MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNICATION ARTS TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT NECESSARY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

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by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to determine teachers' perceptions of administrative support needed for implementation of the Response to Intervention process to increase reading skills for middle school students. Response to Intervention is an instructional model that focuses on regular progress monitoring of students' skills followed by early interventions based on evidence-based practices to improve student achievement. Theoretical traditions informing this study were phenomenology and heuristic inquiry.

Case studies of six teachers in two schools located within a Midwest suburban school district were used to investigate the overarching question for the study: What could be done

to improve the implementation of the RtI process at the middle school level to support reading achievement for all students? Teacher interviews, observations and document analysis were utilized for data collection and analysis. Synthesis of the research revealed four themes necessary for implementation to be successful. First, administrators must communicate a clear purpose of the program, its components, and essential steps for implementation. Second, administrators must provide staff development at the onset and throughout implementation for all stakeholders. Third, administrators must model accountability for implementation for all stakeholders. Finally, administrators must demonstrate adaptability throughout implementation, particularly in regards to scheduling as it pertains to both student and teachers.

Findings from the research may inform middle level administrators as their buildings implement Response to Intervention.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies have examined a dissertation titled "Middle School Communication Arts Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support Necessary for Implementation of Response to Intervention" presented by Stephanie Paulette Schnoebelen, candidate for the Doctor of Education degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Enacted in 2002, Public Law 110-107, more commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is defined as an act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility and choice. The purpose of the law is defined as a way "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state achievement standards and state academic assessments" (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, para. 2). Today's public schools are challenged to provide educational systems and structures that will foster increases in all children's academic achievement in order to meet proficiency requirements in both reading and math. The United States Department of Education (2008) authorized The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) as an instrument to assess American students' progress in reading and mathematics with annual assessments since 1990. Results from 2007 found that while incremental increases have been made, fewer than one third of America's 8th graders met proficiency standards for either reading or math, a percentage nowhere near the 100% proficiency requirement stated in NCLB. What changes must be made in order to ensure that all American children are reaching the goals of NCLB? Additionally, as Missouri has adopted the Common Core Standards proposed by the National Governor's Association in 2010, how we will most effectively work to achieve academic success in reading for all students administered Smarter Balanced assessments by the 2014-2015 school year?

One approach to help all students reach proficiency in reading is Response to Intervention (RtI). The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE, 2006) defined RtI as the practice of providing high-quality instruction and

intervention based on a student's needs, changing instruction and/or goals through frequent monitoring of progress, and applying the student response data to important educational decisions. Schools implementing the RtI process are able to provide support for all struggling students in order to help them reach proficiency in reading. The National Research Center for Learning Disabilities (2006) found that "this support should be provided as early as possible—when students show the earliest signs of difficulty. While schools have attempted many ways to help struggling students…the current focus is on an improved, research-based process known as Response-to-Intervention" (p.1).

As an administrator in a suburban middle school of 750 students utilizing RtI in order to increase academic achievement for all students, it is my job to provide instructional leadership to the teachers. The RtI process directly aligns with my beliefs in individualizing education for every child who enters the school doors. Providing educators, parents and students with a single standardized assessment score categorizing students into levels of proficiency is insufficient if the goal is to move every student forward. As a parent, I have been frustrated by the lack of data provided to me as to how my child is performing throughout the year using any measure other than tasks entered in a grade book. As an educator, I have been similarly frustrated by meetings to address student achievement that focused primarily on standardized assessment results that had been administered the previous year. Specific strengths and areas for growth were rarely if ever identified, leaving the summative standardized assessment given in the spring responsible for gleaning information specific to a child's academic achievement. In a presentation to the National Conference of State Legislatures, Vitaska (2007) stated "more than ever, states need to develop and implement comprehensive strategies to ensure that today's leaders have the skills, knowledge

and support required to guide the transformation of schools to meet higher standards and new

requirements for progress" (p. 4). I believe a viable transformational structure for the

students and staff at my school includes the RtI process because of evidence supporting intensive, systematic reading instruction for small groups of students falling below a benchmark on regular and universal screenings throughout the year (Gersten, Compton, Connor, Dimino, Santoro, Linan-Thompson, & Tilly, 2008).

Though I understood the history and the rationale of RtI and believed that it would provide the structure needed to help guide Cahalan Middle School (pseudonym) raise academic achievement in reading for all students, I questioned my ability to facilitate this process with staff. This research study examined Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of administrative support necessary to implement RtI in a middle school. Communication Arts teachers implementing RtI were asked to identify exactly what instructional leadership and support was needed from administrators to help raise academic achievement in the area of reading for all students. Though the RtI process also addresses math skills, my experiences with the area of reading through thirteen years as a Communication Arts teacher prompted me to study teachers supporting reading instruction specifically.

The Problem

There is little question to as to whether or not the ability to read and comprehend written text is an essential skill within the educational system. The U.S. Department of Education (2010) concluded "in a modern society, the ability to read well is the cornerstone of a child's education. In a modern economy, literacy is a prerequisite for a successful life" (p. vii). In order to help students become successful citizens when they leave public schools, there must be a strong emphasis on increasing the reading skills of every student. Despite this focus, students in Missouri continue to struggle with proficiency in reading. Results

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from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test indicated that only 21% of Missouri's 8th grade students scored as either proficient or advanced on the reading assessment (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 62). It is clear that there is plenty of work to be done before all students leaving Missouri public schools are deemed as proficient readers. Changes in instructional strategies and methods must take place in individual classrooms throughout the state, and it is imperative that teachers help lead the charge of these reforms. Thornton (2010) found "teachers are at the center of all reform movements, and without their full participation and leadership, any effort to reform education is doomed to failure. Real change cannot be mandated…" (p. 36). My work as an instructional leader must take into account the teachers' perceptions of the support they need to make changes in their classrooms. Simply implementing a new program or procedure will not ensure increased academic achievement. In order to be a teacher of teachers, I must learn from those I lead.

The problem is that middle level Communication Arts teachers need guidance from administrators as they implement the RtI process to improve reading skills for all students. If school leaders expect teachers to continually adapt and adjust their classroom strategies to maximize the academic achievement in their classrooms, the administrators must also continue to learn about said strategies and their implementation. "If the principal is to help teachers improve what they do, the principal must continuously be learning to improve what he or she is doing" (Schlechty, 2001, p. 145). The need for continual learning for all faculty, both teachers and administrators, is magnified by the pressures of federal mandates focusing on student performance. It is imperative that administrators continue to focus on instructional methods that help all children become better learners, not programs or practices that merely

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lead to proficiency on specific assessments. "Supervision within a standards-based environment, unless attended to thoughtfully and sensibly, tends to resort to mechanistic, bureaucratic means, aimed not at instructional improvement but to implementing narrowly prescribed measures of performance" (Glanz, 2007, p. 126). School principals must model for their teachers and their students that learning is a process that never ends, and with new information comes improved and more effective strategies for instruction. Robbins and Alvey (2003) asserted:

> A critical learning for leadership is acknowledging that there will always be a need to learn more. One of the most essential behaviors a principal can model is a devotion to lifelong learning, and a willingness to dialogue with members of the learning organization about how new learnings reshape existing knowledge. (p. 8)

Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Division of Special Education (DESE, 2008) awarded Postville Public Schools (pseudonym) a grant in 2005-2006 as a pioneering school district implementing the Response to Intervention process to help all students meet the NCLB requirement of scoring proficient in reading and math by 2014. According to DESE (2008):

> RtI is a tiered model of providing intervention services to students that is systematic and data-driven. The level or intensity of the intervention is based upon the specific academic or behavioral needs of the student. Student progress is monitored during all points in the system in order to provide information on the response of the student to the intervention implemented. If a disability is suspected, data gathered during the progressively more intensive intervention process can be used as a part of the evaluation information required to qualify a student with a Specific Learning Disability   (SLD). For other disabilities, the information is an excellent source of additional data to clarify a student's specific learning needs. (para. 1)

Though it can be used as an evaluative tool for determining if students have a learning disability, Postville Public Schools implemented RtI as standard practice to increase the learning of all elementary and middle school students. The National Association of State

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Directors of Special Education (2006) found that "RtI should be applied to decisions in general, remedial and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction/intervention guided by student outcome data" (p.1).

Terminology of essential components of RtI vary, but research by Klotz and Canter (2007) found that the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities and fourteen organizations forming the 2004 Learning Disabilities Roundtable coalition included three core features that have been incorporated by Postville Public Schools: (a) universal screening, (b) multiple tiers of increasingly intense research-based interventions, and (c) continuous progress monitoring of students. Klotz and Canter (2007) defined universal screening as "a step taken by school personnel early in the school year to determine which students are 'at-risk' for not meeting grade level standards…Universal screening can be accomplished by reviewing recent results of state tests, or by administering an academic…screening test" (p. 2). The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (2006) found RtI is most frequently viewed as a three-tiered model, with the first tier including school-wide systems for all students, a secondary tier including systems for at-risk students, and a third or tertiary tier of specialized individualized instruction for students with intensive needs. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) found "with progress monitoring, teachers collect student performance data on a frequent basis: usually every week, but at least every month. The teacher graphs each student's scores…" (p. 1).

As the instructional leaders of the school, administrators must have a thorough understanding of each step of the RtI process in order to successfully implement a plan to increase academic skills for all students. The delivery of school-wide universal screening,

tiered instruction and student progress monitoring for all students at the middle school level has unique challenges that must be overcome before implementation.

I focused my study on Response to Intervention because I fully embraced the idea of personalizing the education of every child within our educational system. While schools have traditionally provided specialized services for those students performing at the very top or the very bottom of their peer group, I believed the RtI process provided a more comprehensive program to help ensure that all students continue to grow and learn. As opposed to typical measures of student academic achievement including annual standardized testing and grade reports, RtI not only provided educators with frequent and regular data regarding student performance, but it also provided a structure for immediate instructional changes that could increase struggling students' learning. Such an individualized approach to student achievement necessitated considerable changes to middle schools, both structurally and instructionally. Administrators needed specific strategies to facilitate this process at the middle school level, and current research focusing on elementary school scheduling of consistent interventions and assessment of student progress did not always apply to middle school programming. As an assistant principal in a middle school in the initial years of a school-wide RtI process, I found it very challenging to provide the teachers with the instructional support they needed for full implementation. Information regarding administrative assistance needed for middle level implementation of the process was scarce, and many of the strategies or suggestions from the elementary school literature were either not relevant or not realistic at the middle school. I hoped my research would provide all middle school administrators a better understanding to how they can best serve as

instructional leaders for their classroom teachers in the hopes of having all students increase their academic achievement in reading.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this phenomenological naturalistic study was to describe critical administrative support needed for teachers utilizing the Response to Intervention process to increase reading skills of all middle school students. The study also included the heuristic tradition. Flood (2010) determined that as a research approach, phenomenology's "primary position is that the most basic human truths are accessible only through inner subjectivity, and that the person is integral to the environment" (p. 7). I wished to gain the perspective of the teachers who were implementing Response to Intervention. To gain this perspective, I observed the process in its natural setting. "Naturalistic designs look at specific or general issues as they occur—for example, what makes practitioners change their practice, how often is feedback given….what processes are occurring over time in an educational course, what are the different experiences and outcomes" (Hutchison, 1999, p. 1267). Patton (2002) reported that heuristics is a form of phenomenological inquiry in which the researcher has an intense personal interest in the phenomenon being studied and the researcher's personal experience and insights are brought to the forefront (p. 107). My role as an administrator provided me with an intense personal interest in my study, and I welcomed the opportunity to bring my personal experiences and insights to the research.

Research Questions

I was interested in exploring Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of administrative support necessary to implement Response to Intervention at the middle level. My intention was to provide middle school administrators with specific information as to how best to support their staff in utilizing the RtI process. The overarching question for this study was: What could be done to improve the implementation of the RtI process at the middle school level to support reading achievement for all students?

Sub-questions that were investigated included:

a) How have two schools implemented the RtI process in reading at the middle school level?

b) What problems or obstacles did instructors face in the initial stages of the RtI process for reading at the middle school level?

c) What were some stories of success that teachers experienced as a result of implementing the RtI process for reading?

d) What were Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of administrative support provided to middle school instructors involved in the RtI process for reading?

e) What were Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of other supports that were helpful to middle school instructors involved in the RtI process for reading?

Theoretical Framework

A conceptual or theoretical framework provides the researcher with the structure and clarity necessary to design a focused study. Maxwell (2005) found that while the framework serves as tentative theory of the phenomena being studied, "the function of this theory is to

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inform the rest of your design—to help you assess and refine your goals, develop realistic and relevant research questions, select appropriate methods, and identify potential validity threats…" (pp. 33-34). If the study includes qualitative methods, the theoretical framework must also recognize the personal experiences of the researcher. "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). My experiences as a middle school instructional leader challenged to increase student reading skills impacted what I believed about the administrative support teachers needed in order to raise achievement for every child. Maxwell (2005) stated "separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks" (p. 38). The design of a phenomenological naturalistic study allowed me to maximize my ability to make meaning by partnering my personal background and identity with my research findings.

The four topical areas that guided my research included: (a) middle school history, philosophy, and structure; (b) the federal educational policies of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA); (c) Response to Intervention (RtI); and (d) instructional leadership.

Postville Public Schools adopted a Response to Intervention (RtI) process to help meet the No Child Left Behind mandates of every student scoring proficient in reading and math by the year 2014. Embedded in special education research, specifically in regards to the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, RtI provided educators with an alternative method of identifying students with specific learning

disabilities while at the same time assessing and improving the reading skills of all students in the building. Staffing and scheduling of middle school posed challenges in meeting the requirements needed to fully implement this method.

Middle Schools

Early educators believed that while middle level learners were capable of succeeding within format less rigid than that of the elementary structure, they were still in need of more structure than the traditional high school provided. Gruhn and Douglas (1947) noted that a function of the junior high was "to provide a gradual transition from pre-adolescent education to an educational program suited to the needs and interests of adolescent boys and girls" (p. 60). Manning (2000) found that this basic philosophy was extended to the formation of America's first middle school in 1950 in Bay City, Michigan, marking the beginning of a new educational structuring system that focused on the educational needs of students in grades 5-9.

McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1996) found that William M. Alexander conducted the first comprehensive national study of middle schools during the 1967-1968 school year (p. 9). Alexander (1968) defined a middle school as "a school having at least three grades and not more than five grades, and including at least grades six and seven" (p. 1). The trend of grouping students in the middle grades continued to gain momentum in the United States, with increasing numbers of districts adopting this organizational model. "Between 1970 and 2000, the number of public middle schools in the U.S. grew more than sevenfold, from just over 1,500 to 11,500. These new middle schools displaced both traditional K-8 primary schools and junior high schools" (Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010, para. 3).

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Middle schools today continue to be critical to the development and achievement of adolescents. "The conditions students face and how they perform in middle school play a vital role in whether or not they will graduate from high school prepared for college and the 21st century workforce" (United Way of Greater Los Angeles, 2008, p.2).

Regardless of grade configuration of the building, all levels of public education are required to follow and meet guidelines set by local, state, and federal policies.

Federal Policies

Local and state mandates continue to have a significant impact over daily operations of public schools; however, recent federal legislation has also heightened educators' awareness of individual student achievement. Schools are held accountable to not only local and state standards, but are also concerned with national mandates and possible sanctions as well. Two specific federal policies that have substantial influence over education in America in recent history are the reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESA) better known as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975.

No Child Left Behind

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted. This legislation was designed to level the playing field in regard to opportunities for all students in all public schools across America. "At the heart of the ESEA regime was a powerful equity rationale for federal government activism to promote greater economic opportunity through more equal access to equally funded schools" (McGuinn, 2006, p. 25). All students, regardless of where they lived and attended schools, should have an equal opportunity for

learning experiences, and the federal government would provide funding to make this possible. In 2002, President Bush signed legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ensuring that "all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards". Though individual states have the flexibility to design their own assessments, proficiency in reading and math for each state is measured through standardized testing. Smyth (2008) stated "standardized testing has been the main vehicle for measuring student and teacher performance. States all over the nation are using the results of these tests to determine student promotion and placement, teacher salary, school accreditation, district funding, and graduation opportunity" (p. 133). President Bush's legislation, better known as The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Public Law 107-110, is based on four basic principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and doing what works based on scientific research (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

To hold schools accountable for individual results, the law states that schools receiving federal funds must meet state-defined adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals. Schools not making adequate yearly progress receive mandatory assistance to develop a plan to increase student performance within two years. If achievement levels do not increase, parents have the option of transferring their child to a school within the district that is making AYP at the district's expense. To allow for greater local control and flexibility, the law permits each state the freedom to design and implement their own plan to meet NCLB guidelines, including the right to define highly qualified teachers, adequate yearly progress and students with special instructional needs. Finally, NCLB emphasizes comprehensive

school reform through research-based strategies proven to improve instruction and achievement in schools. NCLB provides "…financial incentives for schools to develop comprehensive school reforms, based upon scientifically based research and effective practices that include an emphasis on basic academics and parental involvement so that all children can meet challenging State academic content and academic achievement standards" (p. 177). NCLB gives a detailed description of criteria determining scientifically based research, including research that employs systematic and empirical methods, involves rigorous data analyses and relies on observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers (Wright & Wright, 2003).

The U.S. Department of Education (2010) determined the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provided an impetus for changes made in regard to children with disabilities and their education in public schools. "In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; P.L. 89-10)…provided states with direct grant assistance to help educate children with disabilities. These and other critical federal laws began to open doors of opportunity for children with disabilities" (pp. 4-5). Legislation such as ESEA and NCLB not only brought to the forefront educational inequities that were occurring in public schools, they required that changes be made in order to address them. Students needing specific legislation to protect their rights included those with identified disabilities.

Individuals with Disability Education Act

The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975 by the United States Congress. The legislation supported states and localities in protecting the rights and meeting the individual needs of children with disabilities and their families (U.S.

Department of Education, 2010, p.1). Not all students can be educated with the same

methods or through the same curriculum, and those born with disabilities often need more

intensive or individualized instruction to make academic gains. Prior to IDEA legislation of

1975, students requiring specialized instruction prior to IDEA legislation in 1975 were left to

the mercy of the local school district. Though it seems inconceivable today that educating all

children, including those born with a disability, with a free and appropriate education would

require a federal mandate, this was clearly the case. Hardman (2006) stated:

> In today's schools, access to education on an equal basis is national policy. For most of the 20th century, however, the availability of public education for children with disabilities was sporadic and selective. Even with the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, most states merely allowed for special education; they did not mandate it. Federal policy was silent while many states openly excluded children with disabilities from public schools. (p.2)

Since its inception in 1975, IDEA has been integral in the development of a national

infrastructure supporting the achievement of millions of students with disabilities through the

use of extensively researched teaching approaches, techniques and practices (U.S.

Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). When this far-reaching and influential legislation was

reauthorized in 2004 under the title of The Individuals with Disabilities Education

Improvement Act (IDEIA), it was directly related to the recently enacted No Child Left

Behind legislation of 2002. "The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities with Education

Act (IDEA) is a school-reform law closely aligned with the No Child left Behind Act

(NCLB)" (Turnbull, 2005, p.320). Yell, Katiyannis, and Shriner (2006) also found evidence

of this link that NCLB was a key factor in the reauthorization of IDEA, primarily aligning

both acts' requirements of highly qualified teachers, inclusion of all students in statewide

assessments, and the utilization of peer-reviewed instructional strategies (p. 5). The U.S.

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Department of Education website (2008) lists 500 pages linked directly to researched-based practices, providing educators with a myriad of choices when making decisions as to how to increase academic achievement in America's classrooms. One practice meeting the scientifically based research criteria is Response to Intervention, a process originating as an alternative model for identifying and qualifying students for special education services.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a systematic procedure to help educators determine not only the individual students who are in need of additional help, but also to determine whether or not the additional help is effective for each student. In 2006 The National Association of State Directors of Special Education defined RtI as "the practice of providing high-quality instruction and intervention based on a student's needs, changing instruction and/or goals through frequent monitoring of progress, and applying the student response data to important educational decisions." Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) defined a four step process to follow for RtI implementation: the universal screening of the entire student population, the implementation of a quality general education program for all students, the implementation and monitoring of a supplementary and diagnostic instructional intervention, and finally the recommendation of further testing to determine a possible designation of a disability (p. 93). The research-based intervention begins after the universal screening and implementation of a quality general education program for all students. Hale (2005) clarified the role of the teacher within the instructional intervention phase of the process. "A teacher modifies instruction (intervention) to help a struggling child, and then checks the child's progress regularly (called progress monitoring) to see if the intervention if working…If the

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intervention is not working, you change the intervention and monitor progress. This process continues until the child improves" (p. 3). In addition to choosing scientifically proven interventions, Mellard (2005) found that in order to implement RtI successfully it was essential that teachers delivered the instruction accurately and consistently, followed explicit rules to determine which students were or were not making sufficient progress and monitored student's outcomes in the interventions at least weekly (p. 1). Mellard (2005) continued to note that "RTI requires changes in personal and social interaction among administrators, teachers, parents, and other professional staff. These participants in the RTI process must make significant changes in their roles and responsibilities" (p. 2). These required changes in roles and responsibilities of teachers and administrators are particularly challenging within a middle school structure.

Instructional Leadership

There is an urgency facing all school administrators today; no time is left to waste when we are dealing with groups of children and their academic achievement. Building principals must act immediately to provide the best possible environment in which the students can learn, and their role as the instructional leader in that environment is critical for the success of all. Upon completing fourteen years as a middle school teacher and building leader, I felt ready to handle the responsibilities required by a move into an administrative role. However, as I began my work as an assistant principal the roles and requirements initially appeared to be both overwhelming and intimidating. After years of pre-determined scheduled blocks of time in which my goals were clearly delineated by the curriculum and the master schedule, I was thrust into a daily routine that was anything but consistent. Moving from bus duty to hall supervision to an angry parent phone call to a pulled fire alarm

required quick thinking, and time was always of the essence. My experiences as an assistant principal taught me that there is no "typical" day as a building administrator. Combining an administrator's supervisory role along with the instructional leadership tasks of classroom supervision and teacher evaluation, I began to question how I could identify and then prioritize the multitude of tasks I was expected to complete during each school day. Seyfarth (2008) ascertained that principals should perform seven essential functions, including: (a) plan, develop, supervise, and evaluate the instructional program; (b) select and evaluate staff and provide opportunities for professional growth; (c) communicate with parents and the community; (d) enforce appropriate standards of student conduct; (e) use due process procedures with students and staff; (f) maintain safe, clean, and attractive buildings and grounds; and (g) keep accurate records of enrollment, attendance, disciplinary actions, and funds received and expended (p. 62). While the list helped to identify the many roles and expectations of a building leader, it did not differentiate as to where I should begin—and which group of learners, students or staff, should be my priority. Choosing between adult learners and student learners seemed to be a Sisyphean labor; focusing on one group at the expense of the other would result in neither group remaining at the top of the hill. A better question to ask would be how do I lead the entire school community through this process? What does leadership look like in an educational system?

Sergiovanni (1999) determined that though defining leadership may not be an easy task, there are common distinguishing characteristics most leaders share, including standing for important ideas and values, using their ideas to help others come together, communicating their ideas in a way that invites others to reflect, inquire, and better understand their own thoughts, and having an ability to make the lives of others more

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sensible and meaningful. (p. 95). Covey (2009) defined leadership as "communicating people's worth and potential so clearly that they are inspired to see it in themselves" (p. 66). Coupling the roles of a building administrator with the characteristics of those who serve as leaders in educational settings provides an outline from which I can begin my journey as a building principal. However, with all of the stakeholders involved in education today—the students, the teachers, the parents, the community, the local and national government—how can I maximize my ability to make changes in the lives of the people I serve? How can I bring about structural and instructional changes that not only lead to academic achievement, but also bring about changes in social equity that currently exists in today's schools?

There is no disputing the fact that school administrators today must be both good managers and good leaders; neither solid management without effective leadership nor solid leadership without effective management will allow today's educational institutions to meet their goals. However, if the chief goal of schools is to educate children, it is imperative that the school principal take a primary role in the academic achievement of the students. As the instructional leader of a staff of instructional leaders, the building principal must be highly effective as he or she guides the staff toward increased learning for all.

Effective instructional administration does not occur by accident or chance. While some people may have personality traits that lend themselves more easily to leadership, every person who is truly committed to success for all students in their building must make a conscious effort at improving their skills at providing direction. "The principal's leadership practices are key in forming an organizational culture dedicated to improving student performance" (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzo, 2004, p. 15). Determining exactly what makes a principal an effective leader is not a simple task. After all, motivation is highly

singular, and what moves one person to action may not move another. However, individual preference aside, this does not mean to say that there are no commonalities among the qualities that an instructional leader possesses. Valentine et al. (2004) studied the personal leadership qualities of principals at six highly successful middle level schools and found that though their personal and professional backgrounds were extremely diverse, "what is perhaps most striking in the analysis is how each principal, in a unique and powerful way, exemplified a fundamental belief that principals are charged with doing everything possible to ensure that the students in their school show maximum academic, social, and emotional growth" (p. 93). While there is no elixir or "magic bullet" that defines an effective leader, I believe that there are three essential characteristics a building principal must possess to lead an urban middle school today: a clearly articulated vision, the establishment of a positive school culture, and high expectations for all.

Overview of Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological naturalistic study is to describe critical administrative support needed for teachers utilizing the Response to Intervention process to increase reading skills of all middle school students. Patton (2002) found that "the key issue in selecting…the appropriate unit of analysis is to decide what it is you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study" (p. 229). Because the goal of my study is to provide all students with a structure that will maximize their academic success, the unit of analysis is teacher perception of support needed in order to fully implement RtI, with a special focus on necessary support from the administrative team. Results of this study will

allow middle level administrators to provide teachers with the tools and structure necessary to be most effective.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined qualitative research as:

A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world…This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings,attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Patton (2002) found that the qualitative researcher is the research instrument, and as an administrator involved in the process, I hoped to make meaning from the teachers directly involved with the RtI process. I chose to utilize a naturalistic inquiry approach since I was studying RtI in a Midwestern suburban district where it has recently been implemented. Naturalistic designs are those in which the "research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest…Observations take place in real-world settings…" (Patton, 2002). The understanding of several teachers' shared experiences will provide information to assist administrators as they facilitate the phenomena of RtI implementation. As expressed by Heath (1997) "qualitative researchers attempt to describe and interpret some human phenomenon, often in the words of selected individuals (the informants). These researchers try to be clear about their biases, presuppositions, and interpretations so that others (the stakeholders) can decide what they think about it all" (p. 1). As a researcher, it was imperative that I explicitly state—or bracket, as defined by Moustakas (1994), my assumptions. Bracketing is that "in which investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (p. 34).

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For this study, the phenomenon under examination was Response to Intervention. Van Manen (1990) stated "phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-'thing' what it is—and without which it could not be what it is" (p.10). My research required me to carefully determine exactly what RtI implementation at the middle school level was and was not by "thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it" (Patton, 2002). As an administrator directly involved with the implementation of RtI, my research utilized a heuristic inquiry approach. According to Moustakas (1990), a in a heuristic phenomenological approach "the self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge" (p.9). Through this personal experience, I hoped to "understand the essence of the phenomenon through shared reflection and inquiry with coresearchers as they also intensively experience and reflect on the phenomenon in question" (Patton, 2002, p. 482).

The sites chosen for this study were two middle schools with common demographics from a Midwest suburban school district that were both in the initial stages of RtI implementation for all students. Patton (2002) stated that "purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 230). Intensity sampling allowed me to focus on the teachers working specifically to improve reading skills of struggling students, skills that are directly correlated to increased academic achievement. Patton (2002) found that "an intensity sample consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)" (p. 234). Data collected included respondents' answers to questions structured from my interview research

questions, observations of teachers implementing the RtI process in their buildings, and the

analysis of internal school documents regarding the RtI process.

