSs expressed frustration. RS G1 stated that she needed, "a clearly defined role that is understood by everybody because I don't really have a job description here … so a job description that says these are your duties." RS B, who formerly served as a literacy coach, felt that she could no longer use her knowledge to affect change because her role as a resource was no longer communicated to teachers. Principal C, new to her school, was not sure how teachers came to understand the role and assumed it was through observation of the RS in action. She stated, "Not sure how they come to understand that … I don't know, I never verbalized that to anyone." RS C agreed with her principal and stated that she did not think teachers really understood her job. When asked who communicates the role to teachers, she stated, "I don't think anyone does."

Although Principal H reported that she wanted her RS to serve as more of an instructional leader, the RS was not comfortable assuming that role without a directive clearly communicated to teachers. Consequently, she struggled with her role when working in classrooms and stated that if this role was communicated to teachers, she might feel more comfortable making suggestions.

> I would never go into a classroom and tell a teacher what I think they should be doing with their students. … That's not how it's set up. If it was ever to change, and the role was to be defined a little bit more, everybody understands, I would feel a little more comfortable going to teachers and making suggestions.

She further emphasized, "It's a very, very hard role … and to be utilized within your specialties when you don't have a defined role … I get lost. … It's very difficult." When contrasted with a statement from RS A2 the need for clear communication of role was apparent: "The message is clear. It's not just coming from one person."

A clearly defined role enhances job satisfaction

When principals established a clearly defined role for RSs, satisfaction, perceptions of effectiveness, as well as greater teacher compliance were reported by RSs. During interviews in Schools A and D both principals and RSs confirmed that the role was clearly defined and communicated, leading to expressions of job satisfaction and perceptions of effectiveness by the RSs. RSs who experienced effective communication from their principal regarding their role felt their job was easier. RS A2 explained, "[The principal] is pretty specific about goals for literacy in our building and I'm on board with those and that helps me." RS D3 confirmed that teachers understood her role. "They see the big picture. They see what they're expected to do." RS A1 stated that the definition of her role affected her performance. "When everybody understands the role it just works better. You're more effective." In the other school where the principal clearly communicated the role, literacy coach RS D1 stated, "She flat out says she supports it and supports me." When referring to the clarity of her role RS D2 noted, "I like it, nice and clear." RS D2 agreed, "I like having goals and knowing what I need to work towards." Principal D confirmed, "The message is … that intervention begins in the classroom, doesn't begin with the specialist." Principal D understood the importance of clear expectations for both RSs and teachers. She stated, "Even if it changes,

the expectations change. If it's communicated and there's an understanding there, I think they can do their job."

Standard deviations of survey results by school were calculated to analyze the degree of agreement of role among principals, RSs, and teachers in each school (Table 4).

Table 4: Standard deviation of survey responses, by school

School	*SD*	Enrollment	F&RL* (%)	ELL** (%)	No. of RSs
H	1.31	300	43	3	1
D	1.57	343	60	23	3
F	2.08	279	41	0	1
A	2.17	328	23	.06	2
E	2.62	466	31	9	2.5
B	2.70	507	30	0	1
G	3.09	552	92	.007	3
C	3.59	658	5	0	1

* Free and Reduced Lunch; ** English Language Learner

Although there was no relationship between a clearly defined RS role and the percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch or classified as English Language Learners, schools with a clearly defined RS role tended to have lower enrollments; school size, especially in relationship to staffing, can affect a principal's ability to lead and communicate. Caseload may thus be a factor, although it was difficult to quantify each RS's caseload due to the blend of push-in and pull-out instruction and RTI models.

Meaningful literacy conversations between principals and RSs require an understanding of effective core instruction, literacy instruction, and the intervention needed for struggling students. Principals A and D possessed a strong literacy background and an understanding of the RS role; these schools had medium and high alignment, as shown in Table 4. A different dynamic existed at School C, which revealed the least alignment according to Table 4. In this school, both the principal and RS stated that they did not know how the role was communicated or whether it was understood.

Although the role was clearly defined by the principals in Schools A and D, different dynamics were in place in two other schools with low standard deviations, that is, high alignment.

In Schools F and H the direct intervention model, including both push in and pull out instruction, still existed. Although their low standard deviation indicated a common understanding of the RS role among educators in the building, interviews in Schools F and H indicated that the principal did not communicate a specific role for RSs. In School F, the traditional RS role of student remediation was a long-standing part of the school's culture. RS F, an experienced teacher in the school but new to the RS position, stated that her role had been discussed during her interview and did not deviate from the traditional role that previously existed. In School H, the

school with the lowest standard deviation, the role was defined by the RS schedule developed by administration, which dictated a half-day of pull-out and a half-day of push-in instruction. The responses of teachers in School H indicated a high degree of alignment suggesting that they were content with the role as defined through the schedule. However, RS H expressed frustration. She stated, "Sometimes I feel like I'm just there to be another pair of hands in the classroom, and that's not what I went to school for. I'm not here to be another assistant but rather as a co-teacher or a mentor."

