

**Increasing the Teaching Profession's Collaborative Capacity:  
A Proposal of Organizational Change to Reduce Stress Experienced by Teachers**

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A Research Paper

Presented to the Gordon Albright School of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Education

ECG 640 School Counselling Project

June 1 2015

INCREASING COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY TO REDUCE STRESS

**Increasing the Teaching Profession's Collaborative Capacity:  
A Proposal of Organizational Change to Reduce Stress Experienced by Teachers**

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## INCREASING COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY TO REDUCE STRESS

**Abstract**

The stress experienced by teachers is an internationally recognized problem that has resulted in high rates of attrition in the profession. The purpose of this research is to argue that stress experienced by teachers can be caused by environmental conditions resulting from poorly orchestrated inclusive policies. A review of literature indicated that workloads under current conditions have increased and diversified to unmanageable proportions. Collaboration among colleagues was identified as the primary mitigating factor to these stressful conditions. This research proposes district and school level organizational changes to teaching practice. Through the proper implementation of the Response to Intervention Framework (RTI), stress experienced by teachers could be mitigated by improving environmental conditions, increasing the profession's collaborative capacity, and ultimately increasing each teacher's ability to affect positive change for students.

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**Acknowledgements**

To all of the passionate people who devote themselves to providing the best possible education for all students, I am in awe of your work and I greatly appreciate you. I hope that this project provides a structure from which you can continue to share your invaluable wisdom in rich collaboration with colleagues.

I want to thank my cohort members and our internship professor, Dr. Scott Lawrence, for creating and holding a collaborative and nurturing space for learning and reflection. The joy we cultivated in that classroom sustained me in this journey! I am so grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Maria Stella, who provided endless encouragement in weekly phone calls and more importantly reminded me to take frequent yoga breaks. Her ability to see my vision, help me to refine it and celebrate it, was critical to my success.

Thank-you to my brothers, Geoff and Ben Gustafson, for always making me laugh, reminding me not to take myself too seriously, and for holding the fort at family gatherings in my homework induced absences. For their ability to truly hear me and their unwavering belief that I can make difference in the lives of my students, I would like to thank my parents, James and Gloria Gustafson. I would also like to acknowledge Veronica Morris, for the many years of love and guidance she has shown to my family as we have grown and changed.

Finally for the countless gourmet dinners and loads of laundry; for the impromptu bike rides and spirited road trip sing-alongs; and for lending me his bravery when I was fresh out, I am so grateful to my partner, Chris Bates. When I felt utterly overwhelmed by this process, his love and humor gave me the strength to persevere. Thank-you.

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### **Dedication**

It is with gratitude and joy that I dedicate this project to my parents, James and Gloria Gustafson, for their years of passionate service as educators and unconditional champions of my dreams.

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### Chapter 1: Introduction

My desire to conduct this research was fostered on a morning commute to my classroom. As I drove, I mentally critiqued and tweaked the lesson I was about to give; rehearsed a difficult call I needed to make to a parent; and planned my lonely lunch hour of marking. I dangerously rifled through my day planner to check the time for the after school meeting where I would discuss the profound reading deficits of two of my students and the recent suicide ideation of another. In an arm twisting maneuver, I frantically swatted at the empty space behind the driver's seat to find that my professional development resource for the morning meeting on assessment was indeed absent –probably sitting on the night stand. As I pulled into the parking lot, my mind raced with thoughts of scarcity: no time, no support, and no confidence.

Later that morning, when I walked into my class of goofy juniors hiding under desks, poised in a playful surprise position, I suddenly remembered why I was a teacher. I remembered how much I loved working with this diverse group of human-beings, each with their own talents to offer; I remembered the power of story and my student's willingness to share; and the sheer joy of watching the light go on for a struggling learner. The possibility of abundance in my profession washed over me.

I put my marking away that lunch hour, and instead I went to visit a colleague. I pretended to be there to ask some report-card questions and pick her brain about the most effective way to assign letter grades in junior English. She saw right through the strong young professional and into the mind of the strained novice. In a moment of some magical *teacher telekinesis*, she responded to my silent cry "I'm going to quit" with "Don't do that. We need you. The kids need you."

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### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to argue that stress experienced by teachers can be caused by environmental conditions that increase and diversify workload to unmanageable proportions. I propose that increasing the teaching profession's collaborative capacity through district and school wide organizational change has the potential to reduce problems associated with unmanageable workloads and ultimately reduce the stress experienced by teachers. This study also serves to reduce stigma experienced by professionals; I will assert through the definition of stress outlined in Chapter II that professionals who experience stress are not in some way flawed or incompetent, but are simply responding to working conditions inhospitable to the goal inherent in their profession –to affect positive change for all students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Across decades and borders, in several studies teaching has been characterized as a high-stress career (Cooper & Travers, 1996; Farber, 2000b; Kyriacou & Sutcliff, 1978a; Milstein & Golaszewski, 1985; as cited in Younghusband, 2005) and it exceeds the average level of stress when compared to careers in other “academic, client-related” occupations (Akca & Yaman, 2010; Schaufeli, Daamen, & Van Mierlo, 1994; Smith, Brice, Collins, Mathews, & McNamara, 2000; Travers & Cooper, 1993 as cited in Pietarinen, Pyhältö, Soini, & Salmela-Aro, 2013). I suggest that historically the emergence of research on the problem of stress in the profession, most notably by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978), appears to follow a major philosophical change to public education that lead to significant changes to working conditions for teachers. In the early 1970s Deno's *cascade model* for inclusive education was introduced in the United States. Deno outlined a continuum environment where students with exceptionalities could be supported in five “progressively less restrictive” environments ranging from typical classrooms to pull-out

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situations and home care (Buffman, Mattos, & Weber, 2009). Shortly after its release, Deno's model was further popularized by the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) which made it illegal for students with disabilities to be excluded from typical classrooms in the United States (Buffman et al., 2009). By 1991 the integration of students with exceptionalities into the typical classroom became common practice in Canadian and American schools (Buffman et al, 2009 & Brackenreed, 2008). Similar policy and legislation surfaced internationally (UNESCO, 2007). Currently, several studies indicate that although teachers are supportive of an inclusive philosophy, they continue to voice concerns about the implication of inappropriately resourced inclusive classrooms on effective teaching practice (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Bunch, Lupart & Brown 1997 as cited in Brackenreed, 2008). As diverse classroom composition has become the norm, teachers indicate that environmental problems resulting from the incongruence between inclusive policy and classroom practice are major sources of stress (Younghusband, 2005).

As stress increases for teachers, their satisfaction with the profession decreases (Fisher, 2011; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005) resulting in high attrition rates. For example, inclusion policies were introduced in Ontario in 1991 and by 2004 the Ontario College of Teachers reported a marked increase in occupational stress resulting in 30% attrition rate in the first five years for new teachers and a 10% annual attrition rate for full time teachers (Brackenreed, 2008). In addition, in the 2011 Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) work place survey, 82% of respondents selected "Work-related stress" as a "very" important factor influencing the decision to leave the profession (CTF, 2011). Similarly, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) found that several studies of North American school districts indicate that between 40–50% of teachers leave teaching in the first five years (Hoigaard, Giske, & Sundsli, 2012). Other research indicates that

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many teachers would stay in the profession if working conditions were addressed and stress reduced (Fisher, 2011; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012 in Billingsley & Cross, 1992). Despite this wide body of research, the challenging environmental conditions coinciding with a major philosophical change to public education in the 1970s have not been adequately addressed to reduce the stress experienced by teachers.

