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That Was Then And This Is Now: The Changing Roles Of Veteran Special Education Teachers As A Result Of Response To Intervention

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THAT WAS THEN AND THIS IS NOW: THE CHANGING ROLES OF
VETERAN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AS A
RESULT OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

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2012

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This dissertation, submitted by Tricia K. Lee in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

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This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the Graduate School at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

Dean of the Graduate School Wayne Swisher

Date May 4, 2012

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Title That Was Then and This is Now: The Changing Roles of Veteran
Special Education Teachers as a Result of Response to Intervention

Department Teaching and Learning

Degree Doctor of Education

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To Hunter, Mason, and Connor

ABSTRACT

This study explored how the process of Response to Intervention (RTI) has changed the roles of three veteran special educators. The background knowledge of these teachers that helped make the initiative successful, as well as the "building blocks" that were present in the initial implementation of RTI models in their settings, were described. The essential components that contributed to successful RTI processes in K-12 settings were described by the participants. In addition, the successes, challenges, and recommendations of these veteran special educators for the future of RTI implementation were explored. The experiences of three veteran special education teachers who participated in successful RTI models, as well as current literature on best practice in Response to Intervention, were described. Recommendations for teacher preparation programs, schools, and future research were presented.

Keywords: collaboration, curriculum-based measurement, fidelity, problem solving, progress monitoring, Response to Intervention (RTI), scientifically-based interventions, tiers of support, universal screening

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The teachers came into the room one by one until a small group of nine had gathered. The makeup of the participants in the meeting included three special educators, three classroom teachers, two reading specialists, and one assistant administrator. The moderator of the group was one of the special education teachers who had taken a leadership role in the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) at their school. All participants brought data and student files with them, which they began arranging upon arrival.

As the meeting commenced, data were projected on an overhead screen for the group to review involving the names of students, the tiers of instruction in which they were located, and whether or not they received additional instruction in phonemic awareness. The students were reviewed, one by one, with the teachers sharing information as to whether or not the students were making gains and whether or not they should stay at their current level of intervention. There was also a second chart that was reviewed that was color coded to show performance on measures, such as AIMSweb and Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) testing. The teachers analyzed these results and looked for trends in performance across these tools.

During the discussion of student progress, the teachers openly shared relevant information, as more than one teacher worked with each student (e.g., general education

and special education or general education and reading specialists). They made sure to discuss all potential factors that might be impacting student performance, such as whether the student took medication, what overall health factors might be impacting performance, did a student have vision or hearing issues, or was a student considered "young" for their grade? They discussed what current interventions were being implemented and highlighted those that were yielding positive results. After thoughtful deliberation and analysis of the data, some students who had surpassed their goals were dismissed from Tier 2 or 3 interventions, while others were flagged for continued intervention and further discussion at the next meeting. Before leaving, the teachers moved to a large assessment wall, where student's interventions were color coded and updated, and student name cards were either moved to a new tier or remained at the student's current level.

Definition of RTI

The process described above is called Response to Intervention (RTI), and it has changed the face of education today. Applebaum (2009), Howard (2009), and Mellard and Johnson (2008) indicate that, although initially implemented at the elementary level for literacy, RTI is now being implemented across higher grade levels and in all content areas. Recent additions to RTI models include interventions for behavior as well. Special education teachers have watched their roles evolve and change as they work side by side with regular educators in this collaborative, research-based model that is helping to reach and teach *all* children. Brown-Chidsey, Bronaugh, and McGraw (2009) say, "RTI assumes that all students can learn and it is the work of all teachers to find the solution for school success" (p. 9). This simple definition of the process could serve as the overall mission statement of the RTI initiative.

RTI enables all students to get the help they need right away instead of the old model of special education, where if they were "failing" long enough, they could be referred for possible special education services. VanDerHeyden and Burns (2010) state their own work from 2006 when they emphasize that "the goal of RTI is to enhance learning for all students including those who are at risk, but not identified as with a disability" (p. 3). Wixson, Lipson, and Johnston (2010) note that "RTI is the name given to a method of identifying students as learning disabled (LD) that provides an alternative to the traditional discrepancy model of identification" (p. 1). Wright (2007) mentions that RTI has come about over the "past several decades" (p. 7). Although RTI was in existence back in the 1970s, it really came to the forefront in response to two landmark legislations.

The 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) shifted the focus of educators from a previous discrepancy model (i.e., discrepancy between ability and achievement) to a new model utilizing high quality, research-based instruction and behavioral support, universal screening, and consistent progress monitoring (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009; Howard, 2009). On the heels of NCLB, the implementation of RTI, and progress monitoring were recommendations that came from the findings of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education report (2002) and Prasse (2006).

VanDerHeyden and Burns (2010) point out that the real push in RTI initiatives being implemented has occurred within the last five years, but they acknowledge that some schools have been implementing the process long before it was a part of federal legislation. Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2009) state that the roots of RTI can be traced

back to the landmark work of Deno through the use of his cascade model (1970), where a continuum of services to educate students with disabilities in a setting as much like their peers as possible was developed.

An important component of the RTI model, which Buffum et al. (2009) also attribute to the work of Deno (1970), is the use of curriculum-based measurements (CBMs), or looking at a student's growth over time on typical curricular areas, such as math, reading, and writing. "CBMs involve changes in instruction, intervention, and goals and still serve as the appropriate progress-monitoring tools within an RTI system to determine the efficacy of instructional programs" (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 17). The use of CBMs to measure the progress of students has become increasingly important, as is the need for teachers, both regular and special educators, to be well trained in this approach. Using CBM alone is not enough; there needs to be a systematic process in place for regular and special educators to provide research-proven interventions to students who are struggling.

As a result of the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, RTI has most commonly been described as "a three-tiered approach for providing services and interventions to students, intended to limit academic failure in general and special education by using a preventative model" (Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, & Cardarelli, 2010, p. 48). Based on a definition by the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD), Greenfield et al. (2010) cite the work of Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, and McKnight (2006), where "RTI can be defined as student-centered assessment models that use problem-solving and research-based methods to identify and address learning difficulties

in children" (p. 48). The student-centeredness of RTI is one of its most commonly identified strengths.

There are several primary components that make up the RTI model, including quality instruction provided first in the general education classroom, interventions that increase in intensity as needed, ongoing progress monitoring and data collection, the use of research-based interventions, and an emphasis on fidelity of implementation of interventions. All decisions made for the continuation or changing of interventions and for placement in special education, when deemed necessary, are based on data (Greenfield et al., 2010; Hoover & Love, 2011; Klingner, 2009).

Implementation of RTI

Howard (2009) gives an overview of the essential attributes of RTI. When schools are new to implementing the process, she suggests that RTI supports must be available both inside and outside of the general education classroom. In addition, school-wide screening, occurring three times a year, as well as early intervention tools should be utilized. Interventions at various tier levels must be provided with increasing intensity, depending on student need, with all options fully utilized before considering special education services. She suggests that progress be monitored in an ongoing fashion using a variety of tools to show outcomes of student learning (Howard, 2009).

RTI typically uses general education curriculum, along with additional interventions, which are carefully selected according to what is appropriate for students' needs (Howard, 2009; Shores & Chester, 2009; Wixson et al., 2010). RTI involves collaboration and teaming, where teams of teachers and other school personnel collaborate on a regular basis using a team problem-solving approach. Finally, RTI

involves attending ongoing teacher trainings and workshops. Methods are modeled by special education teachers or other curriculum specialists, who are willing to go into teachers' classrooms to mentor and do demonstration teaching. The learning process is ongoing for teachers and all professionals who are involved in the RTI process (Howard, 2009).

Six guiding principles that have been instrumental in “developing and implementing approaches to RTI” (Wixson et al., 2010, p. 12) have been adopted by the International Reading Association (IRA). The six principles include instruction, responsive teaching and differentiation, assessment, collaboration, systemic and comprehensive approaches, and expertise. With instruction, there is a focus on “optimizing initial language and literacy instruction,” along with “increasingly differentiated and intensified instruction/intervention in language and literacy,” and using “assessment that can inform language and literacy instruction meaningfully” (Wixson et al., 2010, p. 12). These guidelines have been instrumental for schools to consider when implementing RTI.

Once RTI is implemented, there are several considerations that will help the endeavor be successful. Wright (2007) recommends the creation of a steering group, as well as deciding the level of readiness of the school for implementation of RTI. Planning how to educate the school community about the process, as well as determining what resources are available with regard to interventions and progress monitoring, are critical building blocks of the process.

When considering the momentous task of implementing an RTI model within a school district, there are some distinct advantages to utilizing all of the resources

available within a building (Shinn, 2008), including using special education teachers who already have teacher expertise in strategy implementation, data collection and analysis, and collaboration. When looking at the overall model of RTI implementation in a school building, how is a special educator's role defined?

The Special Educator's Role in RTI

Upon examining the special education teacher's role in Response to Intervention, there must first be a shift in mindset from the previous definition of special education to the present definition. Fuchs, Stecker, and Fuchs (2008) point out that "special education is no longer a *place* like a resource room or self-contained classroom in a school building, but rather a *service* brought to students in whatever general education tier they happen to be" (p. 75). With this in mind, the role of the special educator is evolving in order to meet the challenges of this new paradigm.

Special educators are typically called upon to be the "jack of all trades" in their school buildings, and they have typically been responsible for knowing everyone's content, in addition to their own areas of specialty. Having these "tricks of the trade" in their teaching background has proven to be particularly useful within RTI. Currently, more and more special education teachers are functioning as members of collaborative RTI teaching teams, while still serving a standard caseload of students who have already been identified as students with disabilities who need special education, or who have not responded to RTI interventions (Klingner, 2009).

In regard to the former roles and responsibilities of special educators, Cummings, Atkins, Allison, and Cole (2008) believe that the roots of RTI came from special education in terms of "addressing educational needs of students" (p. 25). Cummings et

al. (2008) suggest possible activities that special educators, who are members of RTI teams, can be responsible for. Helping to "identify the need for support, helping to plan and implement support, evaluating and modifying the supports that are in place, and measuring student outcomes through evaluation" (p. 29) are all potential activities that special educators can carry out to assist in successful RTI implementation.

Brown-Chidsey et al. (2009) state that special educators previously functioned as separate from general educators. In contrast, special education teachers now are more likely to be working as interventionists with general educators, helping students who struggle before they need to be referred for special education testing. They also may be working as consultants to general education teachers, assisting them by providing ideas for instruction. Prasse (2006) and Fuchs et al. (2008) point out that the lines are becoming blurred between general and special education. In addition, Prasse (2006) sees the potential for these two systems to merge, citing evidence for this intent in the current federal legislation of NCLB and IDEA.

When defining the role of the special education teacher in the current RTI process, Klingner (2009) notes there are several key responsibilities that align closely with their former, traditional roles. Those responsibilities include collaborating with general education teachers, serving as consultants, helping to identify children who may need special education services, providing individualized instruction, helping all students participate in the general education curriculum, and providing specific expertise in core instructional areas, evaluation, and knowledge of legislation (i.e., IDEA 2004) that impacts educational programming (Klingner, 2009).

The Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD) suggests that special education teachers in the field of learning disabilities focus on contributing to the RTI process when students move on to the third tier (Division for Learning Disabilities, 2006). At this point, students have not responded to instruction at previous tier levels. Because some of these students may end up having a learning disability, special education teachers are involved in evaluation and in collecting additional data regarding student performance. When formal testing is required, the special educator conducts the necessary formal and informal assessment after which they make recommendations for accommodations in the general classroom, as well as assist in the monitoring of the success of such modifications (Division for Learning Disabilities, 2006; Office of Special Education Programs, n.d.).

As part of an RTI model, the Division for Learning Disabilities (2006) recommends that special education teachers have a good grasp of pedagogy, a strong knowledge base as far as identifying scientifically-based interventions, have skills in direct instruction in core academic areas, as well as be able to provide instruction in learning strategies. Sound clinical judgment, the ability to carry out evaluation using informal measures and observation, the ability to communicate clearly with parents regarding assessment information, the skills to be fully collaborative members of RTI teams as part of the problem-solving process, as well as being knowledgeable about laws and regulations that impact the field of education, are critical skills and responsibilities of the special educator in the RTI process (Division for Learning Disabilities, 2006).

One of the most important aspects of the RTI process, as identified by Applebaum (2009), is that "special education teachers and specialists collaborate with general

education teachers to ensure the interventions are implemented correctly and with fidelity" (p. 7). When considering the implications of using evidence-based practice, Cook, Tankersley, and Harjusola-Webb (2008) suggest that teachers use their professional judgment in choosing and implementing interventions and in deciding when to make a change with the intervention being used. They suggest that teachers use evidence-based practices that they are knowledgeable and comfortable with, but that the educational environment is also a consideration when planning and implementing such interventions.

Fuchs et al. (2008) describe different models regarding the role of special education in RTI. The first model, which the authors point out comes from McLaughlin (2006), involves all intensive instruction being provided in general education settings by general education teachers. In this format, special education would potentially be lost, as would "individualized, data-based, and recursive education" (p. 98) provided by special educators. This responsibility would fall on general education teachers.

The second model, where Fuchs et al. (2008) cite the work of McLaughlin (2006) and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education and Council of Administrators of Special Education (2006), involves special education teachers providing services as part of the tiers of general education. In this model, special educators assist general education teachers in identifying and implementing teaching strategies. Special educators co-teach in a general education classroom with no opportunity for providing the individualized instruction required by special education programs. With both of these models, there is a definite presence of the special education teacher in general education settings and programming.

While a majority of sources emphasize collaboration among special educators and regular educators in the RTI process, Mastropieri and Scruggs (2005) do not see special educators as collaborative teaching partners in all levels of RTI saying, “General educators appear to have primary responsibility for all aspects of instruction, monitoring of instruction, and moving students among Tiers 1, 2, and 3, while special educators appear to assume primary responsibility for students in Tier 3” (p. 525). It is evident that there are many different viewpoints on what is considered current best practice for special education teacher participation in an RTI model.

Statement of the Problem

RTI is a general education initiative that is currently being implemented in school buildings across the country. As part of this educational model, special education teachers have increasingly found themselves involved in the planning and implementation of RTI interventions and in data collection for *all* students, not only those identified as needing special education. Whether or not these teachers feel supported in their efforts, or whether RTI is yet another expectation added to an already full plate of duties for special educators, was a concern to be explored.

The participation of special educators in the RTI process, as well as their perceptions about participating in the model, were addressed in this study. In addition, whether or not the expectations for special educators who participate in the RTI initiative were considered realistic by the special education teachers and whether or not they felt supported in their new roles, in terms of time and resources, were also explored.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which veteran teachers' roles in the field of special education have changed over time and how these roles continue to evolve as a result of the Response to Intervention (RTI) educational initiative. Changes in the roles of veteran special educators who participate in RTI on a daily basis in their current positions, as well as potential implications for teacher education programs, were explored. The participants of this study reflected upon and shared their experiences. They also made recommendations that may be used with future special educators working within the RTI model.

Conceptual Framework

The problem-solving model is the conceptual framework identified in this study. Problem-solving is an essential component of any education reform, and RTI is currently one of the largest educational reforms taking place. Prasse (2006) refers to problem-solving as the "reasons, models, and substance of reform initiatives" (p. 7), as well as to the importance of problem-solving as a part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) amendments of 2004, where RTI is alluded to and scientifically-based instruction is required (Prasse, 2006).

Bender and Shores (2007) provide an example of a problem-solving model, as implemented in 1992, by approximately 100 buildings in the Minneapolis Public School District. This model includes "individual decision making and intervention implementation for each student" (Bender & Shores, 2007, p. 8). The stages followed by RTI teams in the Minneapolis schools in the problem-solving model include beginning with classroom interventions, implementing problem-solving team interventions, and

following with special education referral and the initiation of due process procedures when necessary (Bender & Shores, 2007). The problem-solving model is "preferred by practitioners in the school setting in that it allows more flexibility with interventions and focuses more on the individual needs of the student" (Shores & Chester, 2009, p. 9).

Hayas and Klingner (2010) describe the problem-solving process as one that provides help to classroom teachers and parents by providing support and intervention to students who struggle academically and behaviorally. The authors recommend asking questions related to student strengths and areas of need, the interventions that have been tried, along with the outcomes, how classroom teachers can be supported in their efforts, what can be done to adjust the interventions, and what other factors should be considered in terms of environment and family involvement.

When looking at an overall definition, Canter (2004) cites the work of Marston and Reschly and Tilly when she defines a problem-solving model as:

a systematic approach that reviews student strengths and weaknesses, identifies evidence-based instructional interventions, frequently collects data to monitor student progress, and evaluates the effectiveness of interventions implemented with the student. Problem solving is a model that first solves student difficulties within general education classrooms. If problem-solving interventions are not successful in general education classrooms, the cycle of selecting intervention strategies and collecting data is repeated with the help of a building-level or grade-level intervention assistance or problem-solving team. Rather than relying primarily on test scores (e.g., from an IQ or math test), the student's response to general education interventions becomes the primary determinant of his or her need for special education evaluation and services. (Canter, 2004, p. 1)

Most problem-solving models include a process of identifying a problem, defining the problem, exploring solutions, implementing the solution/s, and determining the effectiveness of the solution/s (Marston, 2006; Shores & Chester, 2009; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010). Although it is common to find five step models of

problem-solving, Shinn (2008) adds an additional final step to his description of a problem-solving model. This sixth step in his model includes the actual solving of the problem (Shinn, 2008).

The conceptual framework of problem-solving as a key component of RTI is supported by Marston (2006) and VanDerHeyden and Burns (2010). These authors cite the problem-solving model of Deno (2002) and Deno and Mirkin (1977), who based the process on the problem-solving model of Bransford and Stein (1984). The IDEAL model of Bransford and Stein (1984) included the following steps:

1. [I]—identify the problem.
2. [D]—define the problem.
3. [E]—explore alternative solutions to the problem.
4. [A]—apply a solution.
5. [L]—look at the effects of the application. (VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010, p. 92)

The problem-solving models endorsed by these prominent researchers in the field have proven useful for adoption by educational organizations as well.

