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Response-to-Intervention: Understanding General Education Teacher Knowledge and Implementation

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, RESPONSE-TO-INTERVENTION: UNDERSTANDING GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND IMPLEMENTATION, by ELISSA MARIE BENJAMIN, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

RESPONSE-TO-INTERVENTION: UNDERSTANDING
GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER KNOWLEDGE
AND IMPLEMENTATION
by
Elissa Marie Benjamin

The new IDEIA (2004) mandates regarding the implementation of Response-to-Intervention (RtI) present challenges for general education teachers. The law dictates the implementation of Response-to-Intervention, which requires the application of a pyramid of interventions for students failing to make adequate yearly progress in response to general education programs. Response-to-Intervention regulations redefine general education teacher roles, increase responsibilities regarding instructional interventions for at-risk learners, and change the process used to determine qualification for specific learning disability (SLD).

A qualitative case study investigates how three general educators in a rural public elementary school understand and implement Response-to-Intervention policy. The study also examines teacher descriptions of the influence policy implementation on instructional practices for at-risk students. Data collection methods include structured and unstructured interviews, videotaped classroom observations, Teacher Performance Record data, lesson plans, and relevant RtI artifacts to advance understanding of RtI implementation in relation to the particular research site and study participants. Focusing on a single site allowed the researcher to develop holistic descriptions of contextual situations to inform future RtI implementation, as well as improve professional development and instructional practices for students involved in the RtI process. Study results provide a framework for understanding how elementary school teachers negotiate RtI implementation in the

general education setting. The findings report personal influences on implementation, environmental supports for implementation, and positive and negative consequences of implementation. The study concludes with recommendations for local education agencies (LEA), administrators, and professional learning, as well as suggestions for future research.

RESPONSE-TO-INTERVENTION: UNDERSTANDING GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND IMPLEMENTATION

by

Elissa Marie Benjamin

A Dissertation

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Degree of
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in
the Department of Educational Policy Studies
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2011

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DEDICATION

It is with gratitude that I dedicate this dissertation to the teachers, whose guidance, encouragement, and thoughtful criticism made the accomplishment possible. Throughout my school career, I have been fortunate to encounter teachers, whose wisdom influenced me profoundly. Mrs. Jane Scott, you taught me to believe that anything I could possibly imagine, I could achieve. Mrs. Jane Dillard you taught me the value of perseverance and the concept, "Can't, means won't." Mrs. Shirley Daniels, Mrs. Leslie Schaughnessy, and Ms. Laverne Flithe, you encouraged self-expression through writing. Professor Susan Pongratz and Dr. Donna Gessell, you demonstrated confidence in my ability as a student, a teacher, and a writer. You all continue to inspire me to learn.

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I dedicate this to all teachers, who selflessly devote their lives to cultivating students' minds and spirits. They have the most difficult and rewarding job.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAD	Absolute Achievement Discrepancy
BIP	Behavior Intervention Plan
CRCT	Criterion Referenced Competency Test
DIBLES	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills
DOL	Daily Oral Language
DRA	Developmental Reading Assessment
DRA2	Developmental Reading Assessment 2
EIP	Early Intervention Program
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESL	English as a Second Language
GADOE	Georgia Department of Education
IAD	Individual Achievement Discrepancy
IBA	Intervention Based Assessment
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IDEIA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
IST	Instructional Support Team
IT	Intervention Team
ITBS	Iowa Test of the Basic Skills
ITPA	Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Ability

LD	Learning Disabled
LEA	Local Education Agency
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NRCLD	National Reading Council on Learning Disabilities
OHSR	Office of Human Subject Research
POI	Pyramid of Intervention
PSM	Problem Solving Model
RAD	Relative Achievement Discrepancy
SIA	Special Instructional Assistance
SLD	Specific Learning Disability
SPED	Special Education
SST	Student Support Team
TPR	Teaching Performance Record
TSS	Teacher Support Specialist

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Study Rationale

Since the 1960s, federal policies have focused on educational equity for all students. Over the past four decades, policies such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) have been designed to address academic achievement issues by providing additional educational opportunities and services for at-risk student populations. Yet, there is a large body of research documenting the persistence of achievement gaps, particularly among different racial and socioeconomic groups (NAEP, 2005 a, 2005 b). In addition, the number of students receiving special education services has increased by 283%, since 1976 (Gresham, 2002; Learner, 2003; NCES, 2007). Data on students participating in special education services indicate an overrepresentation of minority students, particularly English as a Second Language (ESL) and African-American students (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002; Hosp & Madyum, 2007, IDEIA, 2004; NCES, 2007). Research on qualification criteria for special education eligibility points to the lack of valid, reliable, and consistent criteria as the primary reason for the increase in students identified with a specific learning disability (SLD) (Burns, Vanderwood & Ruby, 2005; Burns, Jacob & Wagner, 2007; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Two major educational policies, No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), have reshaped the methods used to monitor and address student academic disparities. These federal policies represent a shift away from narrow and rigid approaches for instructing at-risk learners. Both the NCLB (2002) and IDEIA (2004) mandates include provisions for high standards, quality instruction, and scientific research-based strategies to address achievement disparities for learners (NCLB, 2002; IDEIA, 2004).

The Role of Policy in Specific Learning Disability Identification

NCLB (2002) provides specific provisions for state and local educational agencies regarding the alignment of curriculum content with state mandated assessments and progress-monitoring systems. In addition, these provision hold individual schools and districts accountable for ensuring the adequate yearly progress of all students, based on state standards assessments. The IDEIA regulations correspond with NCLB provisions in that they require "highly-qualified" teachers, adequate yearly progress for students and schools, the use of scientific research-based programs and interventions, frequent progress assessments, and data driven decision-making (Kaufmann, 2008).

According to the IDEIA regulations, in order for a student to qualify for specific learning disability services, data must demonstrate that student-learning difficulties are the result of persistent failure to make adequate progress in response to both sound instructional strategies and scientific research based interventions (IDEIA, 2004).

Throughout the United States, state educational agencies are implementing the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) Program not only to enhance the educational outcomes for all students, but also to address persistent achievement disparities by more accurately identifying, documenting, and serving at-risk students (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Reschly & Hosp, 2004). The RtI process suggested in IDEIA consists of four tiers of intervention delivery: (a) effective scientific research-based instructional practices in general education; (b) scientific research-based small group intervention instruction in the general education classroom; (c) intensive, individualized instruction in the general education; and (d) evaluation and qualification for special education services (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). The effectiveness of RtI implementation is dependent upon the quality and consistency of instruction at each tier and continuous, progress monitoring of all students to inform service delivery and more accurately problem-solve appropriate instructional methods at each tier level (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Batsche, Elliot, Graden, Grimes, Kovaleski, Prasse, Reschly, et al., 2006).

Fuchs and Deshler (2007) assert that practitioners need to understand the Response-to-Intervention process and any “conditions” and “contextual factors” (p. 131) within a school or district that may influence the implementation of RtI. Implementing these reform initiatives requires sustained professional development, explicit expectations for program implementation, teacher buy-in, and substantial time to integrate these procedures into personal and institutional practices (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). According to Fullan (2007), the requirements promote a systems approach to reform, one that considers how knowledge and experience influence teacher responses to these new program initiatives (MCCRESt, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Spear-Swerling (2008) suggests Response-to-Intervention implementation involves second order change (Fullan, 2007; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) or a dramatic adjustment in both the procedures teachers use to serve at-risk students and the process for identifying specific learning disability. The IDEIA mandates, however, present challenges for general education teachers. The law dictates the implementation of RtI, which requires the application of a pyramid of interventions for students failing to make progress in response to general education programs. These regulations redefine the teacher’s role. They increase the teacher’s burden of responsibility.

For several decades, assisting struggling students has meant referral for special education evaluation, a practice embedded in the deep structure of schools (Galvin, 2007). Response-to-Intervention makes the referral process, as general education teachers presently understand it, obsolete (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Fuchs et al., 2007). General education teachers assume full responsibility not only for applying a variety of intervention strategies recommended by the RtI pyramid of interventions, but also for documenting student responsiveness to interventions within each of the three tier levels. Implementing a systemic reform requires teachers to change their mental models and assumptions about teaching practices for at-risk student learners (Brown-Chidsey,

et al., 2005; Burns, et al., 2007, Galvin, 2007; Mellard, 2005). In addition, funding for professional development on differentiation of instruction, intervention strategies, scientific research based programs, and the use of progress monitoring systems indirectly influence the accuracy of RtI implementation in the general education classroom (Barnett , Hawkins, Prasse, Graden, Nantais, & Pan, 2007; Burns, Jacob & Wagner, 2007; Fuchs et al., 2003).

A majority of RtI research reflects the standard provisions for quantitative scientific research based methods outlined in the NCLB (2002) and IDEIA (2004). There is a disregard for the qualitative aspects of RtI that influence program implementation. In an era of high-stakes accountability that places emphasis on "leaving no child behind," it is important to understand the relationship between how teachers' responses to RtI influence not only instructional practices for at risk learners, but also the fidelity of RtI implementation within their classrooms (O'Donnell, 2008).

Study Purpose

Teacher interpretations of Response-to-Intervention are dependent upon prior knowledge and experience as well as the social, cultural, and institutional environments in which they function (Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons, 2006). Each teacher brings an accumulation of personal and professional knowledge, values, and beliefs, which shape individual understanding and responses to social stimuli (Bruner, 1990, 1996; Cooley, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978).

Day et al. (2006) assert that identifying teachers' mental models, both cognitively and emotionally, is central to understanding variations in teacher effectiveness; particularly when organizational structures and teacher assumptions are "perceived to be in dynamic tension" (p. 602).

The purpose of this study was to discover what K-5 general education teachers know about RtI, how they implement it in their classrooms, and how implementation influences instruction for at-risk learners. The questions that guided this study included:

1. What do select K-5 general education teachers' know and understand about the Response-to-Intervention policy and implementation requirements?
2. How are select K-5 general educators implementing Response-to-Intervention in their classrooms?
3. How do select general educators describe the influence of Response-to-Intervention on their instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom?

Study Overview

The focus of this dissertation is general educators' knowledge of Response-to-Intervention policy and procedures. The research site is located in Glenn County Public Schools (pseudonym), a rural farming community. The selection of this particular location allowed for the investigation of multiple contextual factors influencing general educator's will and capacity to understand and implement RtI policy. Possible contextual factors include, but are not limited to the political environment, the organizational environment, and the availability of human and financial resources. A purposive sample of study participants includes three general educators at River Rock Elementary School (pseudonym), all of whom had six or more years of teaching experience and were currently implementing RtI in their classrooms.

Data collection methods included structured and unstructured interviews, videotaped classroom observations, and document analysis of related RtI artifacts. Interviews with study participants were conducted between April 2009 and May 2009. A three-step interview protocol (Appendix C) aligns research questions with interview questions, document analysis, and observational data. Initial interviews with study participants established rapport, and allowed the researcher to gain a basic understanding

of general educators' personal history and professional experiences, as well as knowledge about RtI policy and procedures. The second interview coincided with document analysis and videotaped observations to reveal individual details of experience related to RtI implementation. The third, fourth, and fifth interviews involved participant reflection on teaching practices observed during videotaped lessons. The final method of data collection was RtI document analysis. District and school policies and manuals, progress monitoring data, records of intervention strategies, and minutes were analyzed to advance understanding of RtI implementation in relation to the research setting and study participants.

Data analysis incorporated the use of coding and category systems to draw out emerging themes. In addition, the Teaching Performance Record provided a scientific research-based tool for analyzing data from interviews, document analysis of lesson plans, and videotaped observations of lessons. All data were labeled using pseudonyms and securely stored to ensure participant anonymity.

Study Significance

Response-to-Intervention is a relatively new reform initiative. School systems and educators are just beginning to understand the impact RtI will have on instruction for at-risk students. Unfortunately, the literature available on the topic is minimal and primarily focuses on quantifying the effects of implementation on student achievement and/or the validity of qualification criteria used to identify specific learning disability (Barnett et al., 2006; Fuchs, 2003; Reschly, 2004; Vaughn & Shinn, 2003). RtI research focuses primarily on the validity of using multiple criteria for identifying achievement discrepancies (Burns & Senesac, 2005; Speece & Case, 2001), the effects of specific interventions on the achievement of at-risk students (Case, Speece, & Malloy, 2003; Coyne, Kame'enui, Simmons & Harn, 2004; Fuchs, Fuchs & Compton, 2005), and the accuracy of models in identifying specific learning disabilities. Research on variations in implementation in schools and classrooms neglects to consider the role of the

general education teacher (Fuchs et al., 2003; NCCRESt, 2005). At present, studies documenting elementary school educators as they transition from using deficit models to identify specific learning disabilities to the problem-solving RtI model of intervention are unavailable. Bailey (2000), suggested that the research on federal education mandates demonstrates a lack of information on teachers' perspectives of required change processes. This study will help fill that void. As such, it has the potential to add to the broader scholarly literature on general education teachers' understanding of RtI and the influence of this understanding on intervention practices in the classroom. The most promising aspect of this study is its potential to inform how state education agencies and local education agencies support and encourage reform efforts, particularly with regard to providing appropriate information, resources, and support systems for teachers in transition. It is the researcher's hope that the study will provide a deeper understanding of how individual subjectivity influences K-5 teachers' instructional decisions and commitment not only to serving at-risk learners, but also to the details of RtI implementation in the general education classroom.

Study Delimitations and Limitations

Several delimitations in this study place restrictions on the research. The first delimitation involves site selection. As a classroom teacher, and fulltime parent and doctoral student, it was necessary to limit possible site locations to rural schools within driving distance to the researcher's work and home locations. Only one research site and three study participants are included in the study. Both the number of schools included in the study, as well as the number of teachers are limitations that narrow the scope of the study. Initially, I had planned to incorporate the use of purposive sampling procedures to identify study participants. However, only five individuals responded to the request for study participants. Of the five, three met the selection criteria for participation. These individuals became the study participants, who represent a convenience sample. The small sample size decreases the possibility of transferring study findings to other

educational settings. In addition, the use of a convenience sample has the potential to limit whether study findings are representative of the entire population. Finally, choosing to sample only teachers with three years or more teaching experience limits the possibility of examining contextual factors related to teacher expertise.

The methods used for data collection present additional study limitations. The selective content of both lesson plans and videotaped observations limits the scope of data collection. Allowing teachers to choose which lesson plans to share and videotape narrows the data available for analysis to deliberate artifacts. In addition, the use of videotaped classroom observations of RtI teaching practices poses multiple limitations. First, interactions may be constrained by the presence of a video recording device. Second, videotape recordings provide only small selective snapshots of classroom interactions. The placement of the video recording device can pose mechanical limitations with regard to sound capture and peripheral vision. Member checks insured the accuracy of videotaped observations. In addition to watching segments from the videotaped observations, I also discussed my observations with participants. This allowed teachers to clarify their motivation behind observed behaviors and verify interpretations.

The possibility of researcher bias is the final study limitation. Any perceptions or biases gained through teaching experiences and participation in the RtI process as elementary school teacher have the potential to influence the credibility of study findings. However, there are several possible benefits to conducting research as an educator. The first benefit was the accessibility of RtI terminology. Because of my experience, I did not find the educational acronyms used by study participants distracting during data collection. This allowed for more thorough questioning to investigate and understand the phenomenon. Another benefit to conducting research as an elementary educator is that it helped to establish rapport with participants, decreased tension, and improved the comfort level during interviews.

The triangulation of data using multiple methods of collection was the primary methods of addressing study limitations. Interviews, videotaped observations, document analysis, and TPR data yielded a significant amount of information to improve the credibility of study findings. Member checks addressed the issue of researcher bias and contributed to the credibility of data interpretation. A statement of researcher positionality further addresses researcher bias. Finally, the research quality indicators presented in chapter 3 also include steps taken to address study limitations

Theoretical Framework

The process of teacher change necessary for the implementation of Response-to Intervention initiatives takes place amid competing conditions. Political, cultural, and personal philosophies of teaching and learning interact to influence individual responses. Transforming normative practices to address mandates requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for serving at-risk students. To examine how internal and external conditions affect teacher responses and the negotiation of RtI implementation, I used a conceptual framework that incorporates concepts from the intensification thesis (Apple, 1982; 1986, Lawn & Ozga, 1981; 1988) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 1989; 2001). I discuss the intensification thesis (Apple, 1982; 1986) to demonstrate the external influence of NCLB and IDEIA on changing teacher roles and responsibilities. Next, I use social cognitive theory as a framework to identify the personal, environmental, and behavioral factors that influence teachers' "zones of enactment" (Spillane, 1999, p. 144) and the RtI reform process.

The Intensification of Teacher Work

Intensification describes the eroding working conditions of teachers resulting from reform policies that increase teacher roles and responsibilities, while placing controls over curriculum content and teaching practices (Apple & Jungck, 1996). The

intensification thesis draws its roots from labor process theory and Braverman's (1974) concept of proletarianization. It has been advanced by Apple (1982; 1986), Apple et al. (1996), Bartlett (2004), Ballet and Kelchermans (2008), Ballet, Kelchtermans & Loughran (2006), Easthope & Easthope (2000), Gitlin (2001), Hargreaves (1991; 1992), Lawn & Ozga (1988), Reid (2003), and Valli & Buese (2007) to present a critical view of changes in teacher roles and responsibilities. The research demonstrates the application of globalization processes, particularly the division of labor in reform policies aimed to increase teacher productivity by altering work patterns. Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock (2000) identify external bureaucratic controls, management strategies, and producer-consumer ideology as trends from the globalization process that influence the intensification of teacher work and the process of teaching. Apple (1982; 1986) and Hargreaves (1992; 2002) argue the external impositions of broader legislative demands and increased external controls de-professionalize teachers' work by manufacturing teaching practices and limiting teacher involvement in the planning of reform processes.

Intensification is not only concerned with the increase in teacher roles and responsibilities but also issues of power and control. Multiple reform initiatives, including NCLB, IDEIA, and Response-to-Intervention epitomize the bureaucratic controls synonymous with the intensification thesis. These policies place tremendous demands on general educators to produce student achievement through accountability and surveillance (Valli & Buese, 2007; Yeh, 2008). The intensification of teachers' work is present in current trends and legislation, which hold teachers accountable for the growth and progress of learners with varying abilities and liable for student health and well-being. Intensification increases administrative tasks, such as data analysis and documentation, which detract from both professional planning and personal time (Easthope et al., 2000, Hargreaves, 1991; 1992; Valli & Buese, 2007).

RtI is a "system of intervention" (Kratochwill, Clements & Kalymon, 2007, p. 48) occurring in the general education setting. The intensification of teachers'

work is evident throughout the process of RtI implementation. A key component of implementation is monitoring of student responses to instruction. This directly affects teacher roles and responsibilities, as the provision and documentation of RtI services within tiers 1 through 3 are a primary task general education teachers (McMaster & Wagner, 2007). The program requires general educators to implement research-based programs, identify students at-risk of academic failure, monitor student progress, and make data-driven decisions regarding differentiation of instruction (McMaster & Wagner, 2007). Policy mandates place controls over teaching practices by dictating the use of "scientific research-based" or "evidence-based" curriculum methods and materials to address student achievement disparities in the general education classroom. Pre-packaged research-based" programs reflect the influence of behaviorist philosophies on teaching practices and represent attempts to reduce the craft of teaching to a set of routine technical processes (Apple; 1982; 1986; Apple & Jungck, 1990; Symth et al., 2000).

The "scientific research-based" programs authorized in RtI adhere to strict implementation standards, procedures, and in some cases scripts (Barnett, Hawkins, Prasse, Graden, Nantais & Pan, 2007). In order for general educators to select and implement these "research-based" programs in tiers 1 through 3 with fidelity, significant "professional development" and support are necessary to address conflicts of interest with regard to changing methods, materials, and teaching procedures (Fuchs & Fuchs 1998; Gersten, Chard, & Baker, 2000).

Moreover, tier 1 of the RtI pyramid of intervention requires general educators to identify students at-risk of academic failure through screening procedures. Screening approaches vary among school systems; however, the three most broadly used screening approaches include high-stakes state or district level assessments (such as the Criterion Referenced Competency Test or CRCT used in the State), norm-referenced standardized achievement tests (such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the National Assessment of Educational Progress), and general outcome or curriculum-based measures. The

implementation of these assessments necessitates general educators learn screening administration and scoring techniques, as well as data analysis procedures to make informed instructional decisions.

General educators qualify students at-risk when either screening scores are at or below the 25th percentile (Fletcher, Francis, Morris & Lyon, 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005) or performance is below a designated developmental benchmark (Good, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 2001). General educators assume sole responsibility for identifying students as at-risk, providing individualized interventions, and documenting student responses to intervention. Over time, general educators track student achievement and monitor student progress (McMaster & Wagner, 2007). In tiers 2 and 3 of RtI implementation, general education teachers progressively apply intensive intervention services more frequently and in small group or individual settings for students failing to make "adequate progress". Therefore, general educators require precise knowledge of not only the content and curriculum, but also the RtI process, progress monitoring systems, and intervention resources available for application within each tier of the RtI pyramid of interventions.

The intensification of teachers' work is a reality for general educators attempting to implement RtI. Intensification involves not only the increase of teacher roles and responsibilities, but also the use of personal time to participate in professional development, complete administrative tasks, and plan for individualized instruction (Hargreaves, 1992; 2002). Reform policies, which demand accountability and immediate results, create a sense of urgency that may not allow appropriate time for teachers to adjust or relearn the necessary skills for RtI implementation. Teachers experience chronic and persistent work overload when issues of intensification compound with other variables in the educational environment, including, but not limited to, increases in class size, English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, and the mainstreaming of special education students into general education classrooms (Apple, 1986; Apple & Jungck, 1990; Hargreaves, 1992). In order to examine the complexity of teacher

work intensification through reform policies, the study also considered how personal, environmental, and behavioral factors interacted to influence individual teacher responses to RtI implementation.

Intensification through Social Cognitive Theory

Reforming at-risk student services and specific learning disability identification through RtI mandates requires significant teacher (re)learning. A number of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors complicate the learning process for teachers. Social cognitive theory (SCT) presented by Bandura (1977, 1986) provides a theoretical basis for analyzing teacher motivation and engagement in reconstructing practices for RtI implementation. The theory suggests human learning and development result from the bidirectional influence of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors. From the perspective of social cognitive theory, individuals are proactive, self-organizing, and reflective participants who respond to the world based on triadic reciprocity, where internal and external factors serve as interactive motivational determinants. Triadic reciprocality (Bandura, 1977, 1986) claims personal factors in the form of biological, cognitive, and affective attributes both influence and are influenced by behavior. Likewise, behavior shapes and is shaped by environmental factors, which in turn affect biological, cognitive, and affective personal factors. In essence, how individuals interpret the outcomes of their behavior has the potential to inform or alter personal factors, the environment, and future behavior.

Social cognitive theory acknowledges the personal, environmental, and behavioral components involved in re-educating and modifying teacher behavior to address issues of intensification and RtI implementation. Teachers initially come to understand RtI policies based on personal characteristics including experience, knowledge, beliefs, will, motivation, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; 1986, 2001; Spillane, 1999). Educational policies, procedures, professional development, social networks, and the

school environment represent external factors that interact with individual personal characteristics to shape teacher responses to RtI. Spillane (1999) contends that a teacher's "zone of enactment" (Spillane, 1999, p. 144) is a significant determinant of his or her capacity or ability to implement reform initiatives. Zones of enactment represent the space between personal characteristics and external influences, where teachers interpret and operationalize reform initiatives (Spillane, 1999). The interaction of personal and external factors within the zone of enactment serves as either an incentive or disincentive for teacher change with regard to RtI implementation (Spillane, 1999, Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002).

Chapter Summary

Response-to-Intervention implementation has the potential to threaten the continuity of general educators' routines by disrupting predictable personal and organizational patterns of behavior, forcing teachers to revise practices and assume new roles and responsibilities. If RtI is to redefine teaching practices and services for at-risk students, policy initiatives must take into consideration not only the personal characteristics of teachers as the "brokers" or change agents of reform policies, but also the turbulent environments in which they function. RtI implementation may fail to succeed if attempts to change organizational norms, individual behavior, and philosophical beliefs about intervention services for at-risk students do not move beyond the structural level. In addition, teachers must be willing to participate in and learn new approaches for serving at-risk students. A multi-dimensional theoretical approach was used to investigate the personal, environmental, and behavioral conditions influencing general education teachers' responses to RtI implementation.

"Educational change depends on what teachers do and think- it's as simple and complex as that" (Fullan, 2007, p. 129). Although the work of general education teachers often occurs in isolation (Lortie, 2002), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986, 2001) acknowledges the interaction of complex cognitive, affective, and environmental

factors influencing teacher motivation and engagement in the RtI process. The primary focus of social cognitive theory is on the personal, environmental, and behavioral factors influencing individual motivation and willingness to change general education teachers' beliefs and practices. Addressing RtI implementation from either the individual or the organizational perspective, denies the reciprocal influence of both on the capacity to enact RtI policy.

Organization of the Dissertation

The current study seeks to discover general education teachers' responses to the new policies and procedures presented by RtI and to examine the effects of these responses on both reform enactment and services for at-risk students in general education classrooms. The current chapter presents a conceptual framework for exploring teacher responses to federal policy implementation. The research employs the use of social cognitive theory to organize and examine the internal and external factors influencing teacher responses to mandated RtI policies.

An emerging body of literature on teacher change and learning in the context of reform policies supports the research. The review of literature, Chapter 2, presents a detailed analysis of the research on environmental, personal, and behavioral factors influencing both policy implementation and teacher change.

Chapter 3 describes the qualitative case study methodology used to investigate the research questions. Case study methodology was chosen because it can be used to document the development of individual and organizational responses to RtI implementation in specific contexts. A single research site with three study participants examined the ways in which teachers respond to and enact RtI. Data collection procedures included interviews, videotaped classroom observations, and document analysis.

Chapter 4 begins with a summary of policy implementation contexts and a profile of study participants. Study results are presented in reference to the research questions

and the themes that emerged regarding teacher knowledge of RtI, implementation, and teacher descriptions of the influence of RtI implementation of instructional practices for at-risk students.

The final chapter of the dissertation provides a discussion of study findings. A synthesis of study findings relates results to relevant literature. The researcher suggests implications for local education agencies, administrators, and professional learning based on study results. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research on RtI implementation.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

A teacher's capacity to enact reform policies varies significantly based on contextual factors. Drawing from Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1997) social cognitive theory and the concept of triadic reciprocity, the review of the literature is organized to explore the ways in which contextual factors surrounding reform policies in the form of environmental, personal, and behavioral factors individually and collectively interact to inform teacher implementation of policy. Although each factor differs in degree (amount of influence) and power (strength of influence), the overall effect on an individual's capacity or agency during reform efforts depends on a variety of mediating variables and processes. Therefore, the purpose of the review of literature is to examine the existing knowledge regarding the influence of situated contextual factors on teachers' efforts to both enact policy and change practices for policy implementation.

The review of literature is divided into four sections. The first section reports on the historical contexts of intervention in special education to highlight changes in both the process and identification of specific learning disability. This leads to an investigation of the political, social, and physical environmental conditions influencing teacher knowledge and responses to RtI policy. Section three explores personal conditions in the form of individual cognitive, affective, and biological attributes influencing policy implementation. The final section, discusses the ways in which both individual and group behavior influence aspects of the environment and behavioral responses to policy implementation. An analysis of the literature provides a summary of the implications for policy implementation and suggests avenues for future research.

Historical Contexts of Intervention in Special Education

Research on educational interventions for students exhibiting learning difficulties began in the 1960s, based on the process-to-treatment approach (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2006). The premise of the "process-to treatment" approach draws on the theory of remediation introduced by Kirk (1962). Kirk (1962) hypothesized that it was possible to identify intra-individual educational strengths and weaknesses through intensive diagnostic testing in order to develop individualized treatment programs, which capitalize on strengths and remediate weaknesses. The theory of remediation poses two major assumptions: (1) quality instructional practices can remedy low achievement resulting from lack of experience or poor instruction and (2) students either identified with learning disabilities or processing issues require supplemental instruction (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2006). The theory provides significant historical perspective with regard to the identification of learning disabilities because it not only initiated the development of assessment tools and remediation techniques, but also influenced concepts and language used in IDEA (1977; 1998; 2004) to define specific learning disabilities (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2006).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) defined specific learning disability based on Kirk (1962) and Kirk, McCarthy, and Kirk (1968). The law describes specific learning disability as a "severe discrepancy" between achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the following areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, mathematic calculations, or mathematical reasoning (IDEA, 1977). Although the new IDEIA (2004) regulations require local educational agencies to include response(s) to scientific research based intervention in evaluation procedures, the operational definition of specific learning disability still adheres to the original description as a deficit in "basic psychological processes" (IDEA, Section 614, B) in one or more academic areas (Fletcher, Barnes, & Francis, 2002; Hallahan & Mercer, 2002).

Achievement Discrepancy Models vs. Response to Intervention (RtI) Models

Most state education agencies incorporate severe IQ discrepancy models in the identification of students as specific learning disability using achievement measures (Frankenberger & Harper, 1987; Reschly & Hosp, 2004). IQ discrepancy models make the following assumptions: (a) the degree of IQ discrepancy equates to learning disability severity, (b) the achievement performance of students with discrepancies is significantly different from students without discrepancies, and (c) IQ assessments are reliable methods of identifying achievement discrepancies (Peterson & Shinn, 2002). Peterson and Shinn (2002) identify the three primary severe discrepancy models as Intra-Individual Achievement Discrepancy (IAD), Absolute Achievement Discrepancy (AAD), and Relative Achievement Discrepancy (RAD). Each model represents a different perspective for LD identification using a variety of quantitative analyses derived from one or more of the following psychometric evaluations: Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-III (WISC-III), Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery: Broad Reading Cluster (WJ-BRC), and the Reading Curriculum-Based Measurement (Peterson & Shinn, 2002).

Intra-Individual Achievement Discrepancy asserts that a severe discrepancy between individual achievement and intellectual ability indicates a learning deficit. The Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Ability (ITPA) designed by Kirk et al. (1968) was the first intra-individual achievement discrepancy assessment developed to diagnose individual processing problems in the areas of communication, language acquisition, and language organization. The test produces student profiles, which identify areas of strength and weakness in order to create diagnostic instructional programs aimed to address student needs (Kirk et al., 1968; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2006).

Analyses of the intra-individual achievement discrepancy model describe numerous technical problems with regard to the absence of universal diagnostic criteria (Peterson & Shinn, 2002; Fletcher, Francis, Rourke, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 1992; Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003).

Similar to the intra-individual achievement discrepancy model, the absolute achievement discrepancy model views learning disabilities as intra-individual. The primary difference between intra-individual achievement discrepancy and absolute achievement discrepancy is the use of norm-reference assessments to compare individual achievement with national averages. In the absolute achievement discrepancy model, specific learning disability identification results when student scores on norm-referenced tests fall at the lower or tail end of the score distribution (Peterson et al., 2002). Peterson and Shinn (2002) suggest that although the absolute achievement discrepancy model demonstrates successful identification of low achievement, it does not account for environmental factors, which contribute to achievement discrepancies. In addition, the model fails to address qualitative differences among different levels of achievement (Fuchs et al., 2003).

The Relative Achievement Discrepancy (RAD) discrepancy model is an approach that situates student achievement within environmental contexts. Relative achievement discrepancy model draws from Becker's (1963) social deviance theory. The theory asserts that behavior is deviant or atypical only in relationship to standards in specific environments (Becker, 1963). According to the relative achievement discrepancy model, students with the lowest achievement scores within either a school or district receive specific learning disability identification. A major issue with this approach is the inconsistency of specific learning disability identification. Peterson and Shinn (2002) assert that students with no relative discrepancy in low-achievement contexts may demonstrate a severe achievement discrepancy in high-achievement contexts.

A comparative analysis by Peterson and Shinn (2002) evaluated each of the three discrepancy models to identify which more accurately determines school-based specific learning disability identification. Results indicate that none of the models account for 100% of students identified as specific learning disabled in schools. Furthermore, only the relative achievement discrepancy model significantly describes specific learning disability within both high and low achievement contexts regardless of the achievement measure. The results support the notion that severe low achievement is not predictive of specific learning disability identification. Using discrepancy models to identify a specific learning disability poses conceptual problems (Peterson & Shinn, 2002; Gresham, 2002; Vaughn & Shinn, 2003). Variations in specific learning disability identification create inconsistencies in eligibility for special education services. In addition, confounding variables including diagnoses of attention deficit disorder or emotional/behavior disorder interfere with the accuracy of discrepancy model assessments and possess the potential to skew specific learning disability identification (Fletcher et al., 1992). The irregularity with which IQ discrepancy models identify students with a specific learning disability supports the need to provide an alternative method for identification, one that provides a universal definition of specific learning disability, as well as precise qualification criteria (Frankenberger & Harper, 1987; Peterson & Shinn, 2002; Vaughn & Shinn, 2003).

The alternative to discrepancy models is the response-to-intervention (RtI) or problem-solving approach. Heller, Holtzman, and Messick (1982) introduced and developed an inductive framework for identifying a specific learning disability using responsiveness-to-intervention (RtI). Unlike discrepancy models, RtI is non-categorical (Fuchs et al., 2003). The goal of RtI is not to label students with a specific learning disability, but to increase learning for all children and identify Students Needing Alternative Programs (SNAPs) (Fuchs et al., 2003). The basic principle of RtI is that students who respond significantly lower than their peers when provided effective educational interventions (i.e. scientific research-based interventions) qualify

for alternative and/or supplemental programs (Heller et al., 1982; Fuchs, 2003; Fuchs et al. 2003). The RtI model assumes poor or low achievement is the result of either ineffective instructional practices or a learning disability (Fuchs, 2003). The model suggests evaluating a student's responsiveness-to-intervention using a four-step problem-solving process can provide solutions to academic and behavioral issues (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Fuchs et al., 2003). Step 1 in the problem-solving process is to identify the problem in observable terms including intensity, frequency, and duration (Fuchs et al., 2003). The second step in the problem-solving approach is to identify and analyze instructional practices that might contribute to a solution. Step 3 involves progress monitoring to provide corrective feedback. The final step is to evaluate whether interventions are effective.

RtI requires specific procedures and resources prior to implementation. Local educational agencies need to adopt scientific research-based (SRB) general education instructional programs and materials for all grade levels (Brown-Chidsey et al., 2005). NCLB (2002) provisions support and fund scientific research-based programs. A crucial aspect of RtI implementation is the identification of a progress monitoring system. Progress-monitoring systems allow local education agencies to collect benchmark data on student achievement. The data aids in the identification of students making adequate progress and students needing alternative programs (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Fuchs, 2003). Fuchs & Deno (1994) assert curriculum-based measures are valid and reliable benchmark assessments. The two widely used curriculum-based measures in RtI are the AIMSweb Progress Monitoring and Response to Intervention System and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBLES) (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). Three components are necessary for administering these curriculum-based measures: (1) the establishment of assessment timeframes, (2) the identification of a normative profile, and (3) sustained professional development for standardized administration (Fuchs, 2003; Barnett et al., 2006).