Several RSs also indicated that pressure to improve test scores led to an increased caseload and a return to the intervention model. Increased caseload eliminated time to provide in-classroom services and resulted in a return to pull-out instruction with the goal of rapidly increasing test scores.

Greater compliance, not greater acceptance

Although a clearly defined role led to greater teacher compliance with a school's literacy initiatives, it did not affect attitudes and beliefs concerning the RS role in the schools studied. Although RSs in schools A and D reported greater job satisfaction and teacher cooperation, the survey responses of teachers in schools A and D did not show greater consensus concerning RS responsibilities than other schools in the study. Most principals and RSs expressed concern that many teachers were in mere compliance rather than in full agreement with the IRA recommended role; some teachers still prefer a pull-out model. This was the case in School D, where a clearly defined role existed. However, both the principal and a RS in School D stated that the old paradigm of the RS taking responsibility for struggling readers was still in the minds of some teachers.

The "fix them" paradigm. The traditional paradigm of "take them and fix them," a phrase voiced in several schools, persisted in most of the schools studied. RS G1 felt that many teachers preferred she take responsibility for struggling students. "Here's my broken kids, fix them." RS E2 stated that although some teachers value her role, "Others view me as teaching their hard-to-teach children for them. And it's your problem, I don't have to worry about them." Principal B stated, "I think they hope it's somebody who's going to take the kids and fix them. I have found that that is such a hard paradigm to break." Principal D used the same phrase when she stated, "I think some of them would like them to fix their kids." However, RS D2 felt that although the "fix them" paradigm previously existed, seeing the results of collaboration had changed perceptions. Although RS D2's role used to be, "You take the kids and fix them … . Now we work as a team and communicate about what each student's reading behavior is, what they're working on." She stated that teachers seem to agree with this new model, "because we have more students that are reaching the expectations."

Role conflict and ambiguity result from an inadequately defined role

Lack of a clearly defined role led to role conflict and role ambiguity for RSs. The RS role was not clearly defined by the principal and communicated to teachers in six of the eight schools. In five of the six schools without a clearly defined RS role, the RSs

identified more role ambiguity on the part of teachers than their principals identified. Public school Principal E and charter school Principal G depended on the RSs themselves to discuss their duties at grade level meetings or as needed. In fact, when RS G1 was asked how teachers come to understand her role she stated, "I don't know if they do. I mean quite honestly, I think they think my role is to take their kids and fix them …" RS G2 agreed with her colleague that the responsibility for explaining her role rested with her. "It's never explained, it's different every year. … Maybe it was done in the past but we have such a high turnover [of teachers]." In schools where role responsibilities were not discussed or communicated, the RSs often felt uneasy. RS G2 stated, "You never really know if you're doing what you're supposed to be doing."

Challenges to effectiveness. Both principals and RSs spoke of the challenges of being accepted as an instructional leader, with the themes of content knowledge, communication, and trust emerging as key. A sound knowledge of literacy was identified as a means of developing trust. RS D2 was able to demonstrate her content knowledge by going into classrooms and modeling instructional strategies. "I think that has been most helpful in trying to build trust," stated a former literacy coach (D2) who continued to work informally with teachers in a coaching capacity and had a long-standing rapport and credibility with them. RS E2 felt that by going into classrooms teachers get "to see your vulnerabilities."

The willingness of teachers to collaborate was important. RS E2 observed better achievement gains for her students when she had a strong collaborative relationship with the teacher. Although her coaching role had been formally eliminated, RS E2 maintained collegial conversations with teachers she had previously coached. "I really try to keep that communication open, and in the relationships that I have where I have a very open communication my progress is just far greater than in the relationships where the teacher just sees me as 'Okay, you're going to be teaching this child reading now. It's your job.'" Principal D, in the school with the literacy coach, stated, "Teachers who are a little more confident in their practice are more willing to accept [her] to come in and support them in what they do and they don't feel threatened by her." Communication was also seen as key to development of trust. "Tricky communication can mess with the best relationships. It just takes one misstep," stated RS A1. The intricacies of communication that is supportive but not judgmental can present challenges for the RS, and training and experience in this aspect of the role are essential.

