

2015

# Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Response-to-Intervention Program

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*Walden University*

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Alfredo López

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2015

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Response-to-Intervention Program

by

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MA, University of Houston, 1998

BS, Texas A&M University, 1991

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2015

## Abstract

This study was designed to address teachers' difficulties implementing Response-to-Intervention (RtI) program strategies at a low-performing school in south Texas in response to students failing to meet statewide assessment standards in reading. This exploratory case study investigated the perceptions of Grades 3 and 4 teachers to assist in understanding a pathway to increase higher fidelity of RtI implementation and improve student academic performance. Knowles's theory of andragogy and Lewin's change theory provided the framework for the study. The study included interview data from 6 purposefully selected Grades 3 and 4 teachers supplemented by document reviews of professional development (PD) presentations and RtI implementation policies. All data were analyzed using comparative and inductive analysis and coded into 7 emergent themes. The findings included the need for administrative supervision, a lack of RtI fidelity of implementation, and a need for PD focusing on interventions and organizational tools. The project, which was developed based on the findings and literature review, includes opportunities for learning and participating in campus RtI planning to gain support for the program, attending district-approved PD sessions to assist teachers' techniques to improve student performance in reading, and training in specific RtI progress monitor reporting to document use of the various interventions for individuals in the classroom. By ensuring that students receive RtI instruction that is designed to meet their individual academic needs, the project may help the school district decrease referrals to special education and improve students' reading abilities.

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## Dedication

I dedicate my research project with tremendous appreciation to my family, Alfredo Sr., Beatrice, and Cindy Lee López. My family's support and guidance helped me in achieving fruition of my educational endeavor. It is their love and encouragement that allowed me to stay true on my road to reaching my goals. My parents always instill in me the belief that all things are possible with hard work and perseverance. From my earliest memories, I recall their advice being that education was the tool necessary to reaching goals and having a good life.

Thank you to my family for their continuous prayers. I know that my church was also there praying for me as well. God does many things for his children; my degree is God's hands at work with one of His children.

Along with my family, I celebrate my greatest accomplishment. Thank you all.

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Additionally, I want to acknowledge my committee member, Dr. Pamela Harrison, for her guidance and expertise that she provided as my methodologist. I appreciate her for helping me to make my project study one that would benefit schools and bring about social change to the education community at large.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (IDEA) mandated that appropriate intervention services that meet children's needs be provided in natural home and community settings in the United States (Zirkel, 2011). Response to intervention (RtI) is an early intervention program developed to comply with the requirements of IDEA. RtI is a multitiered program that requires detailed monitoring of students' academic progress, and was designed to address problems with the discrepancy model in special education. The discrepancy model was used to identify students with possible learning disabilities based upon sociocultural determinants, rather than actual evidence of learning disabilities (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). As a result of IDEA, children who are referred to special education must have first been provided with appropriate instruction delivered by qualified teachers in a regular educational setting (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008).

Students in the United States qualify for special education services based on either of two criteria: being identified as a student with a disability, or having an educational need based upon a disability (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2012g). Since Congress enacted Public Law 94-142 (U.S. Department of Education [USDoE], 2010), the U.S. public education system used a discrepancy model to determine whether children qualified for special education. Under this model, testing for disability was conducted by qualified staff using a battery of assessments; children had to demonstrate a severe discrepancy between academic achievement and intellectual ability in eight areas:

- oral expression,

- listening comprehension,
- written expression,
- basic reading,
- reading comprehension,
- reading fluency,
- mathematical calculation, or
- mathematical reasoning (Daves & Walker, 2012, p. 69).

In addition, children had to have a 16-point discrepancy between their academic achievement scores and their intellectual ability scores in order to be classified as learning disabled in an area such as reading or math. This 16-point discrepancy and the educational need were used to determine whether or not a special education program would offer special education as a service.

Children in the United States who live in low-income households, who are male, and whose first language is not English are more likely than the general population to be enrolled in special education classes (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Aron and Loprest (2012) noted that male students are likely to be identified as needing special education, and that African American students and English language learners (ELLs) are overrepresented in special education classes. Factors that contribute to this overrepresentation problem include poverty, institutional racism, the low number of teachers and professionals of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and a bias in standardized testing development (Aron & Loprest, 2012).



Nondisabled students in the United States who are referred to special education must be provided with RtI interventions as early intervening services (IDEA, 2004). RtI is an instructional paradigm that includes measurements that affect instruction, the quality of instructional materials, and the students' quality of time to practice goals and objectives that they have not yet mastered. It also provides maintenance and application support (Daly, Martens, Barnett, Witt, & Olson, 2007). Students' progress data must be monitored to determine what, if any, changes need to be made to instruction to support their academic progress. Students in the United States must have interventions prior to being referred to special education.

Public school campus stakeholders use performance data to guide decisions about instruction and to monitor the progress of the fidelity of RtI implementation in the United States (Bianco, 2010). An effective RtI program ensures that teachers' delivery instruction is intended to address the challenges of fidelity of implementation; fidelity of implementation programs are used to ensure that teachers implement a program as it was designed and document actual disability (Bianco, 2010). Teachers need to have an understanding of the RtI program design so that they can implement it as it was designed. Campus stakeholders need to understand all aspects of RtI in order for the implementation of the program to increase student academic performance in reading (Daly, Martens, Barnett, Witt, & Olson, 2007).

The teachers' role is vital in ensuring fidelity of implementation within the RtI program. Teachers need to provide high-quality instruction with problem-solving methods (Dunn, 2010). Public school teachers in the United States are responsible for

monitoring students' progress, so they must document the results of universal screening; the implementation of evidence-based instruction; and the implementation of scientific, research-based interventions (Hoover, 2010). School districts also must provide teachers with the highest quality of professional development (PD) in progress monitoring and intervention implementation (Lose, 2007). Funding for PD for teachers has resulted in higher achievement for students than has funding spent in other areas (Lose, 2007).

### **Background of the Local Problem**

This study examined conditions at Clover Elementary (pseudonym), a public school located in the coastal plains region of Texas. During the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 at Clover Elementary failed to meet the expectations of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in grade-level reading (TEA, 2012a). The campus was scored as having below-standard performance on statewide reading assessments for this period and failed to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) set by No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002).

NCLB established a target standard of 87% for AYP school improvement for all students who are African American, Hispanic American, European American, economically disadvantaged, special education, and limited English proficient (LEP). Clover Elementary did not meet this 87% reading target standard during the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years. In 2010-2011, Clover's AYP percentages were 67% overall, 68% for African American, 66% for Hispanic American, 68% for European American, 65% for economically disadvantaged, 35% for special education, and 50% for LEP students. In 2011-2012, AYP percentages were 73% overall, 56% for African American,

72% for Hispanic American, 76% for European American, 71% for economically disadvantaged, 48% for special education, and 33% for LEP students (TEA, 2012b). As a result of not meeting the 87% requirement for AYP, the campus was labeled as *required improvement*. This label, combined with a failure to meet state assessment requirements, resulted in the campus being identified as low performing.

At the time of the study, Clover Elementary's school district had 29 campuses, comprising 18 elementary schools, four middle schools, one juvenile justice center, one career and technology institute, one advanced learning center, one academy, one alternative education placement campus, and two high schools. The district had approximately 14,000 students during this period and implemented RtI on all campuses in 2006 in an effort to address its low reading scores. Despite this implementation, Clover Elementary's students continued to perform below standard on statewide reading assessments, a problem attributed by the school's principal to a lack of fidelity in implementation of RtI. This lack of fidelity was evident in the lack of in-classroom interventions prior to referrals of students to special education (J. Jameson [pseudonym], personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Problems with the implementation of RtI were further revealed in the below-standard statewide assessment scores of students and the high number of referrals to special education, despite the continuous training of teachers in RtI, the district RtI committee's interventions and structured support, and the need for an outside consultant to assist in training. The reading scores of students in Grades 3 through 5 continued to decrease (TEA, 2012a). The minimum state standard set for reading and math assessment

was 70% in 2011 and 2012. In 2011, Clover Elementary students scored 58% overall in Grade 3, 47% in Grade 4, and 45% in Grade 5 (TEA, 2012a). Subpopulations not meeting the 70% state standard in reading were Grade 3 African American (40%), Grade 3 Hispanic American (57%), Grade 4 Hispanic American (52%), Grade 5 Hispanic American (39%), Grade 4 European American (38%), Grade 3 special education (57%), Grade 4 special education (33%), Grade 5 special education (20%), Grade 3 economically disadvantaged (58%), Grade 4 economically disadvantaged (45%) , and Grade 5 economically disadvantaged students (37% ) (TEA, 2012a). As a result of these low scores, Clover Elementary did not meet the state assessment requirement in reading for subpopulations.

These low scores led the district to provide training and employ a consultant to assist campuses in meeting state requirements; however, Clover Elementary's reading scores continued to decrease. Continuous training in RtI was provided to the teachers at Clover Elementary as an annual 1-day PD training session since 2006, as reported by the district curriculum coordinator (S. Jones [pseudonym], personal communication, May 20, 2013). Follow-up trainings were developed and disseminated to teachers on campuses by the RtI committee. The RtI committee met twice a year to develop interventions and provide structured support to all teachers on campuses (S. Jones, personal communication, May 20, 2013).

The RtI committee used two out-of-district consultants, one for academics and one for behavior, to provide training to the committee that offered annual yearly training to RtI committees on campus. These consultants visited all campuses in order to offer

recommendations to the district RtI committee and guided the RtI committee in various RtI processes (S. Jones, personal communication, May 20, 2013). The academic RtI consultant also met with the district RtI committee 3 times each year to provide committee members with training and plan districtwide PD. All teachers on campuses in the school district received initial training in 2006, with follow-up training every school year from the academic RtI consultant, as reported by an RtI committee member (R. Robinson [pseudonym], personal communication, April 26, 2013). Beginning in 2006, Clover Elementary had seven RtI trainings and yearly campus visits from the consultant contracted by the school district.

The second consultant, an RtI behavioral specialist, began working with the district in 2012 to assist in improving classroom performance. The principal of Clover Elementary stated that the problem at this campus was at the Tier 1 stage of RtI, where teachers failed to acquire the basic knowledge in order to provide the necessary RtI instruction for student success (T. Thompson [pseudonym], personal communication, August 3, 2012). The school's principal also indicated that the majority of students being referred to special education for specialized instruction for unidentified disabilities and without RtI documentation. Records, however, indicated that the school's teachers had received training and guidance from consultants to improve student performance. Despite the training and consultants providing Clover Elementary with tools for improving student academic success, the school's students continued to show decreased reading performance.

The use of RtI interventions at Clover Elementary was designed to assist students in meeting academic goals. RtI is a framework that uses student performance data to determine the effectiveness of instructional strategies and to identify areas where supplemental interventions are needed (VanDerHeyden, 2011). However, integrity of treatment in the RtI model in schools is a challenge (Bianco, 2010). When RtI is implemented correctly, a data set is generated that allows educators to meet the learning needs of students and identify when needs for instructional supports could not be met in the general education classroom setting (VanDerHeyden, 2011). When RtI is not implemented correctly, there can be an increase in the number of students referred to special education and identified as learning disabled, instead of having their academic needs met in the general education classroom (Lose, 2007). RtI includes the use of progress monitoring to guide decision making about the implementation of interventions with fidelity. RtI implementation with fidelity can increase students' academic performance. Students might have been incorrectly referred to special education at Clover Elementary because of the lack of PD about the RtI program available to the teachers.

### **Definition of the Local Problem**

Students at the local elementary school used in this study demonstrated low academic performance in reading despite the prior implementation of the RtI model to improve academic achievement. Clover Elementary's local school district implemented a districtwide RtI program in 2007 to provide support to teachers. In 2007, an RtI team composed of general education teachers, principals, and central administration personnel was created to develop plans to assist the teachers in providing scientifically research-

based interventions. Possible factors impacting the problem could have been that (a) the teachers failed to recognize the importance of the RtI process and found it difficult to change their methods of instruction (Samuels, 2008); (b) there was a lack of correct implementation by the teachers of the training and support provided by the district, as described by Menzies, Mahdavi, and Lewis (2008); or (c) there was a need for an accountability process through continuous supervision by administration, as suggested by Kozleski and Huber (2010). Addressing the students' ongoing low academic performance, despite implementation of the RtI program, was important to the campus because the school was below standard performance on statewide assessments and failed to meet the 87% target standard for AYP state requirements of the NCLB's (2001, 2002) federal requirements (TEA, 2012d). In this qualitative study, I investigated the perceptions of the teachers of students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 about the implementation of the RtI program to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons for the students' low academic performance.

### **Rationale**

At the time of the study, Clover Elementary was a low-performing school whose teachers experienced difficulty correctly implementing RtI intervention strategies to meet the academic needs of students who failed to meet statewide assessment standards. The rationale for this study was to identify the reasons for this lack of effective RtI implementation at Clover Elementary. According to TEA (2012a), Clover Elementary did not meet AYP in reading during the 2011-2012 preliminary results as required by federal law. Between the 2000-2001 and 2011-2012 school years, Clover Elementary students'

scores in reading decreased by 15.8% in Grade 3, 34.5% in Grade 4, and 15.3% in Grade 5 (TEA, 2012a). Additional information was compiled addressing student performance, RtI implementation, and referrals to special education from the district to provide further evidence of this low-performance problem at the local level.

Clover Elementary had a strategic setting within the district. The Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) of the TEA (2012e) reported that the Clover Elementary student population was 79% Hispanic American, 5.6% African American, 13.6% European American, 2% American Indian, and 1.6% other races. Ninety-one percent of the children received a free or reduced-price lunch, 4.8% of the students were classified as LEP, and 34.4% of the students were labeled at risk. Student retention rates were 3.1% for Grade 3, 3.0% for Grade 4, and 1.6% for Grade 5. At the time of the study, approximately 30 instructors taught at Clover Elementary, which had a 29.3% student mobility rate. Teacher ethnicity was 79.5% European American, 1.73% Hispanic American, and 3.2% African American. Teacher experience was 9.7% (beginning), 36.3% (1-5 years), 19.2% (6-10 years), 22.6% (11-20 years), and 12.1% (> 20 years). The average number of years of teaching experience was 10.0. Approximate class size averages were 19 students in Grade 3, 19.3 in Grade 4, and 25.7 in Grade 5. Clover Elementary provided an education to a total of 78 students in Grade 3, 76 in Grade 4, and 77 in Grade 5. Clover Elementary had a high minority (Hispanic American) student percentage, a high European American teacher percentage, and a high percentage of low socioeconomic status (SES) students. These percentages represented factors that had an impact on student performance at Clover Elementary.



