How Does the Implementation of Response to Intervention Change Instructional and Collaborative Practices at the Middle School as Perceived by Teachers?

Submitted by

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Abstract

The purpose of this interpretive, qualitative study was to explore how the implementation of response to intervention (RTI) changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one underperforming middle school located in Southern California. Twelve middle school teachers participated in the study. Instruments used to collect data consisted of an online teacher questionnaire, teacher interviews, and artifact analysis. Bandura's theory of social learning and the response to intervention framework served as the conceptual foundation of the study. Data analysis included calculation of descriptive statistics for the questionnaires. Interview transcripts were analyzed with Tesch's process led to the identification of five themes. Theme 1 showed RTI frameworks and structures were critical to the implementation of RTI at this middle school. The second theme focused on the efficacy of implementation. Collaborative practices and teacher knowledge and understanding of the RTI process needed more reinforcement and consistency. Theme 3 focused on student achievement. Teachers indicated varying opinions about how the implementation of RTI had influenced student learning. Teachers felt students in Tiers I and 2 were not mastering grade level standards after two years of implementation. Theme 4 showed that teachers were positive about RTI and believed that all students can learn. Theme 5 showed teachers felt RTI had changed their instructional practices and use of data. Implications of this study included the identification of key processes and documents for consistent training and support for sustainable RTI implementation. Further research is recommended on the topic.

Key words: Response to intervention, middle school, student achievement

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my wife Tanya who provided support, motivation, encouragement and love that brought clarity to my work. I thank my children, Tabitha and Kyle, for enduring this long journey. You always understood the current sacrifices and those ahead. I give special thanks to my parents, Ronald and Ellen Gruwell for teaching me that I could do anything if I put my mind to it. I thank them both for their encouragement, support, and for teaching me the definition of tenacity. I thank all my family and friends that provided support and constant encouragement at both the low and high peaks. I would also like to dedicate my dissertation in memory of my Grandfather, Dr. Melvin Gruwell who looked over me from heaven and provided emotional and spiritual support throughout the journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Response to intervention is a framework and process used for systematically monitoring student progress and making decisions about the need for instructional modifications or increasingly intensified instructional services (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007). Implementation of the process requires comprehensive, school-wide system reform in order to develop and sustain effective use of data and instructional practices (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007). When Response to Intervention (RTI) model is implemented, teachers are expected to identify and implement instructional and collaborative practices to meet the needs of all students. The implementation also requires teachers to use student data to design instruction in an effort to assure all students are achieving grade level mastery of the state required standards (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, NASDSE, 2005). Despite the good intentions of many educators to make the RTI process a smooth one, the concept and implementation remain abstract and ambiguous for many administrators and teachers. In turn, this impedes changes in instructional and collaborative processes focused on learning for all students.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one underperforming middle school in Southern California. The study findings contribute to existing knowledge and research from the perceptions of teachers directly involved in the implementation over two school years. This chapter covers the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions that guided data collection in the study.

Further, a background to the study has been presented to describe how the RTI process has evolved over time.

Background of the Study

Over the past decade, RTI has become an accepted framework educators use to help struggling students. The framework allows teachers to evaluate whether students perform as expected when provided with evidence-based instructional practices (Lembke, McMaster, & Stecker, 2010). Consequently, the model has engaged schools across the country to look at instructional and collaborative practices to ensure students are mastering the rigorous standards to mastery required under, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2001). Response to Intervention was initially focused at the elementary level, but is now being implemented by middle and high schools in an attempt to see if the processes and successes might be duplicated. Thus, few studies on the topic of RTI have focused on an older school-aged population (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010).

The National Center for RTI (2010) recently responded to the need for a model at the middle school level. However, a great deal remains to be learned about the efficacy of RTI models applied in secondary settings (National Center on Response to Intervention, & Center on Instruction, 2010). As elementary schools refine their implementation of RTI, secondary schools continue foundational work on building the model in an effort to improve using multiple measures of data to assure all students are moving towards grade-level achievement. Past research addressed this problem, but current research on the topic was spawned by the reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The regulation communicates a need for RTI as an approach for identifying students who continue to fail to master core content

standards. Although the legislation may seem to target students for special education identification, the RTI model allows teachers to monitor all students in an attempt to assure their progress is being monitored and that they are performing at grade-level on achievement measures.

Problem Statement

It was not known how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one underperforming middle school in Southern California. Despite intensified interest in secondary school applications of RTI, research in this area remains limited at the middle school level (Sansosti, Goss & Noltemeyer, 2011). Prior research suggested that a stronger focus was needed at the middle school level in an effort to continue to provide students with targeted instruction to close defined gaps in knowledge, skills, and achievement (Sansosti et al., 2011). This type of change requires teachers to use data to plan instruction as they work to help students master the required state standards (Sansosti et al., 2011). Specifically, at the middle school level, this posed a problem in regard to RTI implementation and management of the model related to changes in instructional and collaborative practices.

The RTI model was designed to ensure that students were not moved through educational systems without sufficient efforts to address their academic struggles (Friedman, 2010). Traditionally, professionals at the secondary level performed their job functions in isolation, and the RTI model requires more transparency and collaboration (Friedman, 2010). Thus, instructional and collaborative practices in the classroom are crucial components to the success of RTI. The lack of success for all student groups at the middle school level has been a challenge for educators for several years, but under the

NCLB (2001) legislation, it was now being addressed under the model of RTI. This changed the way teachers use data to inform instructional practices in their classrooms. This study was intended to add to the existing research on the implementation of RTI at the middle school level by exploring the practices of teachers as they have implemented the process over a 2-year period.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this interpretive, qualitative research study was to explore how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one underperforming middle school in Southern California. To date, most of the focus on RTI has been at the elementary level (Friedman, 2010); thus, this study may help administrators identify what specifically needs to be done to move secondary schools towards the successful implementation of RTI. The target population included secondary educators and administrators who collaborated to meet the needs of students who struggled both academically and behaviorally at an underperforming middle school in Southern California. The phenomenon under study was teacher perceptions of instructional and collaborative practices at the middle school level in order to define structures and processes as they implemented RTI. The results of the study were expected to contribute to the educational field and assist current practitioners in the implementation of RTI at the middle school level specifically focusing on changes in instructional and collaborative practices under the RTI model to guide students towards mastery of the state standards and reaching grade-level achievement.

Research Questions

Two research questions were used to guide the data collection and data analysis process for this research. The choice was made to only focus on the instructional practices and collaboration separately rather than include a central research question to remove potential redundancy in the reporting of the resulting data. The following research questions guided data collection in this study:

R1: How did the implementation of Response to Intervention change instructional practices as perceived by the teachers?

R2: How did the implementation of Response to Intervention change collaborative practices among teachers as perceived by teachers?

The rationale for the selected research questions was for the researcher to further explore the need for more research in regard to RTI at the middle school level, specifically how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one middle school in Southern California. In order to answer these research questions, a qualitative methodology was selected. The data sources used to answer the research questions were an online teacher questionnaire, teacher interviews with a smaller sample, researcher observations in a field journal, and artifacts related to RTI.

Advancing Scientific Knowledge

Response to Intervention and Bandura's (1977) theory of social behavior provided the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. Despite strong interest and heightened concern about the applicability of RTI in secondary school settings, actual research on the topic is very limited, particularly at the middle school level (Sansosti et

al., 2011). RTI has been an area of focus as schools strive to meet the requirements of legislation such as NCLB (2001) and the *Individuals with Disability Education Act* (IDEA, 2004). Essentially, RTI is a framework based on offering instructional and behavioral interventions to students based on progress monitoring and data analysis (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998). If students do not respond to interventions, then services are offered at increased levels of intensity with the goal of helping students meet academic and behavioral goals and outcomes (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998). Teachers and administrators use RTI strategies that include research-based classroom instruction, monitoring of student progress, and evaluation of the quality of services delivered (Malecki & Demaray, 2007).

Originally, RTI efforts focused on academic areas such as reading, but more recently they have been broadened to include services and interventions for students who exhibit behavioral challenges (Malecki & Demaray, 2007; Sandomeirski, Kincaid, & Algozzine, 2007). Thus, RTI is a framework designed to serve the needs of the whole student and involves prevention and early identification of academic and behavioral challenges and the provision of appropriate interventions to meet the specific needs of students. However, in order to provide seamless services, teachers must collaborate with other educators, parents, administrators and other stakeholders (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998). In secondary settings, this sometimes poses a challenge as teachers are used to working in relative isolation. The results from this study contribute to current research on the implementation of RTI at the middle school level, specifically in regards to how the implementation of the model changed the instructional and collaborative practices of teachers in one middle school located in Southern California.

School faculty, administrators, researchers, parents, and politicians often debate the merits of implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB; U.S. Department of Education, 2001) and whether changes brought about by this law have had a positive effect on student outcomes (Lembke, Garman, Deno, & Stecker, 2010). It is clear that federal legislation will continue to affect public education, but building a stronger body of knowledge on strategies such as Response to Intervention will practitioners as they work to address student needs. The results of this study were expected to show that the implementation of a RTI model at the middle school level improved the instructional and collaborative practices as they offered services to identified students. These practices are driven by the theory of social behavior and supported below.

Bandura's (1977) theory of social behavior guided this study as well. Bandura noted that individual behaviors are influenced by one's self-efficacy, or perceived ability to successfully perform daily challenges. The theory focuses on four principal sources of information: performance accomplishments, various experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Experience plays an enormous role in such a model and has the ability to change such perceptions or not based on the premise of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Performance accomplishments are based on personal mastery experiences. Successes raise mastery expectations, or a person's perceptions that they will be able to achieve a goal, while repeated failures lower these expectations. The effects of failure on one's self-efficacy depend on the timing and total set of experiences in which the failures occur (Bandura, 1977). Thus, as teachers implement response to intervention at the

school site, those successes and failures directly impact their expectations that the process will meet with success, both in procedure and student achievement.

People do not rely on experienced mastery as the sole source of information concerning their level of self-efficacy as many expectations are derived from vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977). Seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences can generate expectations in observers that they can improve their own personal results if they intensify and persist in their efforts (Bandura, 1977). Thus, with regard to this study, if teachers see other colleagues successfully implementing the RTI process, then their own expectations can be heightened that they can meet with success in the same process.

Verbal persuasion is often used to influence human behavior (Bandura, 1977). People are led, through suggestion, into believing they can cope successfully with change or other events that have overwhelmed them in the past. Although social persuasion alone may have definite limitations as a means of creating an enduring sense of personal efficacy, it can contribute to the successes achieved through corrective performance (Bandura, 1977). Thus, teachers and administrators offer verbal support in the process, it increases their ability to get the job done.

Stressful and taxing situations generally elicit emotional arousal that, depending on the circumstances, might have informative value concerning personal competency (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, emotional arousal is another constituent source of information that can affect perceived self-efficacy in coping with potentially threatening situations. Because stress can debilitate performance, individuals are more likely to expect success when they are less tense (Bandura, 1977). Thus, when implementing RTI,

the entire educational team must experience enough positive stress to create that sense of urgency to get the job done, but not so much stress that they are emotionally debilitated and believe they cannot effectively implement the processes. When aligning a study regarding the implementation of an RTI model these attributes are taken into consideration. The purpose of using such a model of self-efficacy for this study on teachers' perceptions and RTI is to highlight the fact that change is difficult, and can impact how a teacher perceives his or her ability to fulfill their job role. Therefore, this study was expected to add to knowledge of the social behavior theory by highlighting how collaboration and the implementation of RTI influenced teacher perceived self-efficacy.

Significance of the Study

RTI began as a way of identifying students for special education by using a multi-tiered system of three levels to identify where student were responding to each level of instruction (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). RTI has received increased attention as schools endeavor to meet the accountability requirements of NCLB (2001) and the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA, 2004). The vast majority of states and provinces began their RTI efforts in the area of elementary reading, and the strongest research base for RTI is in that area (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Recently, the scope of RTI has broadened to include services and interventions for students who display behavioral challenges (Malecki & Demaray, 2007; Sandomeirski, Kincaid, & Algozzine, 2007). Perhaps more than any other single initiative, (RTI) is likely to restructure how middle and high school teachers teach in a profound and fundamental way (Geisick & Graving-

Reyes, 2008; Gibbs, 2008; James, 2010; National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE], 2006; National High School Center [NHSC], National Center on Response to Intervention, & Center on Instruction, 2010; Protheroe, 2010; Rozalski, 2009).

As states defined and researched RTI models, educators applied the three-tiered model in elementary schools, though very few authors attempted to describe the three-tier model in the context of middle and high schools (Bender, 2012). This study was intended to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by addressing how RTI was implemented at one middle school and how it was perceived to influence instructional and collaborative practices among teachers. The implementation of RTI has resulted in a change in instructional and collaborative practices at the elementary level (Akhavan, 2005). The body of research remains inadequate at the middle school level (Bender, 2012). The results of this study inform the practice of current educators and leaders as they implement RTI at the middle school level. The results of this study can be used by a variety of public school entities responsible for middle school achievement by providing examples of how teachers have implemented the process in one school setting, in addition to their successes and failures.

Rationale for Methodology

A qualitative methodology was selected for this study. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers set out to discover or explore the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspective of those involved. Merriam also noted that qualitative studies focused on how people interpreted and ascribed meaning to experiences in their world. The qualitative approach is inductive, and the researcher is the data collection

instrument, seeking to focus on meaning and understanding. The result is a thorough and robust description of the process and meaning that people give to a specific phenomenon.

A quantitative methodology was not selected as the researcher did not set out to determine cause and effect, predict or describe attributes of a specific population, or define correlations between defined variables (Merriam, 2009). Mixed methods were also not selected due to the quantitative component which was not an appropriate choice for this research. The rationale for conducting qualitative over a mixed-method or a quantitative study was based on the premise that the most effective way to evaluate whether a model was successful is to tell a story based on the derived experiences and meanings assigned to those experiences, from the perspective of middle school teachers as they collaborated to provide response to intervention services to students.

Nature of the Research Design for the Study

An interpretive, qualitative design was chosen for this study to explore how middle school teachers implemented a RTI model. According to Merriam (2009) in applied fields such as education, the most frequently used qualitative design is that of a basic, interpretive study. The core attribute of this design is that the researcher studies how participants build reality through interacting with their social environment Therefore, the researcher attempts to understand the phenomenon as participants experience it (Merriam, 2009). As stated previously, the focus was on how the implementation of a RTI model influenced teacher perceptions in regards to instructional and collaborative practices at a single middle school. Thus, the nature of how teachers experienced the RTI implementation and how it affected their perception of instruction and collaboration was explored. Since a phenomenological design focuses on intimate in-

depth exploration and description of lived experiences and ethnography stresses a prolonged immersion into a culture or situation to describe custom or behaviors of a given group of people, neither of which was the focus of this study, these designs were not chosen (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Case studies explain or design specific cases or situations using triangulation of data sources for data collection (Yin, 2009). Narrative designs present the stories of individuals, groups or situations/experiences in a detail story-telling format (Yin, 2009). The problem this research study focused on was it was not known how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one underperforming middle school in Southern California. A Likert-scale questionnaire and interviews were used as data sources. Hence, the case study and narrative designs were not appropriate for this study. Furthermore, collaboration and instructional practices were studied in the context of RTI, and how it was implemented in order to produce a desired result of increased student achievement at the middle school level. In this study, teachers were selected to participate and provide feedback on how they perceived collaboration changed their instructional practices within a framework of RTI. A group of middle school teachers from one district in California were chosen to participate in this study. This group of teachers had implemented RTI over a 2-year period in their school, prior to data collection. The researcher's goal was to glean their insights as to how collaborative efforts within the RTI framework changed instructional practices in the classroom. The data collection used during this study included an online teacher questionnaire, on-site teacher interviews and artifact analysis. First, an online questionnaire via SurveyMonkey Premium was used to

gather data regarding teacher perceptions of how the implementation of RTI changed their instructional and collaborative practices.

Additionally, a smaller sample of teachers was interviewed to add depth to the information collected during the teacher questionnaire. Finally, an artifact analysis was conducted to support the study by providing important documents from the early stages of the implementation through the progression of RTI at this school site. During the artifact analysis portion of this study the following documents were used (Appendix E): California's RTI model for implementation, district professional development documentation, school site professional development documentation, guidelines for implementation at the middle school, RTI teacher on assignment duties, Coordinated Care Team (CCT) team duties and sample meeting notes, Tier II and III intervention model, master schedule documents, credit recovery guidelines, documents and contract, parent letters, RTI brochure, progress monitoring data and forms, and RTI student placement forms (Tier II and III).

This study was intended to provide new information on how the implementation of RTI strategies influences teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at the middle school level as research on the efficacy of the process at level remains sparse (Sansosti et al., 2011). Fundamental to the successful implementation of RTI with younger students is the implementation of successively more intensive tiers of intervention to respond to students' instructional needs based on their lack of response to previously implemented research-derived interventions (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2010). This study was intended to add to current research on the implementation of RTI at the middle

school level by exploring how teachers perceived the process changed their instructional and collaborative practices.

Definition of Terms

There are several constructs in this study that were identified in order for the reader to understand the vocabulary to gain an understanding to where this study is going and why it is crucial to the scholarly community The following terms, acronyms and terminology were used specifically in this study and might be interpreted differently in similar studies:

Collaborative practices. Collaborative practices, often referred to under the umbrella of Professional Learning Communities, provide a community committed to improving student achievement and professional practices in the classroom, (Nelson, LeBard, & Waters, 2010)

Coordinated-care team (CCT). The coordinated care team consists of the school administration, RTI teacher and coordinator of the CCT team, school counselors, school psychologist, classroom teachers and other members that have a vested interest in the students. This team also plays a key role under the leadership of the RTI teacher and coordinator of the team in progress monitoring. While these multi-departmental teams are referred to by different names such as school-based problem solving teams (South Dakota Department of Education, 2012, p. 7), teaching teams (Casey, 2008, p. 7) and cross departmental teams (NASDSE, 2008, p. 21), in this research in this middle school in California the RTI team was referred to as a coordinated care team (CCT) (Morongo USD California, La Contenta Middle School).

Instructional practices. Refer to changes in classroom instruction directly related to the implementation of RTI at the middle school (Buffum, Matto, & Weber, 2010).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB as stated earlier is federal legislation directly linked to schools across the nation, stepping up and providing learning for all students at grade-level achievement by the year 2014. Under the legislation, specific benchmarks must be met for student achievement or (LEA) Local Education Agencies will be placed on sanctions to make adequate progress (US Departments of Education, 2004).

Program improvement (PI*).* In the State of California, schools are placed into Program Improvement if they fail to reach the standards in NCLB legislation. This PI status begins in a year one phase and can follow a school through five years of specific corrective actions to improve. The goal of these corrective actions is to improve student achievement by the NCLB requirements by 2014 as stated by the California Department of Education (CDE, 2012).

Progress monitoring. Progress monitoring is the process of using multiple measures of data to assess student academic performance and how they are responding to the specific tier they are in within the RTI model. Progress monitoring is also used as a means to quantify student rate of improvement, responsiveness to a specified intervention and in the evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction (Center on Response to Intervention, n.d.). Emphasis should also be placed on fidelity of implementation and the choice of evidence-based tools for instruction aligned with cultural and linguistic responsiveness and recognition of the strengths of the student.

In this research study performed in California, when a student failed to respond to the instruction within a tier, they were referred to the CCT (Coordinated Care Team) for further discussion and assessment.

Response to intervention (RTI). RTI is a practice of (1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to (3) make important educational decisions. These three components of RTI are essential, National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE, 2005). Tier I consists of core instruction for all students. Tier II consists of targeted group interventions, whereas Tier III includes intensive intervention for individual students.

Self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy beliefs develop in response to four sources of information. The most powerful influence of self-efficacy is "enactive experience" in which self-efficacy for a behavior is increased by successfully performing the behavior. The second most powerful influence is "vicarious experience" in which other similar people are seen to perform a behavior successfully. A third source of influence is verbal persuasion, which, if realistic, can encourage efforts that are more likely to increase efficacy through success. Finally, self-efficacy beliefs can be affected by physiological and affective states such as stress. Using the fundamentals of self-efficacy in this study will link towards teacher perceptions of the implementation of RTI and the specific research questions listed above.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions. Assumptions are factors related to a study over which the researcher has limited control. However, if these factors were to disappear, then the study would not be relevant. The following assumptions guided this study:

1. It was assumed that all participants answered all questions honestly and to the best of their ability.
2. It was assumed that all participants engaged in reading all literature provided by the researcher and outside facilitator and engaged in the online focus group interviews and teacher interviews.
3. It was assumed that all participants completed the online focus group interview understanding what was expected of them and completed the interview.
4. It was assumed that the researcher accurately identified the participants for this study.
5. It was assumed that the results compiled by the researcher and outside facilitator were accurate and without bias.