The problem-solving model adopted by the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) aligns with the models of Bransford and Stein (1984), Deno (2002), Marston (2006), and Deno and Mirkin (1977). This is a significant endorsement given the influence of CASE in the field of special education. In a white paper presented in May of 2006, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education and Council of Administrators of Special Education emphasized the importance of using a "structured, systematic, problem-solving process" (p. 5).

In addition, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) has approved the use of a problem-solving method including four basic

components: defining an issue, analyzing the issue, formulating a plan, and evaluating the effectiveness of the plan (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005). Regardless of the entity endorsing problem-solving as an effective component of RTI initiatives, the systematic nature required in the implementation of such a process is a recurring and prominent theme.

Research Question/Hypothesis

The intent of the study was to explore ways in which veteran special educators' roles have changed as a result of Response to Intervention and also to seek out recommendations for teacher education programs in order to better prepare future special educators for a collaborative role in the RTI initiative. The following research question guided the study:

What are the perceptions of special education teachers in regards to their changing roles as a result of Response to Intervention?

Significance/Rationale for the Study

Teachers' roles in the field of special education have changed significantly over the past decade, and these roles continue to evolve. As a result of RTI, the evolution of the roles of special educators has recently come to the forefront in the field, and there have been more questions than answers. The anticipated outcome of the study was that the perceptions of veteran special education teachers teaching in successful RTI models about their roles would lead to recommendations for the preparation of special education candidates who will assume the same roles in an RTI model.

Prasse (2006) states, "It is time to return special education to the mainstream of general education. The law not only allows us to change our practice but also expects us

to change" (p. 14). We, as teacher educators, need to be well versed in what is best practice in order to help our students meet the demands of today's classroom. I anticipated an added benefit of the study would be that participants would be able to reflect upon and share their experiences, thereby recognizing their own contributions to the changing field of special education.

Definitions

Collaboration: A teaming approach where regular and special educators, along with additional school personnel, including administrators, work together to find solutions and strategies for educating all students within an RTI model (Applebaum, 2009; Division for Learning Disabilities, 2006; Howard, 2009; Klingner, 2009; Wixson et al., 2010).

Curriculum-based measurement (CBM): A way of measuring student performance, based on a regularly administered standardized and valid process, that shows student growth over time. The results obtained inform changes in instructional practice (Buffum et al., 2009; Deno, 2003; Shinn, 2008).

Fidelity: Implementing an intervention correctly, with consistency, and for the purpose for which the intervention was designed (Buffum et al., 2009; Office of Special Education Programs, n.d.; Shores & Chester, 2009).

Problem-solving: The model that RTI teams use that includes specific processes and steps for identifying and solving issues related to student learning (Bender & Shores, 2007; Bransford & Stein, 1984; Canter, 2004; Council of Administrators of Special Education, n.d.; Deno & Mirkin, 1997; Hayas & Klinger, 2010; Johnson et al., 2006;

Marston, 2006; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005; Prasse, 2006; Shores & Chester, 2009; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010).

Progress monitoring: Related to the collection of data using curriculum-based measurements (CBMs) (Greenfield et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2006; Prasse, 2006; President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002; Shinn, 2008; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010; Wright, 2007).

Response to Intervention (RTI): A school-wide model of service delivery of academic and behavioral interventions, occurring across all grade levels, where interventions are provided at varying intensity levels according to students' individual needs and beginning in the general education classroom (Applebaum, 2009).

Scientifically-based interventions: Evidence-based knowledge and practices that are proven to be effective through research and proven results (Berkeley et al., 2009; Cook et al., 2008; Division for Learning Disabilities, 2006; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008; Howard, 2009; Johnson et al., 2006).

Tiers of support: A leveled system of interventions in RTI, where Tier 1 includes general education, Tier 2 involves modifications and accommodations to the general curriculum, and Tier 3 is defined as intensive instruction that may be provided in or out of the regular classroom (Brown-Chidsey et al., 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008; Greenfield et al., 2010; Hoover & Love, 2011; Howard, 2009; Klingner, 2009; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010; Wixson et al., 2010).

Universal screening: A process used with all students (three to four times a year) to determine the achievement level of students in academic and behavioral areas. Used

as a method to determine whether RTI interventions are needed and at what tier level (Applebaum, 2009; Mellard & Johnson, 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009).

Assumptions

Assumptions of this study included that veteran special educators who were implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) were doing so successfully, and willingly, as part of their typical teaching duties in their schools. Another presupposition included “buy in” of veteran special educators for the current RTI model. Thus, a preference for this initiative versus the former model of special education, which typically included a pull-out/resource service delivery, was assumed. The idea that Response to Intervention was current best practice and a highly effective model of service delivery in comparison to former models was also assumed to be a factor in this study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I provided the introduction to the study, including (a) the overall definition of RTI, (b) an overview of RTI implementation, (c) the special education teacher's role in RTI, (d) the statement of the problem to be explored, (e) the purpose of the study, (f) the conceptual framework of the study, (g) the research question posed in the study, (h) the significance/rationale of the study, (i) the definitions of the terms referred to in the study, and (j) assumptions of the study.

The methods used for the study are described in Chapter II. Methods and procedures for this qualitative study are presented in detail, as well as information on how participants were selected and how data from the interviews and observations were collected and analyzed. Chapter II also includes the code chart that was developed upon

analysis of the data. This chart includes the codes, categories, themes, and overall assertion derived from the study.

The results of the study with reference to the literature are covered in Chapter III. Excerpts from transcribed interviews and observations were used to present relevant data. In this chapter, similarities in subjects' responses and observations were categorized and combined into themes, which culminated into one overall assertion. In addition to the sharing of the findings of the study, supporting literature was incorporated.

Chapter IV is the culminating chapter of the study. It includes the overall summary of the process and findings, the conclusions drawn from my research, as well as recommendations for current and future teacher education programs and RTI practitioners. In addition, plans for future study around the topic of RTI are discussed, as well as information on a possible researcher bias that emerged later in the study.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which veteran teachers' roles in the field of special education have changed over time and how these roles continue to evolve as a result of the Response to Intervention (RTI) educational initiative. The chosen method for this study was qualitative. The qualitative model suggested by Maxwell (2005) involves five components: goals, conceptual framework, research questions, methods, and validity. I considered his model to be a good "roadmap" for conducting this qualitative study, as it served as a reminder of the essential considerations for this type of research.

Using the methods of observing and semi-structured interviewing proved to be the most effective tools in helping me find out more about the Response to Intervention (RTI) process, including how teachers defined the process, what they considered to be important tools and skills necessary for RTI to be successful in their buildings, what the overall process entailed for these teachers within their school settings, and how the teachers felt about this educational initiative versus previous models they had worked under.

My goal for the research was that it would have an overall quality of "verisimilitude," where researchers "get as close to the truth, or reality, as possible," and "accounts are crafted with rich detail so it has the appearance of reality" (Glesne, 2011,

p. 285). To make sure my methods were appropriate, I looked for ways to triangulate my data through using more than one method of research (i.e., ethnographic interviewing and observation). In addition, I made sure to complete multiple attempts of the methods I employed. I was able to do this in all aspects of the research by completing multiple observations and interviews.

The study was phenomenological in nature, and I used several of the steps in phenomenological analysis that Creswell (2007) shared as being developed by Moustakas (1994). The steps included:

1. Describing personal experiences of those being studied.
2. Using significant statements of the participants, listing them, categorizing them, and making a list of those that differ.
3. Taking the significant statements and creating themes.
4. Writing descriptions of what occurred through sharing verbatim statements of the participants.
5. Reflecting on the setting and context of the phenomenon.
6. Writing an overall description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Participant Selection

The criterion for selection of interview participants was based on their overall years of teaching experience and upon active and ongoing participation in successful RTI implementation in their respective buildings. I looked for educators who had been teaching in the field of special education for a minimum of seven years and who had been heavily involved in the RTI process, either through providing direct interventions to

students, serving as a facilitator of RTI teams, or by providing coaching or training to regular educators on research-based interventions.

In addition, I chose participants who had a reputation of being quality educators and who were reported to have a good grasp on current and former best practices in special education. Information on the teachers' levels of expertise was provided to me on an informal basis by colleagues, administrators, and by school district special education staff. These teachers also needed to have been involved in the successful implementation of Response to Intervention in their settings for a minimum of three years. Participants who had teaching experience in a variety of disability areas were sought out, as were participants who had worked in a combination of pull-out as well as inclusive teaching settings (i.e., where the majority of special education instruction occurs in a general education classroom with general education peers).

Description of the Participants

My first interview participant was Grace, who has taught for over 30 years, primarily in the field of special education. Grace has worked in self-contained settings, pull-out settings, and in inclusive classroom settings and has taught a combination of disability areas, including learning disabilities, developmental/cognitive (i.e., intellectual) disabilities, and emotional disturbances. When her school was given the opportunity to participate in an RTI model, Grace volunteered to attend initial training and to be one of the initial facilitators of RTI in her building. Grace is a skilled data collector and interventionist and she has been trained in Reading Recovery, which is a scientifically-based intervention in the area of reading. Grace defines RTI as "a way to get all students the help they need without anyone falling through the cracks." Grace

assists in providing training to interventionists in her building, helping to ensure implementation fidelity (i.e., correct implementation of a research-based intervention).

Grace has assisted with RTI implementation in her building for the past four years.

Katie, who was my second participant, has been trained in Reading Recovery as well. She is skilled in administering this program with students who struggle with reading. Her teaching experience has been solely in the field of special education, spanning the past 16 years. Her credentials are in the areas of learning disabilities, developmental/cognitive (i.e., intellectual) disabilities, and emotional disturbances. Katie is a staunch advocate for RTI and speaks passionately about the success of this model. Although her school has implemented the process for only three years, Katie has taken a leadership role in assisting classroom teachers with literacy training and in identifying scientifically-based interventions that can be implemented within her building. She stated that she has had knowledge of RTI longer than the school has been implementing it. She commonly facilitates RTI meetings with participating grade levels and hopes one day to be in an interventionist role full-time. Katie is excited about her current role. She stated:

When I very first wanted to do this job, I wanted to be a reading teacher for kids who struggle. What I really wanted to do was be an interventionist. I wanted to catch kids before they struggled, so it finally feels like I've landed there. It feels like the *just right* spot.

My final participant was Victoria. Her role differs from that of the previous two participants in that Victoria's current position is to serve as an RTI coordinator for a rural-based special education cooperative. She has 11 schools on her current rotation, and the building sites are located in eight different school districts. She makes regular

visits to all of these settings. During these visits, Victoria spends her time training teachers to use interventions with fidelity, collaborating with various building administrators and school staff, as well as troubleshooting and problem-solving with regard to RTI issues in K-12 buildings in her rural school settings. Prior to her current role, Victoria taught special education in elementary and high school settings for over 20 years. Her background is in learning disabilities, and she is a certified trainer in the research-based University of Kansas Learning Strategies.

Description of the Settings

At Voyager Elementary, where Katie works, they have been implementing RTI for the past three years. Voyager is located in a small, urban setting with an overall school population of nearly 500 students. This small city is located within a state this is considered rural. The student to teacher ratio at Voyager is 15 to 1. There are multiple sections of each grade level in this K-5 building, as well as various specialists available in reading, special education, and speech/language who participate in RTI interventions. There is a wealth of parent volunteers available at this school, so there is a potential in finding ways to utilize this resource in assisting with the implementation of RTI interventions (e.g., one-on-one reading), although this avenue has not been formally explored at this point.

Expedition Elementary, where Grace works, has a population of over 300 students and, similar to Voyager, the student to teacher ratio is 14.5 to 1. Expedition Elementary is also located in a small, urban community located within a rural state. RTI has been a part of this school for at least six years, although not all of that time has been considered as formal implementation years. There are multiple sections of each grade level in this

setting, as well as reading specialists, multiple special education teachers, speech and language pathologists, and para-educators with teaching backgrounds who work together to implement RTI in this building. Expedition is known in their school district for being a successful RTI school, and they often serve as a model for new schools, both in the district and beyond, that want to implement RTI.

The XYZ Cooperative is a progressive rural special education unit that serves multiple schools ranging from K-12. The cooperative serves eight different school districts and is comprised of 11 individual school sites. RTI has been implemented for several years in this cooperative, although some of the schools are newer than others to the process. This unit has been implementing RTI longer than many in the state. Currently, the director of the cooperative and Victoria are working on creating a standard protocol for interventions and progress monitoring. In addition, they are seeking to implement intervention mapping, where groups, individual students, interventionists, and settings are all charted in order to implement RTI interventions more effectively. RTI is a priority in this unit. Every effort is made to provide training and resources to help the initiative be successful in multiple buildings and across all grade levels.

Procedures

The Question

As stated in Chapter I, the research question in this study was, "What are the perceptions of special education teachers in regards to their changing roles as a result of Response to Intervention?"

Negotiating Entry

Negotiating entry into the observation settings and gaining access to the teachers was a fairly smooth process. Subjects were recruited through the use of professional networking contacts. I was able to informally research what schools have successfully used the RTI model for an extended period of time through visiting with colleagues and administrators in the field. I initially made contact with the administrators in the settings where I sought access to observe. I informed the administrators that the research was not only for dissertation purposes, but to glean suggestions for preparing new special education teachers for their newly developing roles in RTI.

After receiving district level approval to proceed in Voyager and Expedition Elementary schools, I approached two veteran special education teachers who had been recommended as being highly knowledgeable regarding the RTI process in an effort to determine their willingness to participate in the study. These teachers were enthusiastic and willing to contribute their time and expertise for the study.

After securing the participation of Katie and Grace, I contacted the special education director of the XYZ Cooperative to inquire about the possibility of interviewing and observing Victoria. She was willing to have Victoria participate, as long as Victoria was willing. At that point, I contacted Victoria and she agreed to participate.

All three teachers were asked to participate for one semester, with follow up for clarification occurring into the following semester, if need be. All participants were advised that they could discontinue their participation at any time. I mentioned to Katie and Grace that it would be important that any observations I conducted would have the

okay of their building administrators. I conveyed that the permission I had secured was at the district level from the assistant superintendent.

The obtaining of these permissions worked out differently depending on the setting. In Katie's setting, Voyager Elementary, she worked closely with the administrator and secured the permission herself. In Grace's setting, I contacted the principal to obtain permission. After I had made the initial contact, Grace also ran the idea by her principal before beginning participation in the study.

When securing permission to use Victoria as a participant at XYZ, I approached her special education director. I explained my study and what I hoped to accomplish. She suggested that I interview and observe Victoria, even before I made reference to wanting to use her as a participant. Because XYZ Cooperative used Victoria as an RTI coach across a variety of buildings and levels, the sole permission of her special education director was obtained, rather than individual building administrators.

Protecting Confidentiality and Anonymity

In order to protect my participants and their building locations, their names, as well as the names of their settings, were changed in all aspects of the study. The digital recordings of interviews have been stored on password protected computers both in my home and in my office. In addition, consent forms, pseudonym lists, observation notes, and any other documentation have been stored in separate locked file cabinets, both in my home and in my office.

Data Collection

Methods used to collect data included observation as well as in-depth semi-structured interviews (Roulston, 2010). I digitally recorded the interviews using

SoundNote, which is an iPad application. I later transcribed the interviews, verbatim, upon completion. In addition, observations included taking copious notes in a researcher notebook. After the observations were completed, notes were formally typed using a word processing program. I collected researcher notes, both digitally through SoundNote and also by hand in a researcher notebook. These notes were referred to often in order to come up with follow up questions or details regarding the setting or participants that may have been overlooked in the interviews or observations.

It should be noted that the interviews and observations did not commence until the obtaining of Institutional Review Board approval from the University of North Dakota, school district approval, including administration in individual school buildings as well as district level personnel, as well as signed, informed consent from the participants. Information on the purpose of the study, benefits and risks, confidentiality, intent and procedure, time commitment, and notification that participation could be withdrawn at any time and was voluntary in nature was explained to the participants before they signed off on their consent. In addition, before the interviews and observations were carried out, participants were given copies of their signed consent forms for their records.

Observation Format

While the format of the observations remained consistent, the content of each varied. Initial observations were conducted at Voyager Elementary with Katie. The first observation of Katie occurred as she facilitated an RTI grade level meeting with Kindergarten teachers and staff. This observation lasted for approximately one hour, and it involved all RTI team members sharing progress on individual students, as Katie took

notes on her computer and projected them for the group. Katie went student by student, calling out a student's name and moving from teacher to teacher to see who had information to share regarding progress made by each student. After sharing all of the current information relative to student growth, the team discussed which students were ready to move to different intervention tiers or which students were ready to be dismissed from interventions. The meeting concluded with the teachers and staff updating students' placement and intervention information, which were organized on a large display board. The meeting lasted for approximately one hour.

During this observation, I took notes in my researcher notebook. Katie had let the group know that I would be attending ahead of time, and she introduced me to the group as an observer before they commenced the meeting. One of the teachers commented at the end that she had forgotten I was even there. When I left the observation, I digitally recorded follow up questions, using SoundNote, to document additional questions that I wanted to ask Katie upon our next meeting. I also recorded my overall impressions regarding the observation in this digital format.

The second observation of Katie occurred with her as an RTI interventionist with a Kindergarten student. This observation was a half hour in length. I took notes in a researcher notebook. The interventions conducted with the student were centered around reading and involved Katie incorporating verbal and visual cues as she assisted the student in his reading tasks. The student was comfortable in having an observer present. At the end of the observation, Katie and I made plans to complete the interviews.