Significance of the Study

As a new administrator, both the most rewarding and the most challenging part of my

job was the role as a building instructional leader. Much of my preparatory classwork and

internship experiences focused on managerial tasks such as scheduling, supervising, and

disciplining; skills that are without a doubt necessary to succeed, but skills that played little

part in my motivation to become a principal. I became an administrator in hopes of helping

all students be more successful academically, socially, and emotionally. I believe that if it is

implemented correctly, the RtI process will allow schools a unique opportunity to

individualize instruction to allow each child to make appropriate academic gains in reading

and math. However, as the National Association of Secondary Principals (2006) found:

> Many schools and the principals who lead them have been undertaking reforms to
> improve student achievement…Time is of the essence; federal and state benchmarks
> must be met, but, more important, each minute wasted means less time addressing the
> needs of students who are not achieving at   acceptable levels. Millions of young
> adolescents each year rely on principals and teachers to help them fulfill their dreams.
> (p. XIX)

In order to have the most significant impact on the students I wish to serve, I must be

an effective instructional leader for the teachers who are leading them in the classroom. Not

only did this study allow me to listen and learn from teachers implementing the RtI process

the problems they are facing with initial implementation procedures, I also found support

needed in order to have the highest levels of success. The information I found could be

valuable to other middle school administrators who are also in the initial stages of

implementation. Bradley, Danielson and Doolittle (2007) found one of the greatest

challenges in large scale RtI implementation is the limited information available. "Ideally, large-scale implementation of any new innovation would be preceded by significant research and development efforts. The reality, however, is that policy often precedes and drives research and development" (p. 11). This research should help other middle level instructional leaders as they begin to use the RtI process to help each teacher help each child in their building increase their academic skills.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 will discuss the results of research completed over the four concepts

defined in my theoretical framework. The four topical areas that guided my research include:

(a) middle school history, philosophy, and structure; (b) the federal educational policies of

the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and

the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA); (c) Response to Intervention (RtI);

and (d) instructional leadership.

My personal background in education is directly connected to these areas of study. I

have spent the vast majority of my professional career working in a middle school setting.

My brief experience working directly within a high school setting only cemented my belief

that middle school was the ideal setting for me. Research revealing the philosophy and core

beliefs of those committed to middle school education has further reinforced my

determination to support middle level students and educators. Federal policies including

ESEA, NCLB, and IDEA have had a direct impact on my daily experiences working with

students. Legislative mandates have required shifts in scheduling, staffing, and services.

Recent district-wide implementation of RtI in response to federal laws has also significantly

changed not only the manner in which our district identifies students with disabilities, but

also in the instructional practices of all teachers as we monitor the achievement of all

students. I have only recently moved into a full-time instructional leadership role as an

assistant principal and feel that I have much to learn and much room to grow professionally.

Time is of the essence; it is imperative that I strategically focus my attention and energy on

areas in which I can have the most impact on academic growth for all.

Middle School History

For much of the nineteenth Century, American school structure was dominated by an eight year elementary program followed by a four year high school program. Changes to this format began to take place as early as 1894, when the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies suggested that grade seven would be the beginning of secondary education (Vars, 1965). The Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (1918) recommended:

> A reorganization of the school system whereby the first six years shall be devoted to elementary education designed to meet the needs of pupils approximately 6 to 12 years of age; and the second six years to be secondary education designed to meet the needs of pupils approximately 12 to 18 years of age. (p.12)

A further separation in traditional American divisions of education occurred prior to national attention focusing on a suggested shift from the eight years of elementary and four years of secondary to six years at both elementary and secondary. Research by Popper (1967) found that though the year 1910 is usually given as the year of the first American middle school, there are examples of a split of the six years of secondary school preceding that date:

> One historical reference makes mention of a 'junior high school' as early as 1884…Richmond, Indiana is said to have had in 1895 a 'distinct unit of the city school'set apart for seventh and eighth graders. Also, the State   of Florida is known to have paid state aids early in the twentieth century for the operation of 'junior high schools'. (p. 10)

In addition to Popper's findings, Manning (2000) also established "the first three-year junior high schools, incorporating grades 7-9, were established in Columbus, Ohio in 1909" (p. 192). Regardless of when America's first division of secondary education occurred, it was clear that a model of six years of elementary education followed by six years of secondary education was to be replaced by a model roughly defined as 6-3-3: six years of elementary

school, three years of middle level education, and three years of high school. "Beginning in the 1940s, educational reformers began pushing for the creation of junior high schools. They argued that specialized schools for students in Grades 7-9 would better prepare young adolescents for high school by exposing them to a high-school environment without the trauma of placing them in the same building as older teenagers" (Bedard & Do, 2005). Gruhn and Douglass (1947) noted that a function of the junior high was "to provide a gradual transition from pre-adolescent education to an educational program suited to the needs and interests of adolescent boys and girls" (p. 60). How then, did American students move from a junior high into today's prominent middle school format? Though Popper (1967) ascertained "what over the years we have come to know as the Junior High School *is* institutionally America's Middle School" (p. xi, emphasis in original), many believe that middle schools overcome fundamental problems inherent in the format of the junior high. Alexander (1966) determined:

> When we examine the programs characteristic of the 6-3-3 plan, I think we definitely see some flaws...The junior came to look too much like the senior high departmentalization, and an activity program and a social program for adolescents got established. The needs of the older children dominated the program and made it too mature and sophisticated a program for those who are still in between childhood and adolescence. (p.19)

Simply taking the high school model and changing the name was not going to provide middle level students with the structure and format necessary for them to be successful. The needs of younger adolescents differs from those both younger and older, and middle level educators needed to respond with a model that met the unique needs of students from 10 to 14 years

old. Popper (1967) believed that:

> The ultimate goal of America's middle school is to intervene protectively in the process of education which was begun in the elementary school, mediate between the human condition at the onset of adolescence and the pressures of culture, and continue the general education of early adolescents with a curriculum applied in a psychosocial environment which is functional for learning at this stage of socialization. (pp. 48-49)

While the academic focus for students moving from elementary to middle school would remain a primary goal, a transition for their emotional and social needs was a necessary part of their progression into the high school. The middle school focus of meeting the needs of adolescents as opposed to segregating younger students into a pre-high school format was further defined by Haley (1996):

> The goal of middle grades schooling is to provide an affective and cognitive curriculum that will lead students toward productive and rewarding lives. The reorganization of middle grades schools is based on the needs of young adolescents. The social, intellectual and physical needs of adolescents must be understood by well-trained competent middle level educators. (para. 2)

Though middle schools and junior highs may both serve students in between elementary and high school ages, it is how the two schools are structured that distinguishes how they are in theory very different. As its name suggests, a junior high is in basic principle a structure that precedes high school. "Evidence abounds that the 'junior' high school has typically been a secondary school following the 4-year high school model rather than being an in-between school, bridging a gap between elementary and secondary education" (Alexander, 1963, p. 4). Middle schools sought to find an alternative to simply copying the high school format, instead focusing on the unique characteristics of the young adolescents it would serve.

Characteristics

What do "typical" middle school students look like—and what unique characteristics does they posses that separate them from the high school students they will soon become? Eccles, Wigfield, and Schiefele (1997) determined the young adolescents aged 10-15 experience a time of great changes, including those associated with biology and puberty, cognition, friendships and peer groups, and family relations. "Because individuals make many choices and engage in a variety of behaviors during this period that can influence the rest of their lives, it is critical that educators understand what factors influence whether young people stay on a healthy, productive pathway". There are not only a great number of factors to take into consideration; each factor is extremely complex and requires a great deal of personal attention to consider seriously. "Young people undergo more rapid and profound personal changes between the ages 10 and 15 than at any other time in their lives…With young adolescents, achieving academic success is highly dependent upon their other developmental needs also being met" (NMSA, 2003, p.3).

In 1986, the Carnegie Corporation of New York established the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents in order to determine what educators could do to improve the education of middle school students. They found that an ideal middle school focuses directly on the characteristics and needs of young adolescents, creates communities of adults and networks of support and responsibility, offers both multiple sites and methods for fostering learning and health, and prepares all students for productive adult lives (p. 3). In addition, The National Middle School Association's (2003) vision of successful middle schools shared fourteen characteristics, eight of which directly align with the school's culture

and six of which align with the schools programming. Characteristics of school culture include: educators who value working with middle school students; courageous leadership; shared vision; inviting and supportive environment; high expectations; students and teachers engaged in active learning; an adult advocate for every student; and family and community partnerships. Attributes aligned to programming include: relevant and challenging curriculum; multiple learning approaches; assessment programs that promote quality learning; organizational structures that support meaningful learning; school-wide efforts to foster health and safety; and multifaceted guidance and support services (p. 7).

These characteristics and their differences between elementary structures provide unique challenges for the RtI process at the middle school level. Despite these structural differences, research by Clark and Clark (2000) indicated that middle schools can be "... developmentally responsive and still meet the requirements for high-stakes accountability. It is also clear that to achieve the kinds of academic performance that is desired… Developmentally responsive middle level school programs must be highly implemented and fully functional" (p. 11).

Manning (2000) found that this basic philosophy of meeting social, academic and emotional needs of the young adolescent was extended to the formation of America's first middle school in 1950 in Bay City, Michigan, marking the beginning of a new educational structuring system that focused on the needs of younger students. School districts across America continued to embrace the middle school philosophy. McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (2003) recent study of America's middle schools indicated that since the establishment of middle schools in 1960, the movement has experienced much success. "The number of middle schools has continued to increase significantly while other grade

organization plans including the middle grades have rapidly declined in popularity (e.g., K-8, 7-9)" (pp. 4-5). Several comprehensive research studies have been done documenting the progress of America's middle schools, beginning with a study in 1967-1968 led by William Alexander (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996, p. 9). At that time, Alexander (1968) defined a middle school as "a school having at least three grades and not more than five grades, and including at least grades six and seven" (p. 1). Further studies were completed in 1987-1988; 1992-1993; and 2001. (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 2003). The state of Missouri currently elects to embrace the middle school philosophy for adolescent learners as opposed to a junior high format. State reports indicated that as of July 1, 2010, districts across the state organized 285 middle level learners into middle schools with only 57 junior high formats. Accordingly, there were 661 middle school administrators as opposed to 116 junior high administrators (DESE, 2011).

Organizational Structure

One organizational feature that sets many middle schools apart from the traditional junior high set up is interdisciplinary teaming. "The interdisciplinary team of two to four teachers working with a common group of students is the signature component of high-performing schools, literally the heart of the school" (NMSA, 2003, p. 29). The teaming concept provides a transition from the elementary school, where students are typically assigned one teacher for the majority of their instruction. This one to one relationship promotes individualization of instruction and personalization of the relationships between students and adults in the school community. Teachers with a common group of students and a common time in which to plan instruction and progress allows an opportunity for these

same close relationships between students and adults to be formed. "Students and teachers should, upon entering the middle grades school, join a small, ethical community in which adolescents and adults get to know each other well and create a climate of intellectual development and a community of shared educational purpose" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 123). This commitment to a shared educational purpose among the adults who share responsibility for student learning is integral to success for young adolescents. According to McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (2003):

> One of the most crucial elements of successful middle schools is interdisciplinary team organization. The degree of implementation of this practice is especially important since increasing numbers of studies are showing a correlation between student achievement, as measured by standardized test scores, and the use of team organization and common planning time for teachers. (p. 13)

Though teacher certification and staff allocation allow for a myriad of designs for how middle school interdisciplinary teams can be constructed, each of formats will require instruction in the basic core areas of math, social studies, and science and communication arts. "A team consists of two or more teachers and the group of students they commonly instruct. Together, teachers on a team teach all the core academic subjects" (Arnold & Stevenson, 1998, p. 2). One core subject addressed in every configuration on the teaming concept is instruction in reading and writing through a course identified as Communication Arts.

Communication Arts

According to Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2011), students must build a solid foundation of factual knowledge and basic skills in the traditional content areas, including reading, writing, mathematics, world and American history, forms of

government, geography, science, health/physical education and the fine arts. The areas of reading and writing specifically are combined together and designated as Communication Arts. Skills identified within the Communication Arts curriculum include speaking and writing standard English; reading and evaluating fiction, poetry and drama; reading and evaluating nonfiction works and material; writing formally; comprehending and evaluating the content and artistic aspects of oral and visual presentations; participating in formal and informal presentations and discussions of issues and ideas; and identifying and evaluating relationships between language and culture. Evaluation of these skills is described through the Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) in four strands: (a) Reading (both fiction and non-fiction), (b) Writing, (c) Speaking and Listening, and (d) Informational Literacy. DESE furthermore requires that Communication Arts is "scheduled and taught to all students for at least 900 minutes each week in the aggregate (or 1,800 minutes every two weeks". Though some progress has been made, middle school students in the Postville Public School District have struggled to reach proficiency on the Communication Arts section of the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). Administered annually in order to meet NCLB mandates of yearly assessment in both reading and math for students in Grades 3-8, the MAP test is given each April. All students in grades 3-8 are given tests in reading and math with both multiple choice and constructed response items.

Table 1

Proficiency on the Communication Arts MAP Test

	% scoring basic or below basic on the CA section of the 2009 MAP (AYP Target: 59.2%)	% scoring basic or below basic on the CA section of the 2010 MAP (AYP Target: 67.4%)
Postville Public Schools Grade 6	55.9	49.7
State of Missouri Grade 6	51.9	49.8
Postville Public Schools Grade 7	47.6	50
State of Missouri Grade 7	48.9	47.6
Postville Public Schools Grade 8	47.6	45.8
State of Missouri Grade 8	49.8	47.6

Students in both the Postville Public Schools and those in the state of Missouri fall short of

the targeted goals 59.2% proficient in 2009 and 67.4% proficient in 2010 that was required

to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined by No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

legislation passed in 2001.

Students did not fare much better on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational

Progress (NAEP) test in reading. Both within the state of Missouri and the United States as a

whole, the majority of 8th grade students were below standard proficiency scores in reading.

National Average of 8th grade students scoring proficient on the 2007 NAEP test in Reading

■ At or above proficient ■ Below proficient

29%

71%
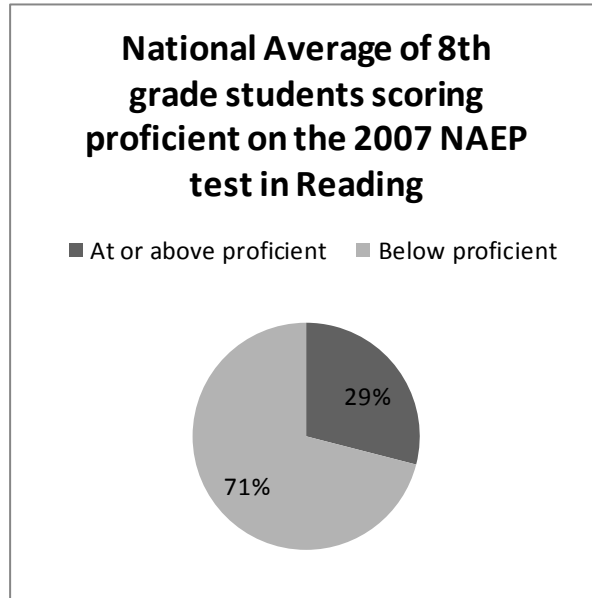
(Planty, et al., 2008, p. 105).

Figure 1. *National Average of 8th Grade Students Scoring Proficient on the 2007 NAEPTest in Reading*

Missouri Average of 8th grade students scoring proficient on the 2007 NAEP test in Reading

■ At or above proficient ■ Below proficient

31%

69%
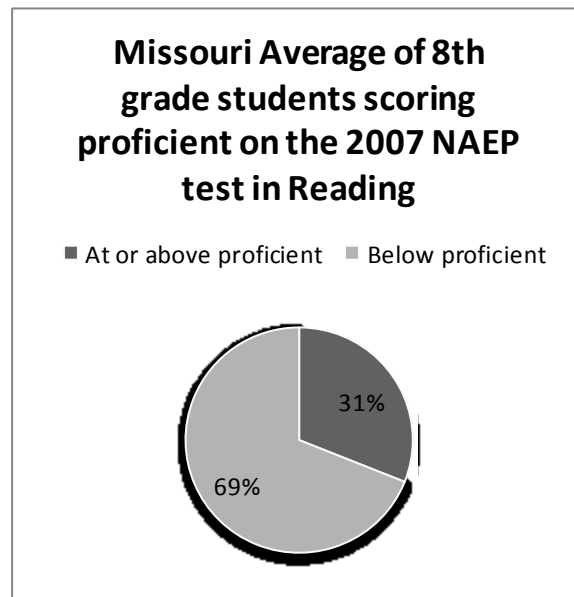
(Planty, et al., 2008, p. 105).

Figure 2. *Missouri Average of 8th Grade Students Scoring Proficient on the 2007 NAEPTest in Reading*

Testing results from both local and national assessments would indicate that middle school students are struggling to meet standards of proficiency on tests of reading.

Federal Policies

Public schools in America acquire funding from multiple sources. Monies are provided from local, state, and federal levels of government. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education reported:

> Education is primarily a State and local responsibility in the United States. It is States and communities, as well as public and private organizations of all kinds, that establish schools and colleges, develop curricula, and determine requirements for enrollment and graduation. The structure of education finance in America reflects this predominant State and local role. Of an estimated $1.1 trillion being spent nationwide on education at all levels for school year 2009-2010, a substantial majority will come from State, local, and private sources. This is especially true at the elementary and secondary level, where about 89.5 percent of the funds will come from non-Federal sources. (para. 1)

These percentages have remained fairly steady throughout the history of the United States, with local and state governments shouldering the majority of the cost of education of school-aged children. "The federal government's role in education has always been small, in recent years hovering around 7 to 8 percent of all public funding of elementary and secondary education" (West & Peterson, 2003, p. 1). While local and state governments continue to their dominance in contribution percentages, the perspective of the role of federal government in public education has recently changed. McGuinn (2006) found:

> Though the funding and day-to-day administrative control of U.S. public schools remain decentralized, the politics of education has been nationalized to a degree unprecedented in the country's history, and the federal government's influence over education policy has never been greater. (p. 1)

Two specific federal policies that have substantial influence over education in America in recent history are the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1975 and its

subsequent reauthorizations, and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002. Both pieces

of legislation are directly linked to improving the academic achievement of assessments of

all children in public schools, specifically in the areas of reading and math. Hardman and

Dawson (2008) reported:

> The uncompromising promise of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001) and
> the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004) is that every student in
> U.S. schools will achieve much higher levels of academic performance. As mandated
> in NCLB, every student will succeed (defined as being on grade level) by the year
> 2013 if schools develop the highest academic standards, provide a rigorous
> curriculum, and use scientifically based instruction. (p. 5)

Moving every student in public schools to levels of proficiency in reading will certainly

require changes for some in not only what is taught, but how it is taught. Instructional

methods that work for many students may fall short for others, and schools must be prepared

with alternate techniques and strategies when even one student fails to meet the mark. All

students, including those with disabilities, must be provided with a rigorous curriculum and

specific teaching methods that will move them toward proficiency.

No Child Left Behind

America's schools would notice a perceptible difference after January 8, 2002, when

"President George W. Bush signed into the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which

dramatically changed and expanded the federal role in elementary and secondary education

policy" (McGuinn, 2006, p.1). Designed to improve the academic achievement of all

American public school students, the law established guidelines to ensure that all students

would be proficient in both math and reading by the 2013-2014 school year while also

determining rewards and sanctions for schools based on the academic achievement of their

students. (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006, p. 2). "Congress's primary goal in passing

NCLB was to hold states and public schools accountable for improving student achievement in reading and math. The controversies notwithstanding, NCLB has had a great effect on the way public school students are educated" (Yell & Drasgow, 2005). NCLB defines very clearly that all students—including those identified with learning disabilities—will reach proficiency in both reading and math assessments by 2013-2014.

> No Child Left Behind affects all students in general education programs and students with disabilities who attend special education programs for part or all of their instruction. The law requires that schools demonstrably improve student achievement so that all public school students are proficient in reading and math by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. Moreover, NCLB mandates that states develop measurable milestones for schools to use to gauge their success in improving student achievement until the goal of 100% student proficiency is reached by the deadline. These measurable milestones that schools must achieve are called adequate yearly progress. (Yell, Katsiyannas, Shriner, 2006, p. 32)

Though individual states have the flexibility to design their own assessments, proficiency in reading and math for each state is measured through standardized testing. Smyth (2008) stated "standardized testing has been the main vehicle for measuring student and teacher performance. States all over the nation are using the results of these tests to determine student promotion and placement, teacher salary, school accreditation, district funding, and graduation opportunity" (p. 133). President Bush's legislation, better known as The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Public Law 107-110, is based on four basic principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and doing what works based on scientific research (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). To hold schools accountable for individual results, the law states that schools receiving federal funds must meet state-defined adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals. Schools not making adequate yearly progress receive mandatory assistance to develop a plan to increase student performance within two years. If achievement levels do not

increase, parents have the option of transferring their child to a school within the district that is making AYP at the district's expense. To allow for greater local control and flexibility, the law permits each state the freedom to design and implement their own plan to meet NCLB guidelines, including the right to define highly qualified teachers, adequate yearly progress and students with special instructional needs.

Finally, NCLB emphasizes comprehensive school reform through research-based strategies proven to improve instruction and achievement in schools. NCLB (2001) provides "…financial incentives for schools to develop comprehensive school reforms, based upon scientifically based research and effective practices that include an emphasis on basic academics and parental involvement so that all children can meet challenging State academic content and academic achievement standards" (p. 177) NCLB gives a detailed description of criteria determining scientifically based research, including research that employs systematic and empirical methods, involves rigorous data analyses and relies on observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers (Wright & Wright, 2003). The U.S. Department of Education website (2008) lists 500 pages linked directly to researched-based practices, providing educators with a myriad of choices when making decisions as to how to increase academic achievement in America's classrooms. One practice meeting both the No Child Left Behind's scientifically based instruction criteria as well as requirements in IDEA legislation is Response to Intervention, a process originating as an alternative model for identifying and qualifying students for special education services. "The 2004 amendments to IDEA also allow states and localities to employ a response to intervention (RTI) framework and consider a student's response to scientific, research-based interventions" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 10).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975 by the

United States Congress. The legislation supported states and localities in protecting the rights

and meeting the individual needs of children with disabilities and their families (U.S.

Department of Education, 2010, p.1). Though it seems inconceivable today that educating all

children, including those born with a disability, with a free and appropriate education would

require a federal mandate, this was clearly the case.

> In today's schools, access to education on an equal basis is national policy. For most
> of the 20th century, however, the availability of public education for children with
> disabilities was sporadic and selective. Even with the U.S. Supreme Court decision in
> Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964,
> most states merely allowed for special education; they did not mandate it. Federal
> policy was silent while any states openly excluded children with disabilities from
> public schools. (Hardman, 2006, p.2)

Since its inception in 1975, IDEA has been integral in the development of a national

infrastructure supporting the achievement of millions of students with disabilities through the

use of extensively researched teaching approaches, techniques and practices (U.S.

Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). When this far-reaching and influential legislation was

reauthorized in 2004 under the title of The Individuals with Disabilities Education

Improvement Act (IDEIA), it was directly related to the recently enacted No Child Left

Behind legislation of 2002. "The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities with Education

Act (IDEA) is a school-reform law closely aligned with the No Child left Behind Act

(NCLB)" (Turnbull, 2005, p.320). Yell, Shriner, and Katiyannis (2006) also found evidence

of this link that NCLB was a key factor in the reauthorization of IDEA, primarily aligning

both acts' requirements of highly qualified teachers, inclusion of all students in statewide

assessments, and the utilization of peer-reviewed research strategies instructional strategies

(p. 5). A specific peer-reviewed and scientifically based research strategy is Response to Intervention.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a systematic procedure to help educators determine not only the individual students who are in need of additional help, but also to determine whether or not the additional help is effective for each student. Originating in special education research and literature as an alternative to the discrepancy formula, it recognizes that one teaching style or strategy does not fit all students. Failure to learn from one method of instruction does not indicate the student is unable to learn, but rather that the instructor needs to modify the learning strategies until the student is able to make academic gains. Kashi (2008) found "the current RtI model is essentially a culmination of several decades of published research about effective teaching" (p.2). Effective instruction requires continual modifications to the instruction being provided, and schools are responsible for individual growth of every student, not only those who are being considered for specialized instruction. According to DESE (2008):

> RTI is a tiered model of providing intervention services to students that is systematic and data-driven. The level or intensity of the intervention is based upon the specific academic or behavioral needs of the student. Student progress is monitored during all points in the system in order to provide information on the response of the student to the intervention implemented. If a disability is suspected, data gathered during the progressively more intensive intervention process can be used as a part of the evaluation information required to qualify a student with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). For other disabilities, the information is an excellent source of additional data to clarify a student's specific learning needs.

In 2005 The National Association of State Directors of Special Education defined RtI as "the practice of providing high-quality instruction and intervention based on a student's needs,

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changing instruction and/or goals through frequent monitoring of progress, and applying the student response data to important educational decisions." Barnes and Harlacher (2008) established five clearly defined principles of RtI: (a) a proactive and preventative approach ensuring an instructional match between student skills, (b) curriculum and instruction, (c) a problem-solving orientation and use of data-based decision making, (d) use of effective practices, and (e) a systems-level approach. Other researchers have reported similar features or characteristics of the Response to Intervention implementation. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) defined a four step process: a) the universal screening of the entire student population; b) the implementation of a quality general education program for all students; c) the implementation and monitoring of a supplementary and diagnostic instructional intervention; and d) the recommendation of further testing to determine a possible designation of a disability (p. 93). The research-based intervention begins after the universal screening and implementation of a quality general education program for all students. Hale (2005) clarified the role of the teacher within the instructional intervention phase of the process. "A teacher modifies instruction (intervention) to help a struggling child, and then checks the child's progress regularly (called progress monitoring) to see if the intervention if working…If the intervention is not working, you change the intervention and monitor progress. This process continues until the child improves" (p. 3). In addition to choosing scientifically proven interventions, Mellard and McKnight (2008) found that in order to implement RtI successfully it was essential that teachers delivered the instruction accurately and consistently, followed explicit rules to determine which students were or were not making sufficient progress and monitored student's outcomes in the interventions at least weekly (p. 1).

Mellard and McKnight (2008) continued to note "RTI requires changes in personal and social interaction among administrators, teachers, parents, and other professional staff. These participants in the RTI process must make significant changes in their roles and responsibilities" (p. 2). These required changes in roles and responsibilities of teachers and administrators are particularly challenging within a middle school structure. Though it can be used solely as an evaluative tool for determining if students have a learning disability, in order to address the learning and leadership problems that are occurring in many of America's school, I believe that school-wide implementation of RtI as standard practice will increase the learning of all students. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2006) found that "RTI should be applied to decisions in general, remedial and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction/intervention guided by student outcome data" (p.1). Terminology of essential components of RtI vary, but research by Klotz and Canter (2007) found that the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities and fourteen organizations forming the 2004 Learning Disabilities Roundtable coalition included three core features that have been incorporated by Postville Public Schools: (a) universal screening, (b) multiple tiers of increasingly intense research-based interventions, and (c) continuous progress monitoring of students. Additionally, Klotz and Canter (2007) defined universal screening as "a step taken by school personnel early in the school year to determine which students are 'at-risk' for not meeting grade level standards…Universal screening can be accomplished by reviewing recent results of state tests, or by administering an academic…screening test" (p. 2). The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (2007) found that RtI is most frequently viewed as a three-tiered model, with the first tier including school-wide systems for all students, a secondary tier including systems for at-risk

students, and a third or tertiary tier of specialized individualized instruction for students with intensive needs.

