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Reading Specialist's Perceptions and Role in Implementing Response to Intervention

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Walden University

College of Education

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Twyla Heindl

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Reading Specialist's Perceptions and Roles in Implementing Response to Intervention

by

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MS, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, 1998

BS, St. Mary's University, 1991

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

April 2015

Abstract

The roles of reading specialists differ from campus to campus throughout the study site due to varied implementations of Response to Intervention (RTI). To ensure that students were receiving consistent interventions based on their needs, the site needed to examine how and when instructional services were delivered to struggling students, as well as the role of the reading specialist in the process. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions, experiences, and roles of reading specialists as the RTI framework was implemented at the elementary school level. This study was guided by Vygotsky's social constructivist learning theory, which holds that understanding is built through interactions, observations, and experiences. The research questions focused on the reading specialists' understanding of RTI, reading specialists' roles in RTI, challenges of implementing RTI, and professional development provided on RTI. Data were transcribed, categorized, open coded, and thematically analyzed. Member checks were used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. Results revealed 5 major themes: understanding the RTI process, supporting struggling students, lack of funding and resources, collaboration/communication, and staff development. The findings can contribute to positive social change by leading administrators, instructional support teachers, and reading specialists to an increased understanding of the RTI process, and thereby improving RTI implementation procedures for struggling readers and subsequently increasing student achievement.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Patrick, and son, Taylor.

Patrick, you have provided me continued support and encouragement throughout this endeavor and for the past 29 years. I love you! Thank you for your patience, belief, and faith in me. Without you, this would not have happened. Hopefully this is the last degree for me!

To my son, Taylor, who inspires me every day to do my best and give it my all. I want you to see that a drive for learning and knowledge never ends. I want you to know how important education is and I hope as your mother, I have shown you this. I want you to make all of your dreams come true! Thank you for your patience when Mom was working on this project and could not spend a lot of quality time with you during the weekdays. Thank you for constantly checking in to see what I was doing and telling me “I love you Mom.” Now, that this goal is over, you are a freshman in college. You now have papers of your own to write!

Pat and Taylor, thank you both for believing in me. I love my two favorite guys!

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First, thanks to God, the Father, and my provider for bringing me through this challenging and rewarding journey. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). This verse has kept me focused at times when this journey has seemed daunting and unattainable.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Reading specialists are considered knowledgeable and highly qualified to follow a model of intervention called response to intervention (RTI; Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008) in an attempt to lessen the academic gap in students who are not on par with their classmates (Courtade et al., 2010; Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). Although no universal approach to RTI exists, researchers have generally described RTI as a multi-tiered model of intervention. RTI is a model of early intervention used as a preventative measure to assist struggling students in becoming literate members of the global society (Bender, 2009; Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010; Fuchs et al., 2005; McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2005). RTI is a method of monitoring the academic progress of students who are identified with a learning disability and for those students who do not have a learning disability (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a). The tiers vary based on the degree of intensity with which the research-based instructions are applied. The intensity differs by the group size, amount of time, and number of days the interventions are employed (Bender, 2009; Bursuck & Blanks, 2010). In this study I will explore the perspectives, experiences, and roles of reading specialists on implementing RTI in a large suburban school district in the southwest.

The purpose of RTI is to prevent reading failure through early detection, and provide remediation using scientifically based reading research strategies by a highly qualified person, such as a reading specialist (Fuchs et al, 2007; Hoover & Love, 2011). The primary roles and responsibilities of reading specialists were classified as assessment, instruction, and leadership (International Reading Association (IRA), 2003).

Reading specialists must understand how to administer and interpret reading assessments and how to use them in planning instruction (Bean, 2009a). These specialists must provide instruction for struggling students and perform more leadership roles by providing staff development, curriculum planning, and by participating on the student study team for interventions (Bean, 2009a). The reading specialist position is more diversified and the responsibilities have changed since the first position was created. IDEA, (2004) has contributed to the current focus on reading specialists by adding additional responsibilities, such as consistent and continuous progress monitoring for students who are in the RTI process. Additionally, the increased role of accountability for making adequate yearly progress (AYP) and providing research-based interventions as a preventative measure to assist struggling readers has increased the demand for reading specialists (Bean, 2009a; Farstrup, 2006; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). In this study, I explored the reading specialist's perceptions and responsibilities in implementing RTI on various campuses throughout the study site. The importance of the reading specialist's role in promoting literacy and how this knowledge was used for student achievement was examined.

RTI Tier 1 Intervention

The first level of support is Tier 1. This level provided the primary support for students in the regular classroom setting (Davis & Barton, 2006; Hall, 2008; Fuchs & Mellard, 2007). At this level, high quality, scientifically-based instruction using a core reading program was provided to address the needs of all or the majority of students in the general education program (Bender, 2009; Davis & Barton, 2006; RTI Action

Network, 2011). Scientifically-based instruction included and referred to instructional practices, curriculum, and programs that had been tested and proven to be effective for most students (CT State Education Resource Center, 2010). Scientifically-based reading instruction and programs had been proven to be successful through thorough analysis and testing in controlled studies; acceptance in peer-reviewed journals; and reliable and valid data measurements from multiple evaluators (Dole, 2004; NCLB, 2002). Intervention support at this level consisted of the classroom teacher providing core instruction to all students for a minimum of 90 minutes (Marchand-Martella, Ruby, & Martella, 2007). The general education classroom teacher determined a student's current academic level by using a district, campus, or universal assessment to evaluate students' current level of performance (Hilton, 2007). Based on the assessment information, teachers created learning goals for students who were identified as performing below level (Hilton, 2007). The classroom teacher monitored the student's individual progress on a consistent basis to ensure core instruction was adequate, appropriate, and effective (Anderson, 2007; Marchand-Martella, Ruby & Martella, 2007).

According to Gersten and Dimino (2006), approximately 80 – 90% of students progress academically with the core curriculum of Tier 1 without the need for additional support. Students who did not show adequate progress received small group instruction from the classroom teacher (Anderson, 2007; Gersten & Dimino (2006); Fuchs et al., 2007). A designated amount of time, usually 8 to 12 weeks was scheduled to allow the student to show progress within Tier 1 Anderson, 2007; Gersten & Dimino (2006). In the classroom, students received differentiated instruction tailored to their needs based on

assessments by the classroom teacher (Anderson, 2007; Gersten & Dimino 2006; Hilton, 2007). If significant progress was made, students in Tier 1 were released back to the core reading program in the classroom. Despite effective instructional practices provided in this tier, some students did not make progress and moved to the next level of intervention, Tier 2.

RTI Tier 2 Intervention

Tier 2 interventions are targeted and augmented the support provided in Tier 1 for 5 – 10% of students (Gersten & Dimino, 2006). This level targeted a specific difficulty for students who did not meet the progress level established in Tier 1 as shown in data collected from academic performance assessments and progress monitoring (Anderson, 2007; Marchand-Martella, Ruby, & Martella, 2007). The intensity varied based on group size, frequency and length of intervention (Anderson, 2007). Tier 2 services and interventions were provided in a small-group setting, in addition to Tier 1 instruction. Tier 2 interventions, in general, did not exceed 12 weeks (Anderson, 2007; Fuchs et al., 2007). If students did not respond at this level of intervention, then more rigorous support was required, and students were moved to Tier 3.

RTI Tier 3 Intervention

Tier 3 was the most intensive level of intervention prior to referral for special education testing (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a). Tier 3 provided 1 – 5% of struggling students individualized support or small groups of one-to-three with the reading specialist or specialized professional (Bradley et al., 2007; Fuchs

& Fuchs, 2006a; Gersten & Dimino 2006). Tier 3 interventions were routinely provided daily for 30 – 60 minutes (Bradley et al., 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a).

The intent of RTI was to close the achievement gap between the low income and middle class populations and provide early intervention for students who are at risk of failure due to not meeting state standards and district created reading expectations (Allington, 2006a; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Greenwood & Kim, 2012; Hughes & Dexler, 2011). The interventions should be based on student needs, and according to the literature, differentiation was an effective means of meeting the diverse learning needs of students who had differing abilities (Friend & Pope, 2005; Levy, 2008; Tomlinson, 2003). The use of differentiated instruction has been gaining momentum in the field of education (Levy, 2008; Tomlinson, 2003). Differentiation allows the lesson's content, process, or product to be changed based on the abilities, interests, and needs of the students (Anderson, 2007; Levy, 2008; Tomlinson, 2003).

RTI provided a more authentic and “valid” method of identifying students with reading difficulties (Gersten & Dimino, 2006, p. 100; Greenwood & Kim, 2012). In the wait to fail model, students often were not identified as having significant discrepancies in reading until they were eight or nine years old (Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Greenwood & Kim, 2012; Hughes & Dexler, 2011). Even though, researchers of RTI approved of the use more so than the previous “wait to fail” model, RTI had its proponents and opponents (Bender & Shores, 2007; Hughes & Dexler, 2011). RTI was a proactive concept which used progress-monitoring, data gathering, high quality instruction, and ongoing assessments to gauge a student’s progress and achievement (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber,

2010). RTI sought success for all students and to keep them from being overly routed into the special education system without being given an adequate amount of time to learn (Buffum et al., 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008; Greenwood & Kim, 2012). The premise behind RTI was to provide early intervention support to struggling students in order to prevent their failure in reading at a later time (Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Greenwood & Kim, 2012). Researchers such as Fuchs and Deschler (2007), advised educators that RTI was still in the initiation stage, and caution should be taken until sufficient research had been conducted to determine the effectiveness of the entire process to include implementation of each tier, interventions provided, and progress monitoring.

Comprehension was a goal of reading and students who lack comprehension failed to succeed in elementary school and beyond (Lenters, 2006; Sporer, Brunstein, & Kiesche, 2009; Youngs & Serafini, 2011). Being a competent reader is an essential in society. Without the ability to read, students will be at a disadvantage (Lenters, 2006; Sporer, Brunstein, & Kiesche, 2009; Youngs & Serafini, 2011). Legislators considered reading success when reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). The intent of these educational reforms was to guide schools in providing support for struggling students, to have all children reading on grade level by the year 2014, and to direct states in creating challenging standards for reading achievement (NCLB, 2002). The purpose of this study was to explore the reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, and roles in

implementing RTI. The participants are four elementary reading specialists who work in a large suburban district in southwestern Texas.

Problem Statement

The implementation of the RTI framework in the district had created challenges for reading specialists. There were inconsistencies in the level of knowledge among reading specialists and how RTI was implemented in schools. While the Northside Independent School District (NISD)Title 1 Office (2011) had outlined the roles and responsibilities of a reading specialist in general, the roles and responsibilities in RTI at the study site were not clearly defined. Due to this vagueness, the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists differed from campus to campus throughout the study site. As a consequence, students were not receiving consistent interventions based on their needs, which caused the RTI process to be ineffective for struggling students based on lower benchmark scores and informal reading assessments.

For example, reading specialists in the study site were required to provide interventions for students who were identified based on failure on state or district curriculum benchmark assessments. Groups formed on targeted needs in the study site did not occur as outlined in the literature on RTI (Allington, 2009; Bursucks & Banks, 2010; Lose, 2008). Faced with time restrictions and curriculum timeline requirements, teachers wanted all students who were not achieving in reading pulled for intervention services at the same time from their classrooms, without regards to the individual deficit(s) each student had according to one fifth grade teacher.

RTI had become a critical factor in determining if a student received reading interventions and academic support prior to testing for a learning disability. The guidelines set in the District RTI Plan (NISD, 2009; see Appendix A) required classroom teachers to produce data, such as reading assessments and fluency rates as evidence that intervention was warranted. This requirement to produce evidence that students were struggling prevented some students from receiving academic intervention services at the study site in a timely manner. Teacher documentation and observation of student strengths and weaknesses based on reading assessments, running records, unit assessments, and teacher observation was lacking in Tier 1. When the RTI committee (composed of the principal, counselor, psychologist, reading specialist, math specialist, and teacher of record) met for collaboration, the committee was supposed to identify current educational concerns and create a plan of action to support the struggling student.

Currently, few researchers have explored the perceptions, experiences, and roles of the reading specialist in implementing the RTI process. In this study, I hoped to contribute to the body of knowledge on understanding how reading specialists perceived their roles and responsibilities in the RTI implementation process. Qualitative data was collected through a survey, semistructured interview, focus group, and a diary. Information was recorded, transcribed, categorized, coded and labeled and entered into a computer database.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a qualitative case study approach to explore the reading specialist's perceptions of his/her responsibilities in implementing the RTI framework on

elementary campuses in the study site. Merriam (2009), stated that “qualitative researchers were interested in how people interpreted their experiences, how they constructed their worlds, and what meaning they attributed to their experiences” (p. 5). In conducting qualitative research, the researcher had a personal connection to the study; the voices and human insight of the participants were in the forefront allowing sense to be made from observations within a natural environment or setting (Glesne, 2011). In-depth information was collected from interviews, a focus group, a survey, and a reflective journal in order to accumulate thick and rich descriptions (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009, Stake, 2010). The reading specialists’ experiences described and analyzed in this study were the perceptions of four elementary reading specialists in one school district. A detailed description of the methodology that I used in this study is presented in Section 3.

Research Question

The main research questions guiding this study were:

1. What were the reading specialist’s understanding of the RTI process?
2. How did reading specialists describe their roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI?
3. What were the experiences and challenges of elementary school reading specialists in implementing RTI?
4. What staff development support did reading specialists provide to classroom teachers regarding implementing RTI?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, and roles in implementing the RTI process. The significance of this study was to provide reading specialists with information that may assist them in discovering the challenges in the study site concerning implementing RTI. In addition this research may give reading specialists an increased understanding of the RTI process and ensure that research-based instructional strategies were being provided to and used with struggling readers.

The results of this study may assist and guide reading specialists in using more collaborative methods to support struggling readers in RTI in the study site and to increase the collaboration between reading specialists and classroom teachers. Also, collaboration may increase reading specialists' knowledge of implementing the RTI process and equip them with learning tools and research based ways to share with peers and colleagues in their schools and across the district.

Conceptual Framework

Reading specialists work with students and teachers to provide and improve literacy outcomes on a campus. The conceptual framework for this research study was based on Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) social constructivist learning theory. *Constructivism* is a learning theory that explains how people learn and it supports the idea that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world they live in through their personal experiences and interactions (Creswell, 2009; Wink & Putney, 2002). The constructivist's view posits that we build our own understanding through interactions,

observations, and unique learning experiences (Creswell, 2009). Constructivists reflected on, created paradigms, and defined their own realities through understanding the perspectives and beliefs of others in order to make sense of their experiences (Matsuoka, 2003).

Social interaction and collaboration with others allowed new learning opportunities to develop (Thirteen Ed Online, 2003). The constructivist's theory of learning allowed reading specialists the opportunity to share their ideas and thoughts on reading issues (Roth, 2009) by constructing their own meaning in order to understand their experiences and responsibilities in implementing RTI. The RTI framework was an early detection or prevention system that helped to identify students who were struggling in reading and provided quality support to keep students from failing. Screenings, monitoring, and targeted instruction were used to address student deficits (Allington, 2009; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008; VanDerHeyden, 2011).

Vygotsky's (1978) position on social development conceived that people learn from each other and language was the primary means of communication between humans. Creswell (2009), stated that qualitative studies using a constructivist's lens communicated and emphasized the participant's views and the setting of the study. Through the use of previous experiences with struggling students and the problem solving component of RTI, reading specialists noticed that old knowledge helped build new connections (Barry, 2008; Bean, 2009a; Gallagher, 2004; Wink & Putney, 2002). In view of this, it was vital that reading specialists became aware of their responsibilities in

implementing the RTI process and how these responsibilities impacted the education of struggling readers.

Ideas can be learned with the help of others who already possess the knowledge and skills (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky (1978), people used language to facilitate learning and thinking. This qualitative study gathered and analyzed data from interviews, a focus group, a survey, and a reflection journal to learn the experiences and responsibilities of reading specialists in implementing the RTI process.

Essential to Vygotsky's constructivist theory was the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD was defined as the range in which a student can work with the help of a teacher, another student, or while working cooperatively (Zaretskii, 2009). There were tasks that a student could perform independently and there were some tasks that students could not complete even with help (Vygotsky, 1986). While in the ZPD range, a student could learn a task with assistance allowing them the ability to complete the task independently the next time. Constructivists viewed reading as the experiences gained through direct instruction as well as the social interactions that occurred in the student's environment (Zaretskii, 2009). The ZPD is Vygotsky's most famous theory presented to those who worked in the education field. The ZPD has influenced our perceptions of how students learn and develop (Wink & Putney, 2002).

Operational Definitions

The following terms and phrases are defined and used in this study.

Differentiated instruction (DI): Instruction that is planned and varied to maximize student growth and meet the specific needs of learners by adjusting time, content, and delivery (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2011; Huebner, 2010; Knowles, 2009)

Explicit instruction: Direct, face-to-face teaching that uses explanation, demonstration, and practice in a logical order to model skills, thinking, and learning concepts (Tackett, Roberts, Baker, & Scammaca, 2009).

Highly qualified educator: An educator who has met the state standards and certifications for the position they are currently employed (Courtade, Servilio, Ludlow, & Anderson, 2010).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA): A national law that governs and ensures that each state and public agency provide early intervention, special education and related services to children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Intensive instruction: Explicit, systematic, and targeted instruction designed to meet the specific needs of struggling readers. Highly skilled reading specialists work in a small group setting or with individual students to provide this instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006b).

International Reading Association (IRA) Standards: The knowledge, responsibilities, roles, and qualifications necessary for a reading specialist to complete their job (2004, 2010).

NISD Title I Office Elementary Reading Specialist Certification Requirements:

- Master's Degree

- Professional Reading Specialist Certification
- Minimum 3 years teaching experience
- Familiarity with IRA/NCTE, state and district standards
- Training in district language arts and reading initiatives
- Campus leadership experience

NISD Title 1 Office Elementary Reading Specialist Job Description:

- Provide support services for students experiencing reading difficulties
- Evaluate students for strengths and weaknesses in reading/language arts.
- Participate in development of 504 and ARD accommodation and modification plans.
- Test students for dyslexia and provide appropriate instructional interventions for identified students.
- Plan, demonstrate, co-teach, and coach with classroom teachers.
- Meet with grade level teams to assist in implementation of reading/language arts curriculum.
- Serve as a resource for professional materials and instructional strategies/materials.
- Present staff development sessions for grade level teams and campus staff.
- Assist administration in identifying campus weaknesses in reading/language arts.
- Assist teachers in disaggregating and analyzing data from curriculum diagnostic benchmarks (CDBs).

- Assist teachers in developing curriculum-based assessments and instruction.
- Participate in position-related professional development.
- Provide support for family reading opportunities/other campus reading initiatives.
- Work closely with parents to assist students with reading difficulties.
- Meet with district instructional specialists for reading/language arts on regular basis and send information to campus.
- Perform other duties as suggested by campus principal and district instructional specialist for elementary reading/language arts.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): NCLB is a federal law that set high standards and established goals in education to ensure all students have an equal and fair opportunity to have academic success (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002).

Problem-solving model approach: A model in which a problem is identified, interventions are applied, and the results are assessed to determine if the problem has been solved (Buffum et al., 2009).

Progress monitoring: A method used to collect information on student academic performance over a selected period of time in order to determine effectiveness of instruction and interventions (Tackett, Roberts, Baker, & Scammaca, 2009).

Pull out program: Reading specialists pull students out of their regular classroom to work with them in an alternate setting (Bean, 2004).

Reading intervention: Instruction provided to struggling readers based on academic deficits in reading. (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Reading Specialist: A person who has extensive knowledge about the reading process, reading instruction, and reading interventions (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Research-based intervention: Interventions that have been used with a large sample of students and have demonstrated a positive correlation between the intervention and student progress. In addition, the results have been documented in peer-reviewed literature or by a panel of experts through vigorous, scientific review. Sometimes called *evidence-based or scientific-based* (Tackett, Roberts, Baker, & Scammaca, 2009).

Response to Intervention (RTI): RTI is a tiered system of interventions used to identify students who are struggling academically (Buffum et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Staff development: The meaning used in this project relates to specific learning behaviors that are intended for teachers to develop professional expertise in reading (Tatum, 2004).

Struggling readers: Students who need extra support in reading based on formal and informal assessments (Bean, 2009a; Dole, 2004).

Study Site RTI Committee: Consists of a school psychologist, counselor, reading specialist, principal, vice principal, language support teacher, math specialist, and writing specialist who meet to discuss the academic needs of struggling students and interventions to implement (NISD, 2009).

Targeted instruction: Instruction focused on a specific skill or need (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006b).

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, I made several assumptions. I assumed that all reading specialists who participated in this study answered the interview questions in a truthful manner according to their experiences and feelings. Also, it was assumed that the reading specialist's perceptions were indicative of reading specialists who held a reading specialist certificate with a minimum of three years in the position. It was assumed that the reading specialists were familiar with implementing the RTI framework and the NISD (2009). It was assumed that the data collection items offered a differentiated look at the practices conducted by reading specialists. It was assumed that reading specialists not participating in this study would have the same perceptions of and experiences with implementing RTI as those reading specialists participating in this study. It was assumed that the researcher's relationship with the participants would not influence their ability to answer questions openly and honestly.