### **Research Questions**

This research will address the following questions:

1. How can systems level organizational change reduce stress experienced by teachers?
2. What are the environmental conditions that cause stress for teachers?
3. What are the common mitigating factors that appear to reduce stress for teachers?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The following theoretical framework provides a context for exploring the above questions in Chapter III and Chapter IV. In both my counseling practice and in my classroom, I endeavor to approach students from a strengths-based and solution-focused position by using Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) techniques (Sklare, 2005). These techniques are guided by several core assumptions about the process of change. For example, Solution-Focused counselors believe that if we can focus on our successes, “beneficial changes” will occur and ultimately produce more change over time (Sklare, 2005, p. 11). In addition, every problem has exceptions and each of us possess unique strengths to identify those exceptions and create lasting change (Sklare, 2005, p. 12). SFBC is particularly practical in situations where external factors like working environments, for example, cause distress. SFBC can illuminate positive environmental conditions that can be expanded upon to create change necessary for a more hospitable environment. In essence, this approach allows the individual to reflect on the

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solutions within the environment rather than internalize the problems in the environment as a personal deficit.

The assumptions regarding the process of change present in SFBC can be found in several theories of organizational change. For example, Abrahamson (2004) cautions, that too often, when leaders of an organization are trying to implement reform they work with an assumption that there is no value in current practices (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006), they fail to see the exceptions and ultimately do not succeed in creating change. Instead, Abrahamson (2004) suggests that leaders endeavor to reorganize the positive existing elements (Fullan et al., 2006) just as SFBC encourages client's to proceed with their strengths. For the purpose of this paper I will suggest that Kotter's (1995) eight-step model for organizational change be used to implement recommended changes as it encompasses the Solution-Focused ideas with which I am professionally and personally aligned. Kotter (1995) explains that for any organizational change to occur and be sustained, the leader must progress through eight important steps. A leader must (1) establish a sense of urgency within the organization; (2) form a powerful guiding coalition; (3) create a vision; (4) communicate that vision; (5) empower others to act on the vision; (6) plan for and create short term wins; (7) consolidate improvement and produce more change; and (8) institutionalize new approaches (Kotter, 1995).

### **Limits and Scope of the Study**

This study surveys the common environmental conditions that cause stress for teachers who work in public education in several different countries where classroom composition is consistently diverse. This study does not, however, discuss specific trends in each of these contexts that may further impact a teacher's experience of stress. This study focuses specifically on the organizational structures surrounding classroom teaching, and does not include other rolls

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in which teachers may engage, like coaching for example. Although research indicates that a teacher's diversity does not impact their experience of stress in the workplace, this study does not account for other societal infrastructures related to gender and gender identity; ethnicity and creed; or age and socio-economic status that professionals may experience as oppressive or stress provoking outside of the work context.

In Chapter II of this study, I will define the stress experienced by teachers as it relates to environmental conditions. I will then review literature produced internationally from 2005 to 2014 on the topic of environmental conditions that cause stress experienced by teachers. Collaboration, as a mitigating factor of stress is also discussed. In Chapter III I will propose that district and school level organizational changes are made to teaching practice through the implementation of the Response to Intervention Framework (RTI). This change is intended to increase the profession's collaborative capacity in an effort to address unmanageable workloads and ultimately reduce stress. These recommendations are relevant and timely in the broader Canadian context where approximately 30% of short and long term disability claims are due to problems associated with mental health (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2010). Establishing norms for hospitable working conditions for teachers could have national implications for preventative mental health initiatives. Finally, in Chapter IV I will suggest that Kotter's eight-step model for organizational change could be used to effectively implement the RTI framework in a manner respectful to teachers.

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### **Chapter II: Literature Review**

This literature review is divided into four sections. The first section defines the term stress as it relates to the environmental conditions of the workplace and intrinsic values of the teaching profession. The second section explores the environmental conditions that lead to unmanageable workloads and ultimately cause stress for teachers. Collaboration as a common mitigating factor for stress experienced by teachers is discussed in the third section. Finally, a brief summary of the themes discussed is included in the fourth section.

#### **Defining Stress**

The American Psychological Association defines stress as the feeling of “being overwhelmed, worried or run-down” (American Psychological Association, 2015). Common understandings of these feelings associated with stress locate a deficit within the individual. For example, Hiebert (1985), similarly to Cooper and Travers (1996), suggested that the level of stress experienced by an individual is related to his or her personal ability to cope with demanding environmental conditions (Younghusband, 2005). Although this definition acknowledges that external circumstances can be taxing, it also suggests that the improvement of the individual’s disposition through the development of coping strategies will ultimately alleviate his or her experience of stress. The recent launch of the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) program, “Starling Minds”, a partnership venture with British Columbia Teacher’s Federation (BCTF) that gives every teacher in the province access to online CBT, perpetuates this understanding. Through video case studies “Starling Minds” details the stressful environmental conditions that teachers face at work. After each case study, the participant is guided through a series of CBT tools to increase their capacity to cope with their environment. Although the course highlights the stressful working conditions that teachers face, like the definitions

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described above, it requires that the individual make the adaptive changes required to function in the environment rather than adapting the conditions of the environment to suit the individual or in this case 41,000 BCTF members.

Although therapies, such as CBT and the Starling Minds program, boast high success rates in returning teachers to work after stress leaves, high rates of stress leave persist (Naylor & Vint, 2009). These therapies may not be helpful over time because they do not address the environment (Noblet & Lamontagne, 2006). Lerner (1986), similar to Eisenstien (2013), suggests that individuals will focus on personal transformation of their disposition to improve their experience of stress, but they are ultimately unsuccessful in the face of overwhelming external conditions (Lerner, 1986). This failure is then attributed to a personal deficit beginning the cycle of individual pathology again (Evans & Payne, 2008; Lerner, 1986). Learner argues that these “failures” are not individual pathologies; rather, they are an indication of the flaw in viewing the individual in isolation from the external environment.

For the purpose of this paper I will argue that teachers cannot be viewed as separate from their environments because their work environments are inextricable from the intrinsic goal of their chosen profession- to affect positive change for students (CTF, 2011; Long & Mckenzie-robblee, 2012; Martin, Dolmage, & Sharpe, 2012) Much like Lazarus’ (1966) hypothesis that stress can arise when a person appraises the conditions of the environment to be counter to the achievement of his or her goals (as cited in Younghusband, 2005), stress experienced by teachers can be defined as the response to environmental conditions that are counter to the achievement of the goal to affect positive change for students. This definition coincides with Hong (2012) whose findings suggest that the difference between a teacher who decides to leave the profession and one who decides to stay could be related to their interpretation of their

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environment in relationship to his or her beliefs and values. Stress, therefore, must be mitigated by organizational change to the work environment rather than change to the individual's disposition. It is required that teachers see occupational stress, and ultimately professional burnout as a systemic condition rather than an individual condition (Pyhalto, Pietarinen, & Salmela-Aro, 2011).

### **Environmental Conditions that Cause Stress for Teachers**

The stress experienced by teachers is not a simply a North American phenomenon; rather, it exists internationally and across a diverse range of cultures (Arikewuyo, 2004; Betoret, 2006; Brown, Ralph, & Brember, 1995; Ferreira & Martinez, 2012; Finlayson, 2002; Pietarinen et al., 2013; Schulze & Steyn, 2007). Furthermore, several studies indicate that a teacher's demographic characteristics do not appear to contribute systemically to the stress they experience (Friesen & Williams, 1985; Holland & Michael, 1993; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978 as cited in Anderson, Levinson, Barker, & Kiewra, 1999a). In fact, Fisher found that lack of job satisfaction was a predictor of increased stress where as age, gender and level of self-acceptance was not (Fisher, 2011). Given this lack of correlation between the individual's diversity and the impact of stress, it is not surprising then that even the most diverse set of stress management strategies are not effective in reducing the stress experienced by teachers (Arikewuyo, 2004). Rather than focusing on individual strategies, both Clausen et al., (2009) and Orioloi (1999) recommended that a reduction in stress experienced by teachers could be achieved by making changes to the conditions of environment, the "organizational or system-level factors" (Arikewuyo, 2004, p. 197). A discussion of the stressful environmental conditions inhospitable to professional success follows.