As the instructional leaders of the school, administrators must have a thorough understanding of each step of the RtI process in order to successfully implement a plan to increase academic skills for all students. The delivery of school-wide universal screening, tiered instruction and student progress monitoring for all students at the secondary level has unique challenges that must be overcome before implementation. I chose to focus on Response to Intervention because I fully embrace the idea of personalizing the education of every child within our educational system. While schools have traditionally provided specialized services for those students performing at the very top or the very bottom of their peer group, I believe that the RtI process provides a more comprehensive program to help ensure that all students continue to grow and learn. As opposed to typical measures of student academic achievement including annual standardized testing and grade reports, RtI not only provides educators with frequent and regular data regarding student performance, but it also provides a structure for immediate instructional changes that could increase struggling students' learning. Such an individualized approach to student achievement will necessitate considerable changes to middle schools, both structurally and instructionally.

Tier one of RtI assumes that every child is a regular education child first and all students must have access to solid instruction from which to learn. This instruction should include rigorous and highly targeted professional development that links directly to daily classroom teaching. Instruction should be differentiated and research-based, and when a student does not learn, for whatever reason, the teacher must have a plan to provide instruction in an alternate manner. These alternate strategies and plans should be addressed

within scientifically based staff development activities. Mellard and Johnson (2008) found that RtI was consistent with scientifically based research on student learning: "it promotes the values that schools have an obligation to ensure that all students participate in strong instructional programs that support student achievement" (p. 17).

Implementation of RtI within a school or a school system requires all students to be regularly assessed and monitored with three universal screenings each year. Standardized assessments, historically used to determine if student qualify for special education by having a discrepancy between their performance and their intellectual ability, are extremely time-consuming and lengthy. The stakes are much too high to allow days or weeks of instructional time can pass while administering and waiting for results. "From today's studies on improving performance in areas such as sports and fitness, we know that timely, individualized feedback based on explicit criteria is critical to boosting accomplishment" (Pollock, 2007, p.30). Such a quick response to student learning is an integral part of the RtI process. Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle (2007) indicated:

> One reason that RTI was a welcome alternative to the traditional discrepancy approach is that teachers no longer would have to wait for students to fail before the students could receive services. RTI begins with the implementation of scientifically based, schoolwide instructional interventions and promotes intervention at the first indication of nonresponse to traditional classroom instruction. (p. 8)

In addition, students whose scores indicate they need additional, individualized interventions should be monitored at least weekly to determine if progress is being made using progress monitoring, defined as "the scientifically based practice of assessing students' academic performance on a regular basis" (Mellard & Johnson, 2008, p. 44). Such a process provides teachers with information for targeted students, allowing adjustments to be made if necessary. "Unlike the external standardized tests that feature so prominently on the school

landscape these days, well-designed classroom assessement[s]…can provide the kind of specific, personalized, and timely information needed to guide both learning and teaching" (McTighe & O'Connor, 2005, p. 11). This personalized information is also essential to ensure that classroom instruction is not leaving specific groups of learners behind. Data provided to building administrators and teachers months after the students have moved to new schools or new grade levels are often referred to as "autopsy data"—that is, information that is essentially dead or irrelevant to the current situation faced by school personnel. While it is certainly worth knowing what may have been the primary weakness or cause of demise for one group of students, such information does little to impact the daily instruction or learning of an entirely new group of students. Gandal and McGiffert (2003) found:

> For example, a particular score in phonemic awareness conveys more to a teacher than an overall score in reading and certainly more than a score in English language arts. Specific results that identify students' particular strengths and weaknesses enable teachers to target instruction to meet the needs of each student. (p. 41)

Such increased involvement with the educational strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers will be a shift for many instructors. "In Tier 1, general educators take a more active role in the screening, identification, and intervention processes of student judged as at risk" (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs & McKnight, 2006, p. 35). With such an active role, classroom teachers can monitor whether or not they are providing equal opportunities for learning for every child in their classroom. "RTI provides a more flexible, mainstream approach that adapts well to the different cognitive and cultural learning styles inherent to minority student whether or not underperforming" (Kashi, 2008, p. 40). When the classroom teacher is personally involved with regular data analysis for all students and in-depth data analysis for a targeted few, meaningful relationships are likely to be formed. "Related to the universal need

to belong and connect, positive relationships improve the mental health of students. Connected, happier students are likely to do higher-quality academic work as well" (Sullo, 2007, p. 16).

Instructional Leadership

School administrators are under tremendous pressure to move all students toward academic proficiency. Defining effective leadership is elusive; there is no one right way to lead every school and every faculty to success. Each leader must evaluate his or her own unique situation and make necessary adjustments to guide the school. I believe that there are three essential characteristics a building principal must possess to lead an urban middle school today: (a) a clearly articulated vision, (b) the establishment of a positive school culture, and (c) high expectations for all. Additionally, schools today that are striving to make changes in student achievement must make meaningful and purposeful dialogue about student learning part of the embedded culture of the community. These conversations are best facilitated through the development and implementation of professional learning communities, which must be modeled and led by the building principal.

Vision

Research is clear that instructional leaders do more than just espouse a vision of achievement for all; they breathe it, live it, and model it at every opportunity. You cannot intentionally reach any goal that has not been established, and today's stakes are much too high to leave any part of the journey to chance.

> A developmentally responsive middle level school is guided by a vision. Research and practice over the past three decades provide middle level educators with a solid

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vision that should reflect the very best we can imagine about all the elements of schooling. (National Middle School Association, 1995, p.14)

My primary role as principal of a middle school will be to maximize academic achievement for every student who walks through the door. Valentine et al. (2004) reported "academic excellence for all students was more than just a phrase in the highly successful schools. The principals and teachers translated that statement into action. They moved from talking about to trusting to acting on their beliefs about excellence" (p. 108). It is one thing to have high expectations and quite another to move all people to perform at such a level, but it is clear from the research that high expectations tend to lead to high success. It may begin with talking, but effective school leaders made sure that discussion led to action, and that action paved the way for success.

> What you (the instructional leader) do on a daily basis in your unique school setting makes a difference in how much and how well the students in your school learn. Your ability to successfully respond to the organizational and environmental context in which you work and to communicate a powerful vision for your school directly influences your teachers' expectations for their students and the students' opportunity to learn. (McEwan, 2001, p. 100)

Actions definitely matter, and there can be no doubt that all stakeholders—students, teachers, and parents—will be watching to see if I walk what I talk. If academic excellence is essential to my vision as a school leader, I need to be an instructional leader for academic excellence. There is perhaps no better way to prove my commitment to student achievement than to experience first-hand what the students in the building experience every day. "One powerful way in which your instructional leadership should assert itself is through your daily presence in the classrooms of your school" (McEwan, 2001, p. 100). A school leader serious about promoting academic excellence cannot expect to lead staff and students from behind the desk in his or her office.

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Finally, the vision of our school must be the vision of and for the school community. It is not the vision of the leader and the leader alone. Blankenstein (2004) found that while our personal vision guides our personal lives, "[a] school's vision should guide the collective direction of its stakeholders. It should provide a compelling sense of where the school is headed and, in broad terms, what must be accomplished in the future" (p. 77). Thus a principal's role is not to define and determine the school's path. A school principal serves to gather the collective dreams and goals of those who he or she serves and move everyone toward seeing them to fruition. "Good leaders are not content with the status quo and are able to project a vision of an alternative future that inspires followers. The vision needn't be original; it may have been borrowed. What is important is that the leader is able to inspire followers to help realize the vision" (Seyfarth, 2008, p. 115).

High Expectations for All

In order to lead a middle school, the school principal must expect only the best from every member of the community. Excellence is excellence, and there is no justice in lowering expectations or learning for any student or any groups of students based on socially constructed categories.

> If we are serious about helping all students achieve at high levels, then principals must rethink the what, how and why of schooling, organized around high expectations and high standards...All policies, planning and decisions must be based on the belief that every child—quite apart from the accident of whether they were born in a low-income family, as a or language minority or with a physical or learning disability—can and will achieve at high levels. (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001, p. 19)

When the building leader refuses to compromise his or her expectations for academic excellence, the students will demand more of themselves as well. The National Middle

School Association (1995) concluded "educators in developmentally responsive middle level schools hold and act upon high expectations for all students, and the students themselves have expectations of success" (p. 14). Even with high expectations for all, there will be some students who are less successful than others in any school environment. When that occurs, it is important that the school leader continues to focus on the expectation for excellence for all. Glickman (2002) asserted "research has found that faculty in successful schools always question existing instructional practice and do not blame lack of student achievement on external causes" (p. 4). It is paramount that the instructional leaders of effective schools not only expect academic excellence of their staff; they must also make such expectations non-negotiable.

> Ninety percent of the principals in the highly successful schools rated their teachers as excellent, compared with 67% of the national sample; 83% of the principals in the highly successful schools rather their special education teacher as excellent, compared with 62% of the national sample. The importance of quality faculty and staff members cannot be disregarded in light of these data.
> (Valentine et al, 2004, p. 49)

As a building leader, I must provide the teachers with every possible tool to be exemplary instructors for the students they serve. It is my role to expect the best, but also to provide scaffolding and support to assist them as they move forward. When teachers are confident and well-supported, they can help all students reach the loftiest of goals.

> It is well known that effective principals are essential to successful schools, doing much to set the tone, promote positive relationships, and keep the focus on student development and learning. Where principals have high expectations of teachers and support them in their efforts, teachers are much more likely to respond to students in a similar manner. (Arnold, 2001, p. 32)

School Culture

A third theme I believe to be critical in effective leadership at the middle level is the principal's ability to create and/or maintain a positive school culture. Defined by Wagner et al. (2006), culture is "the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and the behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school" (p. 102). School culture and school climate are terms that are often used—sometimes mistakenly interchangeably—when discussing the perceived strengths or weaknesses of a school. Gruenert (2008) makes a clear differentiation between the two with the following easily understood analogy: "If culture is the personality of the organization, then climate represents that organization's attitude. It is much easier to change an organization's attitude (climate) than it is to change its personality (culture)" (p. 58). School administrators are in a unique position to have a positive or negative impact on both the school's climate and its culture. However, school culture is much deeper and demands more time and attention to change. Stolp (1994) defined school culture as "the historically transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood, maybe in varying degrees, by members of the school community" (p.1). More than anyone else in the building either individually or collectively, a principal's actions have a bigger impact on creating and maintaining a strong school culture. "One of the most significant roles of leaders (and of leadership) is the creation, encouragement, and refinement of the symbols and symbolic activity that give meaning to the organization" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 10).

Another important aspect of a school culture that improves student learning is the principal's development of day to day living through a clear vision for his or her building and

the community that includes high expectations for all. MacNeil and Maclin (2005) found "a

good school must provide a strong functioning culture that aligns with their vision of

purpose. Good schools depend on a strong sense of purpose and leadership" (p. 1). No

organization can get to its destination if they don't know where they want to go, and the

school principal is both the driver and the navigator of the vehicle.

Though the roles of a building principal are many and varied, direct instruction to

students is not a task for administrators are typically responsible. Therefore, since principals

are not likely to personally impact student achievement through their day to day operations

within a school, it is imperative that they promote a school culture that will best allow

students to succeed.

> Fostering a school culture that indirectly affects student achievement is a strong
> theme within the literature on principal leadership. For example, Scribner, Cockrell,
> Cockrell, and Valentine (1999) assert that building principals can do little to directly
> affect student achievement. Consequently, an effective culture is the primary tool
> with which a leader fosters change. (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 48)

One way to positively affect school culture is to nurture positive relationships between the

school leader and the school staff. When Valentine et al (2004) analyzed six successful

middle schools, they found that in each of the schools:

> Teachers were valued by the principals who made special efforts to know them
> personally and provide them with appropriate support. The results of these efforts
> were evident in the respect and trust that the teachers had for their principals…They
> valued one another, they trusted one another, they enjoyed the collegial relationships
> fostered by collaboration, and they cared for and assisted one another. (p. 92)

The principals' abilities to develop close, trusting relationships with their teachers resulted in

a positive school climate that promoted academic achievement and that supported an

environment of cooperation and common goals. When such relationships are fostered, a

sense of community is established, and with that community comes the confidence to try

whatever it takes to help students be successful. Sergiovanni (1999) noted:

> Successful schools seem to have strong and functional cultures aligned with a vision
> of excellence in schooling. This culture serves as a compass setting to steer people in
> a common direction; provides a set of norms that defines what people should
> accomplish and how; and provides a source of meaning and significance for teachers,
> students, administrators, and others as they work. (p. 12)

If I wish to increase my effectiveness as an administrator, I must be able to assess the culture

of the building and determine how I can continue to support those norms and expectations

that will promote academic achievement for all students. I also must learn how to adjust

behaviors that are in anyway detrimental to student learning and replace those with positive

and nurturing beliefs. One vehicle to promote meaningful discussions regarding school

culture and a clear vision is the utilization of professional learning communities.

Professional Learning Communities

Intentional efforts by instructional leaders to convey a clear vision for success, to

establish high expectations for students and staff, and to promote a positive culture will not

automatically result in increased achievement for all students. Characteristics alone cannot

bring about success for a 21st century principal. One framework that can help with this

transformation is the establishment and implementations of professional learning

communities within a school. DuFour and Eaker (1998) stated that "the most promising

strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability for school

personnel to function as professional learning communities" (p. xii). Additionally, the

National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) determined "central to our

concept of high-quality schools is the creation of learning communities. The notion of

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learning communities is growing because it must. Schools must be places where everyone in them--adults as well as students—is continually learning" (p. 10). Establishing a definition of a professional learning community is easier said than done. DuFour (2004) indicated:

> The idea of improving schools by developing *professional learning communities* is currently in vogue. People use this term to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education—a grade-level teaching team, a school committee, a high school department, an entire school district, a state department of education, a national professional organization, and so on. In fact, the term has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning. (p. 6, emphasis in original)

As a leader, I must be sure that the professional learning communities developed within my building adhere to the basic principles and tenets of the concept. DuFour (2004) revealed three "Big Ideas" that are the core principles of PLCs. First, ensure that students learn. Students experiencing difficulty learning will receive a timely response from the learning community that is based on intervention rather than waiting for a later opportunity success while collaborating for school improvement. Third, PLCs will focus on results through regular analysis of common, formative assessments. Blankenstein (2004) summarized the essence of PLCs into six basic principles: 1) common mission, vision, values, and goals; 2) ensuring achievement for all students: creating systems for prevention and intervention; 3) collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning; 4) using data to guide decision making and continuous improvement; 5) gaining active engagement from family and community; and 6) building sustainable leadership capacity (p. 56). Semantics and definitions aside, there can be no denying that in order for a principal to move a struggling school forward, he or she must make learning about how the students learn through continual, focused and diagnostic dialogue the cornerstone of the school. Thompson

and McKelvy (2007) asserted:

> Although middle schools should be committed to student learning, developmental responsiveness, and social equity, most are focusing their attention on test scores, adequate yearly progress, and No Child Left Behind. Unfortunately, many middle schools do not use one of the most important strategies to improve student achievement and create socially equitable, developmentally responsive middle schools: becoming a professional learning community. (p.12)

Professional learning communities provide a starting point for discussions about creating a school in which social equity and social justice can become a reality. Educators need dedicated time scheduled specifically for discussions of all aspects of student achievement in order to move beyond cursory conversations focusing on improving student behaviors or organizing upcoming field trips. As determined by Marshall, Young and Moll (2010):

> Educational leaders occupy key leverage positions within a system that simply must change if we are to ensure that all children receive an equitable and high-quality education. The will, facts, skills, and guts required to prevent schools from failing children and instead to support social justice in our schools systems must prevail among present and future educational leaders. (p. 317)

An administrator needs to possess a clearly articulated vision, high expectations for all learners in the building including him or herself, and the ability to create and/or maintain a positive school culture. The effectiveness of these characteristics can be enhanced by the establishment and implementation of professional learning communities within the school, led and modeled by the administrator as instructional leader.

Conclusion

My research focused on Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of support necessary to implement Response to Intervention in a middle school. The history and philosophy of middle schools in the United States is congruent with the individualized

approach to instruction identified within the RtI model. Adolescents at the middle level require unique instructional methods and structures that are supported within RtI.

RtI also addresses requirements of several federal legislation mandates including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind, and the Individuals with Disabilities Act.

Simply implementing a policy or a program will not cure what ails American public schools today. In order for meaningful changes to be made, school principals must be responsible and dedicated to being instructional leaders. Effective leadership is not easily defined, but key characteristics include a clear vision, high expectations for all, a positive school culture, and the implementation of professional learning communities.

I hope to help guide instructional leadership team members by identifying administrative support Communication Arts teachers perceived necessary to implement Response to Intervention in their classrooms. Neither administrators nor classroom teachers can be most effective in isolation, and it is important that those educators responsible for directly implementing classroom instructional practices are provided with sufficient scaffolding from building principals to make changes to increase academic achievement. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology for the design of my study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological naturalistic study was to describe teachers'

perceptions of critical administrative support needed to utilize the Response to Intervention

process to increase reading skills of all middle school students. The study also included the

heuristic tradition.

Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology of the study, including the problem and

purpose, theoretical traditions, sampling techniques, data sources, and the data analysis

process.

Problem and Purpose

The 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act had

significant impact on education in the United States. More commonly referred to as No

Child Left Behind, the legislation brought about major changes in the role of the federal

government in regards to public schools, the scope of which had never been seen before:

> The passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002 signaled the beginning
> of a new era of federal education policy and a significantly transformed and expanded
> role in our country's schools. The unprecedented attention that has been devoted to
> the implementation of NCLB by parents, school administrators, the media, and
> politicians testifies to the transformative nature of the new law.
> (McGuinn, 2006, p. 196)

No longer relying on local or state mandates to ensure that all children are learning, NCLB

ensures that the federal government will also have a place at the table of accountability for

student achievement. One specific requirement that NCLB makes of schools is the use of

scientifically based research, defined as "research that involves the application of rigorous,

systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to

education activities and programs" (NCLB, 2001, (37), (A), p. 540). For Postville Public Schools, the district in which I was a newly hired administrator, Response to Intervention was one scientifically based research program that has been adopted for implementation in all elementary and middle schools. Mellard and Johnson (2008) established "using an RTI framework across educational disciplines as well as grade levels is consistent with the focus on scientifically based research" (p. 17).

In addition to meeting federal programming standards, Response to Intervention is an area of specific interest of study for me due to its focus on maximizing the learning experience for each student. As a parent and as an educator, I have found that while much attention is given to those students at the extreme ends of the learning curves, there seems to be little discussion to those in the middle. With encouragement and targeted instruction, every child can make significant gains. "RtI, is in essence, a means of individualizing the education process so every student is taught most optimally for that particular individual" (Kashi, 2008, p.39). I feel it is my duty as an instructional leader to facilitate the learning of every student and every teacher in the building, and in order to be most effective in this role I must have a clear and concise understanding of how I can best support teachers with this initiative. The problem is that middle level Communication Arts teachers need guidance from administrators as they implement the RtI process to improve reading skills for all students.

Research Questions

The goal of my study was to examine the perceptions of support necessary for Communication Arts teachers involved in implementing the RtI process for reading.

The overarching question for this study was:

What could be done to improve the implementation of the RtI process at the middle

school level to support reading achievement for all students?

Sub-questions that were investigated include:

a) How have two schools implemented the RtI process in reading at the middle

school level?

b) What problems or obstacles do instructors face in the initial stages of the RtI

process for reading at the middle school level?

c) What are some stories of success that teachers experienced as a result of

implementing the RtI process for reading?

d) What are Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of administrative support

provided to middle school instructors involved in the RtI process for reading?

e) What are Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of other supports helpful to

middle school instructors involved in the RtI process for reading?

Rationale for Qualitative Research

There are several characteristics of qualitative research that are in direct contrast to

quantitative research: a) qualitative research seeks to make sense of people's experiences; b)

qualitative research employs the researcher as an instrument of collection and analysis of

data; c) qualitative research is primarily inductive rather than deductive; d) qualitative

research includes detailed descriptions of the topic; and e) qualitative research typically

involves work in the field.

To begin, qualitative research strives to find out how the people they are researching make sense of the experiences they are living. "Qualitative researchers *are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructe*d, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6, emphasis in original). Speaking directly to the participants and understanding their reality as it is currently being lived will provide me with more valuable information than obtaining data to conjecture on the future. Patton (1985) found that qualitative research:

> Is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interaction there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting." (p. 1)

Another attribute that contrasts with quantitative methods is that with qualitative research, the researcher is not only involved with the study of the design, but is essential to both the collection and analysis of data. "A second characteristic of all forms of qualitative research is that *the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis*" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6, emphasis in original). I feel that this level of personalization with the data collected will lead to the most powerful findings to help administrators implementing the RtI process.

Thirdly, an inductive rather than deductive approach characterizes qualitative from quantitative research. Maxwell (2005) found that "the strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (p. 22). I do not have years of experience as an administrator to help me hypothesize what support teachers implementing the RtI process

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would find most helpful; therefore my study utilized an inductive approach to how teachers feel about the implementation of RtI at the middle level. Patton (2002) stated that "qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic. Inductive analysis begins with specific observations and builds toward general patterns" (pp. 55-56). Only specific observations of and interactions with teachers will provide in-depth information to move toward such patterns.

A fourth quality of qualitative research includes the development of detailed description of the research topic. Denzin (1989) wrote:

> A thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings…In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (p. 83)

Ponterotto (2006) further defined thick description as a method that "leads to thick interpretation, which in turn leads to thick meaning of the research findings…Thick meaning of findings leads readers to a sense of verisimilitude, wherein they can cognitively and emotively 'place' themselves within the research context" (p. 543). Thick description of perceptions of teachers provided me with an opportunity to focus on collecting information at great depth as opposed to great breadth. "Qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance; that data collection need not be constrained by predetermined analytical categories contributes to the potential breadth of qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 227). As an assistant principal directly involved in a school in the initial stages of the RtI process, qualitative research allows me the opportunity to use this thick, rich description to understand how to better help middle school teachers implement this program.

Finally, qualitative research is differentiated from quantitative research in that "it usually involves fieldwork. The researcher must physically go to the people, setting, site, institution (the field) in order to observe behavior in its natural setting" (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). Qualitative research allows me to focus on people within their natural environments as opposed to impersonal numbers and statistics. Maxwell (2005) stated that "in a qualitative study, you are interested not only in the physical events and behavior that are taking place, but also in how the participants in your study make sense of these, and how their understanding influences their behavior" (p. 22). Choosing to study these behaviors in the educators' natural setting provides yet another advantage to the qualitative research method, since "Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants' experience the issue or problem under study…This up-close information gathered by actually talking directly to people…is a major characteristic of qualitative research" (p. 37). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world…(Q)ualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). The inductive, in-depth and naturalistic qualities of qualitative research design allowed me to best determine how administrators can provide instructional support to teachers implementing the Response to Intervention program at the middle school level.

Theoretical Traditions

I chose a multi-case phenomenological heuristic study design to describe the perception of critical support needed for implementation of Response to Intervention from Communication Arts teachers to increase the reading skills of all middle school students.

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Merriam (1998) reported that "the case study focuses on holistic description and explanation" (p. 29) of a specific phenomenon, in this case Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of critical support. Creswell (2007) reported "the basic purpose of a phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (p. 58). My involvement with the research incorporates a heuristic approach. "Heuristics is a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence or some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 39). Findings from this study may support middle level building administrators to understand how they can best provide instructional leadership to staff as RtI is implemented in their buildings.

Case Study

My research topic was directly aligned to my daily work as a middle school assistant principal working in a school in the initial stages of RtI implementation. This research was designed to help other administrators and me make meaning of this relatively recent educational program to help increase achievement for all students. Yin (2003) ascertained "the case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated. The case study relies on many of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence…: direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events" (pp. 7-8). The focus on a contemporary event, coupled concurrently with my desire to determine exactly how instructional leaders can best support middle school teachers with implementation, led me to choose a case study design. "In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are

being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p.1). This real-life context is particularly applicable for me as a new administrator learning how to support teachers with necessary instructional leadership.

> Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of the phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base. (Merriam, 1998, p. 41)

Much of the previous research done regarding RtI has focused on elementary school structures, teachers and students. The results of my study may help guide other middle level administrators provide instructional leadership to their staff when implementing Response to Intervention. Merriam (2008) further stated:

> A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice and further research. (p. 19)

It was my hope that the findings would provide information necessary to provide the impetus for middle level administrators to change policies and practices. Corcoran, Walker and Wals (2004) indicated that the case study's purpose included a critical analysis of practice that would result in a transformation of practice in others (pp. 7-21); such a transformation could greatly increase the academic achievement of middle school students utilizing the RtI process.

Creswell (2007) further defined case study research as that which "involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)" (p. 73). The case, defined by Patton (2002) as "units of analysis" (p. 447) for my

research was teachers' perceptions of administrative support needed to implement RtI at the middle level. Cousin (2005) found "the case study boundary concerns its physical confines, its activities and the time span of the study" (p. 423). The bounded system for my research design was defined as two suburban Midwest middle schools within the first five years of RtI implementation.

Finally, because the design incorporates multiple cases of study, this was a multi-case study. Merriam (1998) found that research designs involving more than one case "are commonly referred to as collective case studies, cross-case studies, multicase or multisite studies, or comparative case studies" (p. 40). The multiple cases of study included a study of six teachers from two middle schools within the same school district. Collecting data from multiple sources provides an advantage when analyzing results.

> By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings." (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29)

The multicase study design allowed me to glean the perspectives of six Communication Arts teachers as they implemented Response to Intervention to improve reading skills of middle school students. I believe that the multicase study provided me with better understanding than a single case study design. My study included phenomenology, which I discuss next.

Phenomenology

"Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-'thing' what it is—and without which it could not be what it is" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10). In order to describe the critical administrative support needed in implementation of RtI, I needed to learn what was the essence of this experience for those instructors through in-depth

interviews and observations. Patton (2002) found that phenomenological research requires "methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it and talk about it with others" (p. 104). This in-depth data collection provided me with the essence of the experience. "These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences…" (Patton, 2002, p. 106). Analysis of the data required epoche, defined by Katz (1987) as "a process that the researcher engages in to remove, or at least become aware of, prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation" (pp. 36-37). As a researcher, it was imperative that I explicitly state--or bracket---my assumptions. Moustakas (1994) defined bracketing as that "in which investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (p. 34).

There is also a strong connection between phenomenology and philosophy. Cresswell (2007) found that "phenomenology has a strong philosophical component to it. It draws heavily on the writings of the German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)" (p. 58). Smith and McIntyre (1982) wrote:

> The basic task of philosophy, he [Husserl] believes, is to discover the ultimate foundations of our beliefs about the world and our place in it, and to justify – or at least effect an understanding of – the framework within which all our thinking about the world takes place, both our everyday, common-sense thinking and our theoretical, scientific reasoning. Like Descartes, Husserl thinks these foundations lie with an understanding of the nature of the experiencing subject and his consciousness. (p. 93)

While this deep understanding of the subject and his or her consciousness allowed a general phenomenological perspective, it is the search for what Creswell (2007) defined as the

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"essence" or common experiences of the participants (p. 62) that led to a richer description in this study. "A phenomenologist assumes a commonality in those human experiences and must use rigorously the method of bracketing to search for those commonalities" (Patton, 2002, pp. 106-107).

Because I was directly involved with the implementation of RtI at the middle school in which I work, I chose heuristic inquiry as the final theoretical tradition of my study. Moustakas (1990) stated that in heuristic inquiry, "the self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic processes incorporate create self-processes and self discoveries" (p. 9). My hope was to take my personal experiences with implementation of RtI in middle schools and increase my knowledge and awareness of how I as an administrator can best support the teachers who are working to increase the reading skills of students. In the next section, I discuss heuristic inquiry.