Limitations

This research study was intended to collect information on the reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, and roles in implementing the RTI process. A major limitation to this study was that the only participants were elementary level reading specialists in one district. Reading specialists had the opportunity to withdraw if they were uncomfortable with the questions presented. While this research provided valuable

information on the reading specialist's perspectives and roles in implementing RTI, the results may not pertain to middle and high school level reading specialists.

Another limitation to this study was that I worked as a certified reading specialist in the study site and may have a personal stake in the study, in addition to cumulative knowledge of the RTI process. As researcher, interviewer, and data collector there was a potential for researcher bias to occur threatening the validity of the study. According to Merriam (2009), the researcher should identify potential biases and monitor to ensure the biases do not control the research. In order to minimize this threat to validity, I did not choose reading specialists to participate from my cohort of schools. I did not have any authority over the participants, we were just colleagues. Furthermore, I remained unbiased and maintained all focus on the research questions presented in this study.

Delimitations

A delimitation to this research study was that the research only included elementary school reading specialists within one study site. The interviews in this study only included the perceptions of four elementary school reading specialists; Middle school and high school reading specialists were not included in this study. Much of the literature reviewed focused on RTI at the elementary school level in the subject area of reading, which aligned with the purpose of this study.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study included four elementary level reading specialists who worked in a large suburban district in southwest Texas. In this study, semistructured interviews, a focus group, a survey, and journals were used as data collection

mechanisms. The focus of this study was the perceptions, experiences, and roles of reading specialists in implementing the RTI process on various campuses throughout one study site for approximately 6 weeks. Creswell (2009), recommended using a small participant base to accumulate rich and comprehensive data. In case study research the focus is on a small number of participants from a limited area or location (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2009). Extending the study to all 110 elementary school reading specialists in the study site would provide a more comprehensive study, however this was not possible due to the quality of the data to be collected and the time limitation to conduct this research.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because it addressed the reading specialists' perceptions, experiences, and roles in implementing the RTI process. Research existed on the roles of reading specialists, however there were no studies on the experiences, perceptions, and roles of reading specialists in implementing the RTI process. The results of this study may add to the body of research to inform reading specialists on the roles and responsibilities they have in RTI and to improve the reading specialists' understanding of the RTI process and the interventions provided in the RTI process. The results from this study can be compared with the IRA (2010) standards to determine if reading specialists in the study site performed the duties outlined in the publication and adequately supported struggling readers.

In addition, this study may be significant to reading specialists in the study site by guiding them in effectively implementing the high quality research-based instruction component of RTI, which could determine if the interventions were meeting the needs of

struggling students. This study could assist reading specialists in providing guidance to teachers on practices to meet the needs of students who are struggling academically. Preceding the RTI legislation, struggling readers were not often identified until after the academic achievement gap had formed. According to Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, and Linan-Thompson, (2007) early identification of struggling readers were the best strategy for reducing deficits in reading. Students, who struggled to read in the primary grades, continued to do so in the intermediate grades if intervention and remediation did not occur (Wanzek et al., 2007; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008).

RTI had become the buzzword of the reading specialists in the study site since the passing of the NCLB in 2002. RTI was changing the traditional role of reading specialists in the way instruction was delivered to students, the type of professional staff development provided to teachers, and the critical role reading specialists held in implementing the RTI process. Reading specialists were no longer just remedial teachers who provided disconnected instruction in an isolated setting; the role was changing into that of expert collaborators who consulted with teachers and provided guidance in the subject of reading (Bean, 2004; Bean 2009a; Ippolito, 2012).

This study can be used to inform the reader and reading specialists as well as generate effective instructional strategies under the RTI umbrella, in addition to contributing to the limited amount of existing literature on RTI and the reading specialist's role in implementing the process. This study may also provide new information for reading specialists and the study site on approaches to interventions and methods to assist struggling readers.

In addition, the results of this study held the potential to give insight on how to implement change for struggling readers whether in the classroom or in a pullout setting. It was hoped that the campus administrators and district reading and language arts department gain a better understanding of the reading specialist's perceptions of RTI and how this understanding could assist in better implementation and prevention of reading failures. This study can provide knowledge of areas where training was required in order to create an effective RTI program.

Furthermore, this study may assist reading specialists in guiding teachers through staff development opportunities in order to create successful achievement in reading for struggling students. This information may be used to help prepare future reading specialists' for roles at the elementary school level. Finally, this study can contribute to social change in the study site by identifying and providing a uniform process for reading specialists to follow that enabled struggling students in RTI to receive definitive reading support essential to promoting successful and literate citizens.

Summary

Reading specialists have an essential role in improving the achievement of struggling students in the RTI process. In order to be effective, reading specialists must have knowledge of the RTI process and research-based interventions to use with struggling readers. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions, experiences, and roles reading specialist had in implementing RTI. A qualitative case study design was selected for use in this study.

This study is organized into five sections. This section included an introduction to this research study, problem to be studied, the significance of this study, review of the literature and conceptual framework used. In Section 2, I provide a review of the literature on the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists and the emergence of this role in implementing RTI. Traditional and current research related to reading specialists, response to intervention, struggling readers, and professional development was reviewed. Section 3 contains an explanation of the research methodology used in this study, including information about the research design, participants, research questions, interview questions, methods of data collection and data analysis used in this study. In Section 4, I gave details of the data analysis and interpretation of the study. Information on the participants' responses to the research questions, details on themes and categories discovered was included. Section 5 includes a discussion on the data analysis and research findings, recommendations for future research or studies and implications for social change that could be drawn from this study.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to examine reading specialist's perspectives, roles, and responsibilities in implementing RTI. In the following review, I describe the literature associated with the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists and the emergence of this role in implementing RTI. Traditional and current research related to reading specialists, response to intervention, struggling readers, and professional development is reviewed. In this literature review, I also synthesize the research related to the reading specialist's role in RTI.

Organization of the Review

In this section, I examined the literature relevant to the research questions and presented and provided guidance and background information for this study. This literature review was categorized into the following parts: response to intervention legislation, current and past research on roles and responsibilities; IRA reading specialist standards; roles and responsibilities of reading specialist; defining RTI; the three tier model; RTI approaches; RTI and reading specialists; struggling readers; assessment and progress monitoring; effective teaching practices and interventions. Research on the roles of reading specialists was examined in order to explain the work related to reading specialists and to reveal the gaps in the literature when considering the reading specialist's roles in RTI.

Search Strategy

I searched databases and full-length educational textbooks, along with e-books from the Walden Library for references on the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists in implementing RTI. Throughout this study relevant articles continued to surface concerning RTI, interventions, and the reading specialist's role in this problem solving process. The online databases searched in this study were Education Research Complete, Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Academic Search Premier, Teacher Reference Center, dissertations in Walden Research Center, and e-books. The following key words (Creswell, 2009) were used in the search: response to intervention, reading specialist standards, reading specialist roles and responsibilities, research-based interventions, struggling readers, reading assessment, reading specialist staff development, No Child Left Behind, IDEA, and reading specialist.

Although research on the roles and responsibilities of the reading specialist in implementing a RTI framework was absent in the literature, research studies existed on the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists in general. Several studies using surveys and interviews were significant in documenting the role of reading specialists (Bean, 2009b; Cassidy, Garrett, Maxfield, & Patchett, 2009; Dole, 2004; Quattroche & Wepner, 2008); however, those studies did not address or give a definitive description on the role of reading specialists under a RTI framework. Most of the literature researched in this case study on the roles of reading specialist in RTI was centered on the reading specialist roles and reading standards created by the International Reading Association (2000, 2004, and 2010).

Response to Intervention Legislation

Congress passed the NCLB Act (2002) and the IDEA Act (2004) to demand high quality research-based instruction be provided for all students, especially students achieving below grade level expectations. These acts established the response to intervention (RTI) framework supporting the mandate that reading specialists and teachers must be highly qualified professionals and use research-based interventions if students were to achieve success in reading instruction (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2002). Jointly, these laws emphasized the importance of linking general education and special education by using research-based interventions and assisting students in meeting and maintaining grade level expectations. A key portion of the No Child Left Behind Act was the attention placed on reading (NCLB, 2002).

In 2012, President Barack Obama announced a waiver system that allowed states a reprieve from the NCLB mandate (Klein, 2012; McNeil, 2011). States approved for the waiver no longer had to meet the 2014 deadline of having all third graders reading on grade level, but must create a plan for targeting college and career readiness and be willing to set higher and more reasonable academic expectations than those currently outlined in NCLB (Gewertz, 2011; Klein, 2012; NSTA, 2011). Gewertz (2011) pointed out that states must show that “they have rigorous academic standards, a solid plan to transform standards into good instruction, and tests that ensured students were ready for college or good jobs” (p. 20).

Many states were opting out of the federal requirements dictated by the NCLB mandate. The primary reasons for opting out of this federal directive were: lack of

funding for sustaining the necessary requirements to reach the expected levels of performance; the high stakes testing each state had created encouraged teachers to teach to the test while not giving students a well-rounded portion of the curriculum; and by focusing only on math and reading, other curricular areas tended to be neglected (Gewertz, 2011; O'Lear & Dahl, 2008). A profound amount of importance had been placed on reading and scientifically-based reading instruction. In order to meet the demands dictated by the government, struggling readers needed support from highly qualified knowledgeable teachers and support specialists in order to meet the 2014 goal (Courtade, Servilio, Ludlow, & Anderson, 2010).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The previous model of using the intelligence quotient (IQ) to determine a student's qualification for special education was determined to be ineffective because it could not reliably identify students in the primary grades due to the fact that the identified deficit was not significant at that level (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a). The IQ method allowed a large number of minority students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds to be classified as having a disability and entered into special education (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006). The labeling of students and placing them into the special education program failed minority students and failed to close the achievement gap between minority and white students (Harry & Klinger, 2007). The revised IDEA legislation (IDEA, 2004) has more specific language than that written in the previous version of the law (IDEA, 1975). The new edition required local education agencies to collect and analyze data to determine if disproportionality based on

race or ethnicity was occurring in special education and to develop measures to prevent the occurrence (IDEA, 2004). An alternative method for schools and districts to use as an early intervention for students struggling academically and at risk of placement into special education existed in the form of RTI (IDEA, 2004). The cornerstone of the (IDEA) legislation was intervention to provide students who were struggling academically with high quality research-based instruction (Kavale & Spaulding, 2008; Mellard, Frey, & Woods, 2012). When using RTI to prevent failure of struggling students, Johnston (2010) noted that the number of students classified as having a learning disability or enrolled in special education decreased.

Defining RTI

RTI was a problem-solving process where student assessment information was crucial in making educational decisions on interventions for struggling students (Elliot, 2008; Hoover & Love, 2011). RTI had been defined as a method of delivering high quality instruction and interventions to meet the needs of struggling students (Elliot, 2008). Student's academic progress was monitored and assessment information was collected to use in designing and providing intervention support for students. RTI increased the collaboration between key members of the RTI committee and a shared responsibility had begun to evolve within the RTI process (Elliot, 2008; Hilton, 2007; Hoover & Love, 2011).

RTI incorporated scientifically-based instruction, assessment, and intervention practices in a comprehensive approach to education (Bender, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). RTI was a framework that had the potential to reform and improve education for

all students through a systematic process (Bender, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

According to The American Institutes for Research (AIR):

RTI was a multi-level prevention system that included three levels of intensity or prevention. The primary prevention level included high quality core instruction. The secondary level included evidence-based intervention(s) of moderate intensity. The tertiary prevention level included individualized intervention(s) of increased intensity for students who show minimal response to secondary prevention. (AIR, 2015)

Interventions were provided at varying levels of intensity to match the needs of the struggling student (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2014). Regular education teachers and subject area specialists provided high quality coordinated interventions to meet the specific needs of struggling students (Allington, 2009; Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007). Student progress was monitored at each level using assessments to determine the amount of growth achieved and what actions to take based on adequate or inadequate progress (Bender & Shores, 2007; Vaughn, Wanzek, Murray, Scammacca, Linan-Thompson, & Woodruff, 2009).

RTI had the potential to decrease the number of students identified as requiring special education. The RTI process can create an environment of success for all students, not just the ones who struggle in the regular education classroom (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). In general, the RTI framework was usually shown in a three tier design (Buffum et al., 2010) which progressed from Tier 1 classroom instruction provided by the teacher, to Tier 2 instruction provided by a interventionist, to Tier 3

instruction, where more intensive reading instruction was received (Buffum et al., 2010). RTI intended to help all students succeed.

RTI is a legal initiative that supported schools in assisting students who struggled to learn (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009 IDEA, 2004). This idea was envisioned in the IDEA (2004) legislation, which promoted the use of scientific or evidence-based reading instruction, supported constant progress monitoring of student achievement, and encouraged instruction, which met the needs of all students. RTI required schools to provide specific and targeted interventions as soon as a definitive need arose (Buffum et al., 2009; Fuchs et al., 2014). Students who were in need of intervention support were identified by scores on reading assessments, deficient skills exhibited during core instruction, insufficient response to research-based instruction and interventions, and scores that were significantly lower than classroom peers on curriculum benchmarks (Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Fuchs et al., 2014). The RTI mandates emphasized the education of all students: general and special education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Response to Intervention Model, The Three-Tier Model were components explored in this study.

Describing the Three Tier Model

Most common RTI models had three tiers which allowed students time to show progress with the implemented interventions or to increase time or change a strategy if the current method was not showing adequate achievement during the designated period of intervention. RTI integrated a multitiered system of increasing, intensive instruction at each tier or level. Assessments were used to identify students who struggled and did not

respond to instruction received (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a; Vaughn et al., 2009). Similarities existed among RTI models as students were allowed to move fluidly back and forth between tiers as academic needs warranted. According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2007), tiers should be flexible and allow movement based on student progress or lack thereof.

Tier 1. The first tier, Tier 1 was the beginning of interventions that occurred in the classroom for all students using research-based instructional practices (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006b). Small group instruction was given to struggling students based on their specific needs and instructional levels based on reading assessments. Fisher and Frey (2010) found that approximately 75 to 85 % of students who were in Tier 1 instruction should make adequate progress with only core instruction. Teachers monitored student success and gauged growth through universal screenings and progress monitoring 3 to 4 times a year to determine if additional interventions or support was required. Differentiated instruction was the cornerstone that made this tier of instruction successful.

Tier 2. Tier 2 interventions were targeted instruction supplemental to Tier 1 interventions for students who did not make adequate progress in Tier 1. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006b) and Fisher and Frey (2010) found that approximately 10 to 15 % of the students were falling behind their peers in reading and needed more focused and intensive support. Students continued to receive evidence-based instruction at this level, but a trained specialist often provided the intervention and progress was monitored more frequently. Research showed that small group instruction was effective in closing the achievement gap of students who were lagging behind their peers (Allington, 2006b; Buffum et al., 2009; Fountas & Pinnel, 2006; Al Otaiba, Wagner, & Miller, 2014).

Tier 3. Tier 3 interventions were the most intensive, targeted interventions for struggling readers who had not responded to Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions. Fisher and Fry (2010) stated that only 5 to 10 % of students required Tier 3 interventions. At this level, students received more frequency, duration, and intensity of interventions in a smaller teacher to student ratio. Wanzek and Vaughn (2010) noticed that a smaller group of students did seem to reinforce the intervention received. Frequent assessments to diagnose student needs, and focused lessons prescribed to target deficits comprised this level (Buffum et al., 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006b).

Students received research-based instructional practices in all three tiers of the RTI framework (Dunn, 2010; Frey & Fisher, 2010). A system must exist for the collection and analysis of data in order to determine appropriate interventions when a student is experiencing academic difficulty. Student growth and success was monitored at all three levels (Dunn, 2010; Frey & Fisher, 2010). Even though RTI takes a variety of forms, problem-solving and standard protocols were the two approaches prevalent in the literature reviewed (Buffum et al., 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010; Howell, Patton, & Deiotte, 2008). The information reviewed in these models examined the student's experiences and performances to determine if a problem existed (Buffum et al., 2009).

RTI Approaches

The two principal approaches or models used in implementing RTI were the problem solving model and the standard protocol model. Both the problem solving and standard protocol approaches based decisions on data and followed the core principles of

RTI (Buffum et al., 2009; Howell et al., 2008). The two models are explained in the following sections.

Problem-Solving Model

The problem solving model tended to be a more flexible approach to determining the capabilities of students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a). The problem solving model assessed individual student's academic strengths and weaknesses, recommended research-based interventions, and monitored the effectiveness of the interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a; Howell et al., 2008). This model used interventions selected by a RTI committee, which targeted the learning needs of individual students (Buffum et al., 2009; Howell et al., 2008). According to Howell et al. (2008), a problem- solving approach used a collaborative team to review the strengths and weaknesses of students, determine research-based interventions, and collect frequent data on student progress. A team had the ability to develop a more prescriptive learning plan for each student because of the level of expertise and knowledge they possessed (Buffum et al., 2009).

The problem-solving model examined the difficulties a student was having in core instruction and determined a logical intervention based on the needs of the student. If the student did not respond to the intervention, the team collected and analyzed data and created a new intervention plan. Buffum et al. (2009) stated, “the staff may be more likely to embrace the selected intervention because their expertise has been used to make the intervention decisions” (p. 29). Each committee member’s individual talents were used to create an intervention plan for struggling students, which sets this model apart from others (Howell et al., 2008).

Even though the state of Texas did not dictate which model to use, a combination of approaches were used in the study site (NISD, 2009). In the study site, baseline data from all stakeholders (teachers, parents, reading specialist, math specialists, counselors) on the RTI Committee was collected, and then a specific plan of action was designed for each student (NISD, 2009). Fisher and Frey (2010) stated that “the problem solving model required more training on a diverse set of intervention programs.... Reading specialists may have to spend more time ensuring that the interventions are implemented correctly” (p. 29). Problem solving occurred at all tiers in RTI in order to match instructional resources to student needs.

Standard Protocol Model

The standard protocol model was a prescriptive approach with a strong research base. This model increased the amount time and intensity level of support provided at each level (Marston, 2005). The standard protocol model used one consistent intervention, often selected by the reading specialist or a committee of knowledgeable people who could address a variety of student needs. The standard protocol model chose interventions that addressed a number of academic weaknesses. Once the intervention was selected, students received remediation in a small group setting by a staff member trained in the intervention (Allington, 2009; Buffum et al., 2009). This model uses evidence-based instructional practices in an effort to help students acquire deficient skills (Marston, 2005). In the study site, a list of research-based interventions for each tier level has been created (NISD, 2009). Buffum et al. (2009) claimed that the standard protocol model typically had an available list of research-based interventions available for

identified students. The interventions available in the standard protocol model were designed to address identified weaknesses exhibited by most struggling readers (Buffum et al., 2009; Marston, 2005), followed an established criterion and were provided by trained professionals well-versed in all aspects of the interventions they provided (Allington, 2009; Buffum et al., 2009).

This method was highly structured and had a systematic approach to matching identified students to appropriate interventions based on specific needs (Buffum et al., 2009; Marston, 2005). Numerous standard protocol interventions were commercially packaged programs, which had been created to address a specific need as recommended by the National Reading Panel (2000). Berkeley, Bender, Gregg, and Saunders (2009) identified two states, Pennsylvania and Oregon that adopted and consistently used the standard protocol model as the primary system used when determining a student's eligibility for special education testing. Despite the chosen method, RTI is a complex system where schools need to be intentional in their choices on instructional interventions (Fisher & Frey, 2010).

Collaboration, communication, continual assessment, and progress monitoring within each model was necessary for effective implementation and overall student achievement (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Collaboration among administration, teachers, reading specialists, counselors, and psychologists in the RTI process was vital to the success of the RTI process (Buffum et al., 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010). Meaningful staff collaboration allowed for the review of data, sharing of subject area expertise, and

provided feedback from interventions implemented (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

Collaboration and communication on a regular basis between the teacher and the reading specialist allowed for consistency and continuity in instruction and learning (Goddard, et al., 2007; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Reading specialists routinely met with teachers to review progress and discuss academic success in struggling students (Allington, 2007; Cassidy, Valadez, & Garrett, 2010). Accountability for the education of all students became the responsibility of everyone in the school (Bender & Shores, 2007; Bradley et al., 2007).

Current and Past Research on Roles and Responsibilities

Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, and Wallis (2002) conducted a national research survey presenting the question “What do Reading Specialists do?” The International Reading Association charged a team of researchers in 1996 to develop a survey where participants would document the work they performed on a daily basis. These researchers mailed surveys to a random sample of some 4000 IRA members. Out of over 4,000 members who received surveys, only 38% were returned, mostly by elementary school reading specialists (Bean et al., 2002). Based on the results of this survey, the primary functions of the reading specialists aligned with the finding of the IRA (2010), which listed the roles and responsibilities as those of assessment, instruction, and leadership (Al Otaiba, & Hosp, 2008; Bean et al., 2002; IRA, 2010).