Schools that use RtI might be implementing the program poorly because of a lack of staff development (Menzies et al., 2008). RtI staff development can give teachers the training topics and skills that they need to address instructional curriculum, the academic environment, and the individual differences of student learning (Nunn & Jantz, 2009). RtI training also focuses on knowledge, procedures, methods, and instructional strategies to implement a program that is supportive of student success; however, the training needs to be validated through outcome evidence (Nunn & Jantz, 2009). Teachers try to meet student needs by providing effective services, including proactive interventions designed to improve students' skills (Kratochwill, Volpiansky, Clements, & Ball, 2007).

Teachers' perceptions of a new program also can influence the success of program implementation (Pyle, 2011). If teachers perceive RtI implementation as an additional task instead of as a crucial part of a school's improvement plan, its success is at risk (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). The purpose of the study was to investigate the teachers' perceptions about the implementation of RtI and its impact on students' academic achievement.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms were used in the study:

*Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS)*: A state report that is used to gather student performance information for each school and district in the state of Texas every school year (TEA, 2012e).

*At-risk students*: An official designation based upon 13 criteria that include the possibility of dropping out, not advancing a grade level, not meeting standards on state

assessments, placement in alternative education programs, expulsion, homelessness, and so on (TEA, 2012c).

*Differentiated instruction:* A process for teaching students with different levels of abilities in the same classroom used to maximize students' growth and academic success by meeting their individual needs (Huebner, 2010).

*Progress monitoring or universal screening:* A research-based practice used to assesses the academic performance of students and determine the effectiveness of their instruction (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2011).

### **Significance of the Problem**

The significance of addressing the referenced problem is that it could result in a reduction in teachers submitting undocumented referrals to special education for students with suspected learning disabilities, the students and campus could meet statewide assessments in reading in Grades 3 through 5, and the perceptions of the teachers at Clover Elementary might lead to changes in the effectiveness of the RtI program. Each of these areas could have an impact on the local study at Clover Elementary as well as on the district at large that may provide a means for addressing teacher perceptions regarding RtI.

Students at Clover Elementary in Grades 3 and 4 reading are referred for special education diagnostic assessment and possible identification of a learning disability without RtI intervention documentation. Students are misidentified with a specific learning disability label at Clover Elementary because of this incorrect process. The TEA state standard for the percentage of students in special education is 8.5%; at Clover

Elementary, the percentage is 11.2% (TEA, 2012f) for least restrictive environment (LRE) and need to be in general education classrooms for the maximum time possible with nondisabled peers, according to their individual education plan (IEPs; Aron & Loprest, 2012).

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the study was to investigate Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers' perceptions of the implementation of RtI in the reading program at Clover Elementary.

The following research questions guided the project study:

1. What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding fidelity of RtI implementation?
2. What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding RtI Tier I reading interventions?
3. What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding RtI staff development for correct implementation?
4. In which aspects of the RtI process are Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers the most competent?
5. In which aspects of the RtI process do Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers need additional training?

### **Review of the Literature**

To locate relevant studies for the literature review, I conducted searches for literature within the last 5 years on teachers' perceptions of RtI. Topics of investigation included literature on the history of RtI. I looked for articles related to RtI on a variety of

databases, including Thoreau, EBSCO, Proquest, Sage, Education Research Complete, ERIC, Google Scholar, eBrary, and Worldcat with Full Text. Search terms included *response to intervention, andragogy, perceptions, change, and teachers*. Sources cited in the literature review were current and compiled until there was saturation of the literature on this topic.

### **Conceptual Framework Related to the Problem**

The theoretical framework was based upon Knowles's theory of andragogy (as cited in Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) and Lewin's change theory (as cited in Lewin & Gold, 1999). Andragogy was first studied in the early 1920s, when Lindeman began studying the process of how adults learn (as cited in Knowles et al., 2005).

Knowles et al. (2005) stated that adults learn best based upon specific criteria:

- A need to know.
- Self-concept of the learner.
- The learner's prior experience.
- A readiness to learn.
- An orientation to learning.
- Motivation. (p. 4)

As a theoretical framework, andragogy can be used to instruct adults through the use of individualized characteristics of learning. Unlike children, adults learn through different modalities such as the need to understand and expand on their knowledge on a topic, the learner's self-concept, the prior and personal experiences of the learner, the readiness and desire to learn, an understanding that the learning can be applied to their lives, and a

motivation to want to learn the new material (Knowles et al., 2005). For adult learners, education and learning have different meanings. Education changes knowledge, skills, and the attitudes (Knowles et al., 2005). In this study, andragogy addressed the needs of teachers in RtI.

Adult learners, unlike children, learn differently and need to understand why they have to acquire new knowledge. Knowles et al. (2005) hypothesized that for adults to acquire new knowledge, they need to understand why they must learn something before they endeavor to learn it. Adult learners are responsible for their own decisions, a reflection of their self-concept. When adults invest their own interests and welfare into new knowledge, they wish to be treated by others as self-directed. These adult learners prefer not to be in situations where others could impose their will upon them. However, according to Knowles's paradigm, adult learners could be assisted in moving from dependent to self-directed learners.

Adult learners bring past personal experiences to the learning environment. The quantity and quality of these personal experiences have several consequences in adult education. Adult educators need to tap into the experiences of learners and use peer-helping activities to engage adult students (Knowles et al., 2005). Adults learn best when they are ready for new knowledge. In this aspect of the theory of andragogy, Knowles et al. (2005) focused on the acquisition of information when the circumstances require it and when they are able to cope effectively with situations of real life. Educators must time learning experiences so that these occurrences work with developmental tasks in schools. Knowles et al. purported that adult learners are influenced by external factors

such as better jobs, higher salaries, and promotions that motivate them to want to continue developing and growing. According to the theory of andragogy, the optimal time for adults to learn is when they are convinced that there is a rationale for the learning.

The principal is a key player in the implementation of RtI. Knowles et al.'s (2005) theory of andragogy can be used to increase the learning of faculty and reduce the resistance of faculty to change (Sansosti, Noltemeyer, & Goss, 2010). In a study of high school principals, Sansosti, Noltemeyer, et al. (2010) found that the principals perceived RtI to be important in the schools, but required a complex and significant change to implement. Kaesshaefer (2009) argued that PD in RtI should include faculty planning and decision making for adult learning to occur. Knowles et al. (2005) stated that it is important for PD trainers to understand the expectations of trainees through the use of needs assessment and trainees' involvement in planning.

For change to occur, there has to be forces for and against it. In the change theory, Lewin and Gold (1999) addressed the change process in human systems. This theory was used to address the research questions and the ways in which Clover Elementary teachers perceived the implementation of RtI. Lewin and Gold argued that in order to have systemic or institutional change, the forces that favor the change have to be greater than the forces resisting it. There needs to be a balance between the forces that support change and the forces that resist the change. Negative driving forces could lead to increased resistance, resulting in no change or tension (Zand & Sorensen, 1975). Change

happens when one of the two forces is greater than the other, so the forces that favor change need to be greater for positive systemic change to occur.

Different phases need to occur for change to happen. Lewin and Gold (1999) established a three-phase change model: unfreeze, change, and refreeze. Unfreezing includes practices and processes that facilitate change in an organization or an individual. Unfreezing occurs when the participants understand the problem and the factors involved in the problem (Lewin & Gold, 1999). The first step in unfreezing is to inform the organization or the individual that transformation is a required component of change. The second step includes movement toward awareness of the problem and the establishment of a vision for the future. In this change step, activities and interventions that allow the organization to move toward a new level are introduced (Burke, 1987). The change phase introduces movement and behavior that cause a shift from a current stage to a new functional level that demonstrates noticeable behaviors (Burke, 1987). This second stage of the change theory could include changes in thought processes, perceptions, and behaviors, resulting in positive cognitive adaptations to the new procedures (Lewin & Gold, 1999).

Refreezing requires the organization and individuals to anchor new processes, attitudes, and behaviors. In the refreezing step, new behaviors are acknowledged as a new standard in the organization (Burke, 1987). Lewin's change theory (as cited in Lewin & Gold, 1999) is known as action research, a cycle derived from data that provides feedback to the participants, establishes new learning, evaluates the impact of the new learning, and creates more learning (Burke, 1987). Action researchers recognize that

people in organizations work together because they want to achieve common goals (Glassman, Erdem, & Bartholomew, 2013). Action researchers have asserted that change occurs by altering community patterns of interaction towards a democratic process of decision making so that collective action emerges (Glassman et al., 2013). Altering the patterns of how people work together involves shifting how they think about themselves in new positions.

In this stage, the organization's behaviors become standard and cannot be distinguished from the regular operating procedures (Lewin & Gold, 1999). The activities and processes provide the foundation for sustainable change. In the final stage of refreeze, the members change as a group (Silva & Langhout, 2011). This training allows members to become empowered to bring about social change (Silva & Langhout, 2011). This final stage of refreezing, as envisioned by Lewin and Gold (1999), builds unity among the members of the group that fosters transformation. The integration of Lewin and Gold's theory of change with Knowles et al.'s (2005) paradigm of andragogy was pertinent to the conceptual framework of this study because the driving forces causing the problem within an organization and the community of individuals needed to be discovered and analyzed in order for a plan for change to be designed and implemented in the adult learning environment.

### **Review of the Literature Addressing the Problem**

In the review of the literature, I included relevant scholarly literature on the history of special education law and RtI. The initial focus was on the implementation of RtI, including challenges, fidelity, and progress monitoring. I also included literature on



administrative supervision in regard to the support for the development of teachers and principals, teacher and administrator collaboration, principal leadership, teachers' acceptance of change, and PD.

Special education is an individualized instructional program that started in 1965 when Congress created Title VI to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Bureau of Education for the Handicap (U.S. Department of Education [USDoE], 2012). This department was known as the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Aron and Loprest (2012) stated that the evolution of the U.S. special education system could be traced from its origins in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century's civil rights movement. In 1973, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was created to protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination (USDoE, 2012). In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was enacted as IDEA (USDoE, 2007). In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted and included Section 504 regulations (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012). Each of these educational laws had a positive impact on the education and protection of students with disabilities.

### **Implementation of RtI**

RtI has been implemented to achieve positive academic change in reading programs. When the elements of the tiered process of RtI fail to be applied in compliance with the strategies of RtI, students have been referred to inappropriate interventions (Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009). Some implementation challenges of beginning an RtI program were fidelity of implementation, progress monitoring, and the PD of teachers.

**Challenges impacting RtI.** There have been challenges to the correct implementation of RtI in elementary schools in the United States. As one example, teachers became frustrated with RtI, prereferrals, and the referral system to determine special education eligibility (White, Polly, & Audette, 2012). White et al. (2012) noted that state-level staff development could impact the capacity of schools and districts that implement RtI. White et al. addressed the need for the development of an implementation plan, a process, and roles, and they emphasized the importance of the principal and teacher leadership.

Additional challenges have included low academic achievement and expectations, instruction that fails to meet the needs of students, and incorrect assessments of ELLs (Xu & Drame, 2008). ELLs have the lowest scores in achievement and the highest dropout, mobility, and poverty rates, tend to exhibit inappropriate classroom behavior and have difficulty interacting with other students, and have fewer support services to increase language acquisition because instruction is in English rather than their home language (Xu & Drame, 2008). The individual challenges that students have can be addressed through the RtI process and documented to determine interventions.

There has been a lack of training in effective instructional strategies for teachers in school districts because of location, availability of funds, and district size (Dykes, 2009). Texas, more than any other state, has had more students attending small schools, with more than 750,000 students attending rural schools, and the enrollment was less than 18% of the total students in Texas (Johnson & Strange, 2009). The number of students in

a school can affect funding for school districts, and a lack of funds can impact the number of staff development opportunities available to teachers.

**Fidelity of RtI implementation.** Fidelity of instruction is necessary to ensure that the RtI program is effective. RtI that is implemented with fidelity might improve the academic and behavioral performance of students producing data regarding student disabilities (Mellard, McKnight, & Woods, 2009). Interventions delivered to students with fidelity means that the lessons have to be presented as required by the program (Samuels, 2008). Teachers' perceptions of their personal planning abilities regarding RtI could influence student achievement (Stuart, Rinaldi, & Higgins-Averill, 2011). In addition, the way in which teachers perceive the need for the individual RtI components influences the success of the program. The effectiveness of progress monitoring in RtI is influenced by teachers' perceptions and fidelity. If there is a lack of fidelity when an RtI program is implemented, the program could have inconsistent results and exhibit enhanced levels of subjectivity in diagnosis and interventions, which might lead to increased student referrals to special education (Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009). The effectiveness of implementation impacts students' progress. However, the RtI program can produce positive results when implemented with fidelity.

Fidelity of implementation requires documentation of instructional interventions, frequency of days and weeks, duration of minutes and sessions, intensity of individuals or groups, and deviations from the intervention plan (Bianco, 2010). Three supports can be used to document implementation of the RtI program: (a) tracking forms, (b) reading facilitators, and (c) video clips (Bianco, 2010). There also is a higher likelihood of

fidelity of implementation if teachers accept the program and intervention goals and procedures (Mahdavi & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2009). Support of implementation fidelity, with acceptance from teachers, leads to outcomes that are important for all stakeholders.

Fidelity of implementation is the weakest when teachers feel pressured to change their instructional behaviors (Dorn, 2010). Fidelity checklists are used to document and improve RtI implementation to ensure the consistency of implementation as planned (Mahdavi & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2009). Fidelity data should be collected two to three times each month to provide feedback on program implementation (Vaughn et al., 2010). A fidelity checklist might provide data to determine which teachers are implementing the program correctly. Progress monitoring at schools that use fidelity checklists can be used to indicate whether intervention strategies are successful for the majority of students by providing information on the students' mastery of early reading skills in core areas (Mahdavi & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2009). Documentation is necessary to ensure that progress monitoring is occurring throughout the RtI process. Progress monitoring can be used to determine the success or failure of the RtI program and interventions.