There are three RtI models: (1) the Intervention Based Assessment (IBA) in Ohio (Vaughn, 2003), (2) the Instructional Support Team (IST) in Pennsylvania (O'Connor, Fulmer & Harty 2003), and (3) the Problem-Solving Model in Minneapolis (Marston, Muyskens, Lau & Canter, 2003). Both the Ohio and Pennsylvania models are examples of problem-solving approaches that incorporate the use of collaborative multi-disciplinary teams including the principal, school psychologist, special education teacher, and the regular education teacher. The purpose of intervention based and instructional support teams in these models is to assist the classroom teacher in identifying appropriate interventions prior to special education referral. A disadvantage of both the intervention based and instructional support models is the voluntary nature of teacher participation (Fuchs et al., 2003). Since teachers may choose to initiate the referral process, there are significant threats to program fidelity, because the neediest students may be overlooked (Fuchs et al., 2003; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Many states, including Georgia, have implemented intervention based and instructional support team models to identify and serve students with specific learning disabilities (Fuchs et al., 2003; Reschly & Hosp., 2004).

In contrast, the problem solving model focuses on providing quality instruction using a multi-tier approach not only to provide timely interventions, but also to increase the amount and intensity of educational resources for students as they move along an intervention continuum (Fuchs et al., 2003). The problem-solving model seeks to address environmental factors related to instruction by controlling inputs such as the curriculum and intervention strategies (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). In addition, PSM encourages educators to use multiple data sources to evaluate student progress. Of the three models, the problem-solving model most resembles the RtI model suggested in IDEIA (2004). However, LEAs exercise the right to choose the RtI model implemented within the county. The type of RtI model LEAs adopt will dictate services and procedures for implementing the RtI pyramid of intervention.

The Environment

Teacher work is embedded in multiple environmental contexts (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994). The zone of enactment model, proposed by Spillane (1999), provides a framework for conceptualizing the environmental factors providing opportunities and incentives for teachers to reconstruct practice during educational reforms. The model suggests there are five organizations, associations, and individuals within the environment influencing a teacher's capacity and will to participate and comply with reform initiatives: (a) the policy sector, represented by federal. state, and local educational agencies, (b) the professional sector, represented by formal and informal teacher associations and contacts, (c) the public sector, represented by parents and the community, (d) the private sector, represented by textbook/curriculum publishers and private businesses, and (e) the pupils, representing the influence of student responses to teaching practices. Spillane (1999) suggests these environmental factors are mediated within and through a teacher's personal resources of knowledge, experience, and philosophical beliefs to influence responses to policy.

The Policy Sector: Federal, State, and Local Educational Agencies

The interpretation of federal and state policies by Local Education Agencies (LEAs) is central to how teachers respond to reform. A number of studies investigate the role of LEAs (Anderson, 2003; Hill, 2001; Rorrer, Skrla & Scheurich, 2008; Spillane, 1996; 1998; 1999; Spillane & Thompson, 1997) and the influence of situated organizational factors on the implementation of new policy reforms (Dutro, Fisk, Koch, Roop & Wixon, 2002; Elmore, 1995a; 1995b; Fullan, 2007; Olsen & Kirtman, 2002; Smith & Southerland, 2008; Spillane, 1996; 1998; 1999). These studies identify the formal implementation process and the organizational climate as concurrent environmental variables, which both independently and collectively create variation among classrooms, schools, and systems implementing identical reform policies aimed to produce

substantive change in classroom practices. Emphasis is placed on the role of LEAs in providing leadership, structure, and coherence to policy implementation and the reciprocal influence of the formal implementation process on the organizational climate and teacher responses to policy messages (Olsen & Kirtman, 2002; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005).

Several factors involved in the formal implementation process employed by local education agencies affect how teachers respond to mandated policies. Of primary importance is the interpretation of policy and policy language. Local education agencies interpret policy messages from legislation, which function as formal feedback loops to communicate policy objectives and desired outcomes (Hill, 2001; Smith & Southerland, 2007; Spillane, 1999; 2000; 2002). National standards, state curriculum guides, and national and state assessments represent additional "tools of reform" (Smith & Southerland, 2007, p. 401) or contextual factors that have the potential to contain conflicting policy messages guiding the instructional decisions and practices of local education agencies and teachers.

Language serves as a medium for communicating reform policies and ideals (Hill, 2001; Spillane, 1999, p. 155). Yet, studies indicate, language is subjective (Hill, 2001; Spillane, 1998; 1999; 2000) and therefore open to multiple interpretations or misrepresentations that underscore policy goals (Spillane, 2000). Drawing from work on national and state reform efforts, Hill (2001) demonstrates how mathematics language elicits different interpretations of policy based on community discourse. The terms "explore, discover, and construct" (p. 303) when accessed by policymakers describe the ability of learners to construct knowledge of mathematics independent of teacher lectures. However, district leaders and teachers, who lack access to the specified language of policy, interpret this to mean the mathematical knowledge students garner from facts presented by the teacher. In a similar study on the interpretation of policy language, Spillane (1998) found district leaders focused their interpretations of policy language

on the forms or procedural aspects of mathematics reform, which reflective of process-product research. In focusing solely on the pedagogical forms and specific procedural activities for teaching mathematics, district leaders unintentionally disregard the purpose of the mathematics reform, to encourage students to make connections between procedural aspects of mathematical knowledge and real world applications. When the messages communicated to teachers from policy feedback loops are inconsistent or misaligned, the lack of consistency between state and local reform agendas not only creates teacher uncertainty and frustration, but also produces uneven or unintended consequences, which thwart policy initiatives (Smith & Southerland, 2007; Spillane, 1998). Variation in instructional messages corresponds with the "non-monolithic agency of instructional governance" (Spillane, 1998, p. 46) and accounts for differences in policy implementation within schools and local education agencies.

Organizational structure affects policy coherence and responses to reform (Olsen & Kirtman, 2002; Spillane, 1998; Spillane et al., 2002). Local education agencies often share responsibility for governance by creating vertical subdivisions of labor or multiple departments within the central office responsible for the administration of different departments. These separate subunits or departments assume responsibility for curriculum and assessment, staff development, compensatory education, elementary education, and secondary education. The segmentation of organizational structure and governance leads to the fragmentation of policy implementation, as separate subunits exercise jurisdiction over specific departments and/or subject areas. Working in separation, these departments autonomously interpret policies to identify different priorities and approaches to change for policy implementation. Spillane's (1998) study of two Michigan school districts' responses to state mandated reading policy indicates organizational subunits respond differently to reform initiatives based on professional agendas. Although the new state reading policy focused on encouraging students to use prior knowledge of text structure, content, and personal experience to comprehend reading texts, not all organizational

subunits viewed this as a priority. Neither the professional development department nor the elementary education department made the state policy a focal point for reform. In addition, the elementary education department continued to encourage the drill and practice of reading skills. One possible explanation for the lack of consistency between departments within the same local education agency is the absence of horizontal alignment of a clear mission and vision (Spillane, 1998). Organizational members lacked a unifying shared mission and vision for instructional reform (Evans, 2001; Fullan, 2007; Senge, 1990). In the absence of a shared mission, each department established different priorities and interpretations of policy.

Mobilizing Resources from the Professional, Private, and Public Sector

The extent to which teachers learn about policy reform depends on the capacity of local education agencies to create, support, and sustain environmental conditions conducive to collaboration and learning for policy implementation. Local will and capacity are essential to initiating and sustaining reform (McLaughlin, 1990). A clear mission and vision for policy implementation coupled with the engagement of educational leaders in directing change facilitates the will or commitment to reform (Evans, 2001; Fullan, 2007; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Rorrer et al., 2008). Local education agencies build organizational capacity by (1) developing structures to support and encourage change, (2) establishing coherence between mandated reforms, district goals, and strategies, and (3) mobilizing financial, human, and social resources from the professional, private and public sector (Spillane, 1999; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Acquiring and aligning available resources with reform goals further establishes policy coherence between instructional leadership and support.

The amount of financial resources, including instructional materials, staffing, and time is relative to a local education agency's capacity. Although most local education agencies report limited funds available for the purchase of instructional materials, insufficient staff and lack of time pose greater challenges to reform implementation

(Apple & Jungck, 1997, Hargreaves, 1992; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Financial constraints often limit the availability of school faculty and may contribute to a scarcity of time. Administrators from rural education agencies report the small size of their faculties make it difficult to staff additional committees for policy implementation (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). In addition, time is a significant factor in preparing and educating both administrators and teachers about policy reforms. Thus, inadequate staffing and time are a recurring theme in the research on organizational capacity for reform implementation (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). However, some research demonstrates the amount of time available is not as important as the allocation of time for sustained engagement in both professional development and policy implementation. For example, Spillane and Thompson (1997) compared superintendent approaches to reform. The study results revealed two different philosophical orientations toward reform efforts. One superintendent stressed the importance of engaging faculty members in reform over an extended period. Therefore, this district's approach to staff development promoted continuous engagement in ongoing mathematics reform efforts over seven years (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). In contrast, another superintendent in the study focused district professional development on the procedural aspects of reform, placing a one-year deadline on the development of a mathematics curriculum guide. When the curriculum committee was unable to meet the deadline demands, a curriculum guide was purchased from a neighboring school system. Thus, allocation of time designated by the leadership of the latter superintendent did not promote a community of learners engaged in the reform process. Instead, reform efforts focused on deadlines at the expense of teacher learning.

The investment of time in creating human and social capital is perhaps the most crucial aspect of a local education agency's capacity. Local education agencies that demonstrated successful implementation of reforms utilized the human and social capital available within the professional, private, and public community. A strong commitment

to reform efforts, predisposition toward learning, and knowledge of reform are qualities of teacher leaders shown to promote organizational capacity for policy enactment. The usefulness of these individuals in promoting instructional change within local education agencies depends on whether local education agency leaders recognize and employ these individuals to create a cadre of knowledgeable reformers within the school community (Spillane & Thompson, 1997).

In addition to investing in human capital, local education agencies make use of available formal and informal professional networks to create social capital and increase organizational capacity. The concept of social capital closely relates to Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, whereby what an individual is capable of accomplishing independently is enhanced by social interactions and collaboration with one or more knowledgeable members of the community. The establishment of internal and external networks not only links individuals to sources of knowledge, but also facilitates understanding of reform and change by encouraging collaboration and on-going conversations about reform (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994; Fullan, 2007; Spillane & Thompson, 1997).

Several studies reveal the influence of national, state, and local professional associations on educators' ability to understand and implement reforms (Dutro et al., 2002; Hill, 2001; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Networks forged between local education agencies and external experts facilitated opportunities for teachers to participate in situated learning within the context of instructional reform (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). By engaging in conversations about reforms, educators became more reflective about instructional practices (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). In addition, the development of relationships with universities enabled local education agencies with limited funds to access experts and resources, such as pilot program materials.

Approaches to Teacher Change

Change, whether collective or individual, is both a cognitive and psychological process (Schein, 1996). Behavioral change is a difficult task for teachers; it not only requires the examination, rejection, and replacement of personal beliefs and practices, but also occurs within the context of increased policy demands. NCLB (2002) accountability mandates give rise to power-coercive strategies for encouraging teacher change for policy implementation (Hargreaves; 1991; 1992; Richardson & Placier, 2001). Power-coercive approaches use fear of reprisal, peer pressure, humiliation, and pay-for-performance strategies as external motivation factors to prompt teacher change (Valli et al., 2007). Recent value-added models (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997; Rowan, Correnti, and Miller, 2002; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005) assess teacher quality by calculating student achievement gains to reward or punish teachers accordingly through incentive programs. In addition, state education agencies and local education agencies post standardized test scores in the newspaper and outside teacher classrooms as additional motivators for change. While these strategies produce teacher change, the focus on outcomes has the potential to create unintended consequences counterproductive to long-term transformational change.

Local education agencies identify professional development as an important factor in the implementation of RtI reforms. Spillane (2002) posits the theories district change agents have regarding professional development for teacher learning reflect behaviorist (Skinner, 1965), sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978), and cognitive (Piaget, 1970) views of the learning process. Each philosophical orientation presents a different conceptual perspective of knowledge acquisition, curriculum content, and motivation for teacher learning. Depending on philosophical orientation, organizations will approach professional development for policy implementation in different ways. Exploring professional development for teacher change provides insight into the environmental factors influencing teachers' responses to RtI implementation.

Traditional organizational methods for developing teacher capacity for change generally rely on behaviorist strategies (Richardson & Placier., 2001; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Spillane, 2002). The behaviorist perspective (Skinner, 1965) considers knowledge a commodity and treats learners as passive recipients. In a study investigating nine school districts' theories of teacher change, Spillane (2002) discovered 85 percent of district officials subscribe to the behaviorist philosophy. In these school districts, an external locus of control directs professional development and motivates the change process. Teachers receive information about new policies, procedures, and expected outcomes through training demonstrations provided by experts outside the organization (Spillane, 2002; Richardson & Placier, 2001).

The primary focus of this approach is on the replication of behaviors and techniques. Teachers involved in behaviorist professional development initiatives often report feeling a sense of "fragmentation" (Spillane, 2002, 388). This sense results from district efforts to approach teacher learning in chunks specific to the procedural aspects of policy implementation. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) suggest behaviorist strategies represent first order or incremental reform efforts that address technical and procedural knowledge, while neglecting the role of tacit knowledge in an individual's understanding of reform. Inevitably, these first order efforts produce short-term effects on teaching practices because they do not consider teachers as active agents who possess underlying personal beliefs that influence responses to policy reform (Earl & Katz, 2000).

In contrast to the behaviorist perspective, the sociocultural perspective (Lasky, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978) views knowledge as information socially transmitted through cultural artifacts within the environment. From the sociocultural perspective, learning involves active inquiry and dialogue as well as the use of cultural artifacts (Vygotsky, 1978). Professional development opportunities from the sociocultural perspective provide an integrated curriculum based on reform agendas, standards, and opportunities for social interaction. District administrators who approach change from the sociocultural

perspective focus on “building a community of learners” (Spillane, 2002, p. 392). Consequently, they seek to replace “the norm of privacy that dominates most schools with a norm of collaboration and deliberation” (Spillane, 1999, p. 164) about reforms and teaching practices. Local teacher leaders play an integral part in the change process (Spillane, 2002). As practitioners, teacher leaders possess both knowledge of and experience with educational standards and reform. These individuals serve as mentors or guides who assist teachers in understanding the instructional aspects of reform, as well as reform standards and curriculum guides. Both Lortie (2002) and Spillane (1999; 2002) demonstrate the importance of providing opportunities for teachers to socialize. Their research suggests actively engaging in conversations not only facilitates collaborative problem solving, but also encourages teachers to “grapple with the meaning of reform” and its implications for practice (Spillane, 2002, p. 392).

The cognitive perspective (Piaget, 1970; Lewin, 1948; 1997; Schein, 1996) provides a salient approach to changing normative practices. The cognitive approach recognizes that teachers respond to change based on prior knowledge and experience (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Spillane, 2002). From this perspective, knowledge comes from reflection, understanding, and growth. A major assumption of this approach is the notion that growth and change result from the reconstruction of existing knowledge. Lewin (1948; 1997) was the first to present a cognitive model of the change process, which emphasized the social and emotional aspects of relearning skills to modify behavior within organizations. In his model, Lewin (1948; 1997) proposes three distinct stages involved in the change process, unfreezing (stage 1), changing (stage 2), and refreezing (stage 3). Schein (1996; 2004) expanded upon Lewin’s (1948; 1997) initial concept of cognitive restructuring to provide implications for professional development during systemic reform efforts.

The concept of unfreezing relates to the sociocultural perspective that learning is the product of observations and experiences occurring within the cultural setting

that not only influence behavior, but also establish behavioral norms, provide a sense of equilibrium, and perpetuate the status quo (Schein, 1996; Senge, 1990). Behavioral change or the unfreezing of behavioral patterns results from a disruption of the equilibrium (Lewin, 1948; 1997; Schein, 1996; 2004; Senge, 1990). The process of unfreezing requires individuals or groups to identify and address the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values that inhibit change. Unfreezing involves disconfirmation, survival anxiety, and psychological safety (Lewin, 1948; 1997; Schein, 1996; 2004). Schein (1996) suggests all learning for change begins with the disconfirmation of old information and practices. Disconfirmation serves as a catalyst for motivating teacher learning, while survival anxiety drives the need to change in order to survive and successfully meet policy demands. Therefore, teachers must disconfirm or acknowledge the inadequacies of their current practices and be willing to accept new information and practices as personally relevant for change to occur (Spillane, 1999). Schein (1996) asserts that the threats produced by disconfirmation and survival anxiety require a balance of psychological safety in order to create individual motivation for change.

Although motivation is a significant factor in the change process, cognitive restructuring or re-education is vital to the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, habits, and values necessary to facilitate teacher change for RtI implementation (Schein, 1996). Cognitive restructuring involves moving to a new state by building knowledge structures and modifying behavior through social experiences, including observation, imitation, trial-and-error, and active engagement in the problem-solving process (Bandura, 1977; 1986; Lampert, 1997, Lewin, 1948; 1997; Richardson, 1997; Schifter & Simon, 1992). Once teachers are motivated to change, the process of cognitive redefinition affords the opportunity to test the feasibility of new schemas through environmental scanning and trial-and-error. Both methods allow teachers to develop personally relevant or individualized solutions for attaining policy goals.

The objective is not to produce a unified process for goal attainment, but rather that each teacher meets policy goals (Schein, 2004).

Re-education or cognitive restructuring leads to refreezing or permanent behavioral change only when teachers internalize new practices. Internalization results from the development of a reformed self-concept and interpersonal relationships (Lewin, 2004; Spillane, 1999). During the refreezing stage of the change process, teachers receive feedback from stakeholders and sources within and outside the organizational environment. When this feedback provides data to support new cognitive structures, redefined beliefs and practices stabilize to create a new state of equilibrium. This new equilibrium serves to solidify teacher change (Schein, 2004).

The Individual

Teachers assimilate educational reforms differentially based on cognitive, affective, and biological factors that influence their personal dispositions toward learning, change, and policy implementation (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). Teachers who successfully implement reform initiatives have dispositions that allow them to learn new skills, adjust practices, and manage change effectively (Dweck, 1999; 2006; Fullan, 2007). Yet, most reform policies neglect to consider teachers as active agents in the reform process (Olsen & Kirtman, 2002). As active mediators of reform policies, teachers possess personal attributes in the form of prior knowledge, experience, and cognitive mental models or profiles that shape how they perceive, understand, translate, and implement reform policies (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996; Olsen et al., 2002; Spillane et al., 2002; van den Berg, 2002). An examination of individual attributes exposes barriers and enablers, which influence the construction of new knowledge and skills for policy implementation and teacher change.

Prior Knowledge, Beliefs, and Experience

Prior knowledge, personal beliefs, and experience can serve as either an asset or a detriment for teachers participating in the process of RtI reform implementation (Smith & Southerland, 2007; Spillane et al., 2002). Experience serves as an individual's living textbook; it not only provides a knowledge base for continued learning, but it provides an orientation toward problem-solving and application of skills and concepts. From the perspective of constructivism, knowledge or understanding comes from relating new information to prior experience and existing cognitive structures (Bruner, 1960; 1990; Kolb, 1984). As teachers engage in policy implementation, it is natural to relate new information and procedures to prior knowledge and experience in order to create meaning, draw conclusions, and gain insight (Bruner, 1960; 1990; 1996; Kolb, 1984). Consequently, experience can serve as either an asset or a detriment for teachers participating in the process of reform.

A number of studies investigating policy implementation indicate individuals perceive policy contexts as either congruent or incongruent with prior knowledge, beliefs, and experience (Cohen, 1990; Hill, 2001; Spillane, 2000; Spillane & Callahan, 2000). When current reform tasks are congruent with experiences, implementers feel a sense of continuity, stability, and comfort because the environment is non-threatening and familiar (Belzer, 2004, Evans, 2001; Schmidt et al., 2005). Familiarity is important to policy implementation, since implementing agents often attend to personally relevant reform language and initiatives (Spillane, 1999; 2000). In a five-year qualitative analysis of the relationship between policy implementation and teaching practices, Spillane (2000) found educators more than twice as likely (45 % versus 20%) to incorporate reform descriptors that mirror familiar concrete experiences rather than abstract ambiguous language. Educators' use of "hands-on" or "problem solving" terminology, as opposed to "reasoning" is representative of preferences toward personally relevant terminology (Spillane, 2000, p. 153). Both "hands-on" and "problem-solving" evoke concrete visual

images whereas reasoning provides a less tangible image. In addition, these descriptors are indicative of the educators' understandings of reforms (Schmidt et al., 2005; Spillane, 2000). Although familiarity may garner the attention of implementing agents, many reform initiatives seek to change or reconceptualize instructional policies and practices. When interpreted through familiar cognitive schemes, there is a potential to misconstrue, overlook, or partially implement policy initiatives (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; Spillane, 1999).

Ideologies and experiences that conflict with reform goals and expectations can create barriers that impede an implementer's capacity to learn and adjust practices for RTI implementation (Spillane, 2000; Spillane et al., 2002; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). To illustrate the influence of prior knowledge on an individual's interpretation of policy, consider two teachers participating in Spillane's (1999) study on reconstructing mathematics practices. Both teachers reported familiarity with reform themes and techniques for teaching problem solving. However, the manner in which each approached instruction in his or her classrooms demonstrates distinctly different interpretations of what constitutes problem solving. One teacher provided an open-ended problem-solving question that required students to provide a visual to justify answers. By providing an open-ended question, this teacher promoted active engagement, multiple solutions to the problem, and group discussions to demonstrate different reasoning strategies. In contrast, a second teacher asked a similar problem-solving question with the expectation of receiving a correct answer. For this teacher, the main purpose for asking the question was to illicit accurate procedural knowledge, thus limiting the opportunity for students to use problem solving and reasoning skills. Of particular importance in this comparison is the fact that the latter teacher had never personally experienced the type of problem solving that was intended by the mathematics reform policy (Spillane, 1999). The correlation between experiential continuity and policy implementation demonstrates the inextricable relationship between cognition, emotion, and motivation. Thus, personal conditions

throughout life contribute to the creation of different situated or psychological "meaning systems" for individuals (Chiu, Dweck, Hong, Lin & Wan, 1999; Dweck, 1999; 2006; Torff & Sternberg, 2001). These meaning systems create mental models, schemas, habits, biases, and presuppositions that shape how individuals think, feel, and respond to policy.

Tacit Knowledge and Folk Pedagogy

Tacit knowledge is the product of implicit or intuitive learning; it results from an individual's social interactions with others and the environment, unconsciously influencing behavior (Bandura, 1986; Torff & Sternberg, 2001). Intuitive conceptions or pre-existing knowledge structures predispose teachers to think and behave in certain ways (Torff, 2001). Cultural psychologists and psychological anthropologists suggest culture is the primary mediating variable in the construction of tacit knowledge (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Psychological research reveals four distinguishing characteristics of tacit or intuitive knowledge (Gardner, 1991; Bruner, 1996; Torff, 2001). First, intuitive knowledge strongly influences an individual's thought processes. Second, individuals subconsciously employ tacit knowledge. Third, tacit knowledge may be an oversimplified, inaccurate, or misleading conception. Finally, tacit knowledge is difficult to reconstruct or change.

Teachers use their personal experience to develop mental models rather than relying on their formal education (Pajares, 1992). These mental models represent preconceived views of the physical and social world and provide a lens, filter, or frame of reference through which teachers perceive and respond to situations. Mental models encompass personal biases, outcome expectations, and theories regarding cognitive processes (Dweck, 1999; 2006; Hammer & Elby, 2002). Intuitive mental models create "folk pedagogies" (Bruner, 1996; Torff, 2001) or subjective theories regarding what constitutes knowledge, teaching, and learning. Folk pedagogy strongly influences instructional decisions and responses to policies particularly those that require changes in teaching practices (Smith et al., 2007; Spillane et al., 2002).

Tomesello, Kruger, and Ratner (1993) provide a taxonomy for characterizing teacher views of the learner based on common folk pedagogy. According to Tomesello et al. (1993), teachers may view learners as imitators, empty vessels, constructors, or collaborators. Each of these views represents a different theory of intelligence and philosophical orientation toward teaching tasks. Folk pedagogy research demonstrates a strong correlation between teachers' implicit theories of intelligence, approaches to teaching and learning, attributions assigned to student performance, and performance expectations (Dweck, 1999; 2006; Stipek, 1996; Weiner, 1986). Two distinct implicit theories of intelligence have a profound impact on approaches to learning tasks and performance outcomes: (1) entity theory and (2) incremental theory (Chui, Dweck & Hong, 1997; Dweck, 1995; 1999, 2006; Dweck, Grant & Plaks, 2005). The entity theory views intelligence as a fixed entity individuals possess at birth. In contrast, incremental theory portrays intelligence as a malleable entity that can be cultivated through continued practice and learning. In a study on theories of intelligence and teacher practice, Swann and Snyder (1980) report teachers possessing an entity theory of intelligence provided students greater autonomy in learning tasks and problem solving. In contrast, teachers with an incremental theory of intelligence were more likely to provide direct guidance in building problem solving skills. These findings have strong implications for research on teacher responses to RtI policy and instructional approaches to intervention for at-risk students.

Behavioral Responses

Neither environmental antecedents nor personal antecedents alone account for teacher motivation and engagement in RtI implementation. The most significant moderating variable directing behavioral responses to reform is emotion. According to Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism, teachers not only react to the environment, but they also actively shape the environment based on conscious decisions to act. Teachers evaluate and respond to RtI based on the influence of policies and procedures on

their self-survival (Bandura, 1986; Schein, 1996) and ability to act (Bandura, 1986; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). Ultimately, how teachers cope with RtI reform demands depends on their appraisal of reform situations and emotional responses to the harm, threat, or challenge presented by RtI policy implementation.

The Influence of Cognitive Appraisal on Individual Responses to Policy

Individuals self-regulate behavior and effort based on the perceived effects of their actions on personal well-being (Bandura, 1986). Emotional disposition influences the evaluations or cognitive appraisals an individual assigns to a situation. In addition, a teacher's self-efficacy or beliefs about capability, self-regulation, motivation, persistence, and adaptability to uncertainty and change affect responses to RtI reform. Results from a study conducted by Lazarus and Folkman (1987) reveal general patterns of behavior in the evaluation and coping process related to an individual's emotional responses to situations. The personal stakes presented by a given situation along with individual dispositions toward learning, uncertainty, and change encourage different coping strategies (Sorrentino, Nezlek, Yasunaga, Kouhara, Otsubo & Shuper, 2008). Spillane's (1999) research on external reform initiatives and efforts to reconstruct teacher practices during reform provides an example of how the interpretation of personal stakes coupled with a teacher's disposition contributes to different responses to reform and change. A teacher who describes herself as a risk taker unencumbered by change, constantly seeking new methods to improve teaching practices is more willing to embrace change and uncertainty than a teacher who prefers stability, structure, and consistency (Spillane, 1999). Spillane (1999) suggests the disposition of the former teacher provides an advantage to reform implementation primarily because her orientation toward uncertainty and change does not require the unlearning of core beliefs and practices. Individuals who viewed situations as reasonable and/or malleable possess strong self-efficacy and meet demands with planned problem solving (Dweck, 1999; 2006).

However, encounters that present threats to an individual's self-esteem produce confrontational and avoidance coping mechanisms (Dweck, 1999; 2006).

Weiner's (1986; 1992) Attribution Theory incorporates concepts of self-efficacy and self-regulation to explain the effects of cognitive appraisal on levels of teacher motivation and engagement. The theory posits several tenets: (1) pleasant or positive outcomes encourage motivation, therefore people will act in ways that preserve and maintain a positive self-image; (2) an individual's current self-perception dictates interpretations of success and failure; and (3) the attributions an individual assigns to success or failure gauge the amount of effort and motivation applied toward a given task. Stability, locus of causality, and control are contributing factors that influence a teacher's expectations for policy implementation (Weiner, 1986; Spillane, 1999). Each factor evokes different psychologically motivated behavioral responses. According to Weiner (1986) stability affects a teacher's predictions about future achievement. The locus of causality affects emotional responses to task success or failure (i.e. pride, sense of accomplishment, shame, dissatisfaction). Finally, the amount of control a teacher exercises over reform implementation will affect task persistence. The theory suggests teachers with high levels of self-esteem and the ability to self-regulate tend to demonstrate positive attributions, which lead to task mastery, increased motivation, and persistence (Dweck, 1999; 2006; Ross, 1994). On the contrary, teachers with minimal self-esteem and a limited ability to self-regulate exhibit negative attributions, which lead to task avoidance, learned helplessness, and disengagement (Dweck, 1999; 2006).

Implications for Teacher Change in RtI Implementation

Behaviorist strategies for policy implementation direct structural change processes through external controls (Evans, 2001; Richardson & Placier, 2001). Approaching reform implementation from the structural perspective neglects to recognize teachers as active agents in the reform process with different philosophical beliefs, levels of knowledge, and experience. Reform implementation threatens the continuity of daily

organizational life by disrupting predictable personal and organizational patterns of behavior, forcing teachers to change practices and assume new roles and responsibilities. If policy is to change teaching practices and services for at-risk students, initiatives must take into consideration not only the personal characteristics of teachers as the “brokers” or change agents of reform policies, but also the turbulent environments in which they function.

The implementation of policy requires a multi-dimensional approach, one that addresses the personal and environmental conditions surrounding the reform process for teachers. Implementation will fail to succeed if attempts to change organizational norms, individual behavior, and beliefs about intervention services for at-risk students do not move beyond the structural level. In addition, teachers must be willing to participate in and learn new approaches for serving at-risk students. Therefore, professional development for policy implementation should consider not only how policy demands and procedures affect teacher motivation, but also how reform initiatives can capitalize on the qualities and characteristics of teachers as adult learners.

Teacher change is a difficult task because it occurs within the context of increased policy demands and requires teachers to examine, reject, and replace personal beliefs and institutionalized practices. As adult learners, teachers need to understand the value of change in relation to their work. In order to become motivated to change, teachers must accept new information and find it personally relevant. In *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan (2007) promotes reform efforts that combine technical aspects of policy implementation with opportunities for teacher inquiry, problem solving, reflection, and collaboration to create an environment conducive to transformational change. Studies on teacher change indicate a correlation between the level of teacher interaction or teacher socialization and successful policy implementation. The zone of enactment (Spillane, 1999) supports the notion that the amount and quality of social interaction among teachers within an educational organization (Lortie, 2002) coupled

with an individual's personal experience affect capacity. Therefore, the extent to which teachers are capable of changing practices to meet policy demands depends on whether teachers approach tasks individually or collectively, participate in purposeful deliberations about the meaning and substance of reform policies, and work with appropriate support materials and resources (Fullan, 2007, Spillane, 1999).

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Perspective

Crotty (2003) suggests the methodologies and methods used to conduct research are contingent upon the purpose of the research and the specific questions guiding the line of inquiry. Justification of methodological decisions involves determining the epistemological and theoretical perspectives that underpin the research and provide distinct assumptions about what constitutes reality and knowledge. Merriam (1998), Patton (2002), and Strauss & Corbin (1998) suggest that qualitative research offers insight into the lived experiences of individuals, as well as the multiple contexts influencing both individuals and phenomenon. In considering the purpose of the research, to discover what shapes elementary school teachers' perceptions and interpretations of the Response to Intervention (RtI) process and how these perceptions influence the implementation of RtI, the research utilized a qualitative approach integrating the epistemological stance of social constructionism and the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, and the interpretivist approach of symbolic interactionism.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) is an epistemology or philosophical perspective that views knowledge as a social construction, whereby meaning is created by the social interplay of individuals, as they co-exist with others and the environment. Constructionism rejects the idea that an objective, absolute truth exists.

Consequently, truth or meaning exists in multiple social, cultural, and institutional contexts of human experience (Bruner, 1990; Crotty, 2003). Meaning is produced and transmitted through social practices, institutions, interactions, and the discourse among individuals (Vygotsky, 1978). The world and the things in it are important factors in the creation of meaning or knowledge (Crotty, 2003).

The philosophy of constructionism asserts that the world is not independent of beliefs, values, language, artifacts, and experiences (Crotty, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). Social constructionism claims that individuals are born into "a system of intelligibility" (Crotty, 2003, p. 54) containing universal signs and symbols which are culturally mediated and provide meaning (Bruner, 1996; Schwandt, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). The philosophy of social constructionism views knowledge as created by the interchange between social subjects (actors/people) and objects in the world (Crotty, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). By applying social constructionism to my research, I gained an understanding of how teachers created knowledge and meaning through their interactions, discourse, and lived experiences, as they participated in the process of implementing RtI. Additionally, the perspective of social constructionism allowed me to investigate not only where teachers derive knowledge of RtI, but also how socially mediated experiences, personal beliefs, and institutionalized practices shaped their perceptions, as well as their ability to understand and implement RtI. However, constructionism limits the study because it does not seek an absolute truth but rather a subjective truth held by individuals in a specific time, place, and context (Stake, 1995).

Interpretivism

Interpretivism is a qualitative research approach that ascribes to the interpretive nature of knowledge. The interpretivist philosophy is based on three tenets: (a) human action holds meaning or intentionality, (b) human reality is subjective, and (c) the social reality of study informants can be objectively captured (Schwandt, 2000). According to the interpretivist theoretical perspective, people construct meaning as they interpret

their world through social, cultural, and experiential perceptions of reality (Bruner, 1990; Crotty, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). Thus, the interpretivist research approach seeks to capture and represent the actions, feelings, and voices of study informants (Denzin, 1992; 2001). The goal of interpretivist research is to garner *"Verstehen"* or an understanding of the systems of meaning or cultural and institutional norms, which influence the actions of individuals (Crotty, 2003; Schwandt, 2000).

Interpretivism is an abductive research approach that addresses social complexity by producing accounts of reality from the perspective of the research informants. Interpretivism allows researchers to gain insight by clarifying meaning through the process of uncovering not only individual realities, but also shared realities that improve overall comprehension of the phenomenon. In interpretive research, study informants provide conscious accounts of reality, so that researchers can understand not only the phenomenon, but also the social, cultural, historical qualities surrounding the phenomenon (Denzin, 2001). This conception of the interaction between the conscious meaning making of informants and the institutionalized qualities that exert influence on their perceptions of reality is perhaps the most important aspect of interpretivism (Crotty, 2003).

Crotty (2003) asserts that researchers use interpretivism to identify "culturally derived" and "historically situated" (p. 67) interpretations of informants' social realities. Interpretive inquiry informed this research by allowing me to illuminate general educators' understanding of RtI by using thick contextualized descriptions of the historical, procedural, and interactional aspects of program implementation. In addition, the interpretive perspective allowed me to explore how teachers understand RtI through social, cultural, and historical experiences to capture their multiple, naturalistic, interpretations based on lived experiences (Denzin, 2001).

Discovering what informs teachers' knowledge of RtI has created a greater understanding of both individual and group implementation of RtI. Denzin (2001) argues that the interpretivist perspective can provide critical links between informants' personal experiences, institutionalized social structures, and public policies, similar to RtI implementation.