Limitations. Limitations represent potential weaknesses in the study, or factors out of the researcher's control. The following limitations guided this study:

1. The study was limited by the fact that participants selected for this study were all in the early stages of fully understanding and implementing the RTI model.
2. A limitation of this study was that some of the participants may have failed to engage in the implementation of the model based on differences of opinion.

3. Another limitation was that the implementation of the model was a new concept to participants who may have needed more time to understand and engage in a new and intense process.
4. The study was geographically limited to one middle school in the school district out of the control of the researcher and outside facilitator.
5. The final limitation was that there was possible bias as the researcher was an administrator at the site of this study. This is a key reason for having an outside facilitator conducting the online focus group and interview process in order to mitigate potential researcher bias.

Delimitations. Delimitations define the boundaries set within a study regarding the number and type of participants.

1. This study was delimited to one middle school in California that had undergone program improvement. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other middle schools or states.
2. A convenience sample of teachers was recruited to participate in the online survey portion of the study. However, the survey was anonymous as no identifying information was on the results.
3. A convenience sample of teachers was recruited to participate in on-site interviews conducted by an outside facilitator. The researcher held a position of authority over the participants; therefore, an outside facilitator was trained in order to minimize bias. The outside facilitator also brought an ethical persona to the study in regards to a person that had no vested interest in the

results of the study in relationship to the implementation of the RTI model and the research questions.

4. The online survey used the data from 12 teachers with a variety of different teaching experiences and background. These teachers were all participants of the implementation of RTI at the middle school.
5. The on-site survey conducted by the outside facilitator used five participants that had extensive knowledge of RTI and the implementation at the middle school.

Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 1 provides a detailed introduction of the study that included the purpose of the study and the problem and why this research needed further consideration. Included in this chapter was an in-depth reasoning for the need for the implementation of RTI at the middle school level. The lack of current research on the implementation of RTI at the middle school level has a direct effect on instructional and collaborative practices in the classroom in an effort of moving all students toward grade level achievement (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2010). The two research questions were introduced in this chapter.

The chapter outlined the data collection process that involved multiple sources of evidence in this case study. The background of the study was identified and linked to the implementation of RTI at the elementary school level and it's to the lack at the middle school level. The rationale for the methodology was stated in defense of why an interpretative qualitative study was selected. The definition of a qualitative study was identified and explained how it connected to this study. Included in this chapter was an explanation on how this study will advance scientific knowledge to the scholarly

community and current practitioners in the education field, specifically to the middle school level. Several definitions and terms have been identified in an effort to help the reader better understand and read the study without barriers. Assumptions and limitations were listed that again will provide the general reader an explanation of what might be assumed in the study and what limitation might inhibit the results in the study.

The contents in Chapter 1 were introduced and intended to provide a clear focus of the purpose, problem and research questions to be investigated along with the methodology and research design to give the reader an initial idea of what will come further in the study. In Chapter 2, the literature review, the study addresses past and current research directly related to the research questions. Chapter 2 provides a detailed discussion and consideration of the theoretical and conceptual foundation, background of the problem and a review of past research that is crucial to building up to why this study is being conducted as well as recent literature primarily within the last five years. In Chapter 3 the research methodology, study population and sample, data sources, data collection and data analysis are defined. Chapter 4 presents descriptive data on the participant sample, data analysis and results of the research. The study concludes in Chapter 5 with an overall summary of the study, summary of the results and findings aligned with the existing research, implications and recommendations for practice and research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Chapter and Background of the Problem

The purpose of this interpretive, qualitative study was to explore how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one middle school in Southern California. For the purpose of this literature review, both qualitative and quantitative studies were sought by searching *Academic Search Complete*, *ProQuest* and *Google Scholar* as the primary search engines. Additionally, a manual search was conducted to examine the text and reference pages of relevant publications for further related sources.

Research was included in this literature review if it met any of the following criteria. Articles that addressed the topic of RTI and provided attention to the product, people or processes within an organization either individually or in combination were reviewed. Additionally, research which addressed organizational success in the implementation of RTI and had a correlation with people or process either individual or in combination was reviewed. Further, any research, which addressed the development of the RTI model or implementation process within an educational organization, was reviewed along with any that presented guidance in the development of implementing an RTI model.

The existing literature regarding RTI with respect to instructional and collaborative practices provided insight to this study and was carefully explored in an effort to connect the implementation of RTI to changes in instructional and collaborative practices of teachers related to student achievement. The purpose of incorporating

existing literature and similar research will bring the foundation of the past and what is needed currently related to answering the research questions that drive this study.

The gaps and omissions in the current literature lack a clear target towards how the implementation of RTI directly changes instructional and collaborative practices of teachers at the middle and high school levels. In this literature review, the gaps are defined specifically at the middle school level and provided an expansion on the existing knowledge on how the RTI model changed and influenced teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices in one middle school in Southern California. Chapter 2 is organized by the background and history of RTI as it relates to the research questions that informed this study, including the past and current research focusing on educational institutions that had experience with RTI and have implemented the model. The review includes both elementary and secondary examples of how the RTI model has been implemented and its success. Additional consideration was given to how social behavior plays a key role as it effect the learning of children and how they progress through the three tiers of RTI.

Background and history of RTI. The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), similar to many attempts at educational reform, grew from studies supporting growing concerns about public education (Howell, Deiotte, & Patton, 2008). The federal legislation was initiated to respond to the need for more intensive intervention programs aimed at all students moving toward grade-level achievement in English/ language arts and mathematics. The legislation further sought to initiate research-based intervention programs that address these needs for all students, not only those that might qualify for special education identification (NASDSE & CASE, 2006).

Seeking to achieve greater effectiveness in educating the nation's youth, the RTI approach is increasingly being implemented in US schools (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009; Walker & Shinn, 2010). The evolution of RTI dates from Deno's *cascade model*, developed in 1970 which envisioned a continuum of environments in which students with special needs could be served (Buffum et al., 2009). Although the RTI model meets the need of identifying students with specific learning disabilities, it also requires progress monitoring for all students in an effort to provide directed instruction at each student's learning level (Buffum et al., 2009; NASDSE, 2008; NASDSE & CASE, 2006; The Presidents Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). This study focused on how the RTI model could be implemented at the middle school level and how it influenced changes in instructional and collaborative practices of teachers towards building an environment conducive for the grade-level learning of all students.

The vast majority of states and provinces began their RTI efforts in the area of elementary reading, and the strongest research base for RTI is in that area (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). As states define and research RTI models, educators have widely applied the three-tiered model in elementary schools, though very few authors have attempted to describe the three-tier model in the context of middle and high schools (Bender, 2012).

In the state of California, at the middle school level, students continue to struggle with meeting mastery of the state content standards. Although growth was significant between 2003 and 2011, there is much work to do at the middle school level (Vaughn, 2011b). In 2003, 37% of seventh graders and 31% of eighth graders were proficient or

advanced in English language arts, and 30% of seventh graders in math and 21% of eighth graders in Algebra I displayed proficiency levels at working at grade level. In 2011, these percentages increased, 57% proficient in seventh grade English Language Arts, 57% in eighth grade English language arts, 50% in seventh grade general math and 32% in Algebra I. In 2007, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that 69% of eighth-grade students were unable to successfully derive meaning from grade-level text (Vaughn et al., 2011a).

RTI implementation helps schools meet and exceed their educational goals related to state and provincial standards (Bender, 2012). The purpose of the NCLB (2001) legislation was to move all significant subgroups and all students towards grade-level achievement by the year 2014. The legislation set clear and specific goals for student achievement, qualifications of teachers and achievement on summative standardized state testing. This required a great change in core belief systems of educators across the country and the belief that all students had the ability to learn at grade-level without excuses independent of subgroup associations with ethnicity, gender, language, disability, or socioeconomic status (Howell et al., 2008; NASDSE & CASE, 2006).

Over the last few years, the RTI model has shifted towards progress in monitoring all students to assure they were learning at grade-level proficiency and responding to core English Language, Arts, and mathematics instruction in the classroom (Howell et al., 2008). Additionally, the model gained popularity at the secondary level, focused more at the junior high and middle school due to the success at the elementary level (Fuchs et al., 2010). However, many researchers avoid middle and high school entirely because of

scheduling problems and compliance issues often encountered when working with adolescents (Fuchs et al., 2010).

Conceptual Framework

Bandura's theory of social behavior (1997) and the RTI model were used as the conceptual foundation for this research. This section describes the theory of social behavior (Bandura, 1977) and RTI in detail and how this study fits with the existing research in these areas. The section concludes with an argument and rationale for the application of this conceptual foundation to answer the study's research questions and to guide the data collection and data analysis.

Theory of social behavior. Bandura's (1977) theory of social behavior and RTI were used to provide a conceptual framework for this study. Bandura noted that behaviors can be studied through observing one's self-efficacy, or perceived ability to successfully perform daily challenges. The purpose of using such a model of self-efficacy for this study on teachers' perceptions and RTI was to highlight the fact that change is difficult and can impact how a teacher perceives his or her ability to fulfill their job role.

The theory focuses on four principal sources of information: performance accomplishments, various experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Experience plays an enormous role in such a model and has the ability to change such perceptions or not based on the premise of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Performance accomplishments are based on personal mastery experiences. Successes raise mastery expectations, or a person's perceptions that they will be able to achieve a goal, while repeated failures lower these expectations. The effects of failure on one's self-efficacy depend on the timing and total set of experiences in which the failures occur (Bandura,

1977). Thus, as teachers implement response to intervention at the school site, those successes and failures directly impact their expectations that the process will meet with success, both in procedure and student achievement.

People do not rely on experienced mastery as the sole source of information concerning their level of self-efficacy as many expectations are derived from vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977). Seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences can generate expectations in observers that they can improve their own personal results if they intensify and persist in their efforts (Bandura, 1977). Thus, with regard to this study, if teachers see other colleagues successfully implementing the RTI process, then their own expectations can be heightened that they can meet with success in the same process.

Verbal persuasion is often used to influence human behavior (Bandura, 1977). People are led, through suggestion, into believing they can cope successfully with change or other events that have overwhelmed them in the past. Although social persuasion alone may have definite limitations as a means of creating a teacher's sense of personal efficacy, it can contribute to the successes achieved through corrective performance (Bandura, 1977). Thus, as teachers and administrators offer verbal support in the collaboration process, it can increase their perceived ability to get the job done.

Stressful and taxing situations generally elicit emotional arousal that, depending on the circumstances, might have informative value concerning personal competency (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, emotional arousal is another source of information that can affect perceived self-efficacy in coping with potentially threatening situations. Because high arousal usually debilitates performance, individuals are more likely to expect

success when they are less tense and agitated (Bandura, 1977). Thus, when implementing RTI, the entire educational team must experience enough positive stress to create that sense of urgency to get the job done, but not so much stress that they are emotionally debilitated and believe they cannot effectively implement the processes. When aligning a study regarding the implementation of an RTI model these attributes are taken into consideration.

Response to Intervention. Since 1975 with the enactment of *Public Law 94-142, Education of all Handicapped Children Act*, and further back to the *Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965*, the federal government played a key role in public education in an attempt to reform education history and move all students toward grade level proficiency by the year 2014 under NCLB (Bollman, Johnson, & Windram et al., 2012). School districts and schools across the country began the process of making changes to meet both the federal and individual specific state mandates to improve classroom instruction, school culture and improvements in student achievement. Additionally, states across the nation have embraced RTI as a model to improve instructional, collaborative and progress monitoring practices (NASDSE & CASE, 2006). RTI is a set of scientifically based procedures used to make decisions relevant to assigned educational programs (Brown-Chidesey & Steege, 2005). RTI has gained popularity in the educational community for its clear focus on systematic and data driven activities. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) (2006) stated that that RTI model supports a unified system of education, assessment, structured problem-solving process, flexibility and fluidity, tiered levels of intervention, responsibility for student

learning, professional development, and resources. The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002, p. 9) also recommended the implementation of the RTI model "… during the identification and assessment process that are based on response to intervention and progress monitoring. Use data from these processes to assess progress in children who receive special education services" (p. 21).

The RTI Model focuses on three key components to guide the planning, implementation, and evaluation of this model (Center on Response to Intervention, n.d.; National Response to Intervention, 2010; NASDSE, 2008; NASDSE & CASE, 2006). These three components are: a) high-quality instruction/intervention, b) learning rate and level of performance, and c) important educational decisions. These components provide the baseline for the inclusion of all children regardless of ability, early intervention, a multi-tiered model of service delivery, structured problem solving and use of interdepartmental teams, flexibility and fluidity to meet individual student needs, and monitoring of student progress within a unified system of education (NASDSE & CADE, 2006). The next subsection provides greater detail on the multi-tiered model utilized in RTI.

RTI tiers. Over time, RTI grew to include the progress monitoring all students, both regular and special education. The three tiered model is built the same at all levels of K-12 schools with the highest percentage of the student population in Tier I, a smaller percentage in Tier II, and the smallest percentage in Tier III depending on the demographic and size of the student population (Brazo, 2009). Every student receives Tier 1 support, which consists of universal instructional methods and services available to all students, generally provided at the classroom level (Brazo, 2009). Tier I provides core

instruction for students using a state adopted textbook and materials for instruction, including the use of common assessments to monitor all students and their progress towards mastery of the state content standards (Brazo, 2009).

Those students not responding to the core instruction in Tier I are progress monitored, and if needed are placed in Tier II intervention, which provides a research-based intervention program (Brazo, 2009). The specific intervention program used in this Tier depends on programs adopted by each state. In Tier II students receive more individualized instruction specific to their learning needs using state approved research-based intervention programs in English language arts and mathematics. This usually includes short-term instruction for small groups of students who need extra help (Brazo, 2009). Bender (2012) identified Tier II as a group of students needing a more intensive instruction in the classroom and usually includes about twenty percent of a typical student population. In an elementary classroom with 25 students, this intervention would include approximately five to six students. No matter whether at the elementary or middle school level, Tier II intervention occur during core instruction. At the middle school level, outside factors play a role such as students changing classrooms and the limited instructional time built into a typical master schedule. Bender also noted that at the middle school level, extra time must be built into a master schedule to meet the intervention needs of this group of students.

When a student has received several rounds of preventive assistance, including more targeted assistance within Tier 2, and has still progressed poorly academically for both level of performance and slope of improvement, he or she should be considered for special education (Fuchs, Fuchs, and Stecker, 2008). Tier III interventions are typically

taught by an intervention or special education teacher based on multiple measures of previous assessment and intervention and usually include about five percent of a classroom population based on the grade-level (Azzam, 2007). Specific intervention services might include Title I, district remediation programs, special education services based on individual diagnostic assessments and state approved intervention programs that target patterns of skills that the individual student is not meeting (NASEA, 2005).

The RTI model requires that teachers follow several procedural guidelines (Snell, 2008). First, the system is additive. Student performance data are the means for assessing learning and whether there is need for more specialized methods of instruction. The need for more specialized methods in one academic area does not necessarily indicate the need for more specialized methods in other academic areas. Student performance data are also required to make these decisions (Snell, 2008). Thus, if students do not meet success with the methods offered in Tier 1, they then move to Tier 2. A move to Tier 2 or 3 results in the addition of focused instructional methods, services, or supports, not a change in setting (Snell, 2008).

Although there appears to be plenty of literature at the elementary level (Bender, 2012; Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007), a surge of research is beginning to enter the secondary level as schools see a need to continue progress monitoring students through high school to assure students have a chance at graduation (Bollman et al., 2012). Bollman et al. (2012) stated that there is little difference in regards to the implementation of RTI at the secondary level as the model focuses on effective instruction, sound assessment, research-based instruction and providing procedures that assure all students are progress monitored.

Review of the Literature

RTI began as a way of identifying students for special education by using a multitiered system of three levels to identify where student were responding to each level of instruction. Perhaps more than any other single initiative, RTI is likely to restructure how middle and high school teachers teach in a profound and fundamental way (Geisick & Graving-Reyes, 2008; Gibbs, 2008; James, 2010; National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE], 2006; National High School Center [NHSC], National Center on Response to Intervention, & Center on Instruction, 2010; Protheroe, 2010; Rozalski, 2009). This section of the literature review focuses on key attributes of RTI.

Instructional practices within RTI. Participation in learning communities facilitates professional development that is driven by the needs of teachers as they are naturally engaged in efforts to accomplish their goals (Adams, Ross & Vescio, 2008). These collaboration opportunities focus on the need for teachers to grow as professional educators and improve instructional practices in the classroom. Adams et al. focused on the need for sustained professional development opportunities to foster professional learning. With respect to RTI, teachers need to understand how to offer instruction to meet the needs of students at the appropriate tier.

Flowers, Mertens and Mulhall (2000) researched how learning influences classroom instructional practices. The classroom curriculum and instruction inform instructional practices and directly relate to student achievement. In order for middle grade educators to improve student outcomes, teachers must provide rigorous classroom instruction that engages all students in their classroom (Flowers et al, 2000). This leads to

the notion that if a child does not respond to such instruction, more intensive instruction is needed.

In order to effectively implement effective instructional practices and engage in an effective RTI framework Renaissance Learning (2009) provided nine principles for teachers to consider. The first principle focuses on evidence-based instruction. Teachers use student data from a variety of formative and summative assessments to inform their classroom instruction. Based on this data, teachers evaluate and make adjustments in their instruction to meet the needs of students in all RTI tiers. This principle assures the curriculum and interventions are evidence-based (Renaissance Learning, 2009).

The second principle is differentiated instruction, which is based on the individual need of each student and based on formative and summative data (Renaissance Learning, 2009). Instruction might be different each day based whether the individual student is responding or not to standards and content covered. This instruction applies to all tiers during core instruction.

Principle 3 is centered on the fact that students need to be engaged in academic instruction for a sufficient amount of time (Renaissance Learning, 2009). Academic intervention time is built into the school day to meet the needs of all students in all tiers of RTI. In some schools this time would be considered "Universal Access" intervention where instruction is differentiated to meet students learning needs. In addition to sufficient time engaged in academic learning, the fourth principle includes time for students to practice key skills (Renaissance Learning, 2009). Students are given the time to practice key standards with support from the teacher. This practice is based on

previous student assessment data that drives and supports differentiated instruction in the classroom.

1. Frequent, psychometrically sound assessment: Progress monitoring is used at all tiers to determine whether students are learning or not. Consistent screening and diagnostic assessments are used to monitor learning. Students in Tier II and III need this consistent progress monitoring, which gives a clearer picture for the teacher on how to differentiate instruction during universal access intervention instruction (Renaissance Learning, 2009).
2. Real-time use of data: The use of a student data system plays an important role as teachers need real time student data to drive instruction when implementing the RTI model. The concept of using manually administered assessments seems to be a thing of the past (Renaissance Learning, 2009).
3. Best use of technology: Teachers have a better opportunity to use student data to drive planning and instruction if they have real time data. Technology will not make the decisions; however, it will "provide the necessary information to the instructional team so that educators can make decisions efficiently and effectively" (Renaissance Learning, 2009, p. 7).
4. Parental involvement: Parent involvement is important and a crucial component of the RTI model. Parents that have a student identified in Tier II or III need to be an active participant in the process. Parents need to be active participants working toward the success of the learning of their child and stay up to date from the home (Renaissance Learning, 2009).

5. Professional development: In order for teachers to gain the skills to implement RTI in the classroom, they must be given the opportunity to engage in meaningful professional development and reach their full teaching potential (Renaissance Learning, 2009).

The nine principles in correlation to the RTI model support the success of students and teachers. These principles are important to any RTI model and can be implemented at any school from elementary to secondary

Collaborative practices within RTI. RTI is a model that has taken on new meaning over the years; however, the focus continues to be on the core foundation of using multiple measures of student performance data to inform planning and instruction. Thus, collaborative teams and practices must play a role in the school's RTI efforts and to ensure students are meeting grade-level achievement (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2012). The problem is not with building the collaborative teams, but rather finding the time during the school day for teachers to meet. In many educational systems, these teams have been formed, but often fail if teachers do not have the time to collaborate and plan actions directly related to such an RTI model. This process is predicated on the staff having the necessary dedicated allocated time to work together collaboratively (Buffem et al. 2012).

All teachers in a collaborative community take responsibility to assure all students succeed. Often teachers are willing to contribute some of their own time, but quite reasonably are unwilling to shoulder the full cost of what, after all, is a system responsibility—and what research confirms must be a continuing one (Raywid, 1993). What teachers achieve collectively is far greater than what they can achieve individually

(Twadell & Erkens, 2012). These collaborative practices allow teachers to use student performance mastery data to drive instruction, plan and improve best teaching practices in the classroom. It should come as no surprise that the most significant place to impact student achievement is at the classroom level (Twadell & Erkens, 2012). Building such collaborative teams is essential when implementing an effective RTI program that incorporates administrative support, systematic data collection, staff support and training, parent support and involvement, understanding of legal requirements, realistic time line, strong teams, integration with existing scheduling and coordination of existing intervention programs which is the foundation of the work and advise by (Canter, Cowen, & Klotz, 2008). Professional learning communities have become common language and practice in schools across the country, which complements many of the foundational methods of an RTI Model.