Teachers' perceptions of RtI can impact implementation. According to Nunn and Jantz (2009), teachers' beliefs and perceptions impact the implementation and success of the RtI program. Teachers with positive perceptions of RtI have improved outcomes of intervention, a collaborative team, and better results to make data-based decisions about RtI efforts. Likewise, Pyle (2011) found that teachers' perceptions of a new program can have a significant impact on its successful implementation. Huber (2010) indicated that

an inhibiting factor in RtI teacher performance occurs when RtI is viewed as a supplementary assignment to existing instructional practices.

Teachers fail to embrace change when a program is in place, when they perceive RtI as another task instead of an integral part of an improvement plan, and when there is a perceived risk of failure for the new program (Pyle, 2011). Teachers who do not agree with the concepts of a new initiative also might impede its success (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). Teachers' perceptions can impact RtI and change students' progress outcomes; teachers' acceptance also can affect the failure or success of the RtI program.

Teachers might resist the implementation of a new initiative, which could result in a lack of fidelity to the processes of a new program. Implementation of RtI might lead to positive academic change, a strategic part of the program. Progress monitoring by administrators or coaches could occur throughout the program's implementation to reduce educators' frustrations when gathering data for referrals to special education (Johnson & Strange, 2009). Fidelity of implementation is necessary to ensure the implementation of new programs.

**Progress monitoring.** RtI requires detailed student academic progress monitoring to determine mobility through the multiple tiers. Progress monitoring of implementation affects the outcomes of RtI programming and produces the information necessary to ensure fidelity of implementation. RtI has multiple levels of support, and most RtI models have three tiers. The first tier involves instruction and services that are made available to all general education students, the second tier provides short-term instruction that is made available to smaller groups of students who need assistance, and the third tier

includes the most intense levels of instruction with one-on-one assistance. Students receive different levels of support based upon their RtI provided at the different tiers (Brozo, 2010). Teachers, administrators, and intervention team members need to use data to determine instructional decisions to monitor the implementation of RtI (Bianco, 2010). RtI strategies and procedures affect instruction, the quality of instructional materials, the quality of time to practice, and the setting up of assistance for maintenance and application support (Daly et al., 2007). However, for RtI interventions to be successful, the ongoing progress of students in the different tiers is required to provide data to determine eligibility for special education services (Daly et al., 2007). Monitoring student information provides data to determine what changes need to be made to instruction to promote progress to Tier 3.

Documenting the monitoring progress of interventions might reduce reading problems (Menzies et al., 2008). Daves and Walker (2012) defined scientific, research-based interventions as early intervening services that “involve the application of rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (p. 69). The strategies help students to achieve academic success.

The RtI Tier 1 interventions provide students with scientific, research-based interventions designed to meet their academic deficiencies (Mellard et al., 2009). RtI provides a framework to gather data and guide instruction, multiple tier levels of high-quality interventions and instruction, progress monitoring of students, and curricular decisions based on data to improve general education students’ academic and behavioral

outcomes (Mellard et al., 2009). RtI requires that teachers have a knowledge base in regard to making decisions based on data and in selecting empirically validated interventions that are implemented with fidelity (Gotshall & Stefanou, 2011). Progress monitoring of high-intensity instruction, low student-teacher ratios, and explicit instructional approaches for students lacking phonemic awareness could promote academic success (Menzies et al., 2008). Researched-based interventions and strategies can meet the academic needs of students. The progress monitoring in RtI is the framework designed to gather data for decision making. Scientific, researched-based interventions, along with progress monitoring documentation, provide the steps necessary for RtI fidelity of implementation.

**Challenges of implementing RtI for ELLs.** Another challenge when implementing RtI involves students from diverse backgrounds who also are ELLs. The PD necessary to serve ELLs includes strategies for teachers to identify possible disabilities, interpret achievement data, and create plans for individual students to determine whether the interventions are meeting the needs of the students (Kaessheaffer, 2009). Teachers of ELLs are challenged with providing effective interventions, scheduling issues, preparing differentiated instruction, and addressing cultural backgrounds. ELLs are educated in disproportionate numbers in low-SES areas and in schools with high numbers unqualified teachers (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). This type of disproportionality can impact students' academic success, but schools can focus on improving the instructional base for students by incorporating culture, language, and learning in teachers' PD (Kozleski & Huber, 2010).

The teachers of ELLs must be part of the students' RtI and curriculum teams. ELL teacher involvement affects changes to instructional practices based on data and replacement of less effective instructional methods. RtI and ELL interventions are supplemental rather than in lieu of core reading instruction (Kaesshefer, 2009). PD is necessary for teachers to understand the diverse backgrounds of ELLs and have a positive impact on their academic performance. PD can affect the instruction and interventions that ELL students receive.

ELLs are assessed in different ways to ensure the accuracy of standardized testing. RtI can include general outcome measurements (GOMs), which have been supported by researchers (Barrera & Liu, 2010). GOMs have been defined as a standardized method of assessment primarily used to determine students' progress through the curriculum (Barrera & Liu, 2010). This type of assessment provides data for the identification and instruction of ELLs who have disabilities. Concerns regarding RtI validity for ELLs with learning disabilities has been raised (Gerber, 2005). As a result, GOM is recommended for determining academic success and can aid in the progress monitoring of ELLs (Barrera & Liu, 2010). GOMs as an assessment tool provide data for intervention planning and is especially necessary for gathering assessment data of ELLs.

Teachers receive staff development on a continuous basis but are not continuously allowed opportunities to participate in the development of the program implementation. However, if teachers are involved in planning, districts could build capacity among their teaching staff in RtI fidelity and increase the academic achievement of students (Pyle, 2011). Pyle (2011) indicated that tensions in RtI development due to a lack of coherence



between RtI and the framework used by special education, which caused a barrier to the successful implementation of RtI. An initiative is effective if there is acceptance of change from the teachers and all stakeholders (Pyle, 2011). Teachers can be an integral part of RtI implementation when they are part of the planning and development processes. Teachers who are part of program development are more willing to support the program.

In quality public education, teachers are held accountable to themselves, colleagues, and professional associations instead of external authorities regarding teaching practices. Teachers who accept change assume more ownership over their professional work (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010). Teachers in schools that operate professional learning communities (PLCs) are more accepting of growth and change (Teague & Anfara, 2012). Acceptance of change can occur when there is policy renewal to strengthen the performance in classrooms. PLCs allow teachers to contribute to program implementation. Support of autonomous professional activities that pertain to educational working environments also encourages teachers to pursue PD that could improve pedagogy (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010). Teachers' commitment to a program might help to ensure change and successful implementation.

Teachers accept change when the change is internally driven and when they perceive the change to be positive with a sufficient time for complete implementation of new learning (Kearney & Smith, 2010). However, when change is required because of a new initiative, teachers often do not take an active role in the reform process. As a result, the change is complicated by educators interpreting an initiative differently.

## **Administrative Supervision**

Campus administrators are a strategic component in the successful implementation of RtI. Guidance for teaching staff during an RtI implementation is provided by coaches and school administrators. Administrative support that includes PD, teacher-administrator collaboration, and principal leadership can lead to a productive RtI program (Menzies et al., 2008).

**Collaboration and leadership.** Collaboration between principals and teachers can improve teachers' acceptance of new initiatives so that they can be implemented effectively and efficiently. Administrative support is a key component of RtI implementation in the elementary school setting (Koppich, Humphrey, & Hough, 2007). According to Sansosti, Telzrow, and Noltemeyer (2010), principals are catalysts of change in schools, and the effectiveness of an RtI program corresponds to administrators' practices and policies. RtI is implemented successfully when principals support PD and are actively involved in participation at team meetings. Principals also must allocate resources, supply research-based interventions, locate data-based progress monitoring, and use meetings to problem solve. Sansosti et al. (2010) found that principals perceived RtI to be important but also difficult to use on high school campuses, which is significant because successful implementation of RtI requires knowledge and skills of the new practice. Administrative support of any initiative is necessary for its success. Administrators provide the tools necessary for program implementation. Administrators who work closely with teachers and support them have campus initiatives that produce positive outcomes.

Principal and teacher leadership is important for the successful implementation of RtI (Menzies et al., 2008). Koppich et al. (2007) affirmed that teachers want principals to have confidence in their classroom instruction, build a sense of community in the school, encourage the teachers to take risks, and share in the campus decision-making process. In order for RtI to be successful, principals need to understand the perceptions of the RtI program, lead the cultural and instructional changes to sustain the program, and engage the equity concerns of RtI policy (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). Teachers and principals have to work together to implement the program as an educational practice (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). Schools with open school climates can build a culture of cooperation that supports effective teaching practices (Moore, 2009). Collaboration between administrators and teachers is key to the implementation of new programs. The leadership of administrators and teachers can produce effective results in program implementation.

Teachers who have positive perceptions of RtI can provide constructive and positive outcomes for student learning and behavior (Stuart et al., 2011). Nielsen, Barry, and Staab (2008) concluded that teachers who collaborate see themselves as agents of change for their students and their own PD. Teachers' perceptions of change become more supportive of such change when they are given a choice of PD and can help campus administrators to plan the training sessions (Stuart et al., 2011).

Principals play a critical role in RtI implementation at the school and district levels (White et al., 2012). A supportive principal on a school campus will encourage the RtI team and promote the successful implementation of an RtI program. The principal is

key in attracting other principals to the RtI initiative and recruiting other schools.

Administrative leadership can show their commitment to RtI programs by influencing the planning and implementation processes (White et al., 2012). Principals and other administrative leaders on campus, such as assistant principals, instructional coaches, lead teachers, grade level chairs, and so on, are important to decision making that is in the best interests of students. In addition, principals who are familiar with grade-level curricula and understand best practice instructional strategies for students are able to provide support for teachers. Administrator support enables teachers to accept novel and innovative instructional techniques that help to increase the academic achievement of the students (Sansosti et al., 2010). Administrators guide decision making and program implementation, but support and leadership from school principals are necessary to RtI program implementation.

The collaboration between teachers and principals is essential to successful RtI programs. School administrators must listen to teachers' perceptions and integrate these ideas into organizational decisions (Stuart et al., 2011). Teachers' perceptions change when RtI implementation is seen as a cooperative goal to be achieved by teachers and administrators, not an administrative directive (Stuart et al., 2011). Teachers' perceptions of the benefits of school reform influence their ability to address challenges associated with the RtI program and take ownership of its success.

Acceptance of change is necessary for an initiative to be successful, but teachers might resist RtI implementation and not use the program properly. Teachers also might face alterations in their RtI workload that includes overtime and increased paperwork to

document student performance necessary to verify the placement of children in different tiers of the RtI process (Rich, 2010). Teachers' resistance to the changes that they face in implementing RtI include their preferences for the ways in which reading programs are performed before the new program is introduced, unfamiliarity with the new routines of an RtI curriculum, and not knowing how to use the new RtI resources available to them (Samuels, 2008).

As a result of the resistance and challenges, teachers might not implement an RtI program properly. Incorrect implementation of the RtI program could result in students not receiving instructional interventions and strategies that help them to perform at their individual academic levels of ability. Therefore, students documented as performing below academic standard might be referred to special education upon reaching Tier 3 without any prior educational interventions and documentation related to their academic status (Samuels, 2008). Teachers' commitment to the program is an important part of RtI implementation and success. If teachers resist RtI, the program may not be instituted with fidelity. The resistance of teachers to change needs to be addressed before an RtI program can be effectively implemented.

Training for principals also is necessary so that administrators understand that RtI is a strategy to provide individualized instruction. If there is no training for principals, RtI is less likely to be effective (Kozleski, 2010). Duke, Tucker, Salmonoqicz, and Levy (2007) identified a need for customized training for principals to prepare them to address the unique needs of their schools. It is important to determine how school leaders respond to problems based upon employee working relationships, school initiatives, and working

conditions (Duke et al., 2007). School principals need to understand how to implement RtI, so providing them with RtI training allows them to provide support to their teachers. Principals' PD is necessary so that they can provide technical support to teachers and ensure RtI implementation.

Principals' leadership influences teachers' acceptance of change. Teachers whose principals are influential are more positively oriented to institutional change (Kearney & Smith, 2010). During the past 2 decades, researchers have identified campus administrators as being instrumental in the process of school change and growth (Hoover & Love, 2011; Rinaldi, Averill, & Stuart, 2011). Change could result in organizational turbulence when unsuccessful, but growth and transformation could occur when change is successful. When there is a misunderstanding about reform by administrators, teachers, and the external community, there is low fidelity to program implementation that provides ineffective results (Kearney & Smith, 2010). The influence of administrators can help to bring about positive institutional change and teacher cooperation.

### **Implications**

Based upon the teachers' perceptions concerning the implementation of RtI described in the study, the resultant project addresses PD resources and improved staff training of the RtI model of instruction. A strong RtI program requires fidelity of implementation and research-based interventions provided to students based upon continuous progress monitoring. Informed by the findings from the data analysis in the context of the literature reviewed, the project is a multi-day PD for teachers designed to provide resources and training in the effective implementation of RTI. The RtI

Implementation Project has the potential to effect positive social change at Clover Elementary, within the community at large, and in society by ensuring that students receive RtI instruction that meets their individual academic needs. Administrators might use the RtI Implementation Project to help Clover Elementary to meet its AYP goals, achieve statewide standards on assessments, decrease the number of referrals to special education, and increase students' scores on reading tests.

### **Summary**

RtI is available to schools to meet the IDEA (2004) federal requirement of the provision of early intervening services for nondisabled students. In order for RtI to be successful, the program requires fidelity of implementation by teachers in order to meet the academic needs of students. PD to address the perceptions of teachers was needed at Clover Elementary because their perceptions were hindering implementation of RtI.

Section 2 contains information about the methodology of the project study, including the research design and approach, a description of the participants, justification of the data collection, and a discussion of the data analysis. Section 3 provides a review of the literature, a description of the project, a project evaluation plan, and project implications. Section 4 includes the project strengths and weaknesses; recommendations for ways to address the problem; a discussion of what was learned about the process; a discussion of what I learned about myself as scholar, practitioner, and project developer; a reflection on what I learned; and a discussion of the implications, applications, and directions for future research.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Research Design and Approach**

The purpose of this study was to investigate Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers' perceptions of the implementation of RtI and how these perceptions impacted student performance in reading at Clover Elementary (pseudonym), an elementary school located in the coastal plains region of Texas. In this qualitative study, I wanted to obtain the teachers' perceptions of the RtI program to provide a differentiated instructional program that met the academic needs of the students.