Symbolic Interactionism

The interpretive approach of symbolic interaction informs my research methodology. The primary focus of symbolic interactionism is to study social reality from the perspective of the actors or research informants, who interpret their world through social interaction (Crotty, 2003). Referencing the work of George Herbert Meade, Blumer (1969) asserts that symbolic interactionism is based on three assumptions: (a) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings things have for them, (b) the meaning of things is derived from social interaction among individuals, and (c) meaning is modified through interpretation by individuals as they experience and encounter things in the world (p. 2). Therefore, the creation of meaning, according to symbolic interactionism, comes primarily through the social interactions and activities of individuals in society (Blumer, 1969). The implication is that human beings not only rely on symbols, such as language, to construct meaning, but also social groups and the roles they assume in these groups to create reality (Charon, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, Sandstrom, Martin, and Fine (2001) suggest people are conscious, self-reflective, and purposive beings, who actively change their behavior and/or identity as they interact with others and the environment.

Crotty (2003) indicates that through dialogue a researcher can gain awareness of the informants' perceptions, feelings, and attitudes and interpret their meanings. The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism requires the researcher to assume the perspective of the research informant by taking the "standpoint of those studied" (Crotty, 2003, p. 75). The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism provides a focus for

identifying organized patterns of behavior, observable interactions, relationships, and individual and institutionalized definitions or understandings of RtI. Through participant observation, interviews, and artifacts, I investigated how teachers responded to RtI based on their social interactions with others in the school environment, as well as shared and individual meanings of RtI reflected symbolically through language and interaction.

Qualitative research through the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism provided an opportunity to study human action mediated by social symbols, including language, relationships, and institutionalized practices. As a theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism is concerned with how people define and perceive the world and how these definitions and perceptions influence both individual and collective action (Charon, 2004). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that the process of examining and interpreting experiences, as well as social interaction, is what allows individuals to develop their perspective and assign definitions to objects, people, and situations in the environment.

Employing symbolic interactionism requires reflexivity on behalf of the researcher. Reflexivity is the acknowledgement of any personal values, experiences, and/or assumptions that have the potential to influence the interpretation of study findings. Therefore, it is important to identify my positionality in relation to the research to address potential issues of researcher bias and transparency. A discussion of researcher positionality is provided later in this chapter. Another limitation of research conducted through the lens of symbolic interaction is its narrow focus on the immediate and situated social reality of time, location, and human understanding. I address this by providing thick, rich descriptions of individuals, the environment, and situations, to allow for the transferability of study findings to other situations and/or locations.

Case Study Design

Case study research is the examination of a specific object (Stake, 1995). A case may be a person, place, or collection of artifacts (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003; Stake,

1995; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Krathwohl, 1998). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe the process of case study design in relation to a funnel. The research design began with a broad focus, to identify a specific research site and study participants to inform research questions. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe this process as “casting a wide net” to judge not only the viability of research locations and participants, but also the direction in which the research should proceed.

There are numerous approaches to qualitative case study research; however, a descriptive case study design was used to gain an understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of general educators in particular social settings and contexts (Merriam, 1998, Stake, 1995). Formal and informal interviews, videotaped classroom observations, and the examination of documents and artifacts provided insight into how elementary school teachers’ perceptions and interpretations influenced RtI implementation and instructional practices for at-risk students. The case study method allowed the researcher to construct thick descriptions of individual understanding RtI by incorporating the interaction of multiple variables that influence the phenomenon over time to develop emerging themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Although case study is not concerned with results, it provides holistic descriptions of the real-life situations and settings to inform future RtI policy implementation (Stake, 1995).

A qualitative case study investigated how three elementary school teachers implemented RtI in their general education classrooms. The flexible nature of qualitative research, allowed the methodology, sampling procedures, and data collection methods to expand, narrow, or change as the research progressed (Krathwohl, 1998). The purpose of this study was to discover what K-5 general education teachers know about RtI, how they implement RtI in their classrooms, and how RtI implementation influences instructional practices for at-risk learners.

The following questions guided the research investigation:

1. What do select K-5 general education teachers know and understand about the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) policy and implementation requirements?
2. How are select K-5 general educators implementing Response-to-Intervention in their classrooms?
3. How do select general educators describe the influence of Response-to-Intervention on instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom?

Context for the Study

Federal and State Contexts

IDEIA (2004) federal law [PL 108-446, Part B, Section 614(b), 6, A, B] authorized education agencies to use a student's response to scientific research-based interventions in the identification of specific learning disabilities. In addition, the law requires state and local education agencies to establish specific criteria for the determination of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), as well as guidelines for RtI implementation. In October of 2008, the state Department of Education (GaDOE) published a framework for the Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions. The framework adopted a four-tiered model that provides an integrated approach to providing intervention services for general, remedial, gifted and special education students. The Pyramid of Intervention provides "standards-based classroom learning (tier1), needs-based learning (tier 2), student support team driven learning (tier 3), and specially designed learning (tier 4)" (GADOE, 2008, p.6). State regulations support the use of strong academic standards, research-based interventions, and frequent progress monitoring to assess student performance. The state permits local education agencies to develop guidelines that use both IQ discrepancy and RtI for the identification of SLD.

Local Contexts

I entered the research site on April 13, 2009. After meeting briefly with the teachers to recruit study participants, the principal introduced me to the Guidance Counselor, Ms. Greer, who oversees RtI implementation at River Rock Elementary. The principal assured me that Ms. Greer would be able to provide contextual information about RtI implementation, current RtI guidelines, and school-wide efforts to implement RtI. After a brief introduction by the principal, Ms. Greer invited me into her office for a candid conversation about both system and school wide efforts to implement RtI.

Ms. Greer explained that the school system became fully aware of RtI in the spring of 2007 during a two-day stakeholder meeting sponsored by a Regional Educational Service Agency. Administrators and representatives from fourteen local school districts attended the meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to provide general information regarding the new regulations for special education services and to present a timeline for RtI implementation. While at the meeting, participants, including Ms. Greer, discussed current local education agency activities compatible with RtI implementation, potential obstacles and/or barriers to RtI implementation, and necessary guidance and support structures vital to successful RtI implementation. Participants identified the need to develop state and district implementation guidelines that incorporate clear, concise "common language" definitions of RtI and RtI terminology, as well as systematic implementation processes easily transposed from district to district within the state. Several counties volunteered to pilot RtI implementation within their school systems in order to provide feedback to state and local education agencies. River Rock Elementary School became an RtI pilot school for the county in the spring of 2008 and began system-wide implementation of RtI in August of 2008.

Glenn County Public Schools

Large metropolitan school systems tend to possess greater human and capital resources to assist organizational members with the transition from the SST process for identifying specific learning disabilities to RtI (Evans, 2001). However, Glenn County Public Schools, a relatively small, rural school system with limited resources, provided the research site. Over the past twenty years, the population in Glenn County has grown 40%. Known primarily as a farming community, Glenn County has a large population of migrant workers. Conducting research in Glenn County allowed me to investigate how multiple contextual factors, such as funding, staffing, teaching materials, and professional learning, interact to influence teacher understanding and implementation of RtI reform initiatives (Tye, 2000).

The Glenn County Public School System has 7 high schools, 6 middle schools, and 20 elementary schools that serve 25,461 students. Twelve of these schools are Title I schools. Fifty-one percent of the student population is considered economically disadvantaged, 10% of the total population participates in Special Education Programs, and 18% of the total population is English Language Learners. Under the supervision of the Superintendent, the mission of Glenn County Public Schools is to provide rigorous instruction for all students.

River Rock Elementary School

RtI seeks to provide intervention to students experiencing learning difficulties in grades K-12 (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Batsche et al., 2006). However, the public elementary school setting, particularly K-5, is where RtI intends to identify and provide a majority of early intervention services to students struggling academically.

The K-5 public school setting is particularly well suited for examining general educators' understanding of RtI policy and implementation not only because the public school system is directly affected by IDEIA (2004) policy, but also because elementary school teachers are at the forefront of program implementation (Batsche et al., 2006).

In the present study, the research site, River Rock Elementary School, allowed me to investigate how elementary school teachers understand and implement the new RtI reform initiatives. Large-scale reform efforts, such as RtI, require individuals to adjust their ways of thinking and often conflict with the cultural and philosophical beliefs of organizational members (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Evans, 2001). Thus, reform initiatives like RtI, may involve resistance from individuals within the organization (Argyris, 1990; Evans, 1996).

Located twelve miles outside the city in the rustic mountains of a Southeastern state, River Rock Elementary is one of twenty elementary schools serving 548 Kindergarten through fifth grade students in Glenn County. Nestled within a close-knit farming community steeped in tradition, the demographic composition of the school community has not changed much over the past 32 years and has seen little growth in recent years. The school population is 92% white, 5% Hispanic, 2% biracial, and less than 1% black. Thirty-four percent of the student population is economically disadvantaged, 14% participate in special education programs, and 7% participate in the gifted education program.

River Rock Elementary submitted a charter school grant in the fall of 2007. In late spring of 2008, the school received grant money to develop a charter school based on Howard Gardner's (2004) theory of multiple intelligences. At the time of the study, the faculty members were working on the charter school initiative scheduled to begin the following school year in August of 2008. However, River Rock Elementary was not a charter school during data collection for this study.

The Participants

Purposive sampling procedures identified research participants (Bogdan & Biklen., 2003; Krathwohl, 1998). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) assert that purposive sampling facilitates the development of emerging themes and/or theories. The study participants represent a “maximum variation sample” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998) with a wide range in participant age, education, teaching experience, and grade levels. The individuals chosen to participate in the study served as sensitive informants to enrich knowledge of the phenomenon and add to the overall understanding of teacher perceptions of RtI in a specific context (Krathwohl, 1998). By choosing multiple individuals within a single school setting, it was possible to conduct a deep investigation of general educators’ understanding and implementation of RtI within a specific time and location. The environmental context was similar for all teachers, since each participant had access to the same RtI information, training, and implementation materials. Patton (2002) suggests findings from small diverse samples have the potential to identify emerging themes based on shared contexts.

Three criteria directed the process of identifying study participants. The first criterion was teacher experience. Teachers chosen to participate in the study were required to have at least three years of teaching experience in order to assure that any inconsistencies in participant responses were not reflective of lack of experience. The second criterion for participant selection was employment in a single rural public school system. It was important for study participants to have similar standards-based curriculum training, because RtI implementation requires the use of scientific research-based programs and practices. A final criterion for participant selection was employment as a K-5 teacher in a public elementary school system, since primary methods of RtI early intervention will occur during K-5 years.

In order to recruit volunteer participants, an open-ended demographic survey (Appendix A) pertaining to participant selection criteria along with a letter of introduction

(Appendix B) and a self-addressed stamped envelope were sent to the research site principal. General education teachers completed the survey. The survey allowed teachers to indicate interest in study participation. Upon study completion, individuals who agreed to participate in the study received a gift card to the local teacher store.

The study participants were three general education teachers from River Rock Elementary School who were implementing RtI in their classrooms and were willing to volunteer for participation in this study. The names used in the study are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the school system, elementary school research site, and teacher participants. Pseudonyms for the school system, elementary school research site, and individuals were selected at random; however, to assist the reader in the identification of teacher participants throughout the study, the researcher intentionally assigned pseudonyms for teacher participants alphabetically according to years of teaching experience. The study participants, Ana, Mary, and Sarah represent a well-rounded group of individuals with varying backgrounds, degrees of education, experience, and grade levels. Table 2 provides an overview of study participant profiles.

Table 1

Profile of Study Participants

Participant	Ana	Mary	Sarah
Grade Level	1	3	5
Years of Teaching Experience	6	13	25
Years at River Rock Elementary	6	7	9
Advanced Education Degrees	BS in Education; MED Early Childhood; gifted endorsement	Post-baccalaureate Teacher Certification; MED Early Childhood	BS in Education (P-8); Teacher Support Specialist endorsement; National Board Certification

Each study participant signed a consent form and agreed to participate in a series of five interviews, videotape 1-2 (60-minute) math and 1-2 (60-minute) reading lessons, submit lesson plans for videotaped lessons, and provide RtI documentation for students currently involved in the RtI pyramid of intervention. Throughout the course of the study, participants had opportunities to review the interview transcripts through member checks. Aside from occasional corrections due to typographical errors, the content of interview transcripts remained intact. The following provides a brief description of individual study participants.

Ana

At the time of the study, Ana was a first-grade teacher at River Rock Elementary school with six years of teaching experience. A native to the area, Ana has lived in the community since she was six months old. She attended school within the county and graduated from the local high school. Both her undergraduate and graduate degrees were earned from institutions in neighboring communities. She earned a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education and is currently pursuing a Gifted Endorsement. Ana began her teaching career at River Rock Elementary School in the fall of 2003, as a fourth-grade teacher. From 2004 to the present, she has taught first grade at River Rock. Ana believes strongly in self-education, lifelong learning, and teaching to individual learning styles. She stated, "All students have gifts; they just open them at different times" to introduce her educational philosophy. She further elaborated her position by explaining:

> I truly believe it is important to realize that all students learn differently and it is my passion to find that learning style. By teaching to individual learning styles, intrinsic motivation is created within each child and they feel successful, or as the quote says, their gifts begin to open. I also believe teachers must be lifelong learners. As our generations change, so do our educational theories. Teachers must be ready to prepare our students for the future.

Ana believes that "as society changes, so should our teaching strategies." As a member of the School Leadership Team and co-chair of the Multiple Intelligences Charter School Committee, Ana is committed to life-long learning and continues to seek out and "educate [herself] on best teaching practices."

Mary

In 1991, Mary graduated from an out-of-state university with a Bachelor's Degree in Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Administration. She went on to complete the post baccalaureate program at a local college to earn an Early Childhood Education Teaching Certificate. She began her teaching career as a paraprofessional at an adjacent school system. The following year she accepted a teaching position at another local school system. She worked for five years as a first grade, second grade, and Kindergarten teacher before accepting a position at River Rock Elementary School. The move to River Rock Elementary School allowed her to teach within the county she resides.

Mary has taught third grade throughout her seven years at River Rock. Her primary educational interest has been "researching multiple intelligences theory for the charter school initiative at River Rock." In discussing her passion for understanding and addressing student learning styles, Mary demonstrates self-evaluation and reflection.

> It's very evident that no matter how close they are academically, children learn differently. I just can't stress that enough because I'm guilty. When I first started teaching, I got up and taught from a basal reader. And if you didn't get it, well sorry. It's your fault. But now, having my own children go through school, I know my oldest would have done fine with any kind of teaching, but my youngest one will not. This has caused me to re-evaluate what I do. I look back on certain students I have taught and I think, if I had only thought to approach learning tasks differently, there's no telling how far that student could have gone in one year of school.

Mary believes understanding that every child learns differently, and learning to accept and embrace these differences is important to successful student learning.

Sarah

Sarah is a veteran teacher with twenty-five years of public school teaching experience. She attended a university outside the state and graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Education. Sarah is qualified to teach students in preschool through the eighth grade. She also completed coursework for the Teacher Support Specialist (TSS) endorsement. Over the course of her teaching career, Sarah has taught second and fifth grade elementary school students and sixth, seventh, and eighth grade middle school students.

Nine years ago, Sarah began teaching fifth-grade at River Rock Elementary School. Her current teaching interests include upper elementary math and science education and curriculum design. These interests led her to volunteer to participate in the Singapore Math Pilot Program at River Rock. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Sarah serves as the fifth grade Intervention Team (IT) chair. As the grade level IT chair, Sarah attends monthly school Intervention Team meetings and acts as a liaison for the dissemination of information pertaining to RtI implementation. She meets with her grade level weekly to share information, hold RtI grade-level meetings and problem-solve.

As a veteran teacher, Sarah believes it is the teacher's responsibility to be aware of individual student performance. She emphasized the importance of meeting students where they are and being hypersensitive to student needs. Sarah is a self-proclaimed "helicopter teacher."

> I try to wander around and use proximity. When we pair and share, I listen. I listen very carefully. I will go around and progress monitor by asking questions. If I feel like they are really stuck, I will redirect attention…I will go around the room and see what individual children are doing. I listen to what they are doing during the lesson. I'm a hoverer…I'm always around them and in their business all the time. I know where they are and what they're doing.

She attributes her ability to identify and address specific student learning needs to a natural and intuitive response that stems from years of experience in the educational setting.

Classroom Demographics

The study participants' classrooms represent variation with regard to grade level, class size, intellectual ability, and student characteristics. Data from one first grade classroom, one third grade classroom, and one fifth grade classroom were included in the study. Table 3 provides a summary of the number of students in each study participant's classroom served within each tier of the RtI pyramid of intervention.

With only fifteen students, Ana has the smallest class size. However, with eight students in tiers 2 and 3, she has the greatest number of students requiring additional intervention. As student age and grade level increase, so do class sizes. The 20:1 and 22:1 student-teacher ratios in Mary and Sarah's classrooms represent 33% and 47% larger class sizes respectively. Yet, Mary and Sarah each serve only three students in tiers two and three of RtI. The following provides a brief description of the classroom settings and student demographics.

Table 2

RtI Classroom Demographics

Classrooms	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Ana's First Grade	7	7	1
Mary's Third Grade	17	2	1
Sarah's Fifth Grade	19	3	0

Ana's First Grade Classroom

Upon approaching Ana's classroom, a bulletin board displays current student work with references to specific learning objectives. An examination of the student work reveals discrepancies in intellectual ability and fine motor skills. Inside the classroom, the physical environment is indicative of an early childhood classroom with seating for individual student work, a rug area for whole group meetings, and clearly defined learning stations. Three six-foot tables arranged in the shape of the letter U at the front of the classroom provide an area for individual student seatwork. A kidney shaped table in the middle of the room provides an area for small group reading and math instruction. A four-foot diameter round table located at the back of the room offers additional space for centers and/or small group work. An L shaped bookcase provides storage for a classroom leveled reading library. Brightly colored storage tubs house books for independent student reading. A color coding system assists students in choosing books based on independent reading levels. All bulletin boards and displays assist with classroom organization, learning stations, and/or display student work.

Ana describes her class as "average to low-average." The class is comprised of students ages 6-8. There are 15 students in the class, 9 boys and 6 girls. Of the 15 students, 8 students demonstrate special needs including difficulty with social and emotional behavior, fine motor and gross motor skills, attention deficit, hyperactivity, and autism. The majority of students in Ana's class are Caucasian. However, her class is more culturally diverse than the other classrooms in the study with 1 Asian and 1 Hispanic student. Both of these students speak English fluently and do not qualify for English to Speakers of Other Languages services.

Ana's class is a self-contained general education first grade classroom, in which one teacher teaches all subject areas to the same group of students. The only students to leave the classroom for instruction are children who receive additional support from the Speech Pathologist, Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Early Intervention

Teacher, and/or the Special Education Teacher. Several students in Ana's classroom receive one or more of these services. Ana also receives additional instructional support for 45 minutes every day from a Kindergarten para-professional. This individual works one-on-one or in small groups with Ana's tier 2 and tier 3 RtI students.

Mary's Third Grade Classroom

Mary's third grade classroom is located in a pod off the main hallway. Four third grade classrooms are situated within the 15 x 5 foot pentagon shaped pod. When each classroom door in the pod is open, it is possible to see inside adjacent classrooms from within each classroom. Individuals enter Mary's classroom at the back of the room. A small, carpeted area to the left of the entrance provides a noticeable leveled classroom library. Bulletin boards display information relevant to curriculum content. The physical arrangement is suited more for individual, partner, and group work than learning stations. Two parallel groups of desks arranged 2 x 5 are perpendicular to the whiteboard at the front of the classroom. Between the whiteboard and student desks is a carpet area for whole group instruction. To the right of the student desks is a small rectangular table that seats five students. Mary uses the table to provide small group instruction for tier 2 and tier 3 RtI students.

The students in Mary's third grade class are all Caucasian and range in age from 8-10 years old. There are 20 students in the class, 12 boys and 8 girls. At the time of the study, none of the students in Mary's classroom received any Special Education services. All third grade students are ability grouped for reading and math instruction. Mary indicated she is responsible for instructing students functioning on grade level in reading and math. Consequently, she considers the students in her class to be of "average" intelligence. However, the students involved in tiers 2 and 3 of RtI leave Mary's classroom to receive reading and math instruction in another third grade classroom co-taught by the Early Intervention Teacher.

Sarah's Fifth Grade Classroom

Sarah's fifth grade classroom is located directly across from the cafeteria. Even with the classroom door closed, noise from the cafeteria is audible in the background for two hours everyday. Sarah's classroom is noticeably larger than the first and third grade classrooms in the study. The physical environment is conducive to direct teacher instruction and small group student directed work. There is no evidence of a designated whole group, carpeted area or learning stations. Two parallel groups of desks arranged 2 x 5 are perpendicular to the whiteboard at the front of the classroom. At the foot of each of these groups is a single student desk. At the back of the classroom is a 4-foot diameter round table for small group work. Mounted to the wall on the right side of the whiteboard at the front of the classroom is a 50-inch computer monitor. Sarah uses the monitor to display curriculum content, show educational videos, and to provide demonstrations. Sarah also incorporates other technology into her classroom instruction including an overhead projector, a portable laptop station, and Alpha Smarts for math computation practice.

All four of the fifth grade classrooms contain students grouped homogenously based on ability. According to Sarah, "Two of the fifth grade classrooms contain lower functioning students with Special Education students clustered within these two classrooms." Sarah's class is comprised of 22 Caucasian students ages 10-12. There are 15 boys and 7 girls. She describes the students as "above average or high functioning students." She explained, "These kids are at the top of fifth grade or are ahead, completing sixth and seventh grade work." Three of Sarah's students participate in the gifted program. None of the students in the classroom participate in Special Education services. However, three students were involved in RtI tier 2 at the beginning of the school year. According to Sarah these students had difficulty with "spelling," "auditory processing," and "organizational skills."

A high school student, participating in the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Program, volunteers in Sarah's classroom several days each week.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative case study methods generally incorporate data obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Using multiple methods of data collection provides the opportunity for researchers to "triangulate data" (Denzin, 2004, p. 301; Krathwohl, 1998, p. 620) which illuminates the research problem(s) and provides validity to data (Krathwohl, 1998). Therefore, the three primary sources of data collection in this study were interviews, observations, and document analysis. A data collection timeline is presented in Appendix C. Table 1 provides an alignment of the research questions, components of Bandura's (1977; 1986) social cognitive theory addressed by the research questions and data collection methods for investigating each research question.

Interviews

Interviews with individual study participants occurred between April 2009 and May 2009. Interview questions were designed for open responses. Interviews lasted approximately 90-minutes (Seidman, 2006). All interviews were tape-recorded and documented using transcriptions and researcher field notes.

Table 3

Alignment of Research Question, Theory, and Methods

Research Question	Social Cognitive Theory Component(s)	Data Collection Methods
1. What do K-5 general education teachers' know and understand about the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) policy and implementation requirements?	Personal	Interview 1 personal history, experience
	Environment	Document Analysis RtI Guidelines, Training Manuals
		Videotaped Observations Professional Development
		Videotaped Observations Contextual Items (TPR)
2. How are K-5 general educators implementing Response-to-Intervention in their classrooms?	Behavior (teacher)	Interview 2 Details of Experience, Descriptions of RtI efforts Reflection
		Document Analysis Lesson Plans, RtI Documentation
		Videotaped Observations Planning Items (TPR), Interactive Items (TPR)

Research Question	Social Cognitive Theory Component(s)	Data Collection Methods
3. How has Response-to-Intervention implementation influenced instruction for at-risk students in the general education classroom	Behavior (student)	Interviews 3-5 Reflection Document Analysis Student Progress Monitoring Documentation Videotaped Observations Reflective Items (TPR), Pupil Attention and Behavior (TPR)

In addition to interview transcriptions, the Teaching Performance Record (TPR) also documented data from both interviews and videotaped observations. The purpose of conducting interviews was to discover how study participants understand and implement RtI. Through the interview process, the researcher came to understand the perspectives of study participants (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) suggests three types of interviews: highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. A combination of interview techniques promoted the investigation of the research questions. Seidman's (2006) methods for designing in-depth interviews informed the development of protocol for a series of five interviews with each study participant. The interview protocol is presented in Appendix D. The interview protocol aligned research questions with interview questions, as well as document analysis and observational data. Interview questions were piloted and revised prior to beginning the research.

As recommended by Seidman (2006), the first interview provided the research context. During the first interview, I presented a brief, but explicit description of the study including both researcher and participant responsibilities (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). The purpose of the initial interview was to establish rapport with study participants and

gain a basic understanding of the general educator's life history, personal experience, and knowledge. The questions for interview one were designed to encourage participant responses that provided detailed descriptions of what K-5 general educators know and understand about RtI policy and implementation requirements. I incorporated the use of probes when necessary to clarify and extend participant responses.

The second interview coincided with both document analysis and observational data. Interview 2 focused on specific details of RtI teacher experience (Seidman, 2006). Interview questions concentrated on eliciting descriptions of general educators' efforts to implement the tiers of RtI intervention in their classrooms. The participants were encouraged to share a reading or math lesson plan and describe efforts to incorporate RtI interventions for at-risk learners. During the interview, both the study participant and I watched a 10-15 minute segment from the videotaped observation submitted the previous week. Additional interview questions came from my analysis of the videotaped lesson content and focused on encouraging individual study participants to reflect on their RtI teaching strategies.

The purpose of the third interview was to allow study participants to reflect upon their experience. While viewing a 10-15 minute segment from the second videotaped lesson, participants were encouraged to deconstruct the lesson. In order to facilitate reflection, interview 3 questions focused on specific teacher behaviors, student behaviors, and how contextual factors related to personal history and experience influenced not only RtI implementation, but also instructional practices. This process was repeated for interviews four and five. However, Ana and Sarah were the only participants to complete interview four and Ana was the only participant to complete the final interview.

Observations

Collecting data through observation allowed me to explore the phenomenon of RtI implementation in context (Merriam, 1998). Observations allowed me to record numerous variables surrounding a phenomenon, including but not limited to the

environment, participants, activities, interactions, and frequency and duration of events (Merriam, 1998). RtI involves three levels of intervention for students experiencing learning difficulties in the general education setting. Observational data included classroom activities and lessons (Tier1), EIP and/or small group interventions (Tier 2), and intensive individualized interventions (Tier 3). Observations within each tier provided descriptions of not only what teachers understand about RtI, but also how they are implementing intervention strategies at various levels of the Pyramid of Intervention. The observational data included 1-2 (60-minute) math and 1-2 (60-minute) reading videotaped classroom observations.

Videotaped observations are quite prevalent in qualitative research (Ratcliff, 2003; Smith & Southerland, 2007). Paterson, Bottorff, and Hewatt (2003) suggest video recordings supplement observations to document processes, behaviors, and interactions as they occur in the natural setting. The study participants were asked to provide videotaped observations of 1-2 (60-minute) math and 1-2 (60-minute) reading lessons. The researcher met informally with study participants to obtain written copies of lesson plans prior to videotaping the lesson. Participants submitted videotaped observations at the end of weeks 2 through 5. An interview followed each videotaped lesson and served as a means of member checking to validate research interpretations. This not only provided additional information for analysis but also allowed study participants to respond to videotaped lessons to aid in the accuracy of data interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In this study, videotaped recordings of lessons in the general education setting were used for multiple purposes: (1) to document general educators' behaviors, (2) to document RtI intervention strategies employed by general educators, (3) to facilitate interviews in a five-part interview series, and (4) to document teacher engagement in RtI implementation. The school media specialist at River Rock Elementary assisted with video production. All videotaped observations were transferred to DVD format. Two copies were made of each videotaped observation. Digital video recordings were labeled,

cataloged, and stored in a locked filing cabinet along with corresponding transcriptions. Transcriptions of videotaped observations included documentation of classroom dialogue, body language/gestures, facial expressions, and patterns of movement (Ratcliff, 2003).

Document Analysis

The final method of data collection was document analysis. Documents included in the study were materials and/or records that would advance understanding of RtI in relation to the research setting and study participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). The documents analyzed in the study pertained to district and school RtI policies and procedures, progress monitoring, intervention strategies implemented within the classrooms. The district and elementary school documents included in the analysis were the district RtI Implementation Guidelines, the River Rock Elementary School Mission and Vision Statements, the School Improvement Plan, and the Professional Development Plan. In addition, study participants were asked to provide lesson plans for 1-2 (60-minute) reading and 1-2 (60-minute) math lessons, as well as RtI documentation. RtI documentation submitted for analysis included RtI meeting minutes, documentation, and progress monitoring data. Analyses of these forms of documentation facilitated understanding of general educators' knowledge of RtI policies, policy implementation within their classrooms, and descriptions of the influence of implementation on instructional practices for at-risk learners.

Challenges Encountered During Data Collection

Study participants reserved the right to withdraw participation from the study. When data collection was complete, only one participant, Ana, had finished all the study requirements. Sarah withdrew participation from the study on May 15, 2009, the date the last videotaped lesson was due. At the time of her withdrawal, Sarah had not submitted videotaped lesson 4, participated in interview 5, or provided RtI documentation for students currently participating in the RtI pyramid of intervention.

During the last three weeks of the study, Mary requested to reschedule interview dates several times. Interview 3 was scheduled for May 5, 2009; however, on May 4, Mary sent an e-mail to request the interview be rescheduled on Friday, May 8. At noon on Friday, May 8, Mary contacted the researcher to cancel the interview. On May 12, I was able to meet with Mary for interview 3. This pushed the date for interview 4 back to May 19, but Mary was unable to videotape a lesson in time for this meeting.

In the absence of videotaped lessons 3 and 4, the fourth interview was no longer necessary. In order to provide closure, a final interview was scheduled on Wednesday, May 27, 2009. This was the last day of post-planning for teachers at River Rock Elementary School. When I arrived on site, Mary had not arrived for the interview. I attempted to contact Mary through phone calls and e-mail. These attempts were unsuccessful. Although Mary never formally dropped out of the study, the absence of videotaped lessons 3 and 4, interviews 4 and 5, and RtI documentation were considered a forfeit of study participation. Thus, the case findings presented in chapter four represent the data collected from each of the study participants and Ms. Greer, the Guidance Counselor and RtI coordinator.

Study Participant Attrition

Several inferences are drawn from the data to provide explanations for participant attrition in this study. The first inference takes into consideration the time of participant withdrawal. Both participants withdrew in the last few weeks or days of data collection. The last three weeks of data collection coincided with the end of the academic school year. Responsibilities increased, as teachers were required to comply with the end-of-school year shutdown procedures. The implementation of the Charter School Initiative the following school year necessitated the reorganization of the school building. In addition to completing documentation and preparing student permanent records, the teachers were also required to pack up their entire classroom.

Therefore, it is possible that participant attrition resulted from difficulty balancing personal, professional, and study commitments.

Scheduling conflicts offer another feasible explanation for participant attrition. Both Mary and Sarah noted scheduling conflicts made it difficult, if not impossible to fulfill study requirements. Mary cancelled the last two interviews due to personal scheduling conflicts regarding the extra curricular activities of her children. The responsibility of teaching and being a fulltime parent may have made it difficult for Mary to sustain participation to complete study requirements. In an e-mail on May 15, 2009, Sarah explained, “I need to drop out of the study. There are just too many schedule changes this time of the year for me to get videos in. I won’t even be teaching that class as a whole again on a regular basis for the rest of the year...” Thus, scheduling conflicts significantly influenced teacher attrition.

A final consideration is that participant attrition corresponded with requests for RtI documentation. During interview four, Sarah was asked to submit RtI documentation for analysis. She indicated students received tier 2 interventions outside the classroom. When asked about obtaining copies of RtI documentation from the teacher who provided the interventions, Sarah stated, “I don’t think the teacher kept any documentation...” She refused to discuss the issue further stating, “…I don’t want to get anyone in trouble.” It was obvious Sarah was extremely uncomfortable discussing intimate details regarding the lack of RtI documentation. Her comments demonstrate teacher fear of repercussions. Perhaps vulnerability caused teachers to withdraw participation to protect them from incrimination.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was the method used to analyze data. Coding and category systems assisted the process of inductive analysis to draw out emerging themes (Krathwohl, 1998). Initial efforts to code interviews, videotaped observations, and documents strictly adhered to the data, seeking to identify actions within each segment.

Charmaz (2006) suggests by using codes that reflect actions, the researcher is less apt to misrepresent or overanalyze data and more likely to accurately capture meaning or action. Employing these strategies aided in the synthesis of data to create key concepts regarding the conditions, contexts, interactions, and consequences surrounding RtI implementation. Key concepts were sorted into categories and subcategories (Charmaz, 2006). Comparisons within and among types of data collected and individual study participants assisted in the analysis. The process of data coding, sorting, and analysis began in April 2009 and continued until November 2009 when saturation was reached and no new information was anticipated by further inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1984, Krathwohl, 1998, Merriam, 1998). Data collection produced 600 pages of interview transcripts, 8 hours of videotaped observations, 80 pages of RtI student documents, 100 pages of RtI procedures, 50 pages of TPR evaluations, and 100 pages of observational field notes. The amount of data collected assisted in reaching saturation despite the fact that two participants withdrew from the study in the final stages of data collection.

Data Reduction and Organization

All data collected from interviews, field notes, videotaped lesson observations, teacher artifacts, RtI guidelines, and RtI documentation were coded and included in the analysis. During the initial phase of analysis, matrices were created using Excel spreadsheets to sort and code the raw data according to the research questions. Once the data were sorted according to each research questions, the researcher analyzed the content contained within each research question. The frequency of words and phrases assisted in the development of key codes.

The NVivo 8 software program provided an additional tool for storing and organizing coded data. The program allowed the researcher to create a hierarchy of categories and subcategories to sort and classify data with references to original data sources, including interview transcriptions, videotaped observations, and specific documents. Subsequent analyses organized codes under each of the research questions

into categories. Categories and subcategories were collapsed and expanded throughout the data analysis process. A comparison of coded data within each category led to the identification of emerging patterns and the development of broad themes and specific sub-themes. At no point during data analysis were the NVivo 8 software coding capabilities used to code data. I coded all data manually to assure study findings emerged from the data. In qualitative research, it is the researcher's responsibility to determine data representation.

Teaching Performance Record (TPR)

The Teaching Performance Record (Appendix E) was used as a tool for analyzing data from interviews, document analysis, and videotaped observations. The Teaching Performance Record (TPR), developed at the University of Virginia, is a valid and reliable method for collecting observational information about teaching behaviors because it addresses the ways in which specific teaching strategies influence student learning, participation, and motivation. As an analytical device, the Teaching Performance Record documents context, planning, interactive and reflective teacher behaviors relative to student instruction. The TPR data corresponds with the research questions and the theoretical framework developed from Bandura's (1977, 1986) concept of triadic reciprocity between personal factors, environmental factors, and behavior. As previously presented, Table 1 provided an alignment of these components.

Through the process of peer reviewing, twenty-four TPR items were identified as relevant to teacher engagement in RtI implementation. Appendix F provides a list of the TPR indicators identified as indicative of RtI implementation. TPR evaluations provided data regarding observable teaching behaviors identified during each videotaped observation. In addition, TPR data allowed the researcher to identify the frequency and consistency of observable teacher behaviors related to RtI implementation throughout the duration of videotaped data collection.