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### **Workload and Time Constraints**

Several studies have found that increased workloads are contributing to an increase in stress among teachers (Black, 2003; Dibbon, 2004; Naylor, 2001a; Pierce & Molloy, 1990; Taris et al., 2001; van der Klink, Blonk, Schene, & van Dijk, 2001 as cited in Younghusband, 2005, p.28). According to the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) 97% of teachers surveyed, agreed that their workload had increased and 84% cited "heavy workload" as a "very" important factor in deciding to leave the profession (CTF, 2011, p. 5). As workloads increase and diversify teachers experience time constraints (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011), and struggle to "carry the burden of added responsibilities with less time at school to complete the tasks" (Jeter, 2012, p. 82) Several studies have cited time constraints as a contributing factor in the stress experienced by teachers (Blase 1986; Montalvo et al.; 1995 as cited in Younghusband, 2005). Drago et al. (1999) and Harvey and Spinney (2000) found that teachers worked an average of 20 hours more a week that contractually required to try to alleviate time pressures (Younghusband, 2005) and teachers surveyed in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan worked in excess of 50 hours a week to meet minimum job requirements (Martin et al., 2012). Despite this increase in hours worked, King and Peart (1992) found teachers across Canada reported decreased time to work with individual students (As cited in Younghusband, 2005). This problem is not unique to teachers in Canada, as teachers in Spain, for example cited a similar increase in effort (Betoret, 2006).

Of the teachers surveyed by the Canadian Teacher Federation (CTF) in 2011 approximately 87% felt they needed to take more professional development to compensate for increasing demands at work, whereas only 60% felt they had the time to do so (CTF, 2011). One teacher wrote, "The whole issue of time is a question. Not only have I had less time for professional development, I have less time for everything. I am expected to do more in the same

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or less amount of time that I had before. Our curriculum has expanded, what we are expected to do has expanded but our day and our year have not expanded nor has our energy level” (CTF, 2011, p. 11). Unmanageable workloads and the resulting time constraints appear to be caused by problems associated with the speedy implementation of inappropriately resourced inclusive education policies that changed the landscape of the classroom (Leithwood, 2006 as cited in Brackenreed, 2008; Tkachyk, 2013).

Following a monumental shift in educational philosophy in the 1970s and changes to legislation in the 1980s, the integration of students with exceptionalities into the typical classroom became common practice in North American schools by the early 1990s (Buffman et al, 2009 & Brackenreed, 2008). These policies have appeared internationally as well (UNESCO, 2007). Unfortunately, just as Brown-Chidsey & Steege (2005) argue, inclusive education policies have failed to use data-driven procedures to create effective teaching and learning environments. In addition, several studies have implied that the concept of inclusion varies so widely in scope and operational manifestations that the implications for teaching practice are not yet well defined (Lindsay 2001; Leyser and Kirk, 2004; and Fore et al., 2008 as cited in Tkachyk, 2013). In fact, even in 2007 “the inclusion of students with diverse educational needs into the mainstream” and the implications for educational planning became a global issue discussed at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Malinen et al., 2013, p. 34).

Currently, several studies indicate that teachers are supportive of the philosophy of inclusion because it promotes equitable access to education; however teachers continue to voice concerns about the practice of managing inclusive classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Bunch, Lupart & Brown 1997 as cited in Brackenreed, 2008). In a review of literature,

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Younghusband (2005) found that problems associated with inclusive classrooms contributed to increased workload and stress for teachers. Among these problems, teachers identified inadequate professional training and resources; role overload; increased class size and disruptive student behavior; and lack of administrative support as contributing factors to the stress they experience (Younghusband, 2005).

### **Inadequate Professional Training and Resources**

Several studies indicate that a perceived lack of professional training causes stress for teachers (Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape, & Norwich, 2011; Fisher, 2011; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Younghusband, 2005). Bradshaw & Mundia, 2006; Mushoriwa, 2001; Subban & Sharma, 2006; and Westwood, 2005 agree that teachers are specifically concerned about their ability to implement adapted programs in the inclusive classroom (as cited in Boyle et al., 2011). In a study of 268 Canadian teachers teaching in Ontario, Brackenreed (2008) found that the majority of respondents felt that they were unprepared to teach students with exceptionalities and indicated that this insufficient training was a source of stress. Many felt that “they [had] been left to their own devices to survive the stresses created by including all students in the regular classroom without appropriate supports” (Brackenreed, 2008, p. 143). When these teachers tried to seek these supports, Brackenreed (2008) found that they were generally disheartened and frustrated as it was “hard to find materials and people to help with how to adapt/modify/ accommodate the expectations or to find a program to assist in the child’s growth” (p.143). Similarly, Forlin, Keen & Barrett (2008) found that in a study of 228 respondents, 93% were concerned about their insufficient training to provide adequate instruction in inclusive settings (as cited in Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Younghusband (2005) also found that teacher’s felt they were under-qualified for classroom teaching in the new area of inclusive policy. One teacher

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said “How is it that you can’t teach Phys. Ed. unless you have a Phys. Ed. degree, yet with a lowly bachelor of arts and bachelor of education you now have license to teach what is really special education” (Younghusband, 2005, p. 86).

Adera and Bullock (2010) found that increased formal education did not decrease the stress experienced by teachers. Some study participants held Master’s degrees, some held specialty certificates, and others were teaching with provisional certificates; despite these varying levels of education, only 46 % of participants planned to stay in their current positions (Adera & Bullock, 2010, p. 8). Similarly, Forlin and Chambers (2011) found that even after pre-service teachers were given an elective course on inclusion practices the teachers were more concerned that their stress levels would increase in the inclusive classroom (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Furthermore, a report conducted on BC teachers accessing the Salary Indemnity Plan (SIP) for mental health claims found that 61% of the claims were from teachers over 50 years of age whereas only 39% of BC teachers are over 50 years of age (Naylor & Vint, 2009). This statistic implies that older teachers, and likely those with the most opportunity for continued professional training, are over represented in SIP claims and are thus experiencing stress regardless of their exposure to education. These incongruent findings could point to the need for an organizational shift that would allow increased sharing of expertise among the whole profession rather than increased individual qualifications (Boyle et al., 2011).

In addition to feeling insufficiently trained, without adequate resources teachers experience unnecessary stress (Betoret, 2006). Several studies found that when resources were unavailable teachers would spend their own time and money familiarizing themselves with new approaches or new curriculum (Lloyd & Sullivan, 2012; Younghusband, 2005). Without adequate resources, teachers cited feeling low confidence in their content areas, and lower level

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of performance resulting in increased stress (CTF, 2011; Lloyd & Sullivan, 2012; Younghusband, 2005). This stress was further compounded by diverse student need (Boyle et al., 2011; Younghusband, 2005). The combination of lack of training and inadequate resources appears to lead to the phenomenon of *role overload*, wherein teachers are left feeling that they have to be “all things to all people” (Younghusband, 2005, p. 115).

### **Role Overload**

In a short review of literature Fernet et al., (2012) suggest that several studies (e.g. Maslach et al., 2001; Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; and Hakanen et al., 2006) have determined that environmental conditions created by unrealistic job demands cause stress for teachers (Fernet, Guay, Senécal, & Austin, 2012). Teachers’ working environments impact their levels of strain because they are so complex and varied (Pyhalto et al., 2011). This “non-stop” environment wherein teachers struggle to meet the demands of increasing responsibilities causes what has been characterized as *role overload* (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Arikewuyo, 2004; Steinhardt, Smith Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; Wang et al., 2009; Younghusband, 2005). In an article written for teachers entitled “Dealing with Teacher Stress” Botwinki (2007) highlights the role overload faced by teachers when she suggests that in order to reduce stress teachers need to “realize that [they] cannot be the teacher, parent, and mentor to each student” ( p. 271). This idea is consistent with Brackenreed’s (2008) findings that many teachers feel that the expectation, however impractical, is for one teacher to be several people at once. Increased paperwork (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2009); expectations to individualize programs and maintain achievement levels (Betoret, 2006); and care-giving and behavioural support responsibilities (Adera & Bullock, 2010) have been cited as common themes in role overload experienced by teachers.