The following research questions guided the project study.

1. What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding fidelity of RtI implementation?
2. What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding RtI Tier I reading interventions?
3. What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding RtI staff development for correct implementation?
4. In which aspects of the RtI process are Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers the most competent?
5. In which aspects of the RtI process do Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers need additional training?

I used a case study to provide an intensive description and analysis of the teachers' perceptions, as suggested by Merriam (2002). This study was conducted during the spring semester of the 2013-2014 school year at Clover Elementary. I interviewed



teachers in Grades 3 and 4 who had the responsibility of implementing the three-tiered RtI program for reading at Clover Elementary prior to referring students to special education for testing for specific learning disabilities.

### **Description of the Qualitative Tradition**

I used a qualitative design for this study because qualitative researchers study the participants in their natural setting; attempt to interpret phenomena in ways that people bring meaning to experiences; and seek to decode, translate, and describe in an attempt to find meaning and not frequency (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, researchers conduct case studies to investigate “(a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1981, p. 59). Typical case studies have lengthy narratives; however, I presented the findings in a series of themes to address a set of open-ended questions, as suggested by Yin (1981). A case study design enabled me to gather feedback from the participants and then generate a project that addressed the needs identified during the analysis of the data, as suggested by Merriam (2009). The data came from multiple sources to create a chain of evidence (Yin, 1994). I gathered the data through semistructured interviews, field notes, and an analysis of documents and materials.

### **Justification for Qualitative Case Study Design**

The use of a case study designed aligned with the problem investigated by this study because it allowed for exploring teachers’ perceptions to gather data beneficial to the study district and to other school districts attempting to correctly implement the RtI program. I used inductive methods for reasoning and data analysis to develop categories,

themes, and patterns. I also provided a description of what was seen, heard, and understood (Baskas, 2011). I analyzed the interview responses to identify ways to improve the effectiveness of the RtI reading program in the general education classroom setting (Creswell, 2009). A case study was a viable research strategy to obtain data from the interview participants (Yin, 1981). I used a qualitative, exploratory research design to gain a better understanding of the teachers' perceptions about RtI implementation and to present data in a narrative form (Babbie, 1998). A case study allowed me to explore in depth the RtI program, activity, process, and event with the participants (Creswell, 2012).

### **Rationale for Not Selecting Other Qualitative Research Designs**

I considered two other qualitative research designs for this study, grounded theory and phenomenology, but chose not to use them. Grounded theorists gather general data and abstract participant views that enable researchers to generate a broad theory that is “grounded” in the data (Creswell, 2009). Grounded theory includes data that are obtained from the participants' viewpoints in a naturalistic setting, but I wanted to gather the responses of the participants to obtain their perceptions of the RtI program on their campus rather than derive a theory of the process; as a result, I rejected using a grounded theory approach. Phenomenology is concerned with the way individuals understand and construct meaning (Rosunee, 2011). However, phenomenological researchers focus “on the essence or structure of and experience (phenomenon)” (Merriam, 1998, p. 15) rather than emphasize the specific perceptions of the participants.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selecting Participants**

The final sample used in this study was comprised of six teachers with experience working with students in Grades 3 and 4 in Clover Elementary, a low-SES school in the coastal plains of Texas that had implemented a three-tiered RtI program in 2006.

Purposeful sampling allowed me to conduct an information-rich case concerning the issues of central importance for the study (Glesne, 2011). The selection criteria for choosing the participants restricted participants to:

- a) teachers in the lowest performing campus in the chosen district,
- b) teachers from Grades 3 through 5,
- c) general education teachers,
- d) teachers who attended RtI staff development, and
- e) classrooms not meeting state performance standards.

All of the participants in the study met these sample selection criteria. This selection strategy served the purposes of interpreting, understanding, and illuminating, as suggested by Glesne (2011). The final participants were only drawn from Grade 3 and 4 teachers because no teachers in Grade 5 decided not to participate. I identified the participants using alpha symbols to ensure their privacy and the confidentiality of their responses. These symbols were used to present specific information obtained from the interviews and introduce the quotes in the Findings section.

### **Justification for Number of Participants**

I had initially intended to purposefully select 10 participants from the statewide assessment grades to participate in the project study because they met the criteria for selection and represented participants from whom I could gather information about the problem under investigation (Merriam, 2002). The justification for the originally chosen sample group size of 10 general education teachers from Grades 3 through 5 was because Clover Elementary only had 10 teachers in these grade levels. The final six participants were teachers with experience working with students in Grades 3 and 4.

### **Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants**

I gained access to the participants with a proposal and approval from the local school district's designee. The executive director of curriculum, instruction, and accountability signed a letter of cooperation. I contacted the executive director of human resources to obtain faculty listings for the selected campus. After I acquired the list of teachers, I met with the principal to determine who on the site met the selection criteria. Six general education teachers from Grades 3 and 4 were selected from this low-performing and low-SES campus, which had been using the three-tier RtI program since 2006.

### **Methods for Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship**

I established a working relationship with the selected teachers in several ways. First, I personally delivered a letter and a consent form to the selected teachers to explain the purpose of the study, the role of the participating teachers, and the benefits of participation to each participant. I explained the purpose of the project study, and I

informed them that I would return in 3 school days to obtain their signed consent. When I returned for the consent form, I arranged times for the interviews with them.

### **Ethical Protection of Participants**

Research ethics were considered by obtaining the informed consent of the participants, protecting the participants from harm, and ensuring their confidentiality (Lodico et al., 2010). The participant pool did not include members of protected populations. When determining the participants for this study, I considered my position as a special education coordinator in the chosen school district. In that role, I worked with special education staff and campus administrators on secondary campuses in Grades 6 through 12. I did not have supervisory responsibilities at any of the elementary campuses. Each participant was assured that no repercussions would result because of their participation and honest responses in this study.

I applied to and obtained permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study (approval #05-30-14-0232053). I provided the participants with background information about the study, all procedures, the voluntary nature of their participation in the project study, the risks and benefits of participating in the study, assurances of confidentiality, and all contact information. The participants, the selected district, the selected campus, and any other identifying factors remained confidential. Possible risks and benefits to all project study participants were reviewed and discussed prior to any interviews. I informed the participants that as volunteers, they were free to discontinue participation in the project study at any time. I established protocols to ensure that all gathered data were kept confidential and that the participants

did not experience any psychological stress, privacy violations, coercion, health effects, deception, or social or economic loss.

### **Data Collection**

The collection of data in a case study involves a total integration of all factors in an interactive and holistic manner (Merriam, 2009). I collected data from the interviews and a review of documents related to the problem. Use of these case study data collection sources enabled me to ascertain the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers of the RtI at Clover Elementary.

### **Justification for Data Collection Methods**

Interviews are the primary method to gather data to obtain participants' direct statements about experiences, feelings, perceptions, and knowledge (Merriam, 2009). Interviews were the most important source for gathering data in this case study (Yin, 1994) and were organized to facilitate the use of specific wording and question sequences. The interviews were formal and structured. I prepared specific questions as well as follow-up questions that were based upon the responses of the participants. I developed the interview questions with the assistance of two district administrators, who reviewed them and provided feedback to amend them as necessary. The administrators were a special education director and an executive director of curriculum, instruction, and accountability. The special education director had 30 years of experience working with students with disabilities as an adaptive physical education teacher, orientation and mobility specialist, and administrator. The executive director of curriculum, instruction, and accountability had 23 years of experience working as a math teacher, a grant writer,

and an administrator. The participants' responses to the interview questions were used to answer the research questions on the implementation of RtI and the impact on student performance in reading. I asked open-ended questions during the in-depth, interactive interviews (see Appendix B).

I assumed that the naturalistic setting of the school would be a familiar environment to the participants, making them more comfortable to express their perceptions about the RtI program. The teachers had received RtI training and strategies, and the interviews allowed them to share information about what strategies were being used, whether they were being implemented, and what effect they had on student performance. The teachers provided insight into the reading program, fidelity of implementation, and the correct use of staff development. The teachers' classroom environment provided a familiar atmosphere for the participants of this study. This naturalistic setting for interviews assisted in the collection of unbiased, detailed, and accurate information to explore the perceptions of the teachers regarding the implementation of RtI (Lodico et al., 2010).

I also reviewed and analyzed documents related to the problem that included the district's PD and RtI implementation policies, procedures, and protocols. The district PD system allowed me to determine what trainings the teachers had access to, when the trainings were offered, how often, requirements for attendance, and who the trainers were. The data collection method allowed me to obtain answers to the research questions to investigate the teachers' perceptions of the implementation RtI and the effect of the interventions on student performance in reading at Clover Elementary.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

During the first meeting with the teachers who had consented to be in the study, I set up times for the interviews. I explained that each interview would last approximately 60 minutes and that each interview would be recorded using an audiorecording system. I also informed the participants that I planned to take field notes during the interviews.

I met with each potential participant from the three grade levels (3 to 5) to explain the purpose of the study and possible benefits to the campus. One grade level participant volunteered to participate. I informed the participant that I would return to schedule a time and obtain a written consent to participate. Upon returning to my office, I received an e-mail from one of the grade-level teachers explaining that the teachers at her grade level declined to participate. Another teacher from a different grade level also decided not to participate. As a result, the sample comprised six volunteer participants.

On the day of the initial interview, I again explained my role as the researcher and their role as the participants. I reviewed the importance of honest and open responses to the interview questions and the integrity of any of the subsequent interviews. I informed the participants that I would return for clarification of transcription issues. Finally, I assured the participants that all data would remain confidential and would be used solely for the purpose of developing a project to address the implementation of the RtI program to improve campus performance.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher in this project study was to select and interview the participants; record the findings; document through audio, transcripts, and field notes;



and analyze the data and the perceptions of participants. I asked questions that would help to answer the research questions, sought to establish a good rapport with each participant, and interpreted the responses. I was an active listener, was adaptive and flexible when reacting to situations, had a good grasp of the research, and was unbiased (Yin, 1994). I interviewed the participants, gathered all of the data, organized the data, coded the responses, and identified emergent themes.

As a qualitative researcher, during member checking I explained my biases, assumptions, and dispositions to the participants regarding the research (Merriam, 2009) to show how I arrived at particular interpretations of the data. As mentioned previously, at the time of the study, I served as a special education coordinator within the school district for secondary campuses. Previous to this role, I served as a special education coordinator for elementary campuses in the district and provided assistance to special education teachers in the areas of classroom instruction, behavioral issues, and matters about students' IEPs.

My role as the special education coordinator did not include RtI management at Clover Elementary. RtI administration and concerns were addressed by the campus administrators and general education staff. Although I served on the RtI committee for the district when I was first employed by the school district, my responsibilities did not include consultation with the general education teachers who were the participants in this study. The teachers might have known me in a special education capacity but realized that I did not have previous transactions with general education teachers. As such, bias

regarding relationships with participants was minimized because I was not a member or supervisor of the faculty or campus used in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

I used accepted qualitative analytic techniques to interpret the data conducted through interviews and reviews of documentary records to obtain the teachers' perceptions about the RtI program. I analyzed the data using a six-step process: (a) I organized the data, (b) read and reread all of the data to ensure understanding of content, (c) used a coding process, (d) created groupings and themes of the settings and participants, (e) described the findings, and (f) interpreted the collected data (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative data analysis can “transform data into information and information into knowledge and knowledge into wisdom” (Chenail, 2012, p. 248). These qualitative data were organized into categories that helped me to create a project to address the problem of teachers failing to employ the required RtI strategies to meet the academic needs of students. Yin (1994) concurred that a data analysis that includes the development of categories from the findings helps to construct meaning. The qualitative data analysis process produced necessary information for project development.

The first step in the data review was to organize the data, which included verifying each consent form, converting field notes into typewritten text, transcribing the interview responses, and organizing notations on documentary data. Data analysis was a constant process of reflection regarding the data collected and was guided by the research questions. I reread the data transcripts and listened to the audiotapes several times to gain a more in-depth understanding of the data (Yin, 2011). As I reviewed the data, I made

notes in the margins regarding ideas about emerging themes. I conducted a detailed analysis through the use of coding, categorizing, and labeling of the data into descriptions and themes. I also built a detailed description from the data collected from interviews and documentary information. All data were analyzed, emerging themes were reduced to the most evident themes, and smaller themes were combined into larger themes (Creswell, 2009). Interviews were coded using typological analysis (Merriam, 2009). Upon completion of the interview coding, I synthesized and summarized the codes into generalized findings. I wrote a narrative for each finding to address themes and interpretations based upon the experiences and background brought to the study (Creswell, 2009). In the narrative, I relied on the literature and the experiences gathered during the research to present the data in various ways and interpretations (Yin, 1994).

I used member checking to engage the participants and ensure the credibility of the interview responses and the accuracy of the transcriptions. I contacted participants by telephone and scheduled times to disseminate the transcribed interviews and the preliminary findings to them for review (Yin, 1994). At this scheduled appointment, I verified what had been discussed during the private interviews. Glesne (2011) stated that although consultations with the participants can add time to the analysis process, doing so helped to verify my reflections of the participants' input and elucidate different concepts and perceptions that might not have been noted by the independent analysis. I reviewed the data, analysis, and interpretations of the data, as well as any conclusions that I had made with the six participants (Creswell, 2007).

The teachers had the opportunity to review their individual interview transcripts, which I had transcribed verbatim from the audiorecordings, and address any discrepancies. All of the teachers agreed that the transcripts were correct and required no changes. The teachers also approved the initial analysis, interpretations, and conclusions that I had drawn from the data and did not indicate that any changes needed to be made.

### **Organization of the Data**

I kept all data and documents confidential. I used common document and spreadsheet computer programs to maintain all data. I was the only researcher conducting and handling the documents, interview tapes and transcripts, and documentary records. I kept all items in a locked filing cabinet in my home office; I also kept all passwords for locked data in a locked filing cabinet. I stored the typed information of interviews and personal notes in an electronic, password-protected computer in my home office. E-mails to participants, administrators, and district officials were kept on password-protected computer, and paper copies were stored in the locked filing cabinet.

The findings emerged from the interviews, field notes, and documentary records such as forms used to support the interviews. Themes were developed from several readings of the interview transcripts to identify commonalities. Documentary records were reviewed to add depth to the findings. Findings and themes addressed in the research questions are presented later in the study. Summary statements after each finding offered potential implications with information leading to a possible solution, the design of the project, and the educational problem of the study.