RTI requires strong teams that can make collaborative decisions (Canter et al., 2008). A team should include a cross-disciplinary group of subject-area teachers; specialists, such as reading teachers and teachers of English language learners; related services personnel, such as school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, social workers, and school counselors; administrators; and special education personnel. RTI structures and function should be built into the business and routine of the team. Additionally, clear systems should be in place for evaluating and adjusting RTI approaches and for providing staff development. The team should be organized according to existing structures within the school (Canter et al., 2008). For example, middle level schools might be organized as families or grade-level teams and high schools might be organized around academic departments. Additionally, the team should facilitate parent

involvement in planning and reinforcing academic and behavioral interventions, and provide student progress to parents (Canter et al., 2008). Building such collaborative teams is essential in implementing an effective RTI program that incorporates administrative support, systematic data collection, staff support and training, parent support and involvement, understanding of legal requirements, realistic time line, strong teams, integration with existing scheduling and coordination of existing intervention programs which is the foundation of the work and advise by (Canter et al. (2008).

Teacher perceptions of RTI. The conversations and collaboration regarding teacher perceptions in past and current research might date back to the research conducted by Vygotsky (1978) and the development of children behaviors. Although the study was based on children, it could be linked to adult behavior in adults and for the purpose of this study, teachers. The following review includes a variety of examples of such human behavior and how teachers might perceive different situations in the educational setting.

In 2005, the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced RTI (Pyle, 2011). Pyle's study focused on tensions between the implementation process of RTI and the perceptions of both regular and special education teachers. Analysis of this study throughout a focus group revealed that the main challenges centered on the implementation of RTI and the coherence during the progress monitoring of student data. The perception from special education teachers was much different than the regular education teachers. Using this as one example of teacher perception, it could be construed that when one closely examines the RTI model, perceptions begin to play an important role.

Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) studied teacher perceptions of professional identity. The study investigated secondary school teachers and used a questionnaire to explore further how teachers viewed themselves as subject matter experts, didactical experts, and pedagogical experts. In comparison to an RTI model, most teachers' current perceptions of their professional identity differed from when they began their career in education as a new teacher. It is important to note that the differences among the groups of teachers' current perceptions in the study were not related to contextual, experimental, or biographical factors that might have influenced these perceptions.

During the implementation of RTI, teacher expectations, influence and perceptions play a role on student performance. Cooper (2007) examined whether the teachers level of rigor and expectation might have an effect on student performance. Teacher perceptions in this study had adverse effects on opinions among teacher behavior depending on the student population. The purpose and importance of this study was on the foundation of RTI and the need for response to intervention for all students at all levels of learning.

Perceived benefits of RTI. Response to Intervention (RtI) offers a comprehensive model for the prevention of delays in learning and behavior (Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap, & Hemmeter, 2011). Fox et al. identified what many think is a common sense approach to teaching and student learning, but also identified delays students had in learning grade-level standards and the specific behaviors that became consistent barriers to learning. RTI was also noted to be an effective method for helping struggling learners in the general education environment before they failed and faced special education referral and

placement (Canter et al., 2008). The authors also advocated for the inclusion of the RTI model during the next reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Werts, Carpenter and Fewell (2014) surveyed 221 teachers regarding their perspectives on the barriers and benefits of response to intervention. The authors developed a survey based on RTI literature and had faculty members from local universities validate the questions. The survey also gave prompts where teachers could list barriers and benefits. Out of 221 participants, 207 listed at least one barrier, while 14 teachers listed no barriers to the process. Time was mentioned in approximately twenty-five percent of the responses. Time had different meanings to different participants. Some referred to lack of time in the school day to provide interventions, while others referred to lengthy delays in the amount of time it took to identify and deliver services to students. Still other teachers referred to the concept of time in that the RTI processes required too much of their time during the day due to extra administrative tasks, extra paperwork and extra duties (Werts et al., 2014).

The second most mentioned barrier was with regard to what the authors deemed as knowledge gaps in teacher preparation to deliver intervention services, lack of training with regard to appropriate use of assessments and lack of training in RTI processes and procedures (Werts et al., 2014). Approximately fifteen percent of responses referred to teacher attitudes toward RTI. These attitudes reflected barriers in that teachers were resistant to adopting the change, were afraid and were not willing to stretch out of their comfort zone. The final barrier mentioned in the study was resources. Teachers cited lack of materials, professional development and personnel needs to implement RTI with fidelity (Werts et al., 2014).

Barriers to the implementation of RTI. Werts et al. (2014) also surveyed teachers regarding the benefits that RTI provides. Interestingly, while teachers issued over 200 comments regarding barriers to RTI, this number more than doubled when teachers were asked about the benefits. Teachers commented positively about the benefits over 500 times in their surveys. Almost 75% of the statements on the benefits of RTI focused on students being taught at higher levels due to RTI. This included their getting help sooner. Special educators, who were the participants in the study, noted that general educators were providing stronger instruction in their classrooms, in that they were providing more targeted instruction designed to meet the specific needs of students. Thus, teachers felt a benefit of RTI was the use of differentiated instruction (Werts et al., 2014).

Comments also focused on stronger referrals being made for special education services and increased use of data and assessments to identify student needs. In short, teachers felt students were being more successful (Werts et al., 2014). Teachers also noted benefits to the school and themselves as a result of RTI to include better professional development and trainings, higher levels of collaboration among teachers in the school, and changing perspectives of special education. Specifically, teachers felt that special education was part of the tiered process and were more comfortable with providing interventions at all Tiers. Finally, teachers noted they were more accountable for student learning in their classrooms (Werts et al., 2014).

Friedli, Snow, Bunken, and Ritzman (2012) studied concerns and reactions of middle and high school teachers before and after implementing RTI. Data in the form of interviews, focus groups, observations and surveys, collected from 18 teachers chronicled their reactions to RTI over the period of a year. Results revealed several common

concerns regarding the process. These included the fact that regular education teachers are not often prepared to deliver interventions. Several teachers felt the process was difficult and time consuming to adapt to the high school level. Teachers also felt they needed more training on the model and that the interventions and assessments needed to be better adapted for secondary level students. Teachers did note that while use of data took time, it provided evidence for instructional changes, rather than their making changes based on impressions. Experts in special education noted that barriers surrounding more complex interventions for special needs students may become more difficult to implement at the secondary level.

Klingner and Edwards (2006) took the position that children must receive culturally responsive, appropriate, quality instruction that is evidence based. In order to be deemed appropriate, there must be a teacher providing quality instruction in the classroom. At the elementary and middle school level research shows there are barriers that impede the implementation of RTI, and cultural considerations need to be addressed. Klingner and Edwards (2006) discussed these cultural considerations in regards to the implementation of RTI models. The authors made a strong position that educators must address culturally responsive, appropriate quality instruction. If the instruction is less than adequate, then students have not been provided an opportunity to learn. This can be an instructional barrier during the implementation of an RTI model and impede progress if the educators do not consider this as a top priority.

Similarly, the issue of implementation fidelity is an important one in RTI models, and is related to the belief that the results of experimental studies should be generalized and transferable from one setting to another. At the elementary level, these barriers are

less prevalent due to more flexibility in the schedule, student engagement, attendance and parental support (Bollman et al. 2012). All schools have a continuum of strengths and weaknesses in practice, roles, structure and organization. All buildings also have expert teachers and assessment, instruction, and organizational decision-making practices for academic and social behaviors that are effective for kids. Yet, Bollman et al. (2012) questioned why this framework has not been fully implemented in secondary schools. To answer this, Bollman et al stated that educators must examine actual practices and can start by finding answers to questions like these. Danielson, Doolittle, and Bradley (2007) supported the following about RTI and its relationship to professional development, the building process and the issues in implementing the RTI model.

Professional development and training drives the success of a RTI model. Shinn (2007) distinguishes two RTI processes: "little rti" and "big RTI." The author supported the notion that when implementing the model, results can yield true fruition of the desired outcomes, or a model of fragmentation. The article speaks to the need for extensive professional development and time in order to implement the model successfully. The author also spoke to building capacity and the needs for further research on RTI, the tiers of RTI and the critical factors needed for building a capacity of evidence-based/research-based instruction in support of student achievement. The author also focused on the imminent need for future research on RTI and how it affects both academics and behavior. The study also includes several strategies for assuring decisions are made based on multiple measures of information. Another factor consistent to this study is the lack of resources for school districts and schools in regards to the implementation of RTI (Shin,

2007). Teacher buy-in will always play a key role in the implementation, as it is key for the success for the district, school and children.

- Is the expected behavior not happening because it is a skill deficit, meaning we (practitioners) do not know how to do it?
- Is it a performance deficit, meaning we do know how to do it but are not motivated to perform the task?
- Professional development plays a key role in many school districts and its relationship to providing time for teachers to be trained. Productive professional development also drives a successful RTI model, but can be difficult with the lack of resources (Shin, 2007).

Teacher buy-in is another key factor in a successful RTI model and implementation.

Studies on response to intervention in elementary school. Bouman (2010) investigated the implementation of RTI in 140 school districts using the responses from 190 school psychologists. From the responses 80.7 % of the school districts were implementing RTI, but at much different levels of engagement. Through the study recommendations were identified based on step-wise multiple regressions to strengthen the RTI model such as training teachers in the multi-tier process, consistent progress monitoring and early reading screening. An alarming identification in the study was that only 2.2% of the school districts used a consistent student study team. Key findings in the data found that African American students were disproportionality placed in special education increased over time compared to other subgroups. Overrepresented Hispanic students remained within the statistical parameters and underrepresented White students'

risk ratio decreased over the same period of time with RTI. The overall data showed the need for the response to intervention model to continue and move towards more faithful implementation (Bouman, 2010).

Pennyman (2011) examined the implementation of RTI at four elementary schools with the purpose of understanding commonalities and different structures, roles, resources, and professional development. The researcher examined teacher, administrator and RTI specialist perceptions to determine the effectiveness of the RTI model. Two of the elementary schools were part of a RTI pilot program and two were not, both located in Pennsylvania. A case study was used to indicate the implementation of RTI. The results were similar at the four schools even though the demographics were different at each school. Tiered intervention, ongoing assessment, and research-based practices were consistent with the RTI model. The author found the RTI implementation was successful due to teacher buy-in, site leadership, professional development, and resources. In order for RTI to be sustained administrators must develop an understanding of RTI, selecting an appropriate model, building teacher buy-in, providing professional development, setting up interventions, developing assessments and data collection procedures (Pennyman, 2011).

Dupuis (2010) conducted a two-phased mixed method study on teacher perceptions of RTI with respect to the following dimensions: Administrative support, resources, level of implementation, and student performance. The researcher also examined elementary teacher perceptions of their involvement in the RTI process associated with their classroom instructional practices. A questionnaire was used to gather data related to teacher perceptions of RTI, and a focus group was used to get a

deeper understanding of the teacher questionnaire responses and changes in instructional practices. The main finding in the study was the relationship between administrative support and resources provided to teachers when implementing RTI and the 2.5% decrease in special education rates, a change in instructional practices, and an increase in student performance (Dupuis, 2010).

Lee (2012) conducted a descriptive study of RTI implementation at the elementary level in West Virginia. A cross-sectional research design was used to describe the RTI implementation. The study was based on all eight RTI components, and at the completion of the study they all demonstrated statistically significant results. A high percentage of responses in the study were usually or always implemented. School administrators had the highest implementation levels and teachers reported the lowest implementation levels. In the schools with higher implementation levels were those where the staff demonstrated a belief that RTI benefits all students.

Gilkeson (2010) conducted a mixed methods case study to conduct a site-based examination of the early stages (Year 2) of district-wide RTI implementation. The study was conducted in one school district and used three elementary school sites. The researcher found that although all three schools had built an RTI model and implemented the core components of the RTI there were still problems. These problems surrounded around procedural integrity, fidelity, and sustainability related to student benefits.

Studies on response to intervention in secondary schools. There are clear themes present in schools that have successfully implemented RTI at the middle school level. Bender (2012) provided a clear and concise example of RTI at the secondary level by conducting a study of Cheyenne Mountain Junior High (CMJH) where the faculty

began building an RTI model in 2006. First, CMJH began resource restructuring which is always the greatest challenge to overcome assuring that resources are in place to meet the needs of all students within the three RTI tiers. Once the resources were in place, the school began to use universal screening and progress-monitoring began inform their instructional program. The faculty noted that approximately 50% of students receiving Tier II intervention demonstrated significant gains in reading comprehension and improvements in overall grades in all core subject classes. One of the most profound results noted by this faculty, however, was the change in school culture that resulted from a collaborative effort to develop an effective RTI procedure to assist struggling students, (Bender, 2012).

Gary (2010) conducted a qualitative study to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, attitudes, knowledge, and implementation of RTI. The study used interviews of 11 special education directors working in rural school districts in eastern Washington. There were three questions that guided the study. These focused on the level of knowledge that special education directors have of the RTI process, how the directors promote and implement RTI and how they perceive this model as an effective method to deliver specialized services. RTI was perceived to be an early intervention model that targets students for academic failure. Some of the challenges in the findings included a lack in staff training, lack of funds to implement RTI, and lack of agreement between general education and special education staff and whether RTI is a general education or special education model. Only one school district of the 12 in the study implemented RTI at the middle school level (Gary, 2010).

Zahedi (2010) conducted a study on middle school teacher satisfaction with RTI. The study involved an analysis of a teacher satisfaction questionnaire on the implementation process, and conducted interviews of principals of five focus schools. The study used both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the levels of teacher satisfaction in the early implementation of RTI. There was a significant difference between regular and special education teachers. Regular education teachers were less satisfied than special education with the impact of RTI on the distribution of work between types of teachers involved in the RTI model. The findings in regards to principals showed no significant difference between schools, but did reveal concerns about teacher satisfaction with RTI and mandated reform. The study continues to provide research that perceptions between different members of a school community can differ greatly regarding the implementation of RTI (Zahedi, 2010).

Graves, Brandon, Duesbery, McIntosh and Pyle (2011) conducted a quasi-experimental study of how the implementation of Tier 2 interventions impacted the reading achievement of sixth grade students versus those who received traditional, "business as usual" instruction (p. 73). Teachers at the target school participated in workshops on literacy development, and conducted guided reading groups as well as gave writing and reading assignments each week in class with intensive practice designed to improve test scores. All students in both groups received Tier I interventions, but the students in the treatment received additional instruction at Tier II that consisted of research-based reading practices for decoding, reading fluency and comprehension and vocabulary development. The interventions were delivered over a period of 30 hours, for 20 minutes each for 10 weeks. At the end of the 10 weeks, students in the treatment

group had made greater gains than the control group in fluency and comprehension, but less so with regard to comprehension. Students with diagnosed learning disabilities also made as much gains as other sixth graders who were performing below grade level (Graves et al, 2011).

Prewett et al. (2012) studied technical, cultural and contextual aspects of response to intervention implementation in middle schools. The researchers designed a four-phased case study to understand principal and teacher conceptualization of RTI. During Phase I of the study, the researchers searched for middle schools that were implementing RTI. Ultimately, 82 schools were identified. During Phase 2, principals at each school site were contacted to learn about the screening, progress monitoring and intervention processes. Out of 82 contacted, 65 administrators responded. During Phase 3, the participants were interviewed and were asked to describe how their school developed and implemented intervention and maintenance interventions. Additionally, the schools provided information related to the frequency of screening and screening tools.

During Phase 4, telephone interviews were also conducted, but lasted for 90 minutes whereas the interviews in Phase 3 lasted 30 minutes or less. Twenty schools participated in Phase 4. Interview questions consisted of types of assessments, database management and data collection. In order to be eligible to move to Phase 5 of the study, the school had to provide evidence of systematic data collection and a clearly defined RTI policy. During Phase 5, the last phase, data were triangulated and confirmed. The authors noted the most important result of the study was that the administrators noted the purpose of RTI was to close achievement gaps for students struggling in reading and math. Based on data collected, the researchers noted that for the most part, the middle

schools followed procedures similar to those of elementary school. While the schools were at differing stages of implementation, they were all capable of implementing RTI as a "multilevel instructional system complete with academic and behavioral screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, multilevel instruction and fidelity of instructional practices" (p. 146). The authors did recommend that this implementation might be more effective if specific components were implemented with fidelity in a smaller setting before being implemented across grade levels and in core subjects. The authors also noted that administrators should pay careful attention to contextual factors of implementation such as professional development, administrator-led implementation, support from district personnel, and staff buy-in. Staff support and acceptance were key factors mentioned by administrators as facilitating an effective RTI implementation. This support included professional development, common language and terminology, teacher participation in data-based decisions and systemic leadership from the administrative team.

Bade-White (2012) studied the differences existing between the satisfaction ratings of school psychologists in RTI versus non-RTI school districts as perceived by teachers and school psychologists. Special and general education teachers reported statistically significant differences in their satisfaction ratings of school psychological services. There was a clear difference between the RTI schools and the non-RTI schools. Teachers from RTI schools had a higher rate of satisfaction and the non-RTI schools had a much less satisfaction rating regarding these services. School psychologist that worked in RTI schools also had a high rate of satisfaction rating than those in non-RTI schools

and districts. The results conclude that RTI school districts provide a higher level of satisfaction than the non-RTI school districts in regards to school psychological services.

Wexler et al. (2011) studied the effects of intensive reading intervention for eighth-grade students with persistently inadequate response to intervention. The study took a group of sixth graders who were identified as having reading difficulties and were randomized to treatment or comparison conditions. Students in sixth and seventh grade received researcher-provided reading intervention and a comparison group received no researcher-provided reading intervention. The results showed that the eighth grade students involved in the treatment condition demonstrated much higher scores on standardized measures of assessment then those students that received no intervention. Wexler et al. (2011) noted that the study provided a rationale for intensive intervention for middle school students with severe reading difficulties.

Russ (2012) used a mixed methods design to explore teacher perceptions of RTI in five Georgia middle schools. The quantitative component of the study entailed teachers completing a survey on their attitudes toward RTI and their intent to implement the framework. Following the survey, nine teachers participated in interviews. Overall, the surveys showed that teachers had positive attitudes toward the RTI model and intended to implement the interventions, but they had negative attitudes toward RTI policies. In interviews, teachers noted several problems with implementing the model. These included lack of time to deliver appropriate interventions, meet with peers, conduct progress monitoring and to hold meetings. Teachers further reported that they did not have enough resources to instructional intervention supplies and for professional development. Russ recommended further study on the topic (Russ, 2012).

Couch (2012) conducted a case study on teacher perceptions of changes that occurred at the school level over a 3-year period of implementing RTI in a high-poverty and low-performing middle school serving seventh and eighth graders with three research questions served as the focus of the study. The first question explored the factors that made the implementation of RTI effective in the school as a system. The second question focused on barriers to the process and the third focused on how the staff ensured that RTI processes became a sustained part of the school culture which would be maintained over time. Four administrators and 26 teachers participated in the study.

Results of Research Question 1 showed that there were seven factors that lent to the success of RTI. These were the fact that the administrators were strong in terms guiding instruction in the building; professional development including a book study prepared teachers; presence of professional learning communities, teacher use of common classroom assessments, teacher use of differentiated instruction for Tier I interventions; co-teaching for Tier 2 and 3 interventions; and also use of a pull-out model for Tier 2 and 3 interventions as needed (Couch, 2012). The results for the second research question showed that the two top barriers to implementation of RTI at the school were the large number of students who read below grade level and finding ways to implement PLCs for elective teachers in a meaningful manner. Content area teachers did not feel prepared to teach reading, and elective teachers felt their participation in PLCs took time away from their planning content in their own subject areas. In response to the third research question, the faculty and administrators mentioned that use of a common language, common vision, sustained professional development and continued, active

participation in PLCs were ways described as implementing a framework for RTI that was sustainable over time (Couch, 2012).

Jones (2012) investigated the impact of professional learning communities, RTI and leadership experience of high school principals in 74 Missouri high school and its relationship to student achievement. The results of the study implied that the incorporation of RTI and PLC's positively impact student achievement. The findings also suggest that years of experience as a high school principal do not impact student outcomes in regards to achievement.

Williams (2014) conducted a case study on how pressures from different organizational sources influenced middle school principal perceptions of the RTI process. Six middle school principals participated in the study. The researcher conducted interviews with the principals and also observations on campuses. The results of the study showed that principals felt pressures from the district level to implement RTI and felt frustrated with some of the management aspects of the program and also felt they needed more training on how to implement at the campus level. With regard to the community and parents, the principals felt little pressure to implement RTI. The principals felt initial resistance from teachers to implement RTI, but felt this was due to their (the teacher's) lack of understanding of the framework. The principals felt the teachers saw benefits of RTI, but hesitated with implementation when it came to changing daily instructional practices in their classrooms. The principals felt that positive relationships with teachers and school stability enhanced the implementation process and teacher buy-in. Not surprisingly, the schools that had smooth implementations had strong professional learning communities and clear processes for RTI.