Heuristic Inquiry

A final theoretical tradition used in my research design was that of heuristics. According to Patton (2002), "heuristics is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher" (p. 107). Throughout my study, I continued to work with a staff in the initial stages of RtI implementation; therefore my personal experiences were directly connected to my research. Merriam (1988) determined that "in a qualitative study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data, and, as such, can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for

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collecting and producing meaningful information" (p. 20). As opposed to surveys or questionnaires, my role as the primary instrument for collecting and studying data assisted me in elucidating upon the essence, defined by Patton (2002) as "the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced" (p. 106), of the RtI process. Douglas and Moustakas (1985) found "heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behavior" (p. 32). It was my hope that such a combination of my daily work as an instructional leader in a middle school and the study of teachers' perception of administrative support needed for successful implementation would provide me with the information necessary to not only better support the staff in my building, but to also assist other middle level administrators as they began the same journey. Moustakas (1990) revealed that "the question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social—and perhaps universal—significance" (p. 15). My hope was that through my findings I would not only be able to improve my own instructional leadership skills, but also that my research could lead to improved academic achievement for middle school students in all buildings implementing RtI.

<div align="center">

Research Site

</div>

The research site for this study included Albert and Lawrence Middle schools, both located within a Midwest suburban school district. The district is one of the oldest in the state and educates nearly 18,000 students. At the onset of the 2009-2010 school year, the district consisted of 21 elementary schools, five middle schools, and four high schools. The

two middle schools chosen have significantly different total populations and social and

economic statuses, as reflected in Figures 3 and 4.

Albert Middle School 2008-2009

- Asian 8%
- Black 17%
- Hispanic 15%
- Indian 1%
- White 59%
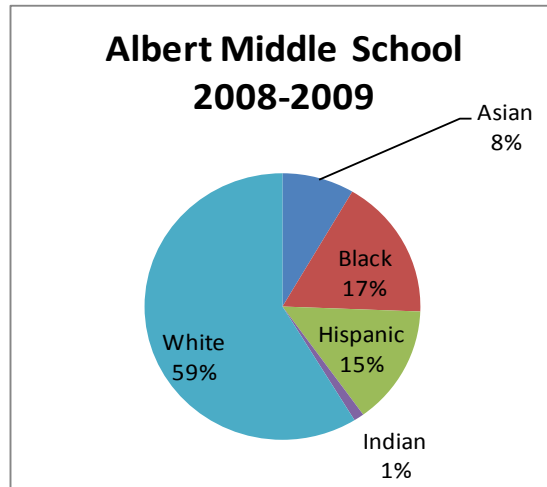
Figure 3. *Students Disaggregated by Race—Albert Middle School*

Lawrence Middle School 2008-2009

- Asian 3%
- Black 9%
- Hispanic 7%
- Indian 1%
- White 80%
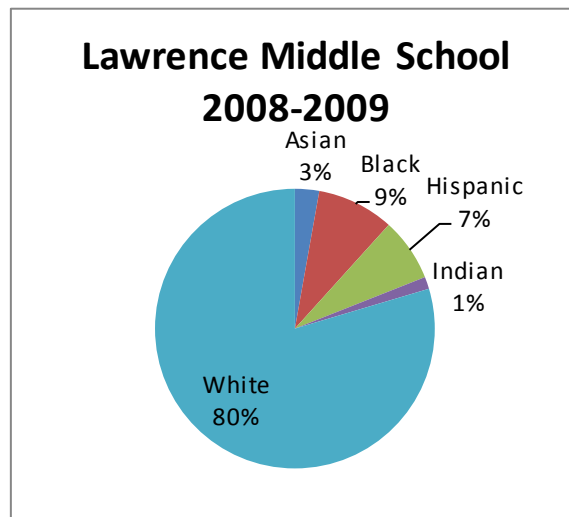
Figure 4. *Students Disaggregated by Race—Lawrence Middle School*

Albert Middle School was founded in 1958 with an enrollment in 2008-2009 of approximately 625 students. The school reports a mobility rate of approximately 15% and a free or reduced lunch rate of 61%. Lawrence Middle School was founded in 1973, with an enrollment in 2008-2009 of approximately 1075 students. The school reports a mobility rate of approximately 7.3% and a free or reduced lunch rate of 19%. The two schools have also had varying levels of success on the Communication Arts section of the Missouri Assessment Program, with Lawrence Middle School consistently outperforming Albert Middle School for the past three years, though both schools have shown modest gains overall.
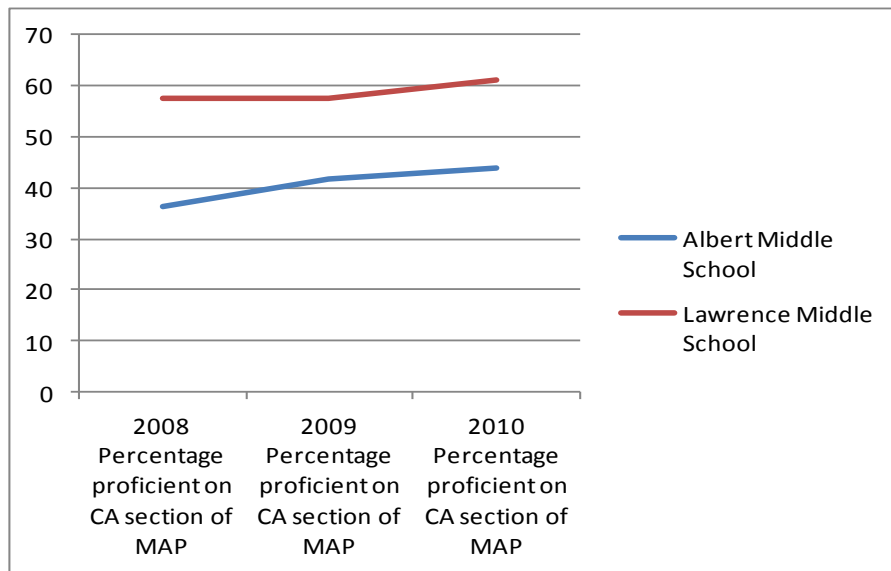
Figure 5. *Comparison of Student CA MAP Performance*

Though the district has had several elementary schools involved in the Response to Intervention program prior to 2007, the district's middle schools did not adopt the RtI initiative for all students until the 2007-2008 school year. While individual schools were

allowed to design the scheduling and staffing to fit their needs, each middle school was responsible for providing all students with instructional support necessary to increase academic achievement based on the Response to Intervention model in 2007-2008.

Sampling Techniques

To begin my research in the schools, I gained permission from the key person(s) in charge of the school district. Within a school community, this person is the superintendent of schools. The key person whose permission is needed to begin research is also referred to as a gatekeeper or an informant. "Essentially, an informant or gatekeeper is the person who will allow you access to the places, people, events, or documents that you wish to study. Establishing an honest, forthright working relationship with this person is the key…" (Farber, 2006, p. 370). This working relationship was best created by an honest and professional presentation of my research and explanation of how my findings could help increase student achievement not only in that district, but in any district implementing RtI. Additionally, Hamersley and Atkinson (1995) found that the gatekeeper is the initial contact for the researcher and leads the researcher to other participants; in this study, six district teachers.

Initially, I submitted a letter explaining the purpose of my research to the superintendent of the district and request permission to collect research data at Albert Middle School and Lawrence Middle School. The letter of consent was delivered with a self-addressed and stamped envelope. Once the superintendent agreed to allow me to study the two district schools, I sent letters of consent to the principals of Albert Middle School and Lawrence Middle School requesting their permission to conduct research in their individual buildings. These letters were also delivered with self-addressed and stamped envelopes. After

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building principals agreed to allow me to conduct research within their schools and I secured

approval from the Social Science Institutional Review Board (SSIRB), I requested a list of

teachers at each grade level who were directly involved with Communication Arts instruction

within the RtI process in their buildings. Each of these teachers was sent an invitation to

participate letter explaining my research study and informing him or her that I would be in

contact with them via an email or a telephone call within five days to determine if they are

interested in participating in this study. I chose one interested participant from each school

and each grade level who was involved with the implementation of Response to Intervention.

These teachers were contacted in person and asked to sign a letter of informed consent.

Burgess (1982) determined that researchers need "to consider where to observe, when

to observe, whom to observe and what to observe. In short, sampling in field research

involves the selection of a research site, time, people and events" (p. 76). Unlike many

qualitative research proposals that study a large sample size, my research only included six

teachers from two middle schools that have recently implemented the Response to

Intervention program. "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small

samples…selected *purposefully* to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon *in

depth* (Patton, 2002, p. 46, emphasis in original). The in-depth understanding of such a

purposeful selection allows for meaningful data to be collected. Patton (2002) established:

> What would be "bias" in statistical sampling, and therefore a weakness, becomes
> intended focus in qualitative sampling, and therefore a strength. The logic and power
> of purposeful sampling lie in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in
> depth….Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding
> rather than empirical generalizations. (p. 230, emphasis in original)

Since the six teachers were chosen purposefully, the design also incorporated nonprobability

sampling, which limits the generalization of results to the population as a whole.

Nonprobability sampling methods are typical of qualitative research, and as Honigmann (1982) found, "logical as long as the field-worker expects mainly to use his data not to answer questions like 'how much' and 'how often' but to solve *qualitative* problems, such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences" (p. 84, emphasis in original).

The two middle school sites were deliberately chosen because of their distinct differences of population within the same school district, which Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to as" maximum variation" (p. 178) sampling. Maxwell (2005) found that researchers could best utilize this strategy "by defining the dimensions of variation in the population that are most relevant to your study and systematically selecting individuals or settings that represent the most important possible variations on these dimensions" (pp. 89-90). The dimensions of variation I felt were relevant to my study included school size and demographic data including racial and economic make-up. Creswell (2007) indicated that "this approach is often selected because when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives—an ideal in qualitative research" (p. 126).

While my research used maximum or heterogeneity variation sampling in determining the two sites, purposeful sampling was used to determine the teachers chosen to interview and observe. Because Response to Intervention is designed to increase academic achievement that is measured specifically with assessments of reading, the teachers selected for this research included those who are responsible for providing reading interventions for students. Patton (2002) indicated "an intensity sample consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely…one seeks excellent or rich examples of the

phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual cases" (p. 234). Finally, within the intensity sample my study used stratified purposeful sampling, or a sample within a sample by one teacher from each grade level to study. "The purpose of a stratified purposeful sample is to capture major variations rather than to identify a common core, although the latter may also emerge in the analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 240). Because middle school scheduling structures can allow for variations among grade levels within the same school, it was important to ensure a design structure that would provide information about the program as a whole as opposed to the program working at an individual grade level.

Data Sources

Once permission was granted to begin my research, I began collecting data. Creswell (2007) asserted "the researcher employs rigorous data collection procedure. This means that the researcher collects multiple forms of data, adequately summarizes…the forms of data and detail about them, and spends adequate time in the field" (p. 45). Data collecting techniques included: a) interviews; b) observation; and c) document collection. The first data collecting technique I utilized was interviews.

Interviews. It was important to establish trust with each teacher I interviewed. Maxwell (2005) indicated "the relationships that you create with participants in your study…are an essential part of your methods, and how you initiate and negotiate these relationships is a key *design* decision" (p. 82, emphasis in original). As opposed to a survey or questionnaire, personal contact with teachers who were answering key questions about their experiences with Response to Intervention allowed me to ask clarifying questions in order to truly understand the participants' experience. "The purpose of qualitative

interviewing is to capture how those being interviewed view their world…and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences. This openness distinguishes qualitative interviewing from the closed questionnaire" (Patton, 2002, p. 348). In order to truly capture the participants' feelings about and experiences with the phenomenon I chose to study, it was imperative that I focus on my listening skills. Yin (2003) determined "for case studies, 'listening' means receiving information through multiple modalities—for example, making keen observations or sensing what might be going on—not just using the aural modality" (p. 60). Using observations of body language and speech patterns with what was said as well as what was not said provided me with invaluable information for my study. Patton (2002) reported:

> We interview people to find out from them things we cannot directly observe…We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place as some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing then is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 196)

The type of interview I conducted was the general interview guide, defined by Maxwell (2005) as that which "lists the questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview. An interview guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed" (p. 343). Since I interviewed six different teachers, it was imperative that I utilize a systematic approach in order to both make the best use of their and my time and to guarantee that the same general topics or themes were covered within each interview. The interview guide provided the necessary structure while also allowing me the opportunity to, if needed, ask clarifying questions to obtain more in-depth information. Chism and Banta (2007) stated "the semistructured open-ended approach is probably most

common because it allows the participant to introduce themes that the interviewer might not

have anticipated in framing questions, yet preserves a consistent list of topics for the

interviewer to explore across all participants" (p. 16). The semistructured interview approach

afforded a unique opportunity for me as the researcher to capitalize on my role within the

research itself. "In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the

research relationships are the means by which the research gets done" (Maxwell, 2005, p.

83). I had the flexibility to adapt and adjust lines of questioning when important themes or

concepts emerged during the interview. Merriam (1998) found "this format allows the

researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent,

and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 74). Finally, a semistructured interview permitted me an

excellent opportunity to develop what Maxwell (2005) described as rapport. "Rapport is a

stance vis-à-vis the person being interviewed… Rapport means that I respect the people

being interviewed, so what they say is important because of who is saying it" (p. 365).

Patton (2002) found that "the raw data of interviews are the actual quotations spoken

by interviewees. Nothing can substitute for these data: the actual things said by real people.

That's the prize sought by the qualitative inquirer" (p. 380). Because accurately scribing

participants' words verbatim posed a real challenge, I requested permission to either

videotape, or if that was not desired, audiotape each interview. Each candidate chose to have

an audiotape as opposed to videotape of the interview process. I also took scripted notes

throughout the interview. Interviews took approximately 30 minutes and were conducted in

the participants' classrooms during their planning period or after school, providing the

teachers a familiar and comfortable environment. The following are preliminary questions

that were used during the interview session, created considering Merriam's (1998)

observation that "generally it is a good idea to ask for relatively neutral, descriptive information at the beginning of an interview" (p. 82).

General interview questions.

1. Tell me about yourself and your role at this school.

2. Tell me about how and when you came to this school.

3. What are some of the best things about working at this school?

4. What are some things that you would consider changing about working at this school that would have a positive impact on student achievement in reading?

Specific research questions.

1. Tell me what you know about Response to Intervention in regarding to reading instruction.

2. Tell me about any training you have received in regards to Response to Intervention in regards to reading instruction.

3. Tell me how RtI in regards to reading instruction impacts students in this school.

4. Tell me how RtI in regards to reading instruction impacts teachers at this school.

5. Tell me how RtI in regards to reading instruction impacts administrators at this school.

6. Tell me how RtI in regards to reading instruction began at your school.

7. Tell me how your building has implemented RtI in regards for reading instruction for students.

8. Tell me about instructional support such as training or materials that have been provided to you in regards RtI in regards to reading at your school.

9. What are some problems or obstacles that you have had to overcome with implementing RtI in regards to reading at the school?

10. Tell me what problems or obstacles need to be addressed in regards to RtI in regards to reading at this school

11. What support from administrators have you received in the implementation of RtI in regards to reading at your school?

12. What if any additional support do you feel necessary to implement RtI in regards to reading at your school?

The second data collection method in my study was observation.

Observation.

Interviews alone would not provide me as a researcher with a complete picture of those staff members helping me to understand their perceptions of the administrative role in implementation of Response to Intervention. A second method I employed in my research was that of observation.

> While interviewing is often an efficient and valid way of understanding someone's perspective, observation can enable you to draw inferences about this perspective that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data. This is particularly important for getting at tacit understandings. (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94)

Interviews provided me with conscious thoughts and reactions to the implementation of RtI, but observations gave me information on unconscious or tacit information regarding the program. "Tacit knowing operates behind the scenes, giving birth to the hunches and vague, formless insights that characterize heuristic discovery" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 49).

Kidder (1981) established that observation is used as a research tool when it "(1) serves a formulated research purpose, (2) is planned deliberately, (3) is recorded

systematically, and (4) is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability" (p. 264). The purpose of observation in my research was to see what has previously been unseen; to observe what has or has not been described; to watch what it means to be for whom I am interviewing. Patton (2002) suggested that the purpose of observational data is "to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of those observed" (p. 202). I observed each participant as he or she was involved in the Response to Intervention program. The data I collected included observations of the physical setting, the participants, the activities, the conversations, and how my presence may or may not affected the research site. Appendix A contains the template used for my field observations.

My observation role was that of researcher participant, defined by Gans (1982) as one "who participates in a social situation but is personally only partially involved, so that he can function as a researcher" (p. 54). Because many people become anxious when they are being observed, it was of utmost importance that I made my observation as unobtrusive as possible.

Finally, because observation is such an intense and personal experience for the researcher and the participant, I made time to reflect upon each observation as soon as possible. Becker and Geer (1970) indicated that because the observer:

> Sees and hears the people he studies in many situations of the kind that normally occur for them, rather than just in an isolated and formal interview, he builds an ever-growing fund of impressions, many of them at the subliminal level…This wealth of information and impression sensitizes him to subtleties which might pass unnoticed in an interview and forces him to raise continually new and different questions. (p. 264)

The final method of data collection involved the collection of documents.

Document Collection

Guba and Lincoln (1981) noted "the first and most important injunction to anyone looking for official record is to presume that if an event happened, some record of it exists" (p. 253). Within a school district, there should be multiple opportunities to collect documents from the paper trail that comes with every new initiative. Documents I collected include: a) Board of Education minutes; b) directives to building level administrators; c) emails or memos to teachers explaining new policies or procedures; d) master schedules; e) and Powerpoints from trainings for staff. When determining which documents to collect and analyze, Merriam (1998) determined:

> Most commonly, when documents are included in a study, what is being referred to are public records, personal documents, and physical material *already present* in the research setting. Because they have not been produced for the research purpose, they often contain much that is irrelevant to the study; but the same token, they can contain clues, even startling insights, into the phenomenon under study.
> (pp. 118-119, emphasis in original)

When used in combination with both interviews and observations, an in-depth analysis of the documents in regards to Response to Intervention facilitated a thorough understanding of the phenomenon. Miller (1997) believed "qualitative researchers are uniquely positioned to study these texts by analyzing the practical social contexts of everyday life within which they are constructed and used. Texts are one aspect of the sense-making…"(p. 77). Following the collection of information from the data sources, I began the analysis. The following section describes the process for data analysis in more detail.

Data Analysis

This multiple case study required an integration of phenomenological, heuristic, and case study to seek meaning for the Communication Arts teachers' perspectives. Both

phenomenological and heuristic analysis explore the essence of the experience of the participants. "Phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or a group of people" (Patton, 2002, p. 482). As reported by Sela-Smith (2002):

> Moustakas (1990) legitimized using the term heuristics to define the organized and systematic form for investigating human experience in which attention is focused inward on feeling responses of the researcher to the outward situation rather than exclusively to relations between the pieces of that outside situation. (p. 59)

For phenomenological analysis and representation, I used the van Kaam Method (Moustakas, 1994), consisting of four processes: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions. Each process contained several steps.

The first step of this analysis involved epoche. "Epoche is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Since I had first-hand experience with the Response to Intervention program, I brought with my study a personal bias that must be addressed. Katz (1987) revealed "epoche helps enable the researcher to investigate the phenomenon from a fresh and open viewpoint without prejudgment or imposing meaning too soon. This suspension of judgment is critical in phenomenological investigation…" (pp. 36-37).

Phenomenological reduction began with bracketing. Denzin (1989) determined that "bracketing is Husserl's (1913) term. In bracketing the researcher holds the phenomenon up for serious inspection. It is taken out of the world where it occurs. It is taken apart or dissected" (p. 55). As defined by Moustakas (1994), bracketing is "when the focus of the

research is placed in brackets; everything else is set aside so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question" (p. 97). Following bracketing, I considered each of the horizons that enabled me to understand the experience. Moustakas (1994) determined that "when we horizonalize, each phenomenon has equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence" (p. 95) and Patton (2002) found that horizontalized data should be "spread out for examination, with all elements and perspectives having equal weight" (p. 486). After this was completed, I worked with the data to create meaning units or themes, followed by "a delimitation process whereby irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping data are eliminated" (Patton, 2002, p. 486). Merriam (1998) found "a unit of data is any meaningful (or potentially meaningful) segment of data" (p. 179). The completion of this process led to the identification of invariant constituents and themes.

The identified themes guided my construction of six individual textural descriptions of his or her experience. "The textural portrayal is an abstraction of the experience that provides content and illustration, but not yet essence" (Patton, 2002, p. 486). During this step, I identified text from the data sources that illuminated the participants' descriptions of their experiences, while continuing to reflect upon my own experiences during the process.

Imaginative Variation "enables the researcher to derive structural themes from the textural descriptions that have been obtained through Phenomenological Reduction (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99).

This was followed by an individual structural description, one that "contains the 'bones' of the experience for the whole group of people studied" (Patton, 2002, p. 486). The goal of the textural descriptions is aim at a structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Structural descriptions provide a vivid account of the underlying

dynamics of the experience and how the feelings and thoughts connected with the experience are evoked and aroused (Moustakas, 1994, p. 135).

The next step in the van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data was to "construct for each research participant a Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) through imaginative variation. "The task of Imaginative Variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles or functions" (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 97-98).

Following this stage, a composite textural portrayal is developed, wherein invariant meanings and themes depict the experiences of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 137-138). Once completed, a composite structural description was completed to describe how the phenomenon may have been experienced by the group. "The Composite Structural Description is a way of understand *how* the co-researchers as a group experience *what* they experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 142, emphasis in original). Finally, a description of the phenomenon incorporating both textural and structural descriptions results in a synthesis that "is the 'essence' of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 159).

Heuristic Analysis

Heuristic analysis was also incorporated into the analysis of the data. Patton (2002) stated "heuristic inquiry focuses on intense human experiences, intense from the point of view of the investigator and coresearchers. It is the combination of personal experience and

intensity that yields an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon" (p. 107). My role

as an administrator had provided me with continuing experiences with implementation of

RtI. Moustakas (1990) defined the five stages of heuristic analysis as:

1. Initial engagement, when the researcher discovers an intense or passionate interest
   in the phenomenon.

2. Immersion, where the researcher becomes totally involved in the world of the
   experience.

3. Incubation, a time of contemplation in which the researcher deliberately
   withdraws permitting meaning to develop in its own time.

4. Illumination, when understanding grows and themes and patterns emerge.

5. Explication, a period in which a full unfolding of the experience occurs and new
   connections are made.

Content Analysis of the Documents and Observation

Documents and observations were analyzed using a set of six sequential steps: affix

codes to data collected; note reflections in the margins; sort and sift to identify similar

phrases or patterns; isolate these patters and commonalities; elaborate a small set of

generalizations that cover the found consistencies; confront these generalizations with a

formalized body of knowledge (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 9). "Developing some

manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis. Without

classification there is chaos and confusion. Content analysis, then, involves identifying,

coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the primary patterns in the data" (Patton, 2002,

p. 463). Categories created from this coding were emic, relying on information obtained

from the participants, rather on my descriptions of what is happening. Merriam (1998)

determined that "the key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the

participants' perspectives, not the researcher's. This is sometimes referred to as the *emic*, or

insider's perspective, versus the *etic*, or outsider's view" (pp. 6-7, emphasis in original).

Cross-Case Analysis of Multiple Cases

My research utilized a multi-case study; therefore there were specific steps necessary

for data analysis. "In a multiple case study, there are two stages of analysis—the within-case

analysis and the cross-case analysis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 194). It is important for me as a

researcher to look at each case individually prior to beginning cross-case analysis. Following

the analysis of each case individually, the cross-case analysis began. Patton (2002) stated:

> The first task is to do a careful job independently writing up the separate cases. Once
> that is done, cross-case analysis can begin in search of patterns and themes that cut
> across individual experiences. The initial focus is on full understanding of individual
> cases before those unique cases are combined or aggregated thematically. (p. 57)

Yin (1994) explained that the researcher attempts "to build a general explanation that fits

each of the individual cases, even though the cases will vary in their details" (p. 112).

Careful analysis of all collected data sources provided support necessary for my study to be

valid. Miles and Huberman (1994) ascertained that there were two reasons to conduct cross-

case analysis: enhance generalizability and deepen understanding and explanation.

Validity and Reliability

A qualitative design "in no way suggests that the researcher lacks the ability to be

scientific while collecting the data. On the contrary, it merely specifies that it is crucial for

validity—and consequently, for reliability—to try to picture the empirical social world as it actually exists to those under investigation, rather than as the researcher imagines it to be" (Filstead, 1970, p. 4). Qualitative research posits that if validity exists, then reliability follows. "Since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 93). Additionally, Golafschani (2003) articulated "triangulation as used in quantitative research to test the reliability and validity can also illuminate some ways to test or maximize the validity and reliability of a qualitative study" (p. 597).

The first strategy I used to enhance internal validity was triangulation, defined by Merriam (1998) as "using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings" (p. 204). I interviewed and completed observations of six teachers and analyzed district and building-level documents discussing the implementation of the RtI process at the middle school level. Maxwell (2005) reported that "this strategy reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating" (p. 94).

An additional strategy to ensure validity was the study's purposeful selection of participants. Maxwell (2005) posits "the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 245). The data collected from a small, albeit extremely purposive sampling resulted in rich, thick data to help ensure validity. Eisner (1991) stated "we seek a confluence of evidence that

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breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions" (p. 110).

Finally, the multi-case design of the study served as a strategy to help with validity. Merriam (1998) indicated "the inclusion of multiple cases is, in fact, a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings" (p. 40).

As a researcher, it was also extremely important that my study was structured for maximum reliability. "Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Since qualitative research is not designed to find one single reality, I used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) term of "dependability" or "consistency" (p. 288). One method for increasing dependability was for me to take careful and thorough notes as the study progressed. Creswell (2007) determined that "reliability can be enhanced if the researcher obtains detailed fieldnotes by employing a good-quality tape for recording and by transcribing the tape" (p. 209). I obtained permission from all participants to record the interview, an invaluable tool for increasing the dependability of my study. A second method to increase dependability or consistency was to clarify my biases and assumptions prior to beginning the study. Though my biases and assumptions were labeled and revealed, they were an important part of my study and its results. "Qualitative inquiry depends on, uses, and enhances the researcher's direct experiences in the world and insights about those experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 51). The next consideration was that of limitations within my research study.

Limitations

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Patton (2002) established that in order to be credible, qualitative studies must consist of rigorous methods, the credibility of the researcher, and a philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (p. 552-553). To meet the standard for rigor, I used triangulation, or the collection of information using a variety of sources and methods (Fielding & Fielding, 1986), including interviews, observations, and analysis of school documents. Patton (2002) stated that the researcher's credibility is mainly founded on the principle that any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection must be reported (p. 566); this coupled with Maxwell's (2005) determination that "separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks" (p. 38) required me to state any assumptions regarding RtI and its implementation in middle schools both prior to my research and as I continued with my study. Finally, I firmly believed that qualitative research was the best method for this study because I wanted to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue, and I cannot separate what people say from the context in which they say it (Creswell, 2007).

Maxwell (2005) defined two specific threats to validity: (a) researcher bias, or selection of data that fit the researcher's existing theory, and (b) reactivity, defined as the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals being studied. I encountered very little research indicating exactly what struggles teachers faced upon implementation and what support teachers needed from administrators to be successful in implementation of RtI, and therefore did not struggle with researcher bias. Because my study was naturalistic and included information from teachers with whom I work, it was be imperative that I did not

influence any participants to answer questions in a specific manner. A final consideration for my study was that of ethics.