Researcher field notes, transcriptions from videotaped observations, and TPR data facilitated analyses both within and between study participants.

The researcher completed a two-day TPR workshop in 2006. To ensure the accuracy of data collection using the Teaching Performance Record, the researcher also participated in online tutorials. In addition, the researcher enlisted the help of a volunteer peer reviewer from CaseNEX, the TPR developer, to aid in the reliability of instrument use. The researcher and peer reviewer watched and analyzed videotaped lessons separately. Then, the peer reviewer's TPR results for each videotaped lesson were compared to the researcher's results to strengthen the reliability of lesson evaluations. At the conclusion of data collection, the researcher shared individual TPR results with each study participant.

Quality

An important aspect of qualitative research is attending to quality (Krathwohl, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each quality criterion is discussed with regard to the proposed research.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence a researcher portrays in the truth of his/her research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). In order to ensure the credibility of research findings, it was important to demonstrate prolonged engagement and persistent observation within the research sites (Lincoln & Guba, 1984; Krathwohl, 1998). As mentioned previously, although two study participants withdrew participation, data collection produced a significant amount of information. In addition, multiple methods and sources of data collection and analysis procedures provided evidence for data triangulation to validate research findings (Krathwohl, 1998). This made it possible to reach the point of saturation during data analysis. For further validation

of research findings, member checks allowed study participants to review their interview transcriptions and researcher observation and document analysis field notes (Krathwohl, 1998). Allowing study participants to clarify, add, and/or retract statements or interpretations added to the credibility of the research findings. In addition, peer debriefings tested interpretations and findings (Krathwohl, 1998). Finally, to enhance the credibility of study findings I sought to eliminate rival explanations for study results (Krathwohl, 1998).

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1984) define transferability as demonstrating the applicability or external validity of research findings to other contexts and locations. Transferability was established through thick descriptions of the research site, study participants, and social and political contexts in which the research took place (Lincoln & Guba, 1984; Krathwohl, 1998). By thoroughly describing research details, readers can evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people.

Dependability

Dependability is concerned with the reliability of study findings and study replication (Lincoln & Guba, 1984; Krathwohl, 1998). An audit trail provides a clear description of the research path, so that readers can follow the steps of the research methods and determine whether study assertions, interpretations, and conclusions are reasonable (Krathwohl, 1998). Dependability is facilitated by detailed documentation of actions, including methodological and data analysis procedures (Krathwohl, 1998). An evaluation of research dependability is discussed in Chapter five to reveal gaps in research findings and identify additional areas in need of investigation to strengthen future research.

Confirmability

Confirmability describes the degree to which the data supports study findings, interpretations, and conclusions. The purpose of confirmability is to make certain that research findings are not the result of researcher bias, motivation, or self-interest. Based on the constructionist and symbolic interactionism theoretical framework, the research does not seek to present an objective truth, but rather a subjective truth based on contextual factors. Confirmability is reached through reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). Therefore, in the following section I present my positionality as a researcher and identify efforts to control for researcher bias to ensure study results are data driven.

Subjectivities Statement

As a researcher, I have fourteen years of experience in public school systems. The students currently assigned to my classroom are those students most likely to be either positively or negatively affected by the new RtI and IDEIA (2004) regulations. I was interested in pursuing dissertation research that explores how individual teachers interpret, respond, and implement the RtI mandates for at-risk student populations. Because my experience as an early childhood intervention teacher, it is imperative that I explore my positionality as a researcher to reveal any personal or subjective biases that have the potential to interfere with study outcomes.

As an educator, my professional and research interests are in providing early intervention programs which acknowledge developmental stages of learning, honor student abilities, foster independence, and facilitate critical thinking skills. Additional biases as a researcher stemmed from my own personal experience as a struggling student and early intervention teacher. The experience of working as a Title I Teacher, Special Instructional Assistance (SIA) Teacher, and self-contained Early Intervention Program (EIP) Teacher have provided an extensive foundation in curriculum modification, basic skills remediation, and differentiation of instruction. I believe all children are capable

of making academic progress and that it is the teacher's responsibility to remediate and differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of all students. My knowledge of early childhood development and developmentally appropriate practices has allowed me to be successful in working with students exhibiting a variety of intellectual and behavioral issues that impede the learning process. Therefore, I hold strong values and beliefs about the nature of learning (students should be active learners), developmentally appropriate methods for facilitating academic growth (meet students where they are and provide age appropriate activities), and expectations for student learning (high, yet appropriate expectations). Although it is impossible to remove all potential researcher bias by revealing researcher positionality, Harding (2007) suggests by placing the researcher's lived experiences in the context of the research and describing the influence of these experiences on the conceptual framework, readers can make evaluative judgments about researcher subjectivity. As I made my way through the research process, I was cognizant of how personal subjectivities influenced the conceptual and theoretical framework underpinning the methodology.

The Role of Emic and Etic Perspectives in My Research

Familiarity with intervention as both a slow learner and teacher of at-risk students positioned me as an indigenous insider (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). In order to examine how educators understand and implement RtI policies, I assumed both an emic and etic perspective. The emic or inside observer perspective allowed me to compare and contrast multiple teacher and administrator interpretations of RtI in the context of familiar educational organizations, cultures and/or environments (Krathwohl, 1998). The etic or outside observer perspective provided an opportunity to investigate how study participants with life histories and experiences different from my own came to understand and implement the RtI process. Ultimately, my positionality as an insider or outsider was determined by the location of the research site, the participants involved in the study, and the availability of information.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of My Positionality

Changes in stance or present situation can cause a shift in researcher perspective. Johnson-Bailey (2004) references “shifting sands” (p. 132) to illustrate how an insider can become an outsider and vice-versa. Positionality can change based on professional roles, experience, and/or cultural changes in the research environment.

At present, I am an insider because of my direct relationship with students affected by the RtI process, my intervention experience, shared demographic and cultural location. Working as an advocate to serve disadvantaged student populations, the research has the potential to influence the dominant culture by providing a compassionate lens through which to observe and evaluate RtI. My shared sense of identity with both the topic and individuals researched was advantageous to collecting data, interviewing participants, and interpreting cultural-bound information. Consequently, I sought clarification as I interpreted findings through both member checks and peer checks to ensure that my conclusions were objective and drawn from actual observations rather than personal perceptions based on shared understandings.

Chaudhry (2000) highlights the complexity of claiming identity in multiple contexts. This is particularly profound, because as an educator I often dexterously assume multiple identities as a means to an end in my classroom, through interactions with students, parents and colleagues. The multiple roles assumed, such as nurturer, disciplinarian, instructional leader, collaborative coworker, and researcher often require unconscious shifts in behavior, body language, and perspectives. These roles are reflective of the power relationships between individuals. Perhaps this is where the designation as an insider or outsider blurs to reveal the shifting nature of my own positionality with regard to personal and professional agendas.

Insider and outsider status can be both advantageous and detrimental in the research process (Merriam, Ntseane, Lee, Kee, Johnson-Bailey & Muhamad, 2000). What an insider understands to be truth or reality may be very different from what an outsider

observes. A more objective understanding of observations is gained by incorporating both insider and outsider perspectives to create tension. This concept of reciprocity is necessary to balance the power relations, particularly in research that involves vulnerable populations (Liamputtong, 2007).

Ethical and Political Considerations

The nature of federally mandated RtI reform and the vulnerable population it serves require ethical and political consideration. Issues pertaining to the treatment of human subjects, specifically respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Office of Human Subject Research (OHSR), 1979; Strike, Anderson, Curren, van Geel, Pritchard & Robertson, 2002). The following is a discussion of how these issues are addressed in the research.

Respect for Persons

Respect for persons requires that research subjects participate voluntarily in the research process and possess adequate information and understanding of the research project (OHSR, 1979; Strike et al., 2002). Prior to beginning the research, study participants received detailed information about the research project, including methods of inquiry, researcher responsibilities, study participants' rights, and any potential positive or negative consequences resulting from participation in the study. In addition, study participants were solicited on a voluntary basis. Those agreeing to participate in the research were asked to sign consent forms for with the understanding that they may withdraw from participation at any time. In addition, consent forms addressed permission to videotape students in the classroom.

Beneficence

Beneficence requires researchers to maximize the benefits of the research, while minimizing the risk of harm to human research subjects (OHSR, 1979; Strike et al.,

2002). As the researcher, I had an obligation to protect the privacy of participants and sites (Strike et al., 2002). In order to protect participants' rights to confidentiality, I guaranteed that disclosure of information would not occur without individual informed consent (OHSR, 1979; Strike et al., 2002).

The rich and specific narrative descriptions of people, places, and events may unintentionally disclose teacher identities and/or site locations which may be detrimental to the participants' teaching careers, particularly once the research is published (Magolda & Robinson, 1993; Van den Hoonaard, 2003). In addition, environmental details and/or graphic illustrations of daily classroom events have the potential to jeopardize teacher confidentiality as these distinguishing details may serve to reveal teacher identities and result in negative or punitive consequences for teacher participants (Bresler, 1996; Magolda & Robinson, 1993; Williams, 1996; Van den Hoonaard; 2003). The sensitive nature of RtI implementation and federal mandates demands careful consideration when constructing research site and participant narratives in order to ensure site and study participant anonymity.

Justice

Justice concerns the moral rights and obligations of the researcher and the study participants to ensure the protection of vulnerable populations (OHSR, 1979; Strike et al., 2002). All identifying characteristics were removed from data and documents collected, such as progress monitoring scores, records of RtI intervention, RtI and IEP meeting minutes, IEP paperwork, and tape recordings of interviews. Pseudonyms were used to protect the rights and identities of the local education agency, the research site, and study participants. All research documentation collected directly from study participants was contained in a locked cabinet, when not in use.

A final consideration regarding justice is the obligation to provide accurate data that contributes to the understanding of phenomenon and improvement of educational practices (OHSR, 1979; Strike et al., 2002). Describing and interpreting data posed two

ethical issues for the fieldwork that have the potential to compromise research outcomes, "the representation of truth and confidentiality" (Bresler, 1996, p. 135). In considering a resolution, Lincoln et al. (1985), Magolda and Robinson (1993), Bresler (1996), and Williams (1996) suggest distributing copies of the provisional text to informants for participant or member checks. Study participants were provided copies of interview transcripts, researcher observations, and data interpretation. Participants reviewed the data to guarantee accuracy. Member checks established credibility, while at the same time respected the anonymity of informants (Lincoln et al., 1985; OHSR, 1979; Strike et al., 2002). Both the use of member checks and multiple sources of data collection ensured the accuracy of information presented in the study.

Representation

The process of writing a case study report requires four tasks: assembling a case record from data collection and analysis procedures, selecting an audience, determining a focus, and creating an outline (Merriam, 1993). Perhaps the most significant of these tasks is audience selection and focus. In considering the rationale for choosing the research topic, it is the researcher's intention to write something that has the potential to both inform current and future intervention policies, as well as teacher practices. In addition, this text must also serve to fulfill the dissertation requirements at Georgia State University. With these purposes in mind, the researcher sought a narrative format accessible to policymakers, practitioners, and academics, one that draws the reader "into the center of the experiences" presented in the research (Denzin, 2004, p. 449).

Since qualitative research relies on the breadth, depth, and detail of the data, and the purpose of this research is to discover how individuals construct meaning, an "emergent text" (Denzin, 2004, p. 451) is presented to emphasize socially constructed realities, contextual generalizations, sources of interpretation, and narratives to represent emergent themes (Krathwohl, 1998). The greatest challenge as a researcher was representing the data in a way that maximizes the issue(s) and voices of study

participants, while acknowledging and minimizing my own voice and bias (Krathwohl, 1998; Denzin, 2004). Ultimately, the successful representation depends on the juxtaposition of data using thick descriptions, participant narratives, interpretive analyses, and commentary (Chenail, 1995).

CHAPTER 4
STUDY FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine what three K-5 general educators know and understand about RtI policy, how they implement RtI in their classrooms, and how they describe the influence of RtI implementation on instruction for at-risk learners in the general education setting. A qualitative case study approach guided the research investigation to answer the following research questions:

1. What do select K-5 general education teachers know and understand about the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) policy and implementation procedures?
2. How are select K-5 general educators implementing Response-to-Intervention in their classrooms?
3. How do select general educators describe the influence of Response-to-Intervention on instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom?

Study results are reported in reference to the research questions and the themes that emerged regarding teacher knowledge of RtI, RtI implementation, and the influence of RtI implementation on instructional practices as described by the teachers.

Results

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding of RtI Policy and Procedures

The first research question sought to determine what a selection of K-5 general education teachers know and understand about the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) policy and implementation. On the Survey for Identifying Study Participants, teachers wrote

a brief description of the RtI pyramid of intervention. Interviews provided additional descriptions of RtI policy, implementation procedures, sources of knowledge, and obstacles to teacher understanding. Examination of these descriptions, particularly how teachers operationally defined RtI, provided insight into teacher knowledge and understanding of RtI policy. Further analyses examined the language used to describe RtI policy and compared teacher descriptions to the definition provided by the local education agency (LEA). The use of certain policy language and information in teachers' descriptions provided evidence of teacher knowledge and understanding. Two themes that emerged from the data were *the importance of language in understanding policy* and *obstacles to understanding policy*.

The Importance of Language in Understanding Policy

Language was critical to teacher understanding of RtI policy. Two sub-themes emerged from the data regarding the importance of language in understanding RtI policy. First, RtI law and policy language provides a basis for teacher knowledge of RtI policy. Second, the language used in teacher definitions of RtI is representative of knowledge and understanding of policy goals and mandated procedures. A discussion of the themes is provided below and concludes with a comparison of local education agency (LEA) policy language and the language used in teacher definitions of RtI.

RtI Law and Policy Language.

Public Law 108-446 Section 300.309 (2004), mandating RtI implementation stipulates state education agencies adopt criteria for determining a specific learning disability (SLD), which includes the use of response to scientific research-based intervention and/or the use of alternate research-based procedures. The law does not provide specific details regarding RtI implementation procedures. State and local education agencies are responsible for interpreting the law and establishing guidelines for policy implementation.

Teachers identified the Response-to-Intervention Procedural Manual produced by the local education agency (LEA) as the main source of information regarding RtI policy. In the glossary of the manual, the local education agency defined RtI as,

> …a method of academic and behavioral interventions that are designed to provide early, effective assistance to struggling students. Research-based interventions are implemented and frequent progress monitoring is conducted to assess student response and progress. When students do not make progress, increasingly more intense interventions are introduced.

Although the teachers could quote RtI policy as presented in the RtI manual in their descriptions, they suggested the definition of RtI was insufficient in guiding RtI teacher implementation. Sarah referred to the language used in the definition of RtI as "vague policy speak." She indicated the definition is laden with policy terminology open to individual interpretation. Ana described RtI policy language as "highly interpretive." She commented, "Everybody had a different interpretation of the policy." Through discussions with other educators, Ana became aware of the variations in teacher interpretations of policy language. She stated that teachers interpreted the terms "effective assistance," "frequent progress monitoring," and "increasingly more intense interventions" in different ways. Of the three teachers, Ana and Mary expressed the greatest concern and frustration regarding what constitutes "effective assistance," "frequent progress monitoring," and "more intense interventions." Ana explained that the RtI manual did not provide specific distinctions or recommend examples of what constitutes a tier-one intervention, a tier-two intervention, or a tier-three intervention. Mary shared similar frustrations. She indicated the teachers on her grade level found policy language "confusing" and often participated in discussions with her peers to interpret the meaning of policy language.

Teacher Definitions of RtI Policy.

In a written response, Ana simply defined RtI as "a step-by-step process used to address student needs and provide more specific interventions." She elaborated further

by explaining, "The RtI process has moved away from the broader Student Support Team method. It gave us a more step-by-step way of helping students and providing interventions they need." Ana's description demonstrates a student-centered focus. She placed more emphasis on aspects of RtI policy intended to help or meet student needs and less emphasis on specific teacher roles and responsibilities necessary for RtI implementation.

Sarah identified RtI as a systematic process; her definition included specialized language from both RtI policy and education. Sarah described RtI as "…a method used to identify educational deficits children have and the strategies needed to alleviate those deficits." She provided additional details stating,

> The system focuses on intervention for rather than the labeling of students with difficulties. Teachers put specific research based interventions in place for 6 to 8 week time periods. Progress monitoring keeps up with student performance and benchmark testing is used to show gains. Special education services are reserved for those students who do not respond to intervention.

The language used in Sarah's description stresses the mandated components of RtI policy that require performance-based assessments and progress monitoring. She viewed RtI as a problem-solving tool for identifying and alleviating "educational deficits." Emphasis was not only placed on how RtI is useful in identifying and addressing student weaknesses through research-based strategies, but also how it necessitates the use of progress-monitoring tools to evaluate and track student performance.

Mary described RtI as "a process used to recognize the students who truly qualify for additional services and testing." In her description, Mary states, "Documentation is done on a regular basis. It includes strategies done in the classroom to better meet the individual needs of each child. Grade-level collaboration is used to make decisions regarding the progress of students in any tier." Although Mary does not refer to specific performance-based assessments, her discussion of ongoing documentation of intervention strategies implies the use of a policy mandated progress-monitoring component.

The inclusion of specific teacher tasks and grade level collaboration her definition indicate a teacher-centered focus.

Comparison of LEA Policy Language and Teacher Language.

The policy language used in the local education agency's definition of RtI was compared to the language used in teachers' oral and written definitions of RtI. The analysis allowed the researcher to determine which aspects of RtI policy teachers focused on in their descriptions and how closely descriptions resembled the definition provided by the LEA. Appendix G provides a chart of the results. The findings indicate the language teachers used in definitions of RtI represents either policy goal(s) or mandated activities and procedures.

The teachers understood RtI implementation as a mandated activity to address "student needs" or "deficits" through intervention strategies; however, none of the teachers indicated whether student needs were academic or behavioral in their written descriptions. This finding was inconsistent with the local education agencies' definition of RtI, which specifies student interventions can be academic or behavioral. Despite the fact that the LEA's definition demonstrated a student-centered focus, both Mary and Sarah's descriptions indicated a teacher-centered focus. Their descriptions included language relevant to the mandated teacher tasks of "documentation' and "progress monitoring." Sarah was the only teacher to include language relevant to the policy mandate requiring the use of "research-based interventions" over a period of "6 to 8 weeks." The analysis revealed Sarah's description of RtI bears the closest resemblance to the LEA's description. The language in her description was highly prescriptive and focused primarily on the goals and mandated activities or conditions outlined by RtI policy. This finding is understandable, considering Sarah's experience as a grade level chair on the school-wide Intervention Team (IT). Her role on the IT committee contributed to her knowledge of RtI policy and provided her with direct access to information and training from LEA experts to inform understanding.

Obstacles to Policy Understanding

Information was essential to teacher knowledge and understanding of RtI policy. The teachers identified the *availability of RtI policy information* and the *consistency of RtI information* as obstacles to their knowledge and understanding of policy. The following presents teacher descriptions of these obstacles.

Availability of RtI Policy Information

System-wide implementation of RtI began in August 2008. Despite the fact that official state guidelines for RtI implementation were not available until October 30, 2008, the LEA was able to provide building administrators with a draft of the district's RtI procedural manual. According to Ms. Greer, the Guidance Counselor/RtI Coordinator, "There was a great deal of frustration on [her] part, as well as the teachers." Both the Guidance Counselor and teachers identified lack of information about policy procedures, transitions from SST to RtI, and resources for RtI implementation, as obstacles to understanding RtI.

The teachers expressed frustration during initial efforts to understand RtI law and policy procedures. The words, "stressful," "frustrating," "overwhelmed," and "disorganized," permeated teacher descriptions of the lack of information available. Ana recalled the lack of information stating,

> There were many questions…We had a lot of support from the counselor and other professionals…but I just got the impression they were not being told everything. So, it's been a struggle because I didn't feel like it was very organized. It wasn't explained in black and white… It was honestly…a big mess

Mary shared similar sentiments when she described teacher understanding of RtI as, "the blind, leading the blind." Throughout her teaching career, Mary had used the Student Support Team (SST) process as a method for identifying specific learning disabilities. She mentioned, "It…took eight years to get really comfortable with the SST process and now they're throwing RtI at us." Mary's choice of the words, "throwing RtI

at us," demonstrates the frustration she experienced during the first few months of RtI implementation due to the lack of guidance and information. She had grown accustomed to the detailed and finely tuned SST process and found RtI implementation, at least during its initial implementation phase, to be "trial and error, learn as you go."

As the current fifth grade Intervention Team (IT) chair, Sarah had firsthand access to information about RtI policy and implementation. Yet, even with her direct knowledge and twenty-five years of teaching experience, she described understanding and transitioning from the SST process to RtI, as "very overwhelming" and "frustrating." She indicated that individuals charged with the responsibility of sharing RtI knowledge were unable to do so, because of the lack of information on RtI policy.

Both Ana and Mary expressed concerns about the lack of specific RtI implementation procedures. Ana recalled, "The guidelines were not specific enough at the beginning of the year in order to know what to do, where to go, what forms to use, and what to do in each tier…" Mary shared similar anxieties about the lack of information regarding the necessary steps for RtI implementation:

> We're held accountable. Number one, we are held accountable for student progress. The accountability stressed me out because I was so unfamiliar with the process of RtI, the process of how to do things, like what to do when this happens or what to do when that happens and what should the next step be…you know how you are when you are unsure of what to do.

Ana explained how the RtI manual did not provide specific distinctions or examples of what constitutes a tier-one intervention, a tier-two intervention, or a tier-three intervention. As a result, she discovered mistakes in the placement of students within the pyramid of intervention. These mistakes often went undetected and resulted in the inaccurate or delayed delivery of intervention services for students. According to Ana, the absence of information regarding procedural guidelines, specific tier boundaries, and intervention resources at the start of RtI implementation contributed to her misunderstanding of RtI policy.

In addition to inadequate information about implementation procedures, the teachers also described a lack of information about transitioning students with active Student Support Team (SST) files into the RtI pyramid of intervention. Ana stated that guidelines were not available regarding how to make the transition:

> Trying to put those kids with active SST files into a tier was very difficult. I would automatically assume these kids needed to be in the second tier because they obviously were in need of extra support, but that wasn't necessarily the case. The students in the SST process didn't necessarily fall into tier-two and in some cases we had to start the process all over again.

Ana also noted that many of the documented SST interventions were tier-one RtI interventions, which made it impossible to merge students with active SST files into tier-two of RtI. RtI requires evidence of intensified interventions and scientific research-based strategies. If SST interventions did not meet the criteria for tier-two, Ana had to spend ten weeks documenting tier-one interventions before she could move a child up to tier-two. Mary also expressed concern with providing a smooth transition for students already receiving intervention services. She explained, "I wanted to make sure that I was recognizing and doing what I was supposed to…because I had some students that came to me who were already in tier-three. I was having to sit down with parents at global RtI meetings and I didn't even know the kids or the process." Mary's comments demonstrate the importance of information availability in teacher understanding, as well as implementation of RtI policy.

Consistency of RtI Policy Information

As RtI implementation progressed, the LEA made changes to RtI protocol and documentation forms. The teachers identified the inconsistency of RtI protocol as another obstacle to understanding. Ana, Mary, and Sarah discussed how the newness of the RtI reform initiative resulted in haphazard, "trial and error" implementation. As a result, RtI expectations and procedures were constantly changing and evolving. Ana described the

process as, “working the kinks out as you go.” The teachers indicated that changes to approved intervention strategies and documentation requirements created obstacles to gaining knowledge and understanding of RtI.

In their descriptions of protocol changes, teachers focused on a single critical incident, the termination of the Lexia® software program as a tier-two intervention and progress-monitoring tool. During a school-wide RtI professional development meeting, the teachers received information and training on the Lexia® computer software program. Mary explained, “Every student in the school had access to Lexia®, a computer-based phonics and language arts practice program…” According to Ana, teachers were told the program could be used as both an intervention and a progress-monitoring device for students in tier-two of RtI. The program provided baseline data on student reading and language arts skills and identified areas of strength and weakness. Once logged onto the program, children completed practice quizzes to review and strengthen skills. Teachers printed weekly progress-monitoring reports as evidence of student response-to-intervention. All three teachers used Lexia® as a tier-two intervention from October through December.

In January, changes were made to the RtI protocol and Lexia® was no longer considered an appropriate tool for intervention. Ana expressed frustration with the policy change stating,

> Well all of a sudden, they [district officials] decided that Lexia® could not be used as a progress-monitoring tool or an intervention because the whole school was being allowed to use it. So, if the whole school was using Lexia®, it wasn’t a tool you could say you were using to help a child, even though we were only allowing certain children to use it.

Sarah also attributed the inconsistency of RtI implementation procedures to district officials or “those higher up.” She explained the dilemma of trying to understand and implement new policy initiatives from the perspective of both a teacher and IT grade-level chair:

> You know the information is so new and so, it [RtI information] changes. We would get this information, we would process it, and then, it would change, as somebody higher up would interpret it in a different way...And sometimes it's hard to be on the cutting edge of the sword because you do try to invent things and then you find out, that's not what the higher ups want you to do. So, we went through some frustration with that.

With Lexia® no longer available as a tier-two intervention strategy and no replacement from the LEA, the teachers had to seek additional information on alternate intervention resources. Although Sarah's students were dismissed from tier-two before the district's decision to pull Lexia® as an approved intervention strategy, she acknowledged the problems this posed for other teachers in the building.

RtI Implementation

The second research question sought to determine how three K-5 general educators were implementing Response-to-Intervention in their classrooms. Data from interviews, field notes, videotaped observations, and documents led to the identification of two categories relevant to teacher implementation of RtI policy: *influences on implementation* and *approaches to RtI implementation*. The presentation of findings on teacher implementation of RtI is presented in two sections. The first section provides a discussion of the influences on RtI implementation identified within the data. The second section describes teacher approaches to RtI implementation.

Influences on RtI Implementation

Analyses revealed influences on teacher implementation of RtI were both personal and environmental. Teacher apprehension, experience, and mindset were sub-themes that emerged from the data as *personal influences* on RtI implementation. Shared goals, supportive and shared leadership, and collaboration were additional sub-themes revealed as *environmental conditions* which supported teacher implementation of RtI. The following provides a discussion of the personal influences and environmental supports affecting RtI implementation.

Personal Influences

A number of personal influences permeated teacher discussions about RtI implementation. The teachers described how personal apprehensions, experience, and mindset served as filters for understanding and implementing RtI in the classroom. The teachers also described the contribution of these personal influences on their dispositions toward RtI implementation. The discussion of personal influences on RtI implementation reports findings according to the sub-themes of *apprehension*, *experience*, and *mindset*.

Apprehension.

RtI implementation involved uncertainty for teachers. The uncertainty teachers experienced during initial efforts to implement RtI contributed to apprehension. According to Ms. Greer, the RtI coordinator, many teachers were afraid of RtI implementation because the process was "ambiguous" and "unknown." Throughout discussions of RtI implementation, the teachers voiced a number of personal apprehensions related to RtI implementation. *Political mistrust*, *fear of the unknown*, *fear of making mistakes*, *fear of appearing incompetent*, and *fear of increased responsibility and workload* were the personal apprehensions that influenced teacher implementation of RtI.

Political Mistrust. The teachers expressed political mistrust resulting from continuous reform policies. Ana, Mary, and Sarah discussed how the newness of the reform initiative resulted in "trial and error" implementation. As a result, RtI expectations and procedures were constantly changing and evolving to address implementation issues. Ana described the process as, "working the kinks out as you go." Consequently, some of the intervention programs and documentation forms changed over the course of the year.

For Ana, every time the district made changes to the RtI protocol, a sharp learning curve required her to acknowledge old processes as invalid, revise her thinking, and reorganize implementation methods. Her comments suggest when protocol remains

consistent the teachers become more knowledgeable and proficient at RtI implementation; therefore, apprehension decreases and confidence increases. Not knowing district intent and expectations for RtI implementation led teachers to feel cautious and insecure. Ana stated,

> I guess the main thing for me is, I'd like to know: 'Is this something that they are going to stay with? Or again, is it something that is going to be changing? Do they see this as a good change for education? Or is this something we are going to be giving the boot here soon, like other reforms in the past? I just don't know. I just don't feel comfortable…this could go one way or the other. Do I like it? Do I not like it? Is this going to benefit my students in the long run? I just don't know.

Ana implies she has experienced the abandonment of reform policies throughout her six-year teaching career. Her comments not only demonstrate the effect of constant reform policy cycles on her sense of security, but also her cautious commitment to RtI implementation. It is difficult for Ana to make a full commitment to RtI implementation without knowledge of the district's intent to execute the reform. Although Mary and Sarah echo these sentiments, as veteran teachers, they have grown accustomed to the volatile nature of reform policies. They accepted instability and change as characteristics of RtI implementation.

Fear of the Unknown. Ana and Mary discussed an overwhelming sense of fear regarding the implementation of RtI. The stress of having to learn a relatively "unknown" process, the lack of explicit guidelines, and continuous changes to RtI policy protocol contributed to teacher apprehension. All the teachers described feeling discombobulated during the beginning stages of RtI implementation. They described the school atmosphere as extremely stressful and confusing. Ana recalled how RtI implementation disrupted her sense of structure, stability, and order. She explained,

> I guess being teachers, we want to know in black and white. This is it. Show me exactly what I need to do. Tell me what you want me to do, and where these kids need to be, and how to get them where they need to be. But it wasn't like that at all. It was left up to the interpretation of the individual teacher.

The absence of definitive “black and white” RtI guidelines made it difficult for the teachers to discern tier boundaries for implement RtI. In addition, the inability of district and school administrators to provide teachers with definitive answers about RtI implementation protocol and specific tier procedures added to the teachers’ sense of apprehension.

Fear of Making Mistakes. RtI implementation made Ana and Mary particularly fearful of making RtI implementation errors. For these teachers, errors in implementation had proven to be time consuming, difficult to remedy, and synonymous with delays in providing timely support for students. Ana explained that the original manual draft did not provide specific distinctions or examples of what constitutes a tier-one intervention, a tier-two intervention, or a tier-three intervention. Ana found she frequently misplaced students in the pyramid of intervention and used inaccurate interventions. Mistakes once recognized required Ana to repeat the intervention process, as well as documentation. Ana remarked, “…When you look at all that’s required by RtI, time is an issue.” In Ana’s experience, errors in implementation caused delays in providing appropriate support and services to students.

Mary also stressed the importance of accurate RtI implementation for timely intervention services. She explained,

> You want to make sure…you are following the right procedures because they [students] have to pass that standardized reading section on CRCT. You don’t want to do something wrong or put a student on the back burner and forget about them.

Mary’s sense of urgency reflects her understanding of RtI teacher accountability in the current political atmosphere. RtI implementation requires teachers to be more accountable for student progress. However, the accountability associated with implementation was also a source of teacher fear and anxiety. Mary indicated teachers could not afford to make implementation errors because NCLB (2001) requires that all students make adequate yearly progress and perform at or above grade level by 2014.

Fear of Appearing Incompetent. When made in the presence of colleagues or parents, implementation errors have the potential to portray the teachers as incompetent. Both Ana and Mary discussed how implementation errors contributed to a lack of confidence and fear of appearing incompetent. Ana found mistakes regarding the placement of students in the Pyramid of Intervention contributed to her sense of insecurity. Ana's awareness of prior implementation errors paralyzed her ability to make future decisions about intervention strategies and student placement on the RtI Pyramid of Intervention. As a result, Ana sought approval from either the grade level Intervention Team (IT) chair or the guidance counselor before making any decisions about RtI implementation. Although Ana believed this was a necessary step for accurate RtI implementation, constantly seeking approval from building experts contributed to her sense of incompetence.

Mary also recalled feeling incompetent when discussing RtI procedures with parents at global RtI meetings during the first few months of RtI implementation. She explained that parents look to teachers as experts. When teachers do not have the ability to clearly define and explain the RtI process, they appear incompetent. Mary also noted how mistakes or delays in RtI intervention have the potential to portray teachers negatively. She provided additional clarification by stating,

> A lot of times I get kids and I'm thinking, how in the world did they get here. I know they lose some skills over the summer. But, I've had kids and the previous teacher never held a meeting on them. And I think, they're not doing their job…If a child can't read, then we need to know why.

Mary's comments indicate the stigma associated with teachers, who neglect to follow RtI protocol or lack the understanding to execute RtI procedures. Because RtI was in the initial stages of implementation the teachers all expressed they were not afraid to ask for additional clarification and assistance. However, Mary noted "… I don't think we are afraid to ask for help, as long as we're not going to get it for asking and we're not going to be judged because we're asking for it." When asked what she meant by "get it," Mary said, "You know, judged for being incompetent."

For both Ana and Mary, fear of incompetence increased their desire to fully understand and implement RtI with accuracy.

Fear of Increased Responsibility and Workload. The magnitude of RtI implementation in addition to other teaching responsibilities was another source of teacher apprehension. Ana remembered, “At the beginning, we were all just thinking, when are we going to have time to do this? I think they started so large with this process that they are realizing, wow our teachers can’t do it all.” Sarah identified the “process” of implementing RtI and the “progress monitoring” components as the most “daunting tasks for the classroom teacher.” She identified several aspects of implementation that contribute to teacher apprehension:

> Number one being the number of children we perceive need proper monitoring, that’s number one. Number two is the documentation requirement. You spend a massive amount of time producing paper on one child. The third thing is you’re hypersensitive as a teacher to what children need, to their struggles. And so, you think, ‘Oh, they can’t do it. I’ve got twenty odd kids in my room who can’t do it.

RtI implementation also increased teacher responsibility and workload. In addition to mastering and teaching grade level content, teachers were responsible for monitoring student progress. Ana and Mary were apprehensive about progress monitoring responsibilities, which required documentation of student progress based on predetermined benchmarks. At the time of the study, the teachers indicated a number of reading diagnostic programs were available through the district; however, few diagnostic programs were available in math. The absence of math resources and progress monitoring tools was not only a source of teacher apprehension, but also contributed to an increase in teacher workload. Ana and Sarah both discussed spending personal time to conduct independent searches to locate math programs and strategies for RtI implementation. Sarah implied that progress monitoring was more difficult for teachers in upper elementary school due to larger class sizes and an increase in learning objectives.

Sarah further explained how RtI implementation amplifies apprehension for beginning teachers. She quoted research on the four stages of a teacher's career, placing emphasis on the "survival mode" of beginning teachers. Sarah explained,

> I know for some of the teachers I work with, who are good teachers but who are younger teachers, it's very difficult for them to really focus in on what's specifically wrong with a child's learning…it takes three years to get out of that 'It's all about me mode' and into the 'What are the children doing mode'

Sarah's comments demonstrate the difficulty beginning teachers face when attempting to implement RtI. In working with beginning teachers, Sarah noted implementation increased beginning teacher stress and anxiety, which further detracted from their ability to focus on and identify the source of student learning deficits. Mary also suggested teacher experience significantly influences teacher apprehension. She explained, "Overall, I don't think people are as overwhelmed as they seemed to be back in the fall. Don't get me wrong, we are still learning. But, as far as being familiar, we're not so apprehensive about trying it [RtI]…it's trial and error. We're learning on the go." Engaging in RtI implementation required Ana, Mary, and Sarah to wrestle with personal apprehensions, make mistakes, and seek solutions. Confidence and security increased, as the teachers gained more knowledge and experience.