### **Procedures for Dealing With Discrepant Cases**

Inconsistencies are identified to strengthen studies (Yin, 2011). During the data collection and narrative writing, I did not find any discrepant cases. Through the data process, I sought to ensure that there was a realistic and valid representation of the findings. There were no differences in the perceptions of participants, which established potency of these findings. All data were included in the composition; no data were discarded throughout the research process.

### **Evidence of Quality and Procedures to Assure Accuracy and Credibility**

Protocols were used and followed to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data. Participants were not contacted prior to receiving approval to conduct the study. Research protocols that were approved by Walden University's IRB were followed throughout the data collection process. Interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed completely. Member checking included dialogues with the participants to increase the trustworthiness of the research. These member checking efforts showed evidence of the procedures established to ensure the accuracy and credibility of all collected data.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions in this study included the expectation that all participants provided honest information without fear of repercussions and that their responses to the interview questions were not based upon my expectations as the researcher. It was assumed that all teachers in the selected district were trained to implement a multitiered reading program. Furthermore, it was assumed that teachers who were trained in the RTI program had the

capacity to answer the interview questions based upon their understanding of the program and its implementation.

### **Limitations**

The participants were limited to teachers in Grades 3 and 4 in a Texas school. Teachers in Grade 5 chose not to participate. Thus, the results might not be generalizable to other grade levels or other schools in the state or country. In addition, the results might not be applicable to other RtI models with different numbers of tiers or schools with different student demographics. The results also might not be applicable to other school districts with different RtI consultants and trainers. The teachers' answers to the interview questions might have been biased in that they were afraid to admit they did not know how to implement the RtI model or lacked an understanding of proper RtI implementation. The teachers might not have wanted additional training that might have been required based upon the research results. The teachers might have felt pressure or stress when interviewed due to other campus and district requirements. Finally, my biases as a researcher might have led to inaccurate interpretations of the data, so member checking was of utmost importance to address this possibility.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of the project study included all teachers of students in Grade 3 and 4 in an elementary school in Texas as participants in this research. I collected the data during the last 3 weeks of the school year. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers in Grades 3 and 4 about RtI implementation and its impact on

students' academic achievement in reading. Teachers outside of Grades 3 through 5 were excluded from the project study.

### **Findings, Results, and Analysis**

The analysis of the raw data involved the coding of the interview transcripts. The identified codes were then organized into themes: inadequate administrative supervision, lack of program application, lack of understanding interventions, lack of teacher acceptance of RtI program, inadequate PD, inconsistent use of organizational tools, and additional PD needed (see Table 1).

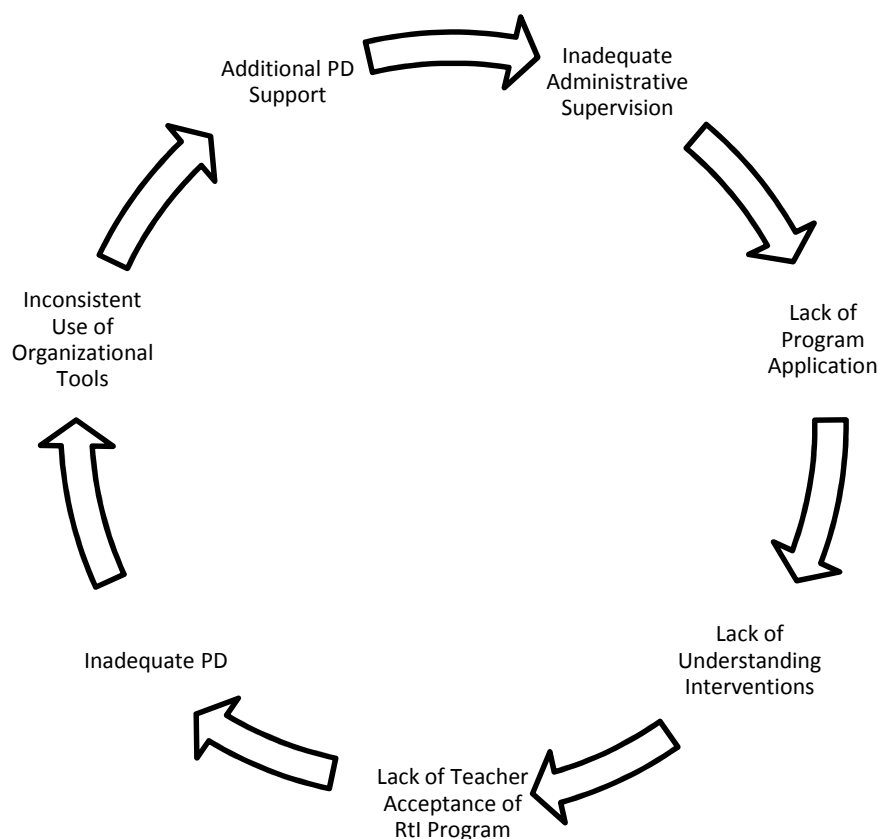
Table 1

#### *Themes and Descriptions*

Theme	Description
Inadequate administrative supervision	Administration not present in classrooms on regular basis to provide guidance.
Lack of program application	Teachers are incorrectly applying the program guidelines.
Lack of understanding interventions	Teachers do not understand the reading interventions.
Lack of teacher acceptance of RtI Program	Teachers do not accept the RtI program.
Inadequate PD	Teachers are receiving inadequate PD.
Inconsistent use of organizational tools	Organizational tools are not consistent and training is not provided.
Additional PD needed	PD is needed to help teachers to understand and implement RtI program with fidelity.

The cyclical relationship of the seven themes is illustrated in Figure 1. The seven identified themes were interrelated through their impact on each other. The teachers believed that there was inadequate administrative supervision, which then led to a lack of program application. This lack of application was subsequently related to a lack of understanding of the ways in which to implement the program. PD was inadequate, again resulting in program application being impacted. The teachers did not accept the RtI

program because of their lack of understanding of the program and the inconsistent tools used to gather data. These identified themes showed that PD might be able to provide the teachers with the tools necessary to implement the RtI program correctly.



*Figure 1.* Cyclical relationship between themes.

### **Research Question 1**

What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding fidelity of RtI implementation? Based upon the findings, the teachers identified inadequate administrative supervision (Theme 1) to provide them with the necessary support to implement the RtI program correctly. The teachers also stated that there was a lack of program application (Theme 2).



**Theme 1: Inadequate Administrative Supervision**

The theme of inadequate administrative supervision emerged in two codes from the data: support and RtI team. Teachers stated that supervision in the form of walk-throughs and observations on a weekly basis from administration was needed to provide them with feedback about their teaching, implementation of the RtI interventions, and progress monitoring of students to assist them in implementing the program. This finding supported Knowles et al.'s (2005) assertions about adult learners and their need to know and readiness to learn. Three codes had a high frequency in the participant interviews: support with request for supervision, monitoring, and retraining; organizational tools for the necessity of checklist for required data for RtI program application; and the previous campus principal and present RtI team making all decisions without the teachers understanding and being a part of the process.

**Support from administration.** I found that teachers were requesting support from administration to provide supervision and monitoring. Administrative support would provide the teachers feedback on their implementation of the RtI program. Teachers would also be able to collaborate with administration to address questions regarding procedures, forms, student progress, data collection, and intervention strategy implementation. Participants indicated that they would prefer additional supervision and support.

Teacher C asserted that RtI was not being implemented correctly. She indicated that not every teacher was consistently implementing the program and that more training was needed. She also indicated that there was a lack of support from campus

administration. She pointed out that administration needed to come into her classroom to check on progress, ensure that RtI was being implemented correctly, and provide her with written feedback on a one-on-one basis a few times a week to help her to implement RtI.

Teacher C stated:

No, actually, I don't think that it is being implemented as it should. I think that could be one of the biggest issues that we're having. That they're [other teachers] not on the same page. We're not all doing it the same way. You know, we need more assistance [training] with that. Consistency and that's something that is real important cuz you know that as an educator, you have that in the classroom with kids.

I think really just you know more support, and by that I mean you know them [administration] coming to the classroom talking to us [teachers], checking on things [teaching], making sure we're doing things [program application] right, and if we're not, then of course let us know so we can apply the right things [interventions] to do. Written feedback, someone [administration] to talk to us one on one, and let us know like this is what areas we need to work on, or we're not seeing this or that, just kinda so we know what's happening, cuz sometimes, we don't get people coming into classes to check on those things. I think that would help, you know, even if they could come in a couple of times a week or something.

Teacher D believed that RtI was not being implemented correctly and that administration thought that teachers knew how to implement it from the training

provided. However, it was not easy to implement. She believed that there was confusion among the teachers and that the RtI program could be improved through administrative support. Teacher D shared:

I don't think it's actually working as good as it could be, you know? I mean that, well, that, it's just that it's easier said than done. Well, I think they [administration] believe we can do it [program application] pretty easy, and it's not that easy, especially when there's confusion. So you do the best you can. I know the [RtI] program could be better if we all [teachers] knew how to do it right, but that involves a lot of administration coming in to help [guide] us. Yes, definitely, I mean to me that's what the campus is supposed to be there for us to provide support and help, so we can go to them because basically they're supposed to be another resource for us. Anything they could provide for us would be helpful.

Teacher C wanted an administrator to come into her classroom to monitor her teaching and provide specific written feedback on how she was implementing the RtI program. She believed that having someone monitor her a few times a week would help her to implement the program. Teacher D believed that the campus was a resource that could provide her with support and help. Both teachers' perceptions indicated that the support and supervision of administration were key to program success.

**RtI team decision making.** According to the data, in previous years, the principal made all RtI decisions regarding the development of goals, intervention use, and student movement among the tiers. Participants also revealed that the procedure was still in place

but with an RtI team making decisions based upon teachers' submission of required documents. The RtI team developed goals, interventions to be used, and student movement among the tiers. Teachers did not participate in this process, but they wanted to be involved.

Teacher A perceived that although the RtI committee knew what they were doing when writing plans for her students, she did not know how they were making their decisions. She wanted to be part of the decision-making process, something that would allow her to assist her students in the classroom and learn how to implement the RtI process. Teacher A stated:

I feel like they [RtI committee] know what they're doing and they have a good grasp on it and they sit and they write the goals for our students for the next meeting. Well, I wanna know how they got that.

Teacher F perceived that the RtI committee made the decisions regarding RtI goal setting and interventions, meaning that the RtI committee decided what needed to be done in her classroom. Teacher F stated:

Yes, we have a team that reviews what we put in, and turn in, they make decisions as to what interventions we get, the goals kids will get, [and] what we then do with the kids. It takes time, but we get stuff back, and that tells us what we have to work on to get kids where they need to be.

Teachers A and F stated that the principal was no longer making all the RtI instructional planning decisions; instead, the RtI teams were now making the decisions. Teacher A stated that she wanted to know how the data were being used to make

instructional planning decisions. The teachers wanted to understand and help in the decision-making process relevant to instructional planning.

Teacher D did not understand all aspects of the interventions, even though she was expected to implement them. She asserted that it was difficult when administration assumed that she knew how to implement the RtI interventions. Teacher D shared:

We don't seem to understand all the aspects of the interventions at times. That's rough when you have to use something new that you haven't used before and people [administration] just assume that you'll understand it and how to implement it.

Teacher B did not believe that the RtI program was being implemented correctly and that more training was needed. Teacher B stated:

I don't think it's being implemented like it should be. Like this is a program, and it's important, and we need to, we need to, get training on it. Focus on it a little bit more so [that] we can be prepared before we get into the classroom and work with these kids.

Teacher E thought that receiving assistance from the RtI team was taking too long and that interventions for students were not being provided in a timely fashion. She believed that her students were having to wait to receive beneficial interventions. Teacher E stated:

I was able to get two children help that needed it, versus the other four that could've if it had been done a lot quicker. They could have been getting certain accommodations and having their needs met a lot earlier on in this school year.

But yet, it would also be beneficial if someone was helping me put that in the system because that takes a long time.

Teacher E stated asking for assistance with four students, but only two of the students received interventions. The time involved was too lengthy. The program was not providing benefit to all students because of the time involved in the data gathering process and the time involved in receiving results and interventions.

## **Theme 2: Lack of Program Application**

**Organizational tools.** Participants indicated that no system was in place to ensure that each required step in RtI had taken place. Participants indicated that having a checklist would ensure that all aspects of the RtI were being implemented correctly. A checklist would allow the participants to check off the interventions as they occurred.

Teacher C mentioned the need for an organizational tool to help the teachers to implement the program correctly. She was unsure whether the interventions were being implemented correctly. Teacher C stated:

I think in order to make sure we're doing things right, we need a [check] list that helps us make sure we've covered all the bases. Sometimes I wonder are we doing those things [interventions] right. We need to try to use that list for math and reading. I think it would help us that make sure we're on the right track and we know what we're doing.

Teacher D saw a need for a checklist to implement the RtI program correctly.

Teacher D stated:

The fidelity is how things are supposed to be done. If you have a checklist of all the things that need to be done for response to intervention, where you could keep track of it yourself, then someone could come in to check it off, to help you know if everything is being done.

Teachers C and D stated that a list was necessary to help them to ensure that they were implementing the program correctly. Teacher D stated that a list could be used to check off the requirements of the program as they were completed. A list would be an organizational tool to ensure that all requirements of the RtI program were being implemented.

The participants also indicated that there was inconsistency in the forms used by the teachers to document intervention strategies and results. Participants also stated there was inconsistency in how the forms were completed by the teachers. Participants indicated that training was needed to know how to complete the forms with follow-up to ensure the accuracy of the data. Teacher F, for example, wanted a universal document to help the teachers to implement the RtI program. She did not know whether all parts of RtI were being implemented. Teacher F stated that they needed a universal student data-gathering form instead of multiple forms. The inconsistency of forms could be addressed with universal forms and PD training. Teacher F indicated:

Make sure I'm completely on the right page doing everything I need to be doing for the students and all that. I mean just a universal document that we can all use. I know this year was kind of a "here's a different paper; here's something

different to monitor and track things.” So if we had a set thing, this is what we use for the RtI students, that would be helpful.

Participants stated that this was the first year that they were responsible for RtI implementation. In previous years, the campus principal implemented the program and made all decisions, and there was little involvement from the teachers. Teachers did not have an opportunity to learn about the purpose of RtI and how to make decisions about interventions and strategies.