Ethical Considerations

All researchers, whether qualitative or qualitative, must be careful to research in an ethical manner. "In qualitative studies, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings. Overlaying both… is the researcher-participant relationship" (Merriam, 1998, p. 212). In my research study, the researcher-participant relationship was particularly important, as I was working directly with people employed by the same school district as myself. In order to ensure that I maintained appropriate boundaries and distance, I utilized the Ethical Issues Checklist from Patton (2002, pp. 408-409). In addition, I provided participants with an informed consent consisting of the IRB guidelines or requirements. Though these guidelines were established and followed, there was no guarantee that all interview or observation data would fall neatly into these requirements. Rubin and Rubin (1995) indicated "you must build ethical routines into your work. You should carefully study codes of ethics and cases of unethical behavior…Throughout your research, keep thinking and judging what are your ethical obligations" (p. 96). Finally, in order to have the best chance of ethical research, it was imperative that I was continually analyzing and reflecting upon not only the data I received, but also on my conduct and behavior. Diener and Crandall (1978) advised:

> There is simply no ethical alternative to being as nonbiased, accurate, honest as is humanly possible in all phases of research. In planning, conducting, analyzing, and reporting his work the scientist should strive for accuracy, and whenever possible, methodological controls should be built in to help. (p. 162)

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My research included heuristic, phenomenological, and multi-case study traditions. The purpose of the naturalistic study was to describe teachers' perceptions of critical administrative support needed to utilize the Response to Intervention process in order to increase the reading skills of all middle school students.

I triangulated data from interviews, observations, and document collection to formulate my findings. I followed standard protocols in regard to validity, reliability, and ethics while completing my research and analyzing the results.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research study was to describe teachers' perceptions of critical administrative support needed to utilize the Response to Intervention process to increase reading skills of all middle school students. I believe that all students deserve specific and targeted instruction to improve their academic skills; Response to Intervention is a systematic approach to assist educators in regularly determining students' strengths, weaknesses, and progress throughout the school year. My role as an administrator is to provide instructional leadership for all staff, and it is imperative that I have a clear understanding of how I can best support teachers who are responsible for Response to Intervention classroom instruction, specifically those focusing on increasing academic achievement in reading. Meaning and understanding of the perceptions of the teachers related to administrative support for implementation of RtI was constructed using one overarching question and five sub-questions:

What could be done to improve the implementation of the RtI process at the middle school level to support reading achievement for all students?

Sub-questions investigated included:

a) How have two schools implemented the RtI process in reading at the middle school level?

b) What problems or obstacles do instructors face in the initial stages of the RtI process for reading at the middle school level?

c) What are some stories of success for teachers as a result of implementing the RtI process for reading?

d) What are Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of administrative support provided to middle school instructors involved in the RtI process for reading?

e) What are Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of other supports that are helpful to middle school instructors involved in the RtI process for reading?

The goal of the study was to develop a thick and rich description of the Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of what administrative support is essential for fidelity of implementation of Response to Intervention. This chapter discusses the findings of the case study of six Communication Arts' teachers in the Postville School District: Derek, Genny, and Denise from Albert Middle School; and Michele, Dave, and Lauren from Lawrence Middle School. The identities of the district, schools, and teachers have been altered and fictitious names are used to ensure anonymity. The conceptual framework focused on middle school history, philosophy, and structure; federal education policies; No Child Left Behind and the leadership. Data were collected to determine how administrators could most effectively support Communication Arts' teachers implementing Response to Intervention.

Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document collection. Interviews provided an opportunity to determine what practitioners feel and what led them to make these determinations. Observations allowed the researcher to see how the instructor interacts in actual practice. District-wide and internal school documents, in combination with interviews and observations, were analyzed to facilitate a thorough understanding of the phenomenon. Such triangulation of data is not designed for identical findings in all areas, but rather "the point is really to *test for* such consistency. Different kinds of data may yield

somewhat different results because different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real-world nuances" (Patton, 2002, p. 248, emphasis in original). The unit of analysis was the perceptions of the Communication Arts teachers of the administrative support necessary for successful implementation of Response to Intervention at the middle school level.

Phenomenological analysis, heuristic inquiry, content analysis and cross-case analysis were used to answer the research questions. Grbich (2007) determined that "phenomenology is an approach which attempts to understand the hidden meanings and the essence of an experience together with how participants make sense of these" (p. 84). During the each phase, it was imperative that I understand not only how the participants perceived their experiences with administrative support provided during implementation of RtI, but also how they were able to make sense of it and communicate it. This understanding would help me determine the essence of the phenomenon for the teachers involved. My research began with interviews.

Merriam (1998) reported "in all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews. The most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another" (p. 71). Research for this case study included semi-structured interviews with Communication Arts teachers from Albert Middle School and Lawrence Middle School directly involved with implementation of Response to Intervention in regards to reading. I had spent considerable amounts of time with both Derek and Michele prior to beginning the research, serving on committees and writing curriculum and district benchmarks. I had been introduced to Lauren and Dave, albeit briefly, during district-level inservice. I had not met Denise nor Genny prior to the study. The two schools were chosen purposefully from the five Postville School

District Middle Schools to reflect the sites with the most dissimilar student populations. Patton (2002) indicated that diversity in research can help to yield "important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from (p. 172). The goal of the interviews was to explore the perceptions of participants' experiences and to understand their beliefs and assumptions about RtI; to determine what was "in and on someone else's mind" (Patton, 2002, p. 278).

Each respondent was asked four neutral and general questions to begin the session, followed by twelve questions directly linked to their experiences with RtI and its implementation. Interviews were conducted in the classrooms of the teachers either before or after school. Sessions were recorded and scripted notes were taken to assist with transcription. As I completed my interviews, I was faced with a quandary. Interviews with the six teachers had provided me with information to begin the phenomenological analysis. However, in hindsight, I did not feel that my interviews had gone as "deeply" as I would have liked to determine the true essence of the experience. Both individual and composite textural, structural and textural-structural descriptions seemed to be lacking something I could not exactly define.

While the interviews from the six teachers selected were a primary source of data collection in this research project, additional tools used to gather data were classroom observations and documents. These sources complemented the in-depth interviews and provided the rich and thick description necessary. Each of the participants interviewed was observed while he or she was directly responsible for providing Response to Intervention instruction to students. Merriam (1998) determined that observations can be distinguished from interviews in two ways. " First, observations take place in the natural field setting

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instead of a location designated for the purpose of interviewing; second, observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview" (p. 94). Both Albert Middle School and Lawrence Middle School have designated the first forty-five minutes of the day as a school-wide block of time designated for general school announcements and Response to Intervention instruction. I utilized the Template for Field Instruction (Appendix A) for while observing each instructor for one class period in addition to scribing the activities and the dialogue of the lesson. Observations can "provide a direct and powerful way of learning about people's behavior and the context in which this occurs" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94). Each observation was completed during instructional time that had been pre-determined by the master schedule for RtI implementation for all students in the building. The teachers observed were each responsible for instruction within the RtI framework that was intended to increase reading achievement for middle school students.

A third and final data-collection method used in this study was documents. The six teachers interviewed and observed were requested to provide the researcher copies of any documentation of information they had received in regards to Response to Implementation. In addition, records of official documents including Board of Education minutes, directives to building level administrators and/or staff, master schedules and handouts designed to train staff in RtI implementation were collected and reviewed. "Because of their overall value, documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies. Systematic searches for relevant documents are important in any data collection plan" (Yin, 2003, p. 87). Collecting documents proved to be a challenging part of this study, as many of the teachers interviewed struggled when asked to provide written documentation they had received or

collected regarding Response to Intervention. Though all but one teacher was able to produce at least one document referencing the program or its components, none of the six teachers had a notebook or file folder kept exclusively for RtI information. Guba and Lincoln (1981) indicated that often those involved in a project or initiative may not maintain thorough notes. "If no documents exist, however, or if the documents are sparse and seem uninformative, this ought to tell the inquirer something about the context" (pp. 234-235). Though sparse, analysis of documents received did support the themes identified from interviews and observations. Because the documents themselves were completely objective, they produced provided insight into the essence of the experience for the teachers involved. Such materials, "because they exist independent of a research agenda, they are nonreactive, that is, unaffected by the research process. They are a product of the context in which they were produced and therefore grounded in the real world" (Merriam,1998, p. 126).

According to Patton (2002), documents such as those listed above provide the researcher with information about many things that cannot be observed nor gleaned through an interview. "They may reveal things that have taken place before the evaluation [research] began. They may include private interchanges to which the evaluator [researcher] would not otherwise be privy. They can reveal goals or decisions that might be otherwise unknown" (p. 293). As with the interviews and observations, data analysis of the documents began immediately after collection. As Maxwell (2005) warned, "one of the most common problems in qualitative studies is letting your unanalyzed field notes and transcripts pile up, making the task of final analysis much more difficult and challenging" (p. 95). All data sources were transcribed if necessary and analyzed as soon as possible once received to avoid accumulating an overwhelming amount of information. As suggested by Miles and

Huberman (1994), "coding should not be put off to the end of data gathering. Qualitative research depends heavily on ongoing analysis, and coding is a good device for supporting that analysis" (p. 66). Observations and documents were analyzed using pattern coding, forming themes from text labeled as descriptive or interpretive. "Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69). I found that at the completion of the interview, observation and document collection steps of the research process that I had somehow come to "know" each of these people in a very personal way. Though the amount of time we had spent together was relatively short, their willingness to share their thoughts and feelings and allow me to observe them in the midst of instruction with their students was amazingly powerful. Since analysis of the data, I have since seen many of the six participants at trainings and have been surprised at the depth of the personal connection which I feel.

This stage of the research also left me somewhat unsettled. Neither the observations nor the documents had been as rich or deep as I would have liked, and much of what I had observed or collected seemed to be an absence of information as opposed to a wealth of information. I did feel that the absence of rich information was, in fact, extremely important and critical to my research. Gordon (2002) concluded "even sparse data carries some information, and it could be argued that a single occurrence of an event provides important information that the event is possible at all" (p. 23). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) reported that a qualitative researcher is like bricoleur, a maker of quilts, who uses the materials at hand to find the necessary information. "If the researcher needs to invent, or piece together, new

tools or techniques, he or she will do so. Choices regarding which interpretive practices to employ are not necessarily made in advance" (p. 4). After coding the observation and document analysis, I rewrote the individual textural and structural descriptions with information gleaned from observations and documents. This analysis was much fuller and felt much more complete. The composite structural, textural, and structural-textural descriptions were also rewritten with information from the observations and document analysis. Hycner (1985) also stated that "no method…can be arbitrarily imposed on a phenomenon since that would do a great injustice to the integrity of that phenomenon" (p. 280). More detail and examples of these analyses will follow later in Chapter 4.

Heuristic Analysis

Through this process, it was imperative to acknowledge my personal experiences with RtI both prior to and during the research, as "the heuristic process of phenomenological inquiry is a highly personal process" (Patton, 2002, p. 486). The six stages of heuristic research design as defined by Moustakas (1990) as "initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research into a creative synthesis" (p. 27) were utilized throughout the analysis of data.

Heuristics is a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences. The deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual through one's senses, perceptions, beliefs and judgments. This requires a passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is illuminated or answered. (Moustakas, 2000, p. 15)

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I found this challenging, as I had been part of an administrative team that had implemented

Response to Intervention in the same district as those interviewed and observed. I needed to

continuously remind myself to listen carefully to the voice of the teachers to fully understand

the experience from their perspectives.

Cross-Case Analysis of Multiple Cases

Yin (2003) indicated "case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why'

questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the

focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). The goal of

my research—to determine Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of administrative

support in implementation of RtI—led me to choose an explanatory case study structure for

my research. I chose multiple cases as opposed to a single-case study; a problem described

by Yin (2009) as "single-case designs are vulnerable only because you will have put 'all your

eggs in one basket'. More important, the analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases

may be substantial" (p. 61). Choosing six participants from two different sites provided a

safeguard against possible criticism of findings to be discerned from too narrow of a

perspective. Merriam (1998) determined that in multiple case study, there are two stages of

analysis: the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis. First, each case is treated as a

comprehensive case in and of itself. Next, the researcher seeks to build abstractions across

cases (pp. 194-195). Creswell (2007) stated cross-case analysis "involves examining themes

across cases to discern themes that are common to all cases" (p. 245). This study utilized a

cross-case analysis of multiple cases. This method was similar to the phenomenological

research method employed in the design of the study.

School Settings

Albert Middle School

Albert Middle School is one of five middle schools in the Postville School District, a suburban district in western Missouri. The school was founded in 1958 and has 2011-2012 enrollment of 710 students. 44.5% of their students were proficient or advanced on the Communication Arts section of the 2010-2011 Missouri Assessment Program. 67.3% of their students qualify for free or reduced lunch. 54% of the student population is White, 17.7% Hispanic, 13.8% Black, 6% Asian and 1.6% Indian. The teachers have an average of 13.5 years of experience with 69.9% having obtained a Masters' degree or higher. Response to Intervention began at Albert Middle School in 2007-2008 school year as a district-wide initiative for all secondary buildings.

The teachers interviewed and observed were all currently Communication Arts teachers responsible for delivering direct instruction to increase reading within the Response to Intervention framework of the building. One teacher from each grade level was included in the study. Interviews took place in the teacher's classroom at Albert Middle School. Observations occurred during a forty-five minute school-wide instructional period designated for RtI instruction. The teachers had an average of seven years of experience in education.

Lawrence Middle School

Lawrence Middle school is also located in the Postville School District. The school was opened in 1973, and has a current enrollment of 1,013 students. 64.0% of students were proficient or advanced on the Communication Arts section of the 2010-2011 Missouri Assessment Program. 22.7% of their population qualifies for free or reduced lunch. 76.6%

of the students are White, 8.6% Hispanic, 7.2% Black, and 2.2 % Asian. Teachers have an average of 15.0 years of experience and 81.7% have obtained a Masters' degree or higher. Response to Intervention began at Lawrence Middle School in 2007-2008 school year as a district-wide initiative for all secondary buildings.

The teachers interviewed and observed were also all Communication Arts teachers responsible for delivering direct instruction to increase reading within the Response to Intervention framework of the building. One teacher from each grade level was included in the study. Interviews took place in the teacher's classroom at Lawrence Middle School.

Observations occurred during a forty-five minute school-wide instructional period designated for RtI instruction. The teachers had an average of sixteen years of experience in education.

The phenomenological and heuristic processes used for the interviews, observations, and document analysis will be presented in the next section.

Process of Data Analysis

As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, the heuristic analysis and analysis of multiple cases were used in this inquiry. Since the major tradition used was phenomenological inquiry, I incorporated the other theoretical traditions of heuristics and case study throughout the data analysis. The process of phenomenological analysis involved epoche, which required "a new way of looking at things, a way that requires that we learn *to see* what stands before our eyes, what we can distinguish and describe" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33, emphasis in original). During this process, I was attempting to become cognizant of my thoughts and beliefs that had been previously formed during my exposure to implementation of RtI as a building

principal. "In taking on the perspective of epoche, the researcher looks inside to become aware of personal bias, to eliminate personal involvement with the subject material, that is, eliminate or at least gain clarity about, preconceptions" (Patton, 2002, p. 485). Once this process was complete, phenomenological reduction could begin, a process reported by Keen (1975) as a" conscious, effortful, opening of ourselves to the phenomenon as a phenomenon…We want not to see this event as an example of this or that theory that we have we want to see it as a phenomenon in its own right" (p. 38). Reduction began with bracketing, a process Hycner (1985) defined as "suspending (bracketing) as much as possible the researcher's meanings and interpretations and entering into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed" (p. 280).

Bracketing was followed by horizontalizing, where "all aspects of the data are treated with equal value" (Patton, 2002, p. 486) in order to form clusters of data. For purposes of this research, these clusters were "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes are usually attached to 'chunks' of varying size—words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 56). I found that often times, even after I believed I had exhausted the information to be learned from a piece of research, additional readings yielded new insights and connections undetermined earlier. Merriam (1998) compared this process to be similar to sorting two hundred food items in a grocery store. There would be several ways to classify the foods: fresh or frozen, canned or packaged, color, weight, price. "All these schemes emerge logically from the 'data'—the food items. The names of the categories and the scheme you use to sort the data will reflect the focus of your study" (p. 180). Though this process was extremely time consuming, it was

continued until I believed I had reached a stage of what Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined as over-extension, "the sense that new information being unearthed is very far removed from the core of any of the viable categories that have emerged (and does not contribute usefully to the emergence of additional viable categories)" (p. 350). Meaning clusters were reviewed to eliminate irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping data to identify invariant themes (Patton, 2002, p. 486) that were utilized to create individual textural descriptions, "a description of an experience that doesn't contain that experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 486). This required me to "write a description of 'what' the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon. This is called a 'textural description' of the experience—what happened—and includes verbatim examples" (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). Moustakas (1994) reported that the goal of textural descriptions is to arrive at a structural description of the experience, consisting of "how" the experience occurred. In a structural description, "the inquirer reflects on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced" (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). Imaginative Variation, the task of which is to seek possible meanings through utilization of imagination by approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives with an aim of answering how did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?" (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 97-98), allowed me to develop an Individual Textural-Structural Description for each participant.

Next, the individual textural descriptions were integrated into a composite textural, and all of the individual structural descriptions were integrated into a composite textural. Finally, I was required to "intuitively-reflectively integrate the composite textural and composite structural descriptions to develop a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience (Moustakas, 1990, p. 181), This passage is the 'essence' of the

experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 159).

Findings: Semi-Structured Phenomenological Interviews, Observations, and Document Analysis

In this section I report the findings of the interviews, observations and document analysis using the steps of phenomenological analysis. To demonstrate the process, the reports of two participants are included for each step: a) individual textural description (Genny and Derek); b) individual structural description (Denise and Dave); and c) individual textural-structural description (Lauren and Michele). These examples will demonstrate the process used while bringing the thoughts and actions of the participants to life for the reader. Additionally, phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to focus on what the phenomenon means to the group through the development of three group reports: composite textural, composite structural and composite textural-structural descriptions. The composite textural-structural description will also be included.

Individual textural description was an arduous process, with each description totaling between four to six pages. Though between three to four pages, individual structural descriptions were still time-consuming and challenging to compose. Structural descriptions require the researcher to utilize Imaginative Variation to express how the participant realized the experience. This required a great deal of reflection and re-reading of transcript notes from interviews, observations and documents.

The task of writing composite reports for each textural and structural description was an extremely lengthy process. Moustakas (1994) reported "from the total group of individual textural descriptions the Composite Textural Description is developed. The invariant

meanings and themes of every co-researcher are studied in depicting the experiences of the group as a whole (p. 138). Making meaning for the group as a whole was definitely enhanced by the specific use of verbatim examples. Many times I would become "stuck" until I had re-read the transcripts from the interviews or my notes from the observation. The structural description, defined by Moustakas (1994) as "a way of understanding *how* the co-researchers as a group experience *what* they experience" (p. 142, emphases in original), was also a lengthy task. As with the composite textural, I found it most helpful to re-read transcripts and notes from observation. These two composite reports were necessary for the final step of phenomenological analysis: the composite textural-structural description, wherein integration of the composites results in a description representing the group as a whole.

Pseudonyms were used for the participants and any other person referenced to maintain confidentiality. In addition, pseudonyms were used for the names of the schools and for the school district in which the participants were employed.

Genny: Individual Textural Description

Genny is a 7th grade Communication Arts teacher at Albert Middle School in the Postville School District. Her teaching career began in 1986, teaching the 2nd grade for five years. She left education to pursue a job in economic development, a field in which she worked for the next eleven years of her professional career. She was successful in her job, moving up the ladder steadily as the years progressed. Eventually, she moved into commercial real estate, and when the market took a down turn, she made the decision to return to school to obtain her Masters' Degree in Reading and return to the school system.

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When asked about her decision to leave the business field after a decade of success, she explained, "Really, my heart was always in teaching. I couldn't stay away forever."

Though she was unable to find a full-time teaching job upon her return, she was hired in the Postville School District as an Instructional Assistant at Albert Middle School in the 2010-2011 school year, a position that was initially a bit disappointing. "I started as an IA even—talk about a cut in pay! Commercial real estate down to that. But that's okay!" Genny's strengths in the classroom were quickly recognized by the building principal, who approached her early in the school year about a change in position despite her lack of certification. This act led to a code of trust that was weaved throughout Genny's interview. "Within two weeks, Dennis [building principal] identified that I was working on my masters' in reading education, so he immediately came and talked to me about taking the reading teacher job." She completed the 2010-2011 school year as a reading specialist in the building, a position she greatly enjoyed. "I loved the small class sizes and the ability to truly make a difference in a student's ability to read. I absolutely loved it." At the end of the year, Dennis approached her again and asked if she would make another transition. "He came and asked me, 'Will you take one of the CA jobs in the 7th grade?' and I was like, 'Okay! Whatever you need!' So now I am the CA teacher." Though she was disappointed to move from the reading position, she was excited about the prospect of the change. "I loved my other position, but really wanted to work on a team with other teachers. The CA position gave me a chance to keep on teaching reading and also work on writing." The theme of trust was also evident when Genny was one of only four teachers from Albert Middle School recruited by the building administration to receive training for a new district initiative entitled Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID). Training received from this

program is clearly exhibited during the observation, with three of the six posters in the classroom specifically delineating AVID strategies designed to increase achievement.

During the observation, she referenced AVID learning strategies that have incorporated throughout the building this year, specifically the building's template for taking Cornell notes.

Despite the fact that she is new to the building, it is clear that Genny is a "mover and a shaker" within her school community. Her expertise and abilities are recognized and appreciated by the leadership team, and the codes trust and respect for them is mutual. "Dennis is not what I would call a paper clip counter. He's not constantly checking on you. He hires good people and then he trusts them to do a good job, and that's nice. It's very professional." Despite this trust and general feeling of good will, Genny is unable to define the role of the principal within RtI implementation suggesting the interpretive code of limited instructional leadership. When asked how RtI impacts administrators, Genny laughed and responded, "I don't know. You take IDKs? I don't know. Does it?" Eventually, she concluded, "Probably, I guess, in a roundabout way if it's [RtI] being effectively taught and the student scores are going up then they look better because everyone looks at test scores at the end of the year to see if they've increased."

Genny appeared to be very enthusiastic about her teaching assignment and the building in which she works; however, she was fairly adamant about what changes she felt were necessary to have a positive impact on student achievement in reading.

> "Well, quite frankly, this is not anything to do with reading, but I would fix the discipline issues. And in order to do that, we teachers as well as the administrators need to be trained in/on discipline issues. Whether we need to take classes and or actually learn to do it correctly."

Several discipline issues were noted during the observation, including fourteen redirects of student behavior during the twenty minutes of direct instruction despite the fact that there were only eight students in the room. These disruptions suggested a code of classroom management. While these redirects were for minor infractions such as daydreaming or chatting quietly with a neighbor, they still disrupted the overall learning environment and took away from instructional time.

Much of Genny's background knowledge in regards to RtI came from her previous experience as a classroom teacher. "My training has been all with my masters' degree in reading and my experience as a 2nd grade teacher as well as a reading teacher." She was able to produce two documents relating to RtI: a Response to Intervention handout from the Postville School District that gave a definition of the practice, its background in state and federal policies, and information regarding each tier of implementation; and a School Readiness for Response to Intervention (RtI) Implementation Secondary Level Considerations in Communication Arts survey, listing specific steps in areas such as measurement, curriculum and instruction, and problem-solving and school-wide organization that are considered to be "essential for RtI implementation". Interpretive codes prominent in these documents included Federal/State policies and Special Education; however, neither the interview nor the classroom observation yielded similar coding results. In addition, she was aware that the program is strongly based on research based interventions and that there has been a district-wide implementation that began with the elementary schools. She was not entirely confident with implementation in the school in which she teaches. "I have to say that I have mixed emotions because some people do not implement it correctly, and when you have a program that is research-based and not done correctly, then you're not going to

see the success." This frustration stemmed from two main codes: a perceived lack of information for all staff regarding implementation and a perception of inadequate resources. Teachers as a whole not receiving sufficient training was articulated multiple times. "I don't think that a lot of people are trained correctly on it. They just kind of go with the flow and don't follow the program." This statement was soon followed by a plea for even the most minimum of time to be allotted for information distribution. "I think some help with curriculum….would be wonderful. Maybe, during some of our training days or something, if we had an hour maybe if we did some training for RtI." Perhaps the most poignant answer received to questions regarding training that she had received in her building was a one word response: "None." When asked to clarify, she chuckled briefly and then responded, "None. That's it. I haven't received any training at all since I've been here." Genny believed the lack of staff development and training had a direct correlation on the staff's ability to implement the program with fidelity, and did not believe that RtI impacted all staff in the school. "I'm not sure that it does. I'm very concerned. We have a handful of teachers that are doing it correctly but there are so many others that aren't." This was frustrating to her as a classroom teacher, because she felt that overall the time provided for RtI is a positive thing for those students whose teachers "actually implement it". For those teachers who are implementing correctly, there was the issue of additional planning for which others are not responsible. The code of perceived inequity in time required for planning was evident in the tone of her interview response. "You have to make separate lesson plans for that [RtI]—the time to locate materials and implement them. It just added another planning period basically. It's certainly frustrating." Genny also felt that though RtI has the potential to raise reading achievement for students, she did not have the tools necessary for implementation. "If you

use it and use it correctly and have the *resources*, I think it's a highly effective program. I'm just concerned that we don't really have the resources to really implement it correctly (emphasis in original)". This coding of lack of resources was also evident in the observation, as Genny was utilizing two resources she had supplied from outside school. First was a workbook she had purchased completely independently at a teacher supply store. "It's a 4th grade workbook, which is what they needed to use. I couldn't find anything here that would work—or if it's here, I don't know where it is---so I just went out and got it myself." Toward the end of the hour, Genny's students began working on a worksheet that had clearly been made by hand. She apologized for the appearance of the paper when the class ended, explaining that she had created the document from home but her computer at school was unable to open it completely, leaving her forced to fill in several sections by hand. Genny's room was well-stocked with other district-provided resources, including student literature books from the recent adoption and several ancillary textbooks and workbooks for student use; however, these were stacked neatly in the back of the room and were not utilized during the lesson observed. In addition, her students had access to several sets of adolescent literature novel sets stored neatly in cabinets throughout the room.

Derek: Individual Textural Description

Derek is in his fourteenth year of teaching at Albert Middle School in the Postville School District. He currently teaches both Communication Arts and Social Studies to 6th graders on a three-person team. He has served in several leadership positions during his tenure at Albert Middle School, both at the building level and at the district level. He has been asked to represent his building to assist with curriculum writing for both Social Studies

and Communication Arts throughout his years at Albert Middle School, and is currently serving as the building leader for the Communication Arts department as a member of the Subject Area Leadership Team (SALT). During the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, Derek was also chosen to be the building's Instructional Coach; however, funding for that position was eliminated for the 2011-2012 school year and he returned to the classroom. Derek's familiarity with the district's curriculum is evident in his classroom, suggesting a code of district level accountability. There are posters referencing the Instructional Alignment Guide (IAG) for the 3rd quarter, listing specific skills and objectives that must be covered. The district-adopted textbook is available at each student desk and additional ancillary materials are easily accessed. Derek is well-respected both among the staff at his building and the district for his knowledge of curriculum and instruction.

When asked about what he enjoyed about working at Albert Middle School, Derek responded quickly about both the students and the staff. "The staff is very friendly. The kids...umm…how do I want to say this? The kids are fun to work with because you can see where they make gains." Derek was always positive about student achievement and learning, and it was apparent that he truly enjoyed working with middle school students. Derek's main frustration with his current teaching position was administrative response to discipline issues, leading to a code of obstacles to learning. "I would say there are disrespectful behaviors that…umm… need to be consistently addressed to create an environment where reading instruction is possible."

