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Response to Intervention:Literacy Instruction for Meeting Standard Students

Jessica Steubing
St. John Fisher College, jsteubing25@gmail.com

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Comments
Response to intervention is a multi-tiered model for implementing instruction to a diverse population of students with differing needs. This study asked the question: how does the RTI model affect literacy instruction for meeting standard students? Research was conducted with a group of four meeting standard students and five educators that work within the school. Through active observations, student interviews, teacher questionnaires, and analysis of student work, it is evident that with the integration of RTI there has been an increase in staff collaboration, data analysis, and a need for additional resources. The implications of this study were the following: the absence of planning time tied to RTI, the need for additional resources, and the importance of data analysis.

Response to Intervention:

Literacy Instruction for Meeting Standard Students

By

Jessica Steubing

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Supervised by

Dr. Joellen Maples

School of Arts and Sciences

St. John Fisher College

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Abstract

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Response to Intervention: Literacy Instruction for Meeting Standard Students

In the education world, identifying struggling readers and students with learning disabilities has become a "wait to fail model" (Al Otaiba et al., 2014). Districts have been guilty of waiting until students are too far behind before deciding to give them the proper instruction needed for them to be successful. By this time it is too late. Students are so far behind that they are not able to catch up, making it extremely difficult for these students to reach the standards that are required of them to be college and career ready. School systems around the world are doing a terrible injustice to these students.

In the more recent years, there has been a push for districts to adopt a Response to Intervention (R.T.I.) model in their schools. Response to Intervention is defined as, "the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions" (Batsche et al., 2005, p. 15). One of the many benefits to this approach is that it allows educators to be more proactive in terms of identifying the needs of all learners. The goal of R.T.I. is that no students will slip through the cracks and fall behind. O'Connor et al, (2014) have identified reading skills such as letter-sound correspondence and phonemic awareness should be mastered by most students in kindergarten or first grade. Beginning intervention in these skills is important before students experience failure which could affect negative long-term outcomes when learning to read. Early intervention can improve reading skills and help students meet grade level expectations.   In O'Connor et al.'s (2014) study, they discovered that students who participated in an R.T.I. model with students in kindergarten and first grade improved reading outcomes over high-risk students in the same settings prior to implementing a tired intervention model.   R.T.I. is a way for teachers to keep

track of students' progress and use data to help make instructional decisions that will best

support all students.

       Through the implementation of R.T.I., many teachers and administrators have had to

make a variety of adjustments in order for the model to run smoothly. Teachers in the past

focused on teaching to the "middle" and hoping that their students would grasp the key concepts.

This way of teaching implies that all learners are exactly the same. They would have to learn in

the same fashion and at the same rate. There would be no re-teaching or differentiation for

students who did not understand the material during the initial lesson. In addition, there would

not be extension activities or more rigorous instruction for the students that are developmentally

ready to engage in higher level thinking. Especially in elementary school, teachers are

responsible for teaching several subject areas. It often feels like there is not enough hours in the

day to get through all the curriculum that is required. Because of the limits of time, teachers may

fall into the habit of not differentiating for the students who are approaching standards as well as

the students that are exceeding standards. In order to combat this problem, some districts have

begun to implement R.T.I. blocks into their school schedules. The students are grouped based on

their learning needs. Grade level teachers are then assigned to work with one of the instructional

groups during this given block of time. Teachers are able to provide higher levels of

individualized instruction to reach the needs of all students. The R.T.I. model creates a

community of teachers working with students to collectively increase student performance.

Educators must adopt the notion that you are not just responsible for the success of the 25

students in your room, but you are also tied to the other students that are in your colleagues

classrooms. As a team, you share these students and therefore share the responsibility in their

growth and development in literacy.

There are many districts and schools across the country that have not yet adopted R.T.I. models in their schools. It takes a lot of time, effort, and organization to get R.T.I. blocks up and running, but once they are started it can actually alleviate stress for teachers. There are many districts that call certain times in their day R.T.I. blocks, but in reality they are sections of the day where students who receive AIS services are pulled out of the classroom and the rest of the students remain within the classroom. Even though the approaching standard students are being serviced, they are not taking into account the specific skills that the meeting and exceeding standard students need in order to propel them forward and continue to make growth.

My school district has begun to implement R.T.I blocks at the 4th grade level. We have been placed in teams of three teachers. The students are broken into three groups, approaching standard, meeting standard, and exceeding standard. Four days out of six day letter cycle, students attend their assigned R.T.I. group for a 40 minute block of time. Students who receive AIS services are also serviced at this time. For these 40 minute increments, all 4th grade students receive instruction tailored to their individual needs.

 I have seen first-hand how the implementation of the R.T.I. blocks at our grade level has caused many teachers to change their teaching styles and become more collaborative with their colleagues than they ever were required to do in the past. In order for the R.T.I. blocks to run smoothly, it is essential that R.T.I. teams have regularly scheduled meetings to plan, review student data, and participate in instructional decision making. During these meetings, you are able to hear other teachers' perspectives of students' progress, strengths, and weaknesses. If all members of the team are not on the same page, it can impact the effectiveness of the instruction. Since this block is taking away instructional time from other content areas, it is important that every teacher makes the most of every moment that you have with these students.

Throughout the course of my research, I will be taking a deeper look into the collaboration that takes place when implementing the R.T.I. model and how it impacts the progress of students. I think that this research is very important because if it is not explored, students in our schools may not be receiving the most effective instruction. If schools do not have a system in place to provide all learners the support they need and deserve, it could result in an increase of students who will not meet grade level expectations.

This action research project was designed to investigate how the RTI model affects literacy instruction for all learners. This research was conducted through the theoretical lens of the sociocultural perspective and the cultural historical theory. The literature in regards to the RTI model revealed the following three themes: the idea of the RTI model as a multi-tier system, the changing roles and responsibilities of the school staff as well as the increase in collaboration amongst faculty members, and the need of ongoing professional development in order to build on the staff's knowledge base. Data was collected for this study in a variety of ways. I was an active participant while observing meeting standard students while they engaged in the use of three different strategies. Work samples were collected from four students to assess their understanding and use of the strategies that were taught. The same four students were later interviewed about the RTI model. In addition, I also collected teacher questionnaire responses from six professionals working in the middle school. After analyzing the data, the following reoccurring themes emerged: data analysis to support instructional decision making tailored to student need, increase in collaboration amongst staff, and availability of resources. Some of the implications that I discovered from this research study were the following: teachers' lack of time to plan instruction collaboratively, need for additional resources, and the importance of data analysis in providing students with the proper level of instruction.

Theoretical Framework

Children are constantly exposed to literature in multiple means within our society today. According to Gee (1989), literacy is one's ability to master their secondary discourse while constantly expanding on it. For one to be categorized as mastering their discourse, the individual must be able to participate in every act of speaking, writing, and behaving linguistically (Gee, 1989). Literacy also includes a multifaceted set of social practices using technology, participation with knowledge of text, social uses of the text, and an analysis of the text (Luke & Freebody, 1990). The combination of these literary skills will create effective communicators and learners in today's society. The way in which these students acquire these skills differs from student to student. Some students may have an easier time tackling secondary discourses, while others may require additional teaching and instruction to help facilitate this process. The design of the response to intervention model helps students receive the support that they need, in order to develop the discourses necessary to be successful both in and out of school. Gee (1989) also writes that literacy can only be mastered through acquisition and not learning. Students must be exposed to literacy discourses in a natural and meaningful way and within well-designed settings. R.T.I. blocks allow students to be in the best instructional setting to support their individual needs. If students are in a setting that is not conducive to their learning style, it can get in the way of their success in the acquisition of literacy (Gee, 1989).

One theoretical lens that the topic of R.T.I. can be viewed through is the sociocultural perspective. The sociocultural perspective according to Larson and Marsh (2007), "defines the child as an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is constructed by larger cultural systems" (p.100). Texts are viewed as communicating messages to the reader. Hall and Piazza (2008) believe that the messages that are

conveyed in texts are both explicit and implicit in nature. The meaning that is taken from the messages promotes specific ideologies and ways of thinking for the reader. The sociocultural perspective states that student's interpretations of the messages will differ depending on their social and cultural backgrounds (Hall & Piazza, 2008). A student's background is the framework that allows them to interpret situations and ideas that arise in texts. According to the sociocultural theory, children are essential to constructing the learning (Larson & Marsh, 2007). R.T.I. groupings are by design meant to be ever-changing. Just because a student is placed in one particular R.T.I. group in the beginning of the year, does not mean that they will remain there. If students continue to improve, or have difficulty in a particular group, they have the opportunity to move to a different group that will better support their needs. The students are mixed with students from other classes and therefore are exposed to a large community of diverse learners. This theory highlights students' cultural differences and sees them as valuable resources for the classroom curriculum (Larson & Marsh, 2007). As a teacher, you must use the background knowledge and experiences that students bring to the table, and use it to develop engaging lessons that inspire student participation within their learning. If teachers don't have a clear understanding of the students that they are working with, then they will not be able to provide the best instruction for students. Larson and Marsh (2007) write that children are key in constructing their own learning and therefore must actively participate in the classroom setting. Teachers must strive to make students feel that their voice is important and should be heard. It can be difficult to develop relationships with students in your R.T.I. group because you only spend short amounts of time with them. This theory makes it clear that teachers should take the time to get to know these students because it will benefit both the teacher and the student in the long run. Under this theory there are no solitary acts of literacy, only social ones (Kucer, 2014).

Larson and Marsh (2007) offer the following suggestions for teachers to facilitate this perspective, use of guided participation, community development, scaffolding, and learning by participation. All of which could be used to provide quality instruction within R.T.I. blocks.

Another theoretical lens that R.T.I. could be viewed through is the cultural historical theory. Researchers Pacheco and Gutierrez (2009), describes the theory as focusing on the "relation between an individual's development and the contexts of development of which the individual student has been a part" (p. 60). With this perspective, it is important that educators gather as much information about their student's history of literacy practices across all contexts. For example, some students might participate in religious, cultural, social, and political activities that involve different language and literacy practices that are not typically seen in the school setting (Pacheco & Gutierrez, 2009). Having this information, allows you to engage in effective instructional decision making. Teachers working in R.T.I. teams must work collaboratively to share information about students and their diverse backgrounds. Working as a team ensures that everyone working with these students are adequately informed and therefore designing quality literacy instruction. Under a cultural-historical perspective, we must consider the role of culture in ones learning and development and work towards arranging the curriculum to build on the knowledge that our students already have. Teachers must work as a team to discuss new and alternative ways to engage students and to use their "funds of knowledge" as a platform for instruction (Pacheco & Gutierrez, 2009).

Research Question

Given that Response to Intervention can be viewed through the sociocultural perspective and the cultural historical theory, this action research project asks, how does the RTI model affect literacy instruction for meeting standard students?

Literature Review

When conducting research in regards to the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, it is important to start by reviewing the current studies and literature to see what information has been gathered thus far. In this literature review, there are three major themes in regards to the RTI model that will be discussed. The first theme is the use of a multi-tiered approach that provides levels of increasingly intense interventions. Even though the look and feel of Response to Intervention may vary from district to district, all RTI models have a multi-tier system in common. A sub theme of this approach is the use of data to help drive decision making of student placement as well instructional decision making. Everything decision that is made within a school that is implementing RTI, needs to be backed up with evidence. This data comes in a variety of forms and is collected by various instructional staff. The second theme is the changing roles and responsibilities of school staff as well as the increase in collaboration amongst faculty members. Since RTI is such a new and drastically different approach to instruction, there is no way that implementation can begin without a shift in the day to day roles and responsibilities of the staff. Teachers have to be flexible and come with an open mind when beginning to work with a new approach to teaching. In the case of the implementation of RTI, there is much that needs to be changed for it to function properly and at every level within the district. Lastly, the third theme is the need of ongoing professional development for staff in order to build on their knowledge base and feel comfortable with implementing the appropriate interventions needed for RTI to run smoothly. RTI puts educators in a position in which they have to think outside the box. There is even more responsibility that is placed on them in regards to student progress. In order for the members within a school to do their job, there needs to be proper training in place prior to RTI implementation.

Multi-tiered Approach with Increasing Levels of Intervention

Ehren (2013) expresses, "students get what they need, when they need it for as long as they need it" (p. 451). This is the ultimate goal of all RTI models. Even though RTI might look a little different depending on the district and schools implementing the approach, they always have the same goal of providing students what they need in order to be successful. All research that has been conducted in regards to Response to Intervention has one major aspect in common, a multiple tier structure with increasing levels of instructional intensity. The amount of tiers within an RTI approach seems to differ depending on the school, but the majority of schools use a three tier model. In order to have a clear understanding of the RTI model, it is important to look deeper into these three tiers and recognize what types of instruction occurs at each level and how students move throughout the tiers.