Teacher A noted that in previous years, the principal made all decisions. She believed that she did not have any responsibilities in the RtI decision-making process and was confused as a result. Teacher A stated:

The year before, my principal, she actually put in the information, and I just came to the meeting, and she would look up all of that data. And she would lead the meeting, and she would do everything. I was just sitting there saying, “Yes, yes, I agree. Yes, yes, that is true.” And so I really didn’t have responsibilities prior to that. I just did what I was told. I kinda really didn’t get it because I wasn’t really involved and was confused.

Teacher D understood that the principal was in charge of RtI and the decision-making process. She believed that she was not part of the process. She also believed that the principal was doing a good job. The teacher would have liked to have been part of the process that was impacting her students. According to Teacher D,

The principal was in charge of RtI. We did very minimal, very little actually, not much at all. She was the one that was in charge of it, and doing it, and everything.



We had very little input, and all decisions were made by her. She did a good job, but we just followed along and did as we were told. It was hard not being part of it, and I for one would have liked to know what was going on. Then I could feel that I was helping to decide what would be done for my students, instead of it being done for me.

Teachers A and D stated that the principal was in charge of RtI in previous years. The teachers provided her with data, and the principal made all RtI decisions for instruction. The teachers did not have any input about goal development and RtI intervention selection except for gathering the data. The teachers wanted to be part of RtI academic instructional planning.

Teachers D and A additionally stated that there was a lack of program application. They identified a need to understand the program prior to implementing it. The program was providing limited benefits to students because of the amount of time involved entering information into the forms on the computer and getting interventions and strategies returned that they could use with the students.

### **Research Question 2**

What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding RtI Tier I reading interventions? Based upon the findings, the teachers indicated a lack of understanding RtI interventions (Theme 3). There was no comprehension of the ways to implement the interventions and what interventions were available to them. The interventions in place were not meeting the needs of students. There was also a lack of teacher support for RtI (Theme 4). The teachers did not support the program because of

their lack of understanding. The teachers stated that they had to use too much time to gather data on student progress and interventions used and that information from the RtI team took too long to produce new reading interventions to facilitate students' academic progress.

### **Theme 3: Lack of Understanding Interventions**

The theme of lack of understanding interventions identified teacher confusion in comprehending the RtI program, the purpose of the program, the training that was necessary, and the inconsistency in data collection to implement the interventions. This finding supported Lewin et al.'s (1999) change theory regarding the teachers' willingness to unfreeze and then change, resulting in freezing and acceptance of the changes.

The participants indicated that interventions were not meeting the needs of the students. They mentioned that the timeliness of the interventions needed to be adjusted so that they could receive the interventions more quickly to meet the needs of the students. The interventions were not as strong as they needed to be.

Teacher A identified a lack of understanding when using interventions with students. Teacher A shared, "I think at our campus, we are lacking in the intervention piece. I think this part is important. I don't think that our interventions are strong enough to actually start closing gaps."

Teacher B felt that there was no structure in the reading interventions. She stated that there was a need for structure to ensure that monitoring of the fidelity of implementation of the reading interventions would happen. Teacher B added:

I don't [see] any kind of structure [with interventions]. I mean, there might be some out there, but I'm not seeing it. And I think that's one of the biggest things [interventions]. To have some kind of structure, something, a form, something to know, to follow up on to see that you're doing things [fidelity] you should be doing with it.

Teacher A stated that the RtI interventions were not strong enough to help students. Teacher B believed that there was no structure in the way that the interventions were set up. The perceptions were that the RtI interventions were not meeting the needs of students.

#### **Theme 4: Lack of Teacher Acceptance of RtI Program**

Teachers' failure to accept the RtI program was a repetitive theme from the participants. The theme of lack of teacher support indicated that the teachers did not accept the RtI program. Participants indicated that the program was time consuming and failed to produce positive results. They believed that although the RtI program may have some benefits for students, the students and the teachers could make better use of their time in areas other than RtI. I noted in my research log that the teachers' body language, such as facial gestures and eye movements indicated that they did not support the RtI program.

Teacher A did not really understand the purpose of the program. She thought that the RtI program was a futile cause that required improvement in order to increase academic achievement. She believed that it needed consistency and organization so that she could become more familiar with the program. Teacher A stated:

That [the purpose of RtI] was the problem. I didn't know where it [purpose] was going. What's happening [how teacher collected data is used]. Well, actually, you know, I just feel that it was kinda [data collection and resulting interventions] like a waste of time. I wasn't too happy with it, and so I really would prefer that it was better [RtI program], different and so I wasn't really getting much from it, and I wish we had more, you know, this more consistency and more organized and, you know, so I could be more familiar with it.

Teacher E saw the RtI program as nothing more than busy work. She did not understand how collecting data and inputting them into the school district's data-gathering program was helping her students. Teacher E said:

To me it seems like a lot of busy work. And I don't really know how I am helping this individual child because that's what I'm here for, to help that child learn. I don't know how much putting stuff into the computer system and nothing being done is really worth it.

Both teachers A and E viewed the RtI program as an interference of time that had to be scheduled into their already demanding classroom reading instructional schedule. They did not understand how the program was benefiting the students. Because the teachers did not understand the purpose of the program, they did not feel committed to implementing the program with fidelity.

The documentation process of RtI was identified by some participants as a time-consuming effort. The perception was that it took too long to gather the data, implement

RtI, and then enter the information into the school district's data system. It appeared that the teachers had to gather the data without understanding why.

Teacher C perceived the RtI program as too time consuming. Teacher C reported: I think it's a lot of time. It's time consuming, and if you've never done it before, learning everything is time consuming, like I said. Sometimes it's a lot of time wasted when I know something's wrong and we need to do something more but you got to go through the process. I think that might be my drawback.

Teacher E perceived the RtI process as requiring her to spend too much time inputting data into a computer instead of helping her students to improve their reading.

Teacher E noted:

With us just getting things in the computer-what is working and what is not working. How are we going to get the kids the help they actually need? A lot of time you're seeing them not getting better each week, and I'm wasting [more] time putting things in the computer than I'm actually helping them [students] get to where they need to be [in their reading process].

Teachers C and E stated that too much time was being spent on the process of gathering and inputting data into the computer system. The teachers' perceptions were that time was being wasted on collecting data instead of helping the students learn.

The participants indicated that after the RtI data had been entered into the school district's data system, it took too long for them to receive information about goals, interventions, and strategies. The participants reported that it took weeks to receive information and interventions that could support the students' learning. As a result,

students continued to fall behind in their reading skills, and student gaps increased, causing students to fall even further behind academically.

Teacher E perceived that it took too long for the teachers to receive reading interventions from the RtI team necessary to help the students. The teacher indicated that she could not move forward with students without knowing what new reading interventions she could use. Teacher E commented:

Because I look at their documentation, and that shows me if they're progressing or what's going on, that kind of thing. Well, because also all the documentation I turn in takes forever for it to be returned and I'm [left] waiting, and the kids are waiting for that intervention that's needed for them. If the time wasn't so long, then the benefit would be there much faster, instead of no interventions while waiting. I can't move forward without knowing what's next.

Teacher D perceived that receiving reading interventions took too long. Although she understood that this process was necessary, the many steps slowed down the process. Teacher D stated:

The effectiveness is a little touchy because it hurts me to have to see kids have to wait so long to get the help that they need. Because you know that kid needs more than just monitoring, and watching, and progress monitoring, and you have to go through all these steps. I do agree there should be steps, but I think it draws out the process way too long for some of our kids.

Teachers E and D believed that it took too much time to get results after the student data were gathered and entered into the computer. The teachers wanted more immediate results so that they could provide their students with interventions right away.

### **Research Question 3**

What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding RtI staff development for correct implementation? The teachers indicated that PD was inadequate (Theme 5). PD was provided to the teachers, but it was either too brief or it did not meet their needs. There was no follow-up communication from administration to ensure that teachers were implementing the RtI interventions correctly.

### **Theme 5: Inadequate Professional Development**

The theme of insufficient supportive PD highlighted the teachers' concerns about the ways in which the RtI program was being applied. The teachers indicated that either they were not receiving appropriate PD or the PD was not meeting their needs because it was presented in short meetings and did not include follow-up support. They also believed that they needed more training to implement the program correctly. This finding aligns with Knowles et al.'s (2005) adult learning and its application to their lives. Two codes had a high frequency in the participant interviews, namely, organizational tools and training for intervention strategies. The teachers requested training in using the forms, entering data into the school district's data system, using the interventions, and having a basic understanding of the RtI program and components.

Teacher C perceived PD as being in need of improvement. She believed that although administrators were attempting to provide good PD, it was still not meeting her needs. Teacher C asserted:

Well, to be honest with you, it's so-so. It can always be better. I think you know, I know they're [administration] trying their best, but I just feel that I'm in there actually doing it working with kids, and with experience so far, it could be better. We could always train more, get more information, or retrain, or whatever it is we need to do. So I'm hoping we get more training in that.

Teacher D believed that PD was too brief. She wanted to have a better understanding of the training provided before using it with her students. Teacher D shared:

I think just them providing us with the information, with more training, that kind of thing, but in a faster way and not so brief. We need to fully understand what we have to do before we can use it in our classes in a way that it helps the students be more successful.

Teachers C and D stated that PD was needed to fully understand the RtI program. Teachers needed to comprehend the program prior to implementing it. Training was considered a necessary component to ensure that the RtI program was being implemented with fidelity.

Teacher F perceived PD as a necessary component of the program to make improvements. She believed that all of the teachers needed the same types of training. Teacher F indicated, "I think we all want training. I don't think you ever really know



everything. So yes, more training for us all. [Other teachers] Probably [have] not [been trained], we all normally go to the same things together.”

Teacher E felt that the teachers were not being informed about PD opportunities. As a result of not attending training sessions, she was falling behind in meeting her students’ academic needs. She believed that even though training was available, she was not aware of it. Teacher E commented:

I haven’t been told about any trainings or I would go to them. Because since I’m not familiar with it [computer system], I think I’m falling behind on what I’m supposed to do. I’m sure that there’s some training that hopefully they could bring to us, but it hasn’t come yet.

Teachers F and E did not believe that there was enough training provided. They indicated that more training was needed. There was a need for more PD for teachers to be able to implement the RtI program properly.

**Staff development for interventions.** Participants identified the need for a list of interventions, training, and support available to teachers. They wanted information about the different types of interventions available; what benefits the students could gain from the interventions; clear descriptions of the interventions; training on using and implementing the interventions; and support from administration, along with monitoring progress when using the interventions.

Teacher A felt that there was an abundance of resources at the school, but no understanding of their use. She suggested that the teachers needed to be trained to use these materials already available to them. As Teacher A indicated, “Our campus has an

overabundance of resources, and I think the downfall with our campus is we keep adding more resources before we actually get good at something so everyone knows how to do things in the same.”

Teacher F felt that the teachers needed training in materials and interventions at different tiers because students themselves were at different levels. Teacher F emphasized:

I think it’s good, but we need to know what kinds of materials and interventions to introduce to those certain students that are at different tier levels cuz we know not every student is on the same page and everybody has different needs.

Teacher A stated that the school had too many resources and kept adding to them instead of learning how to use the one that they already had. Both teachers wanted a list of interventions to select from and more training to help their students succeed. The teachers were uncertain about the different components of the RtI program. More specifically, they were unsure about the purpose of the tracking system and their lack of comprehension about the RtI interventions, their uses, and strategies to implement the interventions.

Teacher B expressed her thoughts about the need for PD in RtI. She did not feel comfortable with her level of understanding of the program, and she believed that she was not receiving enough support. She also mentioned the lack of communication among the teachers. Teacher B stated:

I really need to learn more about it [RtI]. You know, I don’t feel too comfortable with knowing this program like I should. So, that’s kinda like--I feel like I’ve

been left alone to kinda make it on my own. Like I'm not receiving enough support. Like I said before, we and the other teachers don't communicate that much. We don't talk that much. I'm kinda independent on my own, so I'm worried about that. I think that if I had more support, you know, in all this, that I would feel better that I could--it could impact my students more. Then I would feel like I know what I'm doing. Right now, I don't feel that at all.

Teacher E did not fully understand the RtI program and was unfamiliar with aspects of the program. She believed that she was falling behind in her attempts to implement the program. Teacher E added:

Trying to know what I'm supposed to be doing, getting the information right, and then to apply it to my students. It's been pretty tough. Because since I'm not familiar with it, I think I'm falling behind on what I'm supposed to do. I'm sure that there's some training that hopefully they could bring to use, but it hasn't come yet.

Teachers B and E that they wanted to know more about RtI. They wanted to understand the program and how to implement it. They also wanted training in the components of the RtI program and ways in which they should be implemented.

#### **Research Question 4**

In which aspects of the RtI process are Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers the most competent? According to the analysis of the interview responses, the teachers felt the most competent in handling the progress monitoring of students, organizing the data, and submitting them to the school district's data-gathering program. However, the teachers

also identified the need for training on ways to use the forms and the data-gathering program correctly (Theme 6). The teachers were required to gather data on inconsistent forms and then input the data into the district's program, despite not being trained properly.

### **Theme 6: Inconsistent Use of Organizational Tools**

All of the participants were in agreement about the type of data that needed to be gathered, the organization of the data, and where they were to be reported. The teachers stated that progress monitoring, including the DIBELS student assessment done three times per year in reading, was used throughout the school year to guide the development of goals, interventions, and movement in the tiers. The teachers also agreed that the data were inputted into the school district's data-gathering computer program and that school administrators used the data to plan for students.

Teacher E understood what data needed to be gathered for student progress monitoring. However, she believed that there was a lack of consistency in which forms were being used. Teacher E shared:

Well, weekly, we do their progress monitoring according to their needs, graphing their information, and then go plug it into the forms every time. We start a new form every time, and every time we meet, we update forms on their progress. So, yeah, it's basically keeping it in the computer and the system.

Teacher A understood what data needed to be collected and her responsibility to input the data into the computer. Teacher A reported:

Some of my roles and responsibilities are to gather data, you know, like information and that kind of thing. Also, that I'm keeping a running record of the scores and attendance. Those kinds of things, and it is my responsibility to plug it into the computer and be able to meet for however long period of time we have set for our next meeting.