The observations at Expedition Elementary, where Grace worked, differed from the observations at Voyager with Katie in that I observed for the majority of a school day

and the observations did not include Grace. Rather, I shadowed the interventionists who Grace supervised. Grace had commented that she thought this would give me a good overview of the RTI process in her building, rather than observing her for a half hour time slot.

Grace made me a schedule to follow, and I observed in a variety of locations at Voyager. She had talked to the interventionists prior to my arrival. Some of them took time to explain what they were doing and why, while others simply introduced themselves and went about their tasks. Grace indicated that we could follow up on any of the questions that arose during the observations during our subsequent interviews. As previously, I made notes in my researcher notebook, and I wrote follow up questions in the margins.

During this observation period, I watched six different interventionists as they worked with RTI groups. Math and reading were the subject areas that were covered, while the grade levels of the students ranged from Kindergarten to fifth grade. The majority of the interventionists were para-educators, while one of the math interventionists was a classroom teacher. After I left, I digitally recorded final thoughts or questions for future reference using SoundNote on my iPad.

The observations of Victoria were in two different elementary schools, and they varied significantly from the interviews at Expedition and from the observation of Katie carrying out reading interventions. Victoria's time was spent on collaborating with RTI interventionists, where they discussed specific interventions to use, who could carry them out, and what materials were available to use for interventions. I observed in both settings for two hours each time.

The first observation was of Victoria as she collaborated with a special education teacher, while the second observation included Victoria, a reading teacher, a special education teacher, and also a classroom teacher. Although most of the time in the second observation was centered around the discussion with the reading teacher, the special education teacher's input was requested on a student who they were ready to place on an IEP, while the classroom teacher's observations and information were requested to assist in problem-solving on potential interventions for use in her classroom.

I took notes in the researcher notebook during both observations. These observations varied from previous observations in the study since Victoria does not have direct responsibility for carrying out interventions herself. I noted that the problem-solving in these settings was less formal and involved more discussion of resources, as far as staff members and materials.

During each observation, I came in with a notebook and made meticulous notes. I wrote questions in the margins regarding topics and ideas for future follow up. After the initial introductions, I did not interact during the observations unless a participant initiated contact or conversation, as everyone I was scheduled to observe already knew I would be there. I made every effort to “fade into the woodwork” in order not to disrupt the normal flow of activity. Immediately after leaving each site, I digitally recorded questions or impressions using the SoundNote digital recording application. In addition to making digital recordings, I also made handwritten notes and plans for future follow up in an effort to retain as much data as possible.

Although I had planned to not be a participant observer, I found that it occurred naturally on more than one occasion with my observations of Victoria, in particular. The

following is an excerpt from my initial observation notes: "I moved to the role of a participant observer briefly when I brainstormed with them about helping them secure additional time from a graduate student from UND for practicum hours. This may be a way to get them the help they need to be able to implement more interventions." This episode relayed to me the reality that even though schools may know what they want to do for a student, they may not always have the resources, as far as staff, to do so.

As stated previously, the settings and activities of the observations varied. From observing a participant leading an RTI grade level meeting, to watching that same subject implementing interventions, to watching multiple interventions being implemented within the scope of a school day, to observing the problem-solving process between an RTI coordinator and teaching staff, I felt I was able to observe a wide variety of activities encompassing the overall RTI process. The fact that these observations occurred across multiple settings only strengthened the overall process of data collection. The total number of observations made was 10, spanning five different days. The observations ranged in length from a half hour to two hours at a time.

Interview Format

Katie and Grace were interviewed in their classrooms during their prep times, as deemed convenient by the participants themselves. Victoria was interviewed in her office at Harmony High School during her planning hour. Two interviews were conducted with each participant, as well as a follow up visit to check the accuracy of the findings. The interviews ranged anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes.

Before conducting the interviews, I reviewed the definition of interviewing, as provided by Roulston (2010). Roulston refers to ethnographic interviewing as "sharing

similarities with friendly conversation" (p. 19). This seemed to be a good lens with which to frame my interviewing, as I wanted the participants to feel comfortable to share their insights and experiences.

The interviews were digitally recorded using the SoundNote application on an iPad, while notes were taken in a notebook or typed on a laptop. The laptop was not used in all interviews, but was utilized primarily during Katie and Grace's interviews, along with the use of a researcher notebook. While I had questions typed up and ready in advance, the interviewing technique used would best be described as the semi-structured interview. Roulston (2010) describes this interview technique as:

the interview protocol is used as a "guide" and questions may not always be asked in the same order; the interviewer initiates questions and poses follow up "probes" in response to the interviewee's descriptions and accounts. The interviewee selects own terms to formulate answers to questions; responses are guided by the interviewer's questions. (p. 14)

I found that, many times, the questions I had planned on asking were answered in the natural flow of the conversation.

The questions asked of participants involved establishing their background in special education in terms of years in the profession, areas of certification, and experiences in teaching various disability areas. Teaching methods and materials that were previously used was also a component of the interview questions in order to establish a foundation as to how the teachers' "tricks of the trade" had evolved over time. In addition, I wanted to know whether or not former methods utilized by these veteran teachers were useful in their implementation of interventions within their current teaching roles within RTI.

I was particularly interested in how these veteran teachers defined RTI and how they viewed their roles in the process. Whether or not they were able to participate of their own free will, or whether RTI implementation was a requirement when they first began working with the process, was another topic that was explored. How did the initial “buy in” of the teachers occur and how did the transition to working within an RTI model come about for these teachers? I also wanted to know how long RTI had been implemented in their settings and wanted to hear stories regarding successful implementation.

Having the participants provide me with a “snapshot” of RTI in their building was important. I wondered whether or not their roles were similar or different from what they had envisioned they would be as new special education teachers. If their roles had changed significantly, or if they were serving in dual roles, I wondered how they avoided burnout and overcommitment.

Any advice they would give new teachers entering the field, as well as implications for teacher education programs at the university level were important areas that were explored as well. I ended the final interviews by asking whether or not the teachers felt RTI was here to stay and why or why not. I also asked them if they had additional information to share.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews and observations and typing up researcher notes, I began reviewing my data and reading through the handwritten notes I had made in a researcher notebook. I came up with codes that were recurring throughout the interviews and observations by reading and re-reading through all of the data. I wrote corresponding

codes in the margins of the transcriptions on a first attempt at coding and later went back and used Post-It flags to mark the data.

This process involved me flagging where I found each code and then writing the corresponding code on the flag. After flagging all of the codes in all of the interviews and observations, I documented which codes were found on which pages in each data sample, and then tallied the total number of occurrences of the code in a single interview or observation. After this step in the coding process, I created a list of all of the codes. I went back to the individual tally sheets and combined the number of occurrences of each code on one sheet for each code.

To narrow down which codes were critical to the study, I transferred the information one last time to a new document, where I ordered the codes from most occurring to least occurring. I determined a cutoff number, deciding to include only the codes that were present four or more times. In the end, the codes I decided on keeping were those that were most prominent in both my observations and interviews.

Next, I created a code book (see Appendix B) where I defined my codes and gave examples of data that supported the codes and definitions ascribed to them. Once I had completed the code book, I grouped the final codes into similar categories. I did this by listing codes separately and physically arranging them into groups via notecards. After several attempts to group the codes, the final categories emerged through examining the similarities evident in the codes.

After this step, I was able to come up with six themes that were represented by the categories. To assist me in this process, I created a Phenomenological Research Worksheet (see Appendix C). On this worksheet, I noted significant statements from the

participants. Across from each statement, I included the categories of *formulated meanings* and *themes*, used to group statements of importance, to draw conclusions based on the similarities expressed by the participants, and to compile overall themes from such meanings. I reviewed the themes from Appendix C when completing the Data Analysis Chart (see Table 1) to make sure all relevant data were included.

The analysis of the data collected in this study resulted in codes that were grouped into six distinct categories, with six related themes. All six themes were incorporated into four assertions. The codes, categories, themes, and assertions are detailed in Table 1.

Procedures for Ensuring Validity

The methods I used to check that my findings were valid were numerous. First, I made sure that I had given a highly detailed narrative account, filled with thick description, as suggested by Creswell (2007) and Glesne (2011). I employed multiple data collection techniques, the majority of which included personal semi-structured interviews (Roulston, 2010) and ethnographic observations (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, as a tool to increase validity, I incorporated subjects' low-inference vocabulary into my data, where the actual wording used by participants was incorporated into my findings. I also used reflexivity, or self-awareness and reflection, as part of my researcher memos (Milinki, 1999). Triangulation (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005) involved using a variety of techniques and multiple interview subjects.

One of the final measures taken to ensure that my results were valid and triangulated involved having the participants verify that my descriptions of their

Table 1. Data Analysis.

Codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background • Materials • Teacher Expertise • Strategies 	Knowledge and Skills	<p>Participants conveyed that veteran special education teachers often hold a variety of credentials, have additional areas of expertise and background experiences, as well as access to a variety of scientifically-based teaching materials, which all contribute to the knowledge and skills that are useful when implementing RTI.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underpinnings of RTI • Professional Development • Leadership • "Buy In" • Time • Resources 	Building Blocks	<p>Participants identified the building blocks of RTI in their settings as including enacted legislation (i.e., NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEA) bringing about a paradigm shift, administrative support for change, opportunities for initial professional development to gain an understanding of the process, teacher "buy in," as well as being provided with time and resources necessary to plan for and implement RTI.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Screening • Roles (General vs. Special Education) • Leadership • "Buy In" • Time • Resources 	Process	<p>The overall process of RTI, as shared by the participants, includes universal screening implemented school-wide, clear roles for general and special education teachers, "buy in" from all participants, and school leaders who support staff and RTI initiatives through providing time and resources for teachers to be able to successfully implement interventions.</p>

Table 1 (cont.)

Codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Early Intervention • Caseload • Reaching All Students 	Successes	<p>The participants, while working collaboratively with general education teachers through RTI problem-solving models, have found success in reaching students they have not been able to work with previously through the lowered caseloads for students on IEPs, which has provided additional time to work with RTI groups.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduling • Data Management • Response to Intervention for Behavior (RTI-B) • Fidelity • Time 	Challenges	<p>The participants reported the challenges of RTI are how to implement RTI-B effectively, how to find time for scheduling and data management, as well as how to make sure all interventions are implemented with fidelity.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTI Coordinators • New Special Education Teachers 	Future Vision	<p>The participants recommend (1) having RTI coordinators/interventionists available in all schools that implement RTI, and (2) having university programs train new special educators to have a strong knowledge base on progress monitoring and the use of appropriate research-based interventions.</p>

Table 1 (cont.)

Codes	Categories	Themes
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Assertions:

1. Veteran special educators believe that prior background knowledge and professional expertise contribute to successful implementation of RTI in K-12 settings.
2. When planning for the initial implementation of RTI, veteran special educators identify administrative support, teacher "buy in," and opportunities for professional development as essential components.
3. Veteran special educators value a clearly defined RTI process, as well as the availability of resources, including time, materials, and ongoing training, as contributing to the ongoing success of current RTI models.
4. When the successes and challenges of the model are acknowledged and addressed and a vision for the future of RTI is in place, veteran special educators feel hopeful for the continuation of the RTI initiative.

interviews were accurate by having them review the codes, categories, themes, and final assertion in chart form. Finally, external audits completed by my advisor and my dissertation committee contributed to the validity of my methods.

Given the small number of participants, this study cannot be considered as generalizable (Milinki, 1999), as I cannot make overall generalizations on the topic of RTI. Although this cannot be considered as a measure of the validity of my findings, I am able to share my findings as being based on the phenomenon of RTI as perceived and implemented by veteran special education teachers through their day to day involvement in the RTI process in multiple settings.

Summary

In exploring the perceptions of veteran special education teachers as they participate in the RTI process, qualitative research methods and procedures were

employed in this study. Chapter II provided a description of the data and processes used in this phenomenological study. The chapter began with descriptions of the participants and settings. Procedures that were employed to ensure the validity of the process, as well as descriptions of the data collection system used, were discussed. The data analysis process was explained and results were conveyed regarding codes, categories, themes, and an overall assertion.

Chapter III will provide the reader with details of the results obtained in the study. Interview data will be shared, along with supporting narrative from participants. Data from observations will also be incorporated. This information will be used to support the research findings, in conjunction with supporting evidence provided from the literature.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS WITH REFERENCE TO THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which veteran teachers' roles in the field of special education have changed over time and how these roles continue to evolve as a result of the Response to Intervention (RTI) educational initiative. Changes in the responsibilities of veteran special educators who participate in RTI on a daily basis in their current positions, as well as potential implications for teacher education programs, were explored. The participants of this study reflected upon and shared their experiences. They also made recommendations that may be used with future special educators working within the RTI model. In this chapter, the categories that emerged in the study, along with specific quotes from the participants, are included. In addition, literature that supports the findings of the study is presented.

Categories and Themes

There were six categories that emerged, including knowledge and skills, building blocks, process, successes, challenges, and future vision. Along with the categories, themes were used to incorporate the defining characteristics of each category. Quotes from the participants were used to support the themes, as well as literature that supported or disputed the findings.

Knowledge and Skills

“Teacher expertise plays a huge part.” – Katie, Veteran Special Education Teacher

I have defined the category of *Knowledge and Skills* as veteran teachers' background knowledge and experiences, including the ability to implement strategies and to use materials effectively when carrying out RTI interventions with students. The theme identified in this category was that participants conveyed that veteran special education teachers often hold a variety of credentials, have additional areas of expertise and background experiences, as well as access to a variety of scientifically-based teaching materials, which all contribute to the knowledge and skills that are useful when implementing RTI.

The participants made reference to the prior experiences they had in using specific curriculum, materials, and training as useful for their roles in implementing RTI interventions. Both Grace and Victoria made mention of how they used University of Learning Kansas Strategies, specifically. Victoria credited her background in strategies training as the reason she began working with RTI. She noted, "So, that is kind of how I got into RTI. I have to credit the strategies training and certification."

Additionally, the participants indicated that their former teaching duties were similar to their current responsibilities in RTI. They emphasized that the difference is mainly in the students they serve. Grace noted, "I think the work is similar with the RTI model; the difference is we're working with students who have not been identified as having a disability." The participants' views are supported by Klingner (2009) when she states that veteran special education teachers often hold a variety of credentials, have

additional areas of expertise, and are able to provide services not only to students on their typical special education caseloads, but also to students who are receiving support through RTI (Klingner, 2009).

After visiting with all three participants, I found there was a clearly established pattern of longevity in teaching in the field of special education, as well as a variety of experiences in school levels and disability areas. Grace and Katie have certification in multiple disability categories (i.e., learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, and intellectual disabilities), as well as training in an intensive reading intervention called Reading Recovery. Victoria has a single certification in the area of learning disabilities, but has extensive experience across all grade levels. Additionally, she serves as a certified trainer on the University of Kansas Learning Strategies. All of the teachers hold an elementary teaching license, and one of the three teachers had experience in teaching regular education, as well as special education. The participants described how their backgrounds and experiences aligned well with their current responsibilities within the RTI model.

In my initial interview with Grace, she shared her teaching background, including experience in teaching in a general education classroom at the elementary level, in addition to special education. Through the depth and breadth of Grace's career, it was evident that she had extensive background and that her regular education teaching experiences also contributed to her overall knowledge and skills. She shared her teaching background:

I've been teaching since 1980. Most of that has been in special education, but I've also taught regular education. I taught in a self-contained ED room [pause] for three years, then I taught fourth grade for five years. I also taught K-12

special education. When we moved here, I got certified in Learning Disabilities and then have been pretty much working in that area since about 1993 in this district. But now, I am certified in ED and MR, so, I'm not a strategist, technically, but I do have all those certifications.

Katie, although not having had regular education elementary teaching experiences, also shared her background that included teaching in a variety of disability areas:

I've had a variety of disability categories that I've worked with. I don't have my generalist. I have three separate credentials. I've been at three different buildings, and I've always managed a mixed caseload. All of my experience has been in K-5, which is a really good fit for beginning RTI.

At this point, the participants were clearly pointing to the value of a veteran teacher's background in the implementation of RTI interventions. My final participant, Victoria, also had extensive experience in teaching special education:

My degree was in special education and I got my learning disabilities credential. I was, you know, a new grad. You think you're just going to get that elementary job, and, none to be had, so I got a job in special education worked for XYZ [Cooperative]. The first five years I lived in Harmony and commuted to Taylor, and I did K-12 special ed. Then, there was an opening in Harmony, still within XYZ Cooperative, so I worked at the elementary for about 10 years. Then, I moved up to the high school.

In addition to the overall background of the participants, I found that two out of the three had extensive training in Reading Recovery. The training the participants had in this intervention has spanned several years, as the teachers keep current on the requirements for implementing Reading Recovery. Grace initially mentioned the intervention by stating, "I went through the Reading Recovery training. We call it Literacy Lessons now. It's Reading Recovery for special education teachers and we follow the same model." Likewise, Katie made reference to similar background experience when she stated:

All of the special educators in this building have Reading Recovery training and believe about teacher knowledge about readers. There is so much value in being a professional and working with students.

Dorn and Soffos (2012) and Howard (2009) provide evidence of Reading Recovery as an intensive and successful reading intervention. Dorn and Soffos (2012) point to the varying intensity levels of Reading Recovery as effective for diverse learners. Howard (2009) states that “Reading Recovery is the only intervention program to be awarded the highest success ranking by the U.S. Department of Education Sciences What Works Clearinghouse” (p. 5).

Similar to Grace and Katie, Victoria had additional training in scientific, research-based interventions, specifically in the University of Kansas Learning Strategies. Victoria is a certified trainer of these strategies, and she noted she is one of only three in the entire state. She credits her background in being a trainer as opening the door for her to be in her current role as an RTI coordinator in the XYZ Cooperative. She continues to train teachers to use the University of Kansas Learning Strategies, which are some of the primary intervention tools used in Victoria's settings.