Experience.

Experience was influential in teacher understanding and implementation of RtI. Throughout the interview process, the teachers referenced the importance of experience as a scaffold for RtI implementation and instructional approaches for at-risk students. The teachers shared how prior experience established personal relevance for RtI implementation. In addition, teachers described the ways in which knowledge gained from prior experience promoted engagement in RtI implementation and encouraged sensitivity toward student instructional needs. The teachers indicated both *personal and professional experiences* were mutually influential and pertinent to RtI implementation.

Personal Experience. Two types of personal experiences informed teacher implementation of RtI. The first personal experience discussed by teachers was parental experience. Their experience as parents provided a knowledge base for understanding individual learning preferences, as well as the challenges associated with assisting student learning through the RtI process. The teachers discussed specific applications of knowledge derived from their own experience as parents to differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of learners involved in the RtI process.

Ana explained how personal observations of her daughter's development and participation in learning activities contributed to understanding the different approaches children have toward learning. Mary also referenced parental observations when discussing personal influences on RtI implementation. Similar to Ana, Mary recognized distinct differences in the learning characteristics and preferences of her children. She noted, "…My oldest child would have done fine with any kind of teaching, but my youngest child will not." Mary's comment indicates she is aware of the differences in learner needs. Because of this experience, both Ana and Mary made identical conclusions, "all children learn differently" and no one teaching method addresses the individual needs of all learners. Consequently, parental experience made Ana and Mary more cognizant of providing differentiated instruction to capitalize on student strengths and address specific areas of weakness.

Ana provided an example of how her personal knowledge and experience informed the modification of instructional approaches for RtI students. She explained how over the past six years the first grade teachers required students to make a zoo diorama. She knew this project would be problematic for one of her lower functioning RtI students with fine motor difficulties. As a result, Ana modified the assignment to include projects that reflected each of the multiple intelligences. By modifying the assignment and allowing students to choose from multiple project methods and mediums, Ana indicated her RtI student was not only excited about participating in the project, but

also completed the assignment well before the assigned due date. Whenever possible, Ana incorporates activities from each of the multiple intelligences to address individual learner needs, engage students in the learning process, and encourage school enjoyment.

The second personal experience teachers identified as influential in establishing personal relevance for RtI implementation was involvement in the educational plight of a family member and/or child. Both Ana and Sarah shared emotional stories about the experience of coping with the educational difficulties of a family member. The teachers indicated these personal experiences increased awareness of student needs and influenced the manner in which they approached intervention for at-risk learners.

Ana described the difficulties her husband encountered throughout his educational career. His preference for hands-on learning experiences and inability to conform to traditional educational settings created learning barriers that contributed to his lack of success and fear of school. Ana explained,

> I know the struggles my husband faced in school…They thought he had a learning disability. And I think about how he struggled and how he just hates school….the idea of education just makes him tremble…I see my husband in some of my first graders. And so, I don't want that for them. I don't want them to be forty and regretting their education and how they hated school because they were struggling learners.

Seeing her husband in her students demonstrates Ana's compassion and empathy toward struggling learners. She attributes her husband's negative school experiences as a major motivational influence on her teaching approaches for at-risk students.

Sarah also discussed how the experience of coping with the academic struggles of both her children made her more conscious of student needs and proactive in identifying and serving at-risk students in the classroom. Through her personal experience as an advocate for both her son and daughter, Sarah understood the obstacles parents face when attempting to get a child the assistance needed to be successful in the classroom. She explained,

> I know through my experience that you can't assume teachers in the future are going to notice that a child needs things, like written instructions or frequent monitoring. So, we provided…a 504 plan that officially and legally requires the teacher to provide…written assignments and monitor to make sure he understands.

Sarah's personal experience advocating for her son informs her knowledge and use of the 504 process with children in her classroom. She explained her rationale for using a 504 plan to provide intervention strategies for two students in her class.

> Well, the 504 requires teachers to meet student needs and specifically says the intervention that needs to be in place. So, a legal document is there and you don't have to…experience the same situation we went through with my son...and my daughter…these are the things I insisted we do for these children because of my own experience.

Sarah's insistence on documenting interventions for her students using a 504 plan is a direct result of her experiences as a parent. She does not want parents or children to undergo the same frustrations or struggles she encountered with her children. By providing a 504 plan for her students, Sarah believes she is ensuring her fifth grade students have the instructional supports for continued success in middle school.

Professional Experience. Although personal experience seemed to be the catalyst for creating an emotional connection to RtI implementation, the teachers indicated professional experience working in the general education setting with struggling students significantly influenced RtI understanding and instructional practices. All three teachers referenced the natural intuition or instinct teachers develop from professional experiences.

Sarah considered professional experience to be an asset to RtI implementation. Her comments indicate the importance of professional experience when approaching instruction for at-risk students. She explained how her experience teaching "the low kids" informs her understanding of the developmental needs of her students both academically and emotionally:

> For example, you come to fifth grade and you don't know your multiplication facts…you've been told for three years you're a failure because you don't know your multiplication facts. There's no way they're going to get them. By this time, their mind is shut down and their stress level is too high… So, when I taught those kids, we got out their multiplication tables and…they used them. It just would relieve some of the stress. Then, all of a sudden, you know, by Christmas, they're gone [flashcards]. They don't need it anymore. It was a stepping-stone. In most cases, the knowledge was really there, but the stress and pressure of being a ten year old failure and being told for so long, 'Your stickers are not across the board or your baseballs didn't go around the field.' They know. So, it's just little things like that that come with experience and working with lower level kids and knowing it's not necessarily a learning problem. It could be so many other things, when you get to ten, eleven, and twelve year olds.

As both a teacher and a parent, she knows firsthand the "many roadblocks" children entering puberty encounter. Her professional experience has made her sensitive to not only the academic needs of children, but also their social and emotional needs. She applies this tacit knowledge when designing instruction for struggling learners with the intent of building knowledge and self-esteem.

Mary also reflected on her professional experience working with a variety of students in her classroom. In discussing her professional experiences, she admits,

> I guess, if nothing else, it's made me more aware. Because I have one student here that's diagnosed autistic. I have another student here that's not formally diagnosed but they show so many tendencies…of autism…I taught my first autistic child last year. And he was totally different… Five or six years ago, if I had a child standing in his chair, squatting and working, I would say you need to sit correctly. You're not sitting correctly. It's no wonder you can't get your work done. But, I guess being exposed to all these different students and training. I mean you should have seen him during CRCT testing. He was all over the place, but he got it done and he did a great job. Learning to accept what's given to you, it's not how they do it, but that they do it that is important.

Mary's professional experiences have made her more sensitive to the needs of her students. She recognizes that some children require different educational approaches in order to meet success. Over the course of the semester, she shared this belief with her student teacher. The most recent conversation occurred in reference to a student

squirming in his chair during CRCT testing. Mary explained,

> I had a student teacher from [names a college] in here…And she asked, 'Do you think he's being disruptive?' And I said, 'No, cause...this is how he works…why should I single that person out. Every child learns differently. That's how he needs to be to learn.'

In addition to heightening her awareness of student learning preferences and needs, Mary believes her experience has also taught her to maintain an open mind. When students arrive for the first day of school, Mary allows at least two weeks to "get to know" her students. She does not examine student records or talk with parents or teachers. Mary explained her rationale by stating, "I don't have any preconceived ideas about the kids to expect anything." By allowing time to get to know each student without the opinions and expressions of previous teachers and parents, Mary can more accurately assess academic ability and learning preferences to provide individualized instruction for her students. She has also found that many students, who were not successful in years past, are successful in her classroom.

Although Ana had the least amount of teaching experience, she too identified tactical knowledge gained through professional experience as beneficial when addressing student instructional needs through RtI in the classroom. Rather than relying on her experience to determine responses to RtI implementation, Ana used her professional experience to reflect on teaching practices. She explained, "I think my experience helps me to re-evaluate my lessons and helps me to look at how I am differentiating and how I am not, so I can do a better job differentiating." Ana indicated her professional experience has taught her "not every child learns in the same way." Because of this knowledge, Ana stated, "I strongly believe there isn't just one way to reach and teach children.

Mindset.

During initial meetings with the principal and the guidance counselor, both women discussed how RtI implementation required a change in teacher mindset regarding the identification of specific learning disabilities. Mrs. King reflected on

her experience as a teacher and admitted to viewing the SST process as a means of documenting student learning difficulties and removing students from the classroom. Mrs. King understands this mindset represents a “not my problem” attitude, one that is no longer accepted in the RtI process. Mrs. King also noted that although this attitude is no longer condoned, many teachers still approach RtI in this manner. Ms. Greer shared similar thoughts stating, “In the past, teachers viewed the SST process as a gateway to special education.” She went on to explain, “The teachers on the 2008 Intervention Team had an ‘Ah ha moment,’ when they came to the realization that RtI meant interventions within the general education classroom.”

In discussing changes in teacher mindset necessary for RtI implementation, the teachers all discussed having to revise their thinking about the purpose of RtI implementation and intervention for at-risk students in the general education classroom. Mary admitted to teaching at the beginning of her career from a basal reader and not considering individual student needs or learning preferences. She believed the implementation of RtI has not only heightened her awareness of individualized student learning, but also required a change in mindset about special education referrals. Mary explained,

> With the SST process…I think a lot of teachers, if a child was struggling, they would immediately get a referral instead of doing strategies to help that individual child....I gotta get them coded before testing. You know, that was the mentality a long time ago. They just didn’t want their test scores averaged in with the rest of their class. I think that the RTI process is going to eliminate that. Because it really truly, I think it is set up so that the teacher says, ‘This is what I see in the classroom from the student… These are the lessons that stick out in my mind. This is how he was struggling or how she was struggling.’ Then you get suggestions on how to teach, a different approach to teaching, in order to meet that child’s needs. And then you go back and you try it for a couple of weeks.

Sarah shared similar thoughts about how RtI requires teachers to change their mindset about serving at-risk students. She went on to explain how RtI “insists that teachers work with all students and monitor progress.” She provided the following

example from her experiences as the SST grade level chair:

> We would get SST folders and it would be, 'Oh they're so sweet, but they can't read.' Nobody looked at the individual skills…But, I think it [RtI] provides us with and forces us as teachers to look at those individual children in the classroom setting and use special education support for obviously those children who need it…I think that once you get into tier three, you're really looking at a child who truly is struggling, not just needs a little extra attention, but truly has deficits in processing or something specific to a learning disability.

Sarah's comments demonstrate the conceptual shift away from referring struggling students for special education assistance toward addressing student learning difficulties through student responsiveness to intervention in the general education classroom setting.

RtI implementation also requires teachers to change their mindset about professional roles and responsibilities. All three teachers noted that RtI holds teachers accountable for documenting and addressing learning difficulties in the general education classroom. In discussing these changes both Ana and Mary focused on how the process holds teachers more accountable for student learning. Ana stated, "I do feel it [RtI] is holding me more accountable. It's making me more accountable for monitoring student progress." She also talked about the increase in teacher responsibility and accountability, stating, "There's a lot of documenting with this process, a lot, I mean you show a kid's progress. You progress monitor these children out the kazoo." Ana provided specific details on the difference between how she served children under the SST process versus the new RtI mandates.

> We weren't doing as much progress monitoring. At least I didn't feel like I did as a teacher. I can't speak for the school as a whole, but I was not doing as much progress monitoring with SST, as a whole. I don't feel like I was monitoring the students as often as I should. I was intervening, you know, I was doing strategies to get them where they needed to be. But, if it [intervention] wasn't working, I wasn't necessarily documenting it exactly. And with the RtI process, I do feel like that has come…I do feel like it is going to be beneficial. Is it going to be more demanding on a teacher? Yes, it's going to be a lot more demanding!

Ana compared the information documented through the SST process to the data obtained through RtI progress monitoring. “With the SST process, and this is just my personal opinion, I do feel like it was lacking the documentation on student progress. There was not a lot of depth to it. There just wasn’t a lot of data to compare. There was nothing! And with RtI there’s so much more data.” Collectively Ana, Mary, and Sarah all indicated that the changes in teacher thinking required by RtI implementation were difficult. Although they had been implementing RtI since August, the teachers indicated they were still learning about the process and adjusting to the changes required by RtI implementation.

Environmental Supports

Ana, Mary, and Sarah emphasized the importance of the school environment in supporting RtI implementation. Data from interview transcripts, school improvement plans, professional development documents, and interviews indicate several environmental conditions at River Rock Elementary School supported the transition from the Student Support Team (SST) process to RtI implementation. The discussion of environmental supports influencing implementation reports the findings through the sub-themes of *shared goals*, *leadership*, and *collaboration*.

Shared Goals

The River Rock Elementary School mission statement is “Building bold thinkers as we learn in harmony.” This mission is supported by a school vision; one that emphasizes a belief in “rigorous standards-based” instruction, “identified educational goals,” “cooperation and mutual respect” in order to prepare “students to be able to compete or excel in [a] global society.” Mission and vision statements such as these have become cliché in educational communities. What transforms these statements from meaningless words into actions is an educational organization’s ability to promote its capacity to achieve goals.

The data from interview transcripts, school improvement plans, and professional development documents provided evidence of shared goals for school improvement and RtI implementation.

Content analysis and data reduction procedures examined documents containing River Rock Elementary School's mission, vision, school improvement plan, and professional learning plan. The terminology from school mission and vision statements was examined to identify primary objectives. Primary objectives were compared with the common attributes of a supportive school environment to evaluate cohesiveness. Table 4 summarizes the similarities between school mission and vision statements, objectives, and supportive environmental conditions.

Table 4

Comparison of Mission/Vision, Objectives, and Environmental Conditions

	Statement(s)	Objective(s)	Conditions
Mission	Building bold thinkers as we learn in harmony	building confidence, community of mutual learners	collaborative culture, continuous learning and improvement
Vision	A rigorous standards based curriculum provides a framework for students to reach individual academic excellence.	standards-based learning,	systematic standards, shared mission and vision
	All stakeholders must work together to support identified educational goals.	common goals, collaboration	collaborative culture, shared leadership and mission/vision
	Students learn best in an environment where cooperation and mutual respect are part of addressing the educational needs of each individual.	cooperation, respect, learning	collaborative culture, continuous learning and improvement
	Communication and technology skills are needed for students to be able to compete or excel in our global society.	communication, technology, learning	collaborative culture, supportive conditions, continuous learning
	Optimal learning occurs when students are physically and emotionally safe.	learning, safety	supportive conditions, continuous learning

The findings indicate the presence of an underlying framework within the school environment to support school improvement and RtI implementation. The evidence suggests a school-wide focus on continuous learning through common goals, shared leadership, collaborative school atmosphere, and supportive conditions. The identification of these core principles within the mission and vision statements implies clear and consistent articulation of goals and objectives between statements. However, clearly defined goals and objectives do not solely constitute the establishment of a shared mission and vision.

Therefore, additional document analyses compared the school mission and vision statements with school improvement goals, professional development activities, and RtI implementation supports. The purpose of these analyses was to determine whether the theme of shared mission and vision was consistently identifiable within and among school documents. Table 5 presents analysis results.

Table 5

Comparison of School Improvement Goals, Professional Development, RtI Tiers and Environmental Supports

	Goals	Professional Development and Resources	RtI Tier	Supports
School Improvement	Reading: Increase the number of students reading at or above grade level according to DRA2.	Making the Most of Small Groups: Differentiation for All	Tier 1	shared mission and vision
	Increase the number of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the 2009 Reading CRCT.	Spotlight on Comprehension: Building a Literacy of Thoughtfulness	Tier 1	continuous learning
	Increase the number of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding expectations on the 2009 Reading CRCT	Sitton Spelling (Grades 1-5)	Tier 1	supportive conditions
		Lexia® Training	Tier 2	
	Writing: Increase the number of students writing at or above grade level	Units of Study for Teaching Writing: Writer's Workshop	Tier 1	continuous learning
	Math: Increase the number of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the 2009 Math CRCT in grades 1-5.	Singapore Math (Grades K-5)	Tier 1	supportive conditions
		Math Exemplars	Tier 1	supportive conditions
	Increase the number of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding expectations on the 2009 Math CRCT.	Math Journaling (Grades 1-5)	Tier 1	supportive conditions
	RtI: Improve student achievement by effectively implementing the [state] Pyramid of Intervention utilizing progress monitoring to provide positive interventions in the least restrictive environment.	Review CRCT, DRA, DIBELS, and Lexia® data to target domains and focus instruction	Tiers 1-3	shared leadership, collaborative culture
		School-wide RtI Implementation Training		

The results in Table 5 show an alignment of shared goals within the mission and vision statements, the school improvement plan, and professional learning activities. This indicates a conscientious effort to support shared goals. The specificity of professional learning activities not only for each school improvement goal, but also for RtI tiers 1 – 3 demonstrates both supportive conditions for learning and continuous learning for school improvement. Finally, reviewing and deconstructing CRCT, DRA, DIBELS, and Lexia® test data to target areas of weakness and focus instruction provides evidence of both a collaborative school culture and shared leadership. However, in order to ensure that the coordination of these documents and structures were not superficial attempts to create the appearance of shared goals, additional analyses were necessary. A comparison of results from the document analyses and information from interview transcripts provided data triangulation to increase the trustworthiness of the communication and demonstration of shared goals.

The responses teachers provided during interviews and the efforts they made toward RtI implementation further reinforced the tenet of shared goals.

> We’re all in this together. We’re all trying to learn this together. I mean from Mrs. [King] to Ms. [Greer] to the Kindergarten teachers all the way up to the fifth grade teachers; we’re all looking for ways to help make it easier on us, but yet be the most beneficial for our kids, as well. You know, which is the most important thing.

Ana’s simple comments poignantly exemplify the school mission, “Building bold thinkers as we learn in harmony.” Administrators, support staff, and teachers are not only working together to learn, but also collaborating through shared goals to improve education for children. Mary reiterated, “I think as a whole our staff is on board with RtI implementation. It’s what we have to do. You have to have a good attitude about learning something that’s going to be around for a long time and help the students improve their learning.” Her comments demonstrate the inevitability of RtI implementation. Mary suggests teachers need to maintain a positive attitude, keep goals in sight, and focus on common sustained efforts to facilitate student learning.

Leadership

The teachers also acknowledged school leadership as an important environmental factor. The support teachers received from building leaders, including the administrators, the guidance counselor, the instructional coach, and grade level ITs was instrumental in their ability to understand and implement RtI. Ana, Mary, and Sarah specifically described the *supportive conditions* established by the principal, Mrs. King. The teachers also discussed Mrs. King's ability to facilitate and support learning by providing opportunities for teachers to participate in decision-making through *shared leadership*. The discussion of leadership for RtI implementation reports the findings through the sub-themes of *supportive conditions* and *shared leadership*.

Supportive Conditions. The teachers described the environment at River Rock Elementary School as "supportive." Both formal and informal leaders contributed to supportive conditions for RtI implementation. The teachers indicated school leadership provided supportive conditions for RtI implementation through the *Intervention Team*, an atmosphere of *trust, honesty and respect*, *encouraged risk-taking*, *supplemental resources and materials*, and *professional development*.

The Intervention Team.

Prior to the initial implementation of RtI, the guidance counselor, Ms. Greer, supervised the organization of a school-wide Intervention Team (IT) committee. The structure for the Intervention Team followed the same model as the previous Student Support Team (SST) with one teacher from each grade level designated as the grade level IT to disseminate information about RtI policies, procedures, and implementation resources. Grade level ITs attended monthly meetings held by Ms. Greer. According to Ms. Greer, the committee worked hard to address RtI ambiguity and teacher concerns about RtI multitasking. During meetings, the IT committee brainstormed to identify resources for academic interventions, behavioral interventions, and tools for monitoring student progress.

In addition to administrative leaders, teacher leaders were essential to RtI implementation. Sarah, who served as the grade level IT for fifth grade, often discussed her role as a mentor for RtI implementation. Ana and Mary also relied on their grade level IT as a valuable resource for understanding and implementing RtI. The grade level IT chair served as an RtI expert within the grade level and was the custodian of grade level RtI information, documents, and materials. Ana explained her comfort in approaching the grade level IT for information and assistance. She stated, "I can go to her and say, 'I need this.' And she…can show me there are some things that I can do as the classroom teacher to address the problem…She knows what is available and can help." Mary also went to her grade level IT for assistance when attempting to find interventions for struggling learners. She referred to the book of interventions each grade level IT kept stating, "Our IT has this big book. I don't even know what the name of it is, but it has strategies, pages and pages of strategies for any kind of learning disability." Mary was confident in her grade level IT's ability to access to information about a variety of academic and behavioral interventions, as well as information about RtI documentation. Having access to the grade level IT provided Ana and Mary with a sense of security. The IT chair was both knowledgeable of the intervention process and easily accessible. The establishment of the IT committee is an example of how River Rock Elementary School supported the implementation of RtI through teacher leadership.

Trust, Honesty, and Respect.

The school climate established by Mrs. King was one of trust, honesty, and respect. The teachers attributed the increase in faculty morale and positive school environment to both Mrs. King's "warm" personality and her candid leadership style. All three teachers indicated that the principal, Mrs. King, was a visible presence throughout the school building and made frequent informal observations in every classroom. Mary recalled,

> She's in and out of our classroom. She comes in and does a 3 minute walk through all the time. And if it's not her, it's the other administrator. For a walk through, she comes at least once weekly…she'll say, 'I have a question about your word wall. Why is this up when you are studying this?' Or 'I saw an activity that you did on antonyms, but I didn't see any 'I can' statements that you went over with your children…It's very non-threatening.

When asked to explain why she considered Mrs. King's observations and questions "non-threatening," Mary explained, "She shoots from the hip. You know where you stand with her. You don't have to guess what she is thinking because she is going to go straight to the source and speak frankly about any issues or concerns." Mary implies confidence comes from the rapport established between Mrs. King and her faculty. She went on to explain,

> The morale overall in the building is 100% better because of the principal, Mrs. King. I can't tell you how many times she e-mails us saying, 'I appreciate you. Just go home. I appreciate all the hard work you've done this week. It has not gone unnoticed.' You know, if we are unsure of something, then she [Mrs. King] pretty much has an open door policy to where we can come up to her and say look, I'm a little confused. I'm seeing this out of this child. Um, this is what we've tried, this is working, but this is not working what else do you recommend that we might do, you know, to help this child be more successful. And I feel totally comfortable going to her.

The teachers expressed they never felt threatened or afraid to talk with Mrs. King when they did not understand an RtI concept because of Mrs. King's honesty and accessibility.

Encouraged Risk-Taking.

Throughout the RtI implementation process, leadership was essential in supporting teacher understanding and implementation. The teachers indicated because this was the first year of RtI implementation, there was an atmosphere of "trial and error." Both Ana and Mary mentioned they were encouraged to take risks by their administrator Mrs. King. Ana shared, "…[W]e are constantly being told by our leadership in the building, you know what, this is the first year. We're learning." Ana's comment indicates

Mrs. King is aware of the implementation dip teachers experience when participating in new reform initiatives. Mary also commented,

> …[Mrs. King] has given us ample time to be introduced to it [RtI]…She's not afraid to try new things. She lets us come to her with ideas...So [Mrs. King] works with us. If we are doing something, we need to be able to show her why we are doing it. If we aren't doing something, then we need to show her why we don't think it is beneficial.

Mrs. King's actions suggest she gave teachers time to process RtI information, provided appropriate supports and information, and understood that in learning a new process mistakes are inevitable and adjustments necessary. Ana also indicated that the building administrators have encouraged risk-taking by providing teachers with additional information and resources to use on a trial basis in the classroom. She explained,

> I definitely think…the leaders in our building are trying to take some of the load off our backs by going and finding out…information…and what resources we can use to gather our data. They'll send things out in an e-mail and say this is something or here are some ideas. You know, use these.

Her comments indicate building leaders functioned to facilitate RtI implementation and ameliorate teacher anxieties.

Supplemental Information and Materials.

The administrators and support staff continuously sought information and materials to assist teachers with RtI implementation. The teachers received information about RtI through formal and informal communication networks. Ana, Mary, and Sarah each discussed the formal dissemination of information by the instructional coach, the guidance counselor, and grade level ITs. They also mentioned receiving supplemental information, materials, and resources through school e-mail accounts.

Mary stated, "I think we have people in the building who are very knowledgeable in this process that we can go to for help." Ana shared similar thoughts,

> I can go to the principal, the assistant principal, the guidance counselor, and the school psychologist; I feel like there has been a great deal of support from them…I can go to them and say, 'This is what I am doing. This is what I am trying and it's just not working. What do I need to do?'

These comments indicate the teachers had knowledge of available resources and were comfortable seeking additional information and advice from support staff within the building.

Sarah strongly believed the principal set the tone for RtI implementation through leadership and supervision. In the past, Sarah noted that the school district did not provide strong leadership with a focus on rigor or thorough instruction for all students. She explained, "The philosophy was as long as you kept the upper kids happy, and they scored off the charts on the ITBS, it didn't matter if five or six hundred children failed because they average out. They end up here [uses arm motion to designate level] and you can't do that anymore." Under the direction of a new superintendent, Glenn County Public Schools espouses to provide "rigor for all" students. Sarah believes academics are now the center of instruction at River Rock Elementary and the principal was responsible for leading this focus.

> It comes back to your administrator. You know, the bottom line is who your administrator is and what your administrator's expectations are…It's the leadership's responsibility to hire people who'll do it [RtI] in the first place. Provide them the learning during their time on the clock, get them tools, and say 'Yes, we're professionals and this is what we're going to do.' Of course, that doesn't mean they're a dictator, it just means they're our leader.

Sarah's comments suggest the school principal, Mrs. King, supervises RtI implementation. Ultimately, Mrs. King is responsible for providing necessary resources and professional development to enhance teacher understanding of RtI policy and implementation. Sarah also stressed the importance of making effective use of teacher time through professional development.

In making the distinction between a “dictator” and a “leader,” Sarah’s comments acknowledge the importance of engaging teachers in the reform process through shared leadership, as opposed to dictating what and when teachers will perform RtI tasks.

Professional Development.

The building leadership established additional supportive conditions through staff development. Sarah stated, “The quality of our professional development is better than I’ve ever had in any other school.” The teachers indicated the staff development presented by leadership was essential to their knowledge and understanding of both differentiated instruction and RtI implementation.

During the 2008-2009, the teachers at River Rock Elementary participated in 20 hours of professional development for RtI implementation. In addition to receiving basic training on the purpose, goals, and procedures for RtI implementation, additional professional development included strategies for providing differentiated reading instruction, intervention strategies for building student reading comprehension skills, tutoring strategies, working with the SRB programs Sitton Spelling and Lexia®, and progress monitoring for RtI documentation.

Mary recalled the benefits of participating in professional development activities twice a month for two-hour segments:

> A lot of our book studies weren’t necessarily RtI. Some were about moving from teaching reading with a basal to teaching guided reading using leveled readers; or how you can use leveled readers to differentiate instruction. That’s where we became familiar with coming up with all these small group, one-on-one, individual, and partner activities. It was through these book studies.

Mary explained that the book studies were “helpful” and “very beneficial” to her understanding and execution of RtI. “I am so much more comfortable using strategies to implement RtI in my classroom.”

The fact that the book studies increased her confidence suggests meeting with colleagues to discuss RtI relieved some of her anxiety about implementing the policy.

Sarah also discussed the benefits of participating in staff development training. She explained that individuals both outside and within the school community presented training:

> We've had people come in and give us training. Mrs. [Perkins, instructional support teacher] does a lot of our training and [Ms. Greer, guidance counselor]. Then, we do it [staff development] a lot of times in house. We do book studies and the individual grade levels teach chapters from the book, so we do it ourselves. But, we take the test data, choose the goals, and match the professional learning to the goals.

Sarah reiterated that school improvement goals come from assessment data; however, the teachers shared responsibility for determining and meeting school improvement goals. This was significant because it allowed teachers the opportunity to influence the methods used to meet school improvement goals. The alignment of assessment data with school improvement goals and appropriate professional development provides evidence that school improvement was both systematic and goal-directed.

Shared Leadership. Shared leadership was another environmental condition established by the school leadership to support RtI implementation. The principal, Mrs. King, facilitated shared leadership through teacher involvement in *formative assessments*, *the School Improvement Team*, and *the Charter School Initiative*.

Formative Assessments.

The building administrator, Mrs. King, used formative data analysis as a method to drive continuous school improvement, build trust and respect, and promote RtI implementation. Ana, Mary, and Sarah all discussed the opportunities for shared leadership provided by Mrs. King. The teachers all described participating in quarterly formative assessments to analyze student data, reflect on the results, and brainstorm strategies for improvement.

Ana described her involvement in these formative assessments:

> We have grade level meetings with our assistant principal or our principal...They come to the grade level after every formative, four times a year. They bring us our grade level data and…we talked about it. In fact, that's…where we got the idea to do flexible grouping because when she… showed us the data, we realized as a grade level, wow, we've got some kiddos who need extra help with some skills…

Ana asserts that the idea of flexible grouping as a tier-one RtI intervention came from a formative assessment meeting with Mrs. King. Involving all teachers in the interpretation of data allowed them to participate in shared leadership and problem solving for RtI implementation. Through this process, all teachers in the school building were empowered to assumed ownership of school improvement goals and objectives for continuous growth and improvement.

School Improvement Team.

The school improvement team was another method used to solicit input from the teachers and mobilized teacher commitment to school improvement and RtI implementation. Similar to the formative grade level assessment meetings, the school improvement team, comprised of a teacher representative from each grade level, met with school administrators monthly to review assessment data and identify improvement goals and strategies. Sarah explained,

> We start with our test scores, our test data, and look at our strengths and weaknesses. Then the building leadership team decides what we're going to do as far as our school improvement plan; what we need to work on and what our goals need to be. Then we depend on Mrs. [King] and our instructional coach, Mrs. [Timmons], and the people who are experts to go out and find us what we need.

Sarah also notes, "School improvement is teacher driven, as opposed to administrative driven." As a result, the teachers had additional opportunities to influence school improvement plans and RtI activities through shared leadership.

Charter School Initiative.

The final opportunity for shared leadership discussed by teachers was involvement in the charter school initiative. Earlier in the year, Mrs. King had approached the faculty about the possibility of applying for a grant to establish a charter school. Ana described Mrs. King's pitch during a staff meeting.

> So, she [Mrs. King] came to the staff about applying for a school charter. She said, I'm not doing this if you all are not willing or interested. It's not about what I want to do, it's about what ya'll want to do. And so, everybody was, yeah why not. We're willing to try something and if it will give us an opportunity to help our education program at our school, then yes. So, that's how it kind of got started.

Ana's comments support Mary's original description of Mrs. King's candid leadership style and provide another example of the rapport Mrs. King had with her faculty. In shifting the focus away from the administrator, the teachers were once again given the opportunity to direct the decision making process. Mrs. King left participation up to the discretion of the teachers. According to Ana,

> She [Mrs. King] said these are the pros and cons of charter schools. These are the laws we still have to follow. So, that's when we all started kind of brainstorming, as a staff. Okay, where can we go with this charter? What can we do to make it the best possible thing for our kids?

Mrs. King revealed her honesty by discussing the positive and negative aspects of charter schools. She also explained the risks and benefits would be greater for teachers because they would assume more responsibilities and make additional accommodations. After some reflective dialogue, the teachers made the decision to apply for the charter school grant. Under Mrs. King's supervision, a committee of teachers was responsible for completing and submitting the application for the school charter. Ana was co-chair of the charter school committee, while Mary was a supporter. The teachers determined the focus of the charter school grant would be Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. because it had the potential to strengthen RtI implementation and benefit students in the RtI process.

Both Ana and Mary found their roles and participation in the charter school initiative beneficial to their approaches to RtI implementation. They both believed the concept of differentiating instruction based on multiple intelligences was useful in differentiating instruction for each tier on the pyramid of intervention. Consequently, Sarah's leadership experience, as the IT chair, also had a significant influence on her beliefs about instruction for RtI implementation. The results suggest multiple opportunities for shared leadership influenced the teachers' beliefs about instruction for RtI implementation.

Collaboration

The teachers described the professional environment at River Rock Elementary as "collaborative." The theme of working together to achieve common goals and improve student learning repeated throughout the interview process. Working in the company of colleagues reinforced common goals and purpose. Ana, Mary, and Sarah discussed comfort and strength in collaborating with colleagues to make sense of RtI policy and procedures. Through interactions and reflective dialogue, the teachers were able to define RtI, identify specific procedures, and share effective interventions. The collaborative school culture the teachers described allowed them to participate in *collective inquiry*, *knowledge sharing*, and *collective action* for RtI implementation.

Collective Inquiry.

During the initial RtI implementation phase, the teachers discussed collaborative efforts to reach consensus about operational definitions and procedures. Mary recalled participating in grade level examinations of RtI documents and information to create a "group translation." Once the group reached an agreement, they sought "feedback" through verbal and/or written exchanges in person, over the telephone, or via e-mail from other grade levels within the school community. Ana discussed similar exchanges within her grade level, as they attempted to make sense of RtI policies and procedures.

The purpose of these collaborative efforts and exchanges was to identify a universal understanding of RtI implementation. In wrestling with RtI concepts, the teachers were able to work collectively to discuss, analyze, and develop understanding to promote implementation.

Collective inquiry and problem solving continued as the teachers participated in grade level RtI meetings. The teachers discussed the benefits of weekly RtI meetings supervised by the grade level IT. During weekly RtI meetings, teachers met to discuss students in tiers 1-3 of the pyramid of intervention. These meetings provided opportunities for teachers to have reflective conversations about RtI implementation. Conversations focused on sharing ideas and examining classroom practices to differentiate instruction for students in each RtI tier. Mary described the format for grade level RtI meetings.

> We meet weekly on Wednesdays, during our planning for about 45 minutes. We usually meet in the teacher right over there [points to room across the hall]; we usually will meet in her room. We talk about our kids, what we are doing, what's working for us. The entire meeting is dedicated to just RtI. We don't have time to meet on everybody, all tier 2 and tier 3 children at one sitting, so we'll say, 'Okay, you take one. You take one. You take one.' We'll meet on five kids. It probably took anywhere from 10 to 15 minutes just on one child. Just scrambling to say as much as you can about a child and the struggles you're seeing…then, we would talk about some strategies that you could try that we have not done.

Mary stated that this process took some time to orchestrate efficiently given the time constraint and number of students the grade level needed discuss. However, as the teachers within her grade level gained knowledge and experience the process became more systematic.

Ana's description of RtI grade level meetings was almost identical to the one provided by Mary. Ana made use of the collective knowledge of the group when attempting to identify interventions to meet individual student needs. Meeting every week gave her the opportunity to share strategies, as well as seek advice and ideas to modify or expand interventions for the students in her classroom. She explained,

> …It is so great to have four other minds in the room because then you can say, 'I've done all I can; let me pick your brain.' And so, that has really, really, worked for us. And so we'll start talking. 'This is what I've done. What can I do? What else is there? What other interventions can I do?' And…they'll share their ideas.