Teachers E and A believed that they were the most competent in progress monitoring. They understood that the data needed to be gathered and inputted into the district's data computer program. However, the inconsistent use and interpretation of the data to implement reading instruction in the classroom was perceived to be inadequate.

#### **Research Question 5**

In which aspects of the RtI process do Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers need additional training? The teachers indicated that they wanted additional PD in different aspects of the RtI program (Theme 7). There was a general lack of understanding of the RtI program and program application.

#### **Theme 7: Additional PD Needed**

Teachers indicated that they needed PD in using the school district's data-gathering computer program, forms, and reports. Training was needed in the different types and uses of interventions and strategies. The participants also indicated the need for general knowledge of the RtI program; its origins, purpose, and uses; and ways to implement it with fidelity.

Teacher A lacked an understanding of RtI and indicated that the training had been brief. She felt confused about the program and wanted additional training to understand how to implement it. When asked about training for RtI, Teacher A shared:

Well, actually no, very little [in RtI]. I would like to have gotten more [training], but they don't really give us much [too short] training, and that really confuses me, and I would really like to have more [RtI] training because I wanna know what I'm doing [when using RtI interventions in classroom].

Teacher B had a lack of experience with the RtI program because she was a first-year teacher. She stated that she could benefit from receiving some PD training on the RtI program. When asked whether district data computer program training was needed, Teacher B emphasized:

Yes, I would. I think that cuz I'm a first-year teaching [*sic*] here [first year teaching on campus], and I don't have that much experience with it, I would get a lot more out of it by doing that, and I think this would help me out a lot actually.

Teacher A felt that the training was too short and that more training was necessary. Teacher B stated she could implement the RtI program better if she had a clearer understanding of the computer program. Both teachers believed that more training was necessary in all aspects of RtI implementation.

All of the teachers believed that more training was necessary in completing the forms and other documentation, gathering the data, and inputting the data into the school district's computer program. Correct data gathering could have an impact on the types of interventions and number of referrals to special education. According to district

document findings, during the 2013-2014 school year, half of the referrals to special education for disability testing did not qualify for services. The special education office stated that referrals were returned to Clover Elementary because as per the Required Information/Data for Special Education Referral Review Checklist (K. Collins [pseudonym], personal communication, June 5, 2014), the referrals lacked the following information:

- Health information, including hearing and vision.
- Information addressing specific areas of concern.
- Work samples.
- Attendance information.
- Home language surveys.
- Academic history of 3 years of report cards.
- Complete RtI data, including records of meetings.
- Excessive tardies.
- Students making progress in reading when interventions in place.
- Passing benchmarks.
- Medical information for possible other health impaired. (para 2)

Clover Elementary provided training for RtI at monthly staff meetings; however, the participants indicated that the training sessions were brief, meaning that the teachers did not fully understand materials. An RtI meeting provided training on October 1, 2013, for 3 hours that included clarifications for instruction in Tier 1 versus Tier 2, processes for interpreting the data, progress monitoring updates for reading and math, and a team

meeting process for Tier 1 instruction. In addition, an RtI qualifying and nonqualifying flowchart was provided to facilitate decision making. The data from the reading universal screeners for the district indicated that Clover Elementary had the highest number of students in the district below the cut point in reading in Grade 3 at 51.22% and in Grade 4 at 52.94%. These data clearly identified the need for PD in reading interventions.

### **Quality of Data**

I used several procedures to ensure the quality of the data. One such procedure was member checking. Creswell (2007) stressed the importance of member checking to ensure validity. All data were verified for accuracy through participant reviews of their individual transcripts and my interpretations and findings. The participants found no changes or additions required to the findings or analysis, indicating that both the data and the findings were valid.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers of students in Grade 3 and Grade 4 at Clover Elementary about implementation of RtI and its impact on student performance in reading. In Section 2 of the study, I described the qualitative case study. I conducted a qualitative case study. I interviewed the participants to gain their perceptions and reviewed documentary records for Grades 3 and 4 teachers at a school in the chosen district to develop a project to solve the stated problem. In reviewing the research, I reorganized the findings and listed them under each research question in an effort to provide a clear understanding of the ways in which the data



answered the questions. I used a six-step analysis to analyze the data and guide the qualitative narrative.

The results of the interviews and document reviews yielded seven themes. The first theme highlighted inadequate administrative supervision to provide support and guidance to teachers. Theme 1, inadequate administrative supervision supported Knowles et al.'s (2005) theory regarding adult learners and the basic need to know and readiness to learn. The second theme addressed the lack of program application; teachers lacked an understanding of the RtI program and were not implementing it correctly. The third theme outlined a lack of understanding of the interventions. The teachers received interventions with brief descriptions only, and administrators mistakenly believed that they could then implement the interventions correctly. Additionally, Theme 3, lack of understanding of the interventions, further confirmed Knowles et al.'s (2005) findings regarding the needs of adult learners. The fourth theme was lack of teacher support. The teachers did not support the RtI program because of their lack of understanding; their lack of training; and the amount of time that they would need to gather the data, input the data, and wait for interventions. The fifth theme addressed the inadequate PD supported by Lewin et al.'s (1999) change theory concerning teachers' readiness to unfreeze and change, resulting in freezing and acceptance of the changes. The teachers received training that was either too brief or was not meeting their needs. The teachers also indicated that they were not receiving follow-up supervision to ensure that they were using what they had learned in the PD training correctly. The sixth theme was inconsistent use of organizational tools. The teachers believed that they were competent

in progress monitoring and data gathering, but they were unsure how to use the forms and then input the data into the data-gathering program. The seventh theme addressed the need for additional PD. The teachers wanted additional training to fully understand the RtI program and implement it correctly.

Findings from the case study were similar to conclusions drawn from the review of the literature in several areas: impact of PD on teacher performance, support of the program by teachers, building of capacity in the teachers, teachers' understanding of the RtI program, administrative supervision, lack of administrative support, and program application.

PD can impact teacher performance in reading and increase their understanding of ways to implement the RtI program (Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012). When they understand the program and its interventions, they are willing to support both and implement them with fidelity (Stauffer & Mason, 2013). As a result of participating in PD sessions, the teachers can build capacity in their skills of monitoring student progress and meeting their individualized reading needs (Burns et al., 2013). Understanding the different aspects of RtI will enable the teachers to use screenings, progress monitoring, and interventions to meet the varied and individualized needs of their students (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). This new learning can then help to reduce the number of referrals to special education for the testing of disabilities.

When teachers receive support and supervision from administrators, they can implement RtI more successfully (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). However, a lack of administrative support can mean less support from teachers for the program and the

possibility of the RtI program not being successful (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012).

Fidelity of implementation can be key to the success of RtI (Keller-Margulis, 2012).

Teachers who receive PD in RtI can implement the program with fidelity, resulting in the improved academic performance of students (Mellard et al., 2009). Additional findings align with the literature in that collaboration is necessary in helping teachers to be receptive of new initiatives that ensure the effective and efficient implementation of RtI (Koppich et al., 2007).

Section 3 includes a description of the project and introduces the project, goals, rationale for selection and how the problem was addressed, a literature review, a project evaluation plan, and project implications. The project addresses the seven identified themes and shows teachers how they can implement the RtI program correctly, with the potential for a reduction in special education referrals for testing of disabilities and improvements in students' academic performance in reading.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

This section provides a description of the RtI project developed to address the findings obtained from the research conducted at an elementary school in Texas. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers of students in Grade 3 and Grade 4 about the implementation of RtI and how these perceptions impacted student performance in reading at Clover Elementary (pseudonym), an elementary school located in the coastal plains region of Texas. This qualitative study was designed to obtain teachers' perceptions of the RtI program to provide a differentiated instructional program that met the academic needs of the students. This project was developed to provide training that would address the teachers' concerns about the effectiveness of the implementation of the RtI program for students in Grades 3 and 4 reading classrooms. The PD, along with an evaluation, was developed using the literature review findings to help the campus improve student academic performance in reading.

Research Question 1 asked, "What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding fidelity of RtI implementation?" The data analysis identified two themes: inadequate administrative supervision and a lack of program application. The teachers who participated in this study indicated that they were not receiving adequate supervision and assistance in their implementation of RtI. They mentioned that there was a lack of program application because they did not understand the program and were not able to implement it correctly.

Research Question 2 asked, “What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding RtI Tier I reading interventions?” The data analysis identified two themes: a lack of understanding of the interventions and a lack of teacher acceptance of the RtI program. The teachers participating in this study all stated that they did not understand how to implement the reading interventions correctly because they had only received brief training without follow-up support. As a result of not understanding the RtI program, they stated, they did not support the program.

Research Question 3 asked, “What are the perceptions of Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers regarding RtI staff development for correct implementation?” One theme was identified: inadequate PD. The teachers stated that there was a lack of support for PD they received. The training that was provided did not come with sufficient support from administration to ensure that they were correctly implementing new learning.

Research Question 4 asked, “In which aspects of the RtI process are Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers the most competent? One theme was identified: inconsistent use of organizational tools. The teachers understood what data needed to be collected, but the collection forms lacked consistency and were continuously changing. The teachers also did not have enough training on how to complete forms and input the data into the school district’s data-gathering program.

Research Question 5 asked “In which aspects of the RtI process do Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers need additional training?” One theme was identified: additional PD needed. The teachers needed additional PD to ensure that they understood the different

aspects of RtI. They believed that there was a need for training on how to implement the reading interventions correctly.

### **Brief Description of the Project**

This professional development project was based upon the findings from the qualitative data collected in Section 2. PD refers to the formal training of teachers and staff provided to improve knowledge and pedagogical skills (Quint, 2011). This PD was designed to be implemented over the course of a single school year at Clover Elementary. The PD modules will be implemented during 3 staff PD days, but can also be divided into half days to meet district staff PD calendars.

### **Goals of the Proposed Project**

The training modules that make up this PD project were designed to meet the conclusions drawn from the study. Implementation of the PD will have several implications for positive social change: providing teachers with PD, providing administrative support for other teachers, and using consistent documents as organizational tools; ensuring fidelity of implementation that includes teacher support, organizational documents, and time issues for data gathering and return of strategies; and implementing PD for organizational documents, consistent data gathering, intervention forms, and intervention strategies.

### **Rationale for the Project Genre and How the Project Will Address the Problem**

This qualitative case study was conducted to obtain the perceptions of Grade 3 and 4 general education teachers regarding implementation of the RtI program at an elementary school. The qualitative data gathered from the interviews included teachers'

perceptions of fidelity of implementation, reading interventions, staff development, areas of competency, and additional training needed. The PD modules were specifically designed to address the needs identified by the data analysis of the teacher perceptions and documentary reviews. The modules will empower teachers with the necessary skills to meet the varied needs of students in the RtI tiers prior to referral to special education for disability testing.

The PD modules were selected as an effective means of providing training for teachers. The rationale for the development of the modules was based upon the findings and conclusions, along with research described in the literature reviews in Sections 2 and 3. The project was designed to meet the needs of Clover Elementary, as determined by the teachers' responses to the interview questions.

### **Review of the Literature Addressing the Project**

This section reviews current literature on PD related to the identified problems at Clover Elementary. Grade 3 and 4 teachers at the study site stated that they needed PD in reading instruction. Development of the PD project emerged from seven themes identified by the participants:

- a need for support from administration;
- ways to address the lack of comprehension of the RtI program, including
  - the purpose,
  - interventions, and
  - implementation process;

- and the need to understand how the program was supposed to be implemented to ensure program application and improve the academic performance of students in reading.

The literature search for this study used the Thoreau, EBSCO, Proquest, Sage, Education Research Complete, ERIC, Google Scholar, eBrary, and Worldcat with Full Text databases. The key words used in the search were *response to intervention*, *administrative support*, *understanding*, *fidelity*, *professional development*, and *supervision*. The identified themes from this search were: inadequate administrative supervision, lack of program application, lack of understanding interventions, lack of teacher acceptance of the RtI program, inadequate PD, inconsistent use of organizational tools, and additional PD needed. The themes provided in the Findings section were used to produce the project and the following literature review. The literature review addresses areas of need in the RtI project. The areas provide guidance for the development of the project.

### **Inadequate Professional Development**

The study participants indicated that there was inadequate PD at Clover Elementary. The current PD, according to the participants, was not meeting teachers' need to provide students with RtI interventions that met their individualized academic needs. As a result, the project was designed to create PD that will enable them to correctly implement RtI.

**Teacher performance.** PD is necessary to ensure effective implementation of the RtI program. A key factor in PD is to increase teachers' knowledge of the core area of



reading, including basic written English (Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012). There can be better outcomes in teacher performance and the meeting of student needs when PD increases teachers' pedagogical reading knowledge (Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012). PD can focus on the different ways that teachers can use interventions effectively to meet students' needs (Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012). Kaiser et al. (2009) found that for PD to be effective and benefit teachers, it has to be purposeful, facilitate collaboration, increase pedagogy, and include a review of student data.

The PD project developed for this study can give the teachers more knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and RtI implementation. Podhajski et al. (2009) asserted that teachers often believe that they are more competent in teaching reading than they actually are. Noll (2013) argued that teachers either do not know that they are ineffective in regard to RtI implementation or that they do not know the basics of the program. Berkeley, Bender, Gregg-Peaster, and Saunders (2009) found that at the time of their study, 88% of U.S. state departments of education were using PD to improve teachers' performance in RtI because the teachers did not understand the program. Teachers have to understand the purpose of the program and work collaboratively with other teachers to ensure successful implementation. PD is necessary for teachers to learn about the RtI program so that they can implement the interventions effectively and improve student achievement.

**Teacher support.** PD can result in change when teachers are involved in and support the RtI design. In addition, better communication and teacher involvement in decision making can be instrumental in bringing about change because the teachers are

part of the solution (Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, & Cardarelli, 2010; Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). Teachers experiment with new instructional strategies that result in environments more conducive to learning (Beaver, 2009). PD designed specifically to help teachers to make curricular changes can ensure the integrity and fidelity of RtI implementation (Stauffer & Mason, 2013). Harris et al. (2012) found that 10% (2/20) of teachers who did not support the RtI program also were not implementing it correctly. Greenfield et al. (2010) reported that 50% of general and special education teachers believed that student achievement was directly influenced by the RtI program. McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd (2014) stated that quality PD should focus on teachers and their own identified needs. Teachers who participate in PD can bring about change in schools. PD can help to ensure fidelity in the implementation of the RtI program.