A critical point made by all of the participants was the importance of RTI interventionists being highly qualified. In No Child Left Behind, being highly qualified is defined as teachers having a degree in education, certification in the areas in which they teach, as well as the ability to demonstrate competency in the subject areas they teach (Batsche et al., 2005). Katie shared the importance of this requirement when she stated, "All of us doing interventions are highly qualified and are reading specialists or special education teachers."

Grace agreed that special education teachers need to be highly qualified; the interventions at Expedition Elementary are carried out by a variety of school personnel, some of who are para-educators. She noted that the para-educators in their building are "highly skilled and most of them are teachers." The Council of Administrators of Special Education (n.d.) echoes the importance of teachers being highly qualified. They noted that being highly qualified is a way to increase the effectiveness of instruction and to improve overall outcomes for all students.

As part of the discussion on the need for teachers to be highly qualified, Katie made reference to the importance of teacher knowledge and pointed to the International Reading Association (2010) as providing guidelines on the subject. Katie also emphasized not only teacher knowledge, but having teachers take the time to think about what they are teaching and what is good for their students. Her perspective gave light to a common struggle teachers face between implementing research-based interventions, as required in RTI, and implementing what they think will work best, based on their own experiences. Katie spoke to the relevance of teacher-created materials when she stated:

Using teacher knowledge, I'm looking at him not as a kid, but I'm looking at him as a reader and what does he need next? We really believe you can't put that on a para., so that was our belief. Our principal has listened to us over the years talk about that. So we don't have kits; we have teacher made stuff. I'm being a teacher and thinking about what he needs and planning each lesson, and so it is time consuming for all of us to look at a kid and say, "Okay, now for tomorrow, I have to plan lessons." We all really just believe in that, and so there's a purpose for it. Teacher expertise plays a huge part.

Katie also shared the importance of good teachers:

It's not about materials; it's not about a box. Yes, there's good strategies and good methodology, but these kids need good teachers to think through what they are doing and really look at it—what no box or program can do.

There is an emphasis that classroom teachers who are providing core instruction at Tier 1 should be highly skilled (International Reading Association, 2010). When students are not successful with Tier 1 interventions and need to progress to further tier levels, the person carrying out the interventions in those subsequent tiers should have an even higher level of knowledge in research-based strategies and instructional techniques. Since special educators are involved in collaborating on interventions in Tier 2 and are often responsible for carrying out Tier 3 interventions, the need for specialists to be able to demonstrate such knowledge is essential (International Reading Association, 2010).

Grace and Victoria made reference to how they use a combination of materials in the process. They note the importance of using specific, scientifically-based curricula and acknowledged the importance of teachers being formally trained in the use of these programs. I observed Victoria during a problem-solving session with a special education teacher.

While they were looking at what scientifically-based curricula they had access to in their cooperative, they noted a concern about teachers needing to be formally trained to implement the strategies correctly. This emphasized a possible reason for disconnect between what teachers know they should be using and what they are using in practice. During the observation, Victoria and the special education teacher discussed how their buildings use Reading Recovery, Read Naturally, and the Language! program, but brought up the issue that not all teachers had been formally trained, particularly in the Language! program.

Even though the Language! program is scientifically based, the special education teacher and Victoria referred to it as being “very prescribed and requiring extensive

training.” They discussed the importance of fidelity in that they cannot write up a student progress report and note that a program didn’t work when it has not been implemented correctly. The need for fidelity in RTI interventions through implementing the intervention correctly, with consistency, and for the purpose for which it was designed is supported by Buffum et al. (2009), the Office of Special Education Programs (n.d.), and by Shores and Chester (2009).

To address the importance of preparing interventionists to use specific, research-based strategies, Victoria consistently trains her staff in the University of Kansas Learning Strategies. She teaches these strategies in a workshop format to many of the teachers in XYZ Cooperative and mentioned that it is a good place to start for those who may be unfamiliar with high quality, research-based strategies. Victoria stated, "Now I can go from school to school and train teachers and it’s a really good avenue to do that because it’s research based." The importance of using scientifically-based interventions, or evidence-based knowledge and practices that are proven through research, is emphasized by the Division for Learning Disabilities (2006), Fuchs and Fuchs (2008), as well as in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). The Division for Learning Disabilities (2007) referred to IDEA (2004) when they state, “In determining whether a child has a specific Learning Disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention” (p. 6). When considering IDEA legislation, Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) point to the need for teachers to carry out scientifically-based interventions effectively as part of the RTI process.

Building Blocks

“Our administrator really listened to us and what we felt was important.” – Katie, Veteran Special Education Teacher

I have defined the category of *Building Blocks* as the necessary elements that need to be in place for successful implementation of RTI. The theme identified in this category was that participants identified the building blocks of RTI in their settings as including enacted legislation (i.e., NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEA) bringing about a paradigm shift, administrative support for change, opportunities for initial professional development to gain an understanding of the process, teacher "buy in," as well as being provided with time and resources necessary to plan for and implement RTI.

Participants discussed the importance of several elements as being useful and necessary when beginning the process of RTI in a new setting. The three interview subjects agreed that initial support from administration was essential in making changes in service delivery, as were opportunities for training, and follow up time to design and implement the interventions that would be used with students. Also evident in this theme was the expressed need for availability of resources (e.g., universal screening tools, scientifically-based curricula, trained staff), given the fact that research-based interventions are a critical element required in successful RTI models.

When building the foundation for RTI, the participants were given opportunities for training and top down support, which provided them with the initial tools they needed to launch RTI in their respective settings. When I asked the participants about the building blocks of RTI in their schools, they had a lot to share. Katie stated:

You know that training that special ed. did for special ed. teachers way back when we were talking about the new LD guidelines? Those were the first

underpinnings of RTI. Then, as time went on, you know, we had some district level training. We had speakers come in, like Austin Buffum . . . that kind of thing. And then, a team of us from my school, me and another special education teacher, a Kindergarten teacher, and the principal went to a workshop on pyramid intervention before we started implementing to lay the foundation.

In addition, Grace shared that initial RTI training was provided by their state department, as well as by their local special education units:

The year before we started, there was a training sponsored by the state department. They brought in [a speaker on RTI] who had been doing RTI in her district for probably 15 years. We started in October and we trained. Then, in October, November, December, and February, we had one day each month, as it was four whole day trainings.

Because they knew it would be a shift that would be coming eventually, participation in the RTI initiative was a proactive way for all of the participants and their settings to embrace change. When I asked about how they had been recruited to the process, Victoria shared, "Initial participation was voluntary, although we knew things would be changing." Katie shared that the support of the building principal was an important factor in initial implementation of RTI at Voyager. Katie stated, "Our administrator really listened to us and what we felt was important." This emphasized the contribution of administrative support to the overall successful launching of the initiative. In addition, the participants talked about how administrators provided them with the time and support needed to get training in RTI and to plan for its implementation. Bender and Shores (2007) cite the importance of administrative support for RTI to be successful. They emphasize that successful RTI programs have administrators who clearly advocate for the RTI process and who design the overall building schedules to include the time and staffing necessary for RTI interventions. At its initial stages, administrators should

design and support professional development opportunities to educate teachers on the RTI process (Bender & Shores, 2007).

The biggest impetus for change at Expedition Elementary, Voyager Elementary, and XYZ Cooperative seemed to have occurred as a result of changes in educational legislation. All of the participants emphasized that RTI first came about through changes in legislation and that, as a result, their administrators were supportive in incorporating RTI as a new paradigm in education. Katie pointed out that part of the reason they first implemented RTI at Voyager was because "we knew that the regulations for LD would be changing."

Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) stated that No Child Left Behind (2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) brought about the basis for change. In addition, the Council for Exceptional Children (2008) reported the endorsement of the U.S. Department of Education for flexible models of RTI. "Although the Department has not endorsed a single model, there is a basic framework of RTI emerging in research and practice" (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2008, p. 10).

In all of the settings, RTI appeared to be about working together to reach and teach all students by providing quality interventions and using all available resources effectively. In addition to finding ways to train interventionists and to gain the "buy in" of staff who participate in RTI, trust building is an important element needed when RTI is implemented. Victoria noted how she first gained the trust of teachers:

I actually got in [to classrooms] by doing [Kansas] strategies with them. I would go into a classroom and I would teach the strategy and they would watch. Depending on their skill level and comfort level, they would join in and help out and do. So, they were kind of watching me teach the strategy so they could learn how to do it. We would sit down and do a little bit of planning, but I would do

the majority of the teaching and they would help with the scoring and providing feedback and things like that. This kind of got me in the door as a way to provide interventions for kids.

Victoria credited the teaching of the University of Kansas Learning Strategies as a way to gain access to classrooms and help with interventions. The participants have worked to find creative ways to support the work of classroom teachers and to clarify roles when implementing RTI in new settings. This is one of the important considerations in setting up RTI programs. Brown-Chidsey et al. (2009) support the importance of finding out how special education teachers can work collaboratively with regular education teachers and find ways to access general education classrooms (Brown-Chidsey et al., 2009).

As part of planning for reaching and teaching all students, the participants made reference to the importance of scheduling, as well as adequate time for planning, when first looking at the implementation of RTI in a new setting. The time and effort that goes into scheduling is an ongoing challenge. Grace noted, "Scheduling is one of those infrastructure things. We realized that the first year. The first year we didn't have it all figured out." Similarly, Victoria noted:

They started out with a common time in the middle of the day, along with their lunch break, so it is lunch/common time. It was like a whole hour. They went to an eight period day is really what they went was from a seven to an eight period day. Now, schools are looking at tacking it on at the end of the day, so. What their hope is that this will provide intervention time.

The importance of scheduling is emphasized by Howard (2011) when she states, "Scheduling for tier 2/3 interventions requires a school-wide effort that puts kids first" (p. 13). The importance of overall scheduling and building time into schedules for interventions and progress monitoring was emphasized by Brown-Chidsey et al. (2009),

as consistency in implementing interventions and data collection can improve student outcomes. After their respective schools laid the groundwork for the changes that would come from RTI, the participants found themselves involved in addressing issues of process and how best to meet the day to day demands of the initiative.

Process

“We focused on research-based interventions and promoted this. Last year, it was more about the process.” – Victoria, Veteran Special Education Teacher and RTI Coordinator

The overall process of RTI, as shared by the participants, includes universal screening implemented school-wide, clear roles for general and special education teachers, "buy in" from all participants, and school leaders who support staff and RTI initiatives through providing time and resources for teachers to be able to successfully implement interventions. The Council for Exceptional Children (2008) also maintains that "RTI is a process" (p. 1).

While the participants said that teaching techniques are similar to what they have used in the past, the new versus old model of service delivery varies considerably in terms of how support is currently provided to students. The current model focuses on bringing the interventions to the students. This was evident during the observations of RTI interventions at Expedition, as no students receiving RTI interventions were served in the special education rooms. RTI seemed to be the reverse of the traditional model of special education. The changes in service delivery are emphasized by Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) when they refer to former special education models as a destination and not a service.

Regarding successful RTI implementation, the participants discussed the need for a variety of elements to be defined and addressed. The change in the paradigm of service delivery that the RTI process encompasses was a central point. Katie talked about how RTI differs from the former special education model, in terms of the timeframe and support provided to students:

When we are giving RTI boosts to a kid and it's not enough, that's when we start looking at an IEP. RTI is a little more sporadic. Oh, good, you're up, we can withdraw, whereas, special ed., even with our boosts, you're still low. With special ed., you don't need someone to come from underneath you and boost you, you need to change the game plan and get down lower. It's just a little bit different. Those kids might get caught up, but it's the difference from short-term and long-term interventions. Even though I said some of those RTI kids might need services throughout, at a point, they are short-term interventions.

The idea of giving all students the support they need within the context of RTI, and through special education when deemed necessary, is emphasized by Greenfield et al. (2010), Hoover and Love (2011), and Klingner (2009). They point out that all decisions made for the continuation or changing of interventions are based on data. Students who need special education will be referred for those services when RTI interventions are not intensive enough, while students who benefit from RTI will continue to receive support within the tier levels (Greenfield et al., 2010; Hoover & Love, 2011; Klingner, 2009).

All of the participants spoke to their changing roles within the RTI process, and they felt that there will be continued evolution of special educators' roles the longer the initiative is in place. Although recognizing that RTI is, first and foremost, a general education initiative, the participants gave voice to the fact that the roles are more intertwined and blurred with general education as time goes on. Katie talked about the roles changing and the overall shift that is occurring in educational service delivery:

It's this gentle teaming, where we share kids between us. I think that makes a lot of sense. I think we are finally getting closer and closer to the point where we should have been all along, because it's about kids and meeting their needs. I love the fact that we are blurring labels and blurring departments. I like that there's not this huge difference between [regular education] and special education . . . that we work together. I think everyone would say that this feels really good.

As part of a successful process, the Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Learning Disabilities (2007) provides role clarification for general and special education teachers who participate in RTI. Because RTI is a general education initiative, CEC recommends that regular education teachers are responsible for providing research-based interventions in Tier 1 (Division for Learning Disabilities, 2007). In addition, CEC maintains that special education teachers, particularly teachers of students with learning disabilities, should continue to provide special education services to students who are identified with LD, as in previous service delivery models. CEC states that special education teachers should provide teacher expertise and consultation to RTI teams within their buildings (Division for Learning Disabilities, 2007).

All of the participants referenced the importance of universal screening in the RTI process. Grace talked about how it is implemented, in the beginning of the year, on a school-wide basis to assess where students are functioning academically. In addition, she mentioned that it was being used at two other points during the year as a measure of progress at Expedition. Likewise, Katie made reference to the necessity of universal screening as part of the RTI process, and spoke about the time that it takes to implement it well. She noted, "Universal screening time was really busy, although I'm trained to be more efficient."

It was interesting to note that not all of the settings used the same tools. For instance, Katie's setting relied on Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) testing scores, North Dakota State Assessment (NDSA) results, and Fountas and Pinnell (reading level) assessments as some of their primary tools for benchmarking and screening. Grace and Victoria reported the use of AIMSweb (a web-based progress monitoring tool) in addition to MAP scores and NDSA testing as some of their primary universal screening and benchmarking tools. Researchers note the use of universal screening to be essential to the success of the RTI process in terms of identifying the levels of intervention needed and in determining outcomes after interventions have been implemented (Applebaum, 2009; Mellard & Johnson, 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009).

Out of the processes comprising RTI, all participants shared positive outcomes in finding and using research-based interventions. The participants indicated it was much easier to implement the interventions than it was to collect data on them. Grace said, "We had good success with the interventions; we didn't do so well with the data collection. That was harder, but we've done much better now." Additionally, Katie shared the success of the interventions piece by stating, "After having one-on-one intervention, they came back and were higher than the class, so we were looking at upping the classroom instruction." Quality research-based interventions are an integral part of the RTI process (Burggraf, 2007; Council for Exceptional Children, 2008; Howard, 2009).

Burggraf (2007) details the importance of the interventions used in RTI when she gives the guidelines as to what does or does not constitute an intervention. She highlights that interventions do not include only teaching the primary curriculum or giving a student

typical accommodations, such as moving their seat, reading the content aloud, or giving extended time or a reduced number of problems to complete (Burggraf, 2007). She defines an intervention as "a scientifically-researched program used in addition to the core curriculum to help students with significant deficits reach proficiency" (p. 2).

Given this definition, it seemed that the participants approached interventions with the same mindset. All of them shared that they had a variety of interventions they had come to rely on, and they stated that the interventions used were proven to have a high success rate and a good research base. Grace gave an example of one such intervention:

Road to the Code has also been a success. I'd just heard about it at a couple of workshops. It's about phoneme segmentation. We decided to try it last year. I got to be one of the interventionists. They move in and out of this fairly quickly. The main activity is "say it and move it." They have a little sheet, like this, and then we have these little tiles. They start with a few tiles and then you add more. It's been successful. Kids really need to learn to segment sounds.

This was only one of several interventions mentioned by the participants. There were a variety of tools that were used, which varied from setting to setting and teacher to teacher. Additional interventions that were discussed included programs such as Read Naturally, Language!, AGS Functional Curriculum, and Edmark. Victoria reported that she uses a lot of the University of Kansas Learning Strategies, while Katie made reference to incorporating techniques learned in her Reading Recovery training, in addition to teacher-made materials.

As mentioned previously, the interventions aspect of RTI was reported by the participants to have gone fairly smoothly. All of the participants mentioned data

collection as being an integral part of the process. Victoria described progress monitoring in her setting:

They are getting better at figuring out what interventions they need to use. We're still working on that, but the big thing right now is progress monitoring. Schools are starting to see how important this is . . . how just doing an intervention isn't enough.

Similarly, Grace talked about the importance of a process for collecting data on student progress. She developed booklets that are given to all interventionists in her building as a means to standardize the process of data collection as much as possible. Grace said she hands out a progress monitoring booklet to the interventionists and says, "This [progress monitoring] will be your goal." Grace stated, "I've gotten to where I've got booklets from each kid. Most of them are in here somewhere!" Grace emphasized the need for organization of the data so all interventionists could access it effectively and efficiently.

Other than Victoria, whose job is that of an RTI coordinator, the other participants spent considerable time outside of their typical workday on data recording and management. Victoria has one day a week built into her schedule for office time, where she works on data and researching new interventions. Katie's teaching position at Voyager Elementary is half-time, where she spends only a portion of her day on RTI interventions and data management. She shared, "It's part of my job. I wish it could be more of my job, as I spend a lot of my time in RTI, as I so believe in it." The importance of data collection is emphasized in the research (Hoover, 2009; Shores & Chester, 2009; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010).