Ana believed participation in grade level RtI meetings allowed her to concentrate on building a repertoire of intervention strategies aimed to improve student learning.

Unlike Ana and Mary, Sarah did not provide extensive details about the benefits of teacher collaboration during RtI meetings. Instead, she focused on her supervisory role as the IT chair. "It's my job to say this is the paperwork you need and you have to have it done before you come to the RtI meeting." Sarah met every Tuesday with the fifth grade team. She stated, "…I feel like by the time they get here [fifth grade], most of the children who need help have been identified. They're in a resource program or they have a 504 or some interventions in place…" Thus, the primary focus of fifth grade RtI meetings was to discuss students with tier 2 and 3 interventions already in progress. Sarah described a typical RtI meeting. "We meet, we discuss the child…we talk about the interventions we are doing, the progress monitoring, what worked, what didn't work, and then we determine what to do next." Sarah's description provides some evidence of teacher collaboration during RtI meetings. However, she emphatically stated, "As far as all the pre-work and documentation is concerned, that's the individual teacher's responsibility, not the RtI chair. Some of these people expect me to do their documentation for them and no, no, no, no. That's not my job." Although collaboration occurred to identify appropriate student interventions for RtI, Sarah's comments imply the fifth grade teachers worked independently to complete RtI documentation.

Knowledge Sharing.

An additional benefit of collaborating during RtI meetings was the discovery and development of materials for RtI implementation. Ana frequently discussed working in collaboration with her grade level to share and develop tools for documenting student

progress. She revealed frustration about the lack of math progress monitoring tools to her grade level.

> I had this one student, who I needed to progress monitor in math. He didn't recognize the numbers 10 through 20…Somebody in one of our grade level meetings suggested taking a piece of notebook paper and calling out random numbers for him to write. Then, they suggested that I create a little chart on my computer to track the percentage correct each time I assessed him…And that's what's nice about meeting as a grade level…

Ana explained that there were many times when she had "no clue how to progress monitor for a specific math skill." In these situations, she relied on the accumulated knowledge of her grade level to assist her with problem solving.

Internal networks provided opportunities for knowledge sharing to facilitate RtI implementation. Mary recalled the "domino effect" that occurred after working one-on-one with her grade level IT to learn the RtI process. "You know the first time I did it [RtI implementation] was in Ms. [Paul's] room because you know how you are when you are unsure of what to do. Then once I did it, it was fine. So then, I taught this teacher [points to another classroom across the hall] over here how to do it." Initially, Mary assumed the role of mentee, while Ms. Paul, the grade level IT, served as a mentor sharing her knowledge of RtI. Once Mary was confident in her ability to implement RtI, she passed on her knowledge by assuming the role of mentor for others within the grade level. Mary's comments illustrate the interdependent and supportive relationships that existed between individuals within her grade level.

According to Mary, the third grade team at River Rock Elementary participated in "true collaboration." She states that the teachers in her current grade level believed group efforts to share information and plan effective instruction positively affect student learning. In discussing the benefits of team efforts within the grade level, Mary explained,

> I guess what I am trying to say is to work as a team, truly to work as a team, not just cause you are in the same grade level…makes a difference in what you can accomplish…[River Rock] had all the third grades beat across the county. And every one of our third graders passed reading on the CRCT.

Working together as a team toward a common goal was not only beneficial for the teachers, but also beneficial to student achievement on the CRCT. Mary believed planning as a group allowed teachers to share the workload, reduced the amount of variance between classrooms, and maintained instructional focus on performance standards. She attributes the success of the entire third grade student population on the CRCT to the constant collective efforts of her grade level to share information pertinent to designing instruction for all students through RtI implementation.

Both Ana and Mary discussed collaborative efforts to share knowledge and information between grade levels for RtI implementation. Ana stated, "I'm collaborating with the second grade teachers when my first grade students move up. I'm collaborating with Kindergarten teachers, when I'm getting their students. So there's a lot of teacher contact." Ana explained that horizontal teaming efforts between grade levels increased the consistency of effective intervention strategies and instructional practices for struggling students. Mary also mentioned soliciting advice from previous teachers. She explained,

> A lot of times if nothing that the we [grade level] came up with together is working, then I'll get the book of interventions out and I'll try some other strategies. I may even go to the previous year's teacher and say, 'Look, I have this student that you had last year. Tell me what worked with this student, so I can try that in my classroom.'

By reaching out to previous teachers, Mary demonstrates her collaborative efforts to seek effective instruction and individualized interventions for students in her classroom.

Collective Action.

The final benefit of collaboration was collective action. Collaboration focused on providing effective teaching practices to address student needs and improve student

learning. The teachers all discussed working with their grade levels to examine formative student assessments. Grade level teams used data from formative assessments to organize flexible groups that matched instruction with specific student learning goals.

According to Sarah, baseline data from the Dynamic Reading Assessment (DRA) and running records identified student strengths and weaknesses. She explained,

> Once we knew where they were, at that point, we as a fifth grade changed students around and shared students…we um, ability grouped or what's the word you would use, um, skills grouped. We put the students in math who were struggling in certain skills and we grouped within fifth grade for that. Then, we have a co-teacher, actually there are two co-teachers that come in during that segment.

The teachers within the fifth grade collaborated with the Early Intervention Program (EIP) teacher and Special Education teacher to provide focused instruction based on the individual needs of students particularly those in tiers 2 and 3 of RtI. Flexible or skill grouping was a strategy consistently used in all three of the grade levels observed in the study.

Ana discussed the collaborative efforts of her grade level to provide flexible grouping for instruction. The first grade teachers used formative assessment data to identify performance standards and skills students were having difficulty mastering. Each teacher taught a specific skill to a group of students. Ana explained that the groups constantly changed to meet student needs.

> We do skills-based flexible groups. We moved several kids who got the skill the first two weeks. So, we'd move them to another room and brought in students who were having difficulty. We talked about even halfway through, changing up skills. So we do more flexible grouping than ability grouping.

The teachers on Ana's grade level continuously provided flexible grouping based on specific skill sets. Having flexible grouping built into the grade level schedule allowed teachers to provide individualized instruction for students in tiers 2 and 3 of RtI.

As in Mary's case, Ana noted that flexible grouping provided the most efficient means of meeting individualized instructional needs for RtI implementation.

Mary also described the collective efforts of her grade level to support student learning through flexible grouping.

> We are going to do what ever we can as a group to see our kids be successful. Just the other day, you know, we did some grouping in the afternoons prior to CRCT just to focus on reviewing reading skills and things that we have taught. Another teacher asked me to do that with her. So, we just split the group. She worked with 10 and I worked with 10. And the rest of our classes were split up into the other three classes. I asked, [Karen] 'Do you mind taking my kids?' And she said, 'No, I don't mind.' I told her, I just think it would be beneficial for them to hear it from another voice. And she said, 'I totally agree.' So, we are all the time working together. And when she got frustrated, this year because she has the low group, she'd come down, shut the door, and say, 'Can you come by and see me this afternoon? I need some help.' You know, some days, we just hold each other up.

According to Mary, seeking help from others within the grade level and "hold[ing] each other up" were common practices. Her comments demonstrate the supportive relationships between teachers, as well as their dedication toward improving student learning through collaboration for collective action. Mary found working together as a team to plan and implement RtI not only helped individual teachers effectively manage instruction within the classroom, but also assisted the grade level in meeting the specific needs of all third grade students.

In addition to providing flexible grouping, the teachers worked collectively to challenge each other through friendly competition. According to Mary, the third grade team was "very competitive." She explained,

> We are competitive with I guess other grade levels because we want our grade level to shine. So, we are going to do whatever we can do as a group to see our kids be successful. For example, we did some additional grouping in the afternoons prior to CRCT testing just to focus on reviewing skills with EIP students.

Mary collaborated with her grade level to increase student learning and compete with other grade levels. Her third grade team was determined to not only increase CRCT test scores, but also to attain the highest CRCT scores at River Rock Elementary and in Glenn County. Through collective efforts, the third grade team accomplished its goals. Collaborating to compete with other grade levels seemed to raise teacher expectations and maintain momentum for school improvement and continuous student learning.

A final benefit of collaboration for RtI implementation was collective action to complete RtI documentation. Ana and Mary both discussed how collaborating during grade level RtI meetings assisted them with the completion of RtI documentation. Ana stated, "As far as my grade level is concerned, we've pretty much worked on RtI documents together. Yes, in first grade, we sit down and we've pretty much done all of it together...it's pretty thorough." According to Ana, the shared network drive on the school's computer system contained folders for each grade level. These folders housed all the documentation from grade level RtI meetings. When Ana's grade level would meet for RtI meetings, the IT chair would assume responsibility for taking minutes and uploading files to the first grade folder. Ana explained,

> During our meetings, the IT chair plugs in the student's name, the area(s) of difficulty, what interventions are being tried, and what the student's learning goal is. It's just real brief, you know, a few words…Then, I can take that information after school, go back, and fill out my minutes or my progress monitoring form.

Although Ana added annotations to RtI documents, the IT chair's notes were useful in "refreshing" her memory when elaborating details on individual student RtI records.

Mary also found the structure of grade level RtI meetings beneficial to the completion of RtI documentation. Her description of the grade level IT chair's role in assisting teachers with RtI documentation was identical to Ana's description. She also indicated that her grade level IT assumed responsibility for typing RtI documentation during meetings. She explained that her grade level It, Ms. Paul, had an understanding of both the RtI process and how to complete documentation. Thus, Ms. Paul served as

both the RtI mediator and secretary during RtI meetings. This allowed Mary to focus on discussing student issues with the group and reflecting on intervention strategies. For Ana and Mary, sharing the workload with others during RtI grade level meetings made constructive use of their time and aided in the completion of RtI documentation.

Approaches to RtI Implementation

The analysis of individual teacher engagement in RtI implementation included information from interviews, RtI documentation, and videotaped lesson observations. The Teacher Performance Record (TPR) was a tool used to analyze information obtained from these data sources. It provided a general measure of teacher engagement based on the frequency of observable student behaviors, as well as a basis for analyzing the frequency of teacher behaviors relative to the planning, organization, and documentation of RtI. Table 6 presents the frequency of student involvement during observations along with study participant's years of teaching experience.

The scores, represented as a percentage, reflect the frequency of student engagement during videotaped lessons included in the analysis. The distribution between TPR student involvement frequencies is noteworthy. The veteran teacher, Sarah, had the highest level of student engagement. Ana, the novice teacher, had the lowest percentage of student engagement. While the percentage of student engagement for Mary, the mid-career teacher, was between Sarah and Ana. The difference in student levels of engagement reflects individual classroom demographics, teacher experience, and student ability.

Table 6

TPR Student Involvement Frequency

	TPR Student Involvement Frequency	Years of Teaching Experience
Ana	84%	6
Mary	88%	13
Sarah	93%	25

Table 7

TPR Percentage of Teacher Engagement in RtI Indicators

	High	Moderate	Minimal	Low
Ana	4%	71%	8%	17%
Mary	8%	13%	25%	54%
Sarah	0	17%	29%	54%

An expert panel review facilitated the identification of twenty-four items from the TPR as observable indicators of teacher participation in RtI implementation. The researcher asked three individuals affiliated with the Early Intervention Program in a public school system to individually review the TPR 6.0 observation inventory and identify 30 items as the most pertinent to RtI implementation. A comparison of panel and researcher responses revealed 24 items consistently identified as significant indicators of RtI implementation. The 24 items on the TPR provided the basis for analyzing videotaped observations to determine teacher engagement in RtI implementation. (See Appendix F for the selection of TPR indicators used to measure the frequency of teacher behaviors relative to RtI implementation.) Table 7 illustrates the frequency of teacher engagement in RtI implementation based on the observation of select TPR indicators during videotaped lessons and reflective interviews.

A high score on a TPR inventory item indicates the teacher exhibited a specific behavior related to RtI implementation 75 – 100% during lesson observations. A score in the moderate range indicates the inventory item occurred 50 – 74% during lesson observations. Minimal scores on a TPR item indicates the teacher engaged in that particular item 25 – 49% during lesson observations. Finally, a low score indicates a teacher was observed 0 – 24% participating in that item.

Table 7 summarizes the percentage of teacher engagement in RtI implementation based on TPR indicators observed during videotaped lessons and post-reflective

interviews. The TPR observational data indicates teachers established different levels of engagement in RtI implementation. Appendix H provides the cumulative TPR frequency scores for each teacher. Of the three teachers, Ana demonstrated moderate to high participation in RtI related activities. In contrast, Mary and Sarah exhibited low to minimal participation in RtI implementation. This supports the claim that the teachers demonstrated different levels of engagement in RtI implementation. Additional information from interview transcripts, lesson plans, videotaped observations and RtI documentation suggests teachers either made accommodations for RtI implementation or assimilated RtI into existing classroom routines and activities. The following provides a discussion of how teachers implemented RtI in their classrooms and the factors that influenced RtI *accommodation* or *assimilation*.

The Accommodator

The final interview with Ana, the novice teacher, occurred on the last contracted day of school for teachers. The researcher arrived to find the school parking contained only a few cars, one of which belonged to Ana. Although the teachers could leave the building at noon, Ana sat among stacks of boxes in her classroom diligently working on End-of-Year RtI Status Reports for her students. She had been working on them for the past eight hours. When asked why she was still there and everyone else was gone, Ana replied, “I, I don’t know why. That’s a very good question. I don’t know if the other teachers did all that I’m doing. I’m doing this because I feel it will be helpful for the students and their teachers next year.” However, the question sparked Ana’s curiosity, so she decided to open the shared Pyramid of Intervention (POI) folder on the school network, and began counting the average number of active RtI files for each grade level. She explained,

> …So, it looks like the average number of RtI students for first grade is about 6 per class…It looks like the average for second grade is 4 per class. Third grade has only five in their whole grade, hmm. Let’s see what fourth grade has…Looks like an average of 4. Fifth grade… has uh, one…

> And Kindergarten, they have about 3 per class. I don't know. Maybe I am overdoing it? [laughs]

Based on the files uploaded to the school Pyramid of Intervention folder, Ana had at least three more active RtI files than any other teacher at River Rock Elementary. Thus, her level of participation in RtI implementation was significantly high. She noted that her husband often inquired about her long hours, wondering why she worked overtime if she did not receive additional money. Ana paused for a moment to reflect, then, provided the following rationale for her RtI efforts.

> Well, you know, I've worked my tail off for these kids trying to help them. So, I want to make sure that they continue to make progress next year. So, I'm going to provide all the information I can for their teacher next year, so he or she doesn't have to wait until December to figure out, 'Hey, Mrs. [Smith], already did that.' So, they can start out in August knowing this is what worked and this is what didn't work. It takes up a lot of my time, but I do it for the students, especially in first grade. They don't need to wait until fifth grade to get extra support.

Ana's comments indicate she is altruistically motivated to participate in RtI implementation. She demonstrates both concern for the welfare of her students and a strong sense of self-efficacy. Ana's belief that her RtI efforts benefit future student learning contributes to her high level of participation and motivates multiple classroom accommodations for RtI implementation.

Additional evidence regarding Ana's level of participation came from the selection of observational planning, interactive, and reflective TPR inventory items considered indicative of RtI implementation. The TPR data recorded the frequency of observable RtI related behaviors during a single lesson, as well as a cumulative record of observed behaviors over the course of the study. The TPR data indicates Ana engaged in planning items during 88% of videotaped lesson observations. The data also suggests her lesson plans neglected to include provisions for students who complete learning tasks early. In the selected interactive items on the TPR, Ana exhibited both moderate and low frequency of observable RtI behaviors. Observed interactive strengths were monitoring

students, assisting students with task completion, and providing explicit praise. Suggested areas for improvement were summarizing throughout the lesson, providing constructive criticism, and demonstrating that mistakes are a necessary aspect of the learning process. Ana demonstrated moderate frequency on 70% of the TPR reflective items. Presenting information visually was an instructional strength. The scores for reflective items indicate she established classroom routines and made smooth transitions from one activity to another. During lessons, Ana presented information sequentially and related new material to the students' prior knowledge. She provided clarification during lessons by restating questions and offering additional information. However, modeling thought processes and promoting student participation are reflective items in need of improvement. Subsequent analyses compared Ana's TPR results with information obtained from interview transcripts, lesson plans, videotaped observations, and RtI documentation. The analyses reveal Ana made multiple accommodations for *planning*, *organizing*, and *documenting* RtI implementation.

Planning

In planning for RtI implementation, Ana considered student ability, instructional needs, and interests. For Ana, designing guided reading lessons required a significant amount of thought, time, and preparation. Ana spent about twenty to thirty minutes each day planning guided reading groups, readjusting lesson plans, and finding books and resources for lessons.

The planning process was time consuming for Ana because she did not teach the same guided reading lesson for all students. Instead, she planned four different lessons for each of her guided reading groups. The first consideration when planning lessons was the students' instructional reading levels. Ana explained a student's instructional reading level differs from their independent reading level.

> Instructional level means that, they're gonna be able to read through it, but they're not gonna be completely fluent. They may struggle at this level on some words. This way they are able to learn something from it, like how to get through any words they are having a hard time with, versus an independent level book. Using an independent level book would defeat the purpose of the lesson.

Lessons also focused on specific skills to address the instructional needs of RtI students. Thus, planning required identifying appropriate reading materials to meet student needs, designing lessons around the materials, and considering interventions for learners involved in the RtI process.

During interview two, Ana detailed her preparations for guided reading groups based on individual student needs. She stated, "The kids in each group are pretty close instructionally." Ability grouping the students allowed Ana to concentrate on reinforcing specific skills, such as phonemic awareness and vocabulary. She provided two examples of lessons designed to meet the instructional needs of RtI students during guided reading groups. In the first example, Ana recalled beginning a lesson with Spaulding Phonics cards to reinforce phonemic awareness with students who struggled with "identifying chunks in words" and "blending chunks." Ana believed reviewing chunking would assist the students with independent word attack skills once she introduced the new leveled reader. Ana not only focused lessons on building phonemic awareness skills for her bubble students, who benefit the most from additional teacher time, but also provided additional reading lessons for this group of students. Because she met with this group more than the other three reading groups, Ana considered the extra small group lesson a tier-two intervention for RtI.

Ana offered a second example of planning to meet the instructional needs of students through guided reading lessons. She described the difference between her plans for "bubble students" and students functioning above grade level.

> These students [group four] are above grade level. So, I got to really dig deeper in the lesson. But, I only meet with them twice a week. This group is structured differently because I focused more on vocabulary with

> them because they don't need extra phonemic awareness and phonics activities…You know the structure of my guided reading groups changes from group to group and story to story.

Ana suggests the students in each guided reading group had different instructional needs; thus, how she structured the lesson and the number of times she met with each group of students varied based on the individual needs of the group. Ana intentionally planned the lesson to focus on advanced vocabulary building skills. In addition to providing challenging instruction for these students, she selected a high interest leveled reader. For this particular group, Ana also planned a follow up book project to reinforce skills and encourage independent practice. She believes it is important to provide instruction that not only challenges the students but also motivates learning for students in tier 1 of RtI.

Ana frequently applied Howard Gardner's (2004) theory of multiple intelligences when planning lessons and RtI interventions. Her use of the theory was evident in the videotaped Math Exemplar lesson she conducted on April 22, 2009. The lesson integrated curriculum content objectives from math, science, social studies, and language arts. The lesson contained three distinct parts; each part engaged students with different learning styles and needs. First, Ana began the lesson by discussing the significance of Earth Day and showing a brief video about the importance of trees. She believed the video would engage visual and auditory learners.

Once the video was complete, Ana invited the students to sit on a carpeted whole group area. She noted the transition from sitting at desks to sitting on the carpet would benefit bodily-kinesthetic students because it allowed for movement from one area to another. Then, Ana used a graphic organizer to introduce the Math Exemplar problem. She believed the graphic organizer would benefit visual-spatial learners in the class. As she read the problem from the graphic organizer, Ana encouraged students to listen for key problem-solving terminology. When the students identified a key word, Ana had them highlight it on the chart. She considered these strategies beneficial to visual-spatial, auditory, and bodily-kinesthetic learners. The final part of the lesson required students to

interact in pairs to solve the Math Exemplar problem. The interactive problem-solving activity afforded students either independent practice or guided practice depending on their RtI tier.

Ana revealed more evidence of forethought when she talked about pre-identifying student partners with similar abilities to solve the Math Exemplar problem. She explained her rationale for ability grouping student partnerships. Ana wanted every student to have an equal opportunity to participate in the problem-solving activity. In her opinion, grouping a high student with a low student would be counterproductive to student learning because the lower student would likely assume a passive role in the partnership. Another consideration Ana made in planning for the Math Exemplar lesson was differentiating the methods students could use to solve the problem. This provides another example of her use of the theory of multiple intelligences when planning interventions for RtI students. Ana explained, “I made my higher ones draw a picture. But, if you noticed during the lesson, I was going around to the groups and telling some to use manipulatives to solve the problem…but I didn’t supply the manipulatives to all the students.” Ana only provided students in tier 2 of RtI with additional materials to manipulate, as an alternate method for solving the Math Exemplar problem.

> Providing manipulatives was just part of their intervention. I used that strategy for some of my students. It benefits a lot of kids. But when they do math exemplars or word problems, I only allow the tier 2 students to use manipulatives because it, it helps them to actually be hands on in problem solving. It gives them something concrete to manipulate when solving the problem.

Drawing a picture or using manipulatives to solve the problem were techniques Ana used to assist visual-spatial learners. Ana reiterated the importance of group work when planning instruction for students with different learning styles and abilities. She thought the interaction between partners benefits students with verbal-linguistic and interpersonal learning styles.

Ana also carefully planned activities and created materials to support student learning and maintain student interests. When planning tier-two and tier-three reading interventions, Ana focused on providing activities for particular students that reinforced skills not yet mastered or in need of improvement. Ana shared,

> I noticed that [Marissa] was having a hard time chunking, finding the chunks in words and blending them together. So, I jotted that down and when the parapro came during my centers, she pulled her aside and worked with her one-on-one a bit. She gave her a word and had her find the chunks…she let her brainstorm all the words with /ch/ or /sh/ in them. She practiced putting chunks together to read words. Whiteboards and markers are excellent tools for something like that. You could give her a word and have her circle every chunk that she sees in the word. I also used a PowerPoint…It has the sounds of the chunks in words. Like it will show /c/ and then somebody will say the individual sounds or chunks, then blend the chunks to read it. It can also be used to count the sounds or chunks in words.

These were some of the activities Ana planned as RtI interventions for her students during the literacy block. Because Ana only met with two guided reading groups every day, she provided individualized literacy stations to review and/or build student skills. The students worked independently at literacy stations, while Ana met with guided reading groups.

One of the most creative interventions Ana planned was a tier-two behavioral intervention based on the character Hannah Montana. Ana explained she had an impulsive student, who was physically aggressive with other students in the classroom, particularly when she left the classroom environment to go to the bathroom. Ana developed the social story using the character Hannah Montana to reinforce and encourage positive behavior. By relating this girl's problem to her idol, Hannah Montana, Ana believed she was providing motivation for the student to change her behavior. Every morning before announcements, Ana would read the social story with the student. Appendix I provides a transcript of the Hannah Montana social story. Ana typed the social story on an 8" x 6" card. The student carried the card when she left the classroom

and went to the bathroom. In addition, Hannah Montana posters hung on the walls of the girl's bathroom as a constant reminder. Ana also taped a Hannah Montana microphone desktop motivator on the student's desk to track her progress. At the end of the day, the student could color in a microphone on the desktop motivator, if she was successful in refraining from aggressive or harmful behavior. Once the student accumulated five colored microphones, she earned extra time on the computer. Ana found the social story helpful as a tier-two behavioral intervention for this student. She explained, "I love using social stories because you can be creative and silly with them. And you know, I love finding what interests kids. You could write a social story about anyone or anything." For Ana, the key to using a social story as an intervention tool is incorporating something of high interest to the child.

Organization

Ana made multiple organizational accommodations for RtI implementation. She revealed her efforts to accommodate when discussing the organization and management of RtI within her classroom. Ana admitted the grade level schedule did not include a time for progress monitoring, which is an essential component of RtI. The lack of designated time required her to develop a schedule and procedures for progress monitoring students in the RtI process. Ana made time to complete progress monitoring every week after guided reading groups and during centers. She designated Tuesdays as progress monitoring days. By setting aside time in her schedule to complete progress-monitoring tasks, Ana was able to track student progress and check for understanding. Weekly progress monitoring efforts made it possible for her to identify lack of student improvement and specific areas of weakness. Ana used this information to adjust instruction and provide alternate interventions for students in RtI.

Ana also made accommodations to develop RtI assessment tools for monitoring student progress in math. At the time of the study, there were many tools for progress monitoring reading performance; however, few existed for monitoring student progress

in mathematics. Ana developed her own mathematics progress monitoring tools to cope with the lack of progress monitoring materials. The development of a simple assessment, such as writing numbers in sequential order on a piece of notebook paper, established data on student number recognition skills. From the baseline data, Ana was able to focus instruction on the numbers not yet mastered by the student. The data from weekly progress monitoring assessments made it possible to track the consistency of student errors over time for RtI documentation.

Ana spent a significant amount of time searching for and organizing materials to progress monitor for RtI implementation. Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessments made it possible to identify specific strengths and weaknesses in reading; however, Ana encountered problems finding mathematics assessments that could pinpoint a specific area of weakness. The lack of math assessment data made it difficult for her to identify specific areas of weakness, as well as plan RtI interventions for tier-two students. Ana recalled a particular situation that required her to seek methods for evaluating student progress in math. She recalled her first grade students having difficulty with addition facts. In order to address the issue, Ana located an online assessment tool, *Math Minute*. The online resource contains multiple tools for assessing different math content, including but not limited to addition, money, time, and fractions. She explained, “What I do is an addition Math Minute. The kids start on zero and try to go up to adding by twos. It’s just basic addition. They start with zero plus one, zero plus two, and so on. And they have a minute to answer all the addition facts for a fact family.” The format closely resembles math drills. The primary difference is its focus on one fact family at a time. Ana went on to explain, “There are eleven Math Minutes. Once they master the zero fact family, they move up to the ones. I might have one kid working on the fact family of three and another working on two.”

The Math Minute provided opportunities for the students to practice recalling addition facts and offered another method of tracking student progress and documenting error consistencies for students in RtI.

The final organizational consideration Ana made for RtI implementation was scheduling time for guided practice and small group intervention in math. Ana described the accommodations she made to provide small group intervention for students. In her final interview, she reflected on how the current math program, Singapore math, necessitated the implementation of small group intervention for tier-two RtI students. According to Ana, the Singapore curriculum did not provide provisions for instructing various types of learners. Consequently, the program offered few hands on experiences for Ana's bodily-kinesthetic learners. Therefore, she found it necessary to schedule small group interventions to accommodate learners with different learning styles and needs. During these small group lessons, Ana reinforced math concepts by using manipulatives. She frequently used 8 ½" by 11" whiteboards during small group lessons to check for understanding. Ana viewed small group time as both an intervention strategy and an opportunity to engage students in learning math content, Table 8.

Table 8

Summary of Documents Contained in Ana's RtI Files

Manditory RtI Forms	Progress Monitoring Data	Parent Communication Data
Student Information Sheet	Reading Benchmark and Assessment Data (DIBELS, DRA, detailed reading skills reports)	Conference Reports
RtI Meeting Minutes (Tiers 1-3)	Phonics Assessments from Reading A to Z	Behavior Notices
Observation Intervention Conference Form	Sight Words Checklists	Disciplinary Action Reports
End of the Year POI Status Report	Language skills checklist	
	Curriculum-based Assessments	
	Teacher Created Assessments	
	Behavior Intervention Plans	
	Daily Antecedent Behavior Consequence Observation Forms	
	Functional Behavior Assessment	
	Teacher Created Social Story Motivators	
	Daily/Weekly Desktop Motivators	
	Summary of Progress Monitoring	

Documentation

Ana produced a significant amount of documentation for the nine students with active RtI folders. An analysis of the RtI documents submitted for the study indicates Ana maintained three types of documentation: mandatory RtI forms, progress monitoring data, and evidence of parent communication. Each type of documentation required the completion of specific forms, assessments, and reports.

Table 8 provides a summary of the data Ana collected for students in the RtI process. The data is classified according to documentation type.

Over the course of the school year, Ana held 18 RtI meetings. Each meeting involved the completion of mandatory RtI paperwork including the Student Information Sheet, RtI Meeting Minutes, and End of the Year Pyramid of Intervention Status Report. The student information sheet provided basic personal information about a child. Teachers completed RtI Meeting Minutes during grade level RtI meetings. RtI Meeting Minutes contained information regarding student intervention goals, targeted instruction to address goals, and observational records of progress. The End of the Year Pyramid of Intervention Status Report was the final piece of required paperwork Ana completed for the students involved in the RtI process. The purpose of the report was to indicate whether a student should remain active in the RtI process and identify any specific interventions for the following school year.

In addition to mandatory forms, Ana was also required to keep weekly progress monitoring documentation and student work samples. She used a variety of assessment tools to document academic progress and student responses to RtI interventions. A student's instructional goal(s) and identified area(s) of weakness determined the type of progress monitoring assessment(s) and documentation. Data from benchmark assessments, such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), provided a baseline for tracking student progress in reading. Ana used DIBELS assessments, Reading A – Z phonics assessments, sight word checklists, and language skills checklists as progress monitoring tools for students with reading interventions. Singapore curriculum-based assessments provided some baseline data for students receiving mathematics interventions. However, the lack of standardized progress monitoring assessments in mathematics required Ana to create or identify additional assessment materials for tracking student progress.

She used simple paper and pencil assessments to track student progress in number recognition, as well as addition and subtraction operations.

Ana documented behavioral interventions for a male and female student in tier-two of RtI. This required the creation of separate Behavior Intervention Plans. Each Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) addressed inappropriate student behaviors by establishing specific goals for improvement. The BIP for the male student focused on addressing impulsive behaviors and included a behavior contract with a system of rewards and consequences. Furthermore, the BIP for the female student concentrated on addressing aggressive and abusive behaviors. The latter required additional planning and documentation of intervention strategies. As mentioned previously, Ana developed several Hannah Montana social stories to help the female student manage aggressive behavior. The BIP provided documentation of these social stories. In conjunction with Behavior Intervention Plans, Ana kept a record of student progress toward behavioral goals using weekly “goals charts” or desktop motivators. These charts not only served as a method of tracking student behavior, but also provided students with a visual of their progress toward a specific goal. Ana described how students either placed a sticker on the chart or colored in an object every day they accomplished their goal. Copies of goals charts were included in the BIP documentation of RtI files.

Ana also completed Daily Antecedent Behavior Consequence Observation Forms and Functional Behavior Assessments as documentation for students with Behavior Intervention Plans. The Daily Antecedent Behavior Consequence Observation Form is a chart that documents what occurs immediately before an inappropriate behavior, the inappropriate behavior, and the consequences rendered following the behavior. The form provides specific information about the time of day and frequency of inappropriate behavior. Likewise, the Functional Behavior Assessment charts the daily and weekly occurrence of a specific behavior. Ana used the Functional Behavior Assessment to track the frequency of student engagement in undesirable behavior. She placed the chart on

a clipboard and used tally marks to record the number of times a student engaged in an inappropriate behavior. She explained, “I would have this on a clipboard on my desk. It would be for me. The child is not aware that I am doing this. As I would observe the behavior, I would just make a tally mark. Ana found both the Daily Antecedent Behavior Consequence Observation Form and Functional Behavior Assessment beneficial in recording patterns in student behavior.

The final type of documentation included in student RtI files was parent communication data. Ana provided copies of Parent Conference Reports in order to record parental involvement in the RtI process. In addition to conference reports, Ana also made copies of behavior notices to parents and/or Disciplinary Action Reports relevant to a student’s behavioral goals and RtI interventions. These documents served as further evidence to identify patterns of student behavior and responses to intervention.

The accumulation of RtI progress monitoring data required Ana to devise a system for maintaining and storing RtI documentation. During interviews, Ana often referred to a loose-leaf binder used to house progress monitoring data. She called this binder her “Progress Monitoring Notebook.” The notebook contained separate sections for storing progress-monitoring information. Ana stated, “It’s just something I did on my own. It’s something I worked out for me to keep it [documentation] all together...” In one section, Ana recorded observations about student responses to interventions during guided reading group. She found these anecdotal records helpful in determining the success of interventions. Ana also stored individual spiral notebooks for recording observations of each student in pocket folders in the Progress Monitoring Notebook. Observations related to either student academics or behavior. The notes were useful in identifying and tracking academic strengths and weaknesses. The Progress Monitoring Notebook also contained dividers for individual records of student progress, including baseline or benchmark assessment data and weekly progress monitoring assessments. Ana created spreadsheets to summarize student performance on progress monitoring

assessments. She used the spreadsheets and accompanying assessments during tier 2 RtI meetings to document student progress.

The videotaped guided reading lessons provide evidence of Ana's use of the Progress Monitoring Notebook. Observations show her recording information and documentation after the completion of lessons. Once Ana dismissed the students from the table, she would turn on a disk shaped tap light. She explained, "When the light is on, the students know not to disturb me. I use those few minutes in between guided reading groups to record information about the lesson and prepare for my next group." Making accommodations in her schedule to provide a few minutes to record notes helped Ana manage some of the documentation required by RtI implementation. However, Ana noted time was a significant factor in preparing documentation for and substantiating student placement in RtI. Ana took paperwork home to keep it manageable and to ensure that she did not fall behind on documentation. "…It's been left up to us to figure out how we are going to keep up with it [documentation] and monitor student progress…You have to be organized. If you aren't an organized teacher, this process [RtI] would be very hard…" Ana's comments suggest organization and timely completion of documentation is necessary for RtI implementation.

The Assimilators

In contrast to the RtI accommodations made by the novice teacher, Ana, the more experienced teachers, Mary and Sarah, demonstrated a more relaxed approach to RtI implementation, viewing intervention as a natural extension of instruction in the general education setting. Mary, the mid-career teacher, stated, "I'm really not doing anything different." The veteran teacher, Sarah, shared similar sentiments, when she interjected, "It doesn't have to be so complicated. It's not rocket science." The interventions Mary and Sarah provided for the students involved in RtI focused primarily on tier-one strategies with minimal deviation from regularly scheduled programs or classroom activities. The following explores data from the Teacher Performance Record (TPR), interviews, lesson

plans, videotaped observations, and RtI documentation to investigate Mary and Sarah's engagement in implementation. The evidence suggests the more experienced teachers assimilated RtI implementation into existing classroom structures and participated minimally in *planning*, *organization*, and *documentation*.