As Martinez and Young (2011) states, it is the general education teacher that initiates the RTI process. Students spend the majority of their day with the classroom teacher. Therefore, their CORE teacher has a deep understanding of them as a learner and has developed the strongest relationship with these students. Our primary level of RTI takes place in Tier 1. Tier 1 instruction is provided to the entire population of students (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). All students are given high-quality instruction in the core curriculum. Mellard, McKnight, and Jordan (2010) record that about 80% of the student population should be able to learn and function within the general education setting, with little to no additional supports in place for them to be successful and meet grade level expectations. Tier 1 instruction is delivered to all students within the school, but sometimes it is not enough. In our world today, no one is exactly the same. No one thinks, acts, dresses, talks, or believes in all of the same things. Because of this, we cannot expect all students to learn the same way. Some students may need more time

and more practice with a skill in order to bring in to mastery. If a student does not receive

enough support within tier 1 to meet their goals, then they must be given more support.

When students are not responding when receiving core curricular instruction, they are

then moved to the next level of intervention, Tier 2. Tier 2 can be very versatile as far as the

location, amount of time, and material that is being taught. This level of intervention is much

more targeted towards the specific needs of the student. Similarly, Mellard, McKnight, and

Jordan (2010) describe the secondary Tier as a more intense support for the student since the

instruction with the whole population was not powerful enough to prevent academic issues.

About 15% of students require the supports from Tier 2 (Mellard et al.,2010). Once a student's

needs have been identified, then teachers and support staff can tailor instruction that will help to

improve student learning. It is important to note that this level of support is a supplemental

intervention (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). The student is given additional instruction to the

general education curriculum, not in place of it. If the student misses the core instruction, it will

create gaps in their learning making academic progress even more difficult. Printy and Williams

(2015) noticed that, students in Tier 2 need time for remediation of basic skills. After these skills

have been learned and adjusted, they might be able to return to simply receiving just tier 1

instruction. If a student continues to not make adequate growth, then more interventions might

need to be put in place. The location of this support may look different depending on the level of

need of the child. Shepherd and Salembier (2010) noted that some Tier 2 instruction may take

place within the regular classroom in a small group, while Bean and Lillenstein (2012) report

that students may work in small groups, with additional instructional time taught by a specialized

personnel. How and when it happens does not matter as much as long as these students are not

missing out on core instruction, and they are getting the amount of support needed for them to be

successful. The students at this level are frequently monitored for progress. If they are not

proving that Tier 2 is the right place for them, then they might be considered for the next tier of

intervention.

According to Mellard, McKnight, and Jordan (2010), for about five to seven percent of

students, Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions are not enough. For these students, they are provided

with the most intensive forms of intervention. As the prevention level increases, the portion of

the population generally gets smaller and the intensity of intervention becomes stronger (Mellard

et al.,2010). The next and most intensive intervention for our students is Tier 3. The majority of

students that are in this tier receive supports from specialized personal such as, reading

specialists, special education teacher, or a speech and language teacher (Bean & Lillenstein,

2012). The support staff to deliver the instruction depends upon the area of need of the student.

Although this group of students is the smallest segment of the schools population, they require

the most intense and specialized interventions in order for them to keep up with the growth and

development of their peers (Mellard, et al., 2010). For educators, these are the students that are

the most time consuming. It takes a lot of additional thought and preparation on their part to

ensure they are providing quality differentiated instruction that is tailored to their specific needs.

Since these students possess the most severe needs, they require more specialized dosages of

interventions in order to achieve the same learning goals at a similar rate of their classmates

(Mellard et al., 2010). The instruction is designed to fill in the learning gaps that have been

identified through student data. Printy and Williams (2015) describe tier 3 as a means to provide

intense and frequent remedial interventions to a small group of students that have similar

learning profiles. Without quality interventions, a student with severe needs will continue to fall

behind and never be able to catch up to their peers. That is why RTI is so important to many

schools. It creates a system that does not allow students to slip through the cracks but rather

diagnose early, and intervene as quickly as possible. If after the most intense interventions have

been in place and a student does not make adequate progress, they then would be brought

through a decision-making process to determine if they are eligible to receive special education

services (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008).

Now that the three tiers of RTI have been identified and reviewed, we can now discuss in

more depth how students move throughout the tiered system. One of the most important aspects

of RTI that all educators must always keep in mind is that student's tier placements are not of

permanent status. Mellard (2009) writes that the RTI system was established with the idea for

students to move fluidly from tier to tier. Depending on their progress and what their academic

needs call for, they could move forward or backward within the tiers. All changes to instruction

are based on the instruction focus and the proper intensity the child needs during any given time

(Mellard, 2009). As soon as an area of learning has been mastered or a new area of need has

been identified, the instructional focus may change. Educators must adapt and individualize

instruction based on what they notice the student needs. Shepherd and Salembier (2010) believe

that the primary purpose of RTI is to support the needs of all learners. In this case, educators

would be doing their students an extreme disservice if they keep them within a tier that does not

meet their needs or provides them with unnecessary support. Another very important

characteristic of RTI is that the tiers must display an increasing level of intensity. If the levels do

not offer progressively intense instructional opportunities, and the interventions are not delivered

with fidelity, then all efforts to support the child will have been wasted (Mellard, 2009). With

struggling readers, there is no time to waste. It is very important that educators take the role that

they have teaching students very seriously. Bean and Lillenstein (2012) write that teachers are

responsible for "taking lower achieving students and giving them the opportunity to learn what they need" (p. 494). Teachers require proper training and instruction on how to provide certain interventions with reliability. Along with teachers being prepared prior to the implementation of RTI, the school must have developed a system in which the tier structures can be supported within the current organizational capacity with staffing levels, classroom space, as well as a clear understanding of how the system will work (Mellard, McKnight, & Jordan, 2010). Without proper organization of the RTI system prior to its implementation, the approach is doomed to fail from the start.

The primary or Tier 1 intervention level is often viewed as the most essential working part of the RTI model. It is vital that all general education teachers are providing high quality instruction since they are addressing the majority of the student population (Mellard, McKnight, & Jordan, 2010). All instruction begins with the CORE curriculum teacher and therefore instruction must be strong at this level of intervention for the RTI model to work properly. High quality instruction at the general education level must encompass the following; scientifically-based curricula, ongoing assessment, differentiation, and some forms of accommodations (Kuo, 2014; Shepherd & Salembier, 2011). Teachers need to understand that it is still their responsibility to provide differentiation within the realm of tier 1. Without excellent instruction at this level, there is no way of knowing if a student is really experiencing learning difficulties or if it's from a lack of exposure to a particular skill within the classroom. Not only does the student's current teacher need to be a quality teacher, but all teachers within the district need to be providing top-notch instruction. Printy and Williams (2015) strongly believe that no amount of interventions can make up for insufficient general education instruction.

Meyer and Horenstein (2015) noted that the implementation of RTI requires significant and complex decision making across many levels and with a variety of colleagues. Educators need to collect data on their students in order to make proper decisions as to what tier each student should be placed in. Through the data collection process, teachers and support staff must analyze the data to determine what each student requires in order to learn successfully. There are many factors that educators must think about when they are reviewing student data and determining students' individual needs. Meyer and Horenstein (2015) believed that faculty needs to consider the following ideas throughout the decision making process; (1) the level and intensity of each tier, (2) How to target students through universal screening as well as preventative interventions to identify the nature of the students inadequate progress, (3) how to monitor the progress of students, (4) what type of multidisciplinary evaluations should be used before student placement in special education. All of these notions must be addressed by district leadership prior to the beginning of RTI. Educators keep these ideas in mind while looking at data so that students are placed in the tier that will have a positive effect on their learning. The faculty and staff work as a team to make decisions about students' placement within the RTI tiers. Many educators must collaborate to make these important decisions in order to ensure that the responsibility does not lie in the hands of one individual.

Similar to how instruction is provided to students begins with the general education teacher, so does the assessment data. Mesmer and Mesmer (2008) studied the steps that are taken throughout the RTI system. They discovered that the RTI process begins with the use of universal literacy screenings. The assessment provides the teacher with data to help determine who might be potentially at risk of academic problems. Mellard (2009) states that each district must create a criteria for movement among the tiers. Depending on the district, the criteria may

differ. After these norms have been established, teachers can use them as a framework to help

them in the decision making process. That way, educators can use the results to divide students

up, and place them directly into the tier that would best support their needs (Printy & Williams,

2015). Once benchmark scores have been established within the district, students' performance

is then compared with these scores. If students are not meeting the desired benchmark scores,

then those students will receive additional help (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). Without having

developed cut points as a district, it makes it difficult for teachers and school faculty to

accurately place students in the proper tier. The universal screenings take place approximately

three times a year (fall, winter, spring). Students who fall within normal limits on the benchmark

assessments will continued to be monitored through ongoing assessments and their needs will be

met through differentiated instruction within the regular classroom (Shepherd & Salembier,

2010). Since universal screenings take place every couple months, students who may show signs

of struggle as the year goes on, will be monitored and can immediately receive support when it is

needed.

        Once students have been identified through universal screening that they are not meeting

grade level expectations, teachers begin to use scientifically valid interventions with the student

(Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). Depending on the nature of the child's need, this may be

accomplished through differentiation within the classroom, or, if it is a greater need, the student

will begin to receive tier 2 interventions. The instruction is delivered to the student in a small

group. These interventions are intended to assist students in developing skills that will allow the

students to improve their reading skills. While the student is receiving explicit instruction, they

will be continually progress-monitored (Kuo, 2014). All progress monitoring tools must address

the skills that are being targeted during the intervention. In order for them to be reliable, they

must also be valid assessments and brief (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). Without frequent progress monitoring, it is unclear to the teacher providing the intervention, if the instruction is having a positive impact on the student.

Shepherd and Salembier (2010) prefer to refer to Response to Intervention as "Response to Instruction." It makes sense because if students continue to move to more intensive tiers if they are not responding to the instruction they are given. How a student performs within a given tier based on progress monitoring data, will dictate what type of interventions they should be exposed to. When students receiving small group instruction in Tier 2 are not making adequate growth, they are then moved to Tier 3, the most intensive level of instruction. In this tier, the students encounter more concentrated instruction revolving around the skills that they are struggling with (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). Instruction can take place within a small group or sometimes even in 1:1 setting. Progress monitoring continues on a frequent basis to allow teachers to reflect on effectiveness of the intervention. At this stage, additional assessments are often given to the students to clarify areas of difficulty. Educators use data and work collaboratively with other teachers, reading specialists, school psychologists, and parents problem solve for the child (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). As a group, they determine what next steps should be taken that will put the student in a position to be successful. If progress monitoring material and assessments dictated that the student was failing to make progress in response to increasing levels of instruction, then the student was referred to the schools evaluations team (Shepherd & Salembier, 2010). The team would meet to discuss what interventions and strategies had been in place for the student. If they found that the student had received that most intensive services provided to general education students but still was not responding, then the student would be evaluated for special education.

In a study on a group of first grade students, two different forms of RTI were brought to life, Dynamic RTI and Typical RTI (Al Otaiba et al., 2014). The first graders in both the Dynamic RTI study as well as the typical RTI study all took part in a universal screening. The scores gathered from the screening were compared with minimal benchmark scores to assess student performance (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). In the Dynamic RTI, students who entered first grade and presented the weakest skills were provided with intensive early literacy resources. Essentially, these students were fast-tracked to either Tier 2 or Tier 3 depending on their reading skill profile. This group of students did not have to necessarily work their way up the ladder throughout the tiers. Instead, their skills were evaluated and they were put into the tier that would benefit their learning profile. The Typical RTI students who presented weak literacy skills began in Tier 1 and progressed through the succeeding tiers based on continued weaknesses and slow academic growth. Regardless of their learning gaps, all students started at Tier 1 and then progressively moved to Tier 2, and some eventually moved on to Tier 3. Through this study, it was discovered that the Dynamic group achieved significantly higher spring reading scores compared to the students in the Typical RTI group. The data supports the notion that you should immediately place students in the level of intervention that would be most conducive to their learning. Because of these results, Al Otaiba et al. (2014) argued that it is imperative that RTI does not become another "wait to fail" model. There is never a reason to delay intervention. Similarly, Mesmer and Mesmer (2008) believe that RTI is a way to eliminate the discrepancy model. One of the major criticisms of this model was that it did not provide support to students who needed it until they presented a severe need. By this time, it was frequently too late. The RTI model has replaced this way of thinking and instead, supports students with interventions as soon as a need presents itself. It should be addressed immediately

so that the student can continue to make adequate progress. If you wait too long before

providing proper instruction, it may become too late for the child to catch up to their peers.

In some schools today, RTI has been implemented with the use of RTI blocks. This

period of time is in addition to the core curriculum that takes place in the classroom. In this

model, classroom teachers are assigned a group of tiered instruction (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012).