One interesting lesson learned from the study was that Williams (2014) noted the principals seemed to view RTI from a student deficit model, or a framework to help struggling students rather than a set of interventions that could potentially benefit all students. Therefore, the principals tended to start with Tier 2 and 3 interventions and neglected Tier 1, classroom level interventions. Williams recommended future studies focus on district level implementation and perceptions of RTI.

At the secondary level there are consistent themes to whether the RTI model is being faithfully implemented or fragmented in an attempt to make it work. There are also clear themes regarding what general education and special education teachers feel their role is in the implementation process of RTI. As one begins to look at the methodology current researchers are using, case studies have been a popular design researchers use when conducting studies at single and multiple schools involved in the implementation of RTI as a research-based model as depicted in this example, (Bender, 2012). In case studies, as in the interpretative qualitative design, the richness of the phenomenon and the extensiveness of the real-life context require case study investigators to cope with a technically distinctive situation. There will be many more factors that influence the phenomenon of interest than data points, Yin (2009). The purpose of a case study and interpretative qualitative research is to present qualitative data that directly relates to a story or experience. Other research approaches may focus on multiple experiences and methodology approaches. The study conducted at this middle school focused on one school and two research questions. Yin et al. (2009) supports qualitative research that includes a single school or location.

Summary

There is a great deal of research that has been published related to RTI at the elementary and secondary levels (Bender, 2012; Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). There is strength in the research when identifying the effectiveness of the model from its conception at the elementary school level to current practice in schools. There is a clear weakness when one begins to read the research when RTI reaches the secondary level and more clear at the middle school level. Research by Bender (2012), Graves, Brandon, Duesbery, McIntosh and Pyle (2011), Prewett et al. (2012), and Zahedi (2010) on RTI implementation at the middle school level also recognized the strengths of this model, but it begins to get even more convoluted when changes in instructional and collaborative practices are implemented. There are clear gaps and omissions in the literature in regards to changes in instructional practices and school culture at the middle school level during the implementation of RTI.

It was not known or proven in current research whether the model could be replicated at the middle school and experience the same success (Bender, 2012; Graves, Brandon, Duesbery, McIntosh and Pyle, 2011; Prewett et al., 2012; Zahedi, 2010) changed instructional and collaborative practices particularly in the state of California.. Based on the current research and omissions in the literature, further research was needed at the middle school level.

The conceptual framework for the research was Bandura's theory of social behavior (1977) and the RTI model. Bandura recognized that behaviors could be studied by observing one's self-efficacy, or perceived ability to successfully perform daily challenges (Bandura, 1977). The purpose of using such a model of self-efficacy for this

study on teachers' perceptions and RTI was to highlight the fact that change is difficult and can impact how a teacher perceives his or her ability to fulfill their job role. The RTI model (Buffum et al., 2009; NASDSE, 2008; NASDSE & CASE, 2006; The Presidents Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002) was used as the second framework since it was fundamentally linked to this research on the implementation of this model in a middle school setting in California.

This chapter also expanded on instructional (Adams et al., 2008; Flowers et al., 2000; Renaissance Learning, 2009) and collaborative (Bradley, et al., 2012; Buffum, et al.,2012; Canter, et al., 2008; Raywid, 1993; Twaddell & Erkens, 2012) practices with RTI, teacher perceptions of RTI (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000; Cooper, 2007; Pyle, 2011; Werts, et al, 2014), and barriers to the implementation of RTI (Bollman, et al., 2012; Bouman, 2010; Friedli,et al., 2012; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Pennyman, 2011; Shin, 2007; Werts, et al, 2014).

The existing research on the RTI model and research on the implementation was crucial to this study. Past and current research on the model build the foundation of knowledge of where RTI began and where it is today in schools across the country (Geisick & Graving-Reyes, 2008; Gibbs, 2008; James, 2010; National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE], 2006; National High School Center [NHSC], National Center on Response to Intervention, & Center on Instruction, 2010; Protheroe, 2010; Rozalski, 2009).Discussion of the use of quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research was presented (Bade-White, 2012; Couch, 2012; Gary, 2010; Graves, et al., 2011; Prewett, et al., 2012; Russ, 2012; Wexler, et al., 2011; Zahedi, 2010) as well as the different data sources used by these researchers.

In Chapter 3, the research presents a detailed description of the research methodology. Expansion on the choice of a qualitative interpretative design, geographic location, study site, population and participant sample are provided. Data sources, data collection and data analysis plans, ethical considerations, and study limitations and delimitations conclude the chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this interpretive, qualitative study was to explore how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one middle school in Southern California. The RTI model has been extremely popular and effective over the past several years, but has lacked a clear focus of implementation at the middle school level (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010; National Center on Response to Intervention, & Center on Instruction, 2010). Thus, the focus of this study was to add to the emerging body of research on how the model is implemented in secondary schools (Sansosti et al., 2011). This chapter defines the problem statement in consideration of to the research questions on how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions of instructional (R1) and collaborative practices (R2) for this research. The remainder of Chapter 3 presents the research questions, design and methodology, population and sample selection and sources of data. The chapter concludes with the data collection and analysis plan and a discussion of ethical procedures.

Statement of the Problem

It was not known how the implementation of RTI influenced teacher perceptions of instructional and collaborative practices in one school district located in Southern California. Despite intensified interest in secondary school applications of Response to Intervention (RTI), research in this area remains scant at the middle school level (Sansosti et al., 2011). The research suggested that a stronger focus needs to target the middle school level in an effort to continue to provide students with targeted instruction

in order to close defined gaps in knowledge, skills and achievement (Sansosti, et al., 2011). This type of change requires teachers to use student data to plan instruction in an effort to assure all students are achieving grade level mastery of the required state standards. Specifically, at the middle school level, this poses a problem in regards to RTI implementation and management of the model related to changes in instructional and collaborative practices (Sansosti, et al., 2011). These are discussed further in this chapter under limitations of the study.

The RTI model ensures that students are not moved through educational systems without sufficient efforts to address their academic struggles (Friedman, 2010). Traditionally, professionals at the secondary level have performed their job functions in isolation, and the RTI model requires more transparency and collaboration. Thus, instructional and collaborative practices in the classroom are crucial components to the success of RTI at the middle school level (Friedman, 2010). All students must receive a rigorous curriculum and must be taught towards mastery of grade-level standards. The magnitude of the problem at the middle school level has been ignored for years, but under the current NCLB legislation, it is now being addressed under the model of RTI, which changes the way teachers use data to drive instructional practices in their classrooms (Friedman, 2010). This study was intended to fill the gaps in current research on the implementation of RTI at the middle school level by exploring the practices of teachers as they go through the process over a 2-year period.

Research Questions

Two research questions were used to guide the data collection and data analysis process for this research. Since the purpose of the research was an exploration of

how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one middle school in Southern California, the choice was made to only focus on the *instructional practices* and *collaboration* separately, rather than include a central research question to remove potential redundancy in the reporting of the resulting data. The following research questions guided data collection in this study:

R1: How did the implementation of Response to Intervention change instructional practices as perceived by the teachers at one middle school in Southern California??

R2: How did the implementation of Response to Intervention change collaborative practices as perceived by teachers at one middle school in Southern California?

The first research question emphasized instructional practices and how these K-12 middle school teachers perceived them after the implementation of the RTI model. An interpretative qualitative design was chosen to maximize the researcher's ability to be part of the data collection process (Merriam, 2009) and increase the potential for rich, in-depth data to tell the story of these participants during the implementation of the RTI model.

Data sources were used to answer this question consisting of an online teacher questionnaire, teacher interviews with a smaller sample, researcher observations in a field journal, and artifact analysis focusing on the instructional practices only. The second research question stressed the collaborative practices and behaviors of these K-12 teachers in the participating middle school. The same data sources were used, but the focus was on collaboration.

Research Methodology

A qualitative methodology was selected to answer the research questions in this study in an attempt to look at one middle school in Southern California and the implementation of RTI. Yin (2009) addressed qualitative studies as an approach that finds a way to tell a story or an understanding that some people have learned. He explained how certain situations affect how qualitative studies are conducted. Yin also noted that the researcher is the primary person that is conducting the study and may or may not conduct the data collection and analysis based on the specifications of the study. A qualitative methodology was selected over a quantitative study for the reason that specific numbers or data are not needed in order to conclude data or variables. There is no RTI data used in relationship to student data on the State Testing Accountability Reports. If such data was added, a mixed-method approach would have been used to support the understanding of the reader.

According to Merriam (2009) qualitative researchers set out to discover or explore the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspective of those involved. Qualitative studies focus on how people interpret and ascribe meaning to experiences in their world. The approach is inductive, and the researcher is the data collection instrument, seeking to focus on meaning and understanding. The result is a thorough and robust description of the process and meaning that people give to a specific phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

A quantitative methodology was not selected as the researcher did not set out to determine cause and effect or predict or describe attributes of a specific population (Merriam, 2009). The rationale for conducting qualitative over a mixed-method or a quantitative study, was based on the premise that the most effective way to evaluate

whether a model is successful is to tell a story based on the derived experiences and meanings assigned to those experiences, from the perspective of middle school teachers as they collaborated to provide response to intervention services to students.

Research Design

An interpretive qualitative design was chosen for this study to explore how middle school teachers implemented a RTI model. According to Merriam (2009) in applied fields such as education, the most frequently used qualitative design is that of a basic, interpretive study. The core attribute of this design is that the researcher studies how participants build reality through interacting with their social environment. Therefore, the researcher attempts to understand the phenomenon as participants experience it (Merriam, 2009). In this study, teachers were selected to participate and provide feedback on how they perceived the implementation of RTI in regards to the implementation of an RTI model at the middle school level. A basic interpretive design was appropriate for this study as it provides crucial qualitative data and tells a unique and substantial storyline not only by the researcher, but the participants living the story each and every day (Merriam, 2009

In phenomenological designs, the focus is on intimate in-depth exploration and description of lived experiences (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). With ethnography, th researcher stresses a prolonged immersion into a culture or situation to describe custom or behaviors of a given group of people, neither of which was the focus of this study, these designs were not chosen (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) recognized that case studies explain or design specific cases or situations using triangulation of data sources for data collection. With narrative designs, researchers present the stories of

individuals, groups or situations/experiences in a detail story-telling format (Merriam, 2009). The problem this study focused on was it was not known how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one underperforming middle school in Southern California. A Likert-scale questionnaire and interviews were used as data sources. Hence, the case study and narrative designs were not appropriate for this study.

This study was conducted by the researcher and an outside facilitator, used practicing teachers and acquired real time feedback on how a RTI model changed perceptions on instructional and collaborative practices in the classroom during the implementation process. The rationale for selecting an interpretative design was to gain an in-depth look at a single school and how the implementation of RTI influenced teacher's perceptions in regards to changes in instructional and collaborative practices. Questionnaires, interviews, and artifact analyses were used as data sources (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). First, an online questionnaire was completed by teachers in order to get teacher feedback regarding the implementation of RTI and its success at the middle school. The online questionnaire was anonymous. Each teacher that participated could complete the questionnaire in a safe place based on their comfort zone. Following the questionnaire, a smaller set of participants was interviewed by an outside facilitator using an emergent RTI framework. Finally, artifacts, consisting of documents specific to RTI and the implementation were reviewed to support whether or not the implementation changes instructional and collaborative practice. It was expected that the implementation of the RTI process would be clarified and the perception of instructional practices and collaboration of teachers could inform this process in this middle school.

Population and Sample Selection

The site selected for this study was an underperforming middle school located in Southern California under, (PI) Program Improvement sanctions by the state and federal government. The population for the study consisted of all middle school teachers in the district who were involved in the implementation of RTI. Twenty-five teachers at the site who were considered highly qualified under NCLB (2001) in all subject areas comprised the sample of the study. All certified teachers at the school site were invited to participate in the study as they had been involved in the implementation of RTI over a 2-year period and had received entry-level training on RTI and PLCs. All teachers were given written notification by a letter to their home address and email. A written consent form including an introduction and detailed steps was provided before teachers agreed to participate. The written consent also included confidentiality measures assured by the research team, which include the researcher and the outside facilitator that protected the participants from any breaches in confidentiality.

All certified teachers at the middle school were recruited to participate in an online questionnaire, which targeted the implementation of RTI and how it influenced their perceptions on changes to instructional and collaborative practices (Appendix A). A smaller sample of six teachers was selected for on-site interviews designed to gain in-depth information on whether the RTI model changed instructional and collaborative practices as perceived by teachers. An interview guide (Appendix B) was used to guide questioning during the interviews. Finally, artifacts were used to map the journey of the implementation. These forms can be found in (Appendix E) of the dissertation.

The data collection process was conducted by the primary researcher with the support of an outside facilitator in order to mitigate researcher bias. The outside facilitator selected for this study held a doctorate from the University of Southern California. He had expertise is in twenty-first century programs and practices and worked with secondary school response to intervention as a teacher and administrator. At the time of the study, he was a program improvement specialist in the district, where he was responsible for middle school RTI. He had extensive experience in transcription as well as qualitative case study interviewing techniques.

In this research, data were acquired from questions initiated by the primary researcher and outside facilitator during the online questionnaire and on-site interviews. These results were disaggregated after the completion of the research portion of the study. The data collection was conducted using questionnaire monkey premium for the online questionnaire and an emergent RTI framework for the on-site interviews. Both the primary researcher and outside facilitator assessed the online questionnaire responses on-site interview data. The validity of these results is intended at this point to be valid as both the primary researcher and outside facilitator, working as an effective team.

Sources of Data

Three sources of data were used to answer the research questions: an online questionnaire, individual interviews, and artifacts. The online questionnaire supported the study in regards to the implementation of RTI and how it influenced teacher perceptions on changes to instructional and collaborative practices were implemented. It was developed by the researcher and consisted of 10 questions related to how teachers felt the introduction of RTI went at the school, how the implementation had changed their

instructional and collaborative practices, as well as how their understanding of RTI had evolved during the initial implementation in the school. The online questionnaire is located in Appendix A of this study.

A smaller group of five teachers was personally interviewed on-site by the outside facilitator. An interview guide (Appendix C) was developed by the researcher and included questions designed to all teachers to further expand on their questionnaire results. The questions focused on how the teachers perceived the implementation of RTI changed instructional and collaborative practices at the school level, in their individual classrooms and in their department over the past two years. A fourth question focused on teacher perspectives of how the implementation of RTI improved student achievement over the past two years. The final question asked teachers to discuss how the implementation of RTI changed their views on whether all students have the ability to learn by changing instructional and collaborative practices at the current middle school over the 2 years.

An artifact analysis was conducted by the researcher in order to identify repetitive patterns in the data and to help develop a thick, rich description of data (Appendix E). This artifact analysis included: California's RTI Model for Implementation, district professional development documentation, school site professional development documentation, guidelines for implementation at the middle school, RTI teacher on assignment duties, CCT team duties and sample meeting notes, Tier II and III intervention model, master schedule documents, credit recovery guidelines, contracts, parents letters, RTI brochure, progress monitoring data and forms and RTI student placement forms (Tier II and II).

Validity

Multiple sources of data were used in the study: a questionnaire, interviews, and artifact analysis. The questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed and evaluated by an expert panel, the members of which had extensive experience in the implementation of RTI, for expert validation. One member had a doctoral degree related to the topic under study and worked at the central office in the district. The second member of the expert panel was an RTI specialist in the school district, and the third member had extensive knowledge and practical experience implementing RTI and implemented the on-site interview process in the second phase of the data collection. Additionally, member checking was used to verify that participants felt comfortable that the interview transcripts reflected the answers given.

Reliability

Reliability in this study mirrored the validity in regards to putting safeguards in place to assure the researcher followed all guidelines, disclaimers and clear procedures. The reliability of the study was based on these safeguards and clearly showed that the research was viable and worthy of current and future research on the topic of RTI at the middle school level. The purpose of the study was shared with all participating teachers in an effort to assure all teachers had the opportunity to participate. The teachers were given the opportunity to review the online questionnaire questions and individual teacher questions in a direct effort to assure the reliability of the methods. An expert panel that consisted of assistant superintendents, directors and principals within the district where the study was conducted evaluated the data sources used in this study and the reliability. After the completion of the online questionnaire, interview, and artifact analysis, the

panel reviewed all components for accuracy and assurance that the data was true and valid.

Data Collection Procedures

Before data collection commenced, permission was secured from the Institutional Review Board at Grand Canyon University (Appendix G) and from the superintendent of the school district (Appendix F). All certified teachers at the middle school were invited to participate in the study. Data collection included an online questionnaire, interviews, and artifact analysis to assist in the reliability and validity of data acquired. Teachers received an invitation to participate in the study and received information in advance regarding the specific procedures of the study that included an outline of participation requirements and an informed consent form (Appendix E). Once those teachers at the middle school volunteered to participate in the study, they were asked to complete the online questionnaire. Teachers were asked to submit a safe email address where all pertinent information would be sent. Teachers were given access to the questionnaire via the SurveyMonkey site through an email with their username, password and specific instructions. They then posted their responses to the questionnaire questions online by the deadline set by the primary researcher. A 2-week window was set to complete the questionnaire.

After the online questionnaires were completed, a preliminary analysis was conducted in preparation for the onsite interview that followed. Five teachers participated in individual interviews at the school site. The interviews were conducted by the outside facilitator who posed questions related to how the implementation of RTI influenced and molded teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices. Teacher

interviews were recorded using a Google application on an I-Phone and then transcribed into written form. The audiotapes were transcribed by the outside facilitator who had extensive experience in placing response trends into properties and categories directly related to the emergent RTI framework and specifically how they related to the online questionnaire results. Additionally, several artifacts were compiled throughout the study to support both the online questionnaire and teacher interviews. Artifacts (Appendix E) provided sample documentation of how the district implemented RTI over a 2-year period.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher organized all interviews into a Word document. He also collected all questionnaires for review. Following all five interviews and transcriptions, a coding system, developed through the observation of the RTI framework, was used to separate the data into categories. The first data collection source was a Likert-scale questionnaire designed to ask teachers simple questions about their perceptions of the RTI process at this school. Percentages were calculated for questions based on the number of teachers who responded to each of the five answer categories: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Additionally, five teachers participated in individual interviews designed to gain in-depth information on whether and how the RTI model changed their instructional and collaborative practices. Artifacts were also analyzed to identify key phases of the RTI implementation process (Appendix D).

Since the researcher was principal at the school used in the study, an outside facilitator was used to conduct interviews. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The facilitator used the Tesch (1990) coding process as a model for

organizing the data from the interviews, and gathering insight into teachers' perceptions. This process involves the researcher in a methodical process of analyzing qualitative and word-based data (Tesch, 1990). First, the interview transcripts were read in light of the two research questions to determine where and how teachers addressed the constructs of instructional practices and collaboration in their interview responses (Tesch, 1990) in order to answer each of the two research questions. During the second phase of data analysis, the transcripts were again read to gain a deeper understanding of the responses, and notes were made in the margins of the transcripts (Tesch, 1990). Participant responses were highlighted as well. Key questions were also noted and recorded in transcripts.

The next step of the coding process included compiling a list of working codes from the transcripts based on words and phrases that had been highlighted and notes that had been made in the margins. Initial codes were developed followed by the facilitator creating a coding system that tied these topics back to the original categories identified in Steps 1-2. Finally, themes were developed from each code.

The final research tool used to identify recurring patterns in the data was the artifact analysis. These artifacts specific to the implementation of RTI were directly related to changes in instructional and collaborative practices. They included program monitoring reports, growth reports from intervention classes, and RTI observations (See Appendix C) for all artifacts. These were not included in the data analysis for to develop themes, but supplemented the themes to set the context for how staff used these processes and procedures during the implementation of RTI. All the resulting themes and data analysis procedures were then applied to the two research questions focusing on how the

implementation of Response to Intervention changed teacher perception of instructional practices (R1) and collaborative practices (R2) at this middle school in Southern California.

Ethical Considerations

In every research study, it is crucial that the researcher protects the participants and build a trusting relationship. No participant recruitment or data collection began until GCU IRB approval was acquired (Appendix G). The research was conducted under the guidelines of the Belmont Report. The online questionnaire was anonymous and the results were only accessible by the researcher. SurveyMonkey, online software tool for data collection, was used for the online questionnaire and provided a safe environment for teachers to respond without any such pressures. Potential ethical concerns included confidentiality issues regarding the participants sharing questionnaire responses with other participants or outside teachers involved in the implementation of the model. All efforts were made during the instruction phase to assure the participants understood their role in supporting the study.