Planning

The selection of planning items on the Teacher Performance Record (TPR) inventory was one method used to determine Mary and Sarah's engagement in RtI. Data from eight of the twenty-five TPR items recorded the frequency of teacher behaviors relative to planning for RtI implementation in the general education setting. Cumulative TPR results indicate Mary demonstrated low engagement in 50% of TPR planning items, while Sarah demonstrated low engagement in 75% of TPR planning items. Evidence from videotaped observations indicates that Mary and Sarah did not plan instruction based on individual student needs or characteristics. There was also no evidence of provisions for individual student learning needs or for students who complete tasks early.

At the time of the study, Mary had five students with active RtI files. These students only received RtI interventions in reading. Mary noted she really did not have to make many plans for RtI implementation, during her reading block because the third grade ability grouped students for reading. As a result, the tier-two and tier-three students in Mary's class went to another room for reading instruction. Because the tier 2 and 3 RtI students left the classroom for reading, Mary did not provide the majority of their reading instruction. Another general education teacher and the Early Intervention Program (EIP) teacher provided RtI reading interventions for these students. Mary was not able to elaborate on details about the RtI interventions these students received while attending reading instruction in another classroom. Collaboration with regard to RtI interventions occurred between the two teachers co-teaching the EIP class and Mary was not privy to that information. In addition, the videotaped reading lesson and corresponding student documentation Mary submitted for the study did not provide any evidence of RtI

implementation. RtI students were not in attendance during the videotaped lesson and did not receive supplemental instruction on lesson content from Mary.

Mary mentioned that RtI reading students missed the Daily Oral Language mini-lesson. Consequently, she had to review the lesson with RtI students when they returned to the classroom. She described how she managed to re-teach the Daily Oral Language lesson with RtI students in a small group, while the rest of the class worked independently on seatwork. “I usually take the DOL [Daily Oral Language] overhead and I put it on a piece of construction paper...Then, I give the children each a vis-à-vis. They take turns finding the corrections and we …discuss the corrections.” Although Mary’s plans for working with RtI students included scheduling time to work with student in a small group, the scheduling process did not require her to make changes or accommodations to the classroom schedule. Small group instruction occurred within the existing schedule, as non-RtI students in the classroom worked on independent practice activities. According to Mary, this provided a natural break in the schedule, one that allowed her to work with RtI students in a small group setting as a tier-two intervention.

As in Mary’s case, the fifth grade ability group students for reading and math instruction. Sarah taught the “higher level” students. The tier-two students in Sarah’s classroom received additional instruction and interventions in a small group setting co-taught by another fifth grade general educator and the special education teacher. As a result, planning for RtI interventions was not a major priority. Sarah did not believe she was implementing RtI any differently than she had the Student Support Team (SST) process. She found RtI implementation came naturally.

> I don’t know that there was a difference between SST and RtI in my classroom because if I had students going through the SST process, I was doing something different. I had my own things that I was doing. So, maybe that’s why I felt it [RtI implementation] was more natural to me. It fell into the rhythm of my teaching day…That’s just what you do with every child you teach. I teach my kids what they need to be taught. I guess that’s why I don’t have too many kids in RtI.

Sarah's comments suggest she made instructional adjustments to meet individual student needs; however, these instructional adjustments did not require much forethought or pre-planning. As Sarah noticed students struggling with instructional content, she would automatically re-teach or remediate to address student needs. She believes her responsiveness to individual needs has been beneficial to student progress and has kept most in tier1 of RtI.

Throughout the interview process, Sarah made multiple comments about what she considers "good teaching" and "what good teachers do" in reference to RtI implementation. Sarah relied less on planning for RtI implementation and more on what she believed to be intuitive teacher knowledge of effective classroom practices. According to Sarah,

> An effective teacher knows the students, knows their needs, and knows the curriculum. You know, this is where I have to get them. This is why they're not getting there. They need this and that. You could say it's just differentiation. But, I just don't see differentiation as a step in the tier process because you are gonna differentiate anytime you teach anybody. You're going to provide them with instruction, answer their questions... And you make sure they get it. That's just what good teachers do.

As a self-proclaimed "helicopter teacher," Sarah is attuned to the needs of her students. She provides differentiated or individualized instruction to meet student needs. She attributes this sense of awareness to what she calls, "teacher proximity." She notes,

> Technically there are twenty-one different groups in my classroom because everybody is in his or her own spot. Everybody is basically doing their own thing. And I think that's when proximity is going to come into play to make sure everybody understands things. It's just such a fluid thing because everybody needs help with something every once and awhile. So, I think that's differentiation in the normal classroom. In my opinion, I just think that's what you do...

For Sarah, "teacher proximity" is being aware of student academic performance and constantly adjusting instruction. Her description of tier-one RtI implementation as a "fluid" process in the classroom creates an image of continuous, yet natural instructional adjustments to promote student learning. She believes many of the requirements for RtI

implementation are things she instinctively does in response to student needs. Thus, the interventions Sarah provided for her students during videotaped classroom observations were not "scripted interventions," but rather natural responses based on teacher observations of instructional needs.

> I don't just pull certain students at certain points and say, 'You have to come here and we have to talk about this.' You know, I go around and see where they are and if they're stuck at a certain point or I see something is wrong, it's at that point, then, that's when we work on it [skill or concept] because it's more natural at that point. They're ready to listen to you, at that point. So, we work through it…I guess that's what I meant the other day when I said, 'It doesn't have to be so complicated.' It's just natural. I think it's a natural process.

Sarah's focus is on identifying the instructional needs of her students and immediately addressing these needs as they occur in the classroom. Yet, she employs intervention techniques that draw the least amount of attention to the child. For Sarah, interventions should not only meet student needs, but also be respectful of students' emotions. Sarah believes her constant participation in tier 1 interventions minimizes the need for more intensive interventions in tier-two and tier-three of RtI.

Organization

Although the students in tier-two and tier-three of RtI received a majority of their intervention services outside the general education setting, both Mary and Sarah provided some instructional and curriculum interventions for RtI students. The primary methods of instructional intervention in the general education classroom for these two teachers were oral and written instructions, small group instruction with a teacher or paraprofessional, one-on-one conferences to clarify directions, paraprofessional support, and peer tutoring. Mary and Sarah also used extended time as an intervention for students in tier-two and tier-three of RtI. However, the intervention methods these teachers employed did not require adjustments to classroom organization. The evidence suggests Mary and Sarah assimilated RtI implementation into existing classroom structures.

When asked to describe the organization of planned interventions for RtI students Mary, the mid-career teacher, explained, “I don’t really have any specific tools I use on a regular basis. It just depends on what’s being taught.” Small group instruction was the main method of intervention Mary used with students involved in the RtI process. Small group instruction occurred during regularly scheduled reading centers for 30 to 35 minutes twice a week. According to Mary, “It’s never enough time.” Yet, Mary used this time to either re-teach lesson content or provide an “extensive review” of information previously taught, but not mastered by the students in tier-two and tier-three of RtI. Mary also discussed using small group instruction to reiterate information provided during lessons and to provide subsequent information for clarification of assignments. In addition, Mary also provided RtI students with individual copies of overhead visual aids and graphic organizers used during whole group lessons. Mary noted that this information was particularly beneficial to “visual learners” in tier-two and tier-three of RtI.

Assimilation was also a strategy Sarah used to organize RtI implementation in the general education setting. As previously noted, Sarah believed RtI implementation did not need to be “complicated” or “disjointed.” Thus, her primary concern when organizing RtI implementation was to create a seamless connection between RtI interventions and regularly scheduled classroom activities. Sarah stated,

> I think you look to see how you can incorporate any tier-two or tier-three interventions into what you’re already doing, so that it’s smooth. So that it’s a part of the everyday flow in your classroom. So, that the child doesn’t think, ‘Oh, I gotta go over here and do tier-two, but nobody else has to.’ You want them to be a part of the classroom culture…so, I try to make sure that the intervention flows...

Sarah’s comments provide a rationale for incorporating RtI implementation into the current classroom practices. By weaving RtI into the existing classroom organization, the students receiving interventions were not highly visible during videotaped observations. The opportunity to work independently on a variety of tasks was standard practice in Sarah’s classroom.

The differentiation of activities for students of varying abilities benefited all children without drawing undue attention to those involved in the RtI process.

Documentation

Mary completed regularly scheduled progress monitoring tasks twice a week. The recess schedule allotted two thirty minute timeslots each week for teachers to complete progress monitor tasks. Mary explained, “When I don’t have recess duty, I’ll keep a student in and work one-on-one on progress-monitoring.” The progress monitoring documentation Mary discussed was part of the grade level routine to track student achievement. She described the process and schedule for monitoring student progress. Mary stated,

> We use the DIBELS. And I have the um, [flips through a student’s RtI file]. We use this, DRA2, in the fall and then in January, if they are below grade level. Then in the spring, it kinda depends on how low the child is, we may use it [assessments] three times. It just kind of depends. Every three to six weeks we do the non-sense word fluency on the DIBELS. Then, I have the stories back here. I have my own copy right here that I can record everything on it [DIBELS scoring sheet].

Mary mentioned working with other teachers on her grade level to complete required ongoing assessment data and RtI documentation for students. Mary believed working in the company of peers helped her complete tasks efficiently and manage time effectively. She also believed having time built into the third grade schedule for progress monitoring was beneficial to managing assessment data for RtI documentation. Because the grade level schedule allocated time for progress monitoring, Mary did not have to make accommodations in her schedule. As a result, she assimilated progress monitoring for RtI documentation into her existing classroom schedule. Table 9 provides a summary of the documents contained in Mary’s RtI files.

Table 9

Summary of Documents Contained in Mary's RtI Files

Manditory RtI Forms	Progress Monitoring Data
Student Information Sheet	Reading Benchmark and Assessment Data (DIBELS and DRA2)
RtI Meeting Minutes (Tiers 1-3)	Rigby Running Records
End of the Year POI Status Report	Running Records from Reading A to Z

According to RtI documents, Mary held four tier-two RtI meetings and one tier-three RtI meeting during the 2008 – 2009 school year. Each of these meetings required the completion of a Student Information Sheet and RtI Meeting Minutes. The RtI Meeting Minutes contained brief statements about instructional concerns, current student interventions services, and recommendations for continued intervention. A majority of the accompanying progress monitoring data came from DIBELS and DRA2 assessments, two programs used throughout the school building to provide benchmark data and progress monitoring data in reading. Mary also included running records from the Rigby reading program and the Reading A to Z program as progress monitoring data in student RtI documentation. Although Mary used multiple assessment tools for monitoring RtI student progress, the programs were universal requirements within the school or system. Thus, Mary did not have to make additional accommodations for progress monitoring RtI students, which clarifies her statement about not doing anything differently or in addition to regularly scheduled documentation.

During the second interview, Mary shared a spreadsheet she used to monitor student-reading progress. The spreadsheet provided an overview of all reading assessment data collected throughout the school year. Along the Y-axis of the spreadsheet

were the names of Mary's students. The X-axis contained DRA benchmark assessment scores, monthly running record scores, winter DRA2 scores, and spring DRA2 scores. The spreadsheet served not only as a tool for recording student progress, but also provided information relevant to a student's performance in relationship to his or her peers. Mary referred to the spreadsheet during RtI meetings, when discussing a student's cumulative reading progress.

In contrast, the veteran teacher, Sarah, demonstrated a minimalist approach to documentation for RtI implementation stating, "It doesn't have to be flowery documentation." Instead, she assimilated RtI documentation into regularly scheduled assessments to provide progress-monitoring data. Benchmark assessments, weekly spelling tests, and computer generated reports from Lexia®, Sitton Spelling, and Explorer's Club software programs served as documentation of student progress. According to Sarah, "By December, everybody was performing between 70 and 80 percent" or in "the zone." Once students met target RtI goals, Sarah placed them back in tier 1 of RtI and discontinued both intervention(s) and progress-monitoring documentation.

Sarah also relied on her intuitive teacher sense to unofficially track and judge student progress during RtI implementation. She explained, "I've always been able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of my individual children…I could sit down with anybody, go down my class roster, and tell you who was having trouble...I don't need paperwork for that [laughs]..." Sarah's comments demonstrated her belief that elaborate documentation is unnecessary. Twenty-five years of teaching experience has given her a strong intuitive sense that enables her to make mental notes about student progress. Sarah explained,

> You know if you've been in education long enough and you know your curriculum well enough, you know what that one thing you need to focus on is, and you focus on that. You tell the ten year old that's what they need to focus on. And most of them, you know you have to motivate them, but if you tell them what to work on, they'll work on it.

The videotaped observations and TPR data provided additional evidence of what Sarah identified as “teacher intuition” and flexibility. Sarah frequently provided students with opportunities to work on individual assignments. While students worked on assignments, she would move around the classroom and conduct one-on-one conferences with students. During these brief encounters, Sarah not only made students aware of learning objectives and expectations, but also addressed individual student needs. Observations show Sarah providing specific feedback regarding curriculum content, as well as redirecting students for successful completion of tasks. The fact that Sarah’s overall student participation score on the TPR was higher than either Ana or Mary demonstrates the powerful influence of experience on classroom instruction regardless of the level of participation in RtI implementation.

At the end of interview four, the researcher inquired about obtaining official copies of Sarah’s RtI documents. Sarah explained that she did not have any RtI documentation on her students. She provided two explanations for this. First, “By the time the RtI forms had come from the county office, I’d already finished my RtI documentation. Everybody was in tier-one at that point and I don’t have anybody in that stage right now.” Sarah also mentioned that because the students in tier-two received RtI interventions from the Early Intervention Program (EIP) teacher, she did not assume responsibility for maintaining documentation. When asked about the possibility of getting documentation from the EIP teacher, Sarah said, “I don’t think there is any documentation. I don’t think the teacher keeps any intervention documentation.” Sarah was not comfortable discussing the topic of documentation. She would not go on record regarding RtI documentation for any tier-two student receiving RtI services in the EIP classroom. Several days after interview four, Sarah respectfully withdrew from the study.

On the last day of data collection, Ms. Greer, the guidance counselor, attempted to locate RtI documents for Sarah’s RtI students. Unfortunately, the students’ permanent records were no longer available because they had forwarded the files to the middle

school. However, Ms. Greer was able to provide copies of progress monitoring spreadsheets Sarah created for two of her RtI students at the beginning of the school year. Sarah described these spreadsheets during a previous interview when discussing methods she used at the beginning of the school year to monitor student progress for RtI documentation:

> Well, my intervention was Lexia® on the computer, so I pulled Lexia reports. That took about ten minutes a week. I created a spreadsheet to record my benchmark for progress monitoring…All I did was put the Excel spreadsheets together on my laptop for those kids [RtI students]. I used the same spreadsheet. So, it took me maybe another twenty minutes to type their numbers in the document…

Along the Y-axis of the spreadsheet, Sarah listed RtI meeting dates. The X-axis provided the student's name, learning goal(s), specific RtI intervention(s), a timeframe for implementing intervention(s), progress monitoring tool(s) and future RtI meeting dates. Sarah used this document before the school system had developed official RtI documentation forms. In addition, the Lexia® program provided teachers with cumulative reports of student progress. Sarah printed Lexia® reports as RtI documentation of student progress. She used the Excel spreadsheet to track and record RtI meetings and student participation in the RtI process.

Influence of RtI Implementation on Instruction

The final research question sought to determine teacher descriptions of the influence of RtI implementation on instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom. Study results indicate the intent of RtI implementation is to provide high quality instruction and research-based early interventions according to individual student needs. RtI implementation requires the use of curriculum-based measures to assess student performance a minimum of three times each year. The purpose of curriculum-based assessments in RtI implementation is to assist in the identification of "at-risk" students or students performing below the designated grade-level benchmark

and identify individual student needs to inform instructional practices. However, several consequences emerged from the data regarding the influence of RtI implementation on instruction in the general education classroom. Table 10 provides a summary of the consequences of RtI implementation on instruction. In addition, study findings suggest RtI implementation offered instructional advantages and disadvantages to students and teachers.

Table 10

Summary of the Consequences of RtI Implementation on Instruction

Intent of RtI Implementation	
• provide high quality instruction in general education classroom • provide research-based interventions matched to individual student needs • use curriculum-based measures to assess student performance, identify instructional needs, and make instructional decisions	
Consequences of RtI Implementation	
Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences
For Students: • Frequent progress-monitoring of performance • Targeted and individualized instruction • Multiple instructional methods of intervention	For Students: • Excessive amount of time before additional support and services • Inequitable distribution of teacher time and instruction • Teacher participation is voluntary
Positive Consequences For Teachers: • Documentation on student academic performance • Assessment data on individual student instructional needs • Data on the accuracy of applied interventions	Negative Consequences For Teachers: • Excessive time to plan for individualized instruction • Excessive paperwork to document student progress

Advantages

Teachers identified frequent progress monitoring as the most advantageous aspect of RtI implementation on instruction. Progress monitoring benefited both the teachers and the RtI students they served within the general education classroom. Ana explained, “The SST [Student Support Team] process…was lacking documentation on student progress. There wasn’t a lot of depth to it and there wasn’t a lot to compare. But with RtI, there is more data...you can really pinpoint what or where a child is struggling.” According to Sarah, “the RtI process created a paper trail to the benefit of the child.” Data from curriculum-based reading assessments, including DIBELS, DRA, Sitton Spelling, and Lexia® provided teachers with documentation of student reading performance throughout RtI implementation and provided feedback on specific language arts skills. The data allowed teachers to “pinpoint” specific “areas of weakness” such as phonemic awareness, phoneme segmentation, reading fluency, comprehension, and spelling to plan instruction for skills remediation. The teachers used progress-monitoring data to plan individualized instruction for RtI students based on needs. Ana stated, “The data has helped me as a teacher come up with different interventions.” Sarah also used progress-monitoring data to focus instruction on skills in need of remediation. She suggested that the consistent acquisition of information from performance assessments assisted her in adjusting instruction to meet student needs and accelerate student learning overtime.

Frequent progress monitoring offered additional benefits for the teachers. Ana, the novice teacher, and Mary, the mid-career teacher, included progress-monitoring data to supplement required RtI documentation. Both teachers used the reading program running records and DIBELS progress-monitoring data to document student reading performance, specific instructional needs, and student responses to individualized interventions. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), given three times each year in grades 3-5, provided Mary and Sarah with additional RtI progress-monitoring data.

The teachers found the progress monitoring documentation beneficial in judging the success of applied RtI interventions and determining subsequent interventions.

Disadvantages

While RtI implementation produced positive instructional outcomes, the teachers described several negative consequences of RtI implementation on instruction. All three teachers indicated it was easier to acquire special education services for students through the Student Support Team process than through RtI procedures. The amount of time necessary to complete each RtI tier, 6-8 weeks, was considered a "hindrance" in providing timely RtI support or special education services for students with severe needs. Ana recalled how the 6-8 week RtI tier requirement created "an obstacle" in obtaining additional support for students with "severe learning difficulties" and created a "huge challenge" for classroom instruction. She explained,

> It's frustrating because…those students, who I know need special education services, it's taking longer to get them the support they need through this process…you've got to follow the process, document for 6 to 8 weeks, get all the paperwork together. Meanwhile, what's happening to the child and for that matter the other children.

Retaining children with severe needs in the classroom without appropriate supports not only affected the individual student's ability to learn, but also created a distraction that affected the learning of other students within the classroom. Mary and Sarah, also acknowledged the potentially negative impact of the lengthy RtI process on providing timely student support services. However, both teachers indicated that the identification of students with learning difficulties occurred prior to third and fifth grade; thus support or intervention services were already in place for most students.

The inequitable distribution of teacher time and classroom instruction was another negative consequence of RtI implementation. The teachers claimed that students with the greatest instructional needs, those in tier-two or tier-three of RtI, received more

attention and instructional time from teachers. Throughout videotaped observations, the teachers had a tendency to gravitate toward students in need of additional instructional support. Observations indicate teachers spent more instructional time checking student understanding, providing additional instruction, and offering specific feedback for struggling students than average and above average students. Ana admitted, “I’m having to spend a lot more time with certain students and the rest of my class is being put on the back burner…it detracts me from my class, and it can be frustrating because I don’t feel like I am supporting all my students.” Ana believed she was doing a disservice to her class because she was unable to provide optimal support for students with severe learning difficulties and neglected to provide instructional enrichment for students performing above grade level. Sarah, the veteran teacher who served as the fifth grade Intervention Team Chair, shared similar concerns when she recalled an RtI intervention that required a teacher on her grade level to work for twenty minutes twice a week with one student. She stated, “What’s happening is the lower children are getting all the attention…and the other 25-26 students are doing some kind of busy work or individual work.” Sarah was concerned because the RtI intervention took 40 minutes of instructional time away from other children and created logistical problems covering grade level content.

Additional comments made by the teachers suggest students within the general education classroom were aware of the inequitable distribution of teacher time and instruction. During the videotaped math lesson, as Mary worked in small group with RtI students, several non-RtI students interrupted the lesson. According to Mary, these students were not interrupting because they required assistance to solve the math problems, “They just wanted attention from the teacher.” Sarah also recalled incidents in which non-RtI students vied for her attention as she worked one-on-one with RtI students. Students often approached Sarah asking, “When am I going to get to work with you? When am I going to come read to you?” According to Sarah, the competition for teacher attention was a direct result of “focusing on lower functioning students” and

"the amount of time spent on weekly progress-monitoring." In addition to demands on teacher attention, non-RtI students were aware of the intervention materials available only to RtI students. Many tier 2 RtI interventions Ana incorporated into her classroom included special materials, such as slant boards, pencil grips, a wiggle seat, incentive charts, chewing gum, and other supplemental manipulatives. The children did not fully understand the requirements for the additional materials and resources. They only noticed the inequitable distribution of supplemental materials.

Although the teachers viewed RtI implementation as beneficial to students, they identified several disadvantages that influenced participation. RtI is mandatory in order for students to receive special education services; yet, teacher participation is voluntary. According to Ana, "Some teachers are not as motivated and there really isn't any way to hold them accountable…" The additional planning time required for individual student interventions, instruction, and the excessive paperwork necessary to document student progress increased teacher workloads and deterred participation in RtI implementation. The teachers described RtI documentation forms as "massive" and the process of RtI implementation as "overwhelming," and "time consuming." Sarah explained, "…The paperwork is just terrible…I think it's the reason why a lot of stuff doesn't get done…and we miss opportunities to catch these children before they fall through the cracks."

Ana noted the amount of paperwork teachers are responsible for "depends on how many students are going through the RtI process. Some teachers have to work harder and spend more time on RtI than others." Ana suggested the distribution of students within a classroom has the potential to encourage or discourage teacher participation. Ana, Mary, and Sarah implied that teachers with a higher number of low functioning students were less apt to participate in RtI implementation because of the "magnitude" of the task.

Ana complained, "The process is overkill on the documentation…It takes away from other areas I could be putting my time into like my lesson plans…" Ana and Sarah discussed using personal time to complete RtI documentation and to chart progress-

monitoring data. The teachers acknowledged the importance of creating a paper trail to support student learning; however, they questioned the required amount of paperwork. Sarah stated, “Personally, I don’t think the paper trail needs to be quite so massive…if all you had was the child’s deficit skill, the benchmark you used to identify the deficit, and a couple strategies you’re going to use to help them…What more do you need?”

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the study findings revealed by the research investigation. The findings are organized around the research questions and themes that emerged from the data analysis regarding teacher knowledge and understanding of RtI, RtI implementation, and teacher descriptions of the influence of RtI implementation on instructional practices. Data from interviews, observations, and document analysis advance understanding of the study participants’ experiences implementing RtI at River Rock Elementary School.

RtI policy language had the greatest influence on teacher knowledge and understanding. The availability of information and inconsistencies in policy information and procedures created obstacles to teacher understanding and implementation of RtI policy. Teacher apprehension, experience, and mindset also influenced RtI implementation. The teachers identified shared goals, leadership, and collaboration as supportive environmental conditions that positively influenced RtI implementation.

The less experienced study participant, Ana, made multiple accommodations for RtI implementation. In contrast, the more experienced study participants, Mary and Sarah, implemented RtI through the process of assimilation. The theme of accommodation or assimilation was also evident in the teachers’ approaches to study participation. Ana made accommodations to complete study requirements, while both Mary and Sarah withdrew participation without fulfilling all study participation requirements. The next chapter provides a discussion of the study findings and implications for future research.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine a selection of K-5 general educators' knowledge and implementation of RtI policy and descriptions of the influence of implementation on instruction for at-risk students in the general education setting. The following research questions guided the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of study findings:

1. What do select K-5 general education teachers know and understand about the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) policy and implementation requirements?
2. How are select K-5 general educators implementing Response-to-Intervention in their classrooms?
3. How do select general educators describe the influence of Response-to-Intervention on instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss study findings and present reasonable inferences based on the study results. Data analysis categories provide the organization for the discussion. Relevant literature from policy implementation, teacher change, adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 1989; 2001), and the intensification thesis (Apple, 1982; 1986, Lawn & Ozga, 1981; 1988) also support the findings. These findings provide guidance for future RtI implementation, as well as implications for future educational reform policies.

The chapter concludes with recommendations for local education agencies, administrators, and professional learning for RtI implementation.

Teacher Knowledge and Understanding of RtI Policy

The teachers in this study indicated that RtI policy language provided a foundation for knowledge and understanding. Teacher descriptions of RtI were consistent with the LEA's definition and included language relative to policy goals, teacher tasks, and mandated policy activities. Yet, all three teachers stated RtI policy language and implementation procedures are "ambiguous" and open to varying interpretations. Both Ana and Mary had strong reactions to the ambiguity of policy language and the lack of explicit procedures. They demonstrated concern for precise understanding of the process and specific steps for RtI implementation. In addition, the teachers identified the availability and consistency of RtI policy information as obstacles to understanding and implementation. In essence, RtI policy was neither readily available nor consistent which made implementation difficult. Of particular importance is how the teachers dealt with policy ambiguity.

Although the teachers suggested the ambiguity they encountered had a negative impact on their ability to understand and implement RtI, it is reasonable to assert ambiguity is an inherent and necessary component of new policy implementation. "Many legislative compromises depend on language sufficiently ambiguous that diverse actors can interpret the same act in different ways" (Matland, 1995, p. 158). Thus, a certain amount of ambiguity is necessary for policy legislation. According to Matland (1995), two types of ambiguity exist in policy implementation: ambiguity of policy goals and ambiguity of policy means. The ambiguity identified by teachers in Public Law 108-446 Section 300.309 (2004) was ambiguity of policy means, wherein local education agencies possess discretionary power to adopt RtI policies and procedures. The law affords local education agencies the flexibility to make adaptations to policy procedures based on local contexts. As a result, the law does not dictate specific methods and procedures for

implementing RtI policy. Thus, the local education assumes responsibility for providing the details of RtI policy implementation.

Both complexity theory (Morrison, 2002) and adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980) are useful in examining the significance of policy ambiguity with regard to RtI implementation. Research on complexity theory suggests, "…the closer one is propelled towards the edge of chaos, the more creative, open-ended, imaginative, diverse, and rich are the behaviors, ideas, and practices of individuals and organizations…" (Morrison, 2002, p. 24). Consequently, ambiguity with regard to local RtI policy implementation procedures provides enough flexibility for individual teacher creativity in the interpretation and implementation of RtI in the classroom. The ambiguity identified by the teachers resembles bottom-up policy implementation strategies whereby teachers function as policy agents or "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980) with the freedom to choose the manner in which policy mandates are carried out within the classroom. The implication is that no one correct method of RtI implementation exists, but rather multiple methods of implementation to obtain the desired policy outcomes of quality general education instruction, research-based interventions to meet student needs, and data-driven decision making to inform instructional practice.

Implementation of RtI began before the local education agency provided provisions for policy implementation. Ana and Mary indicated there was an immediate need for explicit information regarding the RtI process and implementation procedures. The heightened sense of urgency demonstrated by Ana and Mary reflects individual student needs within their classroom demographics. It is reasonable to assert that Sarah's lack of concern results from both her direct knowledge of RtI as the grade level IT and differences in her classroom demographics. Because the students in Sarah's classroom are "higher functioning," she does not demonstrate a sense of urgency.

In addition, the teachers unanimously noted inconsistencies in policy implementation procedures. However, all three teachers responded by seeking additional

clarification. Knowles (1980) suggests adult learners "…engage in learning in response to pressures they feel from their current life situation…they tend to enter an educational activity in a problem-centered or performance-centered frame of mind" (p. 53). This may account for the teachers' focus on policy goals and specific policy requirements in their descriptions of RtI and initial efforts to understand implementation. Based on the findings it is reasonable to infer that the policy ambiguity and inconsistencies in policy implementation teachers experienced served as catalysts for the acquisition of additional knowledge and understanding of RtI policy in this study.

RtI Implementation

The teachers in this study entered into RtI implementation with different personal attributes including education, experience, and beliefs. Although there was evidence of RtI implementation in all three of the teachers' classrooms, variations occurred in the degree of engagement and approach to implementation. Study findings suggest Ana made accommodations for RtI implementation, while Mary and Sarah assimilated RtI implementation into existing classroom practices. In addition, the teachers reported that several personal and environmental conditions influenced RtI implementation. The descriptions provided by teachers suggest personal and environmental conditions either hindered or supported the implementation of RtI. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 2001) provided a theoretical framework for examining the influence of personal factors, individual behavior, and the environment on the teacher implementation of RtI.

Personal Influences

Apprehension

All three teachers discussed personal apprehensions concerning RtI implementation. The least experienced teachers, Ana and Mary, demonstrated significant fear and anxiety. They recalled feeling overwhelmed, confused, and under-skilled due

to a lack of technical knowledge regarding RtI implementation policies and procedures. Yet, they expressed confidence in their ability to implement the old SST process because they possessed both prior knowledge and experience. One possible explanation for their RtI apprehension is the "implementation dip" (Fullan, 2001, p. 40). Fullan (2001) suggests teachers implementing new policies experience "a dip in performance and confidence" when they encounter situations that require a change in behavior or beliefs. Thus, apprehension is a normal emotional response to information that either challenges personal assumptions or requires complex processing (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Smit, 2005).

In stark contrast to Ana and Mary, Sarah, the veteran teacher, indicated that RtI implementation seemed logical and rational given her prior knowledge and experience with the SST process. She was confident in her ability to implement RtI because she was able to assimilate new information into her existing knowledge base. Sarah's level of teaching experience and involvement on the IT committee seem to have contributed to her confidence and lack of apprehension. Ross & Gray (2006) suggest, "Teachers who perceive themselves to be successful at a particular task…believe they have the ability to perform that task and anticipate they will be successful in future encounters with it" (p. 183). Successful experiences build self-efficacy and confidence (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 1997; 2001).

Experience

All three of the teachers indicated that experience was a personal attribute that supported RtI implementation. Both personal and professional experience provided a schema for processing and implementing RtI. Study results suggest the mid-career teacher, Mary, and the veteran teacher, Sarah, used their knowledge and experience to assimilate RtI implementation into existing classroom practices and schedules. According to the TPR data, Mary and Sarah demonstrated less participation in RtI related activities; however, their student engagement scores were higher than Ana's. In addition, Mary and

Sarah had fewer students in tier-two and tier-three of RtI. Several reasonable assumptions are feasible based on these results. First, the more experienced teachers, Mary and Sarah, possessed pre-existing habits and routines, which enabled them to assimilate RtI implementation. Second, many RtI strategies were already a part of experienced teachers' intervention repertoires. The two more experienced teachers internalized these strategies and applied them reportedly with little or no forethought.

Research suggests teacher education programs have adopted reflective teaching practices; therefore, beginning teachers with lower levels of education and experience are more cognizant of the need for additional information and skills (Livneh & Livneh, 1999; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). This helps explain why Ana perceived a need to work harder and make more accommodations for RtI implementation. As a less experienced teacher, she may not have fully developed a framework for assimilating RtI policy implementation.

Although these are reasonable assumptions, differences in student characteristics and classroom demographics provide another possible explanation for the disparities among student engagement in the TPR data.

Mindset

RtI implementation required the teachers to confront their beliefs about serving at-risk students in the classroom. In addition to challenging beliefs, the teachers were required to change how they conceptualized the identification of students with learning disabilities. All three teachers acknowledged RtI implementation increased teaching responsibilities and administrative tasks. Yet, there were significant differences in observed teaching and administrative tasks among teachers. Although each teacher completed progress-monitoring data for students in the RtI process, the type, amount, and quality of progress-monitoring data reflected individual teacher differences regarding RtI implementation. The accommodation or assimilation of RtI into existing practices provided additional insight into teacher behavior. For example, Ana demonstrated a

strong commitment to RtI implementation. She made many different accommodations for instructional and behavioral interventions, support materials, and documentation. In contrast, Mary and Sarah exhibited a minimalist approach to RtI implementation. Consistent with the literature on teacher change for policy implementation, the two more experienced teachers opted for less invasive methods of RtI implementation. Whenever possible, they incorporated teaching and administrative RtI tasks into existing classroom practices and schedules.

Study results concur with Pajares' (1992) statement, "Beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions…they play a critical role in defining behavior and organizing knowledge and information" (p. 325). The implication is teachers function autonomously in accordance with their personal experience and mindset. Similar to the research completed by Smith & Southerland (2007), the teachers in this study determined which components of RtI policy to accept and incorporate into implementation practices and which components to disregard.

Environmental Supports

Shared Goals

Shared goals and consistent objectives for RtI implementation were evident throughout the data. School documents and teacher comments demonstrate clear communication and understanding of the school's mission and vision. Document analyses showed an alignment between school mission/vision statements, the school improvement plan, RtI implementation, and professional development activities. Increased student learning, quality instruction, and commitment to continuous growth were common objectives among school documents and professional development activities. Additional evidence of shared objectives came from the goal-centered descriptions of RtI provided by teachers.

The teachers indicated that shared goals contributed to their sense of connectedness and encouraged collaboration within and between grade levels. For Ana and Mary, collaboration with others reinforced their commitment to improving instruction. Mary recalled working interdependently with teachers on her grade level to improve student learning. Schein (2004) suggests shared goals are cultural assumptions internalized by members regarding organizational objectives and means for accomplishment. “Cultural artifacts” (Schein, 2004, p. 25) including the school mission and vision statements, school improvement documents, and professional development activities served to establish patterns of behavior and reinforce organizational goals. In this study, shared goals provided organizational coherence, focused teacher actions, and unified efforts toward desired policy outcomes.

Trust and Shared Leadership

The teachers indicated the principal was instrumental in creating a safe environment for learning the RtI process. Trust and shared leadership were behaviors and practices demonstrated by the principal that supported RtI implementation. Trust is a significant predictor of risk taking behavior during reform initiatives (Serva, Fuller, & Mayer, 2005; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). The principal at River Rock Elementary established trust through honesty, openness, respect, and supportive actions. In addition, the principal facilitated teacher learning and supported RtI implementation by mobilizing resources for RtI implementation. Creating opportunities for teachers to take risks throughout RtI implementation without fear of disciplinary action was another way the principal established trust.

Research on professional development and teacher change associates trust with opportunities for teacher leadership and shared leadership (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993; Richardson & Placier, 2001). The teachers at River Rock discussed multiple opportunities to assume formal and informal leadership roles. These roles allowed teachers to exercise some control over decision-making processes, which further contributed to

the establishment of trusting relationships and commitment to shared organizational goals. The decentralization of leadership roles contributed to organizational capacity. Capitalizing on the strengths of individuals within the organization through shared leadership led to collective teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Goddard, 2002; Evan, 1996; 2003; Rose et al., 2003). The implication is teachers are more willing to participate in reform initiatives when they are involved in the construction and implementation of policy.