All reading specialists served as a resource to teachers

Resource services provided by RSs such as co-teaching, modeling of demonstration lessons, and observing and providing feedback continue to be valued by teachers. Although only one school (D) employed a RS as a full-time literacy coach, all other RSs stated that they served as a resource to teachers in an informal manner although no time was allocated in their schedule to do so. Serving as a resource to teachers was found to be a valuable form of professional development by Dole (2004) in a seven-year study that identified the modeling and teaching of demonstration lessons as the most effective coaching element. Although only two principals (A and D) iden-

tified the role of the RS as an instructional leader without being directly asked, when asked the question, "Is the RS role in this school one of primarily providing direct instruction to students or one of serving as a resource to teachers?" all principals except Principal B identified supporting classroom instruction as an expected part of the position. However, even Principal B felt they had not "done enough with teachers to get them to where they need to be." Principal A described each of her RSs as an "imbedded leader." All principals, and about 70 percent of RSs and teachers indicated belief that RSs should serve as a resource to teachers weekly.

Consensus was more limited when specific forms of in-classroom professional development were considered. Although nearly three quarters of principals, RSs, and teachers reported that co-teaching should occur weekly or monthly, another quarter of principals and RSs, and nearly 15 percent of teachers, reported being undecided. A clearly defined role did not bring about consensus for this form of professional development.

Although no time for resource assistance to teachers was allocated in the schedule of any RS except the literacy coach, 50 percent of principals, 76 percent of RSs, and 60 percent of teachers identified "Observing and providing feedback to teachers" as essential enough to occur either weekly or monthly. The challenges of this type of leadership activity are evident when the complex observational and communication skills needed are considered.

RSs also identified themselves as serving as a support to principals in five of the eight schools (A, C, D, E, F). Although this support was generally identified as informal, principals agreed that RSs helped build literacy content knowledge for principals, informed them of legislative and curricular updates, and provided focus on staff development needs. Principal C in her first year at the school stated, "I do go to her quite a bit" and the RS concurred, "usually every day we're talking." The one RS who served as a literacy coach (D1) stated that conversations with the principal might focus on the principal's classroom observations and a request for clarification such as, "I saw this, and this is what I was thinking. Am I on the right track?" Principal D noted agreement with this in her interview.

Scheduling emerged as a challenge in many of the conversations with RSs. The challenges of the RS role were apparent in School A where the principal told her RSs, "You will support the students. You will support the teachers." However, no time was allocated in the RS schedule to provide teacher support. RS A1 stated that she tried to support teachers during her planning time, wishing "there were more hours in the day that I could play that support person." Several former literacy coaches continued to provide informal coaching services when asked by teachers although none had scheduled time to do so. This is consistent with Galloway and Lesaux (2014), who confirmed that while new leadership and resource responsibilities have been added to the RS role, the instructional role has not diminished.

Demands of current assessments on the reading specialist role

RSs reported they faced challenges due to current accountability demands. The instructional and assessment demands of the Common Core State Standards (Common Core

State Standards Initiative, 2012) have intensified efforts to bring struggling students up to proficiency levels and raise test scores for all students to improve school rankings.

An increased emphasis on assessment in the RS role was confirmed in the IRA's national survey concerning RTI implementation, which found that 55 pecent of RSs spent 21 or more days on collection and management of data while another 15 percent spent 40 days (IRA, 2013-2014). Interviews with principals and RSs confirmed this emphasis. Seven of the eight principals identified assessment responsibilities as a prominent part of the RS's duties. The demands of assessment were also evident in conversations with RSs. All principals and RSs in the study agreed emphatically that current assessment demands had altered expectations for the RS. The current movement to use assessment data for teacher evaluation in New York State had heightened assessment significance since test results are "not just about the students anymore," as stated by one principal. Assessment duties included manager of RTI services, administration and management of progress monitoring, screening and diagnostic testing, instruction of teachers in assessment administration and analysis, and sharing instructional strategies based on assessment findings. RSs from schools A and G met with grade levels weekly to review student progress through data analysis and to share instructional strategies.

Discussion

As RSs adapt to current accountability demands, principals need to maintain ongoing communication, not only to define the RS role, but also to develop a shared conception of the role through ongoing dialogue (Turner, 1990). Schools in which role had been clearly defined and communicated by the principal evidenced a shared understanding of the RS role and greater RS satisfaction (Figure 1).