During the data collection process all data were retrieved using on a personal computer that was password protected and only known by the researcher. Raw data from the questionnaire and interviews will be kept for a period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. There was a potential for researcher bias due to the researcher's position as an administrator of the school where the research is being conducted. This was the primary reason for the use of the outside facilitator during the data collection period. All efforts were taken to assure there was no researcher bias and the study was driven strictly by the

perception of teachers in regard to perceived changes in instructional and collaborative practices during the implementation of RTI.

Limitations

The following limitations were present in this study. A select group of participants of this study were involved in the initial implementation of RTI and some still lacked a full understanding of the model. Some of the participants failed to engage in the implementation of the model based on differences of opinion. The implementation of the model was a new concept to participants who may have needed more time to understand and engage in a new and intense process. The study was geographically limited to one middle school in the school district. The research design dictated the need for a small sample of participants. The research was also limited by the fact that the researcher was an administrator at the site where data collection occurred. While an outside facilitator conducted interviews at the site and the online questionnaire was anonymous, the teachers may have felt pressured to respond in a way so as to please the administrator.

Summary

The rationale for conducting this qualitative interpretative study was to gain an in-depth look at a single middle school and how the implementation of RTI influenced teacher perceptions in regard to changes in instructional and collaborative practices. Merriam (2009 and Yin (2009) supported the use of qualitative research when the goal is to acquire an in-depth understanding of an experience, or situation, such as the implementation of the RTI model, in the participant's own words. Therefore a qualitative interpretative design was chosen to gain a clearer understanding of this experience. Three

data sources were used in this research to assist in the validity and reliability of the information acquired (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). These data sources were: an online questionnaire administered to each of the twelve participants, individual interviews with five of the participants conducted by the outside facilitator, and artifacts.

After site permissions were secured, all teachers were invited to participate in the study and were provided with the specific procedures and requirements for participation. The participants either completed an online questionnaire or on-site interviews conducted by an outside facilitator. To bring completion to the data collection, artifacts were compiled and reviewed as well. The participants were given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire on their own time in their own comfort zone. The on-site interviews were conducted by an outside facilitator to assure the results are valid without bias by the researcher.

Ethical considerations were taken in regards to the protection of the study participants. There were several limitations in this study. The participants in the implementation of RTI still lacked full understanding of the model. Some participants failed to engage in the RTI model based on difference in opinions. The study was geographically limited to one middle school and the research design dictated the need for a small sample of participants. In Chapter 4 data collection and analysis is conducted related to the study's methodology and research questions. Descriptive data, data analysis and data collection are conducted giving the study its results based on whether the implementation of RTI changed instructional and collaborative practices at a middle school as perceived by teachers.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to explore how the implementation of response to intervention (RTI) changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one middle school in Southern California. This chapter gives a detailed account of the study results and how the findings answered each of the two research questions focusing on the instructional practices (R1) and collaborative practices and behaviors (R2). The data collection included interviews, an online questionnaire, and an artifact analysis of key RTI documents. These documents detailed the processes the targeted middle school used over their 3-year journey. Study participants were conveniently selected based on their level of engagement with RTI, specifically their level of engagement relating to instructional and collaborative practices. This chapter presents descriptive data of the teacher participants and middle school setting, along with the procedures used to analyze the data, and the results of the study.

Descriptive Data

Setting. The site selected for this study was an underperforming middle school located in Southern California under (PI) Program Improvement sanctions by the state and federal government. At the time of the study, approximately 800 students attended the school. Figure 1 shows the student enrollment by ethnicity. The student population was over 60% White, approximately 30% Latino or Hispanic, and 4.7% African American (http://www.morongo.k12.ca.us/).

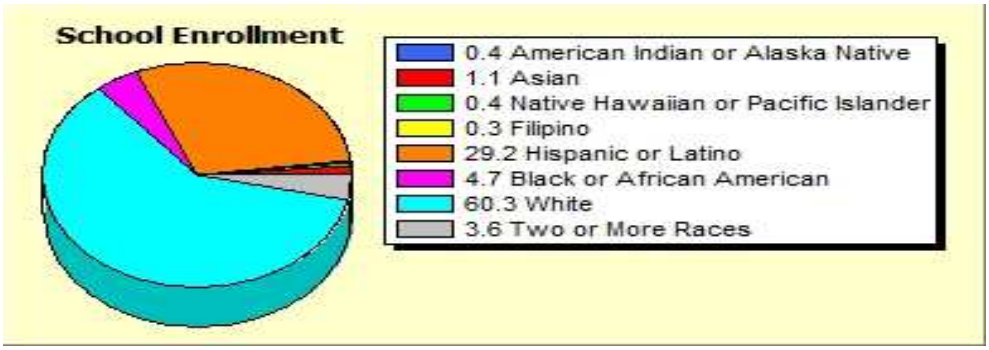

Figure 1. Student Enrollment at the Target Middle School.

Middle school RTI implementation history. The RTI model was first introduced in the target school district as an elementary school initiative with the intention to move to the secondary level in the future. It took 7 years before the middle school in the study made the decision to deploy the RTI process in 2010. During the initial meeting, the staff determined that response to intervention was a model that could move the school, teachers, and students toward greater academic success. In the beginning stages, the focus was on changing school culture, because the school lacked a clear common vision with regard to RTI, collaboration and student success. Through observations and reflection the staff noted gaps in instructional practices and a lack of collaboration among teachers between and across grade-levels, which resulted in low student performance.

At a meeting held early in Year 1, teachers were introduced to the RTI process, which had already been implemented at the elementary school level. Those in attendance agreed that the use of multiple measures of student data and consistent progress monitoring were needed in order to monitor student academic progress. A Coordinated Care Team (CCT) was established at the school to provide the support needed to identify

elements of the model used as the elementary school level and then to implement appropriate strategies of RTI at the middle school site.

Nature of RTI at the middle school. Teachers at the target middle school used the RTI model to gather data and to monitor how students are responding to Tier I instruction. Teachers provided differentiated instruction during a *Universal Access* time provided during the school day. All students in the school received 60 minutes of core instruction and 30 minutes of Universal Access time devoted to differentiated instruction each day.

When students failed to respond to core instruction, they were referred to a team of educators for further discussion and research. The CCT team reviewed multiple measures of data and made decisions whether a student was moved to Tier II for more intensive instruction. Teachers at the middle school received five full-day PLC days on 1 contractual hour per month to review student data from formative and summative assessments by department. The professional collaboration during these opportunities was intended to drive universal access time devoted to differentiated instruction.

Sample. All certified teachers at the site met the classifications of highly qualified in all subject areas as outlined by NCLB (2001). Highly qualified teachers in California must meet several requirements, which include an ELL (English Language Learner) certification. They must also meet a point system based on educational requirement, or they must be highly qualified by the site administrator through formal observations. All certified teachers at the school received entry level training on RTI and professional learning communities. Twelve teachers, three males and nine females, ranging in age from 26 to 56, participated in the study. The youngest teacher interviewed had been

teaching for 7 years, while the oldest had been teaching for 20 years. These 12 teachers completed an online questionnaire. All the teachers in the school district where this study took place had taught at the middle school level, with the exception of two teachers. All teachers were Caucasian, which is consistent with the demographics of the student population. Table 1 includes demographic information for the teachers who completed the questionnaire.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Teachers Who Participated in Interviews

Teacher	Grade Taught	Subject Taught	Gender	Age	Years of Experience
Participant 1	7, 8	Math	Female	35	11
Participant 2	7	Math	Female	26	7
Participant 3	7, 8	SPED/RTI	Female	40	15
Participant 4	8	English Intervention	Male	37	12
Participant 5	8	English	Female	56	20

Data Analysis Procedures

Three sources of data were used for the study: an online questionnaire, interviews, and artifact analysis. The first data collection source was a Likert-scale questionnaire (Appendix A) designed to ask teachers about their perceptions of the RTI process at this school. Percents were calculated for questionnaire data based on the number of teachers who responded to each of the five answer categories: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

Additionally, five teachers participated in individual interviews designed to gain in-depth information on whether and how the RTI model changed their instructional and collaborative practices. An interview guide (Appendix C) was used to facilitate

questioning during the interviews. Since the researcher was principal at the school used in the study, an outside facilitator was used to conduct interviews to mitigate researcher bias during the collection of these data. The outside facilitator held a doctorate from the University of Southern California and had expertise in twenty-first century programs and practices. Additionally, this facilitator worked with secondary schools during the implementation of response to intervention as a teacher and administrator. At the time of the study, he was a program improvement specialist in the district, and responsible for middle school response to intervention. He also had extensive experience in transcription as well as in qualitative research interviewing techniques.

The interviews were audio taped and transcribed with participant permission. The facilitator and researcher used the Tesch (1990) coding process as a model for organizing the data from the interviews, and gathering insight into teachers' perceptions. This process involves the researcher in a methodical process of analyzing qualitative and word-based data (Tesch, 1990). First, the interview transcripts were read in light of the two research questions to determine where and how teachers addressed the constructs of instructional practices and collaboration in their interview responses (Tesch, 1990).

During the second phase of data, the transcripts were again read to gain a deeper understanding of the responses, and notes were made in the margins of the transcripts (Tesch, 1990). Participant responses were highlighted as well. Key questions were also noted and recorded in transcripts. The next step of the coding process included compiling a list of working codes from the transcripts based on words and phrases that had been highlighted and notes that had been made in the margins. Following the identification of these codes, the facilitator created a coding system that tied these topics back to the

original categories identified in Steps 1-2. Finally, themes were developed from each code. Artifacts were also analyzed to identify key phases of the RTI implementation process (Appendix D). The purpose and use of each artifact was described.

Questionnaire. Twelve teachers completed a 10-item questionnaire designed to gain their perspectives regarding how they felt the introduction of RTI went at the school, how the implementation had changed their instructional and collaborative practices, as well as how their understanding of RTI had evolved during the initial implementation in the school. The full online questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. The questionnaire results are presented in Table 2. In this table, for each questionnaire question, the percentage of each response for each category was calculated, and the highest percentages indicated teacher agreement or disagreement.

Table 2

Questionnaire Results

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Do you feel you were effectively introduced to the RTI (Response to Intervention) model over the past two years?	3 (25%)	9(75%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2. Do you feel you were effectively introduced to the CCT (Coordinated Care Team) process over the past two years?	2(17%)	9(75%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
3. Do you feel the implementation of RTI has changed instructional practices related to your classroom over the past two years?	4 (33%)	7 (58%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
4. Do you feel the implementation of RTI has changed collaborative practices related to your specific department team over the past two years?	3 (25%)	6 (50%)	3 (25%)	0 (0%)
5. After the two years of implementation, do you feel you have a better understanding of the RTI model?	3 (25%)	8 (67%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
6. After the two years of Implementation, do you feel you have a better understanding of the CCT process?	3(25%)	7 (58%)	2 (17%)	0 (0%)
7. Do you feel you have played a role in the RTI process over the past two years?	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)
8. Do you feel you have played a role in the CCT (Coordinated Care Team) process over the past two years?	2 (17%)	6 (50%)	3 (25%)	1 (8%)
9. Over the past two years, do you feel that all your students in Tier I of RTI were mastering grade-level standards?	0 (0%)	5 (42%)	7 (50%)	0 (0%)
10. Over the past two years, have you had students in your classroom that should have been receiving Tier II services through RTI?	2 (17%)	10 (83%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Interviews. In addition to questionnaires, five teachers participated in individual interviews. Initial codes from interviews included: student data, teacher conversations, professional development, benchmarks, levels of mastery, best practices, professional learning communities, assessments, Coordinated Care Team, master schedule, and collaboration. Following the identification of these codes, the facilitator and researcher created a coding system that tied these topics back to instructional practices and collaboration. Next categories were developed from these codes. These included: Collaboration (implementation –initial and during), classroom structures and master

schedule, Universal Access, teacher knowledge of the process, professional development, instructional practices, teacher attitudes and beliefs. Based on the results of the interviews and questionnaire the five themes were developed: 1). RTI frameworks and structures, 2) efficacy of implementation, 3) student achievement, 4) teacher attitudes and beliefs about RTI, and 5) instructional practices.

Artifact analysis. Artifact analysis revealed essential documents and processes that were used during the RTI implementation. Several documents were developed and used by the school team as they worked to implement the RTI process over 2 years. These included the Academic Program Survey, Essential Program Components, the RTI Pyramid Model and the Individual Learning Plan. In addition to key documents, the school staff also implemented several processes that were central to the implementation of RTI. These included the creation of a Coordinated Care Team, progress monitoring, scheduling of intervention time and Universal Access. These artifacts are discussed in more detail in the following themes.

Results

In this section, the results of the study are presented. First, each of the five themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis from the online questionnaire in which all 12 of the teachers participated and the interviews with five teachers are provided. Second, the data results are aligned with each of the two research questions showing how they were answered and supported.

Theme 1. RTI frameworks and structures. Several sources of data were used to inform this theme. Teacher questionnaire and interview results will be discussed in this section along with artifacts that were developed by the school. Over the period of 2 years,

the school implemented several different structures and frameworks to more efficiently implement RTI. These included artifacts, the CCT, IPASS, leveling of students, master schedule and Universal Access. These key essential documents were analyzed as part of the artifact collection in this study. These documents formed the structural foundation of the implementation of RTI at this middle school. The following definitions relate to the research questions and further proved evidence of the artifacts as they related to this study.

Essential documents (Artifacts). Several documents were developed and used by the school team as they worked to implement the RTI process over 2 years. These included the Academic Program Survey, Essential Program Components, the RTI Pyramid Model and the Individual Learning Plan.

Academic Program Survey. One of the first key tasks was to administer the state required APS (Academic Program Survey). The survey was designed to allow the school to conduct a self-evaluation of instructional and collaborative practices being implemented and to ensure the master schedule provided the time needed for implementation of the three tiers of RTI. Once the survey results were analyzed by the administration and leadership team, a comparison was done in relationship to the EPC's (Essential Program Components) required by the state.

Essential Program Components. The purpose of the EPC's was to get important feedback from the administration and staff, which then led the completion of the EPC, which is a document completed in the infancy stages of the implementation of the RTI model. The EPC is a roadmap for the middle school to address a variety of issues including the use of standards-based instruction, meeting required instructional minutes,

instructional pacing, site-administrator training, fully credentialed and highly qualified teachers in every classroom, professional development, progress monitoring, teacher collaboration activities and fiscal instructional support. In essence, the EPC is the road map of the school and how the RTI model was implemented.

RTI Pyramid Model. The pyramid model, which drives RTI, was revisited on a regular basis at professional learning community opportunities. It was also posted in every classroom. The pyramid included all three tiers of the model.

Individual Learning Plan. During the CCT meeting and discussion of the student learner and multiple measures of data, an ILP, Individual learning plan is created during the meeting with all parties present. This learning plan includes Tier II or Tier III intensive intervention and who will conduct these interventions. This plan is shared with all teachers who teach the student under the progress monitoring of the RTI teacher.

Essential processes. In addition to key essential documents, the school staff also implemented several processes that were central to the implementation of RTI. These included the creation of a Coordinated Care Team, progress monitoring, scheduling of intervention time and Universal Access.

Coordinated Care Team. The Coordinated Care Team was created in the early stages as a group comprised of educators that had an interest in the learning of each student at the middle school. The team included the school administration, RTI teacher, school counselors, school psychologist, classroom teachers, parents, and students. The CCT team was the first group on campus to begin the crucial progress-monitoring component of RTI that assures all students are responding to core instruction and assuring students are properly placed within the three tiers.

Progress monitoring Tiers 1 – 3. All students were progress monitored during Tier I core instruction to assure they were responding to the grade level standards. Students that failed to respond were referred to the CCT for further evaluation. If the entire team agreed that the student was not responding to the Tier I instruction, the student was moved into Tier II and provided more intensive intervention using a research-based program for English/language arts and math, or both. During Tier II the student was progress monitored by the CCT and evaluated whether he or she was responding to the intervention. If the student failed to respond to Tier II, they were evaluated for Tier III intervention, which was very individualized to the student's needs. If Tier III failed, the students were referred for special education testing. The purpose of special education testing was to rule out whether the student has a learning disability or other factors impede the progress of learning at grade level.

Master schedule. A committee of school administrators and teacher leaders met in the early stages of the implementation to build a master schedule that met the needs of every student on campus. All students received Tier I core instruction for 60 minutes with 30 minutes of universal access where instruction was differentiated based on student data. In addition to core instruction, those students not responding to Tier I were placed in a research-based intervention program in English Language Arts (Read 180) or mathematics (I-Pass). These intervention classes replaced the student's elective class above and beyond the core instruction. In order to implement such a master schedule the passing period was reduced from 7 minutes to 3 minutes in order to host the 30 minutes of universal access attached to the core.

IPASS. In her interview, Cassandra specifically noted how IPASS helped the math teachers collaborate in order to help students graduate from this program. Cassandra stated,

> They (the students) were in IPASS, and we showed them additional tips with the Math. It became motivational to move out of IPASS. Sometimes, during our prep, and sometimes, when we would talk about the students, and sometimes we would change our teaching approach, and sometimes, when they would exit IPASS, they would not only move beyond strategic but go into a regular, benchmark class. Last year I think we had three or four students. We were able to exit them from IPASS, and they were not in IPASS this year. There were a couple who did study island last year. There were some who missed, and they did it on their own. That was what we did for those kids last year.

Lisa noted the benefits of the master schedule, to include IPASS for students. She stated, "The classes are organized in a double period now, as well as adding IPASS to some of the students' schedules, so they are doing everything for three periods, instead of two." Lisa further pointed out that while the schedule helped students in some subjects, she feared their achievement might drop in others: "Probably with the double math classes and English classes that has helped. I know it has helped with the math scores, but I'm sure we will see a decline in science and history." While she had not had a great deal of exposure to RTI, Renee felt that the schedule posed a benefit: "I think it has a lot to do with structuring of classes. Being a benchmark teacher, I don't think I have as many issues, or see as many issues as other teachers might."

Michael, an English teacher, felt the schedule was a detriment to the implementation of RTI, primarily due to the scheduling of students. He stated:

> This scheduling is one of the complaints of the English department. The counselors are not looking at all facets of the student for placement. How they are moving students by ability should happen, but we have had discussions about where the cutoff is. Should the kids who are on the rise be able to be with the other students, or no? RTI, what it does, is basically in my opinion, after the fact. Here we have placed all these students, but then we start to see other things, for example, there is a student who might do better in an advanced class. I totally believe in leveling the classes; some teachers don't like that. If you are a teacher who has been given all lower level kids, it is a harder job. At the same time, for me personally, the lower levels seem to get more accomplished. When a kid goes from 270 to a 340, the reward for teachers is there. Some teachers see it as a punishment; oh, you didn't give me any of the good students this year so I must not be a good teacher. I see it as this; is RTI used to schedule students where they belong, and after that we track it to make sure the kids are still in the same spot. Should the kids be in this class, or not be in this class, which is why you need somebody doing this job.

Universal Access. With regard to Universal Access, Julissa felt the concept should be further clarified for teachers. This was partially due to the changes in staff that had occurred since initial training Julissa stated, "I see a few people doing the universal access, but there are people who have the wrong ideas on what universal access is."

Theme 2: Efficacy of implementation. The second theme focused on the effectiveness with which the RTI process had been implemented over the period of 2 years. The codes associated with this theme included: Collaborative practices, teacher knowledge and understanding of the RTI process. While instructional practices are a key part of implementation, they will be presented in an additional theme.

Teacher knowledge of the RTI Process and CCT. Several questionnaire items pertained to this theme. In the first question, teachers were asked about the effectiveness with which they were introduced to the RTI process. Three teachers strongly agreed to this question, nine agreed, whereas none agreed or disagreed. Thus, all perceived the implementation process in a positive light. As noted earlier, teachers were also asked about their introduction to the CCT, the key mechanism for referring students to the RTI process and for monitoring of their progress. The vast majority of teachers (92%) felt this introduction had been effective. Interestingly, one teacher strongly disagreed with this statement. In total, 92% of the teachers responded in a positive manner when asked about the role and methods used by members of the CCT, or team that synchronized the RTI procedures at the campus.

The fifth questionnaire item asked teachers to whether or not their understanding of the RTI model had changed over the 2-year period. Three teachers strongly agreed, eight agreed and one disagreed. No teachers strongly disagreed with this question. Similarly, the sixth item on the questionnaire had teachers rate if they felt their understanding of the CCT process had improved over the two years. Three teachers strongly agreed, seven agreed, two disagreed and none strongly disagreed with the statement. Questionnaire Item 7 asked teachers if they feel they had played a key role in

the RTI process over the 2-year implementation period. Three teachers strongly agreed, 9 agreed and none disagreed with the statement. Questionnaire item 8 asked teachers if they feel they had played a key role in the CCT team over the 2-year implementation period. Two strongly agreed, six agreed, three disagreed and one teacher strongly disagreed. Therefore, teacher reactions related to how their understanding of the RTI and CCT process over a 2-year period were mixed. Still, most had positive opinions of these two frameworks.