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Adera and Bullock (2010) studied the stressors identified by teachers of children with emotional and behavioural needs and found that role overload or situations wherein teachers were expected to assume several roles beyond teaching was very problematic (Adera & Bullock, 2010). The pressure to produce additional paper work, for example, in the form of Individual Education Plans, Behavior Plans and other documentation was cited as stressful (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Castro et al., 2009; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Some teachers even felt that their ability as teacher was being scrutinized based on what they did and did not record on any given form (Younghusband, 2005). Similarly, in a study of teachers in Hong Kong, Pang (2011) found that government initiatives to manage teacher quality required staff to complete additional paper work, resulting in a perceived loss of professional autonomy which lead to increased stress. Even pre-service teachers noted the stressful amount of paperwork that consumed any free time they could find (Scherff & Ollis, 2006) and many found that within 3 months of entering into a teacher education program they were already concerned about their ability to cope with these additional demands (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006).

Teachers are expected to provide intensive academic support for a range of students in their classrooms and continue to deliver the required learning outcomes (Betoret, 2006; Cheung, 2009), but several studies indicate that the range of cognitive function in an inclusive classroom make it nearly impossible to deliver adequate instruction to so many children at once (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Tkachyk, 2013; Younghusband, 2005). This challenge grows exponentially in secondary schools where content knowledge becomes the focus as indicated by content specific classrooms, for example (Tkachyk, 2013). Brackenreed (2008) and Martin et al. (2012) found that the pressure on teachers to modify and adapt curriculum in such expansive ways is draining for the classroom teacher, but also perceived to interfere with instructional time. This

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interference, teachers indicated, can impede the average child's successes on government exams, for example (Brackenreed, 2008). Some teachers even reported the inequity of instructional time between students as an ethical issue that caused stress (Younghusband, 2005), while other teachers found that the element of competition to maintain achievement despite conditions further compounded stress (Lloyd & Sullivan, 2012; Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012; Scherff & Ollis, 2006).

It has been found that most teachers are not aware of the characteristics and behaviors of students with mental health concerns, yet several teachers cited that they were expected to provide counselling and behavioral support to students in their classrooms (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006; Cheung, 2009). In many cases teachers also cited feeling that students had been abandoned by parents; "We bandage them; make sure they receive medical attention; provide everything they need...we do all kinds of things...I never thought that we could possibly wear so many hats ..." (Adera & Bullock, 2010, p. 10).

Teachers struggle to maintain so many different roles and although they cite commitment to the students with whom they work, they question the sustainability of the profession (Martin et al., 2012). Martin (2012) found that more than half of the teachers surveyed, suggested they would leave if there was a viable career option because work-related stress was keeping them from their personal lives and interests. After a study of the stress experienced by teachers in Spain, Betoret (2006) found that initiatives to help reduce the stress experienced by teachers should include the provision for increased resources to decrease role overload. For example, when teaching assistants were responsible for supporting children with more complex needs such as toileting and mobility, teachers experienced less stress (Brackenreed, 2008, p.141). Even the presence of parent volunteers in the classroom was helpful (Brackenreed, 2008).

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### **Increased Class Size and Disruptive Student Behavior**

Increased class sizes and disruptive student behavior appear to be linked, as together they decrease teacher efficiency resulting in increased occupational stress for teachers (Arikewuyo, 2004). For example, Adera and Bullock (2011) found that behavioral interruptions were consistent when working with children who require emotional and behavioral support because the overcrowded classroom could not serve as a therapeutic learning environment. Large classes where students were misbehaving were found by Duyilemi (1992) and Taal (1995) to be among sources of stress for teachers in Nigeria (Arikewuyo, 2004). Similarly, Griffith et al. (1999) found that teachers who teach smaller classes experience less stress when compared to their colleagues with larger classes (Younghusband, 2005). This assertion coincides with Lavian's (2012) work, where he found that those teachers who worked with fewer students at a time were not "burdened with classroom complexity" and experienced less stress (p.244). Several studies found that class sizes of less than 20 students are most effective in reducing teacher workload enough so that teachers can feel successful in addressing individual needs (Abebe & Shaughnessey, 1997; Betts & Shkolnik, 1999; Biddle & Berliner, 2002; Gates, 2000; Holloway, 2002; Vander Ark, 2002 as cited in Younghusband, 2005). In addition, Cheung (2009) found that when teachers were faced with resistant learners, they prioritized engagement by trying to adapt their lessons. It can be assumed then that if teachers had fewer students they would be able to address individual resistance and improve student behaviors that cause stress for teachers.

Disruptive student behavior has been cited in several studies as major source of stress for teachers (E.g. Axup & Gersch, 2008; Clausen & Petruka, 2009; CTF, 2011; Fisher, 2011; Geving, 2007; McCormick & Barnett, 2011; A. C. Schaefer, 2003; L. Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012; Younghusband, 2005). Axup and Gershche (2008) and Geving (2007)

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confirmed that behaviors such as work avoidance, calling out, unpreparedness and out of seat behavior, were particularly stressful for teachers. Toronto elementary school teachers also cite physical and verbal altercations as well as academic disengagement and general non-compliance as sources of stress in the classroom (Mccready & Soloway, 2010). In a survey of 180 Secondary school teachers from Ekiti State in Nigeria, more than 75% agreed that poor behavior among students was major cause of stress (Ekundayo & Kolawole, 2013) and Schulze et al. (2007) found poor student discipline to be among the top stressors experienced by nearly 100 teachers surveyed. Half of the Canadian teachers surveyed by the CTF (2011) agreed with the statement “Maintaining order among my students demands too much energy/sometimes I feel overwhelmed” (CTF, 2011, p. 8). Demetriou et al. (2009) found that disruptive behavior could lead to a low confidence for new teachers (Beltman et al., 2011). Half of new Canadian teachers thought about leaving the profession as a result of the challenges they faced regarding student behavior (CTF, 2011; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009).

In addition to the above finding regarding the connection between student behavior and stress, Argyris (1957, 1964) wrote that when any mature adult is forced to work in an environment wherein they feel they do not have control, conflict will result (Clausen & Petruka, 2009). This is a complex issue for teachers, however. Just as Kinman suggests, teaching is a profession of “emotional labor,” as coined by Morris and Feldman (1999) and Zapf et al., (1999). Teachers experience “the dissonance between the emotions that are genuinely felt and those that the job requires to be expressed or suppressed” when they are faced with challenging student behavior (Kinman, Wray, & Strange, 2011, p. 844). This dissonance further increases stress. In addition, some teachers report feeling distressed, a term I suggest is indicative of both

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“emotional labor” and stress, when they have to deal with behavioral issues in the classroom (Pang, 2011; Roffey, 2012; Younghusband, 2005).

It has been suggested that teachers who experience this stress in relation to student behavior could require retraining in classroom management (McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Pang, 2011). Brackenreed and Barnett (2006) assert that teacher education programs should equip teachers to meet the classroom management demands of the inclusive model, as student behavior in the inclusive classroom is a major concern. In a later study Brackenreed (2008) found that poor student behavior, as a problem associated with the inclusive classroom, to be among the factors increasing the perceived level of stress for teachers, however teachers felt that with adequate resources, inclusion could be effective. It could be said then that poor student behavior could be mitigated by organizational change, rather than strategic teacher education just as Kounin (1970) originally posited (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006). In fact, Lavian (2012) found that stress leading to burn out for teachers was not necessarily related to behavioral issues related to class size or composition, but it was related to a perceived sense of unsupported organization of these complex elements; school “organizational climate” was thus shown to a contributing factor in stress (Lavian, 2012, p.243). Lack of administrative support in this sense, could be found detrimental to teacher’s well-being.

### **Lack of Administrative Support**

Cheung (2009) recommended that leadership programs for principals should include strategies on how best to support teachers who work with resistant and diverse learners as lack of understanding regarding these teacher’s workloads has been cited as a source of stress (Adera & Bullock, 2010; CTF, 2011). Similarly, it has been found that the most effective schools have involved senior management teams who demonstrate an understanding regarding the challenging

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needs and behaviors faced by teachers (Axup & Gersch, 2008; Schulze & Steyn, 2007). In addition, many teachers have experienced stress because they felt uncorroborated in seeking disciplinary support from administration (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Fisher, 2011; Naylor, 2009; Younghusband, 2005). Others worried that if they approached administration with these problems, they would appear incompetent or bothersome (Clausen & Petruka, 2009). Those administrators who took a managerial approach, rather than one connected to supporting teaching practice (by facilitating behavioral intervention, for example) were viewed as sources of stress for teachers.