During the RTI block, students receive targeted instruction to meet their given needs. Carreker

and Joshi (2010) believed that RTI as an instructional model is achievable. This framework

gives the teachers opportunities to select appropriate and engaging materials and methods to

support a specific group of students with similar learning profiles. Bean and Lillenstein (2012)

provide an example of what an RTI block might look like in a school. They noted that each of

the tiered groups used leveled texts. Depending on the group, the readability of the text differed.

During the week, students would work with the given leveled text on a specific skill or strategy

such as main idea. No matter what tiered group you were in, you would all be working on main

idea, but the instruction would be at the appropriate level for all of the students. In this scenario,

all students will be achieving the same goal of using the comprehension skill, but they are given

materials at their suitable level in order for them to do so. The other positive aspect of using the

RTI blocks is that no students are being pulled out during core curricular instruction to receive

additional services. Bean and Lillenstein (2012) gathered, "In the past, kids were pulled and they

were missing things… it was frustrating…now the whole grade does skill groups at the same

time…we teach at this time…kids are not missing anything" (p.495). Teachers no longer have to

worry about gaps forming from students missing Tier 1 instruction in the regular classroom.

The other positive outcome of implementing RTI blocks is that it can also benefit

students who are exceeding grade level standards. According to Seedorf (2014), RTI tends to be

known as the "problem solving model." This language often implies that all issues that are being

identified within the system are because of deficits. RTI should not simply be a model for

struggling readers. The instructional model should be used as a vehicle for school improvement.

Bean and Lillenstein (2012) describe RTI as a program that provides a high quality core program

that addresses the needs of all students. If the idea is to help every child in the school, that also

includes students who are identified as gifted and talented. There needs to be a shift in thinking

as well as perception for teachers. They constantly need to be thinking of ways to make sure all

students' needs can be met and that they can be successful in school (Seedorf, 2014). There

needs to be a change from a deficit-based model into a needs-based model. Educators must

continue to have their mind thinking about what is best for their students. If schools are using an

RTI block, then one teacher could be responsible for taking a group of above average reading

students and provide them with explicit instruction around higher level thinking skills (Bean &

Lillenstein, 2012). In order for this program the RTI blocks to fully be successful, administrators

need to have the right background and training so they can help teacher be fully aware of the

entire scope of RTI.

Change of Educators Roles, Responsibilities, and Need for Collaboration

As more and more school districts begin to implement the RTI model, they have realized

that it is virtually impossible to implement this approach without making drastic changes. It will

bring about change for all personnel working within the district, especially in terms of their roles

and responsibilities within schools. Shepherd and Salembier (2011) stated that the RTI approach

is associated with the willingness of principals, teachers, and staff in each of the schools to take

on new roles and responsibilities. Many, if not all educators, will be expected to take on more

obligations to ensure that RTI is functioning properly. Change in how faculty function in

schools is inevitable in order for RTI to be implemented effectively (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012).

Not only will the staff see a change in their roles within the school, but if RTI is implemented

properly, there should also be a change in the way the school feels. Bean and Lillenstein (2012)

stated, "RTI requires a different sort of climate in the school and a change in how educators

teach, learn, and interact with others" (p. 492). One of the other major change that is evident in

schools is the transition towards a more collaborative workplace. Colleagues work as a team and

create collaborative goals that will support the needs of all students (Benedict, Park, Brownell,

Lauterback, & Kiely, 2013). No teacher or faculty member is ever working solo. It is expected

that as a group they work to provide the best instruction that will make all children successful.

In order for the implementation of RTI to run smoothly, there needs to be support at the

administrative level first. Printy and Williams (2015) discuss the importance of having the

superintendent as a champion and advocate for RTI. They need to remain connected to the

schools activities. Bean and Lillenstein (2012) believe that it is important that district leadership

supports the RTI initiative. With administrative support, that can place a singular focus on

helping all students learn. In order for them to fully submerge themselves as a part of the

problem-solving team, they need to participate in data review sessions and discussions around

the monitoring of student progress (Printy & Williams, 2015). It is important for them to be a

part of the process in order for them to fully understand the work that goes into to running a

successful RTI program. Printy and Williams (2015) reported a superintendent's view on the

changes he had noticed since the implementation of RTI. The superintendent reports, "we used

to not talk about student achievement. We talked about negotiations,…the majority was

administrative stuff. Now we talk about improving instruction; [each superintendent] reports out

about [progress] with RTI. It has changed the conversation drastically" (p. 189). RTI has

become a powerful force that impacts all levels throughout the district. It becomes a way of

thinking and therefore for it to be fully successful, all members but commit to thinking about

what is best for students at all times.

In Bean and Lillenstein's (2012) study, they discovered that Principals had to take the

lead role in creating the conditions for effective implementation for RTI. Principals are needed

in order to provide structure and direction for RTI at the building level. In this case, "being on

the sidelines was not an option" (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012, p. 497). Without guidance from the

Principal, educators would not know what steps to take in order to make the RTI approach work.

The Principal must take on the essential role of promoting a risk-free environment as well as

developing widespread norms for collaboration in which teachers participate in shared

responsibility and accountability (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). It's a tall order, but one that must

be completed if RTI in the building is to be successful. Faculty will not buy in to the program

unless the Principal has shown his complete commitment. In White, Polly, and Audette's (2012)

article, a Principal they interviewed gave made sure that his faculty and staff were aware of his

expectations for the implementation of RTI. The following quote describes what he expressed to

his faculty and staff on the first day of school:

> I made everyone make a commitment to it. I told them this is what we're going to do. By
>
> that time, I was convinced we were doing one of the best things we could do for the kids.
>
> I told them as much and what I envision seeing over the years and told them this is not
>
> something we can dabble with. We have to either commit to this or forget about it. I'm
>
> not of the mind to forget about it. So, I told them really I need you to commit to it. If
>
> you're not, then we are going to have to talk about where you're going to work next year.
>
> (p. 83)

The Principal began right from the first day of school laying out his expectations for the

implementation of RTI. He made it clear that he was going to move forward with the approach

because it was the best thing they could do for kids. Educators from the start knew that the

Principal was taking this initiative very seriously. Another way that Principals show their

support for RTI is by attending trainings along with selected teachers. According to Shepherd

and Salembier (2011), teachers found that when Principal's attended RTI trainings, it signaled to

the teachers that RTI was important to them and that their principal was equally invested in

developing a deeper understanding of its implications for assessment and instruction.

Bean and Lillenstein (2012) also developed a list of several aspects of RTI that must be

supported by the Principal during the initial implementation. Principals must design schedules

that increases the number of personnel available to provide small group instruction. They must

also promote co-teaching of classroom teachers with special educators, reading specialist, or

English Language Learner teachers. In addition, there must be allotted time for personnel to

meet and have discussions (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Changes to the master schedule may

need to be put into place for collaboration to work effectively. Principals may also make

significant shifts to the school's everyday format as potentially reassign certain staff members

(Printy & Williams, 2015). It is part of their job to make these adjustments and properly notify

staff members so they can prepare for upcoming implementation.

Another important role that Principals take on is becoming key members of the schools'

support team (Shepherd & Salembier, 2011). They have to be prepared to get their hands dirty

and work with faculty to problem solve along with the team. Printy and Williams (2015) report

on the level of involvement that administers have in terms of student data, "No more shooting in

the dark, no waiting it out, no hiding… Because we are always looking at your data. We know

there's a difference in schools, but we're united in working together. We are all moving"

(p.189). Principals' put a high emphasis on data, and therefore spend time looking at the data

within their schools as well as across the district. Strong Principal leaders should make you feel

comfortable and show the teachers that they are willing to help them make decisions based on

data. Overall, leadership is an essential ingredient for change. Shepherd and Salembier (2011)

noted that the degree in which the Principal played a crucial role with the initial implementation,

directly correlated with the likeliness of the model to be sustained over time. Without Principal

undivided support for the RTI approach, especially during the initial implementation, the new

instructional innovation will not be able to flourish.

Bean and Lillenstein (2012) brought light to the fact that even though principals were

involved in the implementation of RTI, many principals expect literacy coaches and specialists to

manage the initiative as well as provide the principal with essential information about assessment

and instruction that is taking place in the building. Since these individuals are seen as the most

knowledgeable in terms of literacy, they are the ones who assume coordination roles within the

RTI system. Literacy specialists and coaches are perfect for taking on a more directive role

because they have a lot of expertise and information that they can share with other educators

within the building. Many principals rely heavily on literacy coaches. Bean and Lillenstein

(2012) report on one principal's reliance on the literacy coach in his building, "the literacy coach

keeps all levels rolling; she has a management position. I meet often with her, often daily…it

could be more that once a day" (p. 498). Principals use teacher leaders as a resource to make

sure that RTI is being implemented with fidelity. Shepherd and Salembier (2011) report

instances of where administrators and teacher leaders engage in databased decision making and

problem-solving. As a team they decide what changes may need to be made to make sure that all

intervention tiers are running smoothly. Teachers expressed how RTI gave them the opportunity

to work with literacy specialists as a team, they were able to ask them questions, and they were

exposed to more professional materials that could help improve their teaching practice (Bean &

Lillenstein, 2012). When literacy specialists meet with teachers throughout the building, they are

usually expected to bring one or two new ideas that teachers could directly apply into their

instructional practice. Another responsibility many literacy coaches and specialists took on was

the facilitation of several grade level meetings throughout the year. During these meetings they

were available to help teachers analyze student data, help with instruction decision making, as

well as provide helpful strategies for teachers to use with students (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012).

One key aspect of RTI is that school leadership is shared broadly. Principal's and teacher

leaders are working together toward a common goal with is, using RTI to improve instruction for

all students (Printy & Williams, 2015). All of the power and responsibility was not held purely

by the Principals or by the literacy specialists and coaches. Teachers throughout the building

were expected to step up and take on more literacy leadership roles (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012).

In order for leadership roles to truly be shared, the Principal must establish conditions where

leadership is shared and collaboration is encouraged. Teachers who Principal's saw as teacher

leaders were often chosen to attend training sessions in regards to RTI. The information that

teachers learned throughout their training, they could then take back and share with other

colleagues in their building and in particularly at their grade level (Printy & Williams, 2015).

Teachers are natural resources and should share their knowledge with their colleagues. Shepherd

and Salembier (2011) described how with the implementation of RTI, classroom teachers

discussed how they expanded their roles by making adjustments to Tier 1 instruction and

curricula. With the implementation of RTI teachers felt more liable for having a deeper

understanding of the core curriculum and working to enhance literacy approaches. Bean and

Lillentstein (2012) made the important discovery that teachers were recognizing that they could

no longer just simply identify the problem, but that they now felt responsible to help solve the

problem. In the past, many teachers would go to the literacy specialist and express that a child

had a problem, but they would not know how to fix it. Through RTI teachers have begun to feel

more comfortable with their abilities to not only discover the problem, but also be part of the

problem solving team to help repair the reading difficulty. A literacy specialist in Bean and

Lillenstein's (2012) study said the following, "the mentality has changed; teachers no longer

want me to 'fix' a student and then bring him back" (p. 496). Now it is seen as a joint

responsibility on both the literacy specialist and the students that they shared. As a group they

would discuss student strengths and needs and made instructional decisions together (Bean &

Lillenstein, 2012). It continues to go back to the importance of creating a culture of shared

leadership everyone feels the responsibility of having all students succeed.

Probably one of the biggest changes for teachers with the implementation of RTI, is the

emphasis on faculty collaboration. According to Erhen (2013), collaboration is defined as:

> Collaboration is the process of shared creation: two or more individuals with
>
> complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none had
>
> previously possessed or could have come to on their own. Collaboration creates a shared
>
> meaning about a process, a product, or an event (p. 452).

With RTI, the focus is on collaboration. Members of the faculty are continually working

together on all aspects of RTI. As Bean and Lillenstein (2012) stated, "RTI requires dynamic,

positive and productive collaboration among professionals with relevant expertise in language

and literacy" (p.493). In order to be a member of the RTI community, you must adopt the notion

that two heads are always better than one. By working with others, you can achieve the common

goal of increasing student achievement. In a school that has embraced the RTI model, there is no

way for teachers to escape collaboration because it has become a non-negotiable element of the

approach. Bean and Lillestein (2012) report:

> Classroom teachers no longer could close their doors and decide independently what and
>
> how they would teach. They were required to work collaboratively with others, not only
>
> their grade-level colleagues, but also specialized personnel. They shared responsibility
>
> for all students and used data to make instructional decisions (p. 499).