Teachers were also asked questions in interviews regarding how their knowledge of RTI had changed from the initial days of the implementation to the current time. One teacher pointed out that the teachers were apprehensive when the process was introduced: She said, "I think initially it was what are you going to make us do now? Initially, I think, we got past that and I think a lot of teachers looked to the program to help and resolve some of the issues in the classroom, learning issues mostly, and/or behavior." In the beginning she noted that teachers struggled with understanding of when to refer students, "I would say there were some (teachers) that didn't know about it; there were some that heavily recommended students. It really depended on teachers. Teachers change, but it really depended on the teacher." This same teacher, though, did not feel the process had affected her work. She did, however, feel that vision impacted the process. Renee stated,

> It has not affected me greatly, personally, because I have not had many students involved in RTI. There have been a few things, assuming this is part of RTI. When I notice something going on with that student in the classroom, it boils down to, not education issues, vision issues. This issue we got resolved, but, regarding education practices in the classroom, I have not had a lot of RTI issues.

Cassandra also discussed her experiences with the initial stages of implementation and her understanding of the way it worked.

> Last year I really wasn't sure what RTI was. It wasn't implemented at the school I'd worked at before, so it was all kind of new to me. I liked that we were able to recommend students to RTI; to say ok, this student is struggling. I even had students last year who were way too advanced for the class he or she was placed in. So, we could intervene appropriately. I think there are some kinks. I don't think there is enough follow up by myself or by counselors, or things aren't getting done in a timely manner. The meetings this year are more spread out than last year, and not as many kids are being talked about as last year. I think that the kids we do get a hold of, we are getting to and we are making a difference. I had several kids last year who needed to be moved up and I could see that there was a change when they were moved. They were doing better in the class. For the students who were doing poorly, it depended on how the kid believed they were doing. Sometimes they felt I'm stupid, so they'd give up altogether, and decide I don't need to make a change. Some of them had fallen even further behind, or been put into Special Education classes, or moved around.

Another teacher, Renee, mentioned that she felt the RTI process needs to continue to grow and expand.

> It doesn't play a large enough role. I believe in the program; I don't hear much about it, even with those teachers that are directly involved in it. I've seen the impact on students. I like the way it's structured. I like the way it targets those individual kids, instead of letting those student slip through the system. That's

> what I see; trying to get to the bottom of why students aren't learning is a huge component.

Collaborative practices. The fourth questionnaire item asked teachers if they felt the implementation of RTI changed the collaborative practices in their specific department team over 2 years. Three teachers strongly agreed with this question, nine agreed, while no teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the question. Teachers also shared their thoughts on how collaboration had changed over the course of the Rti implementation. Lisa mentioned,

> I know this last year we collaborated a lot based on what we were seeing with our test scores. We were trying to share activities, as well as what other practices could be successful in our classroom. This year some of that is still going on, but not as much as last year.

She also mentioned that changes in staff and teacher personalities sometimes reduce levels of collaboration, "New teachers at the school, and there is a teacher on campus that is holding a little bit of resentment towards me. Because of that, she is not collaborating as much as in the past."

Lisa also discussed how teachers collaborated prior to the implementation of RTI.

> Oh, we were always discussing kids. There were a lot of impromptu conversations, not necessarily on our plc days, but we always were talking about, especially with IPASS, we would share information on kids that we mutually had. We had a student that didn't understand a certain concept, and we were bouncing ideas off of each other. We would say this worked in my classroom for this concept, give that a try. The conversations were completely different. They

> seemed to be more focused on the data, more focused on the students. We are trying to get back to that, because that is where we need to be, but we have some outside factors to deal with. The new teachers are a factor to consider, they are, of course, feeling overwhelmed, and our conversations aren't back to where they were.

She further stated,

> Yeah, we were always sharing. I think we had a open door policy; we would go back and forth between rooms. Everybody would pop in, drop an IM to somebody. It seemed like a more flexible, more open to each other, and more open to criticism/suggestions. It just doesn't seem that is quite there yet.
>
> I think over the last two years, there has been a lot of sharing of instructional strategies and practices in the classroom. What I saw before RTI was implemented, I know that I'm taking more of a look at students who are struggling than in the past. I think I've become more focused on the students that are struggling, and I have more time to work with those. I think about what I can do in the classroom to help. If that intervention doesn't work, we have the CCT it can go to. I think there are more opportunities to get more people involved when you talk about RTI.

Renee mentioned that she would like to see a move toward higher levels of collaboration: "I would like it to move in that direction; instead of watching students fail and not understanding why, and determine whether or not it is a learning issue, or a teaching issue, or teaching style issue." Julissa further added her thoughts on teacher collaboration in the school:

> In the past two years, we have gone from a school where we didn't really meet as teams and talk professionally about data, to having regular meetings where we talk about data. We are able to collaborative on things, for example, in history. We got together, and we actually talked about what we were teaching. We tried to make sure that the standards were relevant, and the same thing with Math. I've been a part of that PLC as well.

With regard to the current status of collaboration, Julissa stated,

> I think the collaborations are getting more effective. I think, at the beginning, people really didn't know how it was going. There might have been a lot of downtime, but now that people know what is effective, they are able to get more accomplished." In my experience, and maybe this experience is not typical because of my job, I hear a lot of conversations going on because I am involved with different departments. I guess at the Math PLC I would go as a Math teacher, and I would talk to other teachers outside of the PLCs.

Cassandra also discussed teacher collaboration. She mentioned how change in staff caused changes in collaboration.

> I think I was the only new teacher last year; this year we have three new teachers. There are two brand new teachers; they are trying to be caught up with curriculum, and the day-to-day things of being a teacher. They are not as cognoscente as to what is going on with the students. It took me awhile last year and I had to get in and get settled and know the procedures. RTI seemed like an afterthought. First, I talked to my colleagues about it, and then I asked what do I do? I'm not sure if the new teachers don't know the next step, or if they don't

know what would qualify a student for RTI. Maybe that is the reality of being a new teacher and not knowing what to do.

Cassandra also pointed out that initial collaboration was high, and was waning during Year 2.

Regarding the collaboration of teachers, I didn't feel like we were collaborating on RTI. I don't feel we are really collaborating. It is solely about data, not kids, solely curriculum. Based on a test, how did your kids do? It is not about individual students. I have students who moved to other classrooms, and I asked about the student. The response is that they are doing ok. Other kids come to me; now that I have them, how are they doing know? There is no real conversation on whether or not students are improving, or what is working? I don't think there is much collaboration on RTI with teachers. As a department last year, we talked about movement with the students a lot. We would say to each other that we were thinking about recommending this student to the CCT. And then, we would ask other teachers, what do you think? We would do this before we would take it to the CCT team, before we would take it to _____, before we even changed anything. We would talk to each other, and get a feel for what we thought before we would change anything. This year it doesn't seem like we talk about much. We just have a student showing up, and the student tells us I'm coming from so and so. We ask, oh, why? The student responds with well, I'm not really sure. So there seems to be a small miscommunication. There are a couple of students I have been heavily involved with, and I have provided the reason why he or she needs to move? I provide the data on him or her. As teachers we aren't talking

> about it as much as we did last year, and that is something we need to work on and change as a Math department. Typically, we are moving them from Math class to Math class, so we really need to know what is going on with each student.

Michael discussed how collaboration posed somewhat of a challenge:

> I've seen some teachers who don't want to be involved in collaboration, and some teachers who have taken it too far. These teachers are all about data and collaboration. I'm kind of in the middle. I want to share what I've learned, and I want to learn from others, however does this mean I'm going to spend x amount of hours each week collaborating with teachers, probably not.

Michael continued:

> I've always felt as if we are combustible, however we are, and we have been doing intervention over the years. We just haven't had a formal name for RTI. We do have some issues where everyone wants to have their say. The collaboration this past year was not as good as it could have been because it was personal. It is not about whether a teacher is right or wrong, which is taking things personally. Overall it is always helpful for a program like RTI to come in to a school and tell teachers this is how you do instruction, and there are the steps, and it builds this collaboration. We have had our issues over other things such as the tests and how things work.

Michael commented that collaboration involved administrative leadership.

> . . . it directly motivates the administrator to make sure everyone has the data and collaboration is going to happen. We are all professionals, and when I see you have ten students who have a certain problem, how can I help with this problem.

> RTI is pushing the collaboration. Well, in our department, we are all motivated to do our best. We all have our share of differences on how to do that, but knowing the core curriculum, knowing here is what we need to do, here are the standards, and how do we get there. The conversations on how to get the students there are helpful.

Theme 3: Student achievement. During interviews and on the questionnaires, teachers indicated varying opinions about how the implementation of RTI had influenced student learning outcomes.

Tier 1 and 2 interventions. Questionnaire Item 9 asked teachers if they felt that all of their students in Tier I of RTI were mastering grade level standards after two years of implementation. None of the questionnaire respondents agreed strongly with this statement indicating some of their students were not mastering grade level standards. Five responded agree, seven responded that they disagreed with this statement, and none responded that they strongly disagreed. Thus, even though the school had been implementing Tier I interventions for students for two years, the teachers still felt that many students were struggling to perform on grade level with respect to the content standards.

Questionnaire item 10 asked teachers if they had students in their classroom that they felt should have been receiving Tier II services through RTI. Two teachers strongly agreed, 10 agreed, and no teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed to this statement. Overall, teachers reported that they felt students needed more Tier II level interventions. Teachers further reported that the implementation had been positive, but they did not

have enough time for professional development. With respect to professional development Renee mentioned:

> We have had some introduction to RTI. I would like to know more about it.Just through our initial training; just through the forms we get. If you have a student you want to recommend, and I'm guilty with the one student I had concerns with, I should have formally filled out the forms and started the process. It was still taken care of still addressed -We have had some introduction to RTI I would like to know more about it. Initially, it was two teachers from an elementary school who came over and briefly told us about the program. It sounded great, and it sounded intense. I saw the implementation of the program here, which I'm sure it's challenging and very different from elementary. You have so many students to address. I'm sure that it doesn't have as much impact as elementary school, because of the number of kids. I also think the motivation of the kids. I think there is a component of the student and teacher, and I think you have to go back to the home and the age group intervention students.

Michael shared a specific example of how an instructional program implemented through RTI helped improve student learning:

> Have I seen impact? Yes, here's a great example. One student I had last year, and I have this year again in READ 180, who doesn't want to bother doing any school work, and who is getting horrible grades; he has been involved in here in Math, He came to me, and he asked me if he could go to the library and get another book. He showed me the book, and this is the kid who never cracks a book. He checked out a book, and he read the whole book. If this isn't RTI working, I don't know what it is. This was a kid who had no value for education, and he is now

> reading for enjoyment. It is stuff like the small things, such as kids feeling positive about themselves and having a small bit of success that makes the difference. They've spent their whole career with failure, but having people like you and other people who tweak or change a little thing here or there, makes a world of difference. I gave him a recommendation for another book. We aren't going to get everybody, but if our goal is to bring everybody up as much as we can, we will reach them.

Lisa pointed out how she now had extra instructional time and said,

> I definitely think it has improved student achievement, especially in my classroom. I know that being able to spend more time on concepts, as well as go back and reteach, and do a little bit of extension on the concepts, is helping my students. My students seem to be grasping the math better than before. There were some difficulties with our general math classes only having one class period, which we don't have this year, so I think that will definitely help out.

Theme 4: Teacher attitudes and beliefs about RTI. Teachers were vocal concerning their beliefs about student learning and RTI. Renee said,

> I believe all students can learn, but you have to know their learning style and you have to know the other barriers in the learning process. I believe a teacher has to look at the student and adapt their teaching style to meet the needs of all students. It's hard to do, some teachers do that, and some teachers don't.

Cassandra mentioned, "I've always held the view that all students can learn. Implementing RTI has reaffirmed my belief that there might just be something else I can't give them right now in class." Lisa discussed how the RTI process, while overwhelming

for teachers at times, helped them focus on the job at hand, which was to improve student performance. She stated,

> I think some teachers might be overwhelmed with it, because it is something extra to be worried about. For myself, though, it has been very helpful because I can focus on teaching what students need. I am no longer saying here is what I'm going to teach, because that is what I've been doing over the past so many years. I think some teachers believe RTI is overwhelming and others, like myself, have made it a priority, and it has helped me focus more on what I need to do with the CST and getting the kids to mastery in math.

Julissa, a special education teacher, did not believe that RTI had changed her views, but noted that some teachers still struggled with the implementation of the process, even after two years:

> Since I'm a Special Ed teacher, I think all students can learn. RTI has not changed my views, because I do believe all students can learn. We just have to reach the students in different ways. I've been in some classrooms where they are still stuck. Everybody is in their own spot of figuring out what to do. Like everything else, it takes people longer to get there than others. Everyone is moving in that direction, but you probably still have those people who are still deciding whether or not they are going to do it or not. It has changed teachers' views and teachers' instruction, and, as far as looking at student grades, that is more subjective. We are still not at that point. I think that some people are not going to change, and they are going to move on or do something else.

Michael voiced positive feelings towards RTI:

> I see the implementation of RTI as a positive thing. We are tracking students, not by demographics, by what they bring to the table as a student. When we see different levels of students, and how they operate, we are able to pinpoint the weaknesses they have. Since we've done this the last two years, I personally think it is a positive thing. We are moving towards every kid having a level of mastery that they need. This movement doesn't mean the same kid who is advanced and the same kid who is in strategic is going to have the same level of mastery, but can we raise each of those students up to another level.

Theme 5. Instructional practices. Teachers were given the opportunity to discuss how the implementation of RTI had influenced their instructional practices. Responses to this theme included use of data to inform instruction and student learning. Codes aligned with theme 5 are changes in instruction and data-driven decisions

Changes in instruction. The third questionnaire item asked teachers if they thought the implementation of RTI had changed their classroom instructional practices. Four teachers responded strongly agree, seven responded agree, one responded disagree and none responded with strongly disagree. Again, 92% felt that the RTI process had changed the way they delivered instruction in their individual classrooms.

Cassandra highlighted additional instructional opportunities that were offered to students and how the extra help improve student learning.

> Their (the student's) scores were slowly improving, and then we started tutoring with them. We did after school tutoring on Thursday nights. The one small group of kids would come on Thursdays, and (we) were working with them. They were

> in IPASS, and we showed them additional tips with the Math. It became motivational to move out of IPASS. Sometimes, during our prep, and sometimes, when we would talk about the students, and sometimes we would change our teaching approach, and sometimes, when they would exit IPASS, they would not only move beyond strategic but go into a regular, benchmark class. Last year I think we had three or four students. We were able to exit them from IPASS, and they were not in IPASS this year.

Lisa further discussed how instruction had changed and how the teachers were trying to make concepts being taught relevant:

> In my classroom, I think it has changed my instructional practices, whether I am taking the extra time to focus on individual students, or that I'm focusing on students who are struggling with concepts. I have that extra time to challenge some students, remediate concepts for others, and differentiate instruction more than in the past. There have been some teachers that have used math games, and that goes back to some of the more basic math concepts, to redo things. I know that there was a teacher that did groups in the math department, as well, so we have created hands on activities. I've found a real life application for my Algebra students to use to reinforce one of the concepts we were using. I used this activity to tie it into everyday life. It had to do with counting their pulses at a resting rate, and then they sat for a few minutes and did it again. The activity had to do with graphing, the graphing chapter, so they worked in partners and did that activity. To give the students something hands on, rather than me being at the front saying

here's how we can find our own data, it works better. Also, to tie real life into what I was doing in the classroom made a difference.

Lisa also mentioned:

I think over the last two years, there has been a lot of sharing of instructional strategies and practices in the classroom. What I saw before RTI was implemented, I know that I'm taking more of a look at students who are struggling than in the past. I think I've become more focused on the students that are struggling, and I have more time to work with those. I think about what I can do in the classroom to help. If that intervention doesn't work, we have the CCT it can go to. I think there are more opportunities to get more people involved when you talk about RTI.

Cassandra discussed some classroom management strategies she had used to improve her instruction.

Once a student has a file, and we are working with them, I try to make sure I target them in class and follow up in class. They were referred, and so what can I do to help? Can I change their seats, let them work by themselves, modify their homework. Can I speak with them and ask, "If you can just do this, and show me you are trying, I can accept that. I try to make sure I am asking everyone in the class questions, so everyone answers questions. I want all of them to feel they are a part of the class, and they don't want to feel like an outsider.

Data-driven decisions. Several teachers pointed out that use of data informed and improved student learning. Julissa mentioned:

> I am thinking the implementation of RTI has improved student achievement, because it is the idea of looking at data and changing instruction. Well, I would have to say, since we were in program improvement, there is nothing else we can really attribute to changing that except for what we have been doing with RTI. I am thinking the implementation of RTI has improved student achievement, because it is the idea of looking at data and changing instruction.

Renee iterated that she thought the use of RTI and data helped teachers focus on individual student needs: "I've seen the impact on students. I like the way it's structured. I like the way it targets those individual kids, instead of letting those student slip through the system. That's what I see; trying to get to the bottom of why students aren't learning is a

Cassandra pointed out that the use of data helped teachers more effectively pinpoint student needs and current achievement levels:

> I think one of the important things is, especially for students that are misplaced or are more advanced, how we thought they were. I've seen changes in those students. They have a completely different attitude; they go to a higher level. They realize they can do it and it becomes motivational for them. They do better. I saw several students last year, and by the end of the year, they were different children.

Cassandra, Lisa's teaching colleague, echoed her comments:

> Looking at last year, specifically, and the students we did move, and refer to RTI, we did notice an improvement in their performance and test scores. Leeah and I would look back at their tests scores and say, ok, how did they do in previous

years? How have they improved? When were they referred? What changes were made?

Lisa continued and discussed how her team used data to inform instruction:

> We've used our chapter test scores, and benchmark assessment data, to look at what can be done in the classroom. We look at the quiz scores before we get to the bigger assessments, and we see what we can do.

Julissa discussed how she used computer programs to make data-based decisions:

> In my own classroom I use data director and illuminate to look at each student. Illuminate has made it a lot easier to look at individual students, whereas before you would have to look at your data yourself, and figure out what you needed to re-teach. In other classrooms, I would say you see the same thing. There is a lot of focused instruction. Teachers are looking at their data to see what they should emphasize. There are a lot of conversations focused on data, and changing what they are doing. You hear more conversations about what people are doing to get higher student results.

Research questions. Two research questions were used to guide this study and formulate conclusions based on specific themes and data sources. The research questions were based on two specific topics directly related to an RTI model. This section will describe how these two questions were answered with data.

Research question 1. Research Question 1 focused on how the implementation of RTI had changed teachers' instructional practices over the period of 2 years at one middle school in Southern California**.** Most notably, the themes that emerged as a result of data analysis indicated that instructional practices (R1) were interdependent with collaboration (R2). Key essential documents and processes were developed that facilitated instructional

practice. Themes 3 (student achievement), 4 (teacher attitudes and beliefs about RTI), and 5 (instructional practices) focused on ideas centered on instructional practices and learning outcomes; hence were directly aligned with this first research question.

Theme 3 focused specifically on student achievement. During interviews and on the questionnaires, teachers indicated varying opinions about how the implementation of RTI had influenced student learning outcomes. None of the teachers strongly felt all students were mastering grade level standards. Thus, even though the school had been implementing Tier I interventions for students for two years, the teachers still felt that many students were struggling to perform on grade level with respect to the content standards. Overall, teachers reported that they felt students needed more Tier II level interventions. Teachers further reported that the implementation had been positive, but needed continued professional development on RTI, collaboration and instruction.

Theme 4, teacher attitudes and beliefs about RTI, reflected perceived teacher attitudes and beliefs about RTI. All teachers were passionate in their beliefs that all students were capable of learning. Most teachers felt that RTI had strengthened their beliefs, while others felt that this was a strong belief that would not change, despite new programs initiated. Both Cassandra and Lisa voiced this belief. Cassandra stated, “I've always held the view that all students can learn. Implementing RTI has reaffirmed my belief that there might just be something else I can't give them right now in class.” Lisa felt the RTI process could be overwhelming at times, but the process helped them focus on the job at hand, which was to improve student performance.

Theme 5 focused on specific instructional practices. Two codes associated with Theme 5 were *changes in instruction* and *data-driven-decisions*. An overwhelming

majority of teachers (92%) felt that the RTI process had changed the way they delivered instruction in their individual classrooms. As a result of RTI, specific intervention programs such as IPASS and Read 180 had been initiated to improve student learning. Teachers also reported an increase in sharing of strategies and also heightened awareness of need to individualize instruction for all students, particularly in the classroom with Tier 1 and Tier 2 strategies. Several teachers pointed out that as a result of RTI, they now were better prepared to use data to inform instruction improve student learning. Julissa captured this theme when she stated, "I am thinking the implementation of RTI has improved student achievement, because it is the idea of looking at data and changing instruction."