To adequately support teachers, leaders should be trained to consider issues of teacher stress when examining the organizational structures of the school (Cheung, 2009) as these structures contribute to stress. In addition it has been found that administration plays a significant role in team-building (CTF, 2011) and Dworkin et al., (1990) found that they can help to create a culture of collegial support in a school (Younghusband, 2005). This is important because school culture, or climate, has been found to be a predictor of a teacher's experience of stress (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012)

### **Collaboration as a Mitigating Factor in Stressful Work Environments**

Studies have found that teachers who experience high levels of autonomy also experience high levels of workplace stress (Pietarinen et al., 2013) and the more "closed", or less collaborative a school's organization appears, the more stress teacher's experience (Lavian, 2012). To combat the stress experienced by teachers, Pyhalto et al. (2011), suggest that the professionals in the building need to have collaborative opportunities to identify the demands of the environment as well strategies for dealing with those challenges. In addition, in several studies teachers report that collaborative planning, assessment, and teaching with colleagues;

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opportunities for sustained mentorship and meaningful professional development; as well as social support are factors that reduce stress experienced at work.

### **Collaborative Planning, Assessment and Teaching**

An environment that is organized to increase task sharing and therefore increase time for work on these tasks could increase an employee's well-being. For example, environments that allow schedules to be modified to better accommodate a life-work balance were found to be less stressful for employees than more rigid environments (Kleiner & Pavalko, 2010; Lavoie-Tremblay, Wright, & Desforges, 2008; Lizano, Hsiao, Mor Barak, & Casper, 2014; Noblet & Lamontagne, 2006). Further, Harris and Engdahl (2007) suggested that in order to create optimal work environments organizations should consider training teams to become supportive in sharing individual task workload and Lavoie-Tremblay and Desforges (2008) found that reducing individual workload by increasing collegial support was important in decreasing stress. Similarly, in order to organize the work environments of teachers to reduce workload, increase time for work tasks, and ultimately reduce stress, studies indicate that teaching environments should include opportunity for collaborative planning, assessment, and teaching with colleagues.

In a review of his studies beginning in 2004, Ingersoll found that new teachers with the opportunity to plan collaboratively with department colleagues were more likely to stay in the profession (2012). Similarly, Scherff (2008) found that lack a collaboration caused many beginning teachers to leave the profession (As cited in Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Teachers who felt supported in their efforts to meet the needs of all learners described practices such as differentiating materials with and seeking advice from a range of colleagues as well as sharing ideas between departments and new staff members (Boyle et al., 2011; Roache, 2007; Schmitz & Brown, 2006). In addition, Weiss (1999) found that a teacher's ability to meet the

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needs of a diverse range of learners is enhanced by collaborative time and those teachers who possess a wider range of strategies will also build more positive relationships with their students (Fantuzzo, Perlman, Sproul, Minney, & Perry, 2012). It has been found that a teacher's efficacy in collaboration predicts a positive attitude towards inclusive practices (Malinen et al., 2013). This idea aligns with several other studies that empathized the role of teacher collaboration in improving school systems holistically (Malinen, Savolainen et al., 2012; Savolainen et al., 2012; Mourshed et al., 2010 as Cited in Malinen et al., 2013). These findings also align with several studies cited by Pitetarinen et al. (2013) wherein he argued that the social constructs of teaching such as the school's professional and supportive community among colleagues was a buffer to stress experienced by teachers (Milfont, Denny, Ameratunga, Robinson, & Merry, 2008; Santavirta, Solovieva, & Theorell, 2007; Sharplin et al., 2011). Schools can be organized to foster collaborative relationships (Castro et al., 2009; Cheung, 2009); sustained mentorship and teacher driven professional development are two ways teachers suggest promoting this collaboration.

### **Sustained Mentorship as Meaningful Professional Development**

Human resources research suggests that connection among colleagues is integral in any organization that intends to retain employees and those who feel that they are able to contribute to the organization will be more likely to stay (Armstrong-stassen & Schlosser, 2011; Peterson, 2005; Sheridan, 1992). Similarly, Fisher (2011) found that connection and contribution in the form of mentoring relationships as meaningful professional development was reported to be the most popular stress reduction method recommended by teachers. Unfortunately, however, Kardos and Johnson (2010) found that new teachers did not have the opportunity to be matched with a mentor that shared the same subject or grade level (as cited in Long et al., 2012), a criteria

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that Fisher (2011) suggest is integral to the effectiveness of the relationship. Case studies presented by Clausen et al. (2009) demonstrated that even when mentorship programs were available, teachers were concerned about appearing incompetent if they accessed the support programs. In cases where teachers were willing to access supports, they did not have common preparation periods with their mentors, so they were unable to access support during the work day. Huling-Austin (1990) explained that in order for teacher induction programs to be effective they need to include sustained support and not simply orientation or evaluation (Carr & Evans, 2006). Brackenreed implied that induction programs for new teachers would not be enough support to reduce stress as even seasoned teachers experience stress within the inclusive model (Brackenreed, 2008). Mentorship as meaningful professional development and the resulting social support should then be part of every teacher's daily experience to mitigate both the workload and the perceived stigma in asking for help.

### **Social Support**

Social support from colleagues has been found to increase employee retention across professions (Harris & Engdahl, 2007). For example, hospice nurses who were exposed to patient loss as a regular workplace stressor reported lower levels of occupational stress than nurses who were working in maternity wards who were exposed long hours and insufficient technology (Kalicińska, Chylińska, & Wilczek-Różyńska, 2012). In the case of the hospice nurses, support groups were organized as part of the profession, enabling these nurses to seek social support for their major work place stressor, patient loss; whereas the maternity nurses did not have collaborative opportunities to address their stressors (Kalicińska et al., 2012). Similarly, social support has been found to increase retention in hospital workers across several departments including accounting, maintenance, patient care, and laundry (Harris & Engdahl,

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2007). Given that social support can increase an employee's sense of control in their work environment (Park, Mark, & Lee, 2004) and control is related to adult's overall satisfaction in the workplace (van den Bosch & Taris, 2014), it is an important factor to consider in the retention of teachers.

Cheung (2009) recommended that schools should be organized to grow collegial relationships rather than allow these activities to function in addition to regular routine. Two studies support the need for social support. Kinman found that teachers who reported higher levels of social support at work reported lower levels of strain (Kinman et al., 2011). Richards (2012) discovered that many teachers who experience stress seek opportunities to share ideas with colleagues and find that bonding in these social situations help to alleviate stress (Richards, 2012).

### **Summary of Themes**

Unmanageable workloads and the resulting time constraints are causing stress for teachers (Younghusband, 2005). These increasing workloads appear to be caused by problems associated with poorly orchestrated inclusive policies that fail to consider implications for practice (Boyle et al., 2011). Teachers feel that they do not have the training or the resources to adequately plan for or instruct students with exceptionalities within the typical classroom (Boyle et al., 2011). Without these adequate supports teachers experience role overload (Botwinik, 2007). Increased class sizes further exacerbate role overload and disruptive student behavior (Arikewuyo, 2004), and teachers cite feeling unsupported by administration in their efforts to work with challenging and resistant learners (Clausen & Petruka, 2009).

Regardless of these stressful environmental conditions teachers persevere to try to effect positive change for their students (CTF, 2011). Unfortunately, because the profession is so

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intrinsically motivated, teacher well-being can be compromised (Clausen & Petruka, 2009).

Collaboration, however, in the form of collaborative planning, assessment, and teaching with colleagues; opportunities for sustained mentorship and meaningful professional development; as well as social support can reduce the stress experienced by teachers (Brackenreed, 2008; Harris & Engdahl, 2007; Ingersoll, 2012).