Collaboration

Much of the empirical research on supportive school environments for policy implementation emphasizes the importance of social capital in the establishment of collaborative school cultures (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Ross & Gray, 2006; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Two of the teachers in this study reported participating in voluntary and involuntary forms of collaboration within the school environment. Involuntary collaboration occurred to complete required RtI documentation, while voluntary teacher collaboration sought to negotiate the meaning of policy initiatives and brainstorm RtI intervention strategies. Study findings suggest collaboration minimized teacher isolation and the perceived threat of RtI implementation for less experienced teachers. Teachers participating in collaborative efforts found comfort in the collective knowledge of their colleagues. Understanding policy through the process of group sense making provided them with both comfort and security.

Bandura's (1977; 1986; 2001) social cognitive theory recognizes both individual teacher influences on policy implementation and social aspects of policy implementation derived from the environment. The early-career teachers, Ana and Mary, developed responses to RtI implementation through interactions with colleagues within the school environment. Their collaborative efforts resulted in problem solving for RtI implementation, sharing ideas about teaching practices, sharing the RtI documentation workload, providing feedback, and offering support. It was obvious Ana and Mary

established collaborative relationships with their peers. These collaborative relationships reinforced share goals, interdependence, and parity among participants (Wood & Gray, 1991). Although Ana and Mary discussed shared goals as a mechanism for creating a strong sense of community, there was evidence that the experienced teacher, Sarah, resisted participation in collaboration. Sarah did not describe working in collaboration with her peers to understand or perform RtI implementation tasks. As the grade level IT chair, Sarah was willing to explain the process to her peers, but unwilling to collaborate with peers to plan implementation or complete documentation. This indicates Sarah did not view herself as an equal among her peers. In this instance, level of teaching experience seemed to contribute to differences in teacher attitudes toward collaboration. Further research could investigate years of teaching experience as a moderating variable in levels of engagement in collaboration. It is also possible that the lack of collaborative work is an individual difference not related to years of experience as a teacher.

At one point in the interview process, Sarah referenced Huberman's (1989) research on the four phases of a teacher's career. Ironically, the teachers' responses to collaboration paralleled Huberman's findings. The youngest teacher, Ana, was in the stabilization phase. Her focus was working autonomously and collectively to meet the educational needs of the students. The collaborative efforts of Mary, the mid-career teacher, were representative of the experimentation and diversity stage and demonstrated a focus on impact; thus collaboration sought to improve student performance and outcomes. The fourth and final stage identified as serenity or focusing down best describes Sarah's lack of collaborative effort. Huberman (1989) asserted that teachers with nineteen years or more teaching experience demonstrate a decrease in interest, effort, and commitment as they reach the twilight of their careers.

Consequences of RtI Implementation on Instruction

Tyack and Cuban (1995) suggest, "It is the rare reform that performs and persists precisely according to plan. Even long-lasting reforms are not static, but evolve in ways

often not foreseen by their proponents" (p. 60). Despite concerted efforts to produce specific outcomes, policymakers frequently neglect to consider the ways in which prior reform policies, school contexts, and individual teacher characteristics interact to produce both intended and unintended consequences (Honig, 2006). RtI implementation occurred within the broader context of NCLB (2007) and IDEIA (2004) policy implementation. The findings of this study indicate that the contextual environment and individual teacher characteristics influenced RtI implementation. In addition, even though RtI implementation produced several instructional advantages for students and teachers, it also produced several disadvantages.

Advantages

The advantages reported by teachers in this study resemble findings from Ikeda et al. (2007) and reflect a core principal of RtI implementation, the use of local data to measure and define student learning. The intent of RtI implementation is to improve educational outcomes for all students through continuous progress monitoring and specialized instruction. The instructional advantages of RtI implementation discussed by teachers directly reflect these policy goals. As defined and intended by RtI policy, the use of "curriculum-based measures" and "frequent progress monitoring" assisted the teachers in "data driven decision-making" regarding student performance and instructional needs. RtI implementation produced a significant amount of progress-monitoring data, which identified specific academic strengths and weaknesses. The data also provided a foundation for planning instructional interventions for struggling students in the general education setting. Teachers relied on progress-monitoring data to group students homogenously for small group instruction to target specific academic skills. Furthermore, progress-monitoring data provided documentation of student progress, which allowed teachers to adjust instructional strategies based on student responsiveness to intervention.

Disadvantages

While RtI implementation produced instructional advantages, the teachers identified a number of disadvantages. One of the greatest concerns for teachers was the excessive amount of time required by RtI implementation before additional support services are available. The law requires 6 to 8 weeks of tier-one intervention in the general education setting before students qualify for small group intervention in tier-two. Tier-two of RtI necessitates an additional 8 to 10 weeks of small group intervention prior to receiving intensive interventions in tier three. Referral for special education evaluation only occurs upon completion of 8 to 10 weeks of one-on-one intervention in tier-three. At a minimum, the RtI process takes twenty-two weeks to refer a student for SLD evaluation. As a result, children with severe learning difficulties were often retained the general education classroom.

Retaining students with severe learning difficulties or behavioral issues poses a number of challenges for teachers and students. As Ana suggested, teachers may not have the knowledge or training to address a student demonstrating “autism spectrum” issues in the general education classroom. Consequently, students with severe problems may unintentionally disrupt their own learning as well as the learning and progress of the entire class. The implication is the need to reconsider the law with regard to student due process. While student rights should be protected, provisions for RtI implementation necessitate the inclusion of a discretionary clause; one that provides flexibly and allows RtI committee members to make judgments regarding the placement of students on the pyramid of intervention based on the severity of individual student needs and the imposition of these needs on other students in the classroom.

The inequitable distribution of teacher time and classroom instruction was another problematic consequence of RtI implementation. This finding provides an example of the power issues experienced not only by teachers, but also by students identified in the intensification thesis (Apple, 1982; Apple et al. 1996; Valli & Buese,

2007). As previously suggested by the intensification thesis, the teachers all experienced tremendous pressure from policies such as NCLB (2007) and RtI to ensure optimal student learning. In this study, the children with the greatest needs demanded or required more teacher attention. Over time, the other students became aware of these inequities. Data and observations from the study indicate students often competed for teacher attention in all three classrooms. In addition, the inequitable distribution of teacher time drew undue attention to at-risk students. Although this was not problematic for younger students, Sarah noted at-risk students in upper elementary school are well aware of their academic inadequacies. Therefore, drawing attention to at-risk students through tier-two and three interventions both inside and outside the classroom has the potential to affect student motivation and self-esteem. The implication is the need to address issues of power and the inequitable distribution of instructional time through better classroom management and differentiated instructional practices.

Study findings also revealed components of the intensification thesis relative to the complexity of teacher work conditions and RtI implementation. All three teachers indicated RtI implementation required an excessive amount of time to plan individualized instruction and document student responses to intervention. Although a fifty-minute planning period was built into the workday, weekly grade level meetings and RtI meetings were scheduled during common teacher planning. Mary indicated she effectively managed RtI tasks and responsibilities during work hours. However, both Ana and Sarah spent a significant amount of personal time seeking appropriate RtI instructional programs and materials.

Additional evidence of the intensification thesis and issues of power and control arose when teachers discussed planning for RtI intervention. The law requires intervention programs and activities demonstrate scientific research-based (SRB) evidence, which places bureaucratic controls over the programs available to teachers for intervention and progress monitoring. The U.S. Department of Education website

provides a list of approved scientific research-based programs (SRB) and suggested curriculum-based measures. However, most SRB intervention programs and curriculum-based measures are costly. Intervention program materials, such as Fundations® by Wilson Reading System® can cost up to $400.00 per kit. Prices for curriculum-based measures used 2-3 times per year such as DIBELS (Good, Kaminski, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 2001) and Reading a-z can range from $3.00 to $85.00 per student. The teachers indicated there were very few intervention programs and progress-monitoring materials available in math; thus, Ana and Sarah noted there was a significant need for additional information on available resources to assist teachers with RtI implementation. Considering the budget cuts to educational funding, for-profit educational policies, such as these have the potential to create problems for local education agencies with limited RtI funding.

Another condition of RtI that intensified teacher work was the documentation component. All three teachers indicated that although the quality of documentation had improved with RtI implementation, the quantity of required progress-monitoring data and intervention documentation was excessive. The teachers indicated that required RtI paperwork and documentation was a deterrent to teacher participation. Sarah commented, "I think RtI is creating a paper trail for the child's benefit, but I don't think the paper trail needs to be quite so massive." Ana recalled that the amount of time required for weekly progress monitoring assessments detracted from classroom instruction because of the number of students she had in the RtI process. Sarah also expressed frustration over the amount of assessment data required by policy mandates stating,

> I'm mad because I don't get to teach anymore…the superintendent sent us an e-mail…that said we spend up to 50 days out of our 180 doing some kind of assessment. And when you're doing that you're not instructing students and yet the number of objectives they expect for them to master continues to increase.

The implication is the need to consider the quality of documentation as opposed to the quantity, particularly with regard to which types of documentation yield the greatest

quality of actionable data, yet consume the least amount of instructional and/or teacher time to produce. Tayack & Cuban (1995) suggest, “Overworked educators often feel more like professional accountants than accountable professionals” (p. 138-139). As a consequence of mismanaged or ill-conceived policy implementation, many experienced teachers have developed negative attitudes toward policy implementation (Huberman, 1988; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). This sense of policy mistrust reduces teacher motivation to implement policy initiatives.

Recommendations

The study findings provide implications for professional practice and future research. The following discusses *implications for local education agencies*, *administrators*, and *professional learning* to support RtI implementation. The research also considers *implications for future investigations* based on the scope of the study as well as available research on the topic of RtI.

Implications for State and Local Education Agencies

The study suggests environmental contexts significantly influence RtI policy implementation. While policy makers often design or suggest implementation procedures, resources, materials, and accountability measures, it is impossible to control how local education agencies and schools will respond to RtI implementation. In this study, teacher comments about RtI policy ambiguity indicate the existence of general policy goals with flexible implementation guidelines that allowed state and local education agencies to adapt the policy to local contexts. Therefore, it is important for state and local education agencies to have a framework in place to organize, communicate, and support RtI policy implementation.

RtI implementation requires access to appropriate professional and technical knowledge regarding RtI procedures and intervention strategies. The teachers in this study indicated RtI implementation began with limited information and resources.

The only resource available to teachers at the onset of RtI implementation was the interventioncentral.org website. Both Ana and Sarah spent a significant amount of personal time searching the website for information pertinent to serving RtI students in their classrooms. One recommendation is for state and/or local education agencies to create a database with specific information and procedures for each RtI pyramid tier. The database design should consider ease of teacher access and use. In addition to providing procedural information, the database should provide specific information about available SRB programs and RtI resources. Both the quality and quantity of SRB programs is contingent upon the financial resources of state and local education agencies; thus, education agencies need to consider the allocation of funds for the purchase of SRB programs. Once purchased, teachers should be educated on the proper use of SRB programs.

The teachers also discussed the importance of human resources for RtI implementation. They identified internal and external human resources as RtI experts, who contributed to their knowledge, understanding, and implementation of RtI. However, the teachers' access to RtI experts was limited to RtI professional learning opportunities. The teachers often sought advice and implementation assistance from these individuals during their planning periods and personal time. Therefore, another recommendation is the addition of human resources to relieve some of the stress and absorb some of the additional teacher responsibilities created by RtI implementation. These individuals could reside within the district or school to assist teachers with the collection of progress monitoring data, documentation, and small group and/or one-on-one interventions.

Implications for Administrators

The study confirms the importance of leadership in the development of a school environment conducive to RtI policy implementation. The findings suggest the principal at River Rock Elementary was instrumental in creating a school environment that supported and developed RtI implementation through the establishment of trusting

relationships, common goals, continuous learning, shared leadership, and a collaborative school atmosphere. In the current study, each of these aspects of the environment influenced RtI policy coherence as well as individual teacher and organizational capacity.

The principal was also vital to creating a safe environment for teachers to engage in RtI implementation. Bandura (1986, 1997) suggests that in order for teachers to reach mastery, they must develop a complete understanding of their successful and unsuccessful attempts to implement policy. Thus, teachers need sufficient time to practice RtI implementation in an environment that allows them to make mistakes and revise practices without fear of repercussion. A principal can assist teachers in adapting practices by providing supportive structures and resources for RtI implementation.

In addition, principals can create opportunities for collaboration, establish forums to promote discussions about RtI implementation, and encourage knowledge-sharing regarding RtI practices. Encouraging teachers to be reflective and share ideas has the potential to reduce teacher isolation. However, establishing an environment conducive to teacher collaboration and reflection does not guarantee teacher participation or changes in teaching practices. Prior research demonstrates that social structures within an organization can serve to reinforce existing social norms and practices (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Smylie & Evans, 2006). Therefore, it is the principal's responsibility to clearly articulate and develop a shared mission, common goals, and focus on continuous growth and learning for school improvement that challenge pre-existing norms and practices through collective action and joint accountability.

A final consideration is the role of the principal in providing opportunities for shared leadership. The teachers indicated that the principal provided several opportunities for shared leadership. In this study, shared leadership reinforced teacher trust and commitment to policy implementation and school improvement. Assuming responsibility and ownership also increased teacher understanding and motivation for teacher RtI implementation.

Implications for Professional Learning

The examination of teacher implementation of RtI indicates that several working conditions inherent in the teaching profession intensify teacher workloads and complicate RtI implementation. Multitasking, professional isolation, and the public nature of teacher accountability add to teacher apprehension and influence individual capacity to implement RtI. The teachers indicated that a strong professional community characterized by shared goals, shared leadership, and a collaborative school environment positively influenced RtI implementation. Prior research suggests the development of professional learning communities can alleviate conditions counterproductive to policy implementation and encourage teacher learning for policy implementation (Richardson, 1998; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

The concept of professional learning communities acknowledges both the social and environmental aspects of learning highlighted in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. Teacher implementation of RtI involves mutual sense making and engagement in policy implementation. Thus, the development of a professional learning community has the potential to encourage teacher collaboration, as well as align RtI policy implementation with both school improvement plans and teacher engagement in continuous learning for school improvement. Shared goals contribute to teacher commitment. Consequently, collective teacher efficacy results from the belief that all members make a meaningful contribution to the success of the educational organization.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study was limited to three participants within a single elementary school. The third and fifth grade teachers indicated tier-two and tier-three interventions occurred outside the general education setting. As a result, these teachers had limited knowledge of and access to information about student responsiveness to interventions.

This finding provides implications for future research regarding the influence of grade-level on RtI implementation. While the study participants' perspectives were valuable in the investigation of RtI implementation, a large-scale investigation of teacher implementation of RtI within grade levels K-12 may lead to different findings regarding teacher knowledge, understanding, and implementation practices.

Study results suggest teachers implemented RtI policy based on personal attributes, needs, and the environment. Consequently, RtI implementation occurred within existing communities of practice both inside and outside the school organization. These communities of practice involved multiple social networks that influenced teacher knowledge, understanding, and implementation of RtI. The scope of the current study examined individual teacher practice; however, it is important to understand how social capital not only within schools but also within professional organizations contributes to RtI implementation. Policy implementation is the result of individual and collective decision-making and reflects the social relationships established within organizations and communities of practice. Effective implementation is reliant on mutual goals, trust, support, and communication. Therefore, future research on teacher implementation of RtI should consider how social interactions within educational organizations and professional communities of practice support or impede policy implementation.

To date, studies on RtI implementation have primarily been quantitative analyses of intervention effectiveness. A limited number of qualitative studies on RtI exist. Additional qualitative research is necessary to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers are coping with the policy demands of RtI implementation in the general education classroom. Furthermore, there is a need for longitudinal data on sustained RtI policy implementation across schools, districts, and states. Broader investigations may identify how variations in organizational environments and individual teacher attributes interact to influence RtI policy implementation.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Survey for Identifying Study Participants

Name: _____

Current Grade Level: _____ Circle One: General Ed. EIP SPED

What other grade levels have you taught?

How did you obtain your teaching certificate?

List all degrees and/or certifications held?

How many years of teaching experience do you have? Public: _____ Private: _____

How many years have you taught at this elementary school?_____

What are your interests as an educator?

How would you describe the RtI pyramid of intervention?

How many students in your classroom have active RtI documentation? _____

How many student are in: Tier 1: _____ Tier 2: _____ Tier 3: _____ Tier 4: ____

Please briefly explain how you instruct at-risk students in your classroom.

Would you be willing to volunteer to participate in a study about RtI implementation?

APPENDIX B

TO: General Education Teachers
Elementary School

RE: Notification of Research Study

Response-to-Intervention: Understanding General Education Teacher Knowledge and Implementation

Elissa Marie Benjamin

My name is Elissa Marie Benjamin. I plan to conduct the study listed above in partial fulfillment of my doctoral work at Georgia State University. The Institutional Review Board approved my research. Now, I seek to recruit volunteers for study participation.

I am seeking general educators in grades K-5 actively engage in the RtI process. Participants should have a minimum of three years teaching experience in public schools. I am requesting your assistance in recruiting volunteers. Attached you will find a brief synopsis of the study along with a ten question survey and self-addressed stamped envelope. Please distribute the research synopsis and questionnaire to your faculty and mail the completed forms to me in the envelope provided.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at elissabenjamin@yahoo.com or 706-867-1898. I appreciate your assistance and look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Elissa Marie Benjamin

APPENDIX C

Data Collection Timeline

Data Source	Collection Date(s)	Type of Documentation
Recruitment Questionnaire	April 13, 2009	Open-ended questionairre
Interview 1	April 20 - 24, 2009	Electronic audiotape file, field notes, transcriptions
Lesson Plan 1	April 20, 2009	Electronic Word Documents (e-mail or faxed)
Videotaped Lesson 1	April 20 - April 24, 2009	Electronic videotape file, field notes, videotape transcriptions
Interview 2	April 27 - May 1, 2009	Electronic audiotape file, field notes, transcriptions
Lesson Plan 2	April 27, 2009	Electronic Word Documents (e-mail or faxed)
Videotaped Lesson 2	April 27 - May 1, 2009	Electronic videotape file, field notes, videotape transcriptions
Interview 3	May 4 - May 8, 2009	Electronic audiotape file, field notes, transcriptions
Lesson Plan 3	May 4, 2009	Electronic Word Documents (e-mail or faxed)
Videotaped Lesson 3	May 4 - May 8, 2009	Electronic videotape file, field notes, videotape transcriptions
Interview 4	March 23 - April 3	Electronic audiotape file, field notes, transcriptions
Lesson Plan 4	May 11, 2009	Electronic Word Documents (e-mail or faxed)
Videotaped Lesson 4	May 11 - May 15, 2009	Electronic videotape file, field notes, videotape transcriptions
Interview 5	May 18 - May 22, 2009	Electronic audiotape file, field notes, transcriptions
RtI Documentation (on-going)	April 13 - May 22, 2009	Progress monitoring data
EIP Meeting Minutes (on-going)	April 13 - May 22, 2009	transcriptions
TPR Peer Review of Videotaped Observations	Send copies to UVA on June 1, 2009	Anonymous electronic videotape file
TPR Peer Review Evaluations complete	June 26, 2009	Peer Reviewed TPR evaluations from UVA

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Interview	Research Question	Interview Questions
1. Establish Rapport Personal History	What do K-5 general education teachers' know and understand about the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) policy and implementation requirements?	What is your educational background? (probe) Can you describe your professional experience? (probe) How many years have you taught at this elementary school? (probe) Can you identify and explain the laws governing RtI policy? (probe) Can you describe the RtI implementation process? (probe) Where does this knowledge come from? (probe) Can you describe professional development or training on RtI? (probe) What has your involvement been with RTI? (probe) Do you have any personal or professional experiences that influence your understanding of RtI policy/law? (probe for details) Do you have any personal or professional experiences that influence your understanding of RtI implementation? (probe for details) Do you have any expectations of RtI policy? (probe) What are your expectations for RtI implementation? (probe) What questions do you have regarding RtI? (probe) What are the strengths of RtI implementation? (probe)

Interview	Research Question	Interview Questions
2. Experience with RtI Lesson Plan and Implementation Strategies	How are K-5 general educators implementing Response-to-Intervention in their classrooms?	How are you implementing RtI in your classroom? (probe) What do you do in your classroom that supports RtI implementation? (probe) How are you modifying teaching practices for RtI implementation? (probe: planning, and assessment) Can you discuss specific strategies you are implementing in your classroom with at-risk students going through the RtI process? Both the researcher and participant will watch a 10-15 minute excerpt of the first videotaped math or reading lesson.
3. Reflection on Teaching Practices for At-risk students	How do select general educators describe the influence of Response-to-Intervention on instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom?	Both the researcher and participant will watch a 10-15 minute excerpt of the second videotaped math or reading lesson. Open-ended questions will relate to teacher responses during previous interviews, lesson plans submitted for document analysis, and the videotaped observation.
4. Reflection on Teaching Practices for At-risk students	How do select general educators describe the influence of Response-to-Intervention on instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom?	Both the researcher and participant will watch a 10-15 minute excerpt of the third videotaped math or reading lesson. Open-ended questions will relate to teacher responses during previous interviews, lesson plans submitted for document analysis, and the videotaped observation.

Interview	Research Question	Interview Questions
5. Reflection on Teaching Practices for At-risk students	How do select general educators describe the influence of Response-to-Intervention on instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom?	Both the researcher and participant will watch a 10-15 minute excerpt of the fourth videotaped math or reading lesson. Open-ended questions will relate to teacher responses during previous interviews, lesson plans submitted for document analysis, and the videotaped observation.

APPENDIX E

TPR 6.0

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Teacher:_____ Observer: _____ Date: _____

CONTEXTUAL ITEMS

Grade level: Pre-K K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Classroom Assignment: Regular, SPED – Resource, SPED – Self-Contained, SPED-Inclusion

Subject: Math, English/LA, Science, Social Studies, ESL, Foreign Language, PE, Art, Music, Other

If "other," please specify_____

Number of students:_____ **Context Demands**: 1 2 3 4 **Activity level:** 1 2

PLANNING ITEMS

Does the teacher define the purpose or objectives of the lesson?

- O As they relate to state standards
- O Differently according to student interest, ability, or instructional needs
- O In terms of learner behaviors or performances
- O As they relate to planned instruction
- O In terms of pre-assessment data
- O Related to characteristics of learner (e.g., culture, gifted, disability)

Does plan include any of the following teacher activities?

- O Introductory motivational activity
- O Plans to reinforce learning through homework
- O Plans for guided practice
- O Plans for independent practice
- O Plans to integrate technology into student work
- O Allocate available time to instructional goals
- O Allocate time to develop content in depth

Does the teacher describe learner activities, such as?

- O One or more changes of activity (e.g., listening, writing)
- O Two or more options so learner can choose
- O Provision for learner who finishes early
- O Provision for learner who needs special help
- O Challenges for learners
- O Rewards or incentives

Does the teacher describe plans for evaluating the lesson, in terms of?

- O Achievement of objectives or goals
- O State standards
- O Curriculum-based assessment
- O Group project with individual accountability
- O Learner involvement
- O Learner interest
- O Participation in class discussion
- O Homework or other individual assignment
- O Maintaining and using organized student records of progress
- O Evaluation that fits what was taught
- O Performance evaluations that call for higher order thinking
- O Performance expectations that fit students' needs and abilities

INTERACTIVE ITEMS (4 Minutes)

1 2 3 (Cycle number)

Beginning

- O O O Begins lesson/activity promptly
- O O O Conveys purpose of the lesson/activity at the beginning
- O O O Stimulates student thinking at the beginning
- O O O Begins lessons/activity with a review
- O O O Has material ready

Involve

- O O O Checks to see what students are doing
- O O O Gives explicit instructions during the lesson
- O O O Asks closed questions
- O O O Asks open questions
- O O O Redirects a question to another student
- O O O Probes students' thinking
- O O O Uses wait time
- O O O Encourages students to think critically
- O O O Summarizes during the lesson
- O O O Encourages students to make connections
- O O O Encourages students to explain content in their own words
- O O O Encourages students to speculate how information is usable in other contexts

Affect

- O O O Acknowledges students' feelings
- O O O Encourages group to cooperate
- O O O Uses students' ideas
- O O O Praises student effort or accomplishment
- O O O Gives reason for praise
- O O O Encourages students to ask questions
- O O O Encourages students to do their best
- O O O Provides opportunities for students to help one another
- O O O Helps students as they complete seatwork
- O O O Uses humor
- O O O Communicates support
- O O O Displays friendliness

Feedback

- O O O Punishes appropriately
- O O O Punishes inappropriately
- O O O Indicates whether or not a response is correct
- O O O Answers questions about assignment
- O O O Provides constructive criticism
- O O O Criticizes inappropriately
- O O O Treats mistakes as part of the learning process

REFLECTIVE ITEMS (4 Minutes)

Organizes Information

- O O O Presents new information with reference to what students already know
- O O O Presents information visually
- O O O Presents content sequentially
- O O O Reviews main points
- O O O Relates main ideas to overall goals
- O O O Stresses integrative concepts
- O O O Exhibits facility explaining the academic content
- O O O Sequences questions to develop the content systematically
- O O O Features sustained examination of content
- O O O Helps students to connect content to world beyond school

Strategies

- O O O Connects to students' interests or experiences
- O O O Includes cognitive modeling (think out loud)
- O O O Uses technology
- O O O Provides opportunities for students to work together
- O O O Integrates group goals within group work
- O O O Integrates individual accountability within group work

Invites Participation

- O O O Questions to encourage higher level thinking (e.g., application, synthesis)
- O O O Elicits students' responses regularly
- O O O Restates questions or provides information if there is no response
- O O O Restates question or provides information if there is an incorrect response

Manages Behavior

- O O O Acts to involve inattentive learners
- O O O Uses routines for handling nonacademic business
- O O O Uses routines for handling academic business
- O O O Makes smooth transitions within and between lessons
- O O O Develops and maintains rapport with students
- O O O Responds to inappropriate behavior quickly
- O O O Makes students aware of expectations regarding classroom behavior

Assesses

- O O O States expectations for academic achievement
- O O O Explains purpose of assessment
- O O O Checks understanding of content during instruction
- O O O Engages students in post-activity reflection
- O O O Assesses student work for accuracy
- O O O Uses a variety of assessment strategies

Monitors Performance

- O O O Checks students' completion of assignments
- O O O Prompts students to explain thinking
- O O O Helps students monitor or reflect on their own learning
- O O O Establishes consequences for not completing assigned tasks
- O O O Promotes student participation

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND BEHAVIOR

-- 2 minutes per cycle @ 15 seconds per student --

	Student **A**		Student **B**		Student **C**		Student **D**		Student **A**		Student **B**		Student **C**		Student **D**	
	Invol	Beh	Invol	Beh	Invol	Beh	Invol	Beh	Invol	Beh	Invol	Beh	Invol	Beh	Invol	Beh
Cycle 1	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
Cycle 2	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
Cycle 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3

APPENDIX F

TPR Indicators Relative to Teacher Engagement in RtI Implementation

TPR Indicators of RtI Implementation
Planning Items:
The teacher defines the purpose or objectives of the lesson differently according to student interest, ability, or instructional needs.
The teacher defines the purpose or objectives of the lesson related to characteristics of the learner (culture, gifted, disability).
The teacher describes learner activities with provisions for learners who finish early.
The teacher describes learner activities with provisions for learners who need special help.
Lesson plans include guided practice.
Lesson plans include independent practice.
The teacher describes plans for evaluating the lesson by maintaining and using organized student records of progress.
The teacher describes plans for evaluating the lesson in terms of performance expectations that fit students' needs and abilities.
Interactive Items:
The teacher checks to see what students are doing.
The teacher summarizes during the lesson.
The teacher provides a reason for praising student effort or accomplishment.
The teacher helps students as they complete seatwork.
The teacher provides constructive criticism.
The teacher treats mistakes as part of the learning process.
Reflective Items:
The teacher presents new information with reference to what students already know.
The teacher presents information visually.
The teacher presents information sequentially.
The teacher includes cognitive modeling (thinking out loud).
The teacher restates questions or provides information if there is no response or an incorrect response.
The teacher acts to involve inattentive learners.
The teacher uses routines for handling business and making smooth transitions within and between lessons.
The teacher checks student understanding of content during instruction.
The teacher uses a variety of assessment strategies.
The teacher promotes student participation.

APPENDIX G

Comparison of RtI Definitions, Language Usage, and Policy Indicators

	RtI Definition	Language	Policy Indicator(s)
LEA	…a method of academic and behavioral interventions that are designed to provide early, effective assistance to struggling students. Research based interventions are implemented and frequent progress monitoring is conducted to assess student response and progress. When students do not make progress, increasingly more intense interventions are introduced.	a method of academic and behavioral interventions	mandated activity or condition
		to provide early, effective assistance to struggling students	goal/purpose
		research-based interventions	mandated activity or condition
		frequent progress monitoring	mandated activity or condition
		to assess student response and progress	goal/purpose
Ana	…a step-by-step process used to address student needs and provide more specific interventions. The process has moved away from the broader Student Support Team method. It gave us a more step-by-step way of helping students and providing interventions they need. It narrowed down exactly what each tier was and told us exactly what to do in each tier and how to move students from tier to tier.	step-by-step process/way	mandated activity or condition
		to address student needs	goal/purpose
		provide more specific interventions	goal/purpose
		told us exactly what to do in each tier	mandated activity or condition
		told us how to move students from tier to tier	mandated activity or condition

	RtI Definition	Language	Policy Indicator(s)
Mary	…a process used to recognize the students who truly qualify for additional services and testing. Documentation is done on a regular basis. It includes strategies being done in the classroom to better meet the individual needs of each child. Grade level collaboration is used to make decisions regarding the progress of student in any tier.	process for problem solving	mandated activity or condition
			goal/purpose
		to recognize students who truly qualify for additional services and testing	mandated activity or condition
		documentation is done	mandated activity or condition
		includes strategies	goal/purpose
		to better meet the individual needs of each child	mandated activity or condition
			goal/purpose
		grade level collaboration	
		to make decisions regarding the progress of student in any tier	

	RtI Definition	Language	Policy Indicator(s)
Sarah	…a method used to identify educational deficits children have and identify the strategies needed to alleviate those deficits. The system focuses on intervention for rather than the labeling of students with difficulties. Teachers put specific research based interventions in place for 6 to 8 week time periods. Progress-monitoring keeps up with student performance; and benchmark testing is used to show gains. Special education services are reserved for those students who do not respond to intervention.	scaffold system/method	mandated activity or condition
		to identify educational deficits	goal/purpose
		to identify strategies to alleviate deficits	goal/purpose
		focuses on intervention	goal/purpose
		specific research based interventions…for 6 to 8 week time periods	mandated activity or condition
		Progress monitoring/ benchmark testing	mandated activity or condition
		Special education services are reserved for those students who do not respond to intervention	mandated activity or condition

APPENDIX H

TPR Indicators for Ana

TPR Indicators	Score
Planning Items:	
The teacher defines the purpose or objectives of the lesson differently according to student interest, ability, or instructional needs.	moderate
The teacher defines the purpose or objectives of the lesson related to characteristics of the learner (culture, gifted, disability).	moderate
The teacher describes learner activities with provisions for learners who finish early.	low
The teacher describes learner activities with provisions for learners who need special help.	moderate
Lesson plans include guided practice.	moderate
Lesson plans include independent practice.	moderate
The teacher describes plans for evaluating the lesson by maintaining and using organized student records of progress.	moderate
The teacher describes plans for evaluating the lesson in terms of performance expectations that fit students' needs and abilities.	moderate
Interactive Items:	
The teacher checks to see what students are doing.	moderate
The teacher summarizes during the lesson.	low
The teacher provides a reason for praising student effort or accomplishment.	moderate
The teacher helps students as they complete seatwork.	moderate
The teacher provides constructive criticism.	low
The teacher treats mistakes as part of the learning process.	low

TPR Indicators for Mary

TPR Indicators	Score
Planning Items:	
The teacher defines the purpose or objectives of the lesson differently according to student interest, ability, or instructional needs.	minimal
The teacher defines the purpose or objectives of the lesson related to characteristics of the learner (culture, gifted, disability).	low
The teacher describes learner activities with provisions for learners who finish early.	low
The teacher describes learner activities with provisions for learners who need special help.	minimal
Lesson plans include guided practice.	moderate
Lesson plans include independent practice.	moderate
The teacher describes plans for evaluating the lesson by maintaining and using organized student records of progress.	low
The teacher describes plans for evaluating the lesson in terms of performance expectations that fit students' needs and abilities.	low
Interactive Items:	
The teacher checks to see what students are doing.	moderate
The teacher summarizes during the lesson.	low
The teacher provides a reason for praising student effort or accomplishment.	high
The teacher helps students as they complete seatwork.	low
The teacher provides constructive criticism.	low
The teacher treats mistakes as part of the learning process.	low
Reflective Items:	
The teacher presents new information with reference to what students already know.	low

TPR Indicators for Sarah

TPR Indicators	Score
Planning Items:	
The teacher defines the purpose or objectives of the lesson differently according to student interest, ability, or instructional needs.	low
The teacher defines the purpose or objectives of the lesson related to characteristics of the learner (culture, gifted, disability).	low
The teacher describes learner activities with provisions for learners who finish early.	low
The teacher describes learner activities with provisions for learners who need special help.	low
Lesson plans include guided practice.	moderate
Lesson plans include independent practice.	moderate
The teacher describes plans for evaluating the lesson by maintaining and using organized student records of progress.	low
The teacher describes plans for evaluating the lesson in terms of performance expectations that fit students' needs and abilities.	low
Interactive Items:	
The teacher checks to see what students are doing.	moderate
The teacher summarizes during the lesson.	low
The teacher provides a reason for praising student effort or accomplishment.	minimal
The teacher helps students as they complete seatwork.	low
The teacher provides constructive criticism.	minimal
The teacher treats mistakes as part of the learning process.	low

APPENDIX I

Hannah Montana Social Story:

Hannah Montana loves being a music and television star, but sometimes it is difficult for her to remember the correct behaviors when going to the bathroom. With her busy schedule, she often has to rush to the bathroom and forgets to use good behavior when going to the bathroom. But, Hannah has learned that it is important to keep her hands and feet to herself and not talk or scream in the bathroom. Hannah now stops and thinks about what she should do when she leaves to go to the bathroom. Just like Hannah, it is important for [student's name] to remember to think before going to the bathroom. It makes Hannah proud when [student's name] remembers to do the following: (1) Walk quietly to the bathroom; (2) Go into the stall by yourself and lock the door. Stay in the stall until you have finished using the bathroom. Don't forget…no talking or screaming. (3) Put the toilet paper in the toilet and flush. (4) Leave the stall, go wash your hands, and be careful not to splash water. (5) Dry your hands with a paper towel. Make sure you put it in the trashcan. (6) Leave the bathroom and walk carefully back to where you are suppose to be.