Some of the most important elements noted by the participants were collaboration and problem-solving, which often occurred simultaneously. In an observation at Voyager

Elementary, Katie led a Kindergarten-level RTI meeting. The following is an excerpt from the notes taken at this meeting: “During the discussion of student progress, the teachers openly shared, in a collaborative fashion, the factors that might be impacting the performance of each student and whether or not their current level of tier support was appropriate.” This meeting was a productive example of the problem-solving model in action. The use of the problem-solving model by RTI teams and its usefulness in decision making is confirmed by numerous researchers, as well as by educational associations (Bender & Shores, 2007; Bransford & Stein, 1984; Canter, 2004; Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2006; Deno & Mirkin, 1977; Hayas & Klingner, 2010; Johnson et al., 2006; Marston, 2006; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005; Prasse, 2006; 1999; Shores & Chester, 2009; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010).

The collaborative nature of the RTI meeting was evident, as all stakeholders had the opportunity to contribute to the discussion and had input into the decisions and outcomes of the process. Regarding the evolution of the Kindergarten-level RTI meeting format, Katie shared that she was pleased with how this process has evolved over time. She said, "It's more of a group emphasis now. It's a win-win for everybody."

In addition, the process of collaboration was observed multiple times as Victoria worked with RTI personnel, including the director of special education, classroom teachers, and RTI interventionists (i.e., a reading specialist and a special education teacher). Several researchers and organizations have emphasized the importance of collaboration in the RTI process (Applebaum, 2009; Division for Learning Disabilities, 2007; Howard, 2009; Klingner, 2009; Wixson et al., 2010).

During one of these meetings, when Victoria was problem-solving with a special education teacher, the discussion turned from determining that a student needed more intensive Tier 3 support to concerns about how to address the student's needs from a staffing standpoint. "The special ed. teachers have been taking extra kids in with their groups in other settings," offered Victoria. The special education teacher acknowledged this, but also indicated that there was a lack of adequate personnel to do this in her respective school building, due to the full schedules and high teaching loads of the staff.

At this point in the meeting, I was able to join in as a participant observer (Glesne, 2011). The special education teacher mentioned that a University field student, who had been in the room when I arrived, was going into graduate level special education at the University where I am currently employed.

The teacher stated that the student had been working under her as an undergraduate level field experience student from a local University, but that she would be completing her field hours soon, as it was the close of the semester. She mentioned how the student had done a wonderful job in carrying out supervised interventions with RTI students. I offered that I could check into the possibility of having that same student complete a graduate level practicum experience, where she could continue assisting with interventions. Both Victoria and the special education teacher were excited about this possibility, given that the student was strong and had experience in working with that special education teacher already and was familiar with the interventions used. This seemed to be a potential solution to address the immediate concern of lack of personnel to implement the needed interventions.

As mentioned previously, administrative support, the "buy in" of participants, as well as the importance of time and resource availability, were mentioned by the participants as important. Victoria gave credit to her special education director for supporting her in her role as an RTI coordinator:

My director was very good about giving me the information I needed at that time. She didn't overload me. She gave me some stuff. She didn't say, "Read this and catch up." She provided what I needed at the time. She gave me the framework, and I just filled in.

Grace discussed the support she received from her former special education director regarding how she initially got involved in RTI. She said the director went around to schools, saying the state department was saying they could spend 15% of their money on RTI. Grace said, "She gave us the option to say 'yes.'" After this, the schools that wanted to participate were sent to a state-wide training. The importance of administrative support in a successful RTI process is supported by the research of Bender and Shores (2007). They emphasize that the administrator's role is to provide opportunities and incentives for professional development.

In addition to the support of administration, participants acknowledged that the process would not have been a successful endeavor without the "buy in" of all those involved, particularly the general education teachers. Since Victoria's role is that of an RTI coordinator, she frequently works to elicit "buy in" from RTI participants. She spoke about the process she followed when introducing staff members to the RTI process:

We had an all school in-service with all of our districts. We provided training on it [our RTI website] at that time. I've held trainings with staff. It varied from school to school. I've done it just with elementary or just with high school. I basically come out and we sit right at a computer lab, and I walk them through it. The solution form on there is big. That's kind of our process. We really spend a

lot of time going through that and how to fill it out and where to find things on the website. At some schools, it was once or in some it was more than once. It all depended on what the district was willing to allot time for. I did go to two schools for their in-service at the beginning of the year, and that was nice. And I did [offer] training this summer. [It was] a two day class on RTI. It was basically the solution form from the website. We talk about interventions and progress monitoring too.

Victoria talked about the difference it made for staff to have all of the same information and access to resources later on in the process. Victoria emphasized that every school is different, but that she made an effort to provide the assistance early on in all of her settings, by way of training and modeling, as a way to help school personnel gain knowledge and confidence in carrying out the interventions themselves. She mentioned this is useful in attaining the overall "buy in" of the general and special education teachers in the XYZ Cooperative. Brown-Chidsey et al. (2009) support the importance of finding out how special education teachers can work collaboratively with general education teachers and find ways to access general education classrooms.

Time and resources were also identified as being fundamental to the RTI process. Having administrative support, as far as time in the daily schedule for RTI interventions, regularly set RTI team meetings, in addition to providing interventionists with access to scientifically-based resources and materials, were described in the *process* category. The research of Brown-Chidsey et al. (2009) echoes the importance of incorporating and addressing all of the aforementioned factors as critical elements of the RTI process.

At one of the observations at Voyager, Katie referred to the evolution of their RTI team meetings and how they are now built into the school schedule. She said her administration realized the importance of this and supported her in her role in facilitating the process when the teams meet. Administrators in her building show their support for

the process in making sure they are in attendance at the RTI meetings. Bender and Shores (2007) emphasize administrative support as a contributing factor in successful RTI models. They state that successful RTI models often include the participation of administrators through observations of RTI interventions, the allocation of resources (e.g., materials and staff), the creation of the overall schedule, as well as in designing and supporting professional development opportunities.

Another aspect of the need for an effective schedule included how various buildings, even within a school district or cooperative, are all at a different point in their implementation of RTI. I had the chance to observe Victoria in a meeting with her special education director. For the next school year, she and her director will be focusing on how to help buildings coordinate schedules, mapping out what students need interventions, and finding out which interventionists are available and at what times.

By developing an overarching schedule for RTI implementation within each building, the goal is that time and resources will be used more efficiently in providing the interventions to reach all students who need RTI assistance. Restructuring overall scheduling in buildings is supported by Goetze, Laster, and Ehren (2010) as being essential to the RTI interventions, particularly in the area of K-12 literacy. As participants described the elements of the RTI process in their buildings, success stories began to emerge. It was clear that the participants had much to say about their positive experiences in working with RTI.

Successes

“No more falling through the cracks.” – Grace, Veteran Special Education Teacher

Successes have been defined in this study as the evidence that RTI has improved student outcomes. The theme identified in this category was that the participants, while working collaboratively with general education teachers through RTI problem-solving models, have found success in reaching students they have not been able to work with previously through the lowered caseloads for students on IEPs, which has provided additional time to work with RTI groups.

The participants gave specific examples and evidence of how the RTI model has worked in their respective settings. Over time, the participants have found that everyone "wins" when they are collaborative, incorporate specific tools for data collection and progress monitoring, and are able to use a variety of effective interventions early in a student's educational experiences. The aspects identified as important by the participants are also found in the research of Applebaum (2009), Bender (2009), Howard (2011), Klingner (2009), and Prasse (2006).

Regarding the importance of getting students the help they need early, Grace said, "Early intervention with those Kindergarten kids is so huge with letters, letter sounds, letter segmentation, [and] phonemes. It makes a big difference for kids." Research by Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) supports that the element of early intervention is an integral part of RTI. Additionally, Bender (2009) and Howard (2009) emphasize that RTI enables students to get the help they need right away instead of the old model of special education, where if they were "failing" long enough, they could be referred for special education testing and a possible diagnosis of a disability (Bender, 2009; Howard, 2009).

Grace was enthusiastic about the use of RTI as an avenue to reach more students when she stated, "RTI has really reduced the number of kids being labeled. We are giving

kids a boost, and if that's not enough, then we look at special education." Katie spoke to the overall success of the new model of service delivery versus the old model when she shared:

The amazing thing is that, in special ed., you work with these kids forever, and they kind of make progress, and progress is slow, and it's really hard. And then you work with RTI kids, and they make rapid progress and they go from Tier one to Tier three in like, six weeks, and you say, "Wow! I do know how to teach." You look at them making progress, and you realize how truly difficult it is for our kids who struggle.

Fletcher, Coulter, Reschly, and Vaughn (2011) point out several advantages of the RTI model, including that the focus of the model is on instruction, not on eligibility. They also talk about students not having to "wait to fail" before getting the help they need. In addition, a strength of the model, as identified by Fletcher et al. (2011), is that RTI services do not require the element of teacher referral, as does the process of evaluation for special education.

Klingner (2009) says special educators were often required to be the "jack of all trades," responsible for knowing everyone's content, in addition to their own areas of specialty. Currently, they function as members of a collaborative RTI teaching team, while still serving a standard caseload of students who have already been identified, or have not responded to RTI interventions (Klingner, 2009). The enthusiasm the participants had for RTI was evident. I wondered if there was any hint of them worrying that RTI was a threat to their traditional role, in terms of lowered caseload numbers. Did this pose an issue for them in continuing in their positions as special educators?

The relevance of a special educator's caseload in regards to his/her participation in RTI was acknowledged by the participants. They stated that their special education caseloads were lower than they had been in the past, and RTI was offered as a plausible

explanation for this lowering of numbers. Grace stated, “We have seen a decrease in referrals [because of RTI], and our caseload is lower.” It was interesting to note that, although the overall number of identified students with disabilities was lower, the participants’ teaching schedules were just as full.

When Katie described her caseload, she indicated that she has “one [student] out of my caseload of seven” who she sees on a daily basis for RTI interventions. She also commented on the time she spends on data when she said, “I do spend a lot of additional time on RTI and data collection. A lot is done on my own time. I'm hoping that gets to be less, but is just one of those necessary things.” It should be noted that Katie’s position is half-time, thus her caseload numbers are lower in comparison to a special educator's full-time teaching schedule. Howard (2009) emphasizes the considerations that should be taken into account with scheduling in RTI, including the timing and frequency of Tier 2 interventions as well as progress monitoring being closely tied to interventions and completed at regular intervals, according to the tier level (Howard, 2009).

As far as the overall success of RTI and how it has opened doors for working with all students, Katie shared:

I hear classroom teachers saying, quote, unquote, "RTI is the best thing that ever happened," and that's a classroom teacher saying that. I think, for a long time, we, as special educators, wanted to get in there and work with those kids, but we were sort of bound.

An overall endorsement of RTI and its success also came from Victoria when she said:

The goal is to try and keep them out of there and close this gap up. And then there's teachers that totally get it. They are like, "This is exciting and we are going to work together." They need the guidance, but they understand that it's . . . the end result isn't special education. The end result is, the kid learned. Now we've closed the gap and we can put him back in regular education, and we're good to go.

There are many ways that educators can increase the success of RTI implementation in their settings. From making sure the components of the overall process are in place, to knowledge of the interventions that should be used at the various tier levels, as well as having skills in data collection and assessment techniques used to document student progress, the aspects the participants identified as increasing successful outcomes have a basis in research (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Buffum et al., 2009; Howard, 2011; Shores & Chester, 2009).

Knowing that the RTI initiative has brought about successful outcomes for students through early intervention and providing all learners with the support they need, there are several advantages that have been identified by participants. Considering that RTI continues to evolve as a new educational paradigm, there have also been some challenges brought to light in this study. The *challenges* category included some replication of codes that have been evident in other categories in this study, including the aspects of scheduling and time. Additional areas identified as concerns included data management, how to implement Response to Intervention for Behavior (RTI-B), and monitoring for fidelity in implementation of interventions.

Challenges

“There is always drift.” – Grace, Veteran Special Education Teacher

Challenges have been defined as barriers to successful implementation of RTI. The corresponding theme was that the participants reported the challenges of RTI are how to implement RTI-B effectively, how to find time for scheduling and data management, as well as how to make sure all interventions are implemented with fidelity. While participants were quick to identify successes of the RTI model, a theme of

challenges also emerged. The participants acknowledged that they still had goals for implementation of additional aspects in the process. Incorporating behavioral interventions, as well as making sure there was fidelity in implementation of interventions, were important goals noted by the participants.

With regard to behavior, Victoria noted:

We need to do something about this for behavior because, not that academics are black and white, but it's a little bit clearer because when it's a reading issue, you can kind of diagnostically get down to what the issue is and try to help. Behavior is not that black and white.

Although positive behavioral supports have been emphasized in schools for several years, the importance of incorporating behavioral interventions into the RTI model is currently being emphasized (Bender, 2009; Pavri, 2010).

In addition to adding interventions in RTI for behavior, the participants spoke about implementing academic interventions with fidelity and the challenges that this brings. Grace focused on fidelity as an area of need. She talked about there being "drift" when interventionists are implementing interventions, stating, "There is always drift. When this happens, the focus on what is being implemented is not always maintained." She acknowledged that fidelity of the strategy or curriculum is impacted when this occurs.

Victoria seemed to experience this challenge more often than the other participants, in that part of her job is to train interventionists. She noted an example of a current program that XYZ Cooperative uses and expressed her concern regarding fidelity of implementation:

I think I told you last time about the Language! program. I was talking to another special ed. teacher about it, so the XYZ Cooperative sent three of us to get

trained. It was a weeklong training. It was three or four days; it was a lot. We got a couple of credits for it; it was intense. We left, and we said, "This is going to be great." Well then, you go back. It's one of those things where you almost needed a coach. It was comprehensive, but very good. Then, I found out that it's research-based, and it's going to be one of our tools. It's good with elementary and middle level. But, what we've found, as new staff have come in, not all of the staff have been trained. We are trying to show people how to use them and you lose the [integrity of the intervention]. I just think . . . there's almost like a brain gym thing in there and phonemic awareness and hand movements that you do. There was a specific way to do these, and [the trainer] said why we did it and why it was helping. I worry that that's a great program, but are we doing it to fidelity? Not if you've not been trained.

This is supported by Mellard and Johnson (2008) when they state:

Although both common sense and research support the concept of fidelity of implementation to ensure an intervention's successful outcome, the practical challenges associated with achieving high levels of fidelity are also well documented. Gresham et al. (2000) noted several factors that may reduce the fidelity of implementation of an intervention, including complexity, materials and resources required, and perceived versus actual effectiveness. (p. 128)

Several researchers echo the importance of fidelity in implementation of interventions (Buffum et al., 2009; Mellard & Johnson, 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009). As part of the definition of RTI, as set by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), fidelity measures are highlighted as "measures that focus on those individuals providing the instruction," and they should be "completed by a staff member other than the teacher being observed and indicate whether or not the intervention was implemented as intended and with consistency" (Office of Special Education Programs, n.d., p. 2).

In addition to voicing concerns that interventions be carried out with fidelity, the participants mentioned the challenges of scheduling and a lack of time to plan and implement interventions. Katie wondered, "How can we find time or ways to build in support for some of these kids?" The importance of scheduling and time in relation to RTI is supported by Howard (2009) when she states, "All decisions (in RTI) must respect

the limited time in a school day and be focused on the critical goal of closing the achievement gap” (p. 30).

Another component of RTI involving scheduling and time is the addition of progress monitoring to the RTI models that are currently in place. Victoria stated:

So, we have this time and schools are figuring out that, “Hey, we need this intervention time.” And like I said, they are getting better at figuring out what interventions they need to use. We’ll still work on that, but the big thing right now is progress monitoring. Schools are starting to see how important this is . . . how just doing an intervention isn’t enough.

Victoria indicated that she began her time in buildings by training general and special education interventionists on how to implement strategies and programs that they would be using at the various tier levels. This activity occurred more often in the first years of her position. Bender and Shores (2007) support the efforts of general education teachers to incorporate RTI into their daily instruction. They emphasize looking at what resources may already be in place, as well as restructuring the roles of staff members who may be able to assist with RTI implementation.

A common concern of the participants was in how to successfully incorporate the progress monitoring and data collection that are required in RTI. Grace felt that Expedition was making strides in their data collection when she said, “This year is the first year we’ve done really well with the data collection piece.” Katie mentioned the time she has spent on encouraging interventionists to collect data and be ready to present it when RTI teams meet:

That [data collection process] takes time. Even for special education teams to know, “I’m coming. I should bring some data and some progress monitoring.” It forces you to do that. We don’t have set forms. We all use our own data forms that we what we are comfortable with and what makes sense to us. There kind of was an argument in one of the other grade level meetings, where I ended up

saying, “You need to do more data collection,” to a teacher who hadn’t done data collection in over six weeks! You know, you can find that anywhere—that people aren’t doing that.

Regarding specific guidance on data collection, Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) give the following recommendations to educators:

1. Monitor student progress through graphing for 3 weeks.
2. Keep in mind that frequent assessment is necessary for making decisions.
3. Show students the data.

As they spoke to the importance of data collection and training others to implement it consistently, Katie and Grace both mentioned how helpful it would be if there was a position for someone to serve as an RTI coordinator in their district.

Although the participants were passionate about RTI, having the time to train interventionists and to make sure resources were in place for the interventions has been difficult. In talking with Katie and Grace regarding these obstacles, it sounded like the position that Victoria currently holds was the position the two of them were hoping would evolve over time. Katie shared her hope that an interventionist role would evolve:

There are so many things within RTI that we could be doing and we’re not, so I think that’s where I start thinking about this potential position as an interventionist role. . . . There’s so much more that could be done. The thing that I see that we could be doing better is the data management piece. That could be done better, and that’s just a small piece. It would be sort of better managing that piece, and helping teachers see how that would work better. Helping teachers, because everybody’s really capable of it, they just don’t know how to do it, and they need to have someone who can help figure it out. I’m happy to do that. I just don’t have time in my day to do that.