Reading specialists in this survey “believed that literacy improvement for all students, not just struggling readers was their responsibility” (Bean et al., 2002, p. 738).

Changes in the role of the reading specialist based on this survey highlighted the growth in the increased amounts of paperwork reading specialists were required to complete; the reading specialist's role as a resource to and for teachers; the reading specialist's role in modeling and demonstrating lessons in the classroom; and an increasing amount of the reading specialist's instructional time with students designated as special education (Bean et al., 2002; Farstrup, 2007a).

Qualitative research on the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists tend to view the role as one of a resource to teachers. Using survey data, focus groups, and interviews, researchers found that the major responsibilities of reading specialists included supporting struggling readers and professional development for teachers (Bean et al., 2002; IRA 2000, 2004, 2006, 2010; and Quattroche et al., 2001). Bean et al., (2002) examined the roles of reading specialists who worked in exemplary schools and found that they served in the capacity of a resource for teachers, reading coordinator, and instructor for struggling students. Dole (2004), pointed out in a qualitative study that reading specialists served in a collaborative role of providing teaching and lesson planning support to teachers. Most of the existing studies in the literature revealed the reading specialist's role in relation to curriculum, yet a limited amount of research existed on the reading specialist's role in implementing RTI.

Since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) placed more accountability and demands on students to perform in reading by achieving grade level proficiency, reading specialists have become a vital part of the RTI process. Reading specialists in schools across the

nation provide intervention support to students who are struggling in reading (Allington, 2007; Quinn, 2009). The search for techniques to increase student literacy has made reading specialists the link between instruction and RTI. Improving student success and achievement in reading is the ultimate goal of both RTI and reading specialists.

IRA Reading Specialist Standards

The roles of the reading specialist varied across districts and schools. In a response to meet the needs and accountability of a literate society, IRA (2010) revised the standards for reading specialists. The following list comprised the new IRA standards for reading specialists:

1. Foundational knowledge: Possess an understanding of the reading process
2. Curriculum and instruction: Use instructional approaches to support student achievement and learning in reading
3. Assessment and Evaluation: Use a variety of assessments to evaluate reading practices
4. Diversity: Create and value diverse literacy experiences for students
5. Literate Learning Environment: Create a literate environment that promotes reading
6. Professional learning and development: View professional development as a life-long pursuit

These IRA Reading Specialist standards were emphasized in this research study in order to show the current roles and responsibilities of reading specialists in implementing a RTI framework. RTI is a method of using specific resources to help meet the needs of all

students (Blair, Rupley, & Nichols, 2007; Fountas & Pinnel, 2008; Tilly, 2006). The RTI process identified a student who was struggling academically and used interventions in an attempt to solve the problem that were causing the student to struggle. The progress the student made using the intervention was monitored and adjustments were made as to whether the intervention was a success or failure for that student.

According to Farstrup (2006b) and Walpole and Blamey (2008), reading specialists must be ready and able to work with not only struggling readers, but also serve as a resource and support for teachers. The role of a reading specialist is one that has breadth, depth of knowledge, and expertise in the field of reading (Bean, 2009a). This designated them as an important factor in the response to intervention process revising their traditional role (Farstrup, 2006a; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). The IRA Reading Specialist Standards (2010) described the knowledge reading specialists should possess in relation to the reading process and literacy development. The IRA Standards also emphasized what reading specialists should be able to do when working with struggling readers and in the role of reading specialist.

Roles and Responsibilities of a Reading Specialist

Historically, the role of reading specialists had been that of working with remedial readers (Bean, 2009a) and trying to prevent student failure in reading. This section provided information on the traditional and 21st century roles of the reading specialist. The traditional role of a reading specialist from the inception in the 1930s as illustrated by Bean (2009a) through the changes in the roles of reading specialists that were currently outlined in the IRA Reading Standards (2010) were highlighted. In performing

this study, I discovered that research-based studies on the role of reading specialists in implementing RTI were absent from the literature.

Traditional Role of Reading Specialist

According to Bean (2009a), reading specialists have been present since the 1930s where the primary function was that of supervising teachers in order to improve reading programs. After World War II, in the mid 1940s, reading specialists began to work with struggling students as “remedial teachers” (Bean, 2009a, p. 2). Traditionally, the role of a reading specialist had been that of remediation of students who were struggling and reading below grade level expectations.

In 1965, the government provided funding for Title 1 in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that intended to improve reading and math achievement in schools with large numbers of economically disadvantaged populations (Bean, 2009a). The original act required reading specialists to provide resources and work only with qualified students (Bean, 2009a). During the years between 1960 and 1970, reading specialists worked as remedial teachers working with students in small groups in an alternate pullout setting (Dole, 2004). In the pullout model, students were removed from the regular classroom and missed interactions with peers (Dole, 2004). Quattroche et al. (2001) noted that “pullout” programs have become questionable due to the limitations on the amount of students who can receive reading services. Student reading improved; however, the achievement gap continued to widen. There was disengagement between what occurred in the students’ classroom and what occurred in the pullout setting (Bean, 2004). The instruction in the pullout sessions consisted mostly

of drill and worksheets (Bean, 2009a; Quattroche et al., 2001) and students were not afforded the opportunity to spend quality time reading. Reading specialists working in collaboration with the classroom teacher were required to connect the learning students were receiving in pullout to that which was offered in the classroom (Bean, 2009a; Quattroche et al., 2001). This requirement established the role for reading specialists, as that of resource teacher and collaborator.

Due to budget reform in the late years between 1980 and 1990, numerous reading specialist positions were cut and instruction became the responsibility of instructional assistants (Quattroche et al., 2001). These shortages resulted in schools hiring instructional assistants who possessed only a high school diploma to work with a certified teacher to assist struggling students (Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004). With the loss of reading specialists, an overwhelming number of struggling readers did not receive quality instruction or adequate remediation by a trained professional during this decline because classroom teachers were not prepared for the loss of the reading specialist's support in reading (Allington, 2006c; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011).

Instructional assistants who were originally hired to perform clerical tasks or one-to-one support for student duties changed to those of performing instructional tasks in a regular classroom (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Patterson, 2006). Instructional assistants were charged with performing roles such as administering assessments, creating lesson plans, and providing instruction which many were not highly qualified or trained to provide (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Patterson, 2006). According to Patterson (2006), instructional assistants provided support to students without lesson plans or guidance

from teachers or other more qualified personnel. Instructional assistants can serve a critical role in remediating and supporting students, but only if they receive proper training (Patterson, 2006). Instructional assistants were responsible for providing direct instruction to struggling students even though many of these instructional assistants had not received appropriate training in reading strategies, assessments, and best practices in reading (McKenzie & Lewis, 2008; Hauerwas & Goessling, 2008). Prior to the 2001 reauthorization of IDEA, instructional assistants who worked in Title 1 schools were only required to possess a high school diploma (Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004). Since then, NCLB legislation required instructional assistants to “possess at least 2 years of college, complete a state or local academic assessment of knowledge in the basic skills of reading, writing, and math” (McKenzie & Lewis, 2008, p. 459; NCLB, 2002). In the study site the instructional assistant works with the classroom teacher to meet the challenges of struggling readers.

Typically, the function of reading specialists has been that of working with students who struggled in reading and “supplementing or supplanting” what occurs in the regular classroom (IRA, 2000). Providing guidance in reading to classroom teachers was not an initial part of the reading specialist’s role (Bean, 2009b). Traditionally, reading specialists’ roles were to provide remediation or supplemental instruction to struggling students (Dole, 2004). Struggling students were sent to the reading specialist in a pullout setting to receive instruction that was often separate from the instruction that was being provided by the classroom teacher (Dole, 2004). In essence, reading specialists were seen as remedial tutors to students who were failing reading (Gupta & Oboler, 2001).

Quattroche et al., (2001) mentions that with the staggering number of struggling readers over two million, a special task force was created to identify the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists (IRA, 2000). This task force defined a reading specialist as “a professional with advanced preparation and experience in reading who has responsibility for the literacy performance of readers in general and of struggling readers in particular” (IRA, 2000, p. 116). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed to assist disadvantaged students who lacked literacy skills. According to Allington (1994), the intent of the ESEA was to provide reading resources for economically deprived schools and communities. This legislation allowed the hiring of reading teachers in schools and helped to create college programs for reading specialists (Allington, 1994).

Reading specialists began to pull struggling students out of class to provide remediation of skills in a separate setting from the classroom (Dole, 2004). In the 1970s, the reading specialist’s role was to diagnose and prescribe instructional practices and routines for struggling readers (Bean, 2009b). In the 1980s and 1990s, reading specialists began to push into the classroom and consult with teachers on effective instructional practices to support struggling readers (Dole, 2004; Dole, Liang, Watkins & Wiggins, 2006; Quattroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001). Reading specialists are essential parts in helping teachers deliver quality instruction and interventions to all students (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2007). In order for students to achieve the goal of becoming proficient readers, teachers and reading specialists are crucial to the process.

21st Century Role of Reading Specialists

The reading specialist position has been around for many years and the roles, and responsibilities have changed throughout those years (Quattroche et al., 2001). Reading is a priority; with increasing accountability, more students lacking skills in reading, and increased student diversity, reading specialists are in demand (Bean, 2009). The IRA (2010) stated that the roles reading specialists perform vary based on the needs of the students they support. Quattroche & Wepner (2008) suggested that reading specialists are “valuable leaders on the ground and in the heart of the educational process” who have the “literary expertise” to assist and guide principals who may lack the instructional background necessary to prepare students for academic success in reading (p. 6). Principals can draw upon the reading specialist’s broad knowledge of instruction and instructional practices to build student success (Quattroche & Wepner, 2008).

Reading specialists’ roles in the 21st century have undergone changes and consist of providing research-based instruction for struggling readers, providing staff development, supporting teachers, serving as a teacher resource, assessing students, and demonstrating skills and strategies in the classroom (Bean, 2009b; Dole, 2004; Quattroche et al., 2001). Focus has changed from remedial pullout services to one of emphasizing research-based instructional practices and reading specialists serving as reading coaches (Bean, 2009b). Reading specialists supported students who were having difficulty with reading as well as the school’s literacy program and guided staff in data analysis, administering assessments, consulting with parents, and observing reading instruction (IRA, 2006).

The role of the reading specialist is evolving and uncertain at times (Walpole & Blamey, 2008). Today with the emphasis on reading achievement and at-risk students reading specialists may provide assistance through coaching, collaborating, and are involved in problem solving to determine the best instruction to meet the needs of struggling students (Dole, 2004; Dole, 2009; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). This change resulted in the IRA standards for reading specialists being changed. The International Reading Association (IRA) (2003) contended that the reading specialist were an instructional leader who provided staff development, created, examined, and assessed reading development and progress on a campus. Dole (2004) announced that reading specialists are collaborating with teachers in an effort to help them improve reading instruction and implement quality instructional practices. The primary research on the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists beginning in the mid 1960s to present day studies has come from the IRA and Bean (Allington, 1994; Bean, 1979; Bean, 2009a). The commercially packaged reading programs evolved during this time providing scripted instruction to be used with struggling students (Bean, 1979).

Reading specialists were qualified experts with extensive knowledge of the reading process and promoted learning for all students, especially those who struggle (IRA, 2010). Reading specialists used the knowledge they acquired from past and present research, their work with students, and their conversations with colleagues to gain breadth and depth in their understanding of reading (Allington, 2009). Reading specialists must be aware of reading practices that worked with and helped all students receive the specific instruction essential for achievement in reading. The role was often dictated by

the district and government if federal funding is involved (Gupta & Oboler, 2001). The stakes have been raised with state mandated tests and accountability ratings. Reading specialists are presented with additional challenges to improve literacy achievement of struggling readers in order to meet the requirements of NCLB (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; NCLB, 2002). Successful classroom instruction and intervention support is required to reach struggling students and accelerate their learning.

Based on the premise of IDEIA (2004) and the implications of RTI, reading specialists were presented with new and expanded challenges in the area of professional staff development for teachers (Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008). Professional staff development was discussed later in this review. The roles and responsibilities of reading specialists varied from campus to campus, district to district, and state to state (Berkeley et al., 2009; Quattroche et al., 2001); however, one role of a reading specialist in RTI was to identify struggling readers and provide interventions in an attempt to circumvent failure and to prevent unnecessary identification in the special education system (Allington, 2006a). In the RTI process reading specialists worked directly with special education professionals to determine appropriate reading interventions and assessed student strengths and weaknesses.

RTI Model and Reading

RTI focused on reading, math, and behavior, however, the researcher's intent in this study was to only present the reading perspective. According to VanDerHeyden (2011), "the greatest value to RTI was that it brought attention to the mastery of prerequisite skills, frequency of instructional corrective feedback, and reinforcement

schedules for correct responses that if changed may make a meaningful difference for students” (p. 335). The NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004) laws instituted a framework which was known as RTI to promote academic success for students who struggled academically. Legislation created the RTI framework, but guidelines on employing RTI were not included for states and districts. Each state may take a different approach to implementing RTI, since no standard definition, guideline, or implementation practice exists (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2006). In order to create the RTI framework, there were common principles that must be incorporated which were paramount in the process. These principles based on data-based decision making included research-based instructional strategies, progress monitoring, universal screenings, and high quality instruction (Bender, 2009).

RTI and Reading Specialist: What is the Connection?

A key piece of the No Child Left Behind Act (2004) focused on reading. Schools were required to use scientifically-based research to support students who were not progressing academically (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006b). Reading specialists have a depth of knowledge on best instructional practices for struggling students. This knowledge allowed reading specialists to create and implement interventions and provide staff development sessions to inform best practices in RTI (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). RTI often required reading specialists to change from using traditional practices of assessing and remediating students, to a more strategic plan of action, whereas concentration was on the instruction provided and the monitoring of performance progress over time (Canter, 2006). The reading specialist’s role in RTI was that of expert in providing reading

support to students (Canter, 2006). The reading specialist's role in RTI may become broader, requiring not only traditional style reading support, but additional work in the area of prevention. According to Vogt and Shearer (2007) "RTI seeks to identify and address the needs of struggling readers before they fail" (p. 17), not to create extra work for reading specialists. Shanklin (2008) reported, in order to accomplish the requirements of educational legislation in the forms of Reading First (2004) and Striving Readers (2005) more reading specialists and reading coaches would be needed to meet the needs of struggling readers.

RTI is changing the field of general education by shifting how instruction and reading support is provided to struggling readers in elementary schools. Reading specialists are an essential part of RTI committees by being designated as a knowledgeable member who in collaboration can identify the best intervention practices in reading for struggling students (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010). The expertise of reading specialists is called upon in RTI to ensure all students reach grade level expectations in reading (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010). Reading specialists provided assistance to teachers on research-based instructional practices that gave struggling readers the guidance they needed to succeed in reading. According to Farstrup (2007), "this is consistent with the notion that providing teachers with a rich and proven array of instructional approaches and quality reading materials can help all students become good readers" (p. 17). Reading is the foundation for academic success. The legislative requirement to use research-based reading practices necessitated all stakeholders, specifically educators, to be adept in

teaching the pillars of reading as presented by NRP (2000) in order to support struggling readers.

Reading specialists provided support and instruction to struggling students in small groups or individually to target reading deficiencies in an effort to close the achievement gap between successful and struggling students (Bean, 2009a; Dole, 2004). The NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004) legislations combined increased the awareness that the reading specialist's focus was on struggling students; and greatly changed the role of reading specialists by emphasizing high quality instruction (National Institute of Literacy, 2007). RTI was about having all students succeed and providing multiple opportunities for this success to occur. Reading specialists bring a distinct view to the RTI process by demanding the focus revolve around meeting the needs of struggling students, specifically in the content area of reading.

RTI Referral Process for Reading

RTI held special meaning in the area of reading because the majority of students were identified as struggling in reading (Gersten & Dimino, 2006). The RTI referral process typically attended to issues in reading and were used to obtain extra support for struggling readers. During the RTI process documentation of the interventions implemented to promote student success in reading were detailed. The process consisted of documentation in which the teachers should have immediate access: current running records or reading inventories, writing samples, samples of unit tests, grades, quizzes, and curriculum benchmark assessments (NISD, 2009). In one RTI team meeting, a question was asked: why teachers do not recommend students who were struggling in a

timely manner. The administrator's response was that the teachers' primary response for not recommending struggling students for intervention in a timely manner was that they did not have enough time to complete the referral paperwork (G. Bravo, personal communication, 2011). According to Buffum et al. (2010), "teachers often decided not to recommend students for interventions because it was not worth the paperwork" (p. 12). Students who received interventions were more likely to be successful in reading and on state mandated reading assessments (Fisher & Frey, 2010).

Struggling Readers in RTI

The ability to read is a foundational principle required for success and achievement in a self-sustaining society (Allington, 2009; Cassidy, Valdez, & Garrett, 2010). Teachers were tasked with ensuring that students who entered their classrooms left with the gift of being able to read. Many students who cannot comprehend the printed word in their assigned texts struggled with reading (Allington, 2009; Cassidy et al., 2010). Unfortunately, numerous factors contributed to a student's struggle in reading such as a lack of phonics instruction, limited comprehension, limited background knowledge, limited experiences, auditory and visual processing issues, and possibly a specific learning disability (Mokhtari, Hutchison, & Edwards, 2010).

According to Vaughn & Edmonds (2006) students who fell below grade level requirements in reading tended to have difficulty catching up to grade level peers, especially if the deficit still existed after third grade. Some common characteristics of struggling readers were difficulties in decoding, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary and phonemic awareness (Bukowiecki, 2007; National Reading Panel, 2000; Tatum, 2004).

Sternberg and Lifang (2005), stress that teachers must change their teaching approaches, techniques, and methods in order to meet and match the learning needs of each student, especially those who struggle. Reading specialists must implement and use various interventions in order to promote academic success for all students. Academic achievement was a primary force behind RTI legislation, which intended to prevent failure and find weaknesses in order to provide early intervention (Lose, 2007; Tatum, 2004; Van Bramer, 2011). The implementation of RTI as required by legislation allowed the use of research-based instructional strategies to resolve reading difficulties for struggling students.

Assessments and Progress Monitoring

In the study site, curriculum benchmark assessments were used to identify reading skills students had not yet mastered based on instruction (NISD, 2009). A well-built and organized evaluation system was the foundation of an effective and successful RTI model. The intent of those assessments was to assist the teacher in providing appropriate academic instruction to meet the needs of struggling students (NISD, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010). According to Fisher and Frey (2010), assessments helped determine if the identified concern or problem was instructional or student based. Reading specialists disaggregated benchmark data, identified students who were struggling in reading, and were a part of the RTI committee, which created the intervention plan for struggling readers (NISD, 2009).

RTI promoted assessing student difficulties, implementing interventions to address those deficits, and progress monitoring to determine effectiveness of

interventions. Information collected from reading assessments drove instruction delivered to struggling readers in the RTI process (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2010; Stecker, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008). Assessments should be matched to instructional standards being taught (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2010). Howell et al. (2008) pointed out that assessments identified a potential problem, a possible cause, and guided the proposed intervention to correct the specific problem identified.

Progress monitoring was a research-based practice, which assessed the value of academic instruction for struggling students (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hamlett, 2007). Schools used progress monitoring to help identify the needs of struggling readers. However, progress-monitoring measures must align with interventions to ensure students are making adequate progress and the intended effect is accomplished (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a; Lose, 2007). Measurements and evaluations to ensure that identified goals are being met are major components of successful progress monitoring. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006a), supported the evidence that progress monitoring used constantly during intervention instruction increased the effectiveness of the implemented interventions. Lose (2007), asserted that progress monitoring afforded struggling readers the opportunity to advance towards grade level expectations with the assistance they needed to develop into achieving readers through appropriate interventions and instruction. According to Johnston (2010), literacy instruction in RTI “required a deep understanding of reading and how students acquired it” (pp. 603-604).

Five Components of Reading

The NRP (2000) and IDEIA (2004) recommended instruction in five components of reading. These components or pillars of reading were phonics (decoding), phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (NAEP, 2009). In order for students to have success in reading, all five components needed to be present (NRP, 2000). It is essential that all involved in the RTI process were aware of all available interventions and the research surrounding their effectiveness. The RTI process supported reading specialists using an in-class approach to providing interventions since this allowed cohesion between classroom instruction and the reading specialist's instruction (Bean, 2009b). Reading instruction provided by the reading specialist should match that of the classroom as closely as possible instead of being isolated and segmented (Allington & Walmsley, 2007).

Decoding (Phonics)

The ability to decode is a crucial and fundamental skill necessary in the acquisition of reading for beginning readers and for those who struggle with reading. According to the Texas Education Agency (2002), a student's decoding ability is a "strong predictor" of future success in reading. Decoding is the base upon which reading is built; it is making sense of the printed word by recognizing and remembering that each letter (grapheme) represents a specific sound (phoneme). Ehri, Dreyer, Flugman, & Gross,, 2007 posits "... the grapheme-phoneme connections provided the glue that bonded letters in written words to their pronunciations in memory along with meanings" (p. 172). If a student spent an excessive amount of time decoding, their mental stamina

was exhausted and they were unable to comprehend the text and ultimately enjoy what they were reading (Allington, 2011; Ehri et al, 2007; Turnmer, 2008). These students were known as “word callers” (Stanovich, 1986).