Veteran teachers might have difficulty adjusting to the amount of collaboration needed in the

RTI process. Historically speaking, teachers had the tendency to work in isolation. It will

naturally take time for educators to learn how working collaboratively can improve student

learning (Meyer & Horensein, 2015). When teachers have been working for several years, they

tend to develop a system of their own and may have trouble breaking the cycle. Once educators

are engaging in collaboration more frequently, they are then able to notice the positive changes

that take place when given the opportunity to work with others. Benedict et.al (2013) noticed the

following positive results in their study; the ability to create lessons that are planned and aligned

to the curriculum, their lessons became stronger in content, their instruction was more

appropriately tailored to students' instructional needs within the given tiers of instruction. Bean

and Lillenstein (2012) reported, "this collaboration is more systematic…we are no longer

islands…it opens up a whole new world for teachers" (p. 497). Teachers can develop better

instruction when they work together. So much more can be accomplished when educators work

as a team to set goals, solve problems, and make instructional decisions (Bean & Lillenstein,

2012).

Shepherd and Salembier (2011) wrote about some of the challenges that can be

associated with increased collaboration and expanded roles and responsibilities. One of the

challenges associated with collaboration is the need to find common planning time. All teachers

have a lot on their plate when it comes to, developing lessons, managing student behaviors,

gathering student data, and also keeping in contact with parents. Especially in elementary

schools, there is very limited planning time available for teachers. Educators tend to feel pressed

for time (2011). Even if teachers would like to collaborate with their colleagues, there time is

limited. There never seems to be enough hours in the day to complete all of the mandatory tasks

that are expected of them. Many grade level colleagues do not even have common planning

time. In order for teachers to properly collaborate, they need Principal's support to provide more

common planning times for teachers to identify and monitor the effectiveness of interventions.

Meyer and Horestein (2015) share the following encounter with a teacher in regards to

collaboration, "we talk to make a lesson better, but we don't do it as much as we'd like" (p. 390).

Teachers often believe that collaborating makes their teaching better, but they just require the

time to make it happen. Once time was made available for teachers, it was important that

teachers scheduled time to plan consistent and coordinated approaches for assessing and

instructing children (Shepherd & Salembier, 2010). It was imperative that principals structured

the school day to allow for collaboration to take place during the school day and not simply just

before and after school.

In Benedict, Park, Brownell, Lauterbach, and Kiely's (2013) lesson study, they were able

to uncover many benefits to collaboration amongst educators. As previously stated in this paper,

RTI tiered blocks have become increasingly popular with the implementation of the RTI

approach. Benedict et.al. (2013) reported that "the teachers decided they needed a way to align

instruction for students who struggled most, to ensure that concepts, skills, and strategies taught

in the core curriculum are revisited in supplemental or tiered instruction" (p. 23). The only way

in which this goal could be made possible, is by working as a team to make sure that everyone

working with students within each tier is on the same page. Printy and Williams (2015) use the

following quote to show the integration of RTI within a school once it is implemented:

> Everything is coordinated to RTI. Everyone in the building is evaluated on RTI evidence
>
> and the observation of strategies [during] walk-throughs. All of our P.D. is run by our
>
> instructional team; 75% of that is unstructured, involving teacher engagement in the
>
> principles of instruction…All our programs operate within that framework,100% of the
>
> time, where it's academically, socially, or behaviorally. (p. 193)

The quote proves that everything revolves around RTI. Therefore everyone must be working in

tandem with each other to ensure there are no gaps. It is essential that there is consistency

amongst the tiered system. All tiers must be coordinated in order for a student to be successful

within the general education reading curriculum. Without collaboration, core instruction that is

provided within Tier 1 may be disconnected from the supplementary reading instruction that is

provided in Tiers 2 and 3 (Benedict et. al., 2013). Teachers working in RTI teams need to make

sure that they are on the same page and constantly communicating about the instruction that they

are providing within the intervention tiers. For students who are struggling or have a learning

disability, disconnect in instruction can result in heightened confusion, fragmented knowledge,

and a loss in practice opportunities (Benedict et al., 2013). All students within a tiered system,

especially those at risk for academic failure or students with a learning disability, would benefit

from supplemental instruction that is aligned with Tier 1 curriculum. With teachers working

together, they can develop instruction that can extend and deepen the students' understanding

and mastery of skills that were introduced in the general education classroom (Benedict et al.,

2013).

Teacher Preparation through Professional Development

A common theme all throughout the recent literature on Response to Intervention is the

need for Professional Development. Cheeseman and Swerling (2012) believe that professional

development is crucial if a district expects teachers to implement RTI in reading effectively. As

educators' roles and responsibilities increase through the RTI initiative, they are also required to

become more knowledgeable about several areas of literacy. As discussed in the last theme,

teachers need to be able to problem-solve independently or along with grade level teacher

colleagues in Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3. Albritton and Truscott (2014) argue that the majority of

teachers do not naturally have the prerequisite knowledge and skills to do so which can be

problematic. It is hard to say if teachers have received enough instruction in problem-solving

methods through pre-service or in-service training. Carreker and Joshi (2010) also reported that

although evidence supports RTI as a means to improve student achievement, this goal is

predicated on the fact that there are highly qualified teachers who can facilitate research-based

literacy instruction that is differentiated to meet the needs of all students in a classroom full of

diverse needs. In reality, studies have shown that teachers do not always possess the sufficient

knowledge of literacy to teach reading and spelling appropriately (Carreker & Joshi, 2010).

Without the development of this knowledge, the RTI model is doomed to fail. Carreker and

Joshi (2010) continue by stating "…general educators do not currently have the background

knowledge or skills needed to implement an RTI model even in beginning reading" (p.945).

Problem solving, data-based decision making, and implementing scientific based assessments

and strategies are imperative in the RTI system. Courses teachers completed in college were

often broad in nature and did not provide enough preparation in linking assessment data to

instructional practices. Their courses also lacked instruction on how to adapt general data-based

practices to the content that is required in the state curriculum (Albritton & Truscott, 2014).

Because of the lack of preparation, teachers lacked the confidence to fulfill their educational

practices with fidelity.

Prior to the implementation of RTI, teachers should begin receiving professional

development. In order for the initiative to be effective, educators must develop a deep

understanding and belief in the RTI process (Tucker & Don Jones, 2010). Educators must be

taught about the RTI initiative. It is not something that administrators can assume that they

know. In Shepherd and Salembier's (2011) study, a professional development RTI course was

offered to the faculty and staff. The members of the study reported that the course was a critical

component if their initial implementation of RTI in their school. It provided the faculty and staff

with a baseline of knowledge that would be vital for them to know in order for them to

participate in the RTI process. It gave them a common language to start the year with. Shepherd

and Salembier (2011) described the content of the course as a promotion of greater

understanding of the RTI initiative and helped teachers in developing their collaborative skills.

In addition, there was also a focus on literacy intervention, universal screening, progressing

monitoring, and how to apply the technology needed to collect data. Teachers were even able to

request ongoing professional development if they felt that they needed it (Shepherd & Salembier,

2011). Because of this professional development provided to them prior to the start of RTI,

educators could enter the school year with more ease and confidence. Tucker and Don Jones

(2010) report that providing teachers and faculty with appropriate training will build confidence

in their ability to use RTI with their students. Without the appropriate professional development, the execution of an RTI program would be impossible.

It is clear that teachers will need to learn new skills if they intend to accelerate student learning (Meyer & Horenstein, 2015). There are some districts that might be nervous to take on the idea of implementing an RTI program because they know the resources and professional development that would need to come along with it. Albrittton and Truscott (2014) share in their article the following quote;

> The process of implementing and sustaining an RTI model is daunting because of the requirement that educators effectively acquire new skills, effectively use data-based decision making to inform intervention, and effectively master and adapt evidence-based interventions to their unique school setting. (p. 45)

It is a lot for a school district to take on, but it is worth it if it is the best approach to help kids succeed. Meyer and Horenstein (2015) have laid out a list of several practices that teachers require more training in. Teachers must begin by receiving further training in differentiating and scaffolding within core instruction to help accelerate student learning. Research shows that core instruction must be high quality in order for a multi-tiered structure of RTI to work. Another aspect of RTI teachers must be trained is how to analyze data. Teachers need to be able to interpret data so that they can determine how to share students across the grade level during an RTI block, as well as to group students for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. The third important training that teachers need is in being able to identify research-based interventions that can be used to target a specific student's needs (Meyer & Horenstein, 2015). Teachers must continue to add strategies to their instructional took box in order to combat students' academic demands. Bean and Lillenstein (2012) argued that teachers will also require professional development on

the knowledge of language and literacy, learning how to administer and interpret assessment measures, as well as understanding how cultural and linguistic differences influences student learning. It is evident, that because of the amount of training needed for RTI to be successful, ongoing P.D. is a definite must. These skills will have to be adopted by teacher's overtime and cannot be taught in a one day workshop. For teachers that participated in continuous professional development gained confidence in their ability to collect data, analyze, and make decisions (Meyer & Horenstein, 2015). Without adequate professional development, teachers do not feel comfortable with implementing strategies with fidelity. All of the teachers that participated in Albritton and Truscott's (2014) study felt more motivated to acquire additional skills and knowledge needed to implement data-driven instruction after the start of receiving professional development to prepare for RTI. After the P.D. had ended, all participants reported an increase in their confidence to link assessment data to their instructional practices.

In White, Polly, and Audette's (2012) research study, they noted that some schools had certain members of their school personnel trained in the state's problem solving model and on other RTI practices. Usually the members chosen to attend the training were educators that played key roles in the implementation of RTI such as teacher leaders, specialists, and administrators (White et al., 2012). This team of individuals could then return to the school and provide similar training to the remainder of the staff. One of the literacy coaches in Bean and Lillenstein's (2012) study reported, "because of the professional development they had received, they were more knowledgeable about the literacy information that they provided to teachers" (p.494). Her confidence had grown in her ability to provide high quality instruction due to her participation in the professional development. The literacy coach continued to say that she saw herself as "true scientist-practitioner, teachers now know 'why' they are doing what they are

doing…bringing the science to practice had been another part of my expanded role and function"

(p. 494). As a whole, because of further professional development, the school is much better off

and more prepared to meet the needs of all learners within the building.

Carreker and Joshi (2010) shared what they felt were the most important elements for

creating an effective professional development. They believed that a P.D. must have the

following three things; content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective

participation. When professional developments focus of content, it allows for participants to

complete activities that focus on subject matter and how the students will be learning that content

(Carreker & Joshi, 2010). It allows for teachers to be able to apply what they are learning in the

professional development to future lessons. Carreker and Joshi (2010) also believe that

Professional development should always have some form of active learning. Teachers can use

this time to engage with materials and methods that allow them to provide formative and

summative feedback, analyze student work, and implement their results of the analysis into their

teaching practices. It often helps to organize the teachers into groups such as grade level teams.

Then teachers can pick their own student or group of students to conduct a case study on.

Working in specific groups allows participants to learn as well as demonstrate and apply the

targeted problem-solving skills to and actual student in their classrooms (Carreker & Joshi,

2010). Facilitators of professional development should always be looking for new ways to teach

new material to teachers as well as having them apply it to a group of students that they can

realistically use it will.

Many teachers in Bean and Lillenstein's (2012) study admitted to gaining knowledge of

literacy instruction through the professional development that they received at their schools

rather than from any teacher preparation or graduate program. The study shows the importance

of professional development in the careers of teachers. Schools must continue to provide

educators with effective professional development with a focus on student learning, emphasis on

understanding the content literacy, and how to participate in ongoing collaboration (Bean &

Lillenstein, 2012). If administrators expect for student learning to progress, they must be

committed to providing teachers with professional development. Kuo (2014) discussed a

different way in which teachers could participate in literacy training. Because of the increased

focus on technology in today's society, online courses are becoming increasingly more popular.

Online learning is a potential way for teachers to learn about knowledge and skills, mobbing

beyond the boundaries of time and space (Kuo, 2014). For many busy teachers that may have to

leave at the end of the school day to attend to their families, might like the idea and flexibility

that online learning provides. Kuo (2014) conducted a study in which a group of participants

took the online course over a period of time. Although each of the participants had different

background knowledge of RTI prior to taking the online modules, all of the teachers in the study

improved their knowledge on each of the themes taught in the modules. Moving forward, some

principals may decide that online learning might meet the needs of their staff more adequately.

Mellard, McKnight, and Jordan (2010) believe that professional development in regards

to RTI topics is important for high fidelity implementation. By providing staff professional

development, it will bring about many benefits for the RTI program rather than unintended

consequences that may arise due to an under educated staff.

Method

Context

The research being conducted for this study took place in a public middle school in

upstate New York.   According to the New York State (NYS) School Report Card enrollment

data from 2014-2015, a total of 384 students attend the middle school. The enrollment by gender

is approximately 47% male and 53% female. The student population is approximately 67%

White, 14% black or African American, 12% Hispanic or Latino, 3% Asian or Native

Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and 4% Multiracial. In addition, NYS School Report Card

presents that 10% of students are considered Students with Disabilities, 2% are listed as English

Language Learners, and 33% are Economically Disadvantaged Students.