The concept of having someone in this job role is supported by Mellard and Johnson (2008), when they recommend the addition of mentor teachers and school coaches to

assist with progress monitoring, evaluation of the interventions, and assisting teachers through professional development and training.

Having researched the latest trends of the RTI initiative, I asked the participants about the implementing of RTI for behavioral needs and where their settings were in this process. Victoria spoke about the challenges of addressing the behavioral piece of RTI. She talked about it as being a current work in progress when she stated:

It will be different because our process is different. What we found out was that when we did the academics, because I was the one going out into the field doing all this, and then I'd come back and say to my director, "You know, we need to do something about this for behavior." Not that academics are black and white, but it's a little bit clearer. When it's a reading issue, you can kind of diagnostically get down to what the issue is and try to help. Behavior is not that black and white. [It's] very much more complicated. I kept coming back. The schools couldn't figure out how to collect data or how to measure . . . how to narrow it down. What *is* the problem? So, I don't know. I think we have a better system. It's not foolproof. It's still going to have some things, but now I can go out and say, "Here's where we start."

The importance of the implementation of RTI-B interventions is evident in the research. Bender (2009) had this to say:

While positive behavioral supports in general education have been required for almost a decade, these interventions may soon be implemented in the context of RTI procedures for behavior (Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007). Teachers must therefore spend some time developing and implementing a Tier 2 behavioral intervention for these students with significant behavior problems. (p. 5)

Clearly, the focus on interventions is no longer only for academics. The model of RTI has been an impetus for change, and this change is sweeping across all aspects and levels of education (Howard, 2009; Mellard & Johnson, 2008). Although interventions for behavior are not as clear-cut as academics, the participants saw opportunities for adding

this aspect successfully in their settings. The participants also shared their hopes for the future of the RTI initiative.

Future Vision

"No one is looking at going back." – Katie, Veteran Special Education Teacher

I defined *Future Vision* as being what the participants would like to see transpire with Response to Intervention in the future. The final theme included the recommendations of the participants. The participants recommend (1) having RTI coordinators/interventionists available in all schools that implement RTI, and (2) having university programs train new special educators to have a strong knowledge base on progress monitoring and the use of appropriate research-based interventions.

All participants made recommendations for future success of this educational initiative. I asked them if they felt that RTI was here to stay and why or why not. The responses they shared were positive. All of the teachers felt RTI would be a part of education for years to come. Grace shared:

Once you've done it and you see the impact it has, I don't think I could go back to what the literature now says is "wait to fail." I do think it's here to stay, and I do think we will see our special education teachers' caseloads reduce and it's probably just a natural for those special education teachers to help with the interventions.

Katie felt that it would look a little different, but that "it will change and evolve for the better." She was very excited to see what the evolution of RTI would be in the future because "it's going to be a good thing for kids and teachers." The need for future planning on how to keep successful RTI models in place is emphasized by Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005). These authors recommend that school systems

consider the following questions when looking at sustaining successful RTI implementation:

1. What are the long-term student outcomes?
2. What differences in outcomes are there when RTI methods are used with diverse populations?
3. What system and organizational variables are needed to sustain the process?

In visiting with the participants, there was noted concern for long-term student outcomes as well as how to incorporate RTI with a variety of disability areas, as evidenced by the expanding of RTI to include students with behavioral disorders.

Victoria said, “We came up with a protocol for behavior. The schools didn’t know how to collect data or how to measure and narrow it down to figure out the problem.” The importance of implementing behavioral interventions in RTI models is emphasized by Bender (2009) and Pavri (2010). The authors point out that, as much as there is a range of academic needs in a classroom, there are various levels of behavioral needs that can also be addressed through RTI interventions.

Regarding what is in place within a system, all of the participants shared the importance of having an RTI coordinator employed within any district that is implementing RTI. Rather than focusing on a district level position, the hope for an RTI coordinator to be available in every building, even for just part of each day, was mentioned by Victoria:

I think it would take administration to say, "This is important and we need time to do it. This isn't going away." And it doesn't necessarily have to be a full-time job. You've got to have administration willing to take it on and you've got to have that support. And some schools have, because they have hired someone to do that.

In addition, Victoria spoke to the relevance of her current role and the hope that it would keep evolving as the process changes.

Grace and Katie shared their hope that either a position would be added or their role would evolve into a full-time coordinator position. Katie shared, "What you saw this morning is my job. RTI is part of my job. I wish it could be more of my job as I so believe in it." Grace also shared that her participation in RTI occurs "above and beyond my normal job." Grace shared her hope that having a full-time RTI position would evolve because "we have seen a decrease in referrals and our caseload is lower." When considering organizational variables that would be needed to sustain RTI on a long-term basis, Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) suggest that schools explore avenues for sustainability of the initiative. Although they did not specifically refer to RTI coordinators as a solution to this issue, they do encourage schools to explore potential solutions for maintaining RTI programs into the future. This served to reinforce that a future vision for the initiative, as shared by the participants, is appropriate and useful for future planning.

When asked if RTI was here to stay, all of the participants were enthusiastic in their belief that the initiative would continue. When I asked Victoria to share her thoughts about the future of RTI, she stated:

It's going to keep evolving and it is going to get better. I see this as a better process than what we used before. I think teachers, and even parents, are going to be happy that their kids are getting help . . . the *right kind* of help.

Likewise, Katie had insights to share on how RTI has improved her ability to make a difference for students:

We used to have to "wait for them to fail." They had to be referred for testing. I took them after the reading specialist couldn't teach them to read, and I said, "I've had half a class on that, I'll take a crack at it." How crazy was that? I get to be one of the interventionists now.

All of the participants in the study were asked about their recommendations for teacher preparation programs or for future special educators. When considering how RTI has impacted the role of the special educator over time, what tools and skills did the subjects feel would best prepare new teachers for their role in the RTI process? Victoria gave recommendations for future special educators and for the programs that prepare them:

The biggest thing I have gained from being a coach is a much better understanding of progress monitoring and how to collect data. My advice would be to learn as much as you can about curriculum-based measures and progress monitoring because that is something you have to do for special education. In my experience, we need someone in every building who can progress monitor and why not the special ed. teacher? If I were in a special education position in a classroom right now, I could take those RTI kids and work with them, but I'd like to show someone how to do it. The training I got was "train the trainer." You need to know you have those good skills. Teach others and pass it on. Then you can kind of, divvy up the workload.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) supports what has been shared by the participants through suggestions provided for future special educators who will participate in RTI models within their school settings (Cummings et al., 2008). According to CEC, future special educators should be prepared to help other staff members gain an understanding on how best to evaluate student progress in relation to peers, provide information on effective instructional strategies, as well as give support, instruction, and feedback to general education teachers. In addition, special education teachers should be ready to work within collaborative problem-solving groups, as well as serve as interventionists and evaluators in the RTI process (Cummings et al., 2008).

These job roles will be important in implementation of future successful models of RTI. The need for teacher education programs to prepare teacher candidates for these responsibilities is essential. The tasks of training other staff members on the use of scientific-based interventions and data collection techniques were performed on a regular basis by the study participants. The relevance of future special educator roles in the RTI process and suggestions for successful participation of special educators in RTI models are supported by Cummings et al. (2008) as essential.

Summary

Chapter III included a brief overview of the data collection procedures used, including the process and description of observations and interviews used in this phenomenological study. The codes and categories that emerged were described. Narratives from participants, along with the relationship of the data to the identified categories and supporting research, were discussed. In-depth analysis of the data was presented in anticipation of the overall conclusions and recommendations, which will be shared in Chapter IV.

Chapter IV will be the culminating chapter of the study. It will include a description of the themes of the study, as well as the identification of four overall assertions. Summary information, as well as conclusions, will be presented. Recommendations made by the participants for future teacher educators and teacher education programs will be shared. At the close of Chapter IV, potential areas of future research will be provided.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This qualitative study adhered to the phenomenological research processes of Creswell (2007), where the experiences of participants were described, statements of the participants were provided and categorized, themes were devised, verbatim narratives were included, the context of the phenomenon was reflected upon, and an overall description of the phenomenon was provided (Creswell, 2007).

The research question guiding the study was, "What are the perceptions of special education teachers in regards to their changing roles as a result of Response to Intervention?" Chapter I included a definition of RTI, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, as well as the conceptual framework of the study. In addition, this initial chapter provided the reader with the overall research question, significance of the study, definitions used, assumptions, and an overview of the topics discussed in each chapter.

Chapter II contained information on the methods used in the study, as well as a description of the interview subjects and observation settings. This qualitative study consisted of three veteran special education teachers, all of whom had taught special education for at least 16 years and were considered to be quality teachers, based on successful implementation of both former and current models of service delivery in

special education. The participants in the study currently carry out leadership roles in the RTI process as interventionists, coaches, and RTI team facilitators within their current school buildings and/or special education units. Interviews as well as observations were used as the primary tools to collect data throughout this phenomenological, qualitative study. As part of the data analysis process, six categories emerged, in conjunction with six corresponding themes, drawn from the analysis of the data. Four overall assertions tied all of the themes together.

Chapter III contained the analysis of the data and included quotes from the participants and their relation to current literature on the topic of RTI. A summary of the overall study, as well as conclusions and recommendations, is provided in Chapter IV. To summarize the findings obtained in the study, four assertions are described in this final chapter, as well as the relation of the assertions to current literature. In addition, a personal reflection from the researcher is included.

Assertions

Assertion One

Veteran special educators believe that prior background knowledge and professional expertise contribute to successful implementation of RTI in K-12 settings. Veteran special educators have had extensive training in a variety of scientific, research-based interventions and are familiar with data collection techniques employed in RTI. The participants felt these skills were a good fit for the RTI model, given its emphasis on scientific-based interventions and progress monitoring. This assertion is supported by Klingner (2009) when she states that veteran special education teachers often hold a variety of credentials, have additional areas of expertise, and are able to

provide services not only to students on their typical special education caseloads, but also to students who are receiving support through RTI (Klingner, 2009).

The participants had an established pattern of longevity in teaching in the field of special education, as well as a variety of experiences in school levels and disability areas. They credited this background experience and knowledge as being a benefit for them when implementing RTI. The participants stated that some of the methods or curricula they currently use have not changed much from the previous service delivery model of special education. The relevance of the background knowledge and experiences of veteran special education teachers when implementing RTI interventions is supported by Cummings et al. (2008). They emphasize the importance of a special educator's skills in teaching effective instructional strategies, individualizing instruction for student needs, and establishing meaningful goals and progress monitoring.

A critical point made by all of the participants was the importance of RTI interventionists being highly qualified. In No Child Left Behind (2001), being highly qualified is defined as teachers having to have a degree in education, certification in the areas in which they teach, as well as the ability to demonstrate competency in the subject areas they teach (Batsche et al., 2005). While the participants emphasized the importance of this component of a teacher's background, they also acknowledged the value in teachers being able to use what they know works from their experience as well.

Assertion Two

When planning for the initial implementation of RTI, veteran special educators identify administrative support, teacher "buy in," and opportunities for professional development as essential components. The components noted by the participants as

necessary for successful implementation of RTI programs are echoed by Howard (2009). She notes that administrators who are actively involved and who have a clear understanding of RTI contribute to successful outcomes, in addition to general education teachers and special education teachers working toward the same goals. Attaining the "buy in" of all teachers through a common goal, in addition to providing ongoing professional development, are also emphasized (Howard, 2009). Bender and Shores (2007) cite the importance of administrative support for RTI to be successful, as well.

Participants discussed the importance of several elements as being useful and necessary when beginning the process of RTI in a new setting. Initial support from administration was a key element in making changes in service delivery, as were opportunities for training and follow up time to design and implement interventions. The need for availability of resources, given the fact that research-based interventions are a required element in successful RTI models, was also emphasized.

Assertion Three

Veteran special educators value a clearly defined RTI process, as well as the availability of resources, including time, materials, and ongoing training, as contributing to the ongoing success of current RTI models. The importance of overall planning in making the RTI process a success is outlined by Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005). As part of a successful RTI process, the researchers emphasize the importance of research-based interventions, assessing student progress through data collection procedures, and making sure all teachers are trained as to their role in the process (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). Howard (2009) gives examples of potential scheduling scenarios and acknowledges the importance of how interventionists use their time and resources.

The participants noted that all of their school settings had implemented RTI in a proactive manner, embracing the opportunity to shift their mindset and methods. In all of the settings, RTI appeared to be about working together to reach and teach all students through a well-defined process that used available resources effectively. Shinn (2008) agrees that K-12 schools should utilize all of their available resources when implementing RTI. He offers this as a starting point for schools that have staffing concerns when considering who will implement RTI interventions.

Clearly defined roles of general and special educators, as well as the importance of general education teachers providing Tier 1 interventions, were referenced by the participants as contributing to a successful RTI process. Having access to the resources (e.g., resources and personnel) needed to implement the interventions was important, and the participants were positive about their experiences in accessing ongoing training and a variety of research-based materials.

Assertion Four

When the successes and challenges of the model are acknowledged and addressed and a vision for the future of RTI is in place, veteran special educators feel hopeful for the continuation of the RTI initiative. Regarding the overall success of RTI models versus traditional models of special education, Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) state that RTI provides a "wider net" (p. 9) than special education, thereby getting more students the help they need without the need for a special education label. Through the examples of success stories of positive student outcomes shared by the participants, it was apparent that RTI had yielded a variety of successful outcomes for the participants and their settings.

When considering the challenges of RTI, making sure interventions are implemented with fidelity was identified by the participants as a primary concern. The importance of fidelity in intervention implementation was echoed by several researchers (Buffum et al., 2009; Mellard & Johnson, 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009). Having the time to train other teachers in research-based interventions or finding ways to ensure that those who are implementing strategies are doing so correctly in successful RTI is emphasized by Howard (2009).

The participants were hopeful that future planning for RTI would include teacher preparation programs that consistently train students in the selection and use of research-based intervention and in progress monitoring techniques. Additionally, the participants shared their hope that an RTI coordinator position would evolve as a standard in every district implementing RTI. It was suggested to look at this position as being at both the building and district levels.

The participants all felt that RTI is a constant work in progress, and they were hopeful that it would continue to evolve and strengthen over time. The need for future planning to keep successful RTI models in place is emphasized by Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005). These authors recommend that school systems consider long-term outcomes, diversity, and organizational issues when planning for the future sustainability of RTI.

Conclusions

The themes in this study involved everything from the background of special educators that would be useful to consider when implementing RTI, to the underpinnings of why RTI came about and what is needed when building a process, to the overall

components of RTI in the participants' settings. Overall successes and challenges of the model were explored, in addition to recommendations for the future of RTI, as provided by the participants themselves. After exploring all of the themes devised from the analysis of the codes and categories, four assertions emerged from the study.

The background knowledge and experiences the participants had in previous special education models were useful for them as they participated in their new roles in RTI. Cummings et al. (2008) echo this through their belief that RTI initially stemmed from special education.

The elements present in the initial preparation for RTI implementation included the influence of current legislation, opportunities for professional development, administrative support/leadership, the "buy in" of participants in the RTI process, as well as the availability of time and resources. These elements were acknowledged by the participants and supported by Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) and Howard (2009) through their suggestions on examining available resources and organizational structures in K-12 school systems that are implementing RTI.

As part of the ongoing process of RTI, universal screening, role clarification, leadership, continued "buy in" of participants, as well as time and resources, were all identified as essential to a successful RTI process. The importance of these factors as being essential to a successful RTI initiative was emphasized by the research of Applebaum (2009), Mellard and Johnson (2008), and Shores and Chester (2009).

The participants, while working collaboratively with general education teachers, have found success in reaching students they have not been able to work with previously. Getting more students the help they need without having to "wait to fail" is noted as a

strength of RTI by Fletcher et al. (2011). Participants cited lowered caseloads as useful for providing additional time in their schedule to work with RTI interventions.

Although lowered caseload was not specifically addressed in the literature, Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) and Prasse (2006) see special education and regular education as beginning to merge, thereby allowing for a special education teacher's caseload to include general education students. In addition, the collaborative nature of RTI, where special educators work closely with general education teachers, was found to be a strength of RTI by the participants as well as in the research (Applebaum, 2009; Division for Learning Disabilities, 2006; Howard, 2009; Klingner, 2009; Wixson et al., 2010).

The participants reported the challenges of RTI as including implementing Response to Intervention for Behavior (RTI-B) effectively, finding the time for scheduling and data management, as well as how to make sure all interventions are implemented with fidelity. The importance of fidelity in intervention implementation was echoed by several researchers (Buffum et al., 2009; Mellard & Johnson, 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009), while the addition of RTI-B interventions was emphasized by Bender (2009) and Pavri (2010). In addition, the participants emphasized the importance of looking at scheduling and time management in RTI implementation. Howard (2009) agreed that time and management were essential considerations in successful models of RTI.

Regarding the future vision for the RTI initiative, the participants recommended having RTI coordinators or interventionists available in all schools that implement RTI, as well as having university programs train new special educators to have a strong knowledge base in progress monitoring and the use of appropriate research-based

interventions. The benefit of having schools complete comprehensive future planning on how to keep successful RTI models in place is emphasized by Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005).

Recommendations

"RTI has the potential to revolutionize education so that no child ever really falls behind" (Applebaum, 2009, p. 1). Given the promise of this statement, the implications for this educational initiative are profound. In thinking about what could improve the process of RTI, I have made several recommendations, which are broken down into specific categories. Suggestions for teacher preparation programs, K-12 school settings, as well as recommendations for further research are provided.

Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs

Ensuring that University programs prepare their special education and general education teacher candidates to be proficient in their use of progress monitoring techniques, as well as to provide candidates with a knowledge base on how to access and implement research-based interventions, is a recommendation for all teacher preparation programs. It is my belief that the data collection and progress monitoring skills required could be best addressed in assessment courses, and that the research-based interventions material could be emphasized in methods courses involving core content areas.

I would also recommend making sure general and special education majors have the opportunity to participate in a collaborative course format, where they can learn side by side. This would enhance their future collaborative roles in K-12 schools. In addition, if collaboration is not a focus in their training, classes devoted to this essential element of RTI should be added to a teacher candidate's program of study.

The importance of emphasizing general education participation in RTI is emphasized by Burggraf (2007). This could be an area of future investigation in itself. Exploring how teacher preparation programs in general education can ensure that their candidates are ready to implement the general education responsibilities that are part of RTI is a topic worthy of further exploration. Special education programs often embed a variety of data collection activities, as well as field-based experiences and projects into their curriculum. It is essential to provide these experiences for general education teacher candidates as well.

As a researcher, I currently have a potential opportunity to assist in this venture. A regular education colleague and I have been asked to assist in the writing and implementing a grant that will afford elementary education majors the opportunity to participate in RTI field experiences in general education classrooms. Although only in its beginning stages, there is potential for enhancing the preparedness of general education students, as well as for future research.

Recommendations for Schools

Wherever possible, all settings implementing RTI should consider adding a staff position of an RTI coordinator. This would address the need for the modeling and implementing of research-based interventions for participating interventionists. Whether the educators who participate in RTI are new to the profession or have been in the field for a number of years, formal training in the appropriate implementation of interventions is needed. A person in the role of an RTI coordinator would not only be helpful in training other teachers in the use of research-based interventions, he/she could also assist in the collection of data on student outcomes. Through showing teachers how to

implement a progress monitoring system, or by collecting and monitoring the data themselves, RTI coordinators could provide continuity, consistency, and quality for all RTI programs.

Recommendations for Further Research

RTI implementation at the middle and high school levels should be explored. The current study was comprised of mainly elementary settings, given two of the three participants were elementary level special education teachers. Although the bulk of RTI research and implementation exists at the elementary level, there is evidence that the model has now expanded to higher levels (Howard, 2009; Mellard & Johnson, 2008).

This recommendation evolved from an opportunity I had to attend an RTI planning level meeting for middle schools in an urban school district. Initial discussions on what interventions should be used, who should serve as interventionists in what tiers, and what data systems could be employed to monitor progress were discussed. It was evident at this meeting that there was an impetus for change, and the participants knew they needed to lay the foundational groundwork before RTI implementation would be successful. There was an acknowledgment at this meeting of the importance of administrative support for the provision of resources and for the "go ahead" for implementing new policies regarding RTI that would change the educational structure of the district.

In considering the researcher bias that emerged later in the study, another possible area that is worthy of exploration would be the parent perspective on RTI. It would be interesting to note the differences parents of multiple children with learning disabilities have found in the traditional identification and service delivery model versus the current

RTI system. Do the parents of students receiving RTI interventions, who were later identified as having a learning disability, see a benefit in the use of RTI? This may be an important avenue of exploration. Gaining a sense of the "consumer satisfaction" level would be valuable, as those parents who are proponents of RTI could have an impact in their school communities.

Knowing that schools have scheduling constraints and that special educators are implementing RTI in addition to their typical caseloads, where do schools that are successful with RTI find the time and staff to follow through on this critical element? It seems that follow up study of schools that are implementing RTI interventions with fidelity and that have specific plans they carry out for monitoring interventions would be useful. Developing recommendations for a useful model of fidelity in implementation would be useful for all levels of RTI implementation.

Another potential area of study is how special educators working in RTI models as part of their current roles avoid burnout. The participants involved in this study were passionate about RTI and, although their involvement was on a volunteer basis initially, they were clearly very busy in trying to juggle all of the additional responsibilities that coordinating RTI in their setting entailed. It seemed as though they were busier than ever, due to the participation in RTI, and that this level of intensity was not going to lessen with time. Concerns brought up by the participants included having the time they needed to collect and manage data and to plan for incorporating RTI-B interventions in their current models. Addressing the issues of implementation fidelity and the potential for "burnout" of special educators who have dual roles as RTI interventionists as well as traditional special education case management responsibilities were noted concerns.

Seeking ways to provide these teachers with additional resources (e.g., staff and time) and support for their responsibilities in RTI would be worthy of future exploration.

Personal Reflection

An element of researcher bias emerged late in the study. This evolved due to personal experience. A close family friend heard about the topic of my dissertation. His child had been receiving RTI interventions for a number of years, and the child was currently being placed on an IEP as a fifth grader. The father asked me about the intent of RTI and he questioned, "What has RTI done to help my child? He's in fifth grade and is finally getting looked at. A lot of time was lost when he clearly needed more help than he received."

Talking with this father about the fact that not all schools are at the same point in the process as far as interventions and collecting data did little to alleviate his frustration. The mention of the need for a standard protocol (Wright, 2007) and that many districts are presently only in development stages offered little consolation. His son had first begun receiving intensive interventions in the first grade and had been on a 504 plan (i.e., regular education accommodations plan) since that time as a result of learning difficulties from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. In addition, the child had switched schools in fifth grade and no documentation could be found regarding previous interventions.

The father expressed his frustration regarding the time that was lost for his son and in having him go through an extensive testing process. His son will soon receive the help he needs, but the process from the parents inquiring about his difficulties to getting him on an IEP took years. The father felt that the RTI process had impeded his son's

growth as a learner and that he clearly needed more than the interventions that were provided under the umbrella of RTI.

The information this father shared would fit well under the category of *challenges*. In addition, I felt that the participants would agree that RTI is a work in progress and that there are improvements to be made. This story does raise awareness of issues that may be useful for future study. The importance of the development of a standard protocol (Wright, 2007) for interventions and data collection within a district is something worth exploring. In addition, helping school districts to develop systems to share data on an interschool basis is something I plan to investigate in the future.

In contrast to the story my friend shared, I feel hopeful that change is already on the horizon. In my role as a clinical supervisor, I have recently witnessed multiple occasions where teams have been able to use their RTI data as part of the new identification process for learning disabilities. Students in these settings have been placed in special education without having to go through the rigors of traditional testing practices. Teachers have been able to use their RTI data as part of the identification process. It seems as though the future of identifying students with learning disabilities will be more effective for schools and more positive for families as well.

Through the examination of veteran special education teachers' roles in RTI and how these roles have evolved over time, I have found that there is a useful marriage between the old model of special education and the new paradigm of RTI. Special educators have little reason to fear the new shift in service delivery, as there will be a continued need for their background knowledge in research-based strategies and data collection, as well as their skills in collaboration and consultation.

I was surprised and pleased at the many aspects of the former special education model that are present in the new paradigm. The one difference that was clear to me involved the change in the students veteran special educators are able to serve. Being members of collaborative problem-solving teams who work with all students, regardless of the presence of a disability label or not, is something that special education teachers have desired for a long time. I view the lines of general and special education blurring as exciting for the future of our educational system.

Although the study provided a wealth of information on special educators' roles in RTI and on the process itself, there is clearly a need for future investigation on the topic. It is my belief that RTI is here to stay and that it will keep evolving and improving as time goes on. It is my hope that the research that continues in this realm will prove to be instrumental in improving educational experiences and outcomes provided through the RTI initiative in K-12 schools.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a study of how the Response to Intervention initiative has changed the role of the special education teacher. This study will involve interviews and observations related to your experiences teaching within an RTI model.

Who is conducting the research?

I am Tricia Lee, a doctoral student in the Teaching and Learning Department and a Clinical Supervisor in the Special Education Department at the University of North Dakota.

What is the research?

My research is titled, "That Was Then and This is Now: The Changing Roles of Veteran Special Education Teachers as a Result of Response to Intervention." The purpose for this study is to complete my dissertation.

The rationale for the project is that teachers' roles in the field of special education have changed significantly over the past ten years and these roles continue to evolve. I am particularly interested in the changes in the responsibilities of special educators, as I currently supervise numerous special education interns in the master's level internship experiences. I hope that the anticipated outcome of this project will be to inform my current practices in supervision to better prepare my students for their expected responsibilities in the field, thereby making useful contributions to the profession. I anticipate that the participants of the study will benefit from the opportunity to reflect

upon and share their experiences, as well from the opportunity to make recommendations that may be used with future special educators working within the RTI model.

The study will involve me making a minimum of three visits to your school site to interview you and to complete observations of you as you carry out your work in an RTI classroom. No videotaping will occur. I plan to make audio recordings of your interviews with me, and I will be taking notes via laptop as we visit. During observations, I will be taking notes in a notebook. The purpose of the observations is to inform my understanding of how you carry out the RTI process in your setting.

How much time commitment will there be?

The interviews should take about 45 minutes each. The observations completed will not require any extra time commitment, as they will occur during the course of your regular teaching day. All interviews and observations will be done only with your permission at a time that is convenient to you.

How will confidentiality be maintained?

All names of the participants will be changed in the descriptions of their classrooms, transcripts, and observation notes. The reports of the study will maintain the use of pseudonyms. The digital recordings of interviews, consent forms, pseudonym lists, observation notes, and any other documentation will be stored in separate locked file cabinets in my home and at my office. Other than persons who audit IRB (Institutional Review Board) procedures, I will be the only person with access to digital recordings of interviews, consent forms, and pseudonym lists, observation notes, and any other

documentation related to the study. All files and documents will be stored as described for three years after the research is completed, after which they will be shredded and digital files deleted.

Who will benefit from this study?

Participants may benefit from the opportunity to reflect upon and share their experiences and to make recommendations that may be used with future special educators working within the RTI model. Others who may benefit from the study include administrators, teachers, and future special education teachers. As the conductor of the research, I will benefit in that the research will inform my current practice as a Clinical Supervisor in Special Education.

Whom to Contact?

If you have questions about the research, contact Tricia Lee at (w) 701-777-3155 or (h) 701-775-5132, Stop 7189, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND 58202-7189. If you have further questions, you may contact Lynne Chalmers at 701-777-3187. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279. Please call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone else.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to discontinue your participation at any time and have any of your files destroyed with no adverse consequences to you.

Your signature below indicates you have read the consent form and understand its contents. You will be provided a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Date

Appendix B

Code Book

Codes	Definitions	Examples
Background	The training and experiences of veteran special educators which impact the methods they use and the beliefs they hold regarding their teaching practices.	“Let’s see. I’ve been teaching since 1980. Most of that has been in special education, but I’ve also taught regular ed. We lived in M--. I taught in a self-contained ED room for three years, I taught fourth grade for five years. I also taught in K--, that was K-12 special ed. And then, when we moved here, I got certified in Learning Disabilities and then have been pretty much working in that area since about 1993 in G--. But now, I am certified in ED and MR, so, I’m not a strategist, technically, but I do have all those certifications.”
Strategies	The actual methods veteran special education teachers employ in their teaching.	“(The director) has sent a few of us to the Language! training program. I’ve gotten a lot of training on that and it’s something that we really promote. That is one of the things we use. And, I haven’t used this, but something we often go to first is the Herman Method. One of the things I have used . . . it’s called Mastering Math (or something like that) . . . just how to teach the basic concepts of math. I had some really good math

Codes	Definitions	Examples
		<p>methods in college. It was all manipulatives and the language and how you talk about it. I used that with the elementary.”</p>
Materials	<p>The actual items (e.g., curriculum, manipulatives, textbooks, technology) veteran special education teachers use in their teaching.</p>	<p>“I’ve used <i>Read Well</i>. We used Scott Forman . . . some little basal series book. We’ve always had some math and spelling kinds of workbook things.”</p> <p>“It’s not Jamestown Publishers, but it’s a company where I purchased . . . I think it’s called <i>Five Star Stories</i>. I think we used that, as it coordinated well with the strategies. And, so, over the years, we have kind of found some good materials that way.”</p> <p>“For some kids, <i>Edmark</i> is still being used . . . the revised version.”</p> <p>“<i>Saxon Math</i> was a big push in the late 90s. There was a home school version, and I really liked how it was that constant review. It gave us some options. Now we are using <i>AGS</i>, which is a functional curriculum.”</p>
Teacher Expertise	<p>Veteran teachers' knowledge of not only what is considered best practice, but what is research-based, as well as how to</p>	<p>“Using teacher knowledge, I'm looking at him not as a kid, but I'm looking at him as a reader and what does he need next? We really believe you can't put that on a para, so that was our</p>

Codes	Definitions	Examples
	implement it with fidelity in the classroom.	belief. And our principal has listened to us over the years talk about that. So we don't have kits; we have teacher-made stuff. I'm being a teacher and thinking about what he needs and planning each lesson, and so it is time consuming for all of us to look at a kid and say, 'Okay, now for tomorrow, I have to plan lessons.' We all really just believe in that, and so there's a purpose for it. Teacher expertise plays a huge part."
Underpinnings of RTI	The beginnings of RTI from federal legislation, to the initial presentation of the initiative by administration, to the individual expectations for teachers in their respective districts as schools looked at implementation.	"We knew that the regs. for LD would be changing and so we looked at this first, as we knew RTI would be a part of it. I've had a lot of training in RTI. I had approached our principal to say we should be looking at this and can we try it? He wanted to make sure that we have staff ready before we did anything with implementation, which was really wise. Last year was our first experience actually implementing any RTI, and that didn't even really count as an implementation year because we only started with Kindergarten in the fall."
Professional Development	Any workshops or training provided to teachers, both on an initial level and on an	"I've gotten to go to various national conferences in reading. This last summer,

Codes	Definitions	Examples
	<p>ongoing basis, that is necessary for building and sustaining knowledge and skills about the RTI process.</p>	<p>I got to spend a week with Linda Dorn on her comprehensive intervention model. A lot of it has been slanted towards RTI. I'm always trying to stay up on what's good and interesting. I also try to stay up on what classroom teachers are reading and doing."</p> <p>"We went to a training (sponsored by the state department, and they brought in an expert from another state who has written books on the process and has implemented it for a number of years)."</p>
Leadership	<p>A building block of successful RTI, necessary for successful implementation, both in its early and ongoing stages.</p>	<p>"My director was very good about giving me the information I needed at that time. She didn't overload me. She gave me some stuff. She didn't say, 'Read this and catch up.' She provided what I needed at the time. She gave me the framework, and I just filled in."</p> <p>"I guess part of it is my director. She has vision about how to get things changed."</p>
"Buy In"	<p>Attaining the initial commitment from participants in the process. Participants are able to see the benefit of the initiative. They are willing to</p>	<p>"In Kindergarten, at first, there was some resistance but, honestly, once we got rolling and saw the benefits. They were like, 'This is the best thing that ever</p>

Codes

Definitions

Examples

	<p>contribute their time and efforts and are supportive of the process.</p>	<p>happened,' and, honestly, they sold a lot to the other classes in the school when they started saying this is the best thing to happen to Kindergarten. All the other teachers wanted to take part then, so that worked out really well and it sold itself. That was really, really good with the Kindergarten team. We had some shaky moments, but they were incredibly flexible with us. They changed their schedule five or six times. They ended up making a lot of changes, as we wanted 8:30 to 9:00 to be our RTI time. We figured out the best thing for them (the students) to miss was the calendar and morning opening, and they did they do that right at 8:30 . . . because we figured out that was the best thing for Tier 3 kiddos to miss, and we thought that was something that was maybe a little bit over their head anyway. Finding words in the morning memo, counting the days, the calendar, and all that kind of stuff. Maybe they could benefit from more having one-on-one because they might have been checked out during that time anyway. But there was a lot of trial and error. In the beginning, it was a lot of trying to get</p>
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Codes

Definitions

Examples

		<p>group consensus on what we try. We spent probably until November to work all that out, and most of our meetings weren't necessarily about kids. They were about the schedule and it took us a long time to figure that out. After November, what happened is the teachers started talking about Tier 1, and the K kiddos are coming back to class after having one-on-one intervention and they would be higher than the others in the class. So then, they were looking at upping their class instruction. After Christmas, we started doing Guided Reading. After Christmas, I didn't have a need for that 8:30 time, so I modeled guided reading for the classroom teachers, and that was my role. They're not doing that this year. That was just, sort of, how the needs worked out. I also helped with doing reading groups with the Reading Recovery teachers. Classroom teachers used to send 'Tom' and 'Joe' to the Riley Teachers for referrals. Now, it's more of a group emphasis. Those kids who aren't identified through RTI might need someone to work on reading with expression and intonation and even to sign off on their</p>
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Codes	Definitions	Examples
		backpack sheet. I've done that too. It's a win-win for everybody."
Time	Necessary at all stages of implementation of RTI. Taking part in initial training, building schedules, providing interventions, collecting data, collaborating with team member, and monitoring for fidelity in implementation all require significant allocation of this resource.	". . . helping teachers, because everybody's really capable of it, they just don't know how to do it, and they need to have someone who can help figure it out. I'm happy to do that. I just don't have time in my day to do that."
Resources	Everything from materials used in teaching and training, to personnel who implement the interventions, to the school buildings themselves where the initiative is carried out.	<p>"So . . . we also do reading comprehension where we made up an intervention. Scores went up on MAP, AIMSweb, and Fountas and Pinnell. I use those resources, and I've been doing Kansas Strategies."</p> <p>"The part that I helped out with was to use the resources we had and come up with interventions that we could use for academics, for behavior, and for communication."</p> <p>"Dr. Mark Shinn said, "Use your resources in your building.' If you've got a teacher or a Title One teacher or a reading specialist who knows how to teach reading and is good at it and has that training, why would you not use them with your most severe</p>