Fluency

Fluency directly affects reading comprehension, which was the goal of reading. Fluent reading sounds natural, as in regular speaking. Rasinski and Young (2009) believed “students, who read with expression when reading silently, tend to have good comprehension. Conversely, students who read with little or no expression during oral reading are more likely to have poor comprehension when reading silently” (p. 4). Struggling readers who made numerous errors while reading failed to remember what they had read and spent a vast amount of time decoding. These students fell short where comprehension was required. Students who spent time decoding and not attending to meaning were not reading. The cognitive activity was strained due to the amount of time spent on deciphering the word (Kuhn, 2004; Rasinski, 2006; Rasinski, Rikli, & Johnson, 2009).

Vocabulary

The amount of vocabulary a student possessed had a direct relationship to a student’s comprehension and growth in reading (Goff, Pratt, & Ong, 2005; Tannebaum, Torgesen, & Wagner, 2006; Verhoeven & Van Leeuwe, 2008). The NRP (2000) report highlighted vocabulary as a major element in the development of reading skills. Spoken and reading vocabularies were also considered critical for adequate comprehension to be achieved (NRP, 2000). Students built vocabulary by reading and being taught in a direct

and explicit manner (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2008; Blair, Rupley, & Nichols, 2009). Direct teaching of vocabulary involved teaching specific words applicable to the content area being studied; whereas indirect teaching of vocabulary used context clues and the pragmatics of language to understand the meaning of words (Beck et al., 2008; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004).

The best practice in building vocabulary in struggling readers consisted of using various methods of instruction (Beck et al., 2008). Students should read a wide range of literature to increase vocabulary acquisition. Frequent discussions and conversations about books, teacher read alouds, and providing students the opportunity for self-selected silent reading were strategies to increase word knowledge (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004). One of the greatest tools for the advancement of achievement in reading was to expose and supply students with rich vocabulary and word knowledge. This acquisition of vocabulary ensured that students comprehended what they were reading; after all, comprehension is the goal of reading.

Comprehension

The ability to read on grade level and understand what is being read is critical for student success (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2010). Comprehension is a complex process that allowed the meaning from text to be understood and the written word to be interpreted by readers. When students had adequate fluency to include accuracy, rate, and expression and an adequate vocabulary base, then comprehension happened naturally and intentionally. Instructional strategies such as predicting, making connections, and questioning (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007) allowed students to construct meaning from text.

This matched Vygotsky's learning theory of scaffolding. Students received assistance in learning until they were able to learn without help (Vygotsky, 1978).

Critical thinking, cognitive skills, and problem solving were more progressively emphasized in reading comprehension, particularly as students' progressed through grade levels. Reading comprehension is an action that required a great deal of conscious intellectual activity (Rupley et al., 2009; Sporer, Brunstein, & Kieschke, 2009) and cognitive strategies (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). It is important that students understand and have strategies to use when they do not comprehend text or when comprehension breaks down.

Research has shown that instruction in cognitive or reading strategies increases comprehension of text (Gallagher, 2004; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Rupley et al., 2009) especially when learning was explicitly explained and modeled. Keene and Zimmerman (2007), revealed that skilled reading entails using strategies such as "asking questions, summarizing, and synthesizing text in order to improve comprehension" (p. 27) and actively engaging students in meaningful reading. Gallagher (2004) further added that students need to have an interest in what they are reading. The NRP (2000) and Keene and Zimmerman (2007) suggested the use of multiple or a combination of strategies is the best approach necessary to improve comprehension. If students do not comprehend, they are at a disadvantage in learning. Small groups, such as guided reading allowed the teacher to guide students using instructional level text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006).

Guided Reading

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) defined guided reading as “an instructional setting that enabled teachers to work with small groups of struggling students to assist them in learning effective strategies for processing and understanding text” (p. 189). Students learned in diverse ways and needed strategies that aligned with their learning differences (Ford & Optiz, 2008). Guided reading was one strategy, which allowed struggling students to have lessons adapted to meet their needs while receiving additional support and explicit instructions from the teacher (Mathes, Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, Francis, & Schatschneider, 2005). Students were matched with students who had similar characteristics in reading based on reading assessments, teacher observation, and student discussion (Mathes et al., 2005).

Guided reading intended to show students how to monitor their reading using teacher taught strategies at their instructional reading level. It was the link that joins shared reading and independent reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) found that years of guided reading research has made guided reading an exemplary practice in reading instruction. Allington (2006b) supported guided reading as a method of helping struggling readers achieve grade level reading expectations.

Guided reading promoted the use of the ZPD in assisting students in becoming capable readers. The ZPD was characterized as the difference between what a student can successfully achieve alone and what the student can do with the help of an adult. In guided reading, a child received support in processing text and using appropriate reading

strategies to gain meaning (Guastello & Lenz, 2005). The objective of guided reading was to develop struggling readers into independent readers.

Zone of Proximal Development

Students learn best when they were learning within their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Students were challenged within their ZPD to take risks knowing that the teacher or a peer was available to assist when or if they should need help. While working within the student's ability level, the teacher scaffolded or slowly and deliberately moved the student to advanced levels of comprehension and understanding through incremental steps, until the student accomplished the expected expectations (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD allowed struggling students to receive support for challenging tasks through the process of scaffolding. Scaffolding was an instructional strategy used to help struggling students with subject area tasks (Gibson, 2011). These academic tasks were broken into smaller, more manageable steps, explicit explanations and modeling of tasks were given, and constructive and corrective guidance or feedback was provided for struggling students (Gibson, 2011).

Due to the current demands of the workforce struggling readers required teachers to have knowledge of reading practices that promoted growth and success and create lifelong readers (Allington, 2011; Bean, 2009b). The more text students read, the better readers they become (Allington, 2006b). Teachers were the heart of student learning, so it was vital that these teachers be presented with and engaged in quality ongoing staff development and resources to improve the reading abilities of struggling readers and address their deficiencies (Frey, Fisher, & Nelson, 2010; Mathes et al., 2005).

Effective interventions that included decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, guided reading and work within a student's ZPD improved the opportunities for a struggling reader to learn how to become a successful and fluent reader (Allington & Walmsley, 2007; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; NRP, 2000; Rasinski, 2006; Therrien, 2004; Verhoeven & Van Leeuwe, 2008). Interventions based on the above-mentioned components enhanced a teacher's effectiveness if adequate training and staff development were provided. Professional staff development and guidance in research-based effective teaching strategies were critical to effective instruction in RTI (Chenoweth, 2009; Darling-Hammonds, 2002; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Webster-Wright, 2007).

Effective RTI Instructional Practices and Interventions in Reading

Evidence or research-based (Tackett et al., 2009) interventions and instructional strategies were to be provided to students to help them achieve essential knowledge and skills in reading. These practices have been proven and validated through research studies to promote student achievement. These interventions have undergone rigorous testing and studies in order to ensure verifiable data, which could be repeated in additional studies and accepted by a panel of experts (IDEA, 2002). Gersten and Dimino (2006) regarded reading specialists as the professionals who knew the best interventions appropriate for struggling students.

Interventions were the driving force within an RTI model providing and encouraging successful results for struggling students. Howell et al. (2008) defined intervention as "a new strategy or modification of instruction designed to help a student

or group of students improve performance relative to a specific goal" (p. 57). The aim of an intervention was the attainment of skills and strategies to increase student success and performance level (Fisher & Ivy, 2006; IRA, 2006; Tilly, 2006). Reading was a process of complex skills and strategies that occurred before, during, and after reading while students attempted to create meaning from the written word (Allington, 2006b; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Ouellette, 2006). Teaching students to read was a challenging responsibility; therefore reading specialists must be aware of the latest research based interventions and instructional strategies in order to provide instruction to struggling readers in a pullout, push in, or combination approach (Bean, 2009a). A pullout approach allowed targeted instruction based on the specific needs of each student or a group of students. Struggling readers tended to have limited strategies to pull from when it comes to reading (Allington, 2007; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). A growing concern was the loss of instructional time struggling readers lose when pulled out for interventions (Allington, 2007; Miles, Stegle, Hubbs, Henk, & Mallette, 2004).

Reading specialist's responsibilities of instructing students inside and outside of the classroom, modeling instructional strategies, and demonstrating lessons for teachers all fall under the heading of instruction (Bean, 2009b). Small group instruction to include guided reading, fluency instruction, comprehension instruction, vocabulary instruction, and on-site staff development were core interventions and techniques utilized by reading specialists (Allington, 2006b) to decrease reading deficiencies; however, students continued to struggle even with the increasing number of interventions currently available (Bukowiecki, 2007). Struggling readers may lack decoding, fluency,

vocabulary, and comprehension skills, or have a mixture of reading problems; however, these readers must have effective instruction in these areas if they are to become strong and fluent readers (Allington, 2006b; Rasinski, 2006; Rasinski et al., 2009).

Professional Staff Development

Reading specialists were often called upon to model lessons, teach with a classroom teacher, and provide staff development to teachers on campus (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008). As written in the NCLB law (2002), professional staff development was characterized as training which improved an educator's knowledge, was of high quality, used assessments to inform teaching, and was intense in nature and duration (Allington, 2005; Bender & Shore, 2007; Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). The intent of staff development was to provide educators with useful tools to effectively teach and promote student achievement (Semadeni, 2010). As a result of increased accountability by federal mandates, staff development was a critical role in teacher development. With RTI promoting success for all students (Lose, 2006), it was vital that teachers remained current in research-based effective teaching strategies in reading. Wright (2007) added that "Teachers cannot teach what they do not know how to teach" (p. 6-7). Consistent and ongoing staff development was an avenue to maintaining teacher awareness and knowledge of current practices in education, specifically reading (Lose, 2006; Sterling & Frazier, 2011). Sturtevant asserted in her article that "We cannot significantly improve literacy skills without comprehensive staff development" (as cited in Brozo & Fisher, 2010, p. 74). Educators needed to have a variety of strategies and skills in order for

students to learn to read and comprehend text effectively. Through diagnosing strengths, weaknesses, and implementing remedial instruction, reading problems can be minimized.

In the study site reading specialists were challenged to provide in-house staff development to teachers based on the results of curriculum driven benchmarks and state mandated tests. The purpose of the staff development offered was to help teachers improve teaching techniques and instructional methodologies (Bean, 2009b). Teachers faced many pressures and factors that affected their teaching (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008) and accountability was at a heightened state due to mandated expectations of NCLB. Therefore, staff development must be meaningful and intentional if it is to impact student success (NRP, 2000). Yet, many staff development sessions offered were deemed as not being meaningful and worthy of attendance by teachers (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008).

Staff development must be presented to meet the needs of teachers and the demands of struggling students (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). In order for reading specialists to help teachers, they must possess knowledge of the best instructional methods and teaching practices (Bean, 2009b; Quattroche et al., 2001). Walpole and McKenna (2004) supported the idea that staff development must be open to the needs of teachers and students if it is to be effective. Staff development must be ongoing in order for teachers to expand their knowledge in reading (Lapp, Fisher, Flood, & Frey, 2003). In-house staff development can support teacher learning while allowing them to discuss current methods utilized in the classroom (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008; Lapp et al., 2003; Wasserman, 2009). Staff development tends to be most effective when it recognized and

validated the experiences teachers currently possessed and added to their current knowledge base and specific teaching area (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008). District and campus staff who worked with struggling readers must have knowledge of and training in RTI (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008; Lapp et al., 2003;). Training in data collection and data analysis procedures as a guiding force for instruction must occur. Research-based practices such as administering reading assessments, guided reading procedures, taking running records, and using higher order questioning were some of the staff development opportunities that must be shared with staff who work with students who struggle in their learning. In a report by Vaughn and Fuchs (2003), they wondered which staff members were qualified to carry out the requirements of RTI. A short review of literature related to the qualitative case study approach was presented.

Review of Methodology

The research questions to be answered and the type of data that was to be collected in the research study guided the research design or methodology that was chosen (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) and Glesne (2011) described ethnography, narrative research, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study as five approaches to qualitative research. After reviewing the five qualitative approaches, a case study design was selected based on the research questions and the review of literature. Qualitative research is justified in a study when an inadequate amount of information exists about a topic being studied (Creswell, 2009; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Previous research on the roles of reading specialists and on the implementation of RTI have been qualitative in approach using interviews, observations, and focus groups

(Quattroche et al., 2001). Even though the other qualitative designs of ethnography, narrative, grounded theory, and phenomenology could have been used to gather the perceptions of reading specialists in this research study, a case study approach was selected. The case study is often used by those beginning researchers who conduct research for the first time (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

Ethnography

Ethnography research was considered for this research study since it intends to understand and “learn how a certain culture or group functions” (Glesne, 2011, p. 17). This research is usually conducted by a researcher who is not a part of the culture being studied. Within this form of research, “the researcher immerses in the culture and objectively describes and shares the beliefs and behaviors of the culture” being studied (Merriam, 2009, p. 28). Instead it was necessary for my role to be that of researcher, and interviewer. I did not select this approach because time is a limitation. I do not have the time to study or collect data for a year on this topic.

Narrative

Narrative research tells the story and experiences of one person. This research form “focused on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual” (Creswell, 2009, p. 512). Even though this design could have been used, it would not have given the researcher in-depth information on the perspectives of multiple participants regarding their thoughts and roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI. This approach was not selected because the researcher sought to

discover the experiences of many reading specialists, not individual stories (Creswell, 2008; Creswell, 2009). Although, the experiences of reading specialists were shared, these research questions do not align with this design and the reading specialists' experiences were not offered in the form of a story.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is another research approach that would be acceptable for this study. In grounded theory the researcher collected and analyzed data then develop a theory based on observations of a group and the data collected (Glesne, 2011). This research examines “a number of individuals who have all experienced an action, interaction, or process” (Creswell, 2008, p. 61). Observations and interviews are often the primary means of data collection. Data is constantly and systematically analyzed and compared in order to determine similarities and differences (Merriam, 2009). The intent of this research study was not to develop a theory, but to explore the perceptions of reading specialists.

Phenomenology

The phenomenological approach was considered a suitable design to use in sharing the experiences and perspectives of reading specialists in implementing RTI. Phenomenology focuses on understanding and describing the human experiences from those who have actually experienced an event or phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). This design was not selected because it could be restrictive in allowing the researcher to objectively express the reading specialists' experiences and perspectives in this research study.

Case Study

A qualitative case study was chosen because this study is based on the experiences and perspectives of reading specialists in implementing RTI. Woodside (2010) defines case study research as “an inquiry that focuses on describing, understanding, predicting, and/or controlling the individual (i.e. process...)” (p. 1). The case study approach is appropriate for showing what occurs in a “real life situation” and answering “what and how” research questions (Yin, 2003). In order to better understand the reading specialist views semistructured interviews, a focus group, open ended survey, and a participant journal was used to obtain information about the RTI process and to illuminate the reading specialists’ understandings of RTI. Themes revealed by the IRA relating to the reading specialist’s role and responsibilities include leadership, assessment, and administration; nevertheless, this study hopes to uncover a more definitive role for reading specialists as they implement RTI. This research approach allows an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit” (Merriam, 2009, p. 203). Yin (2003) writes that “a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon are not clearly evident” (p.13). Qualitative research allowed the researcher to gain insight into the perspectives of reading specialists using interviews, document analysis, and observations as data collection methods (Creswell, 2008). A case study using multiple data sources allowed the researcher to develop a complete understanding about the perspectives, roles, responsibilities, and challenges reading specialists face in implementing RTI on each campus (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009;

Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) confirms that using multiple sources of evidence allowed case study research to paint a more accurate and credible picture.

Potential Themes

A list of themes surfaced from the literature reviewed on the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists. Some of the themes introduced are resource, administrative tasks, collaboration, instruction, modeling, mentoring, and assessment (Dole, 2004; Quattroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). Themes not identified as part of the role and responsibilities of reading specialists as identified by IRA or other researchers might emerge from the data collected. These themes needed to be considered as the role of the reading specialist has expanded. Initially, the primary role of the reading specialist was to assist students identified as having learning deficits in reading (Dole, 2006). However, the role of reading specialists changed based on programs created by the federal government for at-risk populations (Walpole & Blamey, 2008). More schools are utilizing reading specialists to help meet the requisites of the NCLB Act (No Child Left Behind, 2002). It is imperative that a concrete perspective of the duties, roles, and responsibilities be identified. The requirement of reading specialists to help support teachers in the subject of reading through assessment, instruction, and professional development were common themes evident in the literature (Quattroche & Wepner, 2008). This study hoped to find similar themes along with new ones, as the roles and responsibilities of the reading specialist have changed.

Summary

In this literature review I explored the perspectives, roles, responsibilities, and challenges of reading specialists in implementing a response to intervention framework. As an increasing number of students continue to struggle and were at-risk in reading, high quality reading instruction must occur (Allington, 2011; Farstrup, 2005). Highly qualified reading specialists (NCLB, 2002) were required to provide evidence-based reading interventions and support to students (Allington, 2011; Farstrup, 2009). Since the RTI framework promoted multiple tiers of interventions for struggling readers, it was imperative that reading specialists had a thorough understanding of RTI and how to select and use effective research-based instructional strategies in preventing students from failing (Allington, 2009).

Responsibilities common to the reading specialist's role included working to provide high quality reading instruction to students, serving as a resource to teachers, and providing reading expertise to the RTI committee on research-based curricular practices. Further clarification of the reading specialist's roles and contributions to the RTI process is needed (Allington, 2009). Reading is the foundation to academic success and future achievement for all students. However, many students in grades three and above were at risk of failure; these students had not learned to read and were at a disadvantage. While there is an abundance of literature emerging on RTI and reading, a gap exists in describing the perspectives, roles, responsibilities, and challenges of reading specialists in implementing RTI. In this section I provide research design to be used in this study.

Detailed descriptions of the data collection methods, analysis process, and instrumentation were shared.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI within a suburban school district in Southwest Texas. In this section, I present the justification for using a case study design, the context of the study, participant selection, and ethical protection of participants, researcher's role, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Rationale for a Qualitative Case Study

I chose the case study methodology because it allowed for an in-depth examination of a topic using data obtained from participant observations, interviews, and document analysis (Glesne, 2011). According to Merriam (2009), case studies can contain qualitative and quantitative data even though the issues are seen from the participant's view, rather than from the researcher's view. The researcher is the main agent seeking to find a participant's point of view (Stake, 2010). This case study looked at beliefs and experiences of reading specialists and allowed reading specialists to share their beliefs and experiences on the subject of RTI and allowed their "personal feelings and thoughts" to surface during interviews (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). Information was collected using semistructured interviews, a focus group, a survey, and a journal.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions, beliefs, roles, and responsibilities of reading specialists in implementing a RTI framework. Data were

collected from reading specialists in a suburban district in southwestern Texas to answer the following questions:

1. What were the reading specialist's understanding of the RTI process?
2. How did reading specialists describe their roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI?
3. What were the experiences and challenges of elementary school reading specialists implementing RTI?
4. What staff development support do reading specialists provide to classroom teachers regarding RTI?

Context for Study

This research study was conducted with a group of reading specialists in a large suburban school district located in southwest Texas. The study site had over 97,000 students enrolled and was culturally and socioeconomically diverse. A common link between the elementary schools was the high number of students who were referred for reading specialist support through the RTI process.

In addition, the availability and access to reading specialists was conducive to this study. The four primary participants for this study were reading specialists at the elementary school level who were members of the district Reading Cadre. The Reading Cadre was comprised of reading specialists from elementary schools across the district who were tasked with developing and offering quality staff development in reading. These reading specialists created and presented research-based reading sessions to teachers in the study site. The intent of the staff development provided was to help

teachers become knowledgeable in reading practices and research based strategies essential to target the needs of struggling readers.

Approval was requested from the Director of Testing and Evaluation office in the district to conduct this research study. Following receipt of approval from the Director of Testing and Evaluation, I e-mailed members of the Reading Cadre to introduce myself, give the purpose of the study, ensure that participants' confidentiality was adhered, and their right to discontinue participation in the study at any time without any negative consequences. I also emailed an Informed Consent Form, along with a survey, to members of the Reading Cadre offering them the opportunity to participate in this study. The informed consent described the purpose of the study, possible benefits, my contact information, and ensured that confidentiality were adhered to as data were collected. Participants were asked to carefully read the informed consent form and sign it. By completing the attached survey, the participants were provided a consent form to participate in the study. Participants received a copy of the consent for their records. Once I received the informed consent and survey responses from possible reading specialist participants, I placed the names were placed in a hat and selected four participants. The four reading specialists were then contacted for interview times and the focus group session was scheduled.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Ethical procedures should be a crucial concern all through the research process (Creswell, 2009). For this study, I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) human research protection training (Appendix B). Once approval was received from IRB,

an informed consent form and survey was mailed to each participant. Participants were given the opportunity to discontinue participation in the study at any time without any negative consequences. All interview recordings, transcripts, field notes, and open-ended surveys will be locked up in a secure file cabinet for a minimum of 5 years accessible only by myself and available to my chair when requested. Electronic files will be stored on my computer and protected by a password which is known only to me.