The interpretive codes of scheduling and strategies were apparent in Derek's interview. He was aware of a specific and designated time for instruction for RtI instruction for all students to occur, and secondly, he was able to provide a specific reading skill—

fluency-- that students struggling with reading need to focus on for increased comprehension. "This is a time that the schools have set aside to help students improve in things like fluency and comprehension using specific strategies….uhh…that they can transfer to their own reading in other classes." During the classroom observation, Derek referenced students improving their fluency three separate times. Additionally, he modeled his strategy of "tracking" the text with his finger to help for reading comprehension, twice asking students to track as individual students read aloud.

When asked to describe how RtI impacts teachers, Derek was less than confident as to whether or not everyone on staff is on board for implementation. "I think most teachers have taken on the difficulty of dealing with kids at different levels." He continued by verbalizing his frustration over the seeming inequity of time to plan in the master schedule, mirroring coding identified previously as perceived inequity in time required for planning. "But it [RtI] is also a burden because it does, you know, add a prep to the day that a teacher without RtI wouldn't normally have to deal with." When asked to clarify his definition of a teacher "without RtI", Derek explained, "Basically a teacher who doesn't do interventions for reading or math. Someone who only does enrichment." Though Derek was definitely perceived to be a team player and seemingly willing to do whatever it takes to raise student achievement, it was clear from his tone that this perception of additional work for Communication Arts teachers was a struggle for him.

Derek believed that the administration provided structural support and some accountability for the program, including making sure it is in the master schedule and ensuring that students are being grouped properly to receive appropriate instruction. The code of flexibility for scheduling was defined when discussing how the program had begun.

When first implemented, Derek reported that, "It began with uh….pulling kids and when we first started it we pulled them and had them work with instructional assistants and teachers provided lessons and things for them to do." When it became apparent that working with instructional assistants was not going to be sufficient, the schedule was reworked to allow the Communication Arts teachers time to work with those students needing extra assistance. This additional time that is provided is key for students who have deficiencies in reading. "Kids who struggle as readers…um…end up in smaller groups where I think they can get a little bit more one on one instruction." This was also evidenced during the observation, where Derek was responsible for instruction of only eleven students. Derek indicated that his RtI group had always been fewer than 12 students, though they were not always the same students throughout the year. "Most of them, when they leave me, they end up in a math group. One or two have moved completely out of RtI into an enrichment group, but for the most part they are in reading, math or both."

Derek did not dwell on the negative components of implementation at his school. In fact, his one stated concern is a lack of student buy-in or accountability for their achievement in the class, suggesting a code of ownership. Derek had clear expectations and procedures for students to follow in his classroom. During the observation, students were orderly and quiet upon entering the room. He had a "Do Now" activity that students began working upon immediately upon the bell. He stated that if a grade were assigned to the instruction, students would take it more seriously and give a better effort. Despite his concerns, both Derek and his students appeared to be relaxed during the observation, and it was clear he had developed good relationships with many of them outside of school based on the good-natured bickering that occurred prior to class regarding the upcoming NCAA basketball tournament. Though

Derek's classroom is relaxed and students are basically compliant, he did have to redirect relatively minor student behaviors four times in less than 30 minutes of instruction for minor disruptions, such as getting up to sharpen pencils without permission or not following along with the oral reading of the novel.

Derek's assignments as an instructional coach and staff development representative provided him with staff development opportunities that result in his ability to clearly define and articulate several key facets to Response to Intervention in regards to reading instruction. As far as administration assisting with training or materials, Derek was less than ebullient with his response. "There have been, there has been, little instructional support and materials." The code of need for resources was evident throughout the interview, observation, and document analyses. An internal school document entitled Intervention Proposal for Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Grade listed possible resources to use in implementation, including non-fiction workbooks and suggested strategies such as "Click or Clunk", choral repeated reading or paraphrasing. Derek felt that he does not have access to all of the materials he needs for instruction. "I think we're always looking for better materials that are both engaging to the kids and simple to implement for teachers." During the observation, students were reading *The Watson's Go to Birmingham*, a high-interest adolescent literature novel and utilizing a graphic organizer from www.interventioncentral.org, an internet site designed to assist with Response to Intervention strategies and implementation. During the observation there was a collective sigh from the group when the bell rang expressing frustration that the hour had ended, indicating that the students were truly engaged in the book chosen for instruction. Additionally, district-provided resources were available for student instruction, including newly adopted Communication Arts textbooks and ancillary non-fiction student texts, though

neither was utilized for the lesson. Derek was able to provide me with several documents he had received regarding Response to Intervention, including building and district-level workshops. Many of the documents list websites, strategies, and assessment information for RtI but do not provide instructors with actual resources that can be used for implementation immediately. Other documents were received during district-level trainings that Derek attended as either an Instructional Coach or as a staff development building-level representative.

Denise: Individual Structural Description

Denise is a young White teacher who was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska. She attended Northwest Missouri State University and is in her first year of teaching at Albert Middle School in the Postville School District. She visited Albert during a practicum experience and fell in love with the school and its multicultural environment. She was called for an interview early in the spring of her senior year, prior to graduating or even completing her student teaching experience, and was offered the job. She did not apply for nor interview for any other teaching jobs; Albert was her first and only choice as a place to begin her professional career. Denise was passionate about the students at Albert and appeared to care deeply about their academic achievement. A prominent code that became evident in her interview and observation was district programming. She was a firm believer in the district's newest initiative—Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID)—but did not report the same level of knowledge nor enthusiasm for Response to Intervention and its implementation.

Denise claimed she had received little information about RtI and even less defining her responsibilities for its success, suggesting the code of defined roles. In fact, despite the fact that it was clear that she understood the distinction between the two programs, she fell back on information regarding AVID as opposed to RtI several times during her interview. In order for the initiative to succeed, all teachers must have their roles within implementation defined. "It is not enough to just change the roles of individuals in RtI. Carefully designed professional development is required to restructure roles, modify expectations, and build internal capacity" (Howell, Patton & Deiotte, 2008, p. 105). When asked for documents with information regarding RtI, Denise was unable to provide even one piece of physical evidence that she had received or read about the program. She reported that she may have read an email at the beginning of the school year with some basic information, but was unable to retrieve this correspondence.

One factor to consider in Denise's level of familiarity with RtI and its implementation was the district's decision to add new initiatives to on-going structures for student support, another indicator for the code of district programming. While districts must continue to adapt and change, it may be important to consider whether or not there has been a consideration for how much teachers in the classroom are able to manage simultaneously—have we overloaded their "plate" of programming at the expense of the students? "It is probably closer to the truth to say that the main problem in public education is not resistance to change but the presence of too many innovations mandated or adopted uncritically and superficially on an ad hoc fragmented basis" (Fullan, 1993, p. 23).

Denise was unsure about her how her administrative team is impacted by RtI at her school, though she did believe they saw the good in it and, like her, wanted the best for the

students. This suggested an interpretive code definition of roles, leading to a theme of a communicating a clear purpose. Speck (1999) claimed "the principal's actions speak to the overall beliefs and expectations held for the school. In leading the school, the principal clarifies the current school status and gains the school community's commitment to the future" (pp. 38-39). Without an administrator's clear communication of the expectations of the current reality and the goals of the future, it is difficult for teachers to play their part in the school's success.

Leaders communicating a clear sense of purpose will be more likely to succeed as the instructional leaders of the school. The research of Blase and Blase (2001) suggested that "principals who are instructional leaders profoundly impact teachers' classroom behavior, leading to powerful cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects on teachers" (p. 157). Denise, new to the profession and to the building, relied heavily on the instructional leadership of a colleague responsible for implementation of another program in her building for her first year as opposed to leaning on her administrative team for guidance. When asked about support received for implementation of RtI, she emphatically stated a specific staff member's name, "Jack. [AVID coordinator]. He's my support system. He gives me a lot of strategies." She continued, "Yeah, he's been my lifeline this year."   The code of instructional leadership was defined in Denise's interview. Though instructional leadership within a building does not need be exclusive to the administrative team, for Denise it appeared she was building her knowledge base and implementation of RtI on the shoulders of a colleague without identified guidance from the principal. Instructional leadership can also be solidified by holding teachers and students responsible for the work they are accomplishing in the classroom, leading to a theme of accountability. Denise had been

observed by her lead administrator for evaluative purposes in her Communication Arts classroom this year, but instruction in the RtI period was a different story. "They [administrators] remind us every now and then what we should be doing but there is not much accountability. I've never been checked on or asked what I'm doing." Ruebling, Stow, Kayona, and Clark (2004) declared "leaders hold teachers, students, and themselves accountable for achieving results. Critical to accountability is measurement of results. Leaders make sure that a required assessment program is established" (p. 250).

Finally, Denise felt that it had been a struggle to identify and obtain the materials necessary for implementation of RtI, an interpretive code identified as lack of resources that was prevalent throughout the interviews and observations of the participants. As stated earlier, she relied heavily on strategies and materials provided by AVID, either through materials distributed in workshops or by specific classroom lesson plans suggested by the teacher coordinating the program. When she was not using AVID strategies, she struggled with implementation. "We don't know what we're supposed to be going, so we kind of just wing it sometimes." As a novice teacher, she relied heavily on structures and scaffolding provided to her.

> "I can do lesson plans…I can follow the Instructional Alignment Guide (IAG), I can, you know, really hammer those skills [skills identified as essential in the district IAG] into their head. But RtI, I mean, I'm just new at it, so you know, it's different."

The classroom observation also indicated a need for resources. Though posters are not an essential part of implementation, they certainly can be a part of classroom instruction and student learning. There were no posters referencing RtI, but Denise's classroom did contain AVID posters outlining tips for successful note-taking and district-level 8th grade Communication Arts Essential Learnings students were expected to master by the end of the

quarter. In addition, though she only had sixteen students in class, she did not have enough novels for every student to have his or her own. The worksheet utilized in class was one designed by Denise herself, based largely on a similar worksheet created by the AVID teacher for use in his classroom. Finally, district-provided literature books were present in the room but placed on a bookshelf in the back while the student workbooks that were also part of the recent adoption were still in the box.

Dave: Individual Structural Description

Dave is a veteran teacher with twenty years of experience in both the classroom and as an administrator. After beginning his career in a classroom for eleven years, he moved into administration for four years as an assistant principal in a rural district near the Postville School District. He returned to the classroom five years ago at Lawrence Middle School and currently teaches 7th grade Communication Arts. He had nothing but positive things to say about his current administration, referencing his perception of principal support for both him and the entire staff multiple times throughout the interview. The theme of trust was suggested as Dave described his principal, strongly believing that she "is willing to let us experiment and try new things to see what works and what doesn't work with kids. The administrators are very supportive of our efforts."

The theme of training was defined through Dave's interview and document analysis. Dave is succinct when asked about RtI training he has received: "I have not received any formal instruction for RtI." During the classroom observation, it was noted that Dave had notebooks with information regarding Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and Step Up to Writing, both previously introduced district-level initiatives; however no

such notebook was available for RtI, and he was only able to provide one document in regards to the program, a handout from a seminar he attended in 2009 that briefly described what RtI is and basic suggestions for initial implementation. The PowerPoint Dave provided indicated "most of the cost of beginning to implement RtI is the cost of PD (professional development) for staff" (Williams, 2009, p. 4). Money considerations aside, it appeared from his interview that little professional development had been provided in the three years since the seminar was held.

Dave believed everyone should be held accountable for student achievement in reading—the administrators, the teachers and the students. Administrators must model accountability by ensuring that everyone is doing their part in implementation. The code of visibility was evident in Dave's interview. "RtI is something we value so it's something they're [the administrators] are going to have to monitor and make sure that things are getting done like they're supposed to." One of the "things" critical to RtI implementation is regular data collection and reporting through progress monitoring, which Dave reported administering and grading weekly:

> The ultimate use of progress monitoring at a district level must include the analysis of high-stakes testing over time and of formative district assessments (perhaps as frequently as every 3 weeks) aligned to standards assessed on high-stakes testing. In a professional learning community practicing RtI, results must be continuously monitored and analyzed, and the findings applied. (Howell, Patton & Deiotte, 2008, p. 77)

Applying the findings requires teachers to make changes in their instruction and the ability to match teaching to student needs, resulting in a coding of grouping. Vanderheyden (2011) determined "When properly implemented, RtI generates a dataset that allows educators to respond to students' learning needs" (p. 335). This response appeared to be part of

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implementation at Mike's campus. "We kind of monitor the students regularly and they move, we have students moving in and out on a regular basis. If a student, if we see something that throws up a red flag like their grades are dropping off and test scores are dropping off, then we'll pull them into RtI and see if we can't get them back on track." Dave was also a strong advocate for increasing the time spent during the school day on the teaching of reading and the importance of helping all students also coded as scheduling, leading to an overall theme of adaptability. He was passionate about teachers assisting students in increasing their "craft of reading" during the school day as he was not confident that all students will receive the time or guidance to practice their reading at home. A PowerPoint provided by Dave entitled "Now What? Starting the journey with RtI" also referenced scheduling and the need for adaptability. "RtI is a systems change process…not a model or program. You can't just plug and play," as well as "RtI needs to be built from the bottom up—get the foundation firmly established" (Williams, 2009, p.5).

High levels of accountability for the teachers and the students will lead to higher levels of engagement in the classroom. "To be engaged in the learning environment, students must, in collaboration with teachers, build the classroom environment around clear and common expectations for their learning" (Nesin, 2005, p. 53). Dave recognized that in order for these expectations to be met, there must be flexibility within the structure and scheduling for both students and teachers. When asked to describe obstacles he faced with RtI implementation, he responded, "Most of the problems are logistical and I think we've done a pretty good job overcoming those. It's just the uh….the odd scheduling of moving kids in and out and I think we've kind of hit our stride on that." Administrators are responsible for the master schedule of the building, and while designing it must be cognizant of such a need

for change. "Organizational structures that facilitate learning and nurture relationships have to be flexible, small learning communities so the needs of the students can be recognized and adjustments made in form and function to maximize learning" (Kasak & Uskali, 2005, p. 141). Though Dave recognized that such adaptations have occurred at Lawrence, he strongly promoted additional changes that would increase not only the amount of time students spend reading, but also an stronger emphasis on matching students to engaging text. "I think the emphasis should be more on reading practice...we need to do the hard work that's necessary to pair low readers with books that will motivate them to read and give them time to practice that craft."

Lauren: Individual Textural/Structural Description

Lauren is an 8th grade Communication Arts teacher at Lawrence Middle School in the Postville School District. She began teaching her teaching career in 1997 at Lawrence for two years, followed by one year at another Postville Middle School. She left teaching for a few years to stay home with her children, returned to education for two years in another local district, stayed at home for a third child for several years and three years ago returned to Lawrence in her current capacity. An interpretive code that was defined throughout Lauren's interview was collegiality. She was enthusiastic about both her 8th grade interdisciplinary team of teachers and her Communication Arts Professional Learning Team. "We have a really great PLT. We share a lot of ideas, we have a lot of exchange….um…we are into the same types of thing, we've done a lot of research into teaching reading and writing with books and so forth." A second code prevalent in Lauren's interview was leadership. Lauren is a highly respected teacher within Lawrence Middle School and within the Postville School

District. She had been recruited to assist with curriculum writing for the district both when she began teaching in 1997 and during her current tenure the last four years. She is an active participant in Staff Development, presenting information to her own staff and to all middle school Communication Arts teachers regarding instructional strategies. She is currently her team's leader and liaison between the administrative team and serves on the Building Leadership Team. The classroom observation indicated that Lauren is also highly respected among the students at Lawrence. Students were on-task virtually the entire lesson, needing a bare minimum of redirects or reprimands, despite the fact that there were multiple transitions and students were up and out of their seats for instructional purposes twice.

Program components. The interpretive code of program components illustrates the theme of a need for continued staff development for implementation. I defined the interpretive code of program components as basic information about the origin of the program and essential steps to put it into place. The theme that emerged from this interpretive code of training is staff development is necessary for effective implementation. I define this theme as providing all stake holders with necessary information about why the program was chosen and specific information as to its design and format for effective implementation. Lauren indicated that a specific deficit she has encountered during implementation of Response to Intervention in her classroom was a need to understand the program and its components, a theme she referenced seven times throughout her interview and observation. "I can't think of any actual training," "When we said we were going to do RtI it was kind of an open field," "Honestly, I don't think I've received any real training. I think that's a kind of another frustration—I know very little about it." Her lack of background knowledge was affirmed when asked how the program began at her school. "We

just put them [students needing additional practice with reading] in the homeroom, basically just saying they needed extra help. And that was about it." Without explicit and intentional staff development efforts led by the building principal, it is unlikely initiatives such as RtI will be successful over time. Sullo (2007) noted "studies have shown that gains are temporary if there is not continued staff development. Quick fixes and short-term solutions do not work over time. Long-term commitment and ongoing staff development are essential to ensuring lasting change" (p. 22). Additionally, Sparks and Hirsh (1997) reported "staff development is at the center of all education reform strategies—without it, such strategies are merely good ideas that cannot find expression" (p. 96). Part of effective staff development for implementation of RtI to increase academic skills in reading would be information on specific resources that are available to teachers for use in the classroom.

Lauren referenced a need for information regarding appropriate resources five times during the interview and observation. "I think definitely, especially for the RtI, I really wish we had a really strong diagnostic test. Something that told me what their weaknesses were, so that I could either work on specific skill sets with groups of kids, or that kind of thing." Later in the interview, she added, 'I think the biggest thing we need is some kind of diagnostic test as to what they are missing." McEwan (2001) reported that students struggling with reading difficulties have one or more of three main problems that need to be addressed: an inability to decode; and inability to use decoding skills to result in reading fluency; and/or an inability to comprehend either written or oral content. "Students with reading disabilities need direct, intense, research-based instruction that meets their specific needs. They need small groups or even one-to-one settings in which to learn" (pp. 37-38). Lauren's confidence in the materials she was currently utilizing for diagnosing or addressing

deficits was less than encouraging. "We've gotten the Buckle Down, which is an okay

source. It certainly helps prep for the MAP (Missouri Assessment Program). I'm not

necessarily sure it's what these kids need. We also have Study Island (a district-provided

internet program) available, um…which, doesn't work well with 8th graders." Lauren's lack

of confidence in currently accessible materials was also demonstrated during the observation,

when twice she indicated to the class that she believed that the exercise they were grading

from the Buckle Down workbook had incorrectly defined the wrong answer in the teacher's

key. Ruebling, Stow, Kayona and Clarke (2004) determined that leaders should "organize

the school's resources—human, facilities, budget, and material—around the curriculum and

its implementation" (p. 250). Current organization of materials was not meeting Lauren's

needs in her classroom. Lauren also articulated a concern combining a lack of staff

development and an uncertainty in specific skills that need to be addressed when asked about

obstacles she had to overcome in implementation.

"There's no clear direction of what we want and there's no real goal per student because they
all have different needs. Some of them are reading just fine, some of them just aren't
performing, some of them have some real gaps that need to be addressed. And we're not
always sure what those gaps are, nor really what, you know, we can do with them."

      Flexibility. The interpretive code of flexibility illustrates the theme of adaptability. I

defined the interpretive code of flexibility as the administrator's willingness to make changes

in order to maximize student achievement. The theme that emerges from this interpretive

code of flexibility is adaptability is essential for full implementation. I define this theme as

an administrator's ability to both promote and allow changes to student and staff schedules in

order for RtI implementation to be successful. Part of addressing different student needs

must be addressed with an ability to have a flexible schedule in which teachers can group and

regroup students based on academic need, a theme that was noted seven times in Lauren's

interview, observation and document analysis. "I think we're grouping two sets of kids

together in there: kids who aren't working and have skills, and kids who don't have skills,

and I think the two of them need completely different types of services." While the

diagnostic tool which Lauren discussed earlier would alleviate this issue, she recognized that

even within the confines of the current system, there was an ability to move students based

on teacher discretion. "We have two groups for RtI that we do. Janelle [the math teacher]

and I mostly switch back and forth. We do 4 ½ weeks with one and then we flip back and

forth 4 ½ for the other. Some of the kids, if they don't need assistance in math, just stay with

me permanently, until they can be taken out of RtI". "The flexible use of time, staff, space,

and instructional grouping sets up relationships whereby students learn and teachers teach in

a more responsive, effective manner" (Kasak & Uskali, 2005, p. 150). Lauren also

recognized that the current schedule provided teachers the ability to change the groupings of

students, but it also allowed some students to receive additional time to address their

instructional needs.

> "A couple of other kids, I think because they've gotten the extra attention in RtI and
> we've had the extra time to practice skills, they feel really successful when they come
> back into class because I will pre-teach kids so when they go back they're like, 'I
> know what's going on'".

To raise academic achievement, administrators must be willing and able to adapt the

schedule to meet the needs of the students and staff, "responding to current challenges,

engaging in thoughtful and reflective discussions, and actively and openly embracing the

revision and refinement of programs" (Williamson & Johnston, 1999, p. 11). Lauren

provided documents indicating the need for additional time and ability to group and regroup

as well, with one handout referencing the fact that "each middle school has options for intermittent regrouping and reteaching, the current structure does not provide time for targeted intervention, or intensive instruction on a daily basis" followed by a recommendation that each middle school principal is "to initiate planning for reinstitution of a 'home room' period of 30 minutes a day to facilitate a variety of student activities, including targeted instruction and intervention." The current master schedule at Lawrence Middle School demonstrated compliance with this suggestion.

Michele: Individual Textural/Structural Description

Michele has been a teacher for sixteen years. She began as a 5th grade teacher in a rural district, where she taught for nine years. Seven years ago she moved to Lawrence Middle School in Postville Public Schools, where she has taught 6th grade Communication Arts and Social Studies. A code of a lack of relationship building was suggested by Michele's claim of why she left her previous school.

> "There was a negativity in that school. We had a poor leader, I will say that, but I don't want to name names…There was just such negativity and back slashing and people talking and I don't live my life like that."

This lack of leadership and relationships within and among the staff encouraged her to look for a teaching position in another district. "This is totally a side thing, but I think relationships are the number one role, and if you're coming in with a negative relationship with everyone talking behind each other's back, then I feel like you can't accomplish much." Michele could not say enough positive things about her current position and the people with whom she works, suggesting a code of collegiality. When asked what she finds to be the best thing about Lawrence Middle School, she gushed, "The people. 100% the people are, I don't

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know, it's definitely a team. And the team I work with, the people are amazing." Michele's respect for her colleagues was clearly reciprocated by the leadership roles in which she serves, a code suggested throughout her interview. She represented the Communication Arts teachers in her building at the district level, served on the district-wide Middle School Council and the Assessment Task Force, and was part of the Building Leadership Team and Site Council. Additionally, she was recruited to assist with the most recent Communication Arts textbook adoption. Though she is clearly a leader among her peers, she does not currently have aspirations to move into an administrative role. "If you took me out of the classroom, I would be…I would have a hard time with that. There's not a doubt, I love the connection with the kids number one." This commitment is restated later in the interview as well when speaking of her team: "Our number one priority is the kids. And we will do whatever it takes to push them forward." This dedication to students is reiterated when asked to explain what she knows about Response to Intervention in regards to reading instruction. "I know that it is best for kids to break down the skills to help push them forward, I mean plain and simple."

Communication. The interpretive code of communication illustrates the theme of communicating a clear purpose for implementation. I defined the interpretive code of communication as clear directives from the administration regarding the program. The theme that emerged from this interpretive code was communicating a clear purpose is essential for implementation. I define this theme as administrators providing stakeholders with concise and specific information as to why the program was chosen and an ability to articulate the program's goals. Michele referenced frustration with the lack of

communication six times in the interview and document analyses. Despite her participation

in several building and district level leadership committees, Michele was unclear as to the

origins of RtI at Lawrence Middle School. "Gosh, it was a couple of years ago. Gosh, I'm

trying to remember, they all start to blend together. And it was basically told to us that that

was what we were going to be doing and we just jumped." This lack of distinction between

initiatives indicated a need for administration to provide clear and concise information about

not only what RtI was meant to accomplish, but why it was selected to increase academic

achievement. "At first there wasn't very much [information], I mean, it felt like, you know,

figure it out." Leaders must provide more structure for teachers than opportunities to simply

"figure it out" on their own; they must provide a sense of purpose behind the change. Vaill

(1984, p. 91) defined purposing as "that continuous stream of actions by an organization's

formal leadership which has the effect of inducing clarify, consensus and commitment

regarding the organization's basic purposes." When this mutual commitment is made among

all staff, student learning will increase. Sergiovanni (1999) reported that "purposing is a

powerful force that responds to human needs for a sense of what is important and a signal of

what is of value" (p. 86). Through documents from district level meetings, Michele was able

to provide some information that referenced background information of what was of

importance and of value specific to the district's rationale for implementation, including

findings from *The President's Commission on Excellence in Education Report of 2002* and

correlations between RtI and regulations of No Child Left Behind legislation. Though she

did have access to these documents, Michele was not able to apply this information to her

person classroom implementation of RtI during the interview, suggesting a need for stronger

and more defined staff development for teachers in the beginning stages and throughout the program.

Training. The interpretive code of training illustrates the theme of a need for continued staff development for implementation. I defined the interpretive code of training as information provided to stake holders regarding the structure and materials necessary for implementation. The theme that emerged from this interpretive code of training is staff development is necessary for effective implementation. I define this theme as providing all stake holders with necessary information about the why the program was chose and specific information as to its design and format for effective implementation. The need for additional training was a theme identified numerous times throughout the interview, observation and document analyses. Michele reported that initially there was very little structure to building implementation.

> "There's definitely been a learning curve, from you know, the first year we did it to now. At first we just kind of jumped in and we were like, 'Okay, let's think of a lesson, let's make this up as we go along' and now we're seeing that it's more impactful when you do certain things, you know, work on certain skills."

Even though she felt there had been progress with this through the years, there was still work to be done. "I think the CA teachers took it a little bit better because like the math teachers we had some training, but the other teachers who really struggled to figure out what exactly was working. We're still not trained specifically in what to do."   Research from Wagner et al. (2006) indicated that "it seems clear that professional development activities must be aligned to a few carefully chosen improvement priorities that are informed by and monitored with data" (p. 31). Failure to align and track progress within staff development activities can lead to a similar lack of targeted instruction in the classroom, resulting in lost opportunities

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for learning for those who are already behind in reading achievement and do not have time to spare when it comes to learning. "You know, trying to figure things out and I'm like, 'Okay, that was a waste of a week and why did I spend time doing that?'" Finally, staff development for all teachers will ensure that everyone is on board and pulling in the same direction. "It would be nice to have more of a set program that everybody is doing the same thing, because right now everyone kind of does their own thing still." This need for consistency with training and implementation was evidenced in the classroom observation with Michele's selection of information to display to students. Though her walls were literally covered with posters, it was apparent that her selections were anything but haphazard. One entire wall was encompassed by posters revealing district-wide 6th grade academic vocabulary and definitions along with four posters delineating each quarter's 6th grade mastery objectives. A second section of the classroom was six grouped posters detailing information from Step Up to Writing, a district-level reading and writing initiative adopted more than five years ago. Michele's students each had access to the district-level textbook, and workbooks and additional non-fiction texts that were also part of the recent adoption were readily available for student use. Finally, document analysis referenced a need for "on-going PD and support" and "provide access to and professional development in research-based interventions" (Postville Public Schools (pseudonym) Spring RtI Summit, 2008, pp. 1-2). Additional information from documents included a focus on fidelity of implementation via staff development of expectations and strategies to be used, stating "fidelity of implementation checks serve the purpose of identifying areas of strength which schools can build and areas of deficiency that need to be remedied" and that the "quality of delivery refers to the qualitative aspects of the intervention, including interventionist

effectiveness, enthusiasm, and preparation" (Mellard, 2009, pp. 15-17). Staff development is critical in both teacher preparation for intervention implementation and in maximizing teacher effectiveness within the classroom.