The students that were studies during the active observations were all members of the

meeting standards RTI group. There are a total of 21 students in the class. The students come

from three different CORE teachers. Seventy one percent of the students are boys and 27% of

students are girls. Two out of 21 students must be progressed monitored for fluency on a weekly

basis. The majority of the needs addressed in the meeting standards RTI block is tied to

comprehension, fluency, and short constructed responses tied to literature.

Participants

I interviewed a variety of educators from my school to gain their perspectives on RTI and

the instruction that is taking place both during core instruction and in the RTI blocks. I

interviewed four teachers from my fourth grade team, an ELA interventionist teacher, as well as

our district coordinator for Response to Intervention.

Shannon (a pseudonym) is white female and is a current fourth grade teacher at Rutgers

Middle School. Shannon has been working in the district for eight years. Her first year of

teaching was performed in sixth grade, and she has spent the remainder of her teaching years in

fourth grade. During the RTI block, Shannon is responsible for working with the approaching

standards group. Her teaching certifications are in childhood education birth through sixth

grade, and special education birth through sixth grade.

Angela (a pseudonym) is a white female also currently working as a fourth grade teacher at Rutgers Middle School. Angela has been teaching in the school district for 26 years. She has taught in first, third, and fourth grade general education classrooms. Within the RTI block, she is responsible for providing instruction to the meeting standard students. Angela's certifications are in childhood education birth through sixth grade.

Diane (a pseudonym) is a white female who has been working at Rutgers Middle School for eight years. She has been in the teaching profession for a total of 10 years. Diane is currently a fourth grade teacher at the middle school. Prior to teaching fourth grade, she had taught fifth and sixth grade. Her role in the RTI block is to instruct the exceeding standard students. She holds certifications in childhood education birth through sixth grade and special education birth through sixth grade. In addition, she received a master's degree as a curriculum specialist.

Katie (a pseudonym) is a white female working as a fourth grade teacher in Rutgers Middle School. She is a new teacher to the district, and is in her second year of teaching. Katie is responsible for teaching the exceeding students during the RTI block. Her certifications are in Childhood Education birth through sixth grade as well as in Literacy for grades birth through six.

Deborah (a pseudonym) is a white female that functions as an ELA interventionist teacher. She has 12 years of teaching experience, and has been working in the district for ten years. She has taught second, fourth, and sixth grade. Deborah currently provides ELA intervention services for students in grades four, five, six. During the RTI block, she works with struggling readers who present intensive instruction. Deborah has certifications in childhood education pre-K through sixth as well as in School Building Leader and School District Leader.

Joelle (a pseudonym) is a white female that serves as the districts RTI coordinator which is a teacher on special assignment position (T.O.S.A.). She has been working in the district for a total of 11 years. Prior to her experience in the current district, she worked at BOCES for 12 years in the diagnostic and prescriptive unit. Joelle received her undergraduate degree from SUNY Binghamton in literature and biology. She attended the University of Rochester for graduate school to pursue a master's of science and education with a specific focus on developmental disabilities. She received a certification in special education kindergarten through twelfth grade. Throughout her years in the career of education, she has received a Wilson reading program certification, has written for two publications, and teachers graduate courses at a local college. Currently, Joelle is taking courses towards earning her administration certification.

For this action research study, I focused on four particular students in more depth from the class of 22 meeting standard students that I teach during the RTI block. With these four particular students, I will be conducting interviews and learning more about their perceptions of the RTI process. In addition, I will be looking at their classwork and comparing the quality of their work in the fall, to the quality of their work in the winter. All of the students are a part of the general education population. All of the students are meeting grade level in most ELA standards. The four students differ in background, race, and gender.

Rob (a pseudonym) is a white, 10-year-old male student in the fourth grade. He is a very social child. He enjoys talking and interacting both with his peers as well as adults. Rob enjoys being active whenever he can. He enjoys being outside and loves to play basketball, baseball, and football. Rob has a difficult time engaging in reading. When he does read, he likes to read books about sports or athletes. Rob enjoys learning but does not always give his best effort.

Tim (a pseudonym) is a white, 10-year-old male student. He is a sweet boy who wants to please his teachers. Tim enjoys working on assignments independently rather than with a partner or a group. He lacks interest in reading and has a hard time picking out books that are a good fit for him. In the classroom, he struggles to stay on task. He usually requires teacher redirection in order for him to regain focus on his assignments. He has been diagnosed with ADHD and takes medication daily. Tim is very active and enjoys playing games outside. He plays several sports such as hockey and football. Tim is also very interested in music and musical instruments.

Valerie (a pseudonym) is a Hispanic, 10-year-old female in the fourth grade. She speaks three languages; English, Spanish, and Italian. Valerie is an English Language Learner. She is very sweet and friendly to peers and adults. Valerie is very smart and can learn new concepts quickly. She is very active and likes to draw and dance. Valerie is also interested in music and musical instruments.

Rebecca (a pseudonym) is a white, 10-year-old female who is in the fourth grade. In addition to speaking English, Rebecca is also fluent in Arabic. Arabic is the language most frequently spoken in the home. Rebecca is very outgoing and has a very loving personality. She is friendly to her peers and loves to please adults and teachers. She is always an active participator in all subject areas. Rebecca comes from a big extended family, and enjoys spending her free time playing with her cousins.

Researcher Stance

I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College and a fourth grade teacher in upstate New York. I am working toward a Master's of Science in Literacy Education for birth through sixth grade. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Childhood Education and Special Education, which I earned from the State University of New York at Geneseo. My current New York State

teaching certification is in Childhood Education first through sixth grade and in Special

Education. As a researcher for this study, I was an active participant observer. As defined by

Mills (2014), a participant observer is, "a genuine participant in the activity being studied"

(p.84). I observed and recorded the outcomes of my own teaching while actively engaging in

teaching literacy concepts and strategies (Mills, 2014). The students that I observed and

interviewed in the process are students that I work with for 40 minutes on four of the days in our

six day letter cycles. The majority of the students I have been working with since October, and

some of them are in my regular classroom and therefore I have been working with them every

school day since the beginning of the year. The observations will come naturally for both me as

the observer, as well as the students, because they are used to my teaching style and my

classroom expectations. For my action research project, I will be observing the students, more

closely and taking notes, before, during, and after each of the three lessons. These students will

also feel comfortable answer questions and having discussions with me during interviews

because they work with me on a frequent basis.

Method

Throughout this action research study, I only collected forms of qualitative data to

determine the impact of the RTI model on student performance. I was an active participant in

observing students in my meeting standards RTI group. I observed these students on three

separate occasions. I observed students for 40 minutes for each observation. Each observation

session there was instruction and independent application of three different strategies. Each

strategy was designed to address three different areas of literacy.

The first strategy that I taught was to assist students in practicing fluent reading. I taught

students the Super Hero Fluency strategy. This strategy focuses on the main characteristics a

reader must have in order to be a fluent reader which are. The fluency strategy focuses on the

following areas; accuracy, expression, punctuation, pace, and comprehension. I started by

teaching a mini-lesson on the characteristics of a fluent reader. Next I provided students with a

poem, and remind the student how to scoop words into phrases on their poem using a pencil.

Using a timer, students then practice reading the phrases with a partner while timing one another

and recording their times. For the second read of the poem, students continued to read in the

scooped phrases, but now began adding expression to their voice. On students' third encounter

with the text, students read each stanza of the poem and searched for meaning within the poem.

Students looked for tricky words and attempted to use context clues to determine the unknown

meaning. They underlined, circled, and marked up the text and looked for the message the

author was trying to convey in the poem. The final read of the text required the students to bring

together all the characteristics of fluent reading together, and preform the poem for their peers.

The second strategy taught assisted students with summarizing a fiction text to strengthen

their comprehension. The strategy used to help with summarization is a Somebody, Wanted,

But, So, Then, (SBWBST) graphic organizer. The organizer was aligned to a plot diagram so

students could see the correlation between the story elements as well as the order in which events

occur. I began by teaching a mini-lesson using the SBWBST organizer with a short fictional

story. After, using the same organizer, students completed a summary based on the story they

have been reading over the course of a week during their RTI block.

The third strategy that was taught helped students organize their writing when responding

to short constructed response questions. The R.A.D.D. strategy reminds students to start by

restating the question, answer the question, and then provide two text details to support your

answer. Students began by participating in a whole group mini-lesson where the teacher

modeled how to write a high quality response using the R.A.D.D. strategy. After the conclusion

of the mini-lesson, students independently completed a short constructed response using the

R.A.D.D. strategy to organize their work and provide a complete response supported by text

evidence.

Quality and Credibility of Research

Since this collection of data in this action research project is qualitative, it is important

for me to take the necessary steps to make sure that I am preforming my research in a

trustworthy manner. Mills (2014) states the importance of addressing the following

characteristics as identified by Guba (1981) to ensure a study is trustworthy: credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The credibility of a study as stated in Mills (2014), is "the researcher's ability to take into

account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not

easily explained" (p. 115). There are several ways that credibility will be met in by study. First,

as a second year teacher in the school district, I am very familiar with the setting, the classrooms,

faculty, and the students. My prolonged participation at the study site allowed me to test biases

and overcome distortions that are often created with the presence of a research who is unfamiliar

with the setting (Guba, 1981). Another way I ensured creditability is to use triangulation of my

data collection. Through, observations, interviews, and student artifacts, I cross-checked my

data to gather accurate information (Mills, 2014).

The second characteristic addressed in this study is transferability. Mills (2014)

describes transferability as a qualitative researchers' belief that the study is bound to a specific

context and setting and therefore the goal is not to develop statements that can be generalized to

other groups of people. In order to make sure I practiced transferability, I made sure to record

detailed and descriptive data and to develop detailed description of the context in which the data

is being collected. Having descriptive data allows researchers to identify with the setting and be

able to picture the setting in which the action research is being performed.

The next important element to ensure trustworthiness of research is dependability. As

cited by Mills (2014), dependability refers to the stability of the data being collected during

action research. One way for dependability to be addressed, is by overlapping data collection

methods. The collection of student work, student interviews, and lesson observations helped

with having a complete understanding of the data. I also took detailed notes during all aspects of

data collection. By creating an audit trail, a critical colleague double checked my work to see if

there are any key understandings that I missed.

The last criterion of creditable research is confirmability. Mills (2014) cites this as "the

neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected" (p.116). Research can only be

confirmable when a researcher's beliefs and opinions are removed from the collection of data

and therefore is not influential to the results of the data that was collected. My study practiced

triangulation through the use of a variety of data sources. I used the different data methods to

compare and cross-check the information that was gathered to ensure trustworthiness of the

research.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants

Prior to beginning to collect data for this study, it was important to properly inform and

obtain proper permission from those individuals who will be participating in the study. I first

contacted the parents of the four students whom I would be interviewing and collecting student

work from if they would be willing to allow their child to participate in the study. If the parent

gave assent over the phone, then I provided them with a parent permission form that informed

them of the students' involvement in the study and asked for their signature of approval. I also

asked students if they would be interested in participating in the study. Since all children are in

the fourth grade, they must complete and sign a written assent form in order for them to

participate in the study. All four of the fourth grade teachers, ELA interventionist teacher, and

RTI coordinator, were informed of the study and completed written consent forms allowing their

participation in the study. All parents and participates were notified that pseudonyms were used

to protect identities and ensure confidentially and anonymity.

Data Collection

For this action research study, I collected data in a variety of ways. Using overlapping

methods of data helped to ensure triangulation of the data. The first form of data collection that I

used was observation field notes. During the three active participant observations, I took notes

while circulating the classroom during independent work periods that took place during the

lesson. After the observations were complete, I continued to reflect on the lesson and add on to

my notes immediately following the period of instruction.

The second form of data I used was student interviews. I briefly interviewed students

after each of the three observations. We discussed what went well during the lesson as well as

what may have been challenging for them. This conversation with students allowed me to cross

check my interview results along with the field notes I obtained from the observations. I also

conducted additional interviews with the children where they expressed their beliefs and

perspectives in regards to the RTI process.

Not only did I conduct interviews with students participating in the meeting standards

RTI group, but I also gave a questionnaire to four fourth grade teachers, the AIS interventionist

teacher, as well as the coordinator of RTI for the building. I emailed these educators a list of

questions for them to respond to in writing in regards to the RTI model. The interview gave

them the opportunity to reflect on the RTI model and share what they believe the strengths and

challenges of the RTI model may be.

Another form of data that I reviewed in this process was student work. I studied student

work collected from lessons being observed. The student work provided me with a clear picture

of how the students responded to the mini-lesson and if they were able to apply the strategies to

independent application. I will also be comparing student work from the fall to the work that

they are producing in the winter.

The last form of data collection was the students AIMSweb median benchmark scores

from the fall and compare it to the median fluency score they received in the winter. These

scores can also be compared with the districts cut point scores for students reading at their grade

level.