All guidelines provided by Walden IRB were followed. In order to protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for the district and any schools referenced in this research. The district was simply referred to as the “study site”. To protect the reading specialists participating in this study each were given a pseudonym. All participants in this study were over the age of 18 and were not a part of any of the vulnerable populations. I did not work directly with any of the participants, nor had any authority over the reading specialists who participated in this study.

Gaining Access to Participants

After receiving approval to conduct this study from the IRB at Walden University, I requested permission from the Director of Testing and Evaluation to seek members from the Reading Cadre to participate in this study. I sent out e-mails seeking volunteers to participate in this research. Upon receiving email responses agreeing to participate from possible reading specialist participants, the names were placed in a hat and I selected four participants. Once the names were selected, an e-mail along with a survey was sent to the selected reading specialists describing the purpose of the study and offering the opportunity for them to participate in the research study.

Background and Role of Researcher

I have been in elementary education for the past 21 years. During this time, I have also supervised student teachers and instructional assistants. For the past 11 years I have been an elementary school reading specialist and for the last 7 years, I have been a part of the RTI committee on my campus.

As the researcher in this study, I interviewed participants, conducted a focus group, created a journal, and surveyed participants. I also collected data, examined the interview transcripts, and transcribed audio recordings looking for themes and patterns. I did not express my perspective or bias when conducting the interviews or focus group. I consistently checked data throughout this study to ensure findings were accurate.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The following criteria directed the selection of participants for this study. The participants whom I selected to participate in this study held a current Texas reading specialist certificate. These participants had been reading specialists for a minimum of three years. The study site required all candidates for the position of reading specialists to have a minimum of 3 years teaching experience prior to working in the reading specialist role.

Consent forms, along with my contact information, were sent to the reading specialists who volunteered to participate in this study. After obtaining consent, I contacted the participants by e-mail and or telephone to coordinate a time and date for interviews and a focus group. The suggested guidelines of the district RTI process began in the study site during the 2008- 2009 school years (NISD, 2009). According to NCLB

(2002) reading specialists are highly trained professionals in the subject area of reading instruction. Each of the participants in this study held a master's degrees, were certified reading specialists by the state of Texas, met the requirements of IDEA, and had a minimum of three years experience as a reading specialist. Careful consideration was taken early in the research process to identify participants who had the knowledge and experience of RTI that was required for data collection in this study.

Participants were informed of the purpose of this study and asked to sign a written informed consent outlining the data that was collected (Appendix C). At this time participants were advised of confidentiality and privacy guidelines. The participants were also guaranteed that the goal of this study was information gathering on the reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, and roles in implementing RTI and not to form opinions on practices that were currently occurring in the school.

Justification for Number of Participants

Four reading specialists who were members of the Reading Cadre were purposefully selected from schools across the study site in order to gain rich information and thick descriptions in this study (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Too large a number can become unmanageable and result in "superficial perspectives" and increase the time to conduct and complete the study (Creswell, 2008). This small sample allowed me to hear and focus on the reading specialists' personal perspectives on RTI and to gain the rich information and thick descriptions as described by Glesne (2011) and Merriam (2009).

In case study research, a researcher may study an individual, a campus or can study a range from one to 40 (Creswell, 2008). In selecting only four reading specialists from across the district, this allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the reading specialist's knowledge, understanding, and insight from the interviews, focus group, and a survey that were conducted.

The chosen reading specialists were contacted by e-mail and asked to sign an informed consent form. Once the informed consent form was received by the researcher, an interview date and time was requested and confirmed by e-mail or telephone. The participants had access to the interview questions prior to the interview so they could be prepared for the interview session, however, the researcher was in charge of the session and had control over the order in which the questions were asked. Out of respect for the duty schedules of the participants, each participant was interviewed only once.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through a semistructured interview, focus group, survey, and journal. This data gave the researcher an understanding of the reading specialists' perceptions of RTI on their campus. Data collection procedures took approximately 6 to 8 weeks: two weeks to conduct the face-to-face interview with each of the four participants and member checks; 2 weeks to conduct a focus group discussion and write the transcript; 2 weeks to send and collect surveys; and two weeks to transcribe, code, and input data onto a Microsoft word spreadsheet. This timeline remained flexible and was adjusted to accommodate the participant's schedules.

Interview

The interview lasted between 20-30 minutes and was planned on days and times determined by the participants outside their normal duty schedule. An interview guide (Appendix D) was used by the researcher to guide the interviews in this study and ensure all participants were asked the same questions. The reading specialists were asked for consent to audio record the interview for later interpretation and clarification. Minimal written field notes were taken during the interviews and added to once the interviews were completed. The field notes allowed me to describe what I saw and heard as well as write questions or comments I may have had during the interview. Once the interviews were completed, the participants were thanked for their participation in this research study.

Focus Group

The four reading specialists met in a focus group that lasted approximately one hour. The participants were reminded of confidentiality and asked to sign consent to record the discussion. A focus group discussion guide (Appendix E) was used to facilitate the group. Participation was strictly voluntary and members could leave the discussion at any time. Once the focus group was completed, the participants were thanked for their participation in this research study.

Survey

I designed an open-ended survey (Appendix F) using information gathered from the literature review, district RTI guidelines, and Reading Specialist standards. The purpose of the open-ended survey was to answer questions about the reading specialist's

perceptions, role and responsibilities in implementing RTI. The survey was pilot tested by three reading specialists who were in my school district as soon as I received approval from Walden to conduct the research. I explained the purpose of the research study and survey. Revisions to the survey occurred as needed based on suggestions from the pilot group.

Reflection Journal

I asked the four reading specialists in this study to keep a journal for five days of interactions with and interventions provided to students and staff during the RTI process. The participants were given a format (Appendix H) to use to write down notes on meetings held to discuss students receiving Tiered support; class interruptions; student assessments; teacher planning sessions; and instructional strategies used to assist students. Participants commented on their interactions and experiences with the students who received reading support and any guidance given to teachers. This journal served as additional data to assist in triangulating the data collected. The participants returned the journal in a self addressed stamped envelope.

Data Collection Instruments

For this research study qualitative data were collected from the following methods: semi-structure interviews, focus group, survey, and reflection journal. Figure 1 provided a method of data collection procedures in alignment with the research questions.

Research Question	Interview	Focus Group	Survey	Reflection Journal
What is the reading specialist's understanding of the RTI process?	X	X	X	
How do reading specialists describe their roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI?	X	X	X	
What are the experiences and challenges of elementary reading specialists in implementing RTI?	X	X	X	X
What staff development do reading specialists provide to classroom teachers regarding RTI?	X	X	X	X

Figure 1. Data collection matrix.

Data Analysis

According to Glesne (2011), qualitative research required organizing data, coding data, finding themes, and validating the accuracy of the data discovered. Interview notes were transcribed into written text. In transcribing the interviews, I played and listened to small bits of the audio recordings and typed the researcher's questions and participants responses. The audiotapes were listened to and reviewed to find key words and phrases

from the reading specialist's daily duties and functions. This process continued until all interviews had been transcribed. Each interview was transcribed into a Microsoft Word document, and stored on a flash drive which was protected by a password. The text was read, reread, and analyzed for themes that emerged. The data collected from the reading specialist's responses during the interviews, focus group, surveys, and journal were read and sorted for patterns in words, phrases, and sentences. Once data were coded, categories were identified and compiled into themes based on reading specialists perceptions, experiences, and roles in implementing RTI. A copy of the interview transcript was given to each participant to check the accuracy of the transcribed notes.

The researcher used an Excel Spreadsheet to collect, organize and analyze information gathered. This spreadsheet was used to highlight emerging themes and patterns in the transcripts and to recognize information that connected to the research questions in this study. This system was used to simplify the information recorded and gathered. I looked for similar phrases and key words to identify categories or topics. Identified categories were placed into themes. I evaluated the accuracy of placement into categories by checking and rechecking coded data. All information collected was evaluated to ensure all relevant data pertaining to this study had been coded.

Throughout the data analysis phase, the researcher returned to the data to ensure triangulation of data. The purpose of data analysis is to make meaning of the information collected in the research. All field notes and audiotapes were transcribed immediately into a written report and organized into a computer database after each interview and observation with reading specialists. The researcher conducted member checks by

allowing the participants to review their typed transcript for accuracy (more information presented in the section on member checks).

Establishing Validity and Reliability

Establishing the trustworthiness of the data was critical to research, even more than the chosen design. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative validity “means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the finding by employing certain strategies” (p. 190), while reliability “means that the researcher’s approach was consistent with different researchers and studies” (p. 190). Merriam (2009) outlined eight strategies or techniques used in qualitative studies to ensure validity. For this study, I used semistructured interviews, focus group, surveys, and a journal. Using multiple sources of data collection to answer the research questions in this review provided for internal validity. Using multiple techniques such as triangulation, member checks, and rich thick descriptions also provided for internal validity.

Triangulation of Data

Triangulation gave a clear picture of the topic being studied. “Triangulation is the process of examining evidence from different sources or data collection methods and using it to corroborate themes” Creswell (2009, p. 191). By using data from a semistructured interview, a focus group, field notes, a survey, and a journal allowed triangulation to occur. Immediate data analysis occurred after each interview, focus group, and received survey. Potential patterns and categories were noted throughout the analysis and organized into themes. Triangulation allowed perspectives and patterns to be

compared and validated as well as allowed the interpretation of information collected to be verified and validated.

Member Checks

Member checks were used in this study to ensure the data collected was accurate. The participants had multiple opportunities to read and comment on the researcher's interpretation of the data collected. Using the guidelines provided by Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2009), all participants had the opportunity to reread the results prior to the final stages of reporting the information in this study. It was important to ensure that the work was accurate based on the participants perspectives but also to let the participants feel as if they were a part of the study and the final reporting. Respondent validation allowed the researcher to understand exactly what the participant intended and helped to eliminate the interpretation of inaccurate data.

Thick Rich Descriptions

Using rich thick descriptions allowed the researcher to notice details in the participant's environment which supported similarities that existed among the previously mentioned validation strategies. Rich, thick descriptions allowed the researcher to interpret the participant's behavior in a natural setting. By developing a deep understanding of the participant's environment through rich, thick descriptions, the reader of the study felt as if they were a part of the context of the study and could reach a deeper meaning from the participant's thoughts, opinions, and experiences (Merriam, 2009). The rich, thick descriptions gave a clear representation of the reading specialists in their natural environment and allowed the researcher to provide a thorough account of the

reading specialists' perspective and the instructional interventions they provided in the response to intervention framework.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the perceptions, experiences, and roles of reading specialists in implementing the RTI process on various campuses throughout one study site. Interviews were conducted with the participants, data were gathered from focus groups, an open-ended survey and journal entries were reviewed and analyzed. Triangulation and member checking were used to validate the findings of this study. Themes that I identified in this review were coded, sorted, and categorized.

Section 4: Findings and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, and roles in implementing RTI on their respective campuses.

Questions for this study were answered by collecting data from a survey, personal interviews with each reading specialist, a focus group, and data recorded in a reflection journal. Specifically, this research study was guided by the following questions:

1. What was the reading specialist's understanding of the RTI process?
2. How did reading specialists describe their roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI?
3. What were the experiences and challenges of elementary school reading specialists in implementing RTI?
4. What staff development support do reading specialists provide to classroom teachers regarding implementing RTI?

This section includes information about the research process, systems for keeping track of data, findings, discrepant cases, patterns, relationships and themes and evidence of quality.

Data Generation, Gathering, and Recording Process

Each interview was held during after school hours with reading specialist participants and lasted approximately 30 minutes. All interviews were transcribed into a word document within 24 hours of the interview. I listened to each interview multiple times in order to assure that the transcription was an accurate version of the participant's

spoken words. Some grammatical errors were corrected in order to make the transcription comprehensible for the reader. The integrity of the spoken sentences was not changed; however, any repeated words or phrases within the same sentence were removed.

After the interviews were transcribed, I used member checking to verify the accuracy of the findings. The typed record was e-mailed to participants to review their responses and determine if any information needed to be removed or added to ensure accuracy of information presented. All four participants reviewed their transcripts and agreed with the accuracy of the typed version. A second, experienced colleague coded the interview transcript using the established codes I provided. No differences in codes were found.

All four participants participated in a focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to collect information on implementation of RTI in the district and on individual campuses. Information shared during this focus group was audio-recorded; minimal handwritten notes were taken. The focus group took place at the district professional library after a reading cadre meeting. The purpose of the study and confidentiality of responses was discussed with the group (Creswell, 2009). The focus group began with a few general questions to create a relaxed atmosphere. Participants discussed the challenges and benefits of keeping a reflection journal. A focus group guide (Appendix E) was used to guide the discussion within the group.

The four reading specialist participants kept a journal for five days documenting their interactions with and interventions provided to students and staff during the RTI process. They were asked to document any meetings held to discuss students receiving

Tiered support; class interruptions; student assessments they gave; teacher planning sessions they lead; and instructional strategies they used to assist students.

In this study I used a survey, an interview, a focus group, and a reflection journal. The data collected helped to make certain that the participant's perceptions, experiences, and roles were correctly revealed. These multiple data sources were used to compare codes and allow emerging understandings to surface.

Analysis of Collected Data

Data were gathered describing the reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, and roles in implementing RTI from the survey, an interview, a focus group, and a reflection journal. An ongoing content thematic analysis method was used for studying the data. After transcribing the interviews, the coding process started. Significant statements, phrases, and words were highlighted. Following the analysis of data, an initial list of codes was generated. These codes were used to compare with codes from the rest of the collected data. The collected data resulted in a large number of codes, which were reduced as repeated readings identified patterns, relationships, and connections. Each code was assigned to responses that matched the research questions they related to in this study.

A spreadsheet was used to display the data collected for each research question based on the responses from each participant. Each research question was placed on an Excel table and the participant's names were placed across the top. This allowed responses to be entered for each participant. Participant's responses included words or phrases such as, intervention, reading support, dyslexia, data collection, at risk students,

to list a few (see Appendix N). Themes were generated from the codes and grouped according to the research questions: Research Question 1 (understandings of RTI), Research Question 2 (roles and responsibilities), Research Question 3 (experiences and challenges), and Research Question 4 (staff development provided).

Research Findings

The findings were organized around themes that emerged from the collected data. Initially the categories addressed at risk students, progress monitoring, interventions, meetings, small group instruction, data collection, assessment, funding, resources, misunderstandings of RTI, the RTI process, scheduling, training, collaboration, and communication. The categories were then combined and reanalyzed until more meaningful themes were attained. The themes were based on the frequency of significant statements, perceived meanings, and word groups (Creswell, 2007).

Research Question 1 sought to understand the reading specialist's knowledge and understanding of the RTI process. The following themes emerged for this question: misunderstanding of the RTI process, supporting struggling students, at risk students, tiered process, and progress monitoring. Upon narrowing this information, two themes emerged; understanding the RTI process and supporting struggling students.

Research Question 1: What was the Reading Specialist's Understanding of the RTI Process?

In order to achieve an understanding of the participant's overall understanding of RTI, participants were asked to describe their understanding of the RTI process. In the literature RTI was described as an instructional framework intended to provide

identification of and intervention for students who were struggling academically (Bender, 2009; Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008). All participants understood that the intent of RTI was to identify students who were struggling academically and provide interventions as a way of ensuring success for all students. However, NCLB (2002) or the IDEA (2004) federal policy were not mentioned in the definition of the RTI progress by three out of the four reading specialists. Throughout the data collection process participants' explanations of RTI centered more on meeting the needs of struggling students rather than on the components or tiers of RTI. A common cord presented by all participants was that the tiers of RTI were often misunderstood and misinterpreted by teachers.

Understanding of the RTI process

There appears to be a disconnect between the intent of RTI and what reading specialists were asked to do. Primary knowledge included a misunderstanding of the RTI process by teachers and the ways in which reading specialists supported struggling students. Participant 4 had an adequate definition of RTI. She discussed the process as a way of assisting struggling students based on a federal mandate. She also referred to RTI as a way of delaying special education services for students "who don't fit a mold" (Participant 4, Interview) of either being described as special education or being several years below grade level expectations. Participants acknowledged that the district had created a RTI manual that defined RTI, but the definition presented was not enough to guide them in implementing RTI. Participant 4 referred to the manual as superficial. She indicated that the manual was a "means to an end" (Participant 4, Interview).

Participants referred to the district RTI manual as a guide, but it did not appear to be the main source of information on each campus. Participant's knowledge of RTI was partial to what the district had shared and was rather limited when probed to give additional information. Participant 1 noted that RTI should be a short-term process where students were carefully monitored and assessed in order to ensure interventions were promoting student achievement.

The participants were not clear in defining RTI as a special education or general education initiative. The participants expressed their confusing and frustrations in trying to understand and follow the RTI guidelines presented by the district. Teachers were unsure of who was responsible for tracking data and student progress once students were receiving interventions from reading specialists. The teachers deemed the reading specialists should hold accountability for providing progress reports and data on the academic interventions received by struggling students.

Participant 3 expressed that if reading specialists were in charge of the data collection for students, teachers would not have knowledge of their student's levels and would have no accountability for the learning of struggling students. If teachers do not fully understand RTI, this may be a source of discord for the entire implementation process. Participants responded that all of their schools had implemented some form or phase of the RTI process in order to identify and support struggling students.

Supporting Struggling Students

When asked to discuss who RTI benefits, the participants focus was on supporting struggling students. The reading specialists understood that struggling students required

support and interventions in reading and also needed the opportunity to show growth based on continuous assessing and monitoring. During the interview, participants stressed that, when RTI was implemented effectively, struggling readers seemed to make more consistent progress. The participants discussed providing research based interventions and ways they supported students who were struggling academically.

In explaining the RTI process, the participants discussed steps taken to address academic needs by providing help to students who do not qualify for special education services and for those who have had a lack of educational opportunity on a consistent basis. Each participant indicated that student data were collected from formative and summative assessments and used during monthly meetings to determine student needs. Students receive interventions in small groups based on the collected data from teachers and the specific needs of the student.

Struggling students receive academic support through the RTI process and obtain the appropriate level of assistance needed in order to become successful. Participant 4 shared that, “RTI is a way to ensure academic success for all students, especially those who usually fall between the cracks” (Participant 4, Focus Group). Although participants showed a basic understanding of the RTI process and were able to explain parts, several participants expressed their confusion and frustration in trying to understand and follow the RTI guidelines presented by the district. Participant 1 shared that RTI is supposed to help keep the numbers down in special education, however, since this new process has been introduced to her district she feels, the number of students tested for special education and dyslexia had increased.

Amongst the participants, RTI seems to mean different things to different people. A tiered process was used to support struggling students, however the participants believed that more guidance on campus and district expectations for the RTI process needed to be clarified. All of the participant's stated that their schools used a three-tiered intervention process to help struggling readers. Agreement was that RTI plays a significant role in identifying struggling students early in their schooling as well as keeping track of those students who may need special education services. Reading specialists' had varied understandings and knowledge of the RTI process and how it was implemented on their campus. Primary knowledge included RTI as an intervention process intended to support students who were struggling academically. A misunderstanding of the RTI process by teachers and the ways in which reading specialists supported struggling students was a conflict mentioned by the reading specialists participating in this study. All reading specialist participants agreed that RTI is a misunderstood process. Participant1 stated: "RTI is misunderstood and teachers are not sure of or know the main purpose for the RTI process" (Interview).

Participants acknowledged that RTI is a multi-tiered process that identified struggling students and provides interventions based on diagnostic assessments and student need. Struggling students receive academic support through the RTI process and obtain the appropriate level of assistance they needed in order to become successful. Numerous factors have impacted the participant's implementation of RTI.

Research Question2: What were the reading specialists roles and responsibilites in implementing RTI?

Research Question 2 intended to discover the reading specialist's roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI. This question was answered by analyzing the data collected from the survey, interview, and focus group. Roles from the data collected included implementing school wide reading programs, providing support and training for new and inexperienced teachers, testing for dyslexia, and supporting the campus writing program. The emerging themes for this question were: provide interventions, small group instruction, expert in reading, resources to staff, RTI committee member, assess students, and provide staff development to staff. These themes were grouped into the following: small group intervention and support, documentation and assessment of students, staff development, RTI committee member, and resource to staff. Participants agreed that their role was to provide small group interventions to struggling or at-risk reading students and at times provide instructional support to campus staff

Small Group Intervention and Support

While the main purpose of RTI was to screen students and provide support for those who were struggling academically, the process had changed. Participants identified small group instruction as a way to meet the individual needs of struggling students through interventions in their area of academic need. The participants commented that each of their campuses had so many students who were struggling academically, that time to provide interventions was short. Participant 3 shared information on how she supported struggling students on her campus. Ideally, she would have three to six

students in a small group, but lately with so many struggling students, it was hard to maintain the integrity of six in a group. At times, Participant 3 had to work with a group of seven students who were at different reading levels and were experiencing academic difficulty in the classroom. RTI allowed all students to receive learning at their level and based on student needs. Participant 4 commented that in the RTI process students came with a range of academic abilities and levels. Through small group instruction, students received direct intensive research-based instruction at their ability level.