Research question 2. Research Question 2 focused on the nature of collaboration and how it had changed in the school as a result of RTI. Themes 1 and 2 best addressed this question. Theme 1 focused on key frameworks and structures that were developed to facilitate the implementation of RTI. Theme 2 focused on the efficacy of this implementation.

Over the period of 2 years, the school implemented several different structures and frameworks to more efficiently implement RTI. These included key essential artifacts and essential processes. Essential documents that were developed or used to ensure effective implementation of RTI included the Academic Program Survey, Essential Program Components, the RTI Pyramid Model and the Individual Learning Plan. As noted in the results section, these documents were used to assess learning and staff needs at this specific campus in order to connect to mandated RTI processes such as the

Pyramid Model and individual learning plans (Tier 1 and 2 interventions). School leaders can view these documents as the plan their own middle school RTI programs.

Additionally, key processes were also important to implement in order to facilitate teachers' ability to initiate interventions and collaborate. These processes included the creation of a Coordinated Care Team, progress monitoring, scheduling of intervention time and Universal Access. The CCT was a focal group on this campus whose charge was to review student progress in order to determine if more intensive interventions were needed. The team also helped teachers with progress monitoring of all students to determine if and how they were mastering grade level standards. The principal and CCT had to also revise some school operational procedures in order to help teachers have time to collaborate and provide intervention services to students. The master schedule was modified and passing periods shortened. Intervention programs and classes were developed and scheduled as well. These included Read 180 and IPASS, as well as, Universal Access time. Individual students were also scheduled with one extra period of reading and/or math, as needed.

Theme 2 focused on the efficacy of implementation of these processes. The codes associated with this theme included teacher knowledge and understanding of the RTI process and CCT, and collaborative practices. These findings were perhaps the most revealing. In total, 92% of the teachers responded in a positive manner when asked about the role and methods used by members of the CCT, or team that synchronized the RTI procedures at the campus. They felt that the introduction of RTI had been strong and that after two years they played a key role in the implementation process. However, teachers did not feel that their understanding of RTI had significantly strengthened or increased

over the 2 –year implementation period. Results of interviews also supported this finding. Teachers verbalized the need for more professional development and a focus on consistently revisiting key structures and processes (RQ1) due to staff turnover and resistance of some faculty to collaborate or adopt RTI. Teachers reported that they collaborated on a regular basis, and that the levels as well as type of collaboration had changed since implementation of RTI, but noted they still were not where they wanted to be and experienced challenge with staff turnover and lack of buy-in from a few staff. Thus, in conclusion, the two (instruction and collaboration) were intertwined, with the need for consistent professional development and learning in order to sustain the RTI process.

Summary

The first research question focused on how the implementation of response to intervention changed instructional practices as perceived by teachers. The second research question focused on how the implementation of response to intervention changed collaborative practices as perceived by teachers. Twelve teachers, three males and nine females, ranging in age from 26 to 56, participated in the study. An online questionnaire, individual interviews and artifacts were used to gather data to answer the research question. Descriptive statistics in the form of percents and frequency counts were calculated for questionnaire items. Interview transcripts were coded, which allowed for five themes to emerge as results.

Instructional practices and how they had changed during the implementation of RTI were the focus of the first research question. Themes 3, 4 and 5 captured the results of data collection for this question. Theme 3 focused on student achievement. Teachers

felt that RTI had improved student learning, but that not all students were mastering the grade level content standards. Teachers felt they needed help with Tier 1 and 2 interventions and reported confusion with regard to the nature of Tier 3 interventions. Theme 4 reinforced the belief of teachers that all students can learn. RTI had reinforced or strengthened this belief for all teacher participants. All teachers believed students can learn and reported they felt the implementation of RTI assisted them in ensuring that no students "fell through the cracks" of the educational system. Theme 5 focused on specific instructional practices. An overwhelming majority of teachers (92%) felt that the RTI process had changed the way they delivered instruction in their individual classrooms.

Collaborative practices were the focus of Research Question 2. Themes 1 and 2 included operational processes and procedures that laid the foundation for RTI implementation. Theme 1 focused on key frameworks and structures that were developed to facilitate the implementation of RTI. Theme 2 focused on the efficacy of this implementation. Teachers reported that while the introduction of RTI had been strong additionally, teachers reported that they wanted more professional development on the RTI process and appropriate intervention strategies. There was consistency in the responses from teacher perceptions that they needed more professional development and time for collaboration during the implementation of RTI at the middle school. Staff turnover and resistance were barriers to implementation. Thus, collaboration and instruction are interrelated. Likewise, a blueprint for implementation in terms of key documents and school processes, both instructional and operational, lay the foundation for successful and efficacious RTI implementation. Chapter 5 presents the summary, implications, recommendations and conclusions of this study.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Response to intervention is a framework and process used for systematically monitoring student progress and making decisions about the need for instructional modifications or increasingly intensified instructional services. Implementation of the process requires comprehensive, school-wide systems reform in order to develop and sustain effective use of data and instructional practices (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007). When an RTI model is implemented, teachers are expected to identify and implement instructional and collaborative practices to meet the needs of all students. The implementation also requires teachers to use student data to design instruction in an effort to assure all students are achieving grade level mastery of the state required standards (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, NASDSE, 2005).

Despite the good intentions of many educators to make the RTI process a smooth one, the concept and implementation remain abstract and ambiguous for many administrators and teachers as noted in this research. In turn, this can impede changes in instructional and collaborative process focused on learning for all students. Prior research on RTI has shown that the implementation of the process requires significant change in how teachers work with students who need extra help (Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003). However, prior research did not adequately consider teacher perspectives of the process (Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, & Cardarelli, 2010). Therefore, it was not known how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at an underperforming middle school in Southern California. Specifically, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how teachers perceived

changes in instructional and collaborative practices during the implementation of RTI at this underperforming middle school. The results of the study contribute to existing knowledge and expand the research done on teacher perspectives of the topic. The remainder of Chapter 5 summarizes the key findings and conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future practice and research related to the research questions in this study.

Summary of the Study

The problem this qualitative interpretative research study focused on was that it was not known how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one middle school in Southern California. There were two guiding research questions for this study. The first research question focused on the implementation of RTI and how it changed teacher perceptions of instructional practices as perceived by teachers. Research Question 2 focused on the implementation of RTI and whether it changed collaborative practices as perceived by teachers. Three sources of data were used to answer the research questions: interviews, a questionnaire and artifact analysis. The proposed sample was all teachers in one middle school located in southern California. The actual sample was comprised of 12 teachers who participated in the online questionnaire and five teachers who participated in onsite interviews. There was a possible bias due to the primary researcher being the principal at the school. Due to this possible bias, an outside facilitator was used to complete the on-site interviews and mitigate this potential. The researcher analyzed the data from interviews, the questionnaire and artifacts to derive five themes, as noted in Chapter 4.

The researcher organized all interviews into a Word document. He also collected all questionnaires for review. Following all five interviews and transcriptions, a coding system, developed through the observation of the RTI framework, was used to separate the data into categories. The first data collection source was a Likert-scale questionnaire designed to ask teachers simple questions about their perceptions of the RTI process at this school. Percents were calculated for questions based on the number of teachers who responded to each of the five answer categories: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Additionally, five teachers participated in individual interviews designed to gain in-depth information on whether and how the RTI model changed their instructional (R1) and collaborative (R2) practices. Artifacts were also analyzed to identify key phases of the RTI implementation process (Appendix D).

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this interpretive, qualitative research study was to explore how the implementation of RTI changed teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one middle school in Southern California. A summary of findings is presented in this section of Chapter 5. The results of the study revealed five themes that were used to answer the two research questions. The section is organized by theme and concludes with the research questions.

Theme 1. RTI frameworks and structures. Over the period of two years, the school implemented several different structures and frameworks to more efficiently implement RTI. These included the CCT, IPASS, leveling of students, changes to the master schedule and Universal Access. Several documents were developed and used by the school team as they worked to implement the RTI process. These included the

Academic Program Survey, essential program components, the RTI Pyramid Model, and the Individual Learning Plan.

Informing teachers about the RTI model was a crucial component in the early stages of building the 3-year implementation plan. Questionnaire responses confirmed that teachers had a general knowledge of the model before moving on to more intensive implementation work. Interview results revealed that some teachers felt the interventions such as Read 180 and IPASS helped both student learning and teacher collaboration. However, one teacher felt the scheduling was a detriment. An additional teacher felt the concept of universal access needed further clarification for the staff.

The results of this study revealed that the processes of implementation and the documents used to inform these processes needed to be consistently revisited and reinforced if RTI implementation is improve over time. Similar results were found by Pyle (2011), who explored teacher perceptions of the early stages of RTI implementation. Data were collected from elementary teachers at five schools through the use of focus groups. The results of this study showed teachers perceived the implementation resulted in an overemphasis on assessment, viewed RTI as one more thing to do, feelings of being overwhelmed, lack of clear implementation guidelines, and lack of clear identification of students who needed extra support both at the school and system level. Thus, as noted in the current study, teacher training with respect to the systems, processes and documents needed for RTI implementation are needed on a continuous basis.

Theme 2. Efficacy of implementation. The second theme focused on the effectiveness with which the RTI process had been implemented over the period of two

years. The codes associated with this theme included: teacher knowledge and understanding of the RTI process and collaborative practices.

Several questionnaire items pertained to teacher knowledge of the RTI process and the coordinated care team. Most teachers felt they were effectively introduced to the RTI process. Additionally, teachers were also asked about their introduction to the CCT, the key mechanism for referring students to the RTI process and for monitoring of their progress. The vast majority of teachers (92%) felt this introduction had been effective. Interestingly, one teacher strongly disagreed with this statement. Teacher reactions related to how their understanding of the RTI and CCT process had evolved over a two-year period were mixed. Still, most had positive opinions of these two frameworks.

Teachers were also asked questions in interviews regarding how their knowledge of RTI had changed from the initial days of the implementation to the current time. Renee succinctly summed up teacher perceptions of the process when she mentioned that teacher knowledge of the RTI process needs to continue to grow and expand.
Teacher responses to if and how the implementation of RTI changed the collaborative practices in their specific department team over two years were positive in questionnaire results. However, responses in interviews yielded mixed results. Teachers reported that collaboration was in place, but not all of the time was spent on the use of data to inform instruction, as intended. Furthermore, teachers felt that collaboration started off strong, but waned as the program was implemented. Therefore, as noted in the first theme, the concepts of coordinated care team, implementation and collaboration needed consistent reinforcement during program implementation. These results were not in alignment to those of Bender (2012) where faculty noted a significant change in school culture that

resulted from a collaborative effort to develop an effective RTI procedure to assist struggling students.

These results in this study were in alignment with those of Werts, Carpenter and Fewell (2014) who surveyed teachers regarding their perspectives on the barriers and benefits of response to intervention. Time was mentioned in approximately one-fourth of the responses. Teachers referred to lack of time in the school day to provide interventions, while others referred to lengthy delays in the amount of time it took to identify and deliver services to students. Still other teachers referred to the concept of time in that the RTI processes required too much of their time during the day due to extra administrative tasks, extra paperwork and extra duties.

The second most mentioned barrier was with regard to what the authors deemed as knowledge gaps in teacher preparation to deliver intervention services, lack of training with regard to appropriate use of assessments and lack of training in RTI processes and procedures. Approximately 15% of responses referred to teacher attitudes toward RTI; teachers were resistant to adopting the change, were afraid and were not willing to stretch out of their comfort zone. The final barrier mentioned in the study was resources. Teachers cited lack of materials, professional development and personnel needs to implement RTI with fidelity. While the results of the current study were more positive, teacher perceptions were still mixed with regard to the effectiveness of the implementation process over the two-year period, noting, as teachers in the Werts et al. (2014) study, that they needed more professional development, time and resources to effectively deliver interventions.

Friedli, Snow, Bunken, and Ritzman (2012) studied concerns and reactions of middle and high school teachers before and after implementing RTI. Concerns teacher noted included the fact that regular education teachers were not often prepared to deliver interventions. Several teachers felt the process was difficult and time consuming to adapt to the high school level. Teachers also felt they needed more training on the model and that the interventions and assessments needed to be better adapted for secondary level students. Experts in special education noted that barriers surrounding more complex interventions for special needs students may become more difficult to implement at the secondary level.

Results obtained by Pennyman (2011) showed that RTI implementation was successful due to teacher buy-in, site leadership, professional development, and resources. In order for RTI to be sustained administrators must develop an understanding of RTI, selecting an appropriate model, building teacher buy-in, providing professional development, setting up interventions, developing assessments and data collection procedures. Therefore, the results of the current study showed that strategies implemented by the administrators could possibly improve the efficacy of implementation.

Prewett et al. (2012) studied technical, cultural and contextual aspects of response to intervention implementation in middle schools. The authors noted the most important result of the study was that the administrators noted the purpose of RTI was to close achievement gaps for students struggling in reading and math. Based on data collected, the researchers noted schools were at differing stages of implementation, they were all capable of implementing RTI as a "multilevel instructional system complete with

academic and behavioral screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, multilevel instruction and fidelity of instructional practices" (p. 146). The authors did recommend that this implementation might be more effective if specific components were implemented with fidelity in a smaller setting before being implemented across grade levels and in core subjects. The authors also noted that administrators should pay careful attention to contextual factors of implementation such as professional development, administrator-led implementation, support from district personnel, and staff buy-in. Staff support and acceptance were key factors mentioned by administrators as facilitating an effective RTI implementation. This support included professional development, common language and terminology, teacher participation in data-based decisions and systemic leadership from the administrative team.

Theme 3. Student achievement. During interviews and on the questionnaires, teachers indicated varying opinions about how the implementation of RTI had influenced student-learning outcomes. The code associated with this theme included teacher understanding and use of Tier 1 and 2 interventions. No teachers felt all of their students were mastering grade level standards. Thus, even though the school had been implementing Tier I interventions for students for two years, the teachers still felt that many students were struggling to perform on grade level with respect to the content standards. Overall, teachers reported that they felt students needed more Tier II level interventions. Teachers further reported that the implementation had been positive, but they did not have enough time for professional development on how to effectively implement interventions. These findings confirmed results obtained by Bouman (2010)

which showed the need for the response to intervention model to continue, but teachers and districts needed to move towards more faithful implementation of the processes.

Dupuis (2010) conducted a two-phase mixed method study on teacher perceptions of RTI with respect to the following dimensions: Administrative Support, Resources, Level of Implementation, and Student Performance. The main finding in the study was the relationship between administrative support and resources provided to teachers when implementing RTI and the 2.5% decrease in special education rates, a change in instructional practices, and an increase in student performance. Therefore, as noted in this study, teachers felt that overall RTI was improving student performance, but this was contingent upon administrative support and adequate resources, including training, for teachers. Additionally, results of a study by Bender (2012) showed that approximately 50% of students receiving Tier II intervention demonstrated significant gains in reading comprehension and improvements in overall grades in all core subject classes.

Theme 4: Teacher attitudes and beliefs about RTI. Teachers were vocal concerning their beliefs about student learning and RTI. Renee noted that she believed all students can learn, but the teacher must know their learning styles and also know the student. Cassandra mentioned, “I've always held the view that all students can learn. Implementing RTI has reaffirmed my belief that there might just be something else I can't give them right now in class.” Lisa discussed how the RTI process, while overwhelming for teachers at times, helped them focus on the job at hand, which was to improve student performance. Julissa, a special education teacher, did not believe that RTI had changed her views, but noted that some teachers still struggled with the implementation of the process, even after two years.

Therefore, teacher perceptions of RTI were that it in general helped students, but again, they needed consistent reinforcement and training in the processes associated with the model. These results were somewhat in alignment with additional results of the Werts et. al (2014) study. Interestingly, while teachers issued over 200 comments regarding barriers to RTI, this number more than doubled when teachers were asked about the benefits. Almost 75% of the statements on the benefits of RTI focused on students being taught at higher levels due to RTI. This included their getting help sooner.

Special educators noted that general educators were providing stronger instruction in their classrooms, in that they were providing more targeted instruction designed to meet the specific needs of students. Thus, teachers felt a benefit of RTI was the use of differentiated instruction. Comments also focused on stronger referrals being made for special education services and increased use of data and assessments to identify student needs. In short, teachers felt students were being more successful.

Teachers also noted benefits to the school and themselves as a result of RTI to include better professional development and trainings, higher levels of collaboration among teachers in the school, and changing perspectives of special education. Specifically, teachers felt that special education was part of the tiered process and were more comfortable with providing interventions at all Tiers. Finally, teachers noted they were more accountable for student learning in their classrooms.

Theme 5. Instructional practices. Teachers were given the opportunity to discuss how the implementation of RTI had influenced their instructional practices. Responses to this theme included use of data to inform instruction and student learning. A vast

majority (92%) of teachers felt that the RTI process had changed the way they delivered instruction in their individual classrooms.

Teachers noted that the IPASS program and time in regular class periods allowed them to spend more time with struggling students. Cassandra highlighted additional instructional opportunities that were offered to students and how the extra help improve student learning. Lisa discussed how instruction had changed and how the teachers were trying to make concepts being taught relevant and that she took extra time to focus on individual students who were struggling with specific concepts. Lisa also mentioned that sharing of instructional strategies and practices in the classroom had occurred during the implementation period.

Several teachers pointed out that use of data informed and improved student learning. Julissa mentioned that teachers were looking at data to inform their instruction. Renee iterated that she thought the use of RTI and data helped teachers focus on individual student needs: “I’ve seen the impact on students. I like the way it’s structured. I like the way it targets those individual kids, instead of letting those student slip through the system.” Cassandra pointed out that the use of data helped teachers more effectively pinpoint student needs and current achievement levels. Therefore, teachers were positive about how the use or RTI, specifically the use of data to inform instructional decisions had improved their lesson delivery and assessment processes. These results were in alignment with those of Friedli, et al. (2012). Teachers in this study note that while use of data took time, it provided evidence for instructional changes, rather than teachers making those changes based on impressions.

Russ (2012) found that while teachers had positive attitudes toward the RTI model and intended to implement the instructional interventions, but noted several problems with implementing the model. These included lack of time to deliver appropriate interventions, meet with peers, conduct progress monitoring and to hold meetings. Teachers further reported that they did not have enough resources to instructional intervention supplies and for professional development. Russ recommended further study on the topic. Thus, as in this study, teachers did change their instructional practices as a result of implementing RTI, but needed continued training and resources.

Research questions. Two research questions were used to guide this study and formulate conclusions based on specific themes and data sources. The research questions were based on two specific topics directly related to an RTI model. This section will describe how these two questions were answered with data and aligned with the existing research.

Research question 1. Research Question 1 focused on how the implementation of RTI had changed teachers' instructional practices over the period of 2 years at one middle school in Southern California. The themes that emerged as a result of data analysis indicated that instructional practices are interdependent with collaboration. Themes 3, 4 and 5 focused on ideas centered on instruction and learning outcomes.

Theme 3 focused specifically on student achievement. Teachers indicated varying opinions about how the implementation of RTI had influenced student learning. None of the teachers strongly felt all students were mastering grade level standards. Thus, even though the school had been implementing Tier I interventions for students for two years, the teachers still felt that many students were struggling to perform on grade level with

respect to the content standards. Teachers reported that the implementation had been positive, but needed continued professional development on RTI, collaboration and instruction. These findings confirmed results obtained by Bouman (2010) which showed the need for the response to intervention model to continue, but teachers and districts needed to move towards more faithful implementation of the processes.

Dupuis' (2010) two-phase mixed method study on teacher perceptions of RTI and Administrative Support, Resources, Level of Implementation, and Student Performance discovered relationship between administrative support and resources provided to teachers when implementing RTI and the 2.5% decrease in special education rates, a change in instructional practices, and an increase in student performance. Therefore, as noted in this study, teachers felt that overall RTI was improving student performance, but this was contingent upon administrative support and adequate resources, including training, for teachers. This need for administrative support, adequate resources and teacher training is supported by the NASDSE (2008) report on RTI implementation at the district level, NASDSE and CASE (2006) white paper on RTI.

Theme 4 reflected teacher attitudes and beliefs about RTI. All teachers were passionate in their beliefs that all students were capable of learning. Most teachers felt that RTI had strengthened their beliefs, while others felt that this was a strong belief that would not change, despite new programs initiated. As previously mentioned, these findings were somewhat in alignment with additional results of the Werts et. al (2014) study. Interestingly, while teachers issued over 200 comments regarding barriers to RTI, this number more than doubled when teachers were asked about the benefits.