Earle's research argues that positive self-concept in adults can be attributed in part to success at work (Younghusband, 2005). Further, job satisfaction is directly related to self-esteem and ultimately retention of employees (Nurullah, 2010). Given that teachers experience stressful working conditions inhospitable to professional success, attrition rates will continue to persist unless a significant reorganization of the teaching environment occurs. After years of studying teacher stress, Blase (1996) strongly encouraged that the organizational structure of schools must be addressed to improve working conditions for teachers. In the next chapter I will propose that organizational structures in schools are changed to increase collaboration and address the problems associated with inclusive environments and ultimately reduce stress for teachers.

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**Chapter III: Recommendations**

Teachers experience stress when poorly orchestrated inclusive policy perpetuates environmental conditions such as inadequate professional training and resources; role overload; and increased class size and disruptive student behavior, increase workload and ultimately hinder their ability to effect positive change for their students (Younghusband, 2005). When collaboration is increased in the form of planning, assessment, and teaching with colleagues; opportunities for sustained mentorship and meaningful professional development; as well as social support, the stress experienced by teachers can be reduced (Brackenreed, 2008; Harris & Engdahl, 2007; Ingersoll, 2012). In an era of cut-backs to education, under-resourced inclusive policy is here to stay. Therefore, if the stress experienced by teachers is to be reduced, the stressful environmental conditions resulting from inclusive policy must be mitigated and the call for collaboration honored.

Dust off your Teacher-Education text books, this is *backwards planning*. We have to ask the question, how do we increase professional success and reduce stress in a system wherein immovable policy deeply impacts our environment and ability to practice? I will argue that the answer is in the organization of our practice, the bones of *how* we do what we do. In essence, the collective practice of the profession has to change to meet the demands of the policy. Specifically, I suggest that the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework (Buffman et al., 2009), has the potential to significantly re-organize working environments to mitigate the causes of stress for teachers and increase the profession's collaborative capacity.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section briefly describes the foundation of the RTI framework conceptualized by Buffman, Mattos and Weber (2009). The second section explores the link between environmental conditions that cause stress for teachers

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and the mitigating factors to this stress present in the RTI framework. Section three connects the elements necessary for educational change as defined by Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2006) to the ideas implicit in the RTI framework. Finally, section four summarizes the key themes of this research.

### **The Foundation of the Response to Intervention Framework**

The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework (Buffman et al., 2009) is a system of organization and practice that increases collaboration among staff and in turn addresses the stressful environmental conditions present in inclusive classrooms. Inherent in the framework is the aim to meet the needs of all learners, a goal deeply implicit in the teaching profession.

The table below summarizes the RTI framework (McInerney & Elledge, 2013).

*Table 1.*

**Response to Intervention**

Tiers	Interventions
Tier 1	Delivery of high-quality core instruction that meets the needs of most students in the class. Teachers deliver core instruction to all students each day.
Tier 2	Delivery of research-based intervention(s) of moderate intensity to address the learning or behavioral challenges of most at-risk students in the class. This instruction is provided in addition to daily core instruction.
Tier 3	Delivery of individualized intervention(s) of increased intensity for students who show minimal response to secondary prevention. Teachers collect and analyze progress monitoring data to determine when and how to provide more intensive intervention for nonresponsive students.

The RTI framework first requires policy makers to engage in organizational change. For example, administration must organize the yearly calendar to include pre-service planning time wherein departments are able to distill learning outcomes and plan for the following year of instruction (Buffman et al., 2009). Daily schedules must include collaborative time and weekly schedules must include whole school intervention time (Buffman et al., 2009). Timetables

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should reflect commonly scheduled subjects so that teachers can easily share instruction (Buffman et al., 2009).

Once these wider organizational changes have been made and an appropriate foundation is laid, organizational shifts in teaching practice can occur; systemic interventions driven by the collaborative team can be implemented in increasingly targeted approaches based on a three tiered system (Buffman et al., 2009). Without these organizational changes to school infrastructure, teachers cannot begin to re-organize practice and engage in increased collaboration, effectively address stressful conditions present in inclusive environments, and ultimately reach their goal to help all students be successful. Included here is an explanation of the ways in which I hypothesize that the RTI framework (Buffman et al., 2009) if implemented within the appropriate infrastructure, can increase collaboration and mitigate stress experienced by teachers.

### **Addressing Stressful Environmental Conditions and Increasing Collaboration with the RTI Framework**

#### **Inadequate Professional Training and Resources Mitigated by the PLC**

A perceived lack of professional training and access to resources causes stress for teachers (Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape, & Norwich, 2011); in particular, teachers are most concerned about their ability to find and create adapted material as well as provide adequate instruction for students with exceptionalities (Brackenreed, 2008). Increased formal training, however, was not found to effectively mitigate this concern (Adera & Bullock, 2010); rather, when teachers were afforded the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues about curriculum and instruction and engage in sustained mentorship, they felt more equipped to manage these unique needs and experienced less stress (Ingersoll, 2012). The RTI framework addresses these

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concerns as well as increases opportunities for collaboration as described in Chapter II within the Professional Learning Community (PLC).

PLCs are collaborative teacher teams who work together at scheduled intervals in their contractual day to ensure high-quality learning for all students (Buffman et al., 2009). These teams are comprised of teachers of the same grade level and/or course. Before instruction occurs, PLCs are responsible for selecting, distilling and prioritizing essential learning outcomes that are meaningful to their school context and will endure over a student's academic career (Buffman et al., 2009). Once these outcomes are established they are plotted on a common department calendar as units of instruction; inclusive in each unit is *buffer* time wherein teachers can work with smaller groups of students to enhance or adapt the curriculum to increase student achievement (Buffman et al., 2009). The collaborative team then selects and *universally designs* material as well as common formative and summative assessments for Tier 1 instruction, the instruction that all students receive in their classrooms every day (Buffman et al., 2009). Each teacher, including Teachers Teaching on Call (TTOCs) and temporary teachers, then has a clear foundation from which to exercise their own creative and autonomous instructional methods and the universally designed materials and assessments to do so efficiently. No teacher is left to find material on their own. As results from the common formative and summative assessments are collected at common points in the calendar, teachers have the opportunity to analyze the effectiveness of their materials and instructional methods (Buffman et al., 2009). Collaborative planning continues and evolves and teachers become increasingly informed about a range of instructional methods. In addition, this data analysis provides an opportunity for sustained mentorship with colleagues teaching the same grade and the course. As teachers reflect on the most effective practices and resources, as well as challenges they encountered, they will

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naturally share ideas. Less experienced teachers, for example, will have direct access to a bank of tested and effective strategies to implement into their classrooms (Tier 1) immediately.

Similarly, teachers new to the profession will be able to share the current strategies they learned in their teacher-education programs. The PLC mitigates the teacher's concern regarding adequate professional training and resources and ultimately reduces the stress experienced by teachers by increasing collaboration both in the form of planning and sustained mentorship.

### **Role Overload Mitigated by the Tiered Approach**

Role overload, or the feeling that one teacher has to be several people at once, causes stress for teachers (Brackenreed, 2008). In particular, expectations to individualize programs and maintain achievement for a large number of students (Cheung, 2009; Martin et al., 2012); care-giving and behavioral support responsibilities (Adera & Bullock, 2010); and increased paperwork have been cited as common themes in role overload experienced by teachers (Castro et al., 2009). Along with the collaborative PLC, the foundation from which the RTI framework runs, the three tiered system of intervention can help to mitigate concerns associated with role overload.