With so many students struggling, schools must find ways to ensure all students were meeting their fullest potential. There was no one way to teach, but small group instruction seemed to remain the best course of action in reaching all students. A consensus amid these reading specialist participants was that they were already pulling students who were struggling in small groups, so this aspect of RTI was not new to them. Participant 2 stated that teachers seemed to be the ones who were not as comfortable using small group instruction with struggling students. Through the use of small group instruction and interventions, various instructional strategies and practices can be used which give struggling students different opportunities to learn. Individual students and their needs were the focus in a small group setting. The district guidelines for RTI were seen as overwhelming for one participant. Participant 2 shared that the district dictates the types of interventions provided for struggling students, which were research-based interventions, however, not all campuses had access to the interventions listed. The participant's agreed that students were receiving instruction based on their needs and teachers were realizing the importance of providing small group instruction, not only in a

pull out setting with the reading specialists, but also in the classroom. In addition to supporting small groups, another role reading specialists served was that of a resource to the staff on their campus.

Documentation and Assessment of Students

Based on the survey, one thing that all participants seemed to agree on was that RTI provided a lot of documentation on interventions and assessments of struggling students. This was seen as a positive and a challenge. Teachers were required to assess struggling students on a regular basis to determine if they were making progress with the current interventions received. Improving reading achievement was the primary goal of the entire RTI process as answered by the participants in the survey. All participants in this study commented on the amount of paperwork required in the RTI process. Brayden shared that RTI required an excessive amount of paperwork documenting student progress, success, and failure. She mentioned that teachers on her campus often considered the paperwork to be time consuming and on occasion failed to provide the required evidence to assist struggling students. Participants revealed that in RTI, a lot of student data must be collected, analyzed, and documented into a documentation management system regarding the interventions students were receiving. Participant 3's campus required documentation to accompany mandatory meetings every three weeks to discuss students who were in RTI and receiving interventions. Teachers were required to create an instructional goal based on weaknesses, administer progress monitoring data based on assessments such as, the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment for Reading, running records to keep track of student reading levels, and ensure this data

had been entered into e-RTI. Participant 1 stated that by using documented data to evaluate student's strengths and weaknesses the most appropriate interventions could then be determined.

Since RTI had been implemented in the district the participants made comments on the role of assessments in the RTI process. Participant 2 commented: "Dyslexia testing is a prevalent part of the responsibilities of reading specialists in our district" (Focus Group). Reading specialists interpret testing data from state assessments and district mandated benchmarks in order to guide teachers in identifying strengths and weaknesses. Reading specialists helped teachers analyze data and review the most appropriate methods and resources to use in order to drive instruction. Suggestions were made to teachers as to which program or technique was best for each of the RTI tiers. Participant 4 also shared her comments on the increase of parent requests for dyslexia testing. She stated that she spends a great majority of her time testing students for dyslexia and that there was no one established time when reading specialist tested students for dyslexia or other assessments. All participants agreed that the study district had established a dyslexia testing timeline similar to that of special education. Reading specialist's had 60 days from the date of parental consent to assess, analyze, and write the dyslexia results report. The participants' responses varied regarding the amount of time allotted for dyslexia testing. Participant 4 shared that she often had to cancel small groups in order to administer a district benchmark test to dyslexic students who received oral administration of questions and answers according to section 504 guidelines. Participant 2 questioned "why in our district does the middle and high schools hire testers to test their students for

dyslexia and elementary does not” (Interview)? Middle and high school teachers do not have to cancel classes. She does not think this is a fair and equitable process in her district. Staff development was seen as vital in order for the RTI process to work effectively.

Staff Development

The last theme revealed in research question 2 is that of staff development. Participants shared that staff development and training were given to teachers on an ongoing basis and continually revisited. The initial RTI training to reading specialists was given by district personnel. Most participants expressed concern that the initial training was not sufficient to prepare them for implementing RTI on their campus. The main emphasis of the initial training received was on data collection and how to enter data into the data collection management system used by the district. Participant 1 stated: “My campus needed hands on training, not just handouts and a slide presentation” (Interview). She added that her staff needed time to learn how the RTI process worked and needed trained personnel to carry out the interventions. The initial training shared a basic foundation on the definition of RTI and how it was perceived to work in the district. Participant 2 explained: “My campus... needed additional training beyond the first impression of the process” (Interview).

Staff development offered a realistic means for reading specialists to gain an optimistic attitude towards RTI. From staff development, reading specialists identified interventions specific to struggling students. In order to be effective, staff development must be research-based, carefully planned, collaborative in nature, and associated with

the needs of the students (Van Horn, 2003). Participants believed that opportunities to attend and join in staff development sessions was a necessary part that contributes to their providing effective instruction to teachers and staff members. As evidenced in the survey, interview, and focus group, all participants agreed that their role was one of reading expert on the RTI committee. Serving as a member of the RTI Committee is another role of the reading specialist.

RTI Committee Member

Teachers brought forth their concerns on the lack of achievement students were making to the RTI committee. The RTI committee was the next step in suggesting additional strategies and programs to use. Participant 1 stated that reading specialists remained constant on the participant's campuses, whereas the counselors and psychologists were often in a revolving door, changing campuses or being split between two campuses. Participant 1 continued to say: "this uncertainty of who will continue on the team had created a committee of members with too little experience.... This leaves me as the most reliable expert on the team" (Focus Group).

Participant 3 revealed that the RTI committee reviewed the data collected by teachers and concerns brought forth by the teacher or a parent. The RTI committee members' role was critical in making recommendations for students based on the data. Participant 2 felt that the reading specialist served as a valuable resource as a member of the RTI committee. Although the amount of knowledge acquired on RTI was diverse, more information was necessary in order for all participants and staff members to have a comprehensible picture of the process. Participant 1 commented that as a member of the

RTI committee, her role as reading specialist helped to facilitate the program and serve as a resource to the campus and staff by answering any questions that arose concerning reading.

Resource to Staff

The participants shared that in the study site, the reading specialist supported the teaching which occurred in the classroom and works cooperatively with staff to implement research based best teaching practices. When discussing their roles on their campuses, the participants identified their role as one of resource to teachers and staff. The participant's responses on their role as a staff resource included, being the "reading expert" in providing interventions to struggling students, being able to identify resources, and providing reasonable suggestions to teachers. Participant 1 expressed that reading specialists were being utilized in more productive and efficient ways to promote student and staff success in the study site. The participants noted that they provided training on effective teaching strategies and practices that helped accelerate student learning. Strategies that the participants received from workshops or district staff development sessions were shared with campus teachers. The participants echoed that they modeled research-based strategies and techniques which teachers used with all students or just with those students who were struggling. As a resource for the campus the participants stated that they were constantly trying to find appropriate resources for teachers to use. Reading specialists serve as a knowledgeable resource in the field of reading. These participants worked with all levels of students in order that they receive the best reading instruction possible.

All participants agreed that implementing RTI required reading specialists to assume various roles and take on many responsibilities. According to the participants, in the study site reading specialist's responsibilities included providing small group intervention and support, serving as a resource to staff, assessing students, serving as RTI committee member, and providing staff development. The reading specialist strived to assist students and teachers in the area of reading. Reading specialists interpreted testing data from state assessments and district mandated benchmarks. Even though the RTI process has many roles and responsibilities for reading specialists, RTI also comes with differing experiences and challenges as it is being implemented.

Research Question 3: What were the experiences and challenges of elementary school Reading Specialists in implementing RTI?

Research question 3 intended to discover the reading specialist's experiences and challenges in implementing RTI. The following themes emerged from the data sources: progress monitoring, data collection, funding, staff development, training, misunderstandings, collaboration, communication, assessments, and meetings. The themes were reduced to: data collection and progress monitoring, time and scheduling constraints, lack of funding and resources, collaboration/communication, and a lack of staff development/training.

Data Collection and Progress Monitoring

In the RTI process, monitoring student's performance in their area of need was a critical part. Teachers assessed student progress using campus or district identified measures. Progress monitoring was a method of determining if the interventions provided

were promoting growth in students (Mellard & Johnson, 2008). The reading specialist's expressed their knowledge of what progress monitoring required. All participants were agreeable on the fact that interventions were provided, however adequate data collection still seemed to be lacking. Participant 4 shared: "progress monitoring was a way to collect sufficient data on struggling students. Participants discussed that RTI had caused an increase in data collection on interventions struggling students received.

Participant 1 explained that she had to document student intervention progress and provided documentation that interventions work or do not work. Initially, she questioned how she was supposed to pull groups, conduct grade level meetings, and monitor student progress at the same time. "It was truly scary, frustrating, and overwhelming!"

Participant 4 commented: "progress monitoring allowed all students to receive some type of support, not just the struggling students. The RTI process allowed for frequent discussion of all students in order to decide who needed additional academic support."

Participant 2 stated that the documentation provided for students allowed the RTI committee to get a complete picture of the student and whether or not progress was being made with the current interventions that were in place. Progress monitoring was a concern when it was often interrupted due to holidays, vacations, assemblies, student absences, or other campus activities.

Based on participant responses, it was clear that progress monitoring was an important aspect of RTI; however a major frustration that surfaced was the amount of time needed to effectively implement all components of RTI. The continuation or adjustments to student interventions were based on student data. Student's progress

should be monitored every one to two weeks to determine if the interventions were working based on the data collected. It was interesting to note that not all of the schools used the same instruments to measure student achievement. It is important for teachers to track data in the district database and bring copies of the data which addressed their student's academic concern to the collaboration meeting each month. Each campus had implemented its own data collection process. The following were the assessments each of the participant's schools used for data collection in RTI. Participant 2's school depended on Rigby Benchmark assessment for reading level, STAAR (State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness) for standardized test scores, CoGAT scores of verbal and nonverbal skills (for third grade), and district curriculum benchmark assessments for reading, math, social studies, and science. Participant 4's school used the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment for reading levels, all other assessments were consistent. Participant 3 and Participant 1's schools used the Development Reading Assessment for reading levels. Universal screenings were prevalent in the literature and were deemed essential to the goal of the RTI process (Mellard & Johnson, 2008). A universal screener was not used in the district. Participant 4 also remarked that, "at times, I feel like RTI is a cumbersome process". Her reasoning was due to all of the paperwork she had to collect on students; then if students were not making progress she was seen as the reason.

According to Participant 1, the lack of a standardized progress measure leaves it open to reading specialists to create a tool to assist in tracking student progress in reading. Running records and fluency were the typical methods used in monitoring reading progress. In the study, district curriculum benchmarks were used to mirror the

state assessment and gauge where students were each semester. Participant 1 also commented that students had to take the state assessment, yet when they were pulled out of class they were missing instruction that was geared towards “the test.” She also noted that if students were a year or two below grade level in reading, they were not able to read the grade level test, she compared this dilemma to being up against a “double-edged sword.”

Observation of student behavior in small groups were used in RTI meetings to assist in determining student needs and placement. If data had been consistently and routinely collected, the committee knew exactly where the students were academically. Participant 1 shared her thoughts on data collection: “I knew rather quickly where my students were because I assess the struggling students frequently. She added that if the intervention she used is not working, she could adjust it and try something else or add more to it. Participant 4 described progress monitoring: “as a way to really monitor your students closely and know what their needs were.” Participant 4 talked about how data allowed for changes in the small groups:

By frequently monitoring students, we know who is progressing, who is not, and when to make changes to the group. As we collaborate with teachers, we can dismiss students back to Tier 1 to see how they perform in the classroom. Then if the student begins to flounder, we can return them to Tier 2 support.

Participant 4 noticed that individual needs were being met and she thinks that through the constant data collection from progress monitoring, she was better able to meet the learning needs of students. She added that RTI was no longer a shotgun approach, there

was actually a method for defining student strengths and weaknesses however, she did not often have the time to do all that was required due to other assignments. The participants spoke openly about how progress monitoring was hindering the RTI process. Even though teachers were collecting student data, inconsistencies still remain in analyzing and using the data to meet the needs of the students. Time was definitely a factor in providing proper documentation of interventions students received and time continued to be one of the most crucial challenges of implementing the RTI process effectively.

Time and Scheduling Constraints

Time appeared to be the resonating barrier to successful implementation of RTI. Time was observed as a significant hindrance in effectively implementing the RTI process. Taking time to schedule intervention groups while staying true to the state and district standards was a top concern for participants. All of the participants shared their thoughts about lacking time to adequately provide interventions to students and documenting student progress based on the interventions provided. Participant 1 responded to time constraints by stating:

In order to get a student tested for either an academic or behavioral concern, our school psychologist required many data points to show lack of or limited progress. The paperwork was time consuming and on my campus teachers do not always do the paperwork required. It takes time to collect intervention data and document success or failure in the computerized documentation system.

Participant 1 elaborated on the challenge of time by explaining that 30 minute groups do not allow her the time to get everything in. She thinks it would be more beneficial to the students if she had more time. It takes about five to seven minutes for transition, where she went to each class and picked up the students. This only left her about 25 minutes of instructional time. With certain skills she would like to be able to take more time, but time is often not on her side. Participant 4 commented on the amount of time she missed with her small group. She stated that she is being pulled in a multitude of directions. When she had monthly team meetings, monthly reading specialist's meetings, dyslexia meetings, and collaboration meetings she often had to cancel small group instruction. She felt that some of the teachers fault her for the inconsistency of the interventions she was supposed to provide, however she thinks she did the best she could and tried to assist and enrich students each time she met with small groups. Participant 3 shared her opinion that her schedule did not allow time for makeups for groups that she was unable to meet with. She shared that if she cancelled a group, teachers wanted to know when she could make up the missed session. Unfortunately, there was no time available in her schedule for makeups. Time was a commodity that the participants did not have a monopoly on. The participants stated that they tried to do the best they could with the time they had allotted for each group.

Participant responses indicated that time was a precious asset that was not on their side. Time was required to progress monitor, analyze data, administer IRIs and running records, give benchmark assessments, and create lessons for interventions or instruction for struggling students. Time was limited, a worry that was persistent throughout the

education community. All through this study time was seen as a deficit to the RTI process. Another challenge rivaling time was the lack of funding and resources necessary to provide research-based interventions. Participants described time limitations in concern with implementing RTI and providing small group instruction. In our interview regarding supporting struggling students, Participant 3 asked, “How am I supposed to meet the needs of all the students I work with in such a short amount of time?”

Participants also shared that implementing RTI was a struggle when time must be allocated for dyslexia testing according to district policy. Additionally, the participants commented that the amount of time allotted to prepare lessons in addition to other duties as assigned such as mentoring new teachers, giving dyslexia assessments, collecting and inputting data into the eRTI program was very time consuming and challenging.

Participant 1 emphasized that time flexibility was a must when supporting struggling students. There were times when students were not pulled for interventions due to other duties or obligations that were scheduled. She acknowledged that trying to meet the curriculum needs and mandates and still schedule time for interventions, affected the RTI process and implementation. Inadequate funding and resources can challenge the RTI process.

Lack of Funding and Resources

The reading specialists agreed that resources were not just about the materials, but also about the quality of the programs and personnel providing interventions. Through the interview and focus group, it seemed that each campus was implementing RTI, however funding to provide appropriate programs and interventions was lacking. In the

district some campuses had more materials for interventions than others. Title 1 funded schools tended to receive more money and were able to purchase more resources for the campus. The participants' voices were loud and clear when discussing funding and resources. Participant 4 stated that she would like for all campuses to have the same materials. She felt that it did not seem fair that some campuses had higher quality programs to use for interventions. The district gave the reading specialists and each campus a list of interventions that were considered Tier 1, 2, and 3, but does not provide the funds to buy those resources. The district provided a list of approved interventions, however not all campuses had or used the same resources to support struggling students. Participant 1 shared her thoughts on resources:

If reading specialists were the experts in reading, then why isn't that knowledge and training sufficient? I keep current on the latest research based practices, plus those that are tried and true. Why isn't my use of guided reading or reciprocal teaching with a small group considered an appropriate intervention? No, according to our school psychologist the interventions we use had to be a program used to remediate students.

Participant 2 explained that her campus allocated funds for her to buy resources, but many of the resources she would like to purchase were not on the district approved list. She believed in using a mixture of resources in order to support the struggling students she worked with.

The non-Title school participants did not receive any Title funding, so any resources they request must be prioritized according to the campus budget. Participant 3

stated that unless there was extra money left over from the budget or I get a grant I lack materials. Oftentimes she purchased materials with her personal money. She often collaborated with other reading specialists to determine what materials they were using for interventions. In RTI, Tier 3 is a concern when there were not enough personnel or research-based interventions approved by the district to support the needs of struggling students. Participant 1 responded, “If I, as the reading specialist, do not provide Tier 3 support to students, who else is going to do it?” On our campus there were teachers who were not willing or adequately trained to follow the RTI process. Collaboration was another fundamental part of the RTI process. Each of the participant’s school were involved in collaboration at some level. Reading specialists view working with others as a way to improve student achievement. Communication with peers allowed reading specialists to discuss and obtain a common language within the RTI process.

Collaboration and Communication

RTI has promoted more collegial collaboration and meetings about struggling students. All stakeholders have an opportunity to voice their opinion in a discussion on best practices for students. RTI was more of a team process, where the committee, along with the teacher, worked together to find appropriate interventions and best strategies that met the need of struggling students. Through interactions and continual dialogue, reading specialists assisted teachers in creating common goals to improve the learning of struggling students. Collaboration could be seen as teachers participated in monthly team meetings and RTI collaboration meetings to discuss strategies, students, and appropriate interventions. This collaboration allowed teachers the opportunity to share their thoughts

and ideas, ask questions and clarify misunderstandings, examine their current teaching practices. Two of the reading specialists agreed that they did not have time in their daily schedule to collaborate with teachers and provide training on best practices and effective teaching strategies in reading. Participant 2 expressed:

That seeing a quantity of struggling students in small group seemed to have more value than training teachers on how to work with small groups. Training teachers was effective only if there was follow-up that they were actually using the strategies or lessons presented.

Participant 3 shared how she discussed assessments with teachers and the role they played in the RTI process. Her description of collaboration included meeting with teachers during their planning time once a month and sharing strategies or discussing student strengths and weaknesses on district curriculum benchmark assessments for reading. She also discussed how to interpret the latest Individual Reading Inventories (IRIs) and running records on students. Participant 1 noted that she did not have the opportunity to meet with teachers as often as she would like. Her schedule was so packed with pulling small groups and dyslexia testing, that she could not meet with teachers on a regular basis. If teachers had questions on reading or RTI, they e-mailed her or asked her when their paths crossed in the hallway. She provided the best answer she could or told them she would get back to them with the answer. Participant 4 mentioned that her schedule appeared to be more flexible however, she was not able to share as much as she would have liked with her teachers. She met with small groups every day, all day. She even spent her planning time either making up a group or testing students for dyslexia.

She attended a lot of reading conferences in order to learn new strategies, but did not get to share a lot of her training due to the lack of time and the important focus placed on state testing.

Progress monitoring, time and scheduling, lack of funding and resources, collaboration and communication, and lack of training were some of the major obstacles to the implementation of RTI. Some type of collaborative discussions between teachers, reading specialists, and administrators had been occurring throughout the participants' campuses in one form or another concerning progress monitoring, time, funding, and collaboration. However, staff development was another challenge that must be faced.

Lack of Staff Development/Training

Whenever a new initiative was introduced, staff development was a necessary requirement to ensure proper implementation. However, participants voiced concerns about implementation procedures amongst the teachers. Some teachers did not know the true purpose of the tiers of RTI. Yet, some teachers were using too many interventions without giving adequate time for the initial intervention to work. Participant 4 understood that students who had many deficits were at a disservice, because teachers were unaware of how to prioritize or determine the major skill or skills that should be focused on. She believed this could be a reason for trying a lot of interventions at one time. Participant 2 shared the following comment: "There were too many students who need interventions and not enough trained personnel to provide the needed interventions." Participant 3 commented: "The training I received was beneficial, but if the training was not ongoing, I don't remember... if I do not understand the process, how can I teach it to others?" At

individual schools reading specialists plan professional development activities. In order to lessen confusion with RTI, all participants perceived that ongoing professional development activities were necessary to implement RTI effectively, because RTI was open to interpretation. Participant 4 noted that many of the new teachers had not been trained, or those who had been trained did not often see the value of small group instruction for students.

Research Question 4: What staff development support did Reading Specialists provide to classroom teachers regarding RTI?

Research question 4 sought to understand the staff development support reading specialists provided to classroom teachers regarding RTI. The following themes emerged for this question: training, interventions, and data collection. These themes were grouped together under the one theme, staff development.