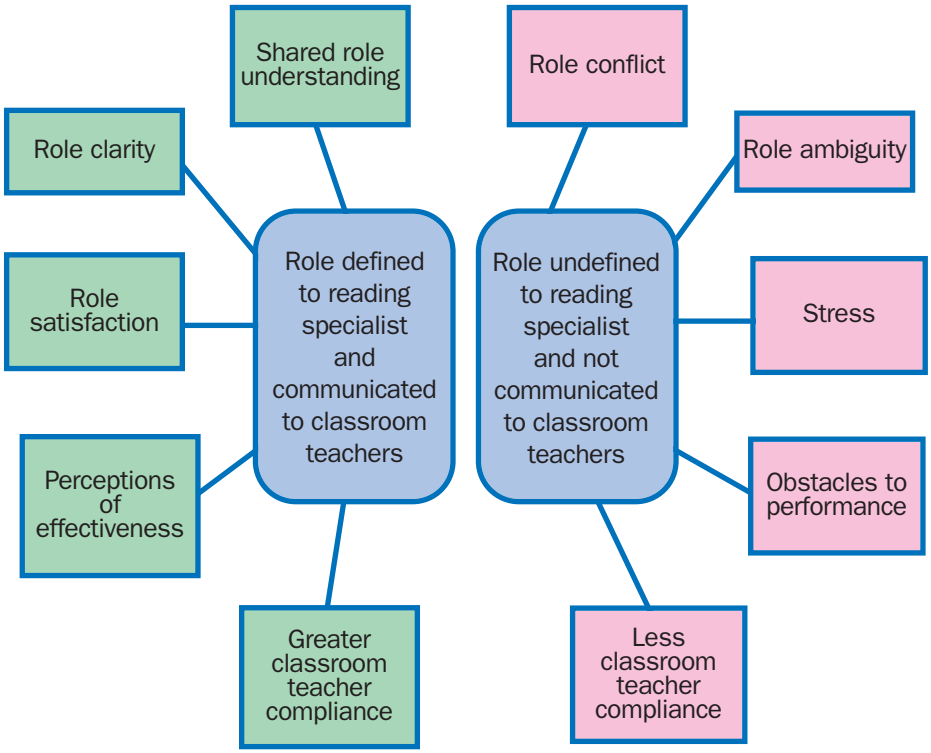

Figure 1: Effects of principal support on reading specialist role

In schools where role clarity was evident, RSs identified working with teachers without exhibiting the role conflict and role ambiguity evident in conversations with RSs where transparency of role did not exist. Strong literacy content knowledge on the part of principals was evident in schools where a clearly defined and communicated role existed, indicating that principal understanding of literacy instruction and RS role enhanced effectiveness. Although no philosophical change may have occurred in the beliefs of teachers, the RSs identified greater cooperation, collaboration, and compliance as a result of clear role communication by the principal. Ambivalence towards certain RS leadership duties may persist regardless of the communication of the role, indicating that acceptance does not necessarily give rise to "buy in" on the part of teachers.

Role conflict and ambiguity existed in schools without a clearly defined role. Assessment mandates also contributed to role conflicts between IRA standards and existing role responsibilities. This role conflict stemmed from an immediate urgency to raise test scores through pull-out intervention rather than strengthen core instruction through in-classroom professional development with a goal of developing capacity in the classroom.

Although the need for principal support of the RS in the literacy coach role has been well documented (Blachowicz, C.L.Z., Buhle, R., Ogle, D., Frost, S., Correa, A., Kinner, J.D., 2010; Ippolito, 2009; Kral, 2012; Shanklin, 2007), this study confirmed that the same principal support is necessary for the majority of RSs who serve as a resource to teachers with responsibilities similar to literacy coaches but without the title. Support of RSs by principals is needed to clear the path for instructional leadership. Responses of teachers indicated that the majority of them expect their RSs to serve as a support to them in their classrooms as well as provide direct instruction to their students. These sometimes hidden expectations may result in stress from role conflict due to a schedule that is incompatible with expected responsibilities (Biddle, 1986). The challenges of time and the complexities of scheduling must be part of the dialogue between principals and RSs so that time is available to serve in a resource capacity to teachers.

There was consensus among principals and RSs that the RS role was increasingly data focused, and research supports the value of data meetings led by RSs and principals to review data to guide instruction (Denton, Swanson, & Mathes, 2007). Although research has identified the responsibilities of the data-oriented coach, this study confirmed the importance of data management in the role of RSs without the literacy coach title. Yet, RSs stated that assessment demands had made the pulling out of students for intervention the priority in most schools in the study. Increased caseload demands can create conflict between immediate student needs and the need to build capacity in the classroom. Unless staffing levels adequately reflect student needs and manageable caseload levels are maintained through adherence to RTI plans, RSs may experience case overload with decreased effectiveness. This conflict between instructional and resource responsibilities can cause role ambiguity resulting in anxiety, stress, and reduced job satisfaction and effectiveness (Biddle, 1986; Rizzo et al., 1970).

In summary, this study affirmed that challenges existed for principals and RSs in defining and communicating the RS role to strengthen effectiveness and job satisfaction. The challenges that these educators face today cannot be met in isolation but through the conscious leadership of principals in collaborative work with RSs and teachers to strengthen literacy core instruction while continuing to address the needs of struggling readers.

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