Data Analysis

All data collected was analyzed in an attempt to answer the following research question:

How does the RTI model affect literacy instruction for all students? The data collected from this

action research project included student interviews, field notes, teacher questionnaire, and

student work samples. To begin the data analysis process, I first read through all of the field

notes that I had taken while observing students engaging in strategies being taught as well as

notes taken in regards to school environment and materials. During a second read of the notes I

search specifically for any notes that correlated with my research question. After, I re-wrote the

important notes I found on a separate piece of paper so that I could connect what I found in

further forms of data to the notes I already had. Next, I printed out a large copy of the teacher

questionnaire and read through the teachers responses several times. I looked for commonalities

that I could find from teacher to teacher and how it connected to the important ideas I had pulled

from the field notes. Thirdly, I read through each of the individual student interview. Each

individual interview was coded and then codes were compared across interviews with all four of

the students. All important information found from the interviews was added to a separate sheet

of paper.   Lastly I reviewed student work samples. All student work samples were taken from

students who are at about the same achievement level. Although the work was not scored, I was

able to use it as linking piece of evidence to support that other data that was collected. After all

of the data forms were reviewed, I placed all of the separate sheets of important information

taken from the data types on a table and began sorting the information based on similarities and

differences until three clear themes were revealed from the data.

Findings and Discussion

Rutgers Middle School (a pseudonym) has undergone many changes since the

implementation of ELA RTI blocks over the course of the school year. The purpose of this study

was to find out how the RTI model has affected literacy instruction for all students. The

qualitative data presented in this section is based on three reoccurring themes found in regards to

the RTI model. The themes were developed by analyzing observations, student responses to

interview questions and student work, as well as a teacher questionnaire responses. The themes

include: the use of data analysis to support instructional decision making, increase in

collaboration amongst staff and students, and the availability of resources.

Data Analysis to Support Instructional Decision Making Tailored to Student Need

Since the implementation of RTI in Rutgers Middle School, the data points to an

emphasis on data analysis to guide instructional decision making. The school uses many

different forms of student data to aid in making instructional decisions. Some of these forms of

data are: AIMsweb benchmarking scores, ELA progress assessments, unit assessments, weekly

quizzes, and student work collected in CORE classroom as well as RTI block (Field Notes,

2016). Each teacher organizes this data into an Excel spreadsheet which is stored on the districts

share drive (Field Notes, 2016). The Excel spreadsheets allows for all teachers working with the

student to access the data at any point in time.

Emphasis on data analysis is evident in teacher responses to the questionnaire, the student

interview, student work, and field notes. In several of the questions answered by participating

teachers, their responses discussed the use of data analysis. When teachers were asked about

how their roles have changed since the implementation of RTI, four out of seven teachers

reported data analysis to be a new role. Diane (a pseudonym), 4th grade teacher, stated,

"…discuss patterns/trends we are seeing. We are then able to make instructional decisions that

best fit the needs of the students" (Questionnaire, 2016). In order for RTI to run smoothly,

teachers need to be able to easily interpret data. Without knowledge of how to analyze the data

they are required to collect, there will be a break down within the RTI model. There must be data

to support the need for a skill to be taught. If the data supports that a skill has been mastered,

then teachers can move on and focus on skills that students are continuing to struggle with.

Shepherd and Salembier (2010) refer to Response to Intervention as "Response to Instruction."

In this case, teachers are looking at the data, and responding with appropriate instruction to meet

the students' needs. Deborah (a pseudonym), the intervention teacher, describes some of her

responsibilities in the following quote, "This includes running intervention reviews 3 times a

year and making instructional decisions/ changes on a weekly basis" (Questionnaire, 2016).

According to Deborah's quote, data based decision making is on-going. Teachers are continuing

to assess students in a variety of formats and using the data to mold their instruction to fit the

needs of the students that they are working with. Rutgers Middle School has ELA intervention

reviews in the fall, winter, and spring to collaboratively discuss student data (Field Notes, 2016).

During this meeting, the team analyzes the data to develop next steps for approaching standard

students and decide what next steps should be in order to achieve student improvement (Field

Notes, 2016). Joelle (a pseudonym), the RTI district coordinator, also reported new roles and

responsibilities tied to data analysis. She writes, "Gathering district level data and providing data

review and norming of data for teacher use" (Questionnaire, 2016). Joelle's quote represents the

important steps that need to be taken in terms of data analysis at a broader level. Being able to

compare data points from across the district can also help teachers with planning unit instruction.

Joelle's role in norming data connects to Mellard's (2009) statement that each district must

create a criteria for movement among the tiers. Since Joelle is responsible for RTI at broader

level, she must collect data from all grade levels and use it to support future changes to the RTI

program. She also must design norms for the data so that teachers can have a better idea of how

to compare students' test achievement to other students in the district (Questionnaire, 2016).

With the implementation of the RTI model, teachers at Rutgers Middles School's data collection

has become more specific and organized therefore allowing them to make instructional decisions

based on the student need presented in the data.

When reviewing the winter AIMsweb fluency benchmark scores, it was discovered that

the 4th grade student Rebecca, was the only student in the class who did not make growth from

the fall to the winter (Field Notes, 2016). Rebecca participates in the meeting standard RTI

block. During the winter ELA review meeting, grade level colleagues found other students

within the meeting standard group were either below the fluency cut point or barely on target. A

fluency need presented itself, so the meeting standard teacher implemented the Super Hero

Fluency strategy into her RTI instruction (Field Notes, 2016). Similar to Meyer and

Horenstein's (2015) argument that the implementation of RTI requires significant and complex

decision making across many levels and with a variety of colleagues. The fluency strategy is

used every day in the meeting standards RTI group for the first ten minutes of the 40 minute

block. On the first day of the strategy, the students are given a poem and a partner to work with.

Prior to working with the poem, the teacher gave each of the students a fluent reader checklist.

The teacher reviewed the checklist which explained the five areas of fluency: accuracy,

expression, punctuation, pace, and comprehension. It was explained the students that in order to

be a fluent reader, you must address all of these four categories (Field Notes, 2016).

On the first day working with the poem, the students use their pencil to scoop the poem

into appropriate phrases. After students are finished scooping, they practice reading the poem in

three to four word phrases and pausing for punctuation (Field Notes, 2016).
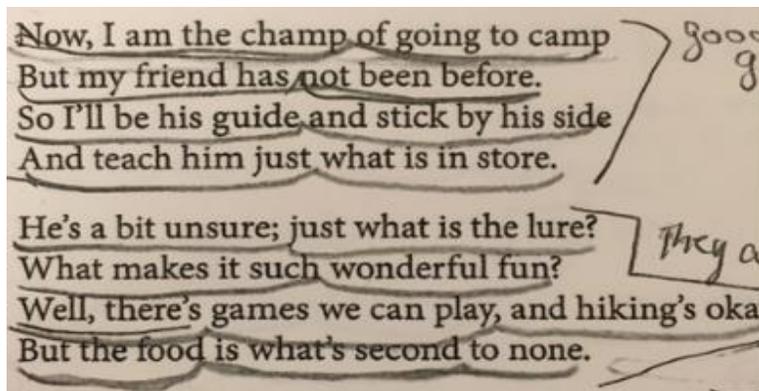
Figure 1. Student work sample from day one of Super Hero Fluency strategy where students

scoop the poem into phrases.

Rebecca scooped both of these stanzas into three to four word phrases. According to the work

sample, she did not account for all punctuation. By analyzing the work sample, the teacher could

review with the student that when we read we must account for punctuation. In line one of the

work sample, her first scoop should have stopped right after the word 'now,' in order to account

for the pausing that occurs after a comma. When reading this passage aloud to her partner, she

did not pause for punctuation when reading that line. It was clear that Rebecca did not have a

clear understanding of what her reading should sound like when she comes to a comma in a text.

The teacher then redirected her to go back and check for punctuation and fix her scoops on those

lines (Field Notes, 2016). After making these corrections, Rebecca was able to successfully

pause for punctuation when reading the poem aloud to her partner (Field Notes, 2016). When

teachers are able to identify areas of difficulty on the spot during lessons, students are able to

make the changes and continue to be successful when using the strategy in the future. During

Rebecca's interview about RTI, when asked if she believed RTI made her a better reader, her

response was, "Yes, by scooping words it doesn't make me skip words" (Student Interview,

2016). Rebecca is able to directly see the benefits of RTI and understands that the strategies

taught to her during RTI correlates with her individual needs. In another interview question, she

was asked if she finds RTI to be helpful. She responds with, "Yes, because we get to practice

our fluency and it helps students" (Student Interview, 2016). Rebecca is self-aware that fluency

is an individual area of need for her. She feels that she is becoming a more fluent reader because

she is given time in the RTI block to practice her fluency and is instructed on strategies to help

her read more fluently.

On the second day working with the poem, students focused on adding expression to their

voices. Students were expected to continue reading in phrases while determining the appropriate

places that their voices should go up and down. The teacher specifically observed Tim and Rob

on this day (Field Notes, 2016). As soon as the teacher began working with the students, it was

evident that Tim's reading was not as smooth as Rob's since he had missed the first day of

scooping the poem. Tim's paper had no scoops on it, and his first read through was very slow

with several miscues (Field Notes, 2016). Clearly, without having the exposure to the poem the day before and the opportunity to scoop the poem into phrases had an impact on Tim's ability to read the poem more fluently and accurately. Since Rob had re-read the poem several times, he was already reading the poem in three to four word phrases. He was able to focus on experimenting with his voice and determining what parts of the text to make his voice go up and what areas he should make his voice go down (Field Notes, 2016). When Rob was asked in his interview if he found RTI to be helpful, he stated, "Yes, it helps me with my reading. Super scooping, sideline notes, and expressions. Super scooping helps me know what word I need to say before another word. It makes sure that I don't skip any words" (Student Interview, 2016). The exposure to the fluency strategy during RTI can be used throughout all areas of the students' day. It is a strategy that cuts across all content areas and can be applied to any form of text. Rob is making the connection that in order to be a good reader, you must read accurately, with expression, and have the ability to comprehend what you read.

The third day of the Superhero Fluency strategy involves an emphasis on comprehension. Students re-read the poem with the goal of looking for the meaning that is attached to the poem. Students show their understanding of the poem through their recording of sideline notes (Field Notes, 2016).
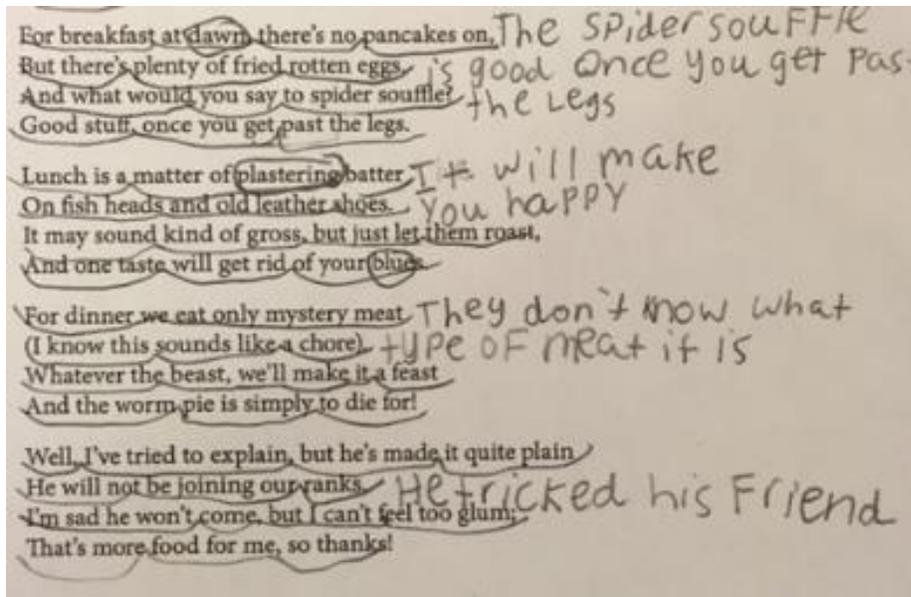
For breakfast at dawn there's no pancakes on, The Spider souffle
But there's plenty of fried rotten eggs, 's good once you get past
And what would you say to spider souffle? the Legs
Good stuff, once you get past the legs.

Lunch is a matter of plastering batter It will make
On fish heads and old leather shoes. You haPPY
It may sound kind of gross, but just let them roast,
And one taste will get rid of your blues.

For dinner we eat only mystery meat They don't know what
(I know this sounds like a chore) tyPe of meat it is
Whatever the beast, we'll make it a feast
And the worm pie is simply to die for!

Well, I've tried to explain, but he's made it quite plain
He will not be joining our ranks. He tricked his Friend
I'm sad he won't come, but I can't feel too glum,
That's more food for me, so thanks!

Figure 2. Student work sample from the third day of the Super Hero Fluency strategy with the focus on comprehension.