All participants stated that as campus reading specialist, they provided training on reading assessments, interpreting running records, and ensure documentation was collected for interventions provided in RTI. Also, they modeled and gave guidance on research based teaching strategies and practices. The participants agreed that staff development was a crucial component for implementing RTI. Participant 3 shared that at the start of a new school year, she provided training to staff on giving, analyzing, and using reading assessment data to guide teacher instruction. If a new reading program had been adopted, all participants stated that they were required to provide training for the teachers on their campus. Participant 2 chimed in that this process was designed to be “turn-key”. All district reading specialists received training from the district, then

returned to their campuses and trained the staff. Participant 2 continued to state “sometimes when I returned to my campus, I am still confused about certain aspects of the training.” Participant 4 stated that “2 or 3 days or a half-day workshop often was not enough training to make us return as curriculum experts.” A majority of staff development given to teachers was on data collection, analyzing and interpreting collected data, and entering the data into the eRTI system in a timely manner. Participants suggested that as reading specialists they would like to have had more formal training on each intervention listed on the district list of interventions and more extensive training on what to do with students who were not making progress with the interventions provided. There was a concern that there was a lack of staff development training offered by reading specialists and sometimes there was a lack of quality in the training delivered to teachers.

Discrepant Cases and Themes

In research, participants have perspectives, experiences, and roles that at times may be conflicting. Since conflict or opposing views enhanced the trustworthiness of research, it is important to present discrepant information from collected data. In this study the survey, interview, focus group and the reflection journal allowed for firsthand accounts of reading specialists implementing RTI. The collected data were coded based on categories and themes that emerged. I searched for discrepant data to increase the credibility of the findings in this study. If any discrepant data were found, it would have been reviewed by the participants and reported in this research. However, no discrepant or nonconforming data were found.

Evidence of Quality

In this qualitative study, semistructured interviews, a focus group, a survey, and a reflection journal were collected and analyzed from four reading specialists. During qualitative research, the researcher shared the understandings of the participants and the experience being studied (Yin, 2009). When using participant perspectives, the researcher must establish validity. In this study, member checking and verbatim accounts from the participants were used to achieve validity. Prior to participant participation, IRB approval was received and permission from the school district was obtained. Each participant signed informed consent that delineated the research topic, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participating in this study.

Triangulation was used with the multiple sources of data collected from the survey, interview, focus group, and reflection journal. The data were transcribed and coded looking for patterns and themes. Member checking was used to provide for reliability and validity in this research study. According to Merriam (2009), member checking assists in determining the accuracy of results by allowing the participants to examine and provide feedback on their responses. The participants were given a copy of their interview transcript to review for inaccuracies. Not one of the participants had any corrections or comments to add to the original transcript. Thick, rich descriptions were used to express the results in the participants' voices. Direct quotes were used to show the accuracy of the themes and patterns discovered.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to gain a better understanding of the reading specialist's perspectives, experiences, and roles in implementing RTI. This study allowed for an in-depth analysis of four research questions. The results of this study showed that reading specialists had similar perspectives and understandings of RTI. Most of the reading specialists participating in this study could give bits and pieces of knowledge concerning what the RTI process entailed and how to define it. Certain variations in definition or description of RTI were noted. A common connection with RTI was that it was intended to help those students who were struggling academically.

Each participant described RTI in a different way and the implementation process on each campus was different as well. The participants described their role as being the one most knowledgeable about RTI. As a reading specialist, they must be current on the latest strategies, models, and best research practices.

Also, the role of the reading specialist is one of resource to staff. The reading specialist participants provided training, modeling, and materials in order for staff to effectively implement the RTI process. The challenges noted in implementing the RTI process included adequate monitoring of student progress, time and scheduling constraints, lack of funding for approved resources, and collaboration between reading specialists, teachers, and the RTI committee.

Staff development was provided to support RTI on campuses. This included an overview of the RTI process and sessions on effective teaching strategies. A disconnect was that the participants felt the training should be ongoing with continual updates to

assure the RTI process was effectively implemented. By collaboration student deficits were assessed and targeted with specific interventions. Data were collected on students and analyzed to determine if interventions were promoting growth and success in struggling students. The participants provided valuable and reliable details to support the themes and findings in Section 4. An interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, and recommendations for further study were discussed in Section 5.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This section contains a summation of the findings written in Section 4. This section also includes an interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, and my own reflections as the researcher.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, and roles in implementing the RTI process. The goal of this study was to gain insight into and a better understanding of the experiences and challenges that affected reading specialists in the course of their everyday role. There had not been a research study that focused solely on the reading specialist's role and perceptions of implementing RTI. A case study methodology was used to collect data from four elementary level reading specialists for this study. Throughout this study, the data were collected and analyzed using a survey, a semistructured interview, a focus group, and a reflection journal. Data was analyzed using a coding process that produced categories.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What was the reading specialist's understanding of the RTI process?
2. How did reading specialists describe their roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI?
3. What were the experiences and challenges of elementary school reading specialists implementing RTI?

4. What staff development support did reading specialists provide to classroom teachers regarding RTI?

Findings from these research questions revealed the following themes: misunderstanding of RTI, supporting struggling students, resource to staff, RTI committee member, staff development, time/scheduling, lack of funding/resources, and collaboration and communication.

Interpretation of Findings

The survey, interview, focus group, and reflection journal were used to discover reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, and roles in implementing RTI. An interpretation of the findings was presented with conclusions while addressing the results that were presented in Section 4 and connecting to the reviewed literature on RTI.

Reading specialists recognized that RTI is a process that helps at-risk or struggling students. RTI is a path by which schools intended to improve academic achievement for struggling students (Risko & Walker- Dalhouse, 2009), while reducing the amount of students recommended for special education services. RTI focused on intervention and prevention linked to the needs of students (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2009). Districts and schools attempted to implement the RTI program in an effort to help students who were struggling academically by establishing guidelines (Lenski, 2011).

In the study site as well as in the literature, discrepancies in implementation surfaced regarding types of interventions, who provided the interventions, the duration of the interventions, number of students in groups, and student qualifications for interventions (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2009). In the literature reviewed, there was a

need to study the reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, roles, and responsibilities in implementing RTI since there is a gap in the research. The role of the reading specialist in the problem solving aspect of RTI was a new one (IRA, 2006, 2010). In order to meet this role, reading specialists need to be knowledgeable about the RTI process and how they could better help to support struggling students, in addition to staff members (IRA, 2006, 2010).

Analysis of the collected data revealed eight themes that emerged during this qualitative case study that sought to understand the perceptions, experiences, roles, and responsibilities of reading specialists in implementing RTI. The participants were four elementary school reading specialists. The following provided an interpretation of the four participant's responses in relation to the research questions. The findings connect to the literature on the subject of RTI and the perceptions of the reading specialists who participated in this study.

Research Question 1

What was the reading specialist's understanding of the RTI process? The reading specialist's participants expressed varied understandings of RTI as revealed in the survey and interview. According to the data, the participant's felt that RTI was a necessary process, but they were not entirely clear on one specific way of defining it. The participant's responses mirrored a number of the reading experts who were interviewed for the *Reading Today*'s annual survey "What is Hot in Reading?" who shared that they were not sure how to define RTI (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Most responses from the participants in this study described RTI as a way of helping struggling students or

students at risk of academic failure by providing interventions. Only one of the participants referred to RTI as a federal initiative set forth by NCLB. A common articulation was that RTI was a preventative way of assisting struggling students before recommending or testing for special education. The district had established RTI guidelines in 2009, but each of the reading specialist's campuses implemented RTI in a different way. These answers were similar to the findings of researchers who have stated that RTI lacks consistency in implementation based on the knowledge and understanding of the implementors (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Lost, 2008).

The findings from this study suggested that the participants had varying understandings the RTI process. The participants had limited knowledge of the true purpose and goal of implementing RTI and their roles in this process. Participants mentioned RTI as a tiered process used to show student progress. Participants agreed with respondents in a study by Bean and Llillenstein, (2012) in that they wanted to see RTI as a collaborative process where they were not alone in making instructional decisions, setting achievement goals, and solving problems students were having in the area of reading. Overall, the participants felt they needed more knowledge of research-based interventions and targeted specific strategies, better ways to support struggling teachers as well as students, and administrative support to accomplish these tasks.

Research Question 2

How did reading specialists describe their roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI? The participants in this study described their role as that of support or resource for teachers, intervention provider for students, and reading expert on the RTI

committee. They believed they had key input in determining appropriate reading interventions to use with struggling students. The participants in this study mainly used a pull-out program to provide intervention support to struggling students.

According to Bean (2009), a combination of pull-out and push-in instruction was used by reading specialists across the nation. Based on the findings, the participants expressed that there were a range of responsibilities connected with their role as reading specialist. Some of those roles included: demonstrating and modeling lessons, providing staff development, assessing students, and providing small group reading support were the roles mentioned by participants. The reading specialist's role had been traditionally one of remediation, assessment, and leadership (Dole, 2004; Vogt & Shearer, 2007).

Participants also noted that they coached or mentored teachers in the use of effective teaching strategies and interpreting assessment data. Participants expressed that the knowledge they have acquired allowed them to develop and provide research based teaching practices. This last role of coach or mentor is still being defined in the study site. However, with the inception of RTI, the reading specialist was tasked with supporting the overall reading program and interventions used to support struggling students (Walpole & McKenna, 2004).

Research Question 3

What were the experiences and challenges of elementary school reading specialists in implementing RTI? The findings revealed that RTI involved changes such as: the number of students needing interventions, the documentation of interventions, personnel to deliver the interventions and time required to perform interventions. In order

to lessen these challenges, participants felt that all staff members should be given clear procedures and goals, resources, staff development, and time to effectively implement RTI.

Participants also shared that reading specialists as well as teachers needed to be informed about RTI in order to effectively implement it. The reading specialist's recognized that implementing RTI on their campus could be challenging and daunting at times. Information on the what, when, why, and how of the initiative was important, but student achievement was more important. Even though research support reading specialists collaborating on or coordinating interventions with the classroom teacher (Allington, 2009), the participants in this study stated that they were required to use and follow the protocols of commercially packaged reading programs as interventions. This limited the type of interventions some campuses in the study site delivered, since not all campuses had the same research-based programs.

This also limited the amount of collaboration that occurred with classroom teachers. Working collaborative with other stakeholders was a way to meet the needs of each learner (IRA, 2006). Participant's thoughts on collaboration reflected how the term was used in the literature. Collaboration was an opportunity for the reading specialist to share reading expertise and learn from others in best ways to support struggling students (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2014; Mellard, Frey, & Woods, 2012). The RTI process allowed reading specialists, teachers, counselors, administrators, and special education to work together and share resources and knowledge (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2014; Mellard, Frey, & Woods, 2012). The participant's knowledge of reading, collaboration

with other RTI team members, and the use of best practices allowed for an in-depth analysis of the academic struggles of students and the appropriate interventions to implement in order to remediate the deficiencies.

Research Question 4

What staff development support did reading specialists provide to classroom teachers regarding RTI? The reading specialists in this study suggested that time and ongoing staff development was required to ensure RTI was implemented with fidelity across the district. In general, the participants did not all agree or disagree on the initial training they received to support RTI. They did agree that the initial district training focused on data collection instead of the framework or theory. Overall, the training was considered beneficial, but lacking. According to (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006a), successful RTI implementation depends on the quality of the staff development. Research on RTI suggested that staff development should focus on knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and interventions in order to be successful (Hollenbeck, 2007). The participant's responses that ongoing training was needed in the areas of: progress monitoring, data collection, data analysis, and appropriate interventions were consistent with the findings in the literature.

Practical Applications of the Findings

District administrators can apply the results of this study by providing quality professional development for staff members concerning research based teaching practices and allowing reading specialists, to include all stakeholders, to have a voice in the implementation process and share their concerns, challenges, and experiences. Staff

members who worked together could reflect and discuss instruction that best met the needs of struggling students. The reading specialist's role should not only be contained to instructing students, but also instructing staff members who want to effectively contribute to creating life long learners. Reading specialists can provide the latest research based practices to the campus by building a common knowledge base that emerge from sharing their practices and learning with those new to the profession. By knowing the effects of RTI on student achievement, this can encourage an increase in knowledge for beginning educators in teacher preparation programs; as a result, leading to more highly qualified teachers according to the NCLB (2002) mandate. The study district could hire an expert on RTI or a campus intervention specialist trained to provide learning opportunities and access to research based strategies and materials to reading specialists as well as other stakeholders. Campus level and district level staff development should be presented by professionals with the greatest knowledge on RTI or by professional consultants who specialized in providing material and information that is research-based. Another application was to consider the potential of professional learning communities as a way to promote collaboration and engagement in ongoing learning experiences between reading specialists and staff in the study site.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study might provide insight for improving the way reading specialists are involved in implementing RTI on a campus, how staff development sessions are delivered, what is presented at the district and campus level, and the prospective it may have on improving student achievement as a result. RTI researchers

have shown that RTI had an encouraging impact on achievement for struggling students (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2014; Mellard, Frey, & Woods, 2012). By outlining a standardized process for reading specialists to follow will help struggling students receive interventions and support that are necessary in creating a literate society. Collaboration between reading specialists and teachers could increase the knowledge of all who were involved with providing assistance to struggling students. Providing time for reading planning between campus reading specialists could benefit all by allowing reading specialists to have an ongoing dialogue on ways they could better assist struggling students and to identify strategies that were and were not working effectively. The following themes were found in the literature reviewed on the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists. Some of the themes introduced were reading specialists: served as a resource, performed administrative tasks, collaborated, provided instruction, provided modeling, mentored staff, and administered and analyzed assessments (Dole, 2004; Walpole & Blamey, 2008; Quattroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001). These themes needed to be considered as the role of the reading specialist had expanded over the past 10 years. Initially, the primary role of the reading specialist was to assist students identified as having learning deficits in reading (Dole, 2006). However, the role of reading specialists changed based on programs created by the federal government for at-risk populations (Walpole & Blamey, 2008). More schools were utilizing reading specialists to help meet the requisites of the NCLB Act (2002). It is imperative that a concrete perspective of the duties, roles, and responsibilities be identified. The requirement of reading specialists to help support teachers in the subject of reading through assessment, instruction, and

professional development were common themes evident in the literature (Quattroche & Wepner, 2008).

According to Walden University, social change required a process of developing and implementing ideas and actions that promoted the growth of an organization leading to improvement (Walden University). The participant's schools that were attempting to facilitate RTI could benefit from this study as it would permit an understanding of the supports required for successful RTI implementation. It would also allow stakeholders such as principals, reading teachers, other reading specialists, and district instructional support specialists for reading to identify factors seen as challenges to a successful implementation. The hope of this study was to find similar themes along with new ones, that helped reading specialists as well as other stakeholders in the reading community acquire new information and learning about RTI and apply that learning in an effort to create improvement in RTI procedures that will support and promote academic achievement for struggling students.

Recommendations for Action

District administrators can use the results of this study to encourage more collaborative and collegial discussions between reading specialists in the study site on techniques to support struggling students. From this study it was determined that in-depth staff development on a continual basis was needed in order to improve the RTI process in the study site. Additionally, this study could be used to direct staff development opportunities as well as provide training for reading specialists to assist them in understanding how to implement RTI and plan effective intervention sessions. A

professional learning community could be established that provided books and other resources that would benefit those working with struggling students. This information may be used to help prepare future reading specialists' for roles at the elementary school level. Districts implementing RTI must provide adequate resources to include personnel and materials in order to effectively implement this framework.

The findings of this study will be shared with the Language Arts Department, the Reading Cadre, and other reading specialists in the district where this study occurred. The Reading Cadre could be used as literacy experts to assist in modeling research-based intervention lessons for those needing more support in their work with struggling students, specifically readers. As a member of the district Reading Cadre for Staff Development, I will present these findings to fellow reading specialists at one of our monthly meetings. I will also attempt to share these findings at local reading and writing workshops, and at the regional education service centers. In addition, I will submit articles on this study to peer-reviewed journals supporting work with struggling readers. Guided by the findings from this study the district may be able to develop professional development and follow-up sessions on RTI. Campuses or the study site may be able to implement a professional learning community (PLC) that can be used to provide current and ongoing information on the RTI process.

Recommendations for Further Study

A number of prospective research topics remain to be studied. Based on the findings, the following recommendations for further research on RTI surfaced during this study:

1. This study took place over a short amount of time, six to eight weeks. It could be more beneficial if the study was implemented for a longer period to obtain more information on intervention procedures and programs used by the reading specialists.
2. Since this study only used four elementary school reading specialists, it is suggested that using a larger participant population would yield more perspectives, experiences, and roles of reading specialists in implementing RTI.
3. Future research could use either a mixed methodology study or an all quantitative study on a larger population of reading specialists to get their views and gain knowledge of reading specialists perspectives on implementing RTI.
4. Future research could include the teacher's perspectives of the reading specialist's role and responsibilities in RTI.
5. A mixed methodology study on the student's perspectives of RTI.

Reflections of the Researcher

When I first started this study, I was uncertain about the demands this would take on my time, my family, and my job. About half-way through the dissertation, I realized that I had come too far and paid too much money to give up without getting my diploma. But not only that, the knowledge, dedication, and rigor this study has instilled in me is another lifelong dream completed.

As a reading specialist, I see many teachers and new reading specialists who lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of the RTI process. Countless numbers of educators rely on the district to provide guidance and instruction on how to work with struggling students. I believe that if these educators had more knowledge and strategies on how RTI is to be used with struggling students, students might receive appropriate interventions to meet their learning needs. Since I worked in the district where this study was conducted, I had personal biases and feelings about how RTI was implemented on my campus. During the interview process and focus group session, I had to be aware of my own biases and preconceived notions about this research. It was important for me to have an interview guide with probing questions if more clarification or information was needed. It was important that my thoughts and feelings not influence the data I was collecting.

In conducting this study, I was able to hold conversations with some awesome reading specialists who encouraged me throughout this process. I truly enjoyed hearing the participant's stories and experiences with RTI. I was amazed at some of the strategies used, workshops attended, and books read by these reading specialists to stay current in the field and abreast of the changes brought forth by RTI. This study was a great opportunity for me to delve more into RTI and learn additional ways of supporting struggling readers and the teachers who worked with these struggling readers on my campus. This study has made me rethink how we were using RTI on my campus and in the district. My experience in conducting this research afforded me the opportunity to explore the voices of fellow reading specialists and gain a sense of accomplishment in

completing this study. Even though there may be obstacles in implementing RTI, we have to be consistent in procedures and guidelines.

Conclusion

This qualitative study used a case study design to examine the perceptions, experiences, roles, and responsibilities of reading specialists implementing RTI. This research intended to study the reading specialists' understanding of the RTI process. From the data collected themes were revealed that sought to answer the research questions presented in this study. Data gathered concentrated on defining RTI, roles and responsibilities, experiences and challenges, and staff development. The RTI process that was implemented in the district was a work-in-progress. Although the findings were not definitive in this study, this qualitative case study was beneficial since a limited amount, if any, case studies existed on the perceptions of reading specialists implementing RTI.

The participants believed they could have benefited from more staff development during the initial implementation of RTI in the district with follow-up sessions along the way. It takes three to five years for RTI to be implemented effectively and equal time for the impact it has had on teaching practices and student achievement to be recognized (Hall, 2008; Mellard & Johnson, 2008). This study could be used to produce an easier transition when reading specialists are involved in implementing RTI on elementary campuses. This could be accomplished by including the support systems mentioned previously and avoiding barriers that challenged the implementation process. This study was an important addition to current research in the field of RTI and may serve to increase the knowledge and understanding of reading specialists, educators, and

administrators who had a role in implementing RTI. In conclusion, this case study offered the researcher a distinct opportunity to examine how RTI and interventions were implemented in one district. The lack of consistency in implementation was a major concern that may critically impact student success and progress. By consistently exposing struggling students to research-based interventions and teaching strategies, reading specialists could provide high-quality instruction as demanded by NCLB (2002) which could elevate reading achievement in RTI.