Not only do teachers need PLC time as part of their schedule, they also require scheduled intervention time, both on a school level and as a department (Buffman et al., 2009). As data is collected in the PLC and it becomes apparent that some learners, typically between 15-20%, are not meeting the essential learning outcomes as they are delivered in Tier 1 classroom instruction, a Tier 2 intervention is applied in collaboration with PLC members (Buffman et al., 2009). Immediately, the teacher's concern with care-giving and behavior support tasks (Adera & Bullock, 2010) are mitigated as the Tier 2 interventions pre-determined by the PLC incorporate the use of other professionals such as specialized reading teachers, or school counselors, to serve

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this small percentage of students (Buffman et al., 2009). In addition, because infrastructures are already in place, such as commonly scheduled subjects and a department wide buffer, a collaborative response to any student who is not achieving is possible. No teacher is left to try to individualize a program on their own for each struggling learner; rather, targeted interventions as previously determined by the PLC such as increased time for learning, pre-requisite skill review, or small group work with a different teacher can be applied (Buffman et al., 2009). Teachers may decide for example, to share their students across classes so one teacher can provide academic support where another can provide an enrichment activity, while others may team teach to the wider group. Further, because the units of instruction that were created within the team are based upon essential learning outcomes, teachers are not burdened to *cover* an unmanageable number of outcomes while trying to ensure deep understanding and achievement for students. Paper work may not be decreased in the RTI framework, but it is streamlined and shared as all members share the responsibility of data collection and interpretation (Buffman et al., 2009). Because interventions are pre-determined, they can appear as checklists on tracking forms increasing the efficiency of record keeping, and because the day is organized to allow time for data collection and interpretation, record keeping becomes part of learning rather than a task in addition to classroom responsibilities.

### **Increased Class Size and Disruptive Student Behavior Mitigated by the Tiered Approach**

Increased class sizes and disruptive student behavior appear to be linked. As class sizes increase, teachers have less time to spend with each individual, so disruptive behavior increases causing stress for teachers (Arikewuyo, 2004). When asked about the impact of disruptive student behavior teachers felt overwhelmed by low engagement and general non-compliance in

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the daily routine (McCreedy & Soloway, 2010). In addition, teachers were concerned that the classroom could not offer an appropriate environment for students who display severe behaviors because of the sheer number of students as compared to the number of adults available (Adera & Bullock, 2010). In order to reduce this stress, it has been suggested that teachers could require re-training in specific classroom management strategies (McCormick & Barnett, 2011); however, several studies have indicated that stress leading to burn out for teachers was not necessarily related to the actual behavioral issues resulting from class size or composition, but it was related to a perceived sense of unsupported organization of these complex elements (Lavian, 2012). The RTI framework offers that supportive and efficient organization to address these issues of disruptive student behavior.

Low engagement is addressed in many aspects of the RTI framework, in particular in the creation of common practices within the PLC. The PLC, for example, is responsible to create high quality extension activities and independent learning guidelines to ensure that differentiated learning time is effective and students have the tools to stay on task and engaged in something appropriate to their ability, when a teacher is not immediately available (Buffman et al., 2009). In collaboration, the PLC may design, for example, a list of “Must Dos” and “May Dos” for their classrooms, based on the departments essential learning outcomes (Buffman et al., 2009, p. 75). As teachers work with smaller groups of students that may require behavioral or academic intervention, the rest of the class can engage in clearly defined independent work (Buffman et al., 2009). Just as indicated in the previous sections, teachers are not left to create these extensions or checklists on their own; rather, these components are well researched and designed by the PLC to deepen a student’s understanding of pre-requisite knowledge and current outcomes. Reorganization of the classroom, as defined by the procedural design within the PLC, can

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effectively address low engagement by increasing student independence and decreasing the number of students the teacher instructs at a time. As engagement increases, disruptive student behavior may decrease, reducing the stress experienced by teachers.

General non-compliance, or “Intentional Non-Learning” as defined by Buffman et al. (2009), is a scenario wherein a student is choosing not to engage in learning despite the PLCs differentiated core instruction delivered in Tier 1. The RTI framework responds to these students during the Tier 2 supplemental instruction both in and outside of the timetable. “Mandatory study hall; mandatory homework help; frequent progress reports; study-skills classes; goal-setting and career planning support; and targeted rewards” are the examples of Tier 2 interventions that can be determined in a PLC to meet the needs of “intentional non-learners” (Buffman et al., 2009). The focus is not on penalizing the behavior; rather, the focus is on creating academic success for students by re-structuring the environment first with the classroom based strategies indicated above and then with activities outside of the timetable (Buffman et al., 2009, p. 176). As schools and departments adopt these policies, low engagement and “intentional non-learning” decrease, resulting in lower incidents of disruptive behavior (Buffman et al., 2009) and I suggest, reducing stress experienced by teachers.

In addition, the RTI framework requires that administration intervene in behavioral support, strengthening the relationship between teachers and administration (Buffman et al., 2009). In particular, the teacher’s experience of stress related to students with severe behavior in the classroom is mitigated by the three tiered behavioral support model facilitated by administration in consultation with the school community.

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**Lack of Administrator Support Mitigated by the RTI Behavior Support Model**

Many teachers have experienced stress because they felt unsupported by the administration in relation to student discipline (Naylor, 2009). Buffman et al., (2009), believe that administrative leadership in this regard is integral to the success of the RTI framework; without a principal who is engaged in supporting students, especially at the Tier 3 level, the teaching staff may perceive that the administration does not see the process and the necessity for all children to learn as a priority (Buffman et al., 2009). The RTI framework ensures that this relationship between teachers and administrators is based on mutual support. The framework not only includes academic intervention, the creation of policies and procedures to increase success, but it also includes a three tiered behavior support model facilitated by administration. These components ensure teaching and learning are the priority in the school community (Buffman et al., 2009).

Typically by reorganizing the classroom environment as outlined in the previous section, approximately 80% of students will respond and not require an intervention by an administrator (Buffman et al., 2009). However, when students do not engage with the classroom procedures that maximize learning, they will be referred to an administrator for a Tier 1 intervention. “These brief conversations should be positive reminders of the high expectations of the school” (Buffman et al., 2009, p. 118). If patterns of behavior emerge across several students, the administration is responsible for reviewing expectations with *all* students as an additional Tier 1 response. This organized response by administration not only increases support for teachers, but also decreases disruptive student behavior effectively addressing two of the conditions teachers acknowledge as stressful.

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Typically between 15% and 20% of students may not respond to the proactive approaches delivered in the Tier 1 behavior support model (Buffman et al., 2009). As these students display more severe and intensive behaviors in the classroom, teachers can experience increased stress as they try to maintain an effective teaching and learning environment (CTF, 2011). Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions can mitigate this stress by systematically increasing the number of adults the child is working with and the frequency and consistency by which the student is monitored (Buffman et al., 2009). These increases in personnel and time are available because of the reduced number of students who require additional support. A Tier 2 response might include the administrator meeting with the student daily to review expectations, and consulting with the teacher regarding preferential seating, for example (Buffman et al., 2009). A counselor or a child psychologist may also be responsible for working with small groups of students on target issues that appear to interfere with learning (Buffman et al., 2009). A Tier 3 response might include components of adult mentorship where teachers and counselors work to strengthen relationships with students through positive reinforcement; explicit social skills training; and self-monitoring where students learn strategies to think about their behavior and begin to develop self-determination (Buffman et al., 2009). In both the Tier 1 and Tier 2 response, the administrator organizes the behavioral supports for the students by intervening with students directly but also by organizing a consistent collaborative response from a team of professionals (Buffman et al., 2009). This organizational shift addresses the relational source of stress between teachers and administration as well addresses the teachers concern related to managing severe behaviors in a classroom.

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### **Components Necessary for Sustained Change Implicit in the RTI Framework**

Fullan, Hill, and Crevola (2006) write that an educational breakthrough wherein teachers can affect positive change for all of their students can only be achieved when “the pieces required for systemic success are creatively assembled in the service of reform” (p.13).