The above work sample was collected from Rob after he had finished taking sideline notes. His sideline notes indicate that he tried to pull out at least on piece of key information from each stanza that would help him have a better understanding of the poem. Some of his sideline notes were re-written portions of the text, while others were inferences that he had made while reading. For example, next to the line, 'For dinner we eat only mystery meat,' Rob writes, "They don't know what type of meat it is" (Student Work Sample, 2016). Rob is able to use context clues to determine and unknown word or phrase. Rob made and inference in regards to the phrase "mystery meat." The student work sample also shows evidence of Rob circling ticky vocabulary words that he found to be essential to know in order to have an understanding of the poem (Student Work Sample & Field Notes, 2016). Rob took what he learned from previous vocabulary mini lessons during RTI and applied the strategies to help him comprehend the poem. This particular strategy was choosen based on the need for fluency practice that presented itself during the ELA winter data review (Field Notes, 2016). If all students in the meeting standard

RTI group were reading at or above the desired district norm cutpoint for AIMswebb, then there wouldn't be a need to implement additional fluency strategies during the RTI block.

When reviewing the teacher questionnaire responses, many teachers commented on how data anaylsis has not only helped with instructional decision making for their RTI block instruction, but also for their CORE ELA instruction. When asked how the implementation of RTI has impacted her CORE instruction, Shannon responded with the following quote:

> I believe that the implementationof R.T.I. has impacted my CORE instruction by allowing me to better assess, address, and monitor the individual needs of my students. Through constant progress monitoring, I am able to regroup my students daily based on their immediate needs as well as strengths. I feel that my small group instruction is more targeted compared to past years. (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016)

Since the implemenation of RTI, teachers are continually assessing and evaluating student needs, they are able to better develop instruction that is tailored to what each individual child needs. Another fourth grade teacher, Katie, responded to the same questions by stating, "The implementation of RTI has impacted my CORE instruction by giving me more insight to all of my students needs" (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016). Teachers now have a better understanding of all students in their class because of the emphasis on data analysis. Since they have easy access to not only the data that they collected on students, but also the data that has been collected in various RTI groups, teachers are now using that information to develop stronger CORE instruction.

The students are now more aware of how the instruction they are receiving is based on their individual strengths and difficulties. Similar to this, Rob stated in his interview, "We get to learn different things at different moments" (Student Interview, 2016). The quote proves that

students are aware that the learning they are involved in, is tailored to their needs. Teachers

create an environment in which students feel comfortable knowing that it is okay to have areas

that they need to work on. Teachers openly talk to students about the specific areas of need that

they will be focusing on during RTI. Not all children in fourth grade are necessarily learning all

of the same skills at the same time. Each student is receiving the instruction that they need in

order to be successful. As Mellard (2009) states that all changes to instruction are based on the

instruction focus and the proper intensity the child needs during any given time. Based on

assessment data, teachers can mold instruction to match students learning gaps.

Increase in Collaboration Amongst Staff

The teachers questioned in this study not only reported data analysis as a new role they

were required to take on, but also the increase in collaboration with different members of the

school and the community. In the past, teachers had a tendency to work in isolation (Meyer &

Horenstein, 2015). With the implementation of RTI, collaboration has become unavoidable. In

this study,Diane (a pseudonym), a 4th grade teacher, wrote the following in regards to the new

roles she has had to take on since the implementation of RTI; "While it adds another layer of

planning, it gives more time to collaborate with colleagues and discuss patterns/trends we are

seeing." (Teacher Questionairre, 2016). Teachers are given more opportunities to collaborate

with others members of the school community to try and interpret the data more accurately. With

the use of RTI blocks, teachers are now sharing their CORE students with other members of their

4th grade team, intervention teachers, and with Teacher Assistants that also provide istruction.

Student success is no longer tied to the instruction of one teacher, but rather several individuals

that cohesively work together to provide high-quality instruction (Field Notes, 2016). Since

students are shared within the school community, that means that the responsibility of student

progress does not fall on one particular teacher. Instead, responsibility is shared amongst all individuals working with the child. Similarly, Erhen (2013) states, "Collaboration creates a shared meaning about a process, a product, or event" (p. 452). Teachers are sharing students and therefore must share the goal of student acievement. Katie (4th grade teacher) wrote, "collaboration has impacted my teaching by having more support from my RTI team. I can problem solve with my team when looking at what my students need to be successful" (Teacher Questionnaire, 2014). Katie's quote indicates that collaboration helps to make instruction stronger due to team problem solving. Bean and Lillenstein (2012) believe that in order for RTI to run smoothly, there must be positive and productive collaboration with professionals across the district. Collaboration is used to discuss how all students can be supported. As a team, they develop a plan that will push students of all levels to continue to improve and move towards mastery of skills. In the questionnaire, all 4th grade teachers provided insight as to what distict and school individuals they collaborated with as well as what the collaboration looked like. The following quote is Katie's explanation of what collaboration as a 4th grade teacher:

> Collaboration with our RTI team takes place about once a week. During this time, we discuss the progress of our students. We discuss adjusting groups during this time if students are ready to move on to a different group based on progress. We also discuss 'next steps' based on the data of our students. During this time, we discuss and share strategies. (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016)

The majority of the collaboration taking place is in regards to data analysis, problem solving, and reviewing student progress. Another 4th grade teacher, Diane, lists the following people within the district that she has found herself collaborating with: "Team members, administrators, and intervention specialists" (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016). It is important to have the opportunity

to work with a variety of people across the district in addition to teachers working at your grade

level. Diane did not list the RTI coordinator as someone in which she spends time collaborating

with. Shannon, a 4th grade teacher, reported the following, "I work closely with the AIS teacher

to plan instruction and collaboratively analyze data and discuss specific student's needs as well

as next steps" (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016). Shannon teaches the approaching students during

the RTI block and therefore plans and creates supplemental materials with Deborah the

intervention teacher, who provides instruction to the intensive students. Teachers collaborate

with other individuals who are teaching a similar population of students during the RTI block.

Since Deborah is the only ELA interventionist in the building, her collaboration is more

extensive than what was described by the 4th grade teachers. Deborah explains her roles and

responsibilities as the intervention teacher in the RTI block in the following quote:

> I am a part of 4 different teams of teachers and 6 blocks of students. I have weekly
>
> meetings with each team. I also have a weekly meeting with the 4 TA's who are working
>
> as a part of the block. I am expected to know and manage all of the AIS students in the
>
> building (around 108). This includes running intervention reviews 3 times a year and
>
> making instructional decisions/changes on a weekly basis. I am the contact for the TA's
>
> and provide ongoing consultation and training. I also build and manage the scheduling
>
> for the TA's. I also still have a caseload of 35 students. (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016)

Almost all of Deborah's roles and responsibilities involves some form of collaboration with

individuals within the district. When she was asked how often she collaborates, her response

was "Everyday" (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016). Collaboration takes up a lot of time and effort

for Deborah on a daily basis. Since Deborah is an a member of each of the RTI blocks in the

buildling (4th, 5th, and 6th grade), she is able to make sure that all staff are on the same page and

can be the communicating link from grade to grade.

Joelle is the districts Coordinator of RTI. Similar to Deborah, Joelle also is responsible

for collaborating with a variety of people. When responding to the teacher questionnaire, she

lists the following people as the staff in which she collaborates with: "General education

teachers, intervention teachers, special education teachers, teacher assistants, related services

providers, principals, supervisors, and administrators" (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016). She has to

essentially meet with all members of the district in order for RTI to run smoothly at all levels.

Since Joelle works cohesively with a wide variety of people across the district, collaboration

looks a little different depending on who she is working with. Joelle writes:

> It varies according to the staff member. With intervention teachers it is often specific to
>
> data review and interventions for high risk students. General ed teachers it is often
>
> related to data, collaboration, resources, & how to differentiate within Tier I.
>
> Principals/supervisiors it is often related to building level initiatives, presentations, and
>
> follow up. TA's it is student profiles and direct teaching of interventions. (Teacher
>
> Questionnaire, 2016)

The RTI coordinator has to wear many different "hats" when collaborating with faculty and staff.

She also must work with district personnel to meet their individual needs tied to the

implementation of RTI. All of her collaboration evolves around making the RTI model that best

that it can be in order for students to be successful.

Over the course of the school year, the 4th grade RTI team was given one professional

development day to allow for instructional planning to RTI (Field Notes, 2016). On this day,

teachers could work with Grade level colleagues on creating instructional material that could be

used in the RTI block. During this professional development day, the teachers who taught the

meeting standard students decided that based on data analysis of the recent progress assessment,

a need for further instruction in short constructed responses with these students presented itself

(Field Notes, 2016). The teachers developed instructional materials to use along with the reading

of the short story *The Longest Winter* which was found in Cricket Magazine. After reading the

story, students had to respond to a short constructed response question using the R.A.D.D.

(Restate, Answer, Detail, Detail) strategy. After these instructional materials were designed

during the collaboration pull out day, it was then used with students in the meeting standard

group.

On the last day working with the *The Longest Winter*, students were asked to respond to

the following constructed response question: "What is the climax of the the *The Longest Winter*?

Use details from the text to support why this event is the turning point in the story" (Field Notes,

2016). The lesson began with referring to a plot diagram that was used in the lesson from the

day before, and reviewing what the climax of the story was. Even though all students had

learned the R.A.D.D. strategy with their homeroom teachers, the teacher provided the students

with a hand out that reviewed the criteria expected from students in order to receive full credit on

the response (Field Notes, 2016). After the climax had been identified and the teacher had re-

taught the R.A.D.D. strategy, students went to their seats to independently complete the

response. The following student work was collected after the completion of the lesson.
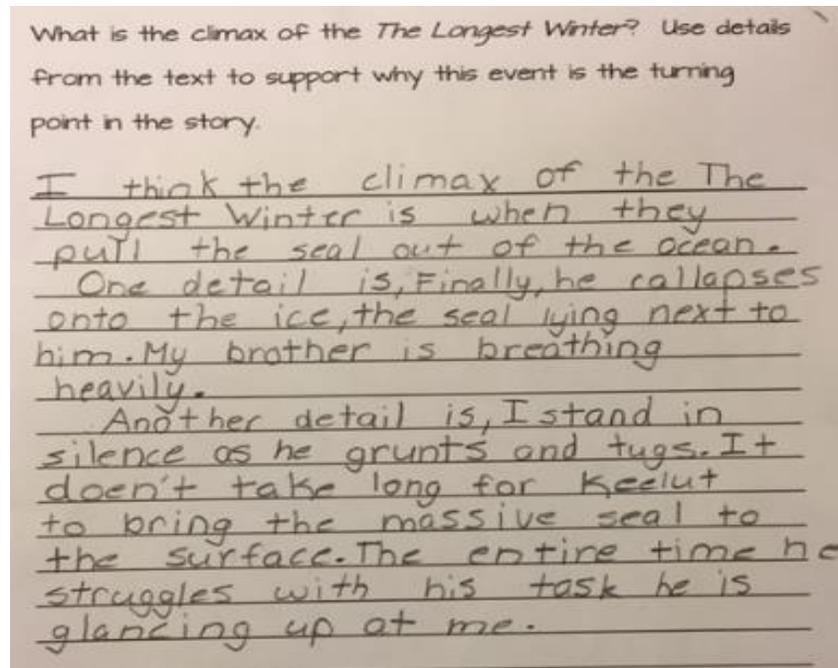
> What is the climax of the *The Longest Winter?* Use details from the text to support why this event is the turning point in the story.
>
> I think the climax of the The Longest Winter is when they pull the seal out of the ocean. One detail is, Finally, he collapses onto the ice, the seal lying next to him. My brother is breathing heavily.
> Another detail is, I stand in silence as he grunts and tugs. It doesn't take long for Keelut to bring the massive seal to the surface. The entire time he struggles with his task he is glancing up at me.

Figure 3. Student work sample collected from short constructed response lesson.