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Appendix A: NISD (District RTI Guidelines for Three-Tier Model 2008 – 2009)

Focus	TIER 1: Core Class Curriculum	TIER 2: Small Group Intervention	TIER 3: Intensive Intervention
Students Served	All Students	Identified students with marked difficulties who have not responded to Tier 1 efforts	Identified students with marked difficulties who have not responded to Tier 1 and Tier 2 efforts
Program	Scientific research based curriculum and instruction	Specialized scientific research-based intervention	Individualized and responsive intervention
Number of students	As needed	Homogeneous small group instruction (1:5–8)	Homogeneous small group instruction (1:1-3)
Time	90 minutes per day	20 – 30 minutes per day in small group in addition to 90 minutes of Tier 1 core instruction	45 - 50 minutes per day in individual or small group instruction in addition to 90 minutes of core instruction
Assessment	Campus based universal screener at beginning, middle, and end of the academic year (more often if receiving additional small group assistance)	Progress monitoring every two weeks of on target skill(s) to ensure adequate progress and learning are occurring	Weekly progress Monitoring of on target skill(s) to ensure adequate progress and learning are occurring

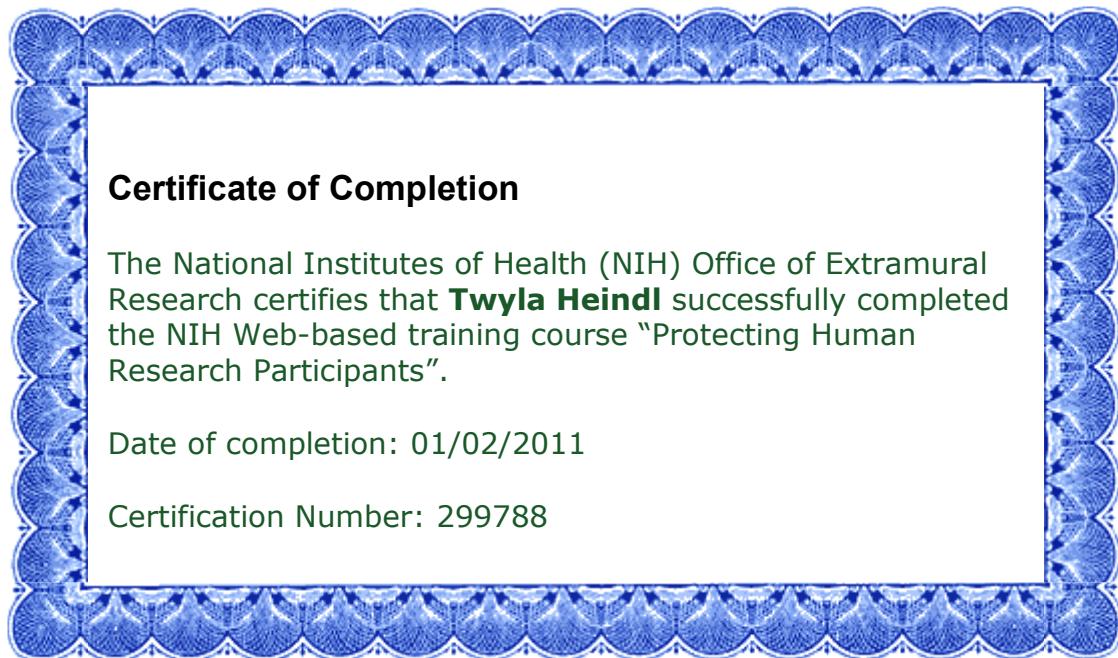
(table continues)

Data	Reading inventories Sight word assessments Writing samples TPRI Fluency samples Running Records STAR Reading Accelerated Reader TAKS/STAAR tests STAR Math Math samples Math Screener Teacher Observation Teacher Anecdotal notes	Reading inventories Sight word assessments Writing samples TPRI Math samples Fluency samples Running Records Program Protocol Assessments (Read 180, Lexia)	Reading inventories Sight word assessments Writing samples TPRI Math samples Fluency samples Running Records Program Protocol Assessments (Read 180, Lexia)
Interventionist	General education teacher	Reading specialist, math specialist, language support specialist, or academic support specialist	Reading specialist, math specialist, language support specialist, or academic support specialist
Setting	General education classroom	Appropriate setting in the classroom or a designated pullout setting with specialist	Appropriate setting outside the classroom with specialist

Note. NISD RTI Plan 2008-2009. Copyright 2008 by Northside Independent School District.

Appendix B: NIH Certification

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Twyla Heindl** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".



Appendix C: Reading Specialist Participation Consent Form

Dear Reading Specialist,

You are invited to participate in a research study on the reading specialist's perceptions, roles, and responsibilities in implementing Response to Intervention. You were chosen for this study because you hold a reading specialist certification, work at the elementary school level, and have been a reading specialist for a minimum of three years. This form is part of a process called "informed consent", which will allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to participate. The information on this form will be explained to you verbally, as well as here in writing.

This study is being conducted by Twyla J. Heindl, a doctoral student at Walden University. The title of this study is The Reading Specialist's Perceptions and Roles in Implementing Response to Intervention. You may know Twyla Heindl as a colleague, but this study is different from that role.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions, experiences, roles, responsibilities of elementary school reading specialists as they implement response to intervention on their campuses.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in study, you will be asked to:

- Sign a consent form
- Participate in a 15 – 20 minute survey

- (Only some of the reading specialists who complete the survey will be selected for the individual interview and focus group in order to get a diverse representation of participants)
- Sit for a 20 - 30 minute individual interview
- Participate in a one hour focus group
- Allow the individual interview and focus group to be audio recorded
- The interview guide is attached in order for you to preview the questions
- Record interactions in a reflection journal for five days

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to participate in this study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be a part of this study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind at any time during the study. You may stop at any time during the study if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions or you may choose to skip any questions that may be too delicate.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Assembling reading specialist's perceptions on response to intervention poses minimal risk to participants. Anticipated benefits of this study are that you will be involved in a research study that can impact social change in the field of education. Also, you will receive valuable information regarding instructional strategies and interventions used throughout the district to help struggling readers succeed. Being in this type of study will help the researcher establish a reasonable representation of the reading specialist's perceptions and role in implementing RTI.

Compensation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. The participants will receive a candy-filled goody bag as a “thank you” for taking the time to assist the researcher in this study.

Confidentiality:

All information you provide in this study will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research study. Also, the researcher will not include your name on anything that could identify you in any reports of this study because pseudonyms will be used. All electronic data will be kept secure by password protection on my home computer and portable thumb drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now, or if you have any questions later, you may contact me via phone number xxx-xxx-xxxx or e-mail xxx@xxx.xxx. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-xxx-xxxx, extension xxxx. Walden University’s approval number for this study is **08-14-13-0153718**. The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix D: Interview Guide

The purpose of this interview is to understand the reading specialist's perspectives and roles in implementing Response to Intervention. The information collected will be kept confidential. No identifying information will be used in the final study. This interview should take approximately 20 - 30 minutes.

Proposed Questions:

Could you tell me your understanding of the RTI process?

Would you describe your role and responsibilities in implementing RTI?

Describe your experiences with implementing RTI on your campus?

Discuss your challenges of implementing RTI?

What staff development were you provided regarding RTI?

What staff development support do you provide to classroom teachers regarding RTI?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Maintaining Confidentiality:

- As the researcher for this study, I will keep all information confidential and no names or identifying information about participants or the school district will be used in the results of this study.
- You may remain quiet or withdraw from this study at any time during the interview if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions.

Appendix E: Focus Group Guide

Introductions – Assign each participant a letter in order to identify the speaker when analyzing the notes. Emphasize that all participants should respect the privacy and confidentiality of all comments made during the discussion and that the identity of all participants must be respected.

Focus Group Questions:

When and how did the district first introduce RTI to your campus and what were your thoughts on this initiative?

Can you describe the type of RTI staff development you were given?

How has RTI changed the way students are supported on your campus as a whole?

What types of instructional strategies do you use to support struggling students?

Possible Probes:

Tell me more about...

How did you feel about that....

What else can you tell me.....

Is there anything else you would like to share before we conclude?

Appendix F: Qualitative Survey

Directions: This 15 – 20 minute survey is being conducted to collect data on the Reading Specialist's Perceptions and roles in Implementing Response to Intervention. Also this survey is designed to gain insight into the reading specialist's and district's implementation practices. If you require more room in responding to this survey, feel free to attach another sheet of paper. Please complete the survey and return to Twyla Heindl, at xxxx address, within one week using the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

Number of years teaching _____ Number of years as a reading specialist _____
Texas certification _____ Master's Degree _____
Meet IDEA requirements _____

What is the role of the reading specialist?

How has the role of reading specialist changed since the implementation of RTI?

What has changed in your district since implementing RTI?

Since the implementation of RTI, has there been an increase or decrease in students being referred to special education?

How are students selected to receive reading support on your campus? Is there a criterion?

What do you perceive as the benefits of RTI, and for whom?

What do you perceive as the limitations of RTI, and for whom?

Do you feel you have access to research-based interventions including support in their implementation? Please explain.

Do you feel that your expertise as a reading specialist is an integral part of the implementation of RTI? Please explain.

Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you feel would be beneficial to this study on RTI?

Thank you for taking time to respond to this survey. If you would be willing to offer more input on this important topic, I welcome your participation in the next round of data collection, which will involve one-to-one interviews and a focus group of reading specialists.

Yes, I am interested in participating in an interview on the topic. (Not all participants will be selected due to time.)

Yes, I am interested in participating in a focus group.

e-mail _____

Appendix G: Jennie Duke's Diary Format

Date	Time	Purpose
		<p>Type of interaction</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Phone call <input type="checkbox"/> Brief conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Other.....
		<p>People involved</p> <input type="checkbox"/> SEP Teacher <input type="checkbox"/> HOSES <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom Teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Therapist <input type="checkbox"/> HOD <input type="checkbox"/> Principal <input type="checkbox"/> Deputy Principal <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Aide

Can you please provide some feedback about the use of this diary in this space?

Thank you

Appendix H: Modified Journal Format

Date/Time	Purpose of Interaction	Type of Interaction
	<p>Describe the interaction, when and where it happened, and who said what.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting • Phone call • Conversation • Modeling/Demos • E-mail • Other... <p style="text-align: center;">People Involved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom teacher • Counselor • Special Ed Teacher • Speech Path • Psychologist • Principal • Vice Principal • Instructional Asst • Parent • Student

Participants please return the completed journal in the attached self-addressed stamped envelope to the researcher.

Permission given by Jennie Duke (Appendix G) to use/modify form.

Appendix I: Permission to Use Journal Format

Subject : RE: Sample Diary Entry Form

Date : Sun, Feb 17, 2013 12:06 AM CST

From : Jennifer Duke <xxx@xx.xx.xx>

To : Twyla Heindl <xxx.xxxx@xxx.xxx>

Dear Twyla

Thank you so much for asking I am pleased you found it useful. Of course you may use it..citations of my work will help my final examination process for my PhD. I would love to track what you are doing I am very interested in RTI and how you will use the diary. Please stay in contact:)

Good luck.

Kind regards

Jennie

Sent from my Windows Phone

From: Twyla Heindl

Sent: 17/02/2013 10:55 AM

To: Jennifer Duke

Subject: Sample Diary Entry Form

Dear Mrs. Duke,

I am a doctoral student in Teacher Leadership at Walden University's online program. I am also a reading specialist at the elementary school level in San Antonio, Texas. I am preparing to do my dissertation on the Reading Specialists Perspectives and Roles in Implementing Response to Intervention. My committee member suggested that I have my participants keep a research diary to help triangulate the interviews, survey, and focus group data. As I was researching references on using a diary, I came across your form.

I am requesting your permission to use and/or adapt your form to collect my data. Please advise me on the process to gain your consent.

Thank you,

Twyla Heindl

Appendix J: Invitation Letter to Participants

Dear Reading Specialist,

My name is Twyla Heindl. I am currently a reading specialist in the district and a doctoral student at Walden University. I am currently working on my dissertation study entitled, Reading Specialist's Perceptions and Roles in Implementing Response to Intervention. In order to get your particular perspective on the role of the reading specialist, In order to get your particular perspective on the role of the reading specialist, I am asking you to volunteer in this study by agreeing to:

- Complete an informed consent form in order to participate in this study.
- Complete and return a 15 – 20 minute survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided by the researcher.
- Participate in a 20 - 30 minute interview with the researcher (scheduled at a time and location convenient for the participant).
- Participate in a one hour focus group at an established time and place convenient for all participants.
- Record interactions in a reflection journal for five days

Consent forms must be obtained from each reading specialist who agrees to participate in this study. The letter of consent will make it clear that participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time and that all identifying information will be kept confidential.

Please send the informed consent form and survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope to: xxx address. If you should have any questions or want additional information on the expectations of being interviewed, please contact me at xxx@xxx.xxx or call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

I know your time is valuable and I greatly appreciate your willingness to share your opinions with me. Thank you for your time in reading my letter.

Sincerely,

Twyla Heindl

Appendix K: District Approval Letter

August 29, 2013


Northside
Independent
School
District

Twyla Heindl
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Dear Ms. Heindl:

This is to confirm that you have been granted permission to conduct your study in the Northside Independent School District. You may conduct the activities necessary to complete your study titled, "Reading Specialist's Perceptions and Roles in Implementing Response to Intervention".

Brenda Ward
Director
Testing &
Evaluation

We have received and reviewed your documentation and find your interests consistent with those of the district. Your ideas were clearly articulated and well thought out. We are satisfied with the relevance of the topic and the profession and technical rigor displayed. We are interested in maintaining a dialogue with you as the study is finalized and results become available. As with any district-sanctioned, unsolicited, external research study, participation is ultimately at the discretion of the employees and students involved.

Your contact for questions, issues or concerns about access to and logistics within each participating campus is the campus principal. Any district policy questions, issues or concerns should come to me.

We wish you well with the study.
Brenda Ward
Brenda Ward, Ed.D.
Director of Testing & Evaluation
(210) 397-3554

5651 Grissom Road
San Antonio, Texas
78238-2220
Tel: 210.397.8726
Fax: 210.257.1171
www.nisd.net



Appendix L: Initial Coding of Responses

Reading Specialist A	Reading Specialist B	Reading Specialist C	Reading Specialist D
SGI- small group interventions	STUD-help students	SWR-help implement school-wide reading program	SUPPT- Literacy support to teachers
ATRSK- working with struggling/at risk students	COLLAB- collaborate with teachers	SGI- small group instruction for K-5	ATRSK- at risk students
ISUPPT-instructional support	BTP-implement best teaching practices	SUPPT-supports and train teachers (TRNG)	DYS- test for dyslexia
SD-Staff development for staff	DYS- help dyslexic students	DYS- test for dyslexia	RTI Process – Superficial means to an end
INTERV-research based programs	T3-help Tier 3 students	WSUPPT- help support writing program	DOC- increase in documentation for students
DOC- documentation of intervention progress	MTGS- many meetings after school	DATA- analyze data	INSTR- inefficient and repetitive instruction
FUND- SCE funded limits interactions	COLABL- collaboration between RS and teachers	COORD- coordinate family literacy nights	SPED- increase in students in SPED
TIME – time needed to prove interventions work	SPED- increase in special education referrals	ATRISK- update at-risk roster	ATRISK- follow at-risk guidelines
DOC- provide time to show interventions work or they don't work	ATRISK- work with at-risk students	CONF- attend parent conferences	ATRISK- service retained and below level students
INTERV access to interventions	FOLTHRU- teachers don't follow through with interventions	MTG- RTI staffing meeting	STUD-benefits students who are struggling
TIME- time to work with students	PAPRWK – to complete time-consuming paperwork	INTERV- creating intervention goals	FLAGS- red flags struggling and failing students
FUNDS- lack of funds to buy intervention programs	PAPRWK- teachers don't do required paperwork	DATA- input data into eRTI program	MISUND- RTI is often misunderstood
TRNG- training and education are lacking	INTERV- too many students needing interventions	ASSMT -conducting small group testing for CDBs/STAAR	DATA – collect sufficient data on students
	FUND- lack of funds to purchase programs and materials	ASSMT- IRI testing, CDBs	INSTR- meant to implement effective instruction so all students can succeed
	TIER3- who else would do Tier 3 if not the reading specialist	MTG- attend ARD SPED meetings	TIME- RTI should be short-term
	RTI – teachers not willing to do RTI	STUD – tutor students after school	INSTRU- access to research based instruction is limited
	EXPT – reading specialists must be the expert in Reading	DUTY- school duty	FUND- programs are expensive
		MTG- PTA/SAT/District meetings	SPED – many programs on campus are exclusive to SPED
		NO VOICE – district makes day to day decisions with input from campus	DATA – collected data for testing

(table continues)

TIME – time is critical to implement interventions	DYS – be aware of students who need to be tested for DYS
TIME- more content, not more time	
DYS- decrease in SPED, increase in dyslexia	
TIER 2- struggling readers, Tier 2	
ASUPPT- lack of support from admin	

Appendix M: Reduced Initial Codes

Description	Code
Progress Monitoring	PM
Misunderstanding	MIS
Support Struggling Students	SS
Dyslexia	DYS
Small group instruction	SGI
Research based instruction	RBI
Staff development	SD
Documentation of interventions	DOC
Interventions, programs, research based instruction	INTERV
Assessment, testing, CDBs	ASSMT
Time	TIME
Funding	FUND
Special Education	SPED
Training	TRNG
Writing support	WSUPPT
Collaboration	COLLAB
Meetings	MTG
Communication	COM
Paperwork	PAPWK
Resources	RES
At-Risk	ATRSK
Data	DATA
Tier 3	T3
Instructional Support	ISUPPT
Teacher follow through	FOLTHRU
Admin Support	ASUPPT
Instruction, best instruction	INSTRU

Appendix N: Codes According to Research Question

Research Question	Emerging Codes	Emerging Themes
1. What is the reading specialist's understanding of the RTI process?	<p>Way to help students struggling in reading and math before testing for special ed (STUD) (ASSMT) (SPED)</p> <p>Seems like more students are being pushed for DYS and SPED testing instead of being reduced (DYS) (SPED)(ASSMT)</p> <p>Tiered process (TIERS)</p> <p>Help struggling students (STUD)</p> <p>Misunderstood because we all are interpreting RTI differently (MISUND)</p> <p>Federal initiative (LAW)</p> <p>Stop or prevent overcrowding of students in special ed (STUD) (SPED)</p> <p>Monitor students with academic or social concern (MONIT)</p> <p>Implement plan of action (IMPLEM)</p> <p>Support students (SSTUD)</p> <p>Show progress in what they are struggling with (PROGR)</p>	<p>Supporting Students (At Risk, Struggling) (SUPPT)</p> <p>Monitoring Progress (student) PM</p> <p>Tiered process (TIERS)</p> <p>Assessment (special ed, DYS) (ASSMT)</p> <p>Data collection (DATA)</p>
2. How do reading specialists describe their roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI?	<p>Resource for teachers</p> <p>Resource to teachers (RES)</p> <p>Provide interventions (INTERV)</p> <p>Small group instruction (INSTRU)</p> <p>Track interventions available on campus (DATA) (INTERV)</p> <p>Participant in CHILD process (TIERS)</p> <p>Part of committee (COMM)</p> <p>Meet to discuss students every Wed (MTGS)</p> <p>Collect data (DATA)</p> <p>Provide reading support (RSUPPT)</p> <p>Staff development (SD) (FUND)</p> <p>Share best strategies and practices in reading (READ) (STRAT) (PRAC)</p> <p>Provide reading interventions (INTERV) (FUND)</p> <p>Work with struggling students (STUD)</p> <p>Document and monitor student progress (DOC) (MONI)</p>	<p>Interventions (provide, track)(INTERV)</p> <p>Small group instruction (INSTRU)</p> <p>Participate in meetings (MTGS)</p> <p>Data collection (DATA)</p> <p>Support (reading, student) (SUPPT)</p> <p>Monitor student progress(PM)</p> <p>Staff Development (SD)</p> <p>Funding (FUND)</p>

(table continues)

3. What are the experiences and challenges of elementary school reading specialists implementing RTI?	Progress monitoring (PM) What data to collect (DATA) Providing consistency in interventions (INTERV) Lack of resources (LRESOUR) Lack of funds to buy research based programs (FUND) Dyslexia testing causes groups to be canceled. (DYS) (CANCEL) Meetings that disrupt group time (MTGS) CDB testing – too much (ASSMT) Tracking student progress (DATA) Trained personnel to deliver interventions (SD) (INTERV) (TRNG) Too many students – too many needs (STUD) No time to collaborate with teachers (TIME) What assessments to use for monitoring progress (ASSMT) (MONIT) Lack of staff and professional development(SD) Scheduling of small groups(SCHED) (SG) Tracking data (DATA) Misunderstanding of what RTI is (MISUND) Not understanding the purpose of the process (NOT UNDERS) Admin support (ASUPPT) Consistency in district implementation (IMPLEM) Identifying appropriate strategies (STRAT) Communication with teachers (COMMO) Admin support (ASUPPT) LSSP expectations for data collection (DATA) At times I feel the process can be cumbersome, because some students are not making progress (CHALLEN) (STUD) (PROGR) Additional interventions are added on, or testing is initiated (INTERV) (ASSMT) Students missing classroom instructional time (STUD) (TIME) Students are falling further behind (STUD)	Progress monitoring (PM) Collecting and tracking data (DATA) Funding (FUND) Lack of resources (FUND) Trained personnel (FUND) (SD)(TRNG) Scheduling (TIME) Misunderstanding RTI(MISUND) Admin support (ASUPPT) Collaboration/communication (COLLAB) (COMMO) Increased testing (ASSMT) Meetings (MTGS)
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(table continues)

4.	What staff development support do reading specialists provide to classroom teachers regarding RTI?	District list of interventions per tier (INTERV) How to enter data based on running records (DATA) Nothing formal (OTHER) I think a lot of teachers follow the RTI process for documentation purposes, however authenticity of the intervention and purpose it should be serving is not consistently followed through. (DOCU) (INTERV) (FOLTHRU) Training should have been extended on what to do with these students once they're in the system (TRNG) How to enter students into Esped (STUD) (DATA)	No formal training (TRNG) District list of interventions (INTERV) Each campus does its own thing Entering data into Esped (DATA) Data (DATA)
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