Abrahamson (2004) cautions, however, that too often when leaders of an organization are trying to implement change they work with an assumption that there is no value in current practices; this approach can lead to increased stress for employees and ultimately no lasting change (Fullan et al., 2006). Instead, Abrahamson (2004) suggests that leaders endeavor to reorganize existing elements (Fullan et al., 2006). This type of change Fullan et al. suggest is about knowing what can be revised and what can be done to “redeploy and recombine existing elements in the system into new configurations” (p.14). In essence, for change to be effective and sustainable, leaders have to identify the “pieces” that need to be in place and reorganize those pieces while recognizing successes in the current system. Implicit in the Response to Intervention are the core pieces needed to reduce stress for teachers –increased collaborative capacity and increased success for learners. The infrastructural change to timetables and schedules; the tiered framework for academic and behavioral intervention, and the PLC model are the *how*, the way in which these elements are deployed. In addition, the RTI framework recognizes, just as Abrahamson suggests, that teachers already provide differentiated instruction and work diligently to meet the needs of all learners and encourages this practice to continue by providing the time for this instruction to take place in smaller more focused groups (Buffman et al., 2009). Not only does the RTI framework offer organizational change for stress reduction, implicit in its ideas exists the components necessary for sustained change a plan of deployment of resources and recognition of successful practice. In Chapter IV, I will recommend a model by

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which the organizational change of this magnitude can be effectively implemented while honoring Abrahamson's ideas described above.

### **Summary**

Research indicates that environments within which teachers work are inhospitable to professional success; teachers cannot effectively meet the needs of all learners nor are they typically afforded the infrastructure to collaborate with colleagues. In an era where inadequately funded and thus poorly orchestrated inclusive policy dictates the conditions of the classroom, teachers are experiencing heightened levels of stress and leaving the profession. A re-organization of the teaching environment to allow for a shift in practice –one that is built on collaboration –has become increasingly necessary to combat occupational stress and attrition. The Response to Intervention framework, if implemented with the infrastructural changes and pre-service planning time as described, has the potential to mitigate the environmental causes of stress for teachers while increasing the profession's collaborative capacity. PLCs ensure that all teachers have the opportunity, by way of collaboration, to feel adequately trained and equipped with specialized resources to teach students with exceptionalities. As the tiered system is activated, students received targeted support from several professionals reducing the potential for teachers to experience role overload. Disruptive student behavior exacerbated by class size is mitigated by department wide classroom procedures and the ability for teachers to work with smaller groups of students during intervention time. In addition, the relationship between administrators and teachers is enhanced as administrators are required to facilitate a behavior support program with the tiered framework. I believe that with the RTI framework in place, unmanageable workloads and time constraints perpetuated by conditions of poorly organized

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inclusive environments will be mitigated as the collaborative capacity of the profession increases and ultimately reduces stress.

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### **Chapter IV: Summary, Implications and Conclusion**

#### **Final Summary**

The purpose of this research was to assert that stress experienced by teachers can be caused by environmental conditions that increase and diversify workload to unmanageable proportions. I propose that increasing the teaching profession's collaborative capacity through district and school wide organizational change has the potential to reduce problems associated with unmanageable workloads and ultimately reduce the stress experienced by teachers. Chapter II reviewed the current literature and Chapter III provided recommendations regarding the following questions related to this research project.

1. How can systems level organizational change reduce stress experienced by teachers?
2. What are the environmental conditions that cause stress for teachers?
3. What are the common mitigating factors that appear to reduce stress for teachers?

#### **Implications for Implementation of the RTI Framework: Kotter's Eight Steps of Organizational Change**

As discussed in Chapter III, implicit in the RTI framework are components necessary to allow the change required by the framework to persist. The following section details how Kotter's eight steps of organizational change could be applied to successful implementation of the Response to Intervention framework in a school district. The eight steps are described as follows: (1) a leader must establish a sense of urgency within the organization; (2) form a powerful guiding coalition; (3) create a vision; (4) communicate that vision; (5) empower others to act on the vision; (6) plan for and create short term wins; (7) consolidate improvement and produce more change; (8) and institutionalize new approaches (Kotter, 1995, p. 61).

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### **Step 1: Establish a Sense of Urgency & Step 2: Form a Powerful Guiding Coalition**

Between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 and September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008, over 19.5 million dollars was paid out to BC teachers under the Salary Indemnity Plan (SIP) for stress-related disorders (Naylor & Vint, 2009). To create urgency and promote change in a BC school district, I recommend that research is conducted to assess the environmental stressors in each specific district to assess whether or not additional environmental conditions, other than those discussed in Chapter II, impact the rate at which teachers access SIP claims for stress related disorders in their district. With a clear understanding of specific work-related stressors combined with the data collected by Naylor and Vint (2009), a formal presentation of findings to all district personnel could be made. After the presentation of findings was given, a presentation of the mitigating factors and implicit values present within the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework could be presented. Just as Fullan et al. (2006) and Abrahamson (2004) suggest, the presentation of the new idea, in this case Response to Intervention, should demonstrate how the new idea addresses the elements the organization needs to be successful, how those elements will be deployed, as well as highlight what is working well in the organization. For example, it might be explained that implicit in the Response to Intervention are the core pieces needed to reduce stress for teachers –increased collaborative capacity and increased success for learners. The infrastructural change to timetables and schedules; the tiered framework for academic and behavioral intervention, and the PLC model are the *how*, the way in which these elements are deployed. In addition, the RTI framework recognizes that teachers already provides differentiated instruction and work diligently to meet the needs of all learners and encourages this practice to continue by providing the time for this instruction to take place in smaller more focused groups.

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Given that the RTI framework is typically adopted as district wide initiative supported by senior administration, the guiding coalition (Kotter, 1995) will be, in part, established. I suggest, however, that teachers need to be a part the guiding coalition in order to sustain a change that will have profound impact on their working environments and goals inherent in their profession. The amount of money spent on SIP claims in each district could be used instead to pay teachers to begin to lay the foundation of the RTI framework. These teachers would function as the guiding coalition, distilling outcomes and designing assessments for each curriculum district wide.

### **Step 3: Create a Vision, Step 4: Communicate the Vision & Step 5: Empower Others to Act on the Vision**

Once urgency is created and a guiding coalition is established, strategies to achieve goals can be discussed. This is what Kotter describes as creating, communicating and empowering a vision (Kotter, 1995). In this case the distilling of outcomes and designing of assessments is the first strategy in implementing RTI. Once this work has been done, the vision as to how those outcomes and assessments can be effectively delivered, adapted and assessed in each school site can be conceptualized. In step 5, administrators and teachers can begin to discuss the barriers and organizational systems that are counterproductive to their conceptualization. For example timetables that include adequate Professional Learning Community (PLC) time, commonly scheduled subjects, and school wide intervention time will need to be discussed. It is important to note that once barriers are removed and PLCs are established, each team will proceed through step 3-5 as they plot their units of instruction, design materials and assessments, and establish group norms.

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### **Stage 6: Plan for and Create Short Term Wins, Stage 7: Consolidate Improvements and Produce More Change & Stage 8: Institutionalize New Approaches**

In these three steps Kotter describes the need to track improvements, provide opportunities for employees to essentially mentor others in the vision, and highlight the connection between the new behaviors and the success. For the RTI framework to be effective, the decisions educators are making in their collaborative teams about teaching and learning, must be data driven. Student achievement is tracked and the most successful strategies for instruction are shared. As students achieve, the team will naturally adapt their approaches to include only the most successful strategies essentially institutionalizing collaboration and sound classroom practice as a means to student achievement. Research indicates that teachers experience stress when their working conditions are inhospitable to professional success and they cannot meet the needs of learners. As such it could be assumed that as environments are reorganized, achievement will improve, and stress experienced by teachers will be reduced. To validate this assumption, I recommend that research is conducted that explicitly asks teachers to reflect on their personal level of stress after the RTI has been implemented and practiced for a significant period of time. Leaders would then have two measures of improvement related to the working conditions of teachers – student achievement and perceived stress level.

### **Conclusion**

Since the inception of poorly organized inclusive policy in the 1970s, teachers have endured increasingly stressful working conditions inhospitable to professional success. Research indicates that individual qualities have little impact on the stress teachers experience and thus programs that focus on individual change have not been effective in sustainably reducing the stress experienced by teachers. Instead, I have suggested that organizational change that

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addresses environmental conditions and increases collaboration may reduce the stress experienced by teachers.

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