Ownership. The interpretive code of ownership illustrates the theme of accountability. I defined the interpretive code of ownership as students, teachers and administrators understanding their roles. The theme that emerged from this interpretive code of ownership was accountability necessary for implementation. I define this theme as each stake holder holding both themselves and all other stake holders responsible for necessary steps for full implementation. Michele's interview, observation and document analyses resulted in the coding of ownership, referenced nine times. Michele clearly holds her students accountable to their learning in her classroom during instruction. The class is small—a total of eleven students—all of whom are required to participate the entire hour, each reading aloud at least twice and each answering a minimum of three questions. Michele demands that students can articulate not only what they are learning in class that day, but also what they have learned in previous class sessions. Student behavior issues are non-existent during the observation, with a complete absence of teacher redirects for behavior or time on task. It is also evident that Michele considers both herself and her colleagues in being accountable to her building principal, trusting and supporting her leadership. "That's kind of what we do in this building-she, Denise [building principal] tells us what to do, and we're like, 'Okay, let's figure out how to do it!' and just kind of go from there." When asked how RtI in regards to reading instruction impacts administrators at Lawrence Middle School, Michele laughed and asked if I could stop recording for a minute. She continued with light-

hearted laughter, explaining, "I'm so joking—there's not anything bad. I don't know, like,

my ideal would be that they would come in every once in awhile. I think when you remove

yourself from a situation…you kind of lose that touch, you know what I mean, that

connection?" She continued later by stating,

> "And it would be nice if they [administrators] would come in sometimes and actually
> do it themselves. Like every once in awhile, like teach an RtI class and see what it is,
> what's going on, the whole connections, to really have the good discussions with us
> to know exactly what we're talking about."

Research completed by Lambert (2003) concluded "the principal models, teaches, coaches,

and provides leadership training to school staff members as they become skillful participants

in leadership" (p. 119). Document analysis also made specific references to accountability in

RtI, specifically noting the role of the administrator in ensuring fidelity of implementation,

stating district leadership supporting implementation through "building information systems

to monitor all students' achievement" and "holding people accountable for results" (Mellard,

2009, p. 26).

Composite Textural/Structural Description: The Essences of the Communication Arts Teachers Perceptions of Administrative Support Necessary for Successful Implementation of RtI

By following phenomenological reduction process as defined by Moustakas, I was

able to determine the essence of four core themes that occurred throughout all six of the

Communication Arts teachers' experiences of administration support necessary for

successful implementation of RtI. I remained mindful of the heuristic nature of the study

throughout the analysis, as it was important to consciously separate my personal experiences

with RtI implementation from the experiences of the participants. Patton (2002) explained

"these essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon

commonly experienced" (p. 106). The themes of communicating a clear purpose, staff

development, accountability, and adaptability are discussed in detail using information from

interviews, observations and document collection.

Communicating a Clear Purpose

Communicating a clear and concise purpose is one way administrators can help to

improve implementation of Response to Intervention at the middle level. Interpretive codes

leading to this theme included the definition of roles, limited instructional leadership,

leadership, and obstacles to learning. I define communicating a clear purpose as articulating

with clarity the rationale behind the program, its key components, and individual stakeholder

responsibilities. Principals, as the leaders of the building, are responsible for the success of

the school organization which they lead.

> Over the last half century a great deal has been written about the importance of
> leadership, in general and in relation to organizational performance in particular.
> Academics, practitioners and reviewers from every field of study have concluded that
> leadership is a central variable in the equation that defines organizational success.
> (Murphy, Elliott, Goldring & Porter, 2007, p. 179)

Administrators can support implementation of RtI by clearly communicating the

overarching goals of the program. All stakeholders must be informed not only about what

the RtI is, but also why the decision was made.

> Getting schools, districts, and the individuals within them to begin working in these
> new ways requires that leaders prepare the community and educators for the
> transformations and hard work ahead. To generate the much needed momentum and
> urgency for change, people need to fully understand the why behind the journey they
> are beginning. (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 138)

When teachers are fully aware of the rationale behind the decision, they will have a better

sense of ownership in its success. Clarity of roles and expectations will also provide the

entire staff with consistency in regards to implementation. Teachers must understand the goals of the initiative and have defined expectations for all involved with its implementation. This lack of clarity was evident from several teacher interviews when asked about what they knew about RtI and how it began at their site. Denise stated, "They've given us a bare minimum description to be honest of what we should be doing" while Lauren claimed, "We just put them in homeroom, basically just saying they [students] needed extra help. And that was about it." Understanding of not only how the program will be implemented, but also why it was chosen and a detailed description of each of its components will give the teachers the background knowledge necessary for ownership in its implementation and its success. While the teachers interviewed were able to articulate the schedule or the structure in which Response to Intervention was to take place within the building, they had fewer details as to how, or perhaps more importantly why, it began in the first place.

Speck (1999) reported "as the school develops its vision and models on the path toward becoming a learning community, the principal's role as leader is to help facilitate and communicate the vision on an ongoing basis" (p. 56). As an instructional leader when the decision was made to implement RtI at the middle level, I was provided with procedural or structural information as to how the program should look in the building, but was given little information as to why this initiative was chosen. The teachers also expressed a lack of clarity as to exactly why RtI was essential for student achievement to be raised. Principals must be explicit in not only how the program when it is implemented, but also give detailed information as to why it was chosen and how it will lead directly to student gains if implemented correctly.

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The role of the teachers must also be communicated clearly within the purpose of the implementation. When teachers are unsure of their roles within an initiative, there may be perceptions of inequity as to who is responsible for the work to be done. "Instructionally anchored leaders ensure that responsibility for achieving targets is made explicit and that timelines for achieving objectives are specified" (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 182-183). It is important that all teachers not only understand their role within RtI, but also that all feel that they share an equal responsibility for student success. Dave was fairly adamant about the lack of equity he perceives through the current implementation plan: "It [RtI] doesn't impact teachers other than those who teach Communication Arts. That's one issue I think we have with it here." All teachers must have their roles within implementation defined. "It is not enough to just change the roles of individuals in RtI. Carefully designed professional development is required to restructure roles, modify expectations, and build internal capacity" (Howell, Patton & Deiotte, 2008, p. 105). Administrators who make these designations and distinctions could avoid this clearly articulated lack of equity in regards to all staff responsibility with implementation. Without such clarity, teachers currently involved in daily implementation of the program stated that they faced challenges other staff members did not. Though Communication Arts teachers clearly have a direct impact on increasing reading achievement, they cannot reach this goal working in isolation. An administrator can improve implementation of Response to Intervention at the middle level by clearly communicating the purpose of the initiative.

Schmoker (1999) stated that "schools improve when purpose and effort unite. One key is leadership that recognizes its most vital function: to keep everyone's eyes on the prize of improved student learning" (p. 111). This clearly defined purpose of improvement

through Response to Intervention was not evident in observations. Many of the six classrooms I observed included posters and charts indicating district-wide specific learning objectives that students would be expected to master. It was clear that the teachers understood not only the content that was to be taught within the classrooms, but also the scope and sequencing of the information of which students were to learn. In addition, all of the classrooms contained the recently adopted textbook and ancillary materials for student use. Several classrooms exhibited posters with reading and writing strategies explicitly taught within the Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, a district initiative in its first year for middle school implementation. In contrast, none of the classrooms exhibited any poster, strategy nor resource that was specifically defined as a component of Response to Intervention.

While it was clear that several other district-level initiatives concerning curriculum and programming were embraced by the teachers observed, it was equally clear that Response to Intervention was not a presence where students were learning. Administrators communicating a clear purpose of Response to Intervention would help teachers better understand the program goals and expectations, which in turn would lead to a clarification for students. In addition, a clear sense of purpose would help to avoid the pitfalls of poor staff development practices identified by Sparks and Hirsch (1997):

School improvement too often has been based on fad rather than a clear, compelling vision of the school system's future. This, in turn, has led to one-shot staff development workshops with no thought given to follow-up or how a technique fits in with those taught in previous years. At its worst, staff development asks teachers to implement poorly understood innovations with little support and assistance. (pp. 12-13)

Staff Development

There can be no doubt that staff development is a key to improvement in any organization. Interpretive codes leading to the theme of staff development included perceived lack of information, inadequate resources, program components and training. I define staff development as training for all stakeholders providing information regarding structure, responsibilities, strategies and materials. "Instructionally centered leaders establish an expectation that the continual expansion of one's knowledge and skills focused on helping student succeed is the norm at the school" (Murphy et al, 2007, p. 187). Howell, Patton and Deiotte (2008) determined, "The single most important error to avoid in setting up a Response to Intervention implementation plan is failing to provide school staff with in-depth, high-quality professional development and resources" (p. 75). Such advice would be well heeded by administrators seeking strategies to improve implementation based on research from this study.

Providing staff development is a key tenet for administrators wishing to improve the implementation of the RtI process to improve reading achievement at the middle level. "Principals recognize that staff members are learners, just as they are teachers, and must have the instructional and development tools they need to pursue their own learning and growth" (The National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001, p. 41). When teachers are given opportunities and tools to learn and grow, they will better be able to plan and administer classroom instruction to meet the needs of the students. As with communicating a clear purpose for the program, staff development instruction for all teachers on exactly how to implement the program will alleviate frustrations of certain departments or groups of teachers having more responsibilities than others. For widespread and sustained

implementation of new practices, Sparks and Hirsh (1997) ascertained "staff development not only must affect the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of individual teachers, administrators, and other school employees, but it also must alter the cultures and structures of the organizations in which those individuals work" (pp. 1-2). Participants for this study indicated they had received little, if any training for implementation, hardly enough to alter the culture of organizations in which they worked. Michele remarked, "I don't know if I've specifically had RtI training. I can't remember anything specific to that. We've had lots of trainings for strategies and things like that, but for RtI training specifically? No, I don't think so." This shared responsibility will allow Communication Arts teachers the opportunity to provide students needing additional time and instruction to increase their reading abilities. "If you want to raise achievement, you must allocate sufficient instructional time to reading, particularly for those students who are well below grade level, and then use every minute of that time wisely" (McEwan, 2001, p. 17). Making every minute count while implementing a new initiative without staff development is analogous to taking an extended road trip without a map—with no set direction or agenda, the results are likely to be disastrous. Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) found that principals must not only ensure that teachers have the necessary staff development opportunities to directly enhance their learning, but they also must ensure that teachers have the necessary materials and equipment.

"Resources are to a complex organization what food is to the body" (Glickman, 2002, pp. 59-60). A lack of staff development to help guide teachers through implementation will leave them unable to match the resources available to the instructional needs of the students, resulting in a lack of academic growth. Murphy et al. (2007) reported that leaders in highly productive schools "make sure that the materials that teachers require to perform their jobs

are on hand in sufficient quantity and in a timely fashion" (p. 184). Lauren particularly was concerned with her level of support in this area. "I think the biggest thing we need is some kind of diagnostic test as to what they [the students] are missing. Otherwise it feels like a real hit or miss for me as a teacher. Am I giving them what they need?" Denise also reported that she was unsure of exactly how to proceed with instruction for all students: "I wish we had some kind of research-based plan. This works, this is what you need to be doing, not options for this is what you can possibly do." This was of particular concern to me as a building administrator, as many of the teachers interviewed reported having no training whatsoever on a district initiative directly aligned to increasing student achievement. There is an obvious need for administrators to do a much better job of communicating purpose and providing development for teachers in order to implement RtI at the building level.

Interview data indicate that more staff development is needed for staff to understand that RtI is not designed to be an individual school initiative, but rather a systemic change for all students within the district—a plan based on increasing achievement through determining individual needs and providing research-based interventions to address deficiencies. "Through its focus on alignment of general classroom instruction, progress monitoring, and evidence-based interventions, RtI can help schools work more efficiently and effectively in addressing the needs of all learners" (Mellard & Johnson, 2008, p.1). Efficiency will be likely reached through consistency throughout the building, something that is reported to be lacking. Michele stated, "It would be nice to have more of a set program that everybody is doing the same thing, because right now everyone kind of does their own thing still."

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Because teachers understand that Response to Intervention provides some students needing individualized attention or more instructional time to raise their reading achievement, it is imperative that all staff receive training to be a part of implementation in order to provide for small group or individualized instruction. Not only will staff development provide teachers with a clear understanding of the need for smaller, more intensive instruction provided to students within the Response to Intervention structure, it will also clarify specific instructional strategies and resources that would be appropriate.

Teachers who are provided staff development for implementation of RtI will be better trained to match appropriate resources to the instructional needs of the students. Murphy et al. (2007) reported that effective leaders "work with teachers to accentuate the use of instructional strategies that maximize student engagement at high levels of success" (p. 185). Teachers in the study are utilizing resources of which they are either unsure of the instructional information being asked of students or in disagreement with the validity of the resource, neither of which is acceptable for increasing student achievement. Lauren openly questioned the answers provided to the workbook utilized in the class during the observation, stating, "This is one I dispute the book on" and, "From what I know, C is wrong. I don't know why that's what's listed in the book." Dave, using the same resource designed for a different grade level, also communicated uncertainty with the validity of the resource with comments including, "I would say your best answer would be C" and, "I agree with Jack [student]. C is probably the right answer. I think the book is wrong." If teachers are not confident in the materials used for instruction, it is difficult to believe that student achievement will be maximized with their use. Bianco (2010) urged "districts, schools, and administrators to set expectations for the implementation of RtI, provide adequate resources,

and support the use of procedures" (p. 6). It is critical that teachers are able to not only identify students' instructional needs, but also implement with fidelity strategies that will help students learn. In addition, staff who have received staff development for implementation are more likely to maximize the additional instructional time provided for students to increase their skills.

Staff development opportunities will provide teachers with the necessary information to deliver instruction that pairs appropriate resources with student needs in order to increase achievement. Administrators must not assume that teachers have the necessary tools and strategies at their disposal when implementing RtI. All staff, including those who work specifically with increasing reading achievement, must have access to staff development activities that will increase their knowledge of matching specific learning strategies to student deficits. Howell, Patton and Deoitte (2008) concluded that principal and administrative support was critical in the RtI process. "Principal understanding must be not only vocalized but also actualized in the form of resources—materials, staff development, and most importantly, time to conduct the process" (p. 55). Instructional leaders are responsible for not only developing the skills and knowledge of the staff in the building, but are also responsible for ensuring that they have the resources necessary to implement these changes in the classroom. For implementation to be sustained and successful, resources must be readily accessible, including having the resources readily available physically as well as providing both initial and ongoing support to teachers for their use (Mellard & Johnson, 2008, p. 130).

Accountability

Current perceptions of Communication Arts teachers regarding administrative support

being provided to instructors implementing RtI to increase reading achievement indicated the

theme of a need for increased accountability on the part of the administration. Interpretive

codes included in this theme included district-level accountability, ownership and visibility.

Initially I believed that accountability would be included within the staff development theme,

but multiple readings of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents provided by

the teachers I determined that it encompassed something entirely different. I define

accountability as personal responsibility for each stakeholder within an organization. While

staff development provides teachers with the why and what of implementation,

accountability requires administrators to "be" with the teachers during implementation:

giving instructional support, assisting with data collection/distribution and holding everyone,

including building leadership, accountable.

Administrators need to provide increased instructional support to teachers who have

received staff development information regarding RtI. "The faculty of a school will persist

with novel approaches to teaching if the principal expects to see new behaviors learned in

professional development, and if coaching, supportive feedback, and encouragement guide

initial efforts" (O'Shea, 2005, p. 136). It is not enough to provide a template for the

program; there must be both clear expectations and additionally support and guidance given

in order for full implementation to occur. Administrators who have communicated a clear

purpose for the instructional change will have developed a strong sense of trust, leading to

more effective coaching through feedback. Teachers must believe that they will be given

opportunities to practice their learning, and that they are being supported along the way.

Blase and Blase (2001) concluded that educators felt empowered when "principals encouraged teachers to experiment with new teaching techniques, new materials, new curricula, and new programs to improve student learning" (p. 91). This was somewhat of a paradigm shift for me, as I am more familiar with teachers presenting well-crafted and planned lessons as part of the formal observation process. Providing a safe and trusting environment for everyone to learn, one in which teachers are not afraid to try something new and struggle with success, is paramount to RtI implementation. Fullan (2003) reported "the school principal, of course, was the key person in developing a relational trust, both in demonstrating it herself or himself and in fostering a culture of trusted relationships" (p. 41). Administrators implementing RtI must build a sense of trust with their staff members in order to promote a sense of trust and accountability among their staff all stakeholders, whether that be by listening carefully to concerns or questions or by simply being both present and a presence within the classroom. Though the teachers in the study could not clearly articulate the purpose or origin of the program, they did believe that their current administration supported the change. Derek stated, "I think they see the good in it and want the best from it. They want what's best for the kids, ultimately." Genny also stated she felt administration was on board, "They come in the classroom, they're supportive, always positive on what they've seen. I feel like I can go to them if I'm having trouble or need help with something."

Michele also believed her principal was there for her and her colleagues, "The administration is definitely a support system, like if we have questions or concerns we easily go them and voice them. There's never a hesitation with that." Finally, Dave said, "They've been very supportive…we need their assistance from time to time deciding exactly what to

do during RtI and they're always there as a sounding board. They might not have the answers right away, but they'll always listen and get back to us!"

Administrators can also hold all accountable with implementation by providing assistance with data collection and reporting, a process that can include multiple steps for each individual student: defining the problem, gathering data and evidence, performing data analysis, developing and implementing the intervention, evaluating the intervention, reviewing data for trends (Howell, Patton & Deiotte, 2008, pp. 51-54). School-wide data collection is an integral part of Response to Intervention, and teachers will need administrative guidance and support in order to focus on the instructional aspect of the program as opposed to data management. This does not mean that administrators are directly responsible for inputting data, but rather that they will oversee and manage a system that provides teachers with data they need in a timely manner. Teachers acknowledge that administrators have specific responsibilities in implementation of RtI within their building. Derek indicated, "The administration has made sure that all data is on a centralized access program so separating the kids has been made easier. They [administrators] also have to make sure teams are separating kids properly and accurately so that kids who need intervention are in intervention and kids who need enrichment are in enrichment."   In addition to making sure data is recorded and easily accessible to all, Lauren reported that administrators help with some aspects of assessment. "They [administrators] fill in some data piece, like the probes we give weekly. I think that's something we definitely need. It just takes something off our plate that eats up a lot of time—finding the right probe and the answer key. It doesn't sound like much, but it's a pain." Dave also acknowledged that administrators have accountability within implementation. "I certainly think that it's

something else that they [administrators] have to monitor and make sure that things are getting done like they're supposed to."

Monitoring is certainly a task that a principal should take on, particularly since accountability begins at the top: the building administrator. Mellard and Johnson (2008) indicated that as part of changing roles and structures to implement progress monitoring within RtI, administration must lead the effort to create an infrastructure for progress monitoring; provide necessary technology, materials, and resources; review aggregate data of classrooms and provide feedback; and ensure fidelity of implementation through routine, periodic observation and discussions with staff (p. 56). Bianco (2010) established "fidelity of implementation or treatment integrity requires that teachers provide instruction and progress monitoring according to the research-based method prescribed or to a best-practice protocol" (p. 6). This emphasis on fidelity of implementation leads to the final causal condition of the need for increased administrative support: the need for increased accountability for all. Teachers receiving increased levels of support will not only be clear on the strategies and techniques they should use in the classroom to maximize student learning, they will also observe an increased level of accountability from the principal. If we as educators truly "measure what we treasure", administrators must be an active part of the classroom experience with implementation of RtI.

> Through the use of positive approaches to accountability, schools have the opportunity to implement a system of fidelity checks within a collaborative environment that promotes teacher improvement. As part of that approach, accountability for implementation involves active participation and shared participation among teachers, administrators, students and parents. (Mellard & Johnson, 2008, p. 127)

Administrators who are actively involved in the process will have the opportunity to not only promote student achievement through teacher improvement, but also model accountability for all involved in implementation. "The role of the principal becomes one of capacity-building for the school learning community by helping teachers make decisions for themselves and establish responsibility and accountability for their actions" (Speck, 1999, p. 112).

Such accountability will provide buy-in from the teachers, leading to buy-in from students and other stakeholders. Administrators must not only provide staff development and resources, they must also provide support to teachers by clarifying specific strategies to maximize student learning and by holding all members of the school accountable for increased achievement. "Principal support and understanding are as important to the success of RTI as good instruction and interventions. Principals must provide guidance in the fidelity of the Problem-Solving Team process, and must also ensure that sufficient evidence-based interventions are available" (Howell, Patton & Deiotte, 2008, p. 55-56). Document analysis makes it clear that there must be a variety of intervention strategies with which teachers are able to provide students with support to increase their abilities in reading. "Although much work remains in this area (e.g., especially skill areas other than literacy), research-based methodologies and protocols are available" (Bianco, 2010, p. 5). Students with reading deficits are greatly benefitted by early and ongoing interventions in five core categories of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Report of the National Reading Panel, 2000) and not a focus on grammar and identifying parts of speech. Research by Hughes and Dexter (2011) continued with "The NRP (National Reading Panel) reports that although there are no simple answers or solutions for improving

reading achievement, an extensive body of knowledge now exists delineating the skills children must learn to read well" (p. 5). Teachers must utilize research-based and high-yield strategies in intervention groups for fidelity of implementation. Observations of three classrooms, Genny, Dave and Lauren's, indicated a focus on basic grammar review to prepare for the upcoming state assessment. Michele's lesson included the reading of a short, non-fiction article and answering basic multiple choice comprehension questions, also in preparation for the upcoming state assessment. Denise's students were reading a novel and determining character traits and motivation for behavior, a review of an essential skill that had been previously taught. Derek's students were also engaged in the reading of a novel, and the observation of his classroom was the only one in which any of the five core categories of reading was referenced. Twice during the lesson he spoke to the class about increasing their fluency by the use of specific strategies such as following the text with your finger as you read aloud.

Administrators must increase support by holding everyone, including themselves, accountable for the academic success or failure of students. Wagner et al. (2006) found that when the school leaders themselves began owning the problems and taking responsibility for student achievement "they model a different and more productive way of approaching problems. The collective mindset shifts to a deeper level of engagement, bringing about a new sense of purpose, mission, and commitment to change" (p. 140). School administrators must lead by example, modeling acknowledgment of their commitment and accountability to fidelity of RtI implementation. "In the preparing phase, change leaders also begin to institute new forms of accountability that require collective ownership of and responsibility for the system's problem" (Wagner et al., 2006, p 140). When administrators first communicate and

model their accountability in the need for the change, teachers and students can better

understand their role in being a part of the solution. Derek indicated, "Sometimes the kids

don't see the value in the instruction. It's not really graded as a class. It's on the schedule,

but since they don't get a grade on the report card, they don't take it as seriously. It's hard to

assign homework or make tests seem important when they know there won't be a final

grade." Denise found this to be true as well, "The kids don't work because it's not for a

grade. Sometimes they don't behave as well as they do in regular class because they don't

think it really matters." A lack of student accountability can lead directly to student behavior

issues, which was noted in several of the observations. High levels of accountability for the

teachers and the students will lead to higher levels of engagement in the classroom. "To be

engaged in the learning environment, students must, in collaboration with teachers, build the

classroom environment around clear and common expectations for their learning…" (Nesin,

2005, p. 53). Administrators must support the staff by holding all members accountable for

implementation of RtI, thus providing clear and common expectations for student buy-in and

learning.

However, teachers also report that accountability for the program in general needs to

be increased. An integral part of Response to Intervention is the use of assessments to

determine if the intervention is working. If teachers are not administering and tracking

assessment data frequently, they are not able to modify instruction to meet students' needs.

> The ultimate use of progress monitoring at a district level must include the analysis of
> high-stakes testing over time and of formative district assessments (perhaps as
> frequently as every 3 weeks) aligned to standards assessed on high-stakes testing. In
> a professional learning community practicing RtI, results must be continuously
> monitored and analyzed, and the findings applied.
> (Howell, Patton & Deiotte, 2008, p. 77)

Teacher observations revealed no indicators of frequent student assessment given to determine achievement. "RtI involves a series of measurements and decisions within an iterative process that leads to a final decision about whether or not a child has had an adequate response to intervention" (Vanderheyden, 2011, p. 336). Without such data, it is difficult, if not impossible, to adjust classroom instruction accordingly. A possible solution to increasing student accountability would be to a change in the master schedule in assigning a grade to the RtI instructional block, which would necessitate a need for continued adaptability of programming and structure.

Adaptability

The final theme that emerged from the data analysis of support currently being provided to instructors of RtI for reading at the middle level was a need for adaptability. Interpretive codes included in this theme included scheduling, flexibility of scheduling, grouping, and perceived inequity of time for planning. I define adaptability as the ability to be flexible and adjust according to the need of the organization. Fullan (2002) stated "only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement of student achievement" (p. 6).

Kasak and Uskali (2005) indicated "organizational structures that facilitate learning and nuture relationships have to be flexible, small learning communities so the needs of the students can be recognized and adjustments made in form and function to maximize learning" (p. 141). Teachers interviewed recognized the willingness of the administration to not only make adjustments to the master schedule, but also continual and regular adaptations to the classroom groupings of student in order to best meet the academic needs. Genny

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reported that in order to create the block of time for RtI instruction, "They [administrators] decreased every other class and put it into the RtI time." Additionally, Derek reported, "The teachers saw a need for them to take kids who were struggling and at that point we adjusted our schedule to accommodate."

Master schedules from buildings indicated that there had been recent changes to accommodate student instructional needs; adjusting the master schedule to provide every student in the building a common designated time to receive additional instruction within the Response to Intervention framework. Such adaptability is critical for successful implementation. "The operative word for middle level education has long been *flexibility*. Young adolescent needs and characteristics defy rigidity, and good schools for young adolescents are places that design their practice to reflect and understanding of young adolescent growth and development" (National Middle School Association, 2003, p. 90, emphasis in original). RtI requires that students are continually grouped and regrouped according to their academic needs, and administrators must continue to provide teachers responsible for implementing the necessary interventions with a system in which the need for student schedule change holds a higher level of priority than the needs of the classroom teachers or the attendance system. Leaders are responsible for "ensuring that learning environments do not look like teaching environments—that they are student-centered, not staff-centered, and that core instructional needs and interventions supersede other environmental needs that are less important, such as bell schedules" (Howell, Patton & Deiotte, 2008, p. 30). I believe this is a challenge for building level administrators, as it forces many staff members outside of a comfort zone where it is possible to micromanage student behavior, knowing exactly where each student is supposed to be at every minute of

the school day. While this can be a legitimate concern, student needs for direction and explicit instruction to address instructional needs must outweigh staff needs of managing student behavior and attendance.

A major component of RtI implementation is a schedule that allows flexible groupings of students. "Research has documented that teachers who routinely measure student progress, analyze the results, and adjust their instructional practice accordingly have higher student achievement than those who do not" (Mellard & Johnson, 2008, p. 46).

The documents analyzed, including the master schedules for both schools included in the study, indicated that all students have access to a block of time at the beginning of the school day in which they are able to receive additional instruction in reading. In addition, this period, though listed on the students' schedule for attendance purposes, was fluid and changed based on assessment data. Administrators must continue to provide teachers with a master schedule that is able to accommodate these needs in order for full implementation of RtI.