Theme 5 focused on specific instructional practices. An overwhelming majority of teachers (92%) felt that the RTI process had changed the way they delivered instruction in their individual classrooms. These results were in alignment with those of Friedli, et al. (2012). Teachers in this study note that while use of data took time, it provided evidence for instructional changes, rather than teachers making those changes based on impressions. Russ (2012) found that while teachers had positive attitudes toward the RTI model and intended to implement the instructional interventions, but noted several problems with implementing the model such as lack of time to deliver appropriate interventions, to meet with peers, conduct progress monitoring, and to hold meetings. Russ' recommendation was for additional research to examine this aspect of RTI. Teachers also reported an increase in sharing of strategies and also heightened awareness of need to individualize instruction for all students, particularly in the classroom with Tier 1 and Tier 2 strategies. Several teachers pointed out that as a result of RTI, they now were better prepared to use data to inform instruction improve student learning. Thus, as in this study, teachers did change their instructional practices as a result of implementing RTI, but needed continued training and resources.

Research question 2. Research Question 2 focused on the nature of collaboration and how it had changed in the school as a result of RTI. Themes 1 and 2 best addressed this question. Theme 1 focused on key frameworks and structures that were developed to facilitate the implementation of RTI. Theme 2 focused on the efficacy of this implementation.

Over the period of 2 years, the school implemented several different structures and frameworks to more efficiently implement RTI. These included essential artifacts and

essential processes. Essential documents that were developed or used to ensure effective implementation of RTI included the Academic Program Survey, Essential Program Components, the RTI Pyramid Model and the Individual Learning Plan. These findings are supported by the recommendations on RTI process by the National Center on Response to Intervention (2010) and NASDSE and CASE (2006) for a unified system of education, assessment, structured problem-solving process, flexibility and fluidity, tiered levels of intervention, responsibility for student learning, professional development, and resources.

Additionally, key processes were also important to implement in order to facilitate teachers' ability to initiate interventions and collaborate (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010; NASDSE, 2008; NASDSE & CASE, 2006). These processes included the creation of a Coordinated Care Team (California Department of Education, 2011; Casey, 2008), progress monitoring (Center on Response to Intervention, n.d.; South Dakota Department of Education, 2012, scheduling of intervention time and Universal Access (Brazo, 2009; Renaissance Learning, 2009). The CCT was a focal group on this campus whose charge was to review student progress in order to determine if more intensive interventions were needed. The team also helped teachers with progress monitoring of all students to determine if and how they were mastering grade level standards.

Theme 2 focused on the efficacy of implementation of these processes. The codes associated with this theme included collaborative practices, teacher knowledge and understanding of the RTI process. These findings were perhaps the most revealing. In total, 92% of the teachers responded in a positive manner when asked about the role and

methods used by members of the CCT, or team that synchronized the RTI procedures at the campus. They felt that the introduction of RTI had been strong and that after two years they played a key role in the implementation process. However, teachers did not feel that their understanding of RTI had significantly strengthened or increased over the 2 –year implementation period. While the results of the current study were more positive, teacher perceptions were still mixed with regard to the effectiveness of the implementation process over the two-year period, noting, as teachers in the Werts et al. (2014) study, that they needed more professional development, time and resources to effectively deliver interventions and by Friedli, Snow, Bunken, and Ritzman (2012) where middle and high school teachers before and after implementing RTI felt that regular education teachers were not often prepared to deliver interventions. Pennyman (2011) noted that RTI implementation was successful due to teacher buy-in, site leadership, professional development, and resources, but administrators must develop an understanding of RTI, selecting an appropriate model, building teacher buy-in, providing professional development, setting up interventions, developing assessments and data collection procedures in order for the model to be sustained. Therefore, the results of the current study showed that strategies implemented by the administrators could possibly improve the efficacy of implementation. Thus, the two (instruction and collaboration) were intertwined, with the need for consistent professional development and learning in order to sustain the RTI process.

Implications

Theoretical implications. Bandura's (1977) theory of social behavior provided the theoretical foundation for this study. Bandura noted that behaviors can be studied

through observing one's self-efficacy, or perceived ability to successfully perform daily challenges. The purpose of using such a model of self-efficacy for this study on teachers' perceptions and RTI was to highlight the fact that change is difficult and can impact how a teacher perceives his or her ability to fulfill their job role. The theory focuses on four principal sources of information: performance accomplishments, various experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Experience plays an enormous role in such a model and has the ability to change such perceptions or not based on the premise of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Performance accomplishments are based on personal mastery experiences. Successes raise mastery expectations, or a person's perceptions that they will be able to achieve a goal, while repeated failures lower these expectations. The effects of failure on one's self-efficacy depend on the timing and total set of experiences in which the failures occur.

The results of this study advanced knowledge of this theory by showing that teacher perceptions of mastery of RTI processes and frameworks, as well as instructional interventions do indeed impact their self-efficacy. While teachers in this study had overall positive perceptions of the process, they needed consistent training and reinforcement of the components of the program in order to feel it was being implemented with efficacy. Stressful and taxing situations generally elicit emotional arousal that, depending on the circumstances, might have informative value concerning personal competency (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, emotional arousal is another source of information that can affect perceived self-efficacy in coping with potentially threatening situations. Because high arousal usually debilitates performance, individuals are more likely to expect success when they are less tense and agitated. Thus, when implementing

RTI, the entire educational team must experience enough positive stress to create that sense of urgency to get the job done, but not so much stress that they are emotionally debilitated and believe they cannot effectively implement the processes.

The findings of this study also advanced knowledge of the RTI model (Bollman, et al., 2012; Brown-Chodesey & Steege, 2005) at the middle school level. The findings and conclusions drawn from this study on the implementation of RTI at the middle school level reveal that in general, the model has an impact on instructional and collaborative practices. Although there is evidence of an impact, teachers continue to have varied perceptions as to the extent of the impact in multiple areas. It has been clear conducting this study that the implementation is much different at the middle school level than at the elementary school level. Additionally, one important finding of this study is that the implementation of RTI is a process, and not an event. Therefore, the processes, documents and skills associated with the program must be consistently reinforced, a source of training and focus of implementation.

Practical implications. There are several practical implications that can be tied to this current study regarding the implementation of RTI at the middle school level. The need for a prevention system that keeps students from falling through the cracks is ongoing at the elementary school level (Snell, 2008), but needs further consideration and development at the middle school level (Bollman, et al., 2012)l. In such a systematic model, all students have the ability to achieve at high levels.

All teachers can improve their instructional practices and engage in collaborative professional environments (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012). It is evident that teachers simply need more training, time, practice, support and resources to implement a RTI

model. It was evident within this study, two years was not enough for teachers to grasp the model, then turn around and faithfully implement it. Therefore, practical implications center on strong processes and procedures being developed before a program is implemented. Additionally, training, resources, time and support need to be consistently planned for and practiced over a sustained period of time in order for the process to be effective. Additionally, the middle school for this study implemented many good processes, developed documents and other frameworks that can be used by other administrators and schools as they work to implement effective RTI programs.

Future implications. Future implications in the RTI research surround around working with middle school staff in regards to progress monitoring and assuring all students are correctly identified within the three tier model (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). At the middle school, professional development will play a crucial role in the success of the model. During this professional development, staff will need to be trained on using student data to drive instructional and collaborative practices.

The use of "universal access" intervention time (Renaissance Learning, 2009) is extremely important in which progress monitoring using student data will drive this instructional time. The middle school used in this study incorporated a CCT process, but future implications will need to assure they learn from studies like this to ensure they do not make similar mistakes during the RTI implementation process.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future practice. It is recommended that the RTI model be implemented across the nation in all schools, which would include the elementary, middle, high and alternative schools within the public and private school settings. It is

recommended that central office administrators build extensive professional development opportunities for principals and teacher leaders to assure that the RTI and PLC models are faithfully implemented at all education levels, not just elementary schools. It is recommended that school administrators are taught to provide all professional development opportunities as they are the instructional leaders that will drive these models on a daily basis. These recommendations are supported in research and recommendations by NASDSE (2006), NASDSE and CASE (2006) and the National Center on Response to Intervention (2010) for administrative involvement, coordinated plan for implementation at all tiers and responsibility for student learning. The final recommendation is that more accountability is held on school administrators and more flexibility is given in dealing with teachers that fail to engage in implementing such models in their classrooms.

Recommendations for future research. There are several recommendations for future research based on the data analysis. The existing research supports the idea that the implementation of RTI may profoundly influence how middle and high school teachers teach in a profound and fundamental way (Geisick & Graving-Reyes, 2008; Gibbs, 2008; James, 2010; National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE], 2006; National High School Center [NHSC], National Center on Response to Intervention, & Center on Instruction, 2010; Protheroe, 2010; Rozalski, 2009). In this sub-section, six recommendations are provided to guide future researchers in expanding the existing knowledge on RTI in middle school settings based on the finding from this study.

1. Additional qualitative research is recommended on teachers and their deeply rooted convictions and beliefs about students being able to perform towards grade-level achievement in individual classrooms.
2. Additional quantitative research is recommended on student performance with students that have been identified in Tiers II and III of RTI. Student achievement data with multiple sources could be reviewed to determine if these interventions can produce sustained increases in student achievement over time.
3. A study on the same middle school over a 7-year period of the implementation of RTI, might provide much better teacher perceptions in regards to instructional and collaborative practices. To gain a further depth of knowledge, more research would benefit from a study that tracks a group of students identified in the RTI model through high school graduation.
4. A study at the high school that replicates this study could be conducted in an effort to compare changes in instructional and collaborative practices as perceived by high school teachers over a two year period of time of implementation.
5. Another recommendation would be a study at the middle school level that looked closer at other factors, which would include informal teacher conversations, professional development and data driven decision-making.
6. Finally, since results of this and other studies yielded little data about teacher perceptions of how they change their instructional practices during the implementation of RTI, more qualitative research is needed on this topic.

Researcher's Reflection

This study has been extremely emotional and rewarding at the same time. The study has allowed me as the principal of the middle school in this study, to take a deep look into the implementation practices of a RTI model and how it affected instructional and collaborative practices over a two-year period. It was my intention that I conduct this study and use the results from the implementation of the RTI model to paint a clear picture for current practitioners in the field. It was my goal to provide further understanding of the process for my counterparts in other middle schools. The results showed that the RTI model and processes were successfully introduced to teachers. However, the results also showed that teachers needed more consistent training and exposure to all facets of implementation, but specifically, the CCT process. Additionally, teachers lacked knowledge in several key areas and needed more consistent and sustained engagement in the process. The results of the study also showed a critical lack in a system of school wide collaboration, which instantly leads to a fragmented RTI model. Although this might sound negative, it should not outshine the work of the efforts of other components of the model which include a clearer focus on progress monitoring students in Tier I and II and providing research-based intervention programs. The study shows where consideration is needed in regards to instructional and collaborative practices and how the implementation process can be improved at the middle school level. This study only focused on one middle school, and there are many middle schools across the nations that are implementing the same model. It is my opinion that we look further at other middle schools that have implemented the RTI model and work together on building further and more concrete, successful research.

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Appendix A

Online Questionnaire Questions

1. Do you feel you were effectively introduced to the RTI (Response to Intervention) model over the past two years?
2. Do you feel you were effectively introduced to the CCT (Coordinated Care Team) process over the past two years?
3. Do you feel the implementation of RTI has changed instructional practices related to your classroom over the past two years?
4. Do you feel the implementation of RTI has changed collaborative practices related to your specific department team over the past two years?
5. After the two years of implementation, do you feel you have a better understanding of the RTI model?
6. After the two years of implementation, do you feel you have a better understanding of the CCT process?
7. Do you feel you have played a role in the RTI process over the past two years?
8. Do you feel you have played a role in the CCT (Coordinated Care Team) process over the past two years?
9. Over the past two years, do you feel that all your students in Tier I were meeting grade-level standards to mastery?
10. Over the past two years, have you had students in your classroom that should have been receiving Tier II services through RTI?

Appendix B

Online Questionnaire Results

How does the Implementation of Response to Intervention Change Instructional and Collaborative Practices at the Middle School as Perceived by Teachers

1. Do you feel you were effectively introduced to the RTI (Response to Intervention) model over the past two years?

Strongly Agree 25.0% 3

Agree 75.0% 9

Disagree 0.0% 0

Strongly Disagree 0.0% 0

answered question 12

skipped question 0

2. Do you feel you were effectively introduced to the CCT (Coordinated Care Team) process over the past two years?

Strongly Agree 16.7% 2

Agree 75.0% 9

Disagree 8.3% 1

Strongly Disagree 0.0% 0

answered question 12

skipped question 0

3. Do you feel the implementation of RTI has changed instructional practices related to your classroom over the past two years?

Strongly Agree 33.3% 4

Agree 58.3% 7

Disagree 8.3% 1

Strongly Disagree 0.0% 0

answered question 12

skipped question 0

4. Do you feel the implementation of RTI has changed collaborative practices related to your specific department team over the past two years?

Strongly Agree 25.0% 3

Agree 50.0% 6

Disagree 25.0% 3

Strongly Disagree 0.0% 0

answered question 12

skipped question 0

5. After the two years of implementation, do you feel you have a better understanding of the RTI model?

Strongly Agree 25.0% 3

Agree 66.7% 8

Disagree 8.3% 1

Strongly Disagree 0.0% 0

answered question 12

skipped question 0

6. After the two years of Implementation, do you feel you have a better understanding of the CCT process?

Strongly Agree 25.0% 3

Agree 58.3% 7

Disagree 16.7% 2

Strongly Disagree 0.0% 0

answered question 12

skipped question 0

7. Do you feel you have played a role in the RTI process over the past two years?

Strongly Agree 25.0% 3

Agree 75.0% 9

Disagree 0.0% 0

Strongly Disagree 0.0% 0

answered question 12

skipped question 0

8. Do you feel you have played a role in the CCT (Coordinated Care Team) process over the past two years?

Strongly Agree 16.7% 2

Agree 50.0% 6

Disagree 25.0% 3

Strongly Disagree 8.3% 1

answered question 12

skipped question 0

9. Over the past two years, do you feel that all your students in Tier I of RTI were mastering grade-level standards?

Strongly Agree 0.0% 0

Agree 41.7% 5

Disagree 58.3% 7

Strongly Disagree 0.0% 0

answered question 12

skipped question 0

10. Over the past two years, have you had students in your classroom that should have been receiving Tier II services through RTI?

Strongly Agree 16.7% 2

Agree 83.3% 10

Disagree 0.0% 0

Strongly Agree 0.0% 0

answered question 12

skipped question 0

Appendix C

On-Site Interview Questions

1. As a school, how has the implementation of RTI changed instructional and collaborative practices over the past two years?
2. How has the implementation of RTI changed instructional practices in your classroom over the past two years?
3. How has the implementation of RTI changed collaborative practices in your department over the past two years?
4. Has the implementation of RTI improved student achievement over the past two years?
5. How has the implementation of RTI changed your views on whether all students have the ability to learn by changing instructional and collaborative practices at the current middle school over the past two years?

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Appendix D

List of Artifacts

1. RTI Teacher Job Description
2. Academic Program Questionnaire
3. Essential Program Components
4. RTI Pyramid Model
5. Coordinated Care Team
6. Individual Student Learning Plan
7. Progress Monitoring Tier I & II
8. Progress Monitoring Tier III
9. Master Schedule

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

Garrett M. Gruwell
Doctoral Candidate, College of Doctoral Studies, Grand Canyon University
57198 Jarana Court, Yucca Valley, CA 92284
Phone: 760-668-1693

Grand Canyon University
College of Doctoral Studies
3300 W. Camelback Road
Phoenix, AZ 85017
Phone: 602-639-7804
Fax: 602- 639-7820

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
(SAMPLE FOR ADULTS MORE THAN MINIMAL RISK)

CONSENT FORM

.How does the Implementation of Response to Intervention Change Instructional and Collaborative Practices at the Middle School as Perceived by Teachers

Garrett M. Gruwell

(Doctoral Candidate)

Under the Direction of Dr. Cristie McClendon, Dissertation Chair, College of Doctoral Studies, Grand Canyon University

Page 1 of 5

INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this study/form are to provide you (as a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research and to record the consent of those who agree to be involved in the study.

RESEARCH

The following study will be conducted by Garrett M. Gruwell, Principal at La Contenta Middle School, with the support of an outside facilitator, Dr. Kurt McLachlan, Morongo Unified School District, Program Improvement Specialist. I am a doctoral candidate at Grand Canyon University, Phoenix, Arizona and am requesting your participation in the study as you have been identified as a participant that can add great validity and knowledge to the study with your experience over the past two years of the implementation of RTI (Response to Intervention). If you have further questions, please contact Grand Canyon University, College of Doctoral Studies or the IRB Committee at the number listed above.

STUDY PURPOSE

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore how the implementation of RTI changes teacher perceptions regarding instructional and collaborative practices at one middle school in Southern California. To date, most of the focus on RTI has been at the elementary level. Thus, further research would help administrators identify what specifically needs to be done to move seconday schools towars the successful implementation of RTI.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

If you decide to participate, then as a study participant you will join the following study design:

Research Design

A case study has been selected for this study for the purpose of looking at a specific middle school and how the implementation of RTI influenced teacher perceptions of changes in instructional and collaborative practices. The rationale for selecting a case study over a mixed-method study is the fact that student data will not be used to reach a conclusion on whether RTI influences the research questions that drive the study. Using a case study in the research design provides the most effective and efficient way to reach a sound qualitative study.

All teachers will be given the opportunity to participate in the study and will be given written notification by a letter to their home address, personal and school email. Interested participants will be given specific procedures on how to enter the study depending on the role they choose, online survey or on-site interview process. A written consent form including an introduction to the study and detailed steps will be provided before they enter into an agreement to participate. The written consent will also include confidentiality measures assured by the research team, which include the primary researcher and outside facilitator, that protects the participants from any breaches in such confidentiality.

RISKS

Risks/Limitations

The following limitations will guide this study:

1. A select group of participants of this study were involved in the ground floor implementation of RTI and still lack the full understanding of the model.
2. Some of the participants failed to engage in the implementation of the model

based on differences of opinion, most possibly being veteran teachers.

3. The implementation of the model is a new concept to participants and need more time to understand and engage in a new and intense process.
4. The study was geographically limited to one middle school in the school district out of the control of the researcher and outside facilitator.
5. The research design dictated the need for a small sample of participants.

BENEFITS

The possible/main benefits of your participation in the research is that you as a member of the ground floor implementation of RTI (Response to Intervention) over the past two years will assist other teachers and administrators as they implement the model at the middle school level across the United States.

NEW INFORMATION

If the researchers, Garrett M. Gruwell finds new information during the study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then you have the right to exclude yourself from participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify you as a teacher participating in the study. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, Garrett M. Gruwell assures that your name or participating information will never be disclosed and all responses will be confidentially saved on a secured computer with a pass code that only the primary researcher has access to.

WITHDRAWL PRIVILEGE

It is ok for you to say no. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and withdraw from the study at any time. Garrett M. Gruwell, confirms that you have the right to not participate in this study or withdrawal at any time.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

N/A

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

N/A

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

Any questions you have concerning the research study or your participation in the study, before or after your consent, will be answered by Garrett M. Gruwell, 57198 Jarana Court, Yucca Valley, CA 92284, 1-760-668-1693 and Dr. Kurt McLachlan, 7050 La Contenta Road, Yucca Valley, CA 92284, 1-310-435-7900.

If you have questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the College of Doctoral Studies at (602) 639-7804.

This form explains the nature, demands, benefits and any risk of the project. By signing this form you agree knowingly to assume any risks involved. Remember, your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. In signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be given (offered) to you.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in the above study.

_____

Subject's SignaturePrinted NameDate

_____ _____

Other SignaturePrinted NameDate
(if appropriate)

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

"I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature. These elements of Informed Consent conform to the Assurance given by Grand Canyon University to the Office for Human Research Protections to protect the rights of human subjects. I have provided (offered) the subject/participant a copy of this signed consent document."

Signature of Investigator: ***Garrett M. Gruwell*** Date: October 10, 2012

You can contact Dr. Cristie McClendon, Dissertation Chair at 1-817-382-8459 or email: cristie.mcclendon@mygcu.edu

Appendix F

District Site Authorization

[redacted]

Board of Education

[redacted]

[redacted]

District Superintendent

[redacted]

June 18, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter to confirm that permission has been granted for Garrett Gruwell to conduct research in the [redacted] Unified School District. The permission is granted until his research is completed.

If you should have further questions, please feel free to contact me at [redacted] (Extension 4221).

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Superintendent

Appendix G

IRB Permission to Conduct Research

GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY™

3300 West Camelback Road, Phoenix Arizona 85017 602.639.7500 Toll Free 800.800.9776 www.gcu.edu

DATE:	October 31, 2012
TO:	Garrett Gruwell, Doctoral
FROM:	Grand Canyon University Institutional Review Board
STUDY TITLE:	[378298-1] How does the Implementation of Response to Intervention Change Instructional and Collaborative Practices at the Middle School as Perceived by Teachers (Doctoral Candidate)
IRB REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	
EXPIRATION DATE:	
REVIEW TYPE:	
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Expedited review category # *[7.7]*

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. Grand Canyon University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.