Codes	Definitions	Examples
		<p>students? Why would you put a para. with one of your most severe when you know they are the ones who need the training? And so, this to me, breaks down those lines. It says, 'We've got this group of kids and they are reading three years below grade level.' We don't know if they need special education because they've never gotten the right kind of instruction. Let's try a good intervention and see if it works."</p>
Universal Screening	Tools used with all students to gain as a starting point or baseline to determine who may require RTI support.	<p>"Universal screening time was really busy, although I'm trained to be more efficient. The last go round, I entered the data for five grades and five data points for each."</p>
Roles (General and Special Education)	The responsibilities and job assignments of those who participate in an RTI model, particularly those of regular education and special education teachers.	<p>"I looove the fact that we are blurring labels and blurring departments. I like that there's not this huge difference between Reading Recovery specialists and special education . . . that we work together. I think everyone would say that this feels really good."</p> <p>"I hear classroom teachers saying, quote, unquote, 'RTI is the best thing that ever happened,' and that's a classroom teacher saying that. I think, for a long time, we, as special</p>

Codes	Definitions	Examples
		educators, wanted to get in there and work with those kids, but we were sort of bound.”
Change	The evolution of current practices in education. Necessary and constant.	<p>“We knew that the regulations for LD would be changing and so we looked at this first, as we knew RTI would be a part of it.”</p> <p>“I don’t see how it (RTI) could go away or someone could say this isn’t an important part of what we do. Even grades, that have sort of struggled this year, to rethink what they are doing. You know this is our first year with grades 3, 4, 5, and some of those grades, as we start to look at where we’ll go next year, no one has said, ‘Let’s go back to where we were.’ No one is looking at going back. Will it look different? Sure. It will change and evolve for the better. I’m just excited to see what that’s going to look like because I think it’s going to be a good thing for kids and teachers.”</p>
Interventions	The teaching methods, strategies, and curriculum used to assist students at various tiers within the RTI model.	<p>“We looked at the data, we met with the teachers, and we decided to start some new interventions.”</p> <p>“I think it’s a win-win. We have this time (part of the daily schedule is for</p>

Codes	Definitions	Examples
		interventions) and schools are figuring out that, ‘Hey, we need this intervention time.’ And like I said, they are getting better at figuring out what interventions they need to use.”
Data Collection/Progress Monitoring	The systems used to monitor students’ growth in the RTI process. Necessary to determine outcomes and plans for future interventions, as needed.	“This shows our reading interventions. This is just 5th grade, and these are the reading groups. This is our Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment level, which we do with all students, this is our MAP testing, and then the color coding is AIMSweb. Red is below the 10th percentile, yellow is a little bit above that, and then there’s green. Green is average. She put the areas of concern. Some on AIMSweb were fluency, and some were comprehension. We looked at the data, we met with the teachers, and we decided to start some new interventions.”
Problem Solving	The model used in RTI, where teams ask questions, look at data, and determine how best to meet the needs of struggling students.	The observation took place in an elementary school in the unit in which Victoria works. She met with a veteran special education teacher, who had some cases to discuss. The special education teacher began by saying she hasn’t been directly involved with the student, but the

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Examples

		<p>documentation on the student has come to her.</p> <p>There is data projected for the group to review involving the names of students, the tiers in which they are located, and whether or not they receive additional instruction in phonemic awareness. The students are reviewed, one by one, with teachers sharing information as to whether or not the student is making gains and whether or not they should stay at their current level of intervention. There is also a second chart that is color coded to show performance on measures, such as AIMSweb and MAP testing. They look for trends in performance across these tools.</p> <p>During the discussion of student progress, the teachers openly shared relevant information, as more than one teacher worked with each student (e.g., regular ed. and special ed. or regular ed. and Reading Recovery). They made sure to also discuss the factors that might be impacting performance, such as whether the student had been on medication for ADHD, health factors, if they needed glasses and</p>
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Codes	Definitions	Examples
		hadn't been wearing them, or if students are young for their grade.
Collaboration	Regular and special education teachers, along with additional school personnel, working together to find ways to meet the needs of students.	<p>The classroom teacher came down to give her input, and Victoria mentions using a red and green dot system. The classroom teacher says she is not willing to do anything additional, as it wouldn't be "fair" to the other students. She is concerned about ability and behavior.</p> <p>More problem solving goes on with the title teacher. Can the student be required to go back, check her work, and show how she gets the answers when she gets them wrong and has to redo them? Can parents do the reward at home?</p>
Early Intervention	Assisting students who struggle early in their academic career, providing them at a younger age with the assistance they need to improve overall learning outcomes.	<p>"We need to work on catching them young. That's why we started with Kindergarten and went to first because we really believe early intervention is key, and that's where we will continue to stay with most of our efforts. We know we can make the 'biggest bang for our buck' in that half hour time and our model probably won't change much."</p>
Caseload	The number of students on a special education teacher's teaching schedule	"I just do it (RTI coordinating) above and beyond my normal job.

Codes	Definitions	Examples
	<p>or case management load who are identified as having a disability.</p>	<p>Hopefully, some day it would be because we have seen a decrease in referrals and our caseload is lower.”</p> <p>“We started with the Kindergarten students from 8:30 – 9:00. Us special education teachers used part of our caseload time. Then, our schedule changed a little bit and we knew that Tier 2 was more of a need at nine o'clock until 9:30 depending on what kind of group of kids we are serving. We took the initiative to preserve that time in our schedule and we get our schedules in the fall. That's kind of how it developed for us.”</p> <p>“One out of my caseload of seven is an RTI student.”</p> <p>“I do spend a lot of additional time on RTI and data collection, etc. A lot on my own time. I'm hoping that gets to be less, but is just one of those necessary things. To do it (RTI) well, it needs to be done.”</p>
<p>Helping All Students</p>	<p>Making sure all students get the educational assistance they need without having to wait for qualifying for special education services.</p>	<p>“The majority of these students are not labeled with a special education disability; however, special education should be considered if the services needed for success are very intensive, you know, so it's</p>

Codes	Definitions	Examples
		<p>kind of measured by intensity. I think if you look at your bell curve of your student's percentile, you are only looking at those kids who are maybe only a little below average. In the three years that I've been doing this, I've seen many kids receiving the interventions all three years. I don't think they would qualify as a student with a learning disability, as they don't have the peaks; they are more just kind of low, flat kids. I think those are the kids that teachers used to say, 'These are the kids that fell through the cracks.' They're not really average, but they are not learning disabled, or mentally handicapped. They just need a little more practice. You think of a school doing it for fifteen years. In my mind, I just think, we should be helping all students' learning anyway."</p>
Scheduling	The daily/weekly planning of the overall happenings that occur within the context of the school day (e.g., times for RTI interventions, core academics, specials, collaboration, etc.).	<p>"We started with the Kindergarten students from 8:30 – 9:00. Us special education teachers used part of our caseload time. Then, our schedule changed a little bit and we knew that Tier 2 was more of a need at nine o'clock until 9:30 depending on what kind of group of kids we are serving. We took the</p>

Codes	Definitions	Examples
		<p>initiative to preserve that time in our schedule and we get our schedules in the fall. That's kind of how it developed for us.”</p> <p>“Scheduling is one of those infrastructure things. We realized that the first year. The first year we didn’t have it all figured out. There are still some glitches.”</p> <p>“A big part of RTI is their schedule. We have reading blocks, and math blocks. RTI interventions for math. Those are 30 minute blocks. Those students may miss science or social studies. They don’t miss reading or math.”</p>
Data Management	After the initial data has been collected, the analysis and upkeep necessary to keep the process up to date and valid. What is done with the data collected and how it is maintained.	<p>“There’s so much more that could be done. The things that I see that we could be doing better is the data management piece. That could be done better, and that’s just a small piece. It would be sort of better managing that piece, and helping teachers see how that would work better.”</p> <p>“There's never enough time (to do the data). I do a lot on my own time because I believe in it so much.”</p>
RTI-B	Response to Intervention for Behavior	“It will be different because our process is different.”

Codes

Definitions

Examples

		<p>“What we found out was that when we did the academics . . . because I was the one going out into the field doing all this and then I’d come back and say to my director, ‘You know, we need to do something about this for behavior’ because . . . not that academics are black and white, but it’s a little bit clearer because when it’s a reading issue, you can kind of diagnostically get down to what the issue is and try to help. Behavior is not that black and white . . . very much more complicated. I kept coming back. The schools couldn’t figure out how to collect data or how to measure . . . how to narrow it down. What IS the problem? So, I don’t know. I think we have a better system. It’s not foolproof, but it’s still going to have some things, but now I can go out and say here’s where we start.”</p>
Fidelity	<p>The knowledge that an intervention being used is being implemented in a correct manner and that the intervention is scientifically-based and valid for the purposes for which it is being used.</p>	<p>“One of the things we haven’t been doing is monitoring our interventions for fidelity implementation. Three students who were having trouble went from one interventionist to a second one. All three of them had the same pattern. It made me say, ‘Hmmm.’”</p>

Codes	Definitions	Examples
		<p>Somebody needs to be observing the paras. as they conduct the interventions, as there is always drift.”</p> <p>They talk about fidelity and how they can’t write up a report that a program didn’t work when it hasn’t been implemented correctly.</p>
RTI Coordinator	<p>Person who provides overall support, in terms of modeling, selecting appropriate interventions, assisting with data collection systems, and assessment of fidelity of implementation. This position is not in place in all settings that are implementing RTI.</p>	<p>“The biggest thing I have gained from being a coach is a much better understanding of progress monitoring and how to collect data.”</p> <p>“You know when I think about that, I think I’d want it to be school-based because it’s really important that you be connected to kids. So, first off, I’d still want to be able to provide intervention services for kids because that’s really important for me that I’d have that contact with kids. I think that’s important for anybody because you help lead professional development, you are still working with kids. There are so many things within RTI that we could be doing and we’re not, so I think that’s where I start thinking about this potential position as an interventionist role.”</p>
New Special Education Teachers	<p>Special educators who have just entered the profession within the past 1-3 years.</p>	<p>“My advice would be to learn as much as you can about curriculum-based</p>

Codes

Definitions

Examples

	<p>Although they have recent training, they do not have the background experience of the veteran special educators.</p>	<p>measures and progress monitoring because that is something you have to do for special education. In my experience, we need someone in every building who can progress monitor and why not the special ed. teacher. And why not? If I were in a special education position in a classroom right now, I could take those RTI kids and work with them, but I'd like to show someone how to do it. The training I got was 'train the trainer.' You need to know you have those good skills. Teach others and pass it on. Then you can kind of, divvy up the workload."</p>
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Appendix C

Phenomenological Research Worksheet

Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings	Themes
<p>1. I've had a variety of disability categories that I've worked with. I have three separate credentials.</p> <p>2. I have additional training in Reading Recovery.</p> <p>3. All of us doing interventions are highly qualified.</p> <p>4. That's part of the IRA RTI regulations—teacher knowledge.</p> <p>5. Teacher expertise plays a huge part.</p>	<p>Teacher expertise and a wealth of background experiences has been helpful in the implementation of RTI.</p>	<p>Veteran special education teachers often hold a variety of credentials, as well as have additional areas of expertise, all of which are useful and essential for providing services to students within an RTI model.</p>
<p>1. We knew that the regs. for LD would be changing.</p> <p>2. Initial RTI training was provided by DPI and our local special education director.</p> <p>3. Initial participation was voluntary, although we knew things would be changing.</p> <p>4. Our administrator really listened to us and what we felt was important.</p>	<p>RTI has brought about a paradigm shift in the way educational services are provided in today's schools.</p>	<p>When RTI was presented as a new paradigm in how to get all students the help they need without necessarily progressing to needing a sped. diagnosis and an IEP, special ed. teachers were given opportunities for training and top down support which gave them the initial tools they would need to launch a new, innovative education initiative.</p>
<p>1. We had good success with the interventions. We didn't do so well with the data collection. That was harder, but we've done much better now.</p>	<p>The early process of RTI was one of trial and error.</p>	<p>With RTI implementation, special ed. teachers jumped in to start providing interventions first, and then they went back to focusing on the data, which is another key</p>

Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings	Themes
<p>2. In Kindergarten, at first, there was some resistance, but once we got rolling, we saw the benefits. We got the "buy in" once they experienced the results.</p> <p>3. After having one-on-one intervention, they came back and were higher than the class, so we were looking at upping the classroom instruction.</p> <p>4. We are trying out this intervention with decoding and some with math.</p> <p>5. I needed to start over (with data collection) and wipe the slate clean and start over with my little worksheets here.</p> <p>6. We started right away with the interventions and then focused on the data piece later.</p>		<p>aspect of RTI . . . progress monitoring in order to make decisions for student programming and placement in the Tier levels.</p>
<p>1. During the discussion of student progress, the teachers openly shared, in a collaborative fashion, the factors that might be impacting the performance of each student and whether or not their current level of Tier support was appropriate.</p> <p>2. We use Fountas and Pinnell, AIMSweb, and MAP testing scores, and we</p>	<p>Over time, there are some aspects of RTI that have been proven to be effective by veteran special educators.</p>	<p>Over time, when implementing RTI, special ed. teachers have found that everyone "wins" when they are collaborative, when they incorporate specific tools for data collection and progress monitoring, and when they are able to use a variety of interventions, some of which are teacher-made.</p>

Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings	Themes
<p>color code them as to the ones we are concerned about.</p> <p>3. We use MAZE (probes), Road to the Code, and Kansas Strategies, as well as other interventions.</p> <p>4. We don't have kits; we have teacher-made stuff.</p> <p>5. Data collection/progress monitoring is huge.</p> <p>6. It's more of a group emphasis now. It's a win-win for everybody.</p>		
<p>1. What you saw this morning is my job. RTI is part of my job. I wish it could be more of my job as I so believe in it. (30 min. of her half day position spent on RTI interventions. 1 of 6 on her caseload is RTI kids.)</p> <p>2. We used to have to "wait for them to fail." They had to be referred for testing. I took them after the reading specialist couldn't teach them to read, and I said, "I've had half a class on that, I'll take a crack at it." How crazy was that?</p> <p>3. I get to be one of the interventionists now.</p> <p>4. It's about early intervention and getting kids the help they need right away.</p>	<p>The new vs. old model of service delivery varies considerably in terms of how support is provided to students.</p>	<p>Students are able to get the help they need right away instead of the old model of special education, where if they were "failing" long enough, they could be referred for special ed. services and often assigned a disability label. Special educators were, formerly, to be the "jack of all trades" and be responsible for knowing everyone's content, in addition to their own areas of specialty. Currently, they function as members of a collaborative RTI teaching team, while still serving a standard caseload of students who have already been identified, or who have not responded to RTI interventions.</p>

Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings	Themes
<p>5. RTI has really reduced the number of kids being labeled. We are giving kids a boost, and if that's not enough, then we look at special education.</p>		
<p>1. The amazing thing is that, in special ed., you work with these kids forever, and they kind of make progress, and progress is slow, and it's really hard. And then you work with RTI kids, and they make rapid progress and they go from Tier one to Tier three in like, six weeks, and you say, "Wow! I do know how to teach." You look at them making progress, and you realize how truly difficult it is for our kids who struggle.</p> <p>2. There have been several student success stories (boy with behavior, girl who called "T" the "church thingy," etc.).</p>	<p>RTI has been shown to be successful in many instances, improving overall student outcomes.</p>	<p>Special educators have found success in the students they have been able to reach, and how quickly they have been able to see gains in their performance.</p>
<p>1. There's never enough time (to do the data). I do a lot on my own time because I believe in it so much.</p> <p>2. Scheduling was the most difficult thing at first. It's one of those infrastructure things.</p>	<p>In addition to its successes, there are challenges that are present within the current RTI model.</p>	<p>Challenges include the lack of a person to serve as the RTI Coordinator, scheduling, and the time it takes to manage the data that is required as part of the RTI process.</p>
<p>1. There are several pieces that could be managed by an</p>	<p>Current veteran special educators share a vision</p>	<p>It has been shared by all three participants that it would help</p>

Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings	Themes
<p>RTI coordinator/interventionist (e.g., work with kids, help teams make better decisions as far as interventions, fidelity checks for interventionists, work with data, manage technology aspects that could be incorporated, manage and train parent volunteers).</p> <p>2. In my experience, we need someone in every building who can progress monitor and why not the special ed. teacher. And why not? If I were in a special education position in a classroom right now, I could take those RTI kids and work with them, but I'd like to show someone how to do it. The training I got was "train the trainer." You need to know you have those good skills. Teach others and pass it on. Then you can kind of, divvy up the workload.</p>	<p>for the future of RTI.</p>	<p>the overall success of the RTI model if there could be RTI coordinators/interventionists available in all schools that implement the RTI model. In addition, having new special educators coming out of their programs with a strong knowledge base on progress monitoring and effective interventions would also be important in contributing to the overall effectiveness of the RTI process.</p>

Appendix D

Interview Questions

The following are questions used for interview subjects in the study *That Was Then and This is Now: The Changing Roles of Veteran Special Education Teachers as a Result of Response to Intervention*. Questions will include, but will not be limited to, the following:

1. Tell me about your background in teaching special education.
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. What were some commonly used methods used when you were first teaching?
4. Describe the methods you commonly used when you were first teaching.
5. If someone knew nothing about RTI and asked you to define it, what would you say?
6. How long has RTI been used in your school?
7. Give me an example of a success story of a student who was successful as a result of the RTI model.
8. What were your former responsibilities as a special educator before your school adopted the RTI model?
9. What are your current responsibilities as a special educator in an RTI school?
10. Describe the RTI model in your school.
11. How has your role in your school building differed from what you had envisioned when you were a new teacher? Or, is it what you expected it to be?
12. What advice would you give the new special education teacher, who is just starting out, when thinking about their roles and responsibilities in RTI?
13. What advice would you give new special educators in general, not related to RTI?
14. Do you think RTI is here to stay? Why or why not?

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