Response to Intervention provides all students in a building with targeted opportunities to increase achievement in the classroom before they have become seemingly insurmountable. Administrators must support teachers providing these interventions with increased levels of support and continued adaptability with grouping of student learners within the master schedule. Part of that support should be additional time for students to read, time that Dave finds to be essential for increasing student achievement, "I would definitely have students read more—give them more time to read. I also think it's important to pair students with books they enjoy. I truly believe we have to give them the time to practice the craft of reading here at school because they aren't going to get that practice at

home." The additional time that is needed for students also leads to additional time for planning for teachers, a topic which was referenced by multiple participants. Lauren reported, "I think because there's little direction, it's a time crunch. There's a lot of things to do, it's an extra prep. I think we're all willing to help these students. I'm not necessarily sure there's enough direction for us to figure out ourselves how to help them." This frustration was echoed by Michele, "For some people, RtI was definitely a negative approach. Just because they felt that it was another plan and they weren't prepared, you know, weren't well trained to do it. I have regular CA, Challenge CA and Team Studies [RtI] to plan for every day. It's a lot of stuff, a lot of time. Sometimes I can't get it all in." Finally, Genny explained that for successful implementation would require, "Less meetings and more time. Either we, we need to get organized and people do RtI kind of like leadership, our professional leadership teams, where we all get together and discuss what we've been doing or they need to give us time to do it right. It's a lot of extra planning for those of us who do it right." Research completed by Stuart, Rinaldi, and Higgins-Averill (2011) of teachers who were satisfied with their implementation of RtI reported that "participants indicated that the RtI model was effective because they were given time to problem-solve issues surrounding the implementation of instructional interventions while having a framework to use data to inform instruction" (p. 61). Administrators must provide time within the schedule for teachers to plan for effective implementation of RtI. Additional research from Martinez and Young (2011) of how RtI was practiced and perceived recommended:

> School administrators may offer more support and acknowledgement of efforts to classroom teachers as they participate in the formal RtI process. The comments by teachers regarding perceptions of RtI seemed to indicate that teachers were frustrated

with the cumbersome process of meetings, data collection and assessment of effectiveness. (p. 52)

Summary

The process to determine the meanings of the phenomenon of Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of administrative support necessary to implement Response to Intervention has been an enormous undertaking. To complete this task, I utilized interviews, observations and document analysis.

Through the triangulation of data, four predominant themes were identified: communicate a clear purpose, provide staff development, accountability for all, and a need for adaptability.

Five sub-questions were posed to address the overall research question, including:

1) How have two schools implemented the RtI process in reading at the middle level?

2) What problems or obstacles did instructors face in the initial stages of the RtI process for reading at the middle school level?

3) What are some stories of success that teachers report as a result of implementing the RtI process for reading?

4) What are Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of administrative support provided to middle school instructors involved in the RtI process for reading?

5) What are Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of other supports that are helpful to middle school instructors involved in the RtI process for reading?

The first sub-question involved how the individual schools had implemented RtI for reading at the middle level. Both schools have adopted a master schedule providing a

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protected time at the beginning of each school day for interventions in reading and math. This period of time is connected to a brief 5-10 minute homeroom period in each school, during which announcements are made. Following announcements, a block of 30 minutes is assigned to every student and staff member for RtI implementation. Teachers reported that this was somewhat of an iterative process, beginning in previous years with instructional assistants pulling students for additional instruction or students being assigned to a Communication Arts teacher for the homeroom time to allow for additional instruction. The current structure allows for ease of mobility for students, since every student and staff member is engaged in implementation at the same time. However, this flexibility in movement does not translate to practicality of assigning a grade to the class. RtI implementation would require that students should and do move frequently from group to group and there is not a grade assigned to the class in either building. As an administrator responsible for overseeing student schedule changes within the current program of PowerSchool, I understand the apprehension to assign a grade to this time. The time necessary to make schedule changes and transfer grades within the system is not practical nor efficient. This issue leads to teacher frustration with student accountability, and certainly must be addressed to support and sustain RtI implementation.

The second question involved problems or obstacles faced in the initial stages of the RtI process for reading at the middle school level. Largely discussed earlier in the chapter, teachers reported a lack of understanding of the rationale behind the program's selection and its overall purpose, a lack of training, a need for increased support and accountability for all stakeholders, and a continued need for flexibility and change. "It's this simple: schools won't improve until the average building leader begins to work cooperatively with teachers

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to truly, meaningfully oversee and improve instructional quality." (Schmoker, 2006, p. 29). Teachers felt that the structural changes made to provide the common time for all students had helped with implementation, but still struggled with identifying or choosing appropriate resources for instruction and managing the data. Additional or continual training is imperative for staff buy-in and understanding of the program, its components, and individual responsibilities of implementation.

The third question asked for some stories of success that teachers reported as a result of implementation of RtI process for reading. Many teachers felt that students had made academic gains as a direct result of the initiative. Lauren reported, "I have one guy that I've had all year. He came in as a non-reader, failed pretty much 7th grade. He's got a B- now— he's started to like reading." Genny indicated, "I can see a change in my students whenever we get to the classroom, because I will use the RtI time to take adapted versions of stories and teach them prior to them getting it in the classroom. And what happens is, they already know it, it increases their confidence level." Finally, Dave found, "There's been some impact. I had five students in my RtI group move from Basic into Proficient on the MAP (Missouri Assessment Program) test last year, which is a pretty good jump in one year." Teachers have individual or small group stories of success of students with whom they have worked with to increase reaching achievement. They are clearly proud of students' progress and the gains they have made in increasing their academic skills. Key to sustaining the success of RtI implantation is reporting, celebrating and replicating these stories of success throughout the building.

The fourth question addressed was the perceptions of administrative support currently being provided to middle school instructors involved in the RtI process for reading.

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Information provided by interviews, observations and document analysis mirrored information gathered from the second question determining problems or obstacles faced in implementation. Though none of the participants spoke poorly of their current administration or the support they offered, they did express both appreciation and frustration with the key themes of clarity of purpose, staff development, accountability and flexibility. Sparks and Hirsch (1997) reported "it is now clear that success for all students depends upon both the learning of individual school employees *and* improvements in the capacity of the organization to solve problems and renew itself" (p. 12, emphasis in original). It was clear through the research that while there was some level of support being offered in both buildings, this support needed to be increased and continued, or in some cases, initiated. Schlechty (2002) found that before principals can lead others, they must be clear about what they believe. "There is widespread support in the literature of education for the idea that the school is the most important unit in the change process and that the position of principal is the most important position in the educational equation" (p. 53).

The final question addressed Communication Arts teachers' perceptions of other supports that are helpful to middle school instructors involved in the RtI process for reading. One theme identified in this question was the Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program that was initiated at the secondary level in the Postville School District during the 2011-2012 school year. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not the teachers' reliance on strategies or procedures articulated in AVID is due to its recent implementation and training or if it would be of assistance for RtI regardless of when it had been introduced, but regardless there was a strong presence of the program during both interviews and observations. Denise particularly relied heavily on both the program and its lead teacher for

assistance in her classroom. When asked what she would change in order to have a positive impact on student achievement in reading, she replied, "Definitely giving them [students] more tools for organization, and that's where I think AVID is going to help a lot. Because I think having those binders and keeping them in check and tracking their progress is what these kids need to see where they are going and why." Later, she reported that the only training for RtI she had received was AVID strategy training and that the lead teacher for the program in the building was responsible for the support she had received for RtI implementation. All of the teachers observed had physical evidence of AVID implementation in their classrooms, whether it was posters or notebooks.

Though originally I felt that information from this study would mainly be beneficial to administrators in the initial stages of RtI implementation, I believe the final analyses yielded themes that would be advantageous to building leaders hoping to improve implementation at any stage in the process. As the themes emerged from the research, particularly the voices of the teachers in the interviews, it became apparent that as a building leader I must make changes to facilitate RtI implementation in my building. All teachers need a clear communication of purpose, continuing staff development, accountability for all stakeholders, and an adaptable schedule for both students and staff in order for this initiative to succeed. It is my job as a building administrator to ensure that this support is provided.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

Successful Implementation of RtI

Implications for Practice

One of the main reasons I decided to become a building administrator was to focus on improving my skills as an instructional leader in order to raise student achievement for all. I had always enjoyed the classroom experience of leading students through their learning, but there was a part of me that wanted to impact not only the students, but also the adults. While working with adults would bring about many of the same challenges experienced in a classroom, it would necessitate careful and deliberate contemplation of my delivery and results. Initiatives may be required from all staff by the district leadership, but ultimately the building principal is responsible for successful implementation. Response to Intervention was one of the first major shifts in instruction and practice for which I was responsible, and it became an essential part of my learning and instructional leadership in my new role. Teachers were initially less than enthusiastic with information regarding the adoption of this program, and some of them were even hostile during trainings. I was unprepared for such a reaction, as I had always been on the "teacher" side of implementations; this was my first exposure to the administrative side of a shift in programming.

My initial training for RtI left me less than crystal clear on the details—the why, the what, the how—I was unable to articulate this information when asked to present it to the staff. I felt unprepared and that my background information was wholly inadequate for such a presentation. How could I expect the staff in my building to implement such a change in instructional methods and scheduling when I was unable to fully grasp, let alone articulate,

the concept? I knew what I needed to clarify the program and its components, but was more interested in knowing exactly what I needed to do as an instructional leader to help teachers, particularly those responsible for the critical instruction designed to improve reading achievement, implement RtI successfully.

I chose to research schools within my school district because I believe the findings from any of the five middle schools within the district would provide insightful information for me as a leader. The district in which I work has some fairly disparate socio-economic statistics, and I believe that as a whole the district is representative of a number of districts throughout the state. The purpose was to explore teachers' perceptions of the administrative support needed for improved implementation of RtI and what support they currently perceived to be already in place. The findings from this study should help administrative teams at buildings that are at any stage of implementation of RtI with instructional leadership, providing what the teachers deem to be necessary support. Because my intention was to facilitate implementation or continuing implementation at any site, I felt it was important to listen to voices of the teachers involved in the day to day implementation of the program. While administrators definitely would have opinions and insight as to how to best implement RtI, when the rubber hits the road it is the teachers who left to put the policy into practice. Often times, these practices are done largely behind closed doors, without the full knowledge of the administrators within the building. I felt teachers would provide honest and helpful feedback when they were asked to report what support they deemed necessary from the administrative team for full implementation.

To begin, principals need to communicate a clear purpose to staff and stakeholders when implementing Response to Intervention. The method of communication is not at issue

here; it is simply imperative that communication is occurring regularly between the

administrator and his or her staff. Without this information, teachers will not have an

understanding of why such a change needs to be made and how it will best serve the needs of

the students. Schmoker (1999) believed that many schools do not explicitly define the

connection between the change in programming and measureable academic achievement

increases:

> We have what is perhaps the most striking, contradictory, self-defeating characteristic of
> schooling and our efforts to improve it: the gap between the need—and intent—to improve
> academic performance in our schools on the one hand, and the conspicuous and virtual
> absence of clear, concrete academic goals in most school or planning efforts on the other.
> (p. 23)

Building administrators may have clear understanding of RtI and its origins and conceptual

framework and goals, but unless it is if it clearly communicated to the staff, there cannot be

ownership in implementation. An initiative will not make lasting change unless everyone is

on board, and it is imperative that every person's role is clearly defined by the building leader.

"The leader must communicate through words and actions the analysis of the present and the

development of the shared vision on a daily basis. The leader learns to expand current

knowledge and understanding for the improvement of the school" (Speck, 1999, p. 53). Staff

members left to find their own way through the change will likely fall back onto previous,

familiar roles—roles that may be comfortable, but roles that did not lead directly to academic

achievement for all students. Blase and Blase (2001) recommended "all faculty and staff

members should be included in school-based decision making. Paraprofessionals, secretaries,

and other support staff members are essential to the effective functioning of the school, and

they provide significant services for students (p. 70)." When everyone is on board, there will

be consistency throughout the building with implementation. If only a select group of

teachers, whether it be a content area or a grade level, are clear on their roles and expectations, there will a sense in inequity in work done for implementation. The building leader is responsible for distributing information to all staff members to share the work load necessary for the change.

An absolutely critical piece of improving implementation of RtI is to provide staff development. Sparks and Hirsch (1997) concluded "professional development of school employees and significant changes in the organizations in which they work are both required if schools are to adequately prepare students for life in a world that is becoming increasingly complex" (p. 96). While this seems to be a fairly pedestrian concept, it was startling to me as a researcher to learn that many of the teachers interviewed reported having received absolutely no staff development whatsoever prior to implementation. Whether that was truly the case or if training was indeed provided but under a different umbrella of instruction, the perception remains the same: Teachers directly involved with providing the instruction to increase reading achievement through RtI did not feel they had received adequate professional development, or worse yet, had none at all. Speck (1999) stated:

> The principal must cultivate the development of the collaborative decision-making process where teachers work together with access to information and resources critical to effective instructional decision making and promote substantial professional development to implement new curriculum and instructional practices." (p. 132)

Without training, educators are unable to provide lesson plans that match the needs of the students they are teaching. Providing staff development opportunities in and of itself will not suffice. A building leader must lead his or her staff to connections to the training and the classroom. "Competencies are most effectively built when professional development is focused, job-embedded, continuous, constructed, and collaborative" (Wagner et al., 2006, p.

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99). Additionally, teachers without training are unaware of the resources that are available in the classrooms. My observations indicated that teachers were in possession of and students had access to district-level adoptions of textbooks and other ancillary resources. District-level adoptions are supported by on-going staff development opportunities provided to teachers as part of the contractual agreement between the district and the textbook company. Without such development, newly purchased textbooks and other materials are more likely to sit on the shelf. Teachers interviewed were unable to refer directly to aligned resources—textbooks or otherwise---that would be essential to helping with RtI implementation. Despite this seeming wealth of resources, Wagner et al. reported "without defined and focused priorities, directly connected to improving instruction, we see little likelihood of raising student achievement. A clear purpose and focused efforts are indispensible to a successful change process in any organization" (p. 66). Administrators must make connections between instruction and resources clear. Finally, as the person responsible for the building budget, administrators must communicate not only what resources are available, but also dialogue with teachers about what resources are needed. "The principal must provide the information, resources, and opportunities for teachers to understand, review, decide, and develop or implement curriculum that will lead to learning for all students" (Speck, 1999, p. 133). We cannot let an implementation fail because teachers do not have access to proper materials or are unclear as to how they should be used.

Teachers perceived that administrators at the time were providing some support for implementation of RtI; however, this was an area in which there was ample room to grow. Not only do teachers need to be clear on the resources that are available for use, but they also need clarification on specific strategies and techniques that will maximize student learning.

Need for instructional support goes hand in hand with staff development, however, current

middle level administrators are required to do more than act as instructional leaders within

the building. "Current research points to middle level principals continuing to act not only as

instructional/management leaders, but also as 'enablers' of the transformation of middle level

schools to become more developmentally responsive to the nature and needs of young

adolescents" (Valentine, Trimble, & Whitaker, 1997, pp. 344-345). Such a transformation

will require administrators to provide both staff development and clear communication as to

the purpose. The data management piece of RtI is another area in which teachers need

administrative support. "Data help us to monitor and assess performance. Just as goals are

an essential element of success, so data are an essential piece of working toward goals. As

with goals, data must be used judiciously and with discretion" (Schmoker, 1999, p. 35). In

addition, Howell, Patton, and Deiotte (2008) reported "data must be easily accessible,

understandable, relevant, current, and accurate. RtI fails when data do not conform to these

requirements, thus rendering the data unusable by teachers, administrators, and parents" (p.

9). Response to Intervention is extremely data-rich; teachers must have access to data

regarding universal screenings, weekly probe scores, growth indicators, national rankings,

and rates of improvement to name a few. If there is not a data management system and plan

in place to assist them, they will be drowning in data within a few weeks of implementation,

and it will not be possible for educationally sound decisions about instruction to take place.

Administrators must provide teachers with a process for which the information can be stored

and easily attained when needed. Howell, Patton, and Deoitte (2008) suggested the use of

either a spreadsheet to graph student progress a commercially distributed assessment

program meeting the requirements for probes, data tracking and graphing (pp. 87-88). While

either of these programs will meet the requirements of recording and tracking student

progress, it is the responsibility of the building leader to oversee a systematic method in

which data are accessed and utilized.

Finally, teachers need increased accountability from the top down for

implementation. Reeves (2006) determined:

> by employing holistic accountability, leaders know not only what the results are but
> what the purported causes of student achievement are. Identification and
> measurement of adult professional practices are essential if we are to move from the
> secrecy essential for chaos to the openness necessary for order. (p.167)

When principals are able to define and articulate what exactly is making an impact

instructionally in the classroom, all students will benefit. Administrators must model this

accountability through classroom observations and reflective conversations on instruction.

"Until we begin to routinely respect and respond to the best that is known about effective

teaching and organizational improvement, we forfeit the benefits of the rich knowledge base

that can inform our teamwork as we pursue substantive goals" (Schmoker, 1999, p. 70).

Learning what is effective in classrooms must begin with principals being in classrooms—

observing and having reflective conversations with the teachers about the instruction that has

just occurred. RtI cannot succeed for all students without fidelity of implementation from all

involved. If all teachers, not just those directly involved with increasing reading

achievement, are held accountable for their role and responsibilities, there will be increased

buy-in from both the staff and the students. Once administrators have modeled

accountability for the staff, it can become a part of the fabric of the entire school:

> In cultures of commitment, it is not so much the administrators who hold teachers
> accountable, it is the teachers who hold themselves accountable to creating genuine
> learning opportunities for their students. Their sense of accountability is passed on to
> the students." (Starratt, 1996, p. 120)

It is important that the building administrator ensures that everyone is doing his or her part to increase student learning.

Teachers also perceive that administrators must continue to be adaptable within the constructs of the schedule or student groupings. Schools must make changes to provide a common time for all students to receive individualized instruction, whether that is additional should be designated on the master schedule, again increasing accountability for all staff to implement the program with fidelity. "Successful schools do not give a second thought to decisive and immediate interventions, including changing schedules, providing double classes for literacy and math…" (Reeves, 2006, p. 87), and leaders must be at the forefront of these cultural changes occurring. The building administrator must prioritize to keep this time sacred to instruction for RtI, as there will never enough time in a school day to meet the need of every program or group. What is scheduled for all students is important for all students and staff, and this block of time must be maintained by the school leader. This block of time provides teachers with the ability to move students based on academic needs as opposed to needs of a strict schedule dictated by a clock. Without this flexibility, students will not receive the individual attention they need. "The developmentally responsive middle level principal provides teachers with time for planning and encourages modifications of time, grouping, and instructional strategies to meet students' needs" (Anafara, Roney, Smarkola, DuCette, & Gross, 2006, p. 60). Administrators are the keeper of the master schedule and as such must ensure that it reflects this school-wide common time for RtI implementation.

"The leader provides planning, organizing, coordinating, and scheduling to the life of the school. An accomplished management engineer is skilled at manipulating strategies and situations to ensure optimum effectiveness" (Serviovanni, 1999, p. 7).

Recommendations

I recommend that administrators in any stage of RtI implementation take a hard look at their implementation plan and ask themselves and their teachers some critical questions.

1. Leaders must communicate the purpose of RtI. Can all staff articulate not only the how, but the what and the why? If not, it will be necessary to take a step back and reengage the staff in background information about how this initiative will increase the achievement of all students within a building. Johnson and Smith (2011) stated that though the challenges of RtI implementation are significant, they are manageable. "The building principal must understand the system and must develop short-and-long-term goals and procedures to make implementation successful. The principal must keep staff focused on the school's goals of improved student achievement and must manage resources" (p. 28).

2. Leaders must provide professional development to teachers for implementation. Did they leave the development with clear expectations and roles for all in the school community? If staff development has been provided, it is important to revisit the plan, how it will be implemented and the resources available for implementation on a regular basis. Fischer and Hamer (2010) reported that while many districts impose on teachers a model for implementation for new initiatives from outside the school or district, they found "quality, sustainable restructuring and reform efforts emerge when teachers and administrators engage as skilled collaborators in their own professional development" (p. 16). The needs of the students and the staff will continue to change over time; the staff development made available to lead this implementation must change as well.

3. Administrators must provide adequate support to teachers for proper implementation. Are teachers able to match appropriate strategies with student needs? Do

they have access to necessary information to make instructional decisions? Do they feel that everyone is being held accountable for implementation? Clark and Clark (2007) reported "a commitment to high expectations and student success guarantees that student learning will be the focus of the school and that principals and teachers will take action on that commitment in their classrooms and in their schools" (p. 56). If teachers do not feel they are receiving enough support, it is likely that the students also feel they are not receiving enough support. Stronger teachers will result in stronger achievement from students. Administrators are responsible for providing whatever it is that teachers need.

4. Administrators must ensure the master schedule provides all students with opportunities to receive individualized instruction. Are instructional needs or scheduling needs dictating a student's day? If the clock or the attendance system is leading the charge on the master schedule, it is time to revisit the purpose of RtI. Student learning must be at the forefront of the master schedule, and the need for continued adaptability will require that today's schedule may not look like tomorrow's. Sartori (2010) reported that in order to prepare students for the world that awaits them, administrators must facilitate a shift to agile education:

> Agile education requires a new lens on the process of education that is driven by student learning data and best practices. The data must be timely and relevant and the best practices must be appropriate for a generation of learners who will require a new definition of 'highly qualified', 'proficient', and 'conducive learning environments.'(p. 13)

5. Administrators must be cognizant of the need to reculture the school and staff they oversee in order for sustained change to be possible. "Reculturing is defined as changes that occur as a result of educators reflecting on, evaluating, and expanding their own mental models regarding the education of young people" (Caruthers, Thompson, & Eubanks, 2004,

p. 36). Teachers involved in the process must have opportunities to reflect upon the instructional changes that are being made in the classroom and engage in critical conversations that determine if these changes are indeed working. Without such a reculturing process, there is a possibility of returning to patterns and methods of instruction that are more familiar and less intimidating to previously held mental models.

Future Research Needs

Future research is needed with a mixed method study with a randomized selection sample size, across a broader demographic range, and including a variety of geographical regions. These expanded parameters would increase the perspective of administrative support needed for implementation from its currently limited scope. More research is needed to determine what staff development activities are particularly relevant and produce the most application in classroom instruction. More research is needed to determine not only which resources are best aligned to increasing reading achievement, but also to determine which specific strategies maximize student learning in regards to increasing reading abilities. More research is also necessary to determine how best to manage and store the data produced within Response to Intervention.

While there is an abundance of research available in regards to implementation of RtI at the elementary level, there is a need for additional research at the secondary level. Since the time this research began, many secondary schools have successfully begun the process of implementation, and more research is needed to determine what critical elements were

necessary for implementation in those buildings. High school implementation, particularly with a school-wide common time master schedule, is an area that needs additional research.

Recent trends in education include instructional leadership from not only the building administration, but also from a teacher hired to act as an instructional coach. Instructional coaches could be a key component to effective implementation of Response to Intervention, and more research is needed to determine how instructional leadership can be shared most effectively between the administration and the instructional coach when implementing RtI.

There is a continued need for more research on Response to Intervention and its success with raising student achievement in regards to reading. What impact is made on learning if intervention begins at the middle level? Will RtI change the way public schools look at Special Education placement and programming? What role will RtI have in helping students succeed with Common Core Expectations or Smarter Balanced Assessments?

Building leaders who are charged with raising academic achievement for all students in middle schools today are faced with many challenges. One program that addresses the needs of all students, including those in the middle of the achievement spectrum, is Response to Intervention. As with any initiative, simply stating that it is in place will not yield any long-term results. It is imperative that building principals lead instructional change for both students and for staff in order for sustainable change to take place. Administrators must be mindful they communicate a clear and concise purpose for the program and the reasons for the change, provide initial and continual staff development for the instructors responsible for implementation, model accountability for all stakeholders, and provide a structure and schedule that is adaptable to the needs of the teachers and the students.

TEMPLATE FOR CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Classroom Observation Template

Teacher's Name:

Building Location:

Date:

Time Entered:
Time Exited:

How does this observation directly align with the Response to Intervention process?

Physical Environment

What if any indications are visible regarding the instruction of reading?

What if any indications are visible regarding the Response to Intervention program?

What if any support materials (not part of district-wide adoptions) aligned to the instruction of reading are visible?

Instructional Time

What if any direct references to improving reading abilities are made by the instructor?

What resources if any were used for the purposes of improving reading skills?

What if any assessment materials were used to measure individual student's reading skills?

Descriptions of Activities (including length between transitional activities):

What is the teacher doing?   **What are the students doing?**

Time:

Time:

APPENDIX B

SSIRB APPROVAL

From: barrethr@umkc.edu [mailto:barrethr@umkc.edu]
Sent: Friday, February 03, 2012 10:48 AM
To: Friend, Jennifer I.
Cc: Barreth, Rebekah; Barreth, Rebekah
Subject: Study SS11-153e: Communication Arts Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support
Necessary for Implementation of Response to Intervention
February 3, 2012

Jennifer Friend, Ph.D.
UMKC - School of Education
328 Education
Kansas City, MO 64110

Approval Date: 12/16/2011
Expiration Date: 2/1/2013
Review Type: Expedited Category # 7

RE: SSIRB Protocol #: SS11-153e, entitled: "Communication Arts Teachers' Perceptions of
Administrative Support Necessary for Implementation of Response to Intervention"

Dear Dr. Friend,

The above referenced study, and your participation as a principal investigator, was reviewed by a
member of the Social Sciences Institutional Review Board on 2/2/2012, and was granted a
conditional approval.

You have met the required conditions for approval and are granted permission to conduct your
study as described in your application.

The approval includes the following:
- Consent Form Version approved form 02/3/2012 to 02/1/2013
All subjects must be consented on a copy of the stamped SSIRB approved consent form.
-Application submitted on 02/1/2012
-Letter to Parents
-Template for field observations

-Template for Teacher Interviews

The ability to conduct this study will expire on or before 2/1/2013 unless a request for continuing review is received and approved. If you intend to continue conduct of this study, it is your responsibility to provide a Research Progress Report prior to the expiration of approval.

There are 5 stipulations of approval:
1) No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date. (PIs and sponsors are responsible for initiating Continuing Review proceedings).
2) All unanticipated or serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB.
3) All protocol modifications must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk. This includes any change of investigator.
4) All protocol deviations must be reported to the IRB.
5) All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.

Please contact the administrative office of the SSIRB (email: umkcssirb@umkc.edu; phone: 816-235-5927) if you have questions about what may or may not need review.

Thank you,

SSIRB Administrative Office

PLEASE NOTE:
If you are using a signed consent form, a SSIRB stamped approved version will follow via a separate email.

If a signed copy of this letter is needed, please contact a member of the IRB staff.

This e-mail is an official notification intended only for the use of the recipient(s). If you have received this communication in error, please return it to the sender immediately and delete any copy of it from your computer system.

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VITA

Stephanie Paulette Schnoebelen was born in Iowa City, Iowa in 1969. She attended elementary through high school in the Iowa City School District, graduating from West High School in 1987. She completed her Bachelors in Arts at the University of Iowa with a major in English. She moved to Kansas City, Missouri after student teaching at Central Middle School in Kansas City, Kansas. She was married to David Schnoebelen in 1992.

Mrs. Schnoebelen began her teaching career at Central Middle School, where she taught English for 11 years. While at Central, she served as a House Coordinator, ultimately sparking an interest in administration. She moved to North Kansas City Schools in 2002, teaching 7th grade Communication Arts at Northgate Middle School. In 2005, she was awarded her Masters Degree in Administration and accepted the position of Secondary Communication Arts Coordinator for the North Kansas City District. In 2008, she completed her Specialist in Education and began her administrative career as an assistant principal at Northgate Middle School. She is currently an assistant principal at Maple Park Middle School, also part of North Kansas City Schools.

Mrs. Schnoebelen has been married to David for 20 years and has two children. Her son, Derek, will be a freshman in the fall of 2012 at Missouri University of Science and Technology, where he will study engineering. Her daughter, Lauren, will finish her senior year at St. Pius X High School in Kansas City, Missouri in 2012.