The above work sample was taken from Tim (4th grade, meeting standards student). Tim was able to accurately restate the question and provide an answer for the climax of the story. He was also able to provide two specific details from the text (Student Work Sample, 2016). Although Tim used text evidence, his response does not directly support why that specific event in the story was the climax. He could have used the details he provided and supported them with explanation of the details to receive a full score. Teachers could analyze the above work sample, and use it to develop instruction that could help push the meeting standard students to write a response that would earn them full credit.
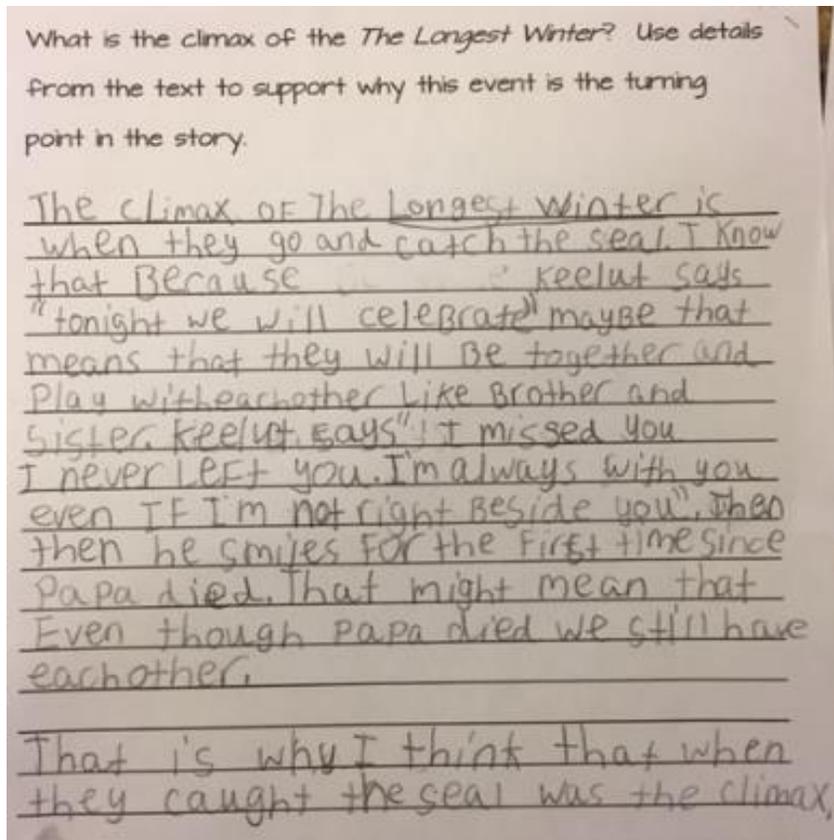
What is the climax of the *The Longest Winter*? Use details
from the text to support why this event is the turning
point in the story.

The climax of The Longest Winter is
when they go and catch the seal. I know
that Because   keelut says
"tonight we will celebrate" maybe that
means that they will be together and
play witheachother Like brother and
Sister. keelut says "I missed you
I never left you. I'm always with you
even If I'm not right Beside you". Then
then he smiles for the first time since
Papa died. That might mean that
Even though Papa died we still have
eachother.

That is why I think that when
they caught the seal was the climax.

Figure 4. Student work sample collected from short constructed response lesson.

The above work sample was collected from Rob, another member of the 4th grade

meeting standard group. Rob was able to accurately restate the question and provide an answer

for the climax of the story. He was also able to provide two specific details from the text

(Student Work Sample, 2016). Rob was able to meet the general criteria listed in the R.A.D.D.

strategy. Although Rob used text evidence, his details are not relevent to the climax. He is able

to provide explanation to explain his details. Since it was the first time using the teachers used

this prompt, teachers could work together to develop a mini lesson that would be better tailored

to get students to develop a desired response.

The data in this study shows numerous occurances of collaboration. In Angela's

questionnaire, she noted "Most of the collaboration has been around groupings and materials.

There has been a very little bit of actual planning time" (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016). Teachers

are focusing on analyzing data but are not given actual time to plan instruction. Other teacher

responses lacked evidence of planning while collaborating but rather discussed collaboration as a

time to discuss strategies and group students based on need.

Availability of Resources

Throughout the variety of data, one commonality was the availability of resources. When

teachers were asked in the questionnaire is they had the necessary resources needed to implement

RTI effectively, 50% of teachers responded 'yes,' 17% responded 'yes' and 'no,' and 33%

responded 'no' (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016). Of the teachers that responded 'yes' to this

question, when responding to the follow up question of 'why or why not?,' one of those teachers

stated that she has the necessary materials because, "I have personally purchased the materials"

(Teacher Questionnaire, 2016). Her comment proves that many of the materials that she uses to

facilitate effectively RTI instruction was not supplied to her by the district. The teacher that

responded with 'yes' and 'no' reported the following when asked the follow up question of 'why

or why not?":

> Yes and no. While we have purchased some items, we have had to create many lessons
>
> or search for them on our own-especially for novels. This can be very time consuming. I
>
> also feel that we could use more time talking with specialists for additional instructional
>
> ideas for the classroom. (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016)

The above quote brings up the point that when there is a lack of resources available, it forces the

teachers to spend more time creating and searching for high quality materials. She also reports

on the need for not only receiving physical resources, but also having time to work with

specialist and use them as a resource to improve instruction.

Angela (4th grade teacher) believed that she does not have the necessary resources to implement RTI effectively. When further questioned why she felt this way, her response was, "It is a matter of gathering enough books for all the students to have a copy" (Teacher Questionnaire, 2016). It is difficult to instruct students at a high level if not all students can have access to engaging books. If a certain text is selected from the book room to use with RTI students, there usually is not enough copies for the enitre class to have a copy (Field Notes, 2016). Because of the limited number of books, some grade level colleagues are forced to share books and alternate the materials between classrooms to be used at different points during the day (Field Notes, 2016). The lack of books is an inconvenience and can hinder instruction.The two teachers providing instruction for the meeting standard RTI groups are given a single copy of that months edition of <u>Cricket Magazine</u>. Teachers have to find time to look at the magazine together, and decide what stories and articles should be copied to use in RTI (Field Notes, 2016). Students read these texts from a poor quality black and white copy that does not provide the reader with engaging visuals as that of the original color copied edition of the magazine (Field Notes, 2016).

During the student interviews, when the four student participants were asked, Do you like RTI?, Seventy five percent of students answered yes. Tim (a pseudonym) was the only student to respond no to this question. When he was further asked why, his response was, "because it's just like reading workshop and I don't like it because I don't get to choose the books that we read" (Student Interview, 2016). Students are more engaged when they have the opportunity to choose books that interest them. Tim would like to have more control over the types of texts he reads rather than having the teacher choose the text. Because of the lack of multiple copies of books, it makes it more difficult to provide students with options to choose what book they are going to

read during the RTI block. Later in the interview, Tim was asked, if there was anything that you

could change in regards to the RTI block, what would it be? He stated, "Well, I wish that we

could use computers more often" (Student Interview, 2016). In order for computers to be used in

RTI, there needs to be appropriate programs that are readily available to students. Based on

conversations his homeroom teacher has had with Tim's parents, he has been described as a child

who does not enjoy reading (Field Notes, 2016). His mother has reported that it is difficult to

find books that interest him (Field Notes, 2016). The book room that is available to 4th grade

teachers is filled with several novels at varying text complexity. Many of the books are

described as 'old' or 'outdated'. Since they are older, students often lack the motivation to reach

for them to read (Field Notes, 2016). In order for schools to have access to newer books, there

would need to be adequate funds to order a variety of new texts that could be used during the

RTI block.

     Throughout the data analysis process three major reoccurring themes were evident in the

data. The themes include: the use of data analysis to support instructional decision making,

increase in collaboration amongst staff and students, and the availability of resources. All of

these themes were supported through all of the data sources. The data presented important

information to take into consideration when implementing a successful RTI model.

Implications and Conclusions

     The above findings and data gathered through field notes, student interviews, student

work, and teacher questionnaires implies that in order for teachers to meet the needs of all

learners using the RTI model, teachers must be given time to plan and collaborate with grade

level partners and other educators from the district. The data also implies that appropriate

resources should be available for teachers so they can plan high quality and engaging lessons.

In this study, I found that teachers did not have adequate time to plan instruction

collaboratively. The majority of the collaboration that was taking place was tied to data analysis

and student placement. Benedict et. al (2013) believed that through frequent collaboration,

teachers have the ability to create lessons that are planned and properly aligned to the

curriculum. In return, their lessons then become much stronger in content and more

appropriately tailored to students' individual needs. Without adequate planning time, teachers

may not be designing the appropriate individualized instruction. Although administrators at

Rutger's Middle School have taken steps to integrate more time for collaboration since the

implementation of RTI, they has only been limited time given to the process of designing of

instruction. According to Bean and Lillenstein (2012), teachers can develop better instruction

when they work together. They are able to accomplish more when they work as a team to set

goals, solve problems, and make instructional decisions. When administration does not provide

the teachers with time to collectively design instruction, they are doing a huge disservice to their

students. Not only does teacher collaboration allow for the creation of quality materials and

lessons, but it also alleviates stress for teachers when they can divide and conquer with their

peers.

The second implication discovered from this action research project was the need for

additional resources. As described above, both teachers and students noted concerns about the

availability of resources with the implementation of RTI. In Meyer et al. (2015) study, many

teachers also noted the lack of tangible and functional resources such as flowcharts, decision-

making guides, and lists of research based strategies. These are all resources that teachers

thought would benefit their instructional practices. In this particular action research study, some teachers even reported having to purchase resources with their own money. Students also stated that they wished that they had more choice in the books that they chose as well as more time to implement the use of computers into the RTI block. Without the access to different books and instructional materials to be used with the books, it makes it difficult for teachers to provide multiple options to the students. Teachers would also benefit from having access to computer programs that could track student progress and growth in regards to fluency and comprehension.

In addition, the findings from this action research project also prove the importance in data analysis in providing students with the appropriate level of instruction. Throughout multiple forms of data, a reoccurring theme was the use of data to support instructional decision-making. Meyer et al. (2015) believes that teachers must be trained in how to interpret data. It is not a skill that comes naturally to most educators and therefore needs to be an aspect of ongoing professional development. Teachers in this study discussed how they used data to help guide their decision-making but they did not indicate that they had received any formal training in regards to how they can accurately analyze student data. With increased professional development, teachers can become more confident in their ability to link assessment data to their instructional practices in the classroom.

This action research project was designed to investigate how the RTI model affects literacy instruction for all learners. This research was conducted through the theoretical lens of the sociocultural perspective and the cultural historical theory. The literature in regards to the RTI model revealed the following three themes: the idea of the RTI model as a multi-tier system, the changing roles and responsibilities of the school staff as well as the increase in collaboration amongst faculty members, and the need of ongoing professional development in order to build

on the staff's knowledge base. Data was collected for this study in a variety of ways. I was an

active participant while observing meeting standard students while they engaged in the use of

three different strategies. Work samples were collected from four students to assess their

understanding and use of the strategies that were taught. The same four students were later

interviewed about the RTI model. In addition, I also collected teacher questionnaire responses

from six professionals working in the middle school. After analyzing the data, the following

reoccurring themes emerged: data analysis to support instructional decision making tailored to

student need, increase in collaboration amongst staff, and availability of resources. Some of the

implications that I discovered from this research study were the following: teachers' lack of time

to plan instruction collaboratively, need for additional resources, and the importance of data

analysis in providing students with the proper level of instruction.

        Over the course of this study, I faced two limitations throughout my data collection

process. The limitation was the absence of students. One of the students in which I was

observing, collecting student work, and conduction interviews with missed several days of

school due to illness. Her absence made the data collection process challenging. The second

limitation was the limited responses provided by the 4th grade students. Many of them were

hesitant to respond at first and provided limited feedback during interviews.

        Moving forward, I would be interested to investigate further into the effect of

professional development on the implementation of RTI. From the research that I gathered,

teachers did not provide evidence that they had received professional development in regards to

research-based strategies that could be implemented in their classroom. It would be interesting

to know what professional development opportunities could be provided in order to better

prepare teachers and instructional leaders in the district. Two additional questions I have to guide

future research are the following: What forms of professional development would be beneficial

to faculty and staff prior as well as during RTI implementation? And how can RTI motivate

teachers to develop more targeted CORE instruction?

In conclusion, after conducting this research, it is clear that there are several layers to the

RTI model. A great deal of thought and preparation must occur prior to its implementation. In

order for RTI to function properly, faculty and staff at all levels must work as a team to provide

high-quality instruction to all learners. Administrators, teachers, and support staff must be

willing to adjust their roles and responsibilities and create a community in which leadership is

shared. RTI is able to meet the needs of all learners once the district as a unit is willing to work

towards the common goal of improving student achievement.

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Appendix A

Student Interview Questions

1. Do you like RTI? Why or why not.

2. Do you find RTI to be helpful? Why or why not

3. Is there anything that you do not like about RTI?

4. If there was anything you could change in regards to the RTI block what would it be?

5. Do you believe that RTI has made you a better reader?

6. Do you believe that RTI has made you a better writer?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share in regards to RTI?

Appendix B

Teacher Questionnaire Questions

1. How has the implementation of RTI impacted your CORE instruction?

2. Do you believe the students in your class are benefiting from RTI?

3. Since the implementation of RTI how has your roles and responsibilities changed?

4. If you answered yes, what new roles have you taken on?

5. Who do you consider to be the "leaders" in the implementation of RTI?

6. Do you feel supported by your principal?

7. Do you have the necessary resources you need to implement RTI effectively?

8. Why or why not?

9. Do you receive professional development in regards to RTI?

10. If so, what professional development opportunities have you received?

11. Do you collaborate with other educators in your district/building?

12. If so, with whom?

13. What does that collaboration look like and what is discussed during these collaboration

    meetings?

14. How often do you collaborate with others?

15. How has collaboration impacted your teaching?

16. What are the challenges of RTI?