**Teacher collaboration.** Collaboration is a key component of PD, and teachers who work cooperatively with colleagues in PD sessions tend to be more successful as educators (Beaver, 2009). Teachers who are willing to learn from one another in PD sessions can help their students to progress academically (Walker, 2012). By brainstorming and problem solving to find solutions to students' academic problems, teachers can establish trust in and appreciation of one another's skills and knowledge (Beaver, 2009). Collaborative learning in PD can result in teachers working together to reduce failure rates and the number of unprepared students (Walker, 2012).

PD allows teachers to address common problems in their pedagogy and receive collaborative support to meet instructional challenges (Beaver, 2009). Teams of grade-level teachers can review progress-monitoring data, make RtI programming decisions for

students, and offer recommendations for interventions (Burns et al., 2013). Sansosti, Telzrow, et al. (2010) found that the RtI program was strengthened by the collaborative efforts of staff when they were given opportunities to participate in PD.

Opportunities for collaboration can help to sustain RtI programs (King, 2011). Teachers who attend PD can work together to resolve problems that hinder student progress and make decisions based upon discussions with other teachers. In addition, learning and reflection can help to sustain RtI programs. Harn, Parisi, and Stoolmiller (2013) found that 79.6% of the sites that they investigated actually sustained the RtI program for 2 years and that 88% of those sites made program changes to meet their campus needs. Teachers who work collaboratively in PD sessions have more opportunities to meet students' needs.

PD also can give teachers many opportunities to work in small groups and learn from each another to solve problems, coach one another, and troubleshoot intervention issues (Chard, 2012). Collaboration allows teachers to work in study groups and build capacity in their efforts to implement RtI (Herner-Patnode, 2009). RtI teachers require flexible schedules to work together, along with their administrators, to plan interventions (Dougherty-Stahl, Keane, & Simic, 2012). In Shepherd and Salembier's (2011) study, the teachers reported that PD was key to their initial RtI implementation because it gave them a better understanding of the program and the opportunity to work with colleagues on literacy interventions and progress monitoring.

Teachers also can benefit from participating in PD that is taught by other teachers who have encountered the same problems in their classrooms (Walker, 2012). In this

way, teachers are not isolated and do not have to address problems on their own (Walker, 2012). In addition, the teachers learn to cope, model instruction, and integrate new strategies into their instruction (Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). PD can be more productive when teachers are involved in planning and implementing the training.

**Teacher capacity.** The required reading skills necessary to effectively implement RtI also can be provided to teachers during PD sessions. PD provides teachers with a common language regarding reading fluency (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Teachers who are given materials and training, along with different tools to choose from, can devise different ways to monitor student progress (Burns et al., 2013).

It can take many years for teachers to understand that PD is necessary (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012); however, Bean and Lillenstein (2012) found that PD was necessary for teachers to understand instruction to help low-performing students to improve academically. According to Sun, Penuel, Frank, Gallagher, and Youngs (2013), 30 hours or more is considered sufficient PD for teachers. Teachers who receive training through PD can acquire the skills necessary to teach reading. PD also can provide teachers with the base knowledge necessary to teach reading.

Capacity can be built in a school when PD is provided to train teachers in the skills and techniques required to assist their students. PD also allows teachers to share their experiences and knowledge to help other teachers to improve their delivery of instruction (Beaver, 2009). Adult learners can develop personal feelings of confidence and achievement, both of which can increase teachers' instructional capacity (Sharvashidze & Bryant, 2011). PD gives teachers the experience to become leaders who

can facilitate training in established intervention practices (Walker, 2012). Greenfield et al. (2010) also stated that PD helps the participants to understand the data, improve their instructional techniques, implement new skills, and share what they have learned with other educators.

**Understanding the RtI program.** Teachers who receive PD might better understand the purpose of and ways to implement a strong RtI program and student movement between and among the tiers. By participating in PD, teachers can provide information to principals to ensure that the RtI program remains effective (Shepherd & Salembier, 2011). For PD to be effective, teachers must contribute to their own learning (Herner-Patnode, 2009). Bryant, Pedrotty-Bryant, Boudah, and Klingner (2010) found that even though only 5% of teachers implemented PD based solely on initial training, 80% to 90% of them implemented new learning once they had received feedback, modeling, and coaching. Walker-Dalhouse et al. (2009) contended that continuous progress monitoring is needed to determine whether teachers' implementation of the RtI program is effective.

PD that is used within the RtI model can be beneficial when it includes screenings, progress monitoring, and strategies designed to meet individual students' needs (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Greenfield et al. (2010) identified an impact on special education referrals, understanding of tiers, and improved effectiveness in teaching practices in all three tiers of RtI when teachers received PD. Greenfield et al. also found that after 1 year of RtI implementation, special education referrals for disability testing decreased by 50%. Through PD, teachers can gain an understanding of the RtI program

and are able to gather data and grow professionally. PD enables teachers to understand how to use different components of the RtI program to improve not only their teaching but also students' progress.

PD also might provide teachers with an understanding of RtI interventions. PD sessions can provide research-based interventions needed at lower levels of RtI tiers to support students' reading skills (Jones, Yssel, & Grant, 2012). General and special education teachers require PD to learn research-based interventions to monitor progress, along with skills in teacher collaboration and decision making (Thomas & Dykes, 2011). Achieving student success requires effective and useful PD content and strong classroom interventions (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Understanding RtI interventions is necessary for teachers to provide support for students at different tiers. PD can prepare teachers to use the different types of interventions.

**School change.** Instructional changes might occur when PD is facilitated effectively. Sharvashidze and Bryant (2011) asserted that PD can facilitate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. PD also can be a catalyst for teachers to learn throughout their careers (Beaver, 2009). Learning involves changing personal behaviors and attitudes to improve teaching abilities (Sharvashidze & Bryant, 2011). PD for teachers is necessary to facilitate systemic change in schools (Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009), but PD requires several years of involvement by teachers before school reform actually becomes evident. PD will need to be sustained with continuous training (Dougherty-Stahl et al., 2012), and teachers who support PD are more receptive to

learning. Systemic change can occur when PD leads to consistent, schoolwide interventions to meet the needs of the school, its teachers, and its students.

**Student achievement.** PD can impact student achievement because when teachers are committed to improving their teaching skills, they can use the information gained in PD sessions to develop resources that will help them to better meet students' needs (Beaver, 2009; Chan, 2010). Teachers who are willing to learn new strategies and interventions also become more willing to problem solve with colleagues and share insights into ways that they can meet students' needs (Beaver, 2009). PD can help to improve learning when it is continuous, relevant to the school, and embedded in instructional and intervention strategies (Kaiser et al., 2009). Teachers can benefit from PD that includes information about practices designed for students with learning difficulties (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Students benefit when teachers attend PD and acquire new instructional practices.

### **Inadequate Administrative Supervision**

Administrative support is vital for the success of PD (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Through supervision, teachers can be provided with the necessary leadership. In addition, administrators can build more positive relationships with teachers and improve program implementation.

**Lack of administrative support.** A lack of administrative support can cause RtI programs to fail. According to O'Connor and Freeman (2012), even RtI programs that are well established fail when there is a lack of leadership. O'Connor and Freeman added that stakeholders might even assume leadership roles to maintain programs rather than

allow them to fail. O'Connor and Freeman also found that among the 700 school staff who were surveyed for the study, only 11% believed that their administrators supported new initiatives. Administrative support is necessary to ensure the success of RtI programs in helping teachers to overcome barriers (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). RtI programs can be successful when knowledgeable administrators have strong frameworks of leadership (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012).

Administrative support is essential for RtI change to occur. Administrative support is key to the success of change in the school setting (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Effective RtI programs attribute leadership and support from administration to their success (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Administrators need to be proactive in supporting RtI programs that benefit students (Ehren, 2013). Ongoing monitoring and coaching by administrators are necessary to assist teachers in correctly implementing RtI interventions (Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). Continuous support and support from administration are key to the success of RtI implementation (Jones et al., 2012). Support from teachers is not difficult to obtain once they understand the value of the intervention (Burns et al., 2013). RtI can bring about positive change in a school and improve student performance. The support that administrators provide through ongoing supervision can determine the success or failure of an RtI program. Administrator supervision guides change and ensures that the necessary program support is in place.

**Teacher leaders.** Administrative support can include other key school personnel. Leadership and supervision can come from any person who can influence another person; for example, a teacher can assume a role as a leader to help others to learn about and



implement the RtI (Ehren, 2013). Where leadership comes from is irrelevant, especially in rural districts that might not have strong administrators (Robinson, Burscuk, & Sinclair, 2013). Administrative support affects teachers' classroom practices and success (Jones et al., 2012). Teachers in the study by Shepherd and Salembier (2011) indicated that the principal's involvement was the key component in helping to implement the RtI program. Administrators and teachers are equally necessary in the successful implementation of any RtI program.

**Administrative leadership.** Administrative supervision can guide the success of RtI programs by providing assessments, training, and effective use of personnel; assigning locations for intervention implementation; and helping teachers to manage their time (Higgins-Averill, Baker, & Rinaldi, 2014). According to Noltemeyer, Boone, and Sansosti (2014), administrative support enhances the ways that RtI is implemented and evaluates changes that might be occurring in the school setting. In addition, administrators can help to plan and guide the evaluations of RtI initiatives (Noltemeyer et al., 2014).

Administrative supervision can facilitate the achievement and enhancement of RtI initiatives. Administrators also can help to ensure the effectiveness of RtI programs by following established guidelines and program evaluations. Administrative supervision provides clear direction for RtI programs.

**Relationships.** Administrative supervision can build relationships with teachers to ensure schoolwide support. Administrator support can produce effective results, especially when they build relationships with the teachers (Walker, Emanuel, Argabrite-

Grove, Brawand, & McGahee, 2012). These relationships ensure that the RtI team members allow teachers to contribute to the planning of new interventions for students and the implementation of change (Walker et al., 2012).

### **Lack of Program Application**

Program application is vital for the successful implementation of the RtI program to address students' academic deficits (Keller-Margulis, 2012). Administrators can work with the teachers and provide them with feedback program application. Teachers who do not receive feedback might not be aware that they are not implementing the program correctly.

**Protocols.** Program application comprises specific components. RtI programs that are implemented correctly have structure and purpose that improves the effectiveness of all three tiers (Greenwood & Min-Kim, 2012). Schools with correctly implemented programs stand out from other schools (Greenwood & Min-Kim, 2012), but the lack of program application can result in low performance (Harn et al., 2013). Harn et al. (2013) stated that for students to have quality instruction, correct program application should be 90% or more.

RtI programs have two protocols necessary to ensure program application, namely, outcomes and implemented interventions (Hill, King, Lemons, & Partanen, 2012). Hill et al. (2012) found that 30% of studies on RtI interventions indicated that schools were not implementing RtI effectively. Teachers need a concise understanding of their instructional plans to ensure the RtI program application (Kupzyk et al., 2012).

Program application is an important aspect of RtI implementation to ensure student success (Keller-Margulis, 2012).

A key component of program application is the monitoring of the entire program to ensure correct evaluation of student progress and decision making (Keller-Margulis, 2012). In the study by Ruby, Crosby-Cooper, and Vanerwood (2011), 72% of the school district representatives stated that no common screening was being conducted, 51% stated that no interventions were being used, and 65% stated that no clear RtI program was in place. Schools that do not have program application for their RtI programs do not have positive results in student performance. RtI programs that are implemented correctly monitor student outcomes and interventions to ensure students are successful.

**Program application and administrative supervision.** Program application requires administrative supervision of all aspects of the program to ensure that instruction is organized, implemented correctly, and timely; interventions are occurring; and interventions are being implemented according to the RtI design (Kupzyk et al., 2012). High expectations for program application ensure the validity of decisions made for students (Kupzyk et al., 2012). Monitoring by administrators for correct application, along with support for teachers, needs to occur on a regular basis to ensure correct implementation (Kupzyk et al., 2012). Instruction of students needs to be monitored and supported to ensure program application.

Program application includes the frequency and quality of interventions (Nellis, 2012). Program protocols also require the integrity of decisions, quality curriculum, interventions, progress monitoring, and procedures for supervision (Nellis, 2012). A high

level of program decision making produces greater results in students, whereas a lower level of programming produces poorer results (Ruby et al., 2011). The number of interventions, along with interventions that meet the specific needs of students, can help them to be successful academically. Protocols need to be in place to guide program implementation. Monitoring the RtI program application can help students to achieve academic success.

### **Summary**

The literature gathered in this review focused on areas identified in the themes that addressed the project of this study. This review was necessary to meet the deficits that Clover Elementary has been experiencing. PD was found to be important in providing the school with training on the ways in which administrative supervision can support implementation of the RtI program. The literature review was a necessary part of this research and was meant to show teachers and administrators at Clover Elementary the importance of implementing the RtI program with fidelity. PD was found to be necessary for teachers and administrators to substantiate the project design. RtI that is implemented as it was designed provides support for students in improving their reading skills. Administrative supervision can assist teachers by providing guidance and feedback on their implementation of the RtI program. Teachers can use what they learn in the PD to guide RtI program application to meet the academic needs of low-performing students.

## **Implementation**

### **Potential Resources and Existing Support**

The resources that are necessary for the project include a location for the PD to occur and the availability of training materials, including copies of the modules, handouts, and evaluations. The school district and the campus administrators will allot time for the 3-day PD training. The PD also can be divided into half-day training sessions, depending on the district's PD calendar. The PD might impact the school's budget only if substitute teachers are necessary so that the general education teachers can participate in the training. Rooms for the PD will have to be organized so that the participating teachers can work in collaborative groups to build relationships and support colleagues.

### **Potential Barriers**

The most important potential barrier will be the allocation of time by the school district and the school. Districts have required PD scheduled into their calendars, and schools are given only a limited number of full- and half-day PD sessions before school starts and throughout the year. Obtaining 3 full days of time is a barrier that can be overcome only with district and school support and commitment to the training.

The second barrier might be the cost involved in hiring substitute teachers so that the general education teachers can participate in the training. A third obstacle to implementing the PD might be the need for the school district, the school, the school administrators, and the teachers to commit to attending all 3 days of the PD. These

barriers will be addressed by providing the district, campus, administrators, and teachers with data from previous studies highlighting the benefits of PD.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Time Line**

The implementation of the project is for the 2015 school year at the school where the data were collected for this study. The time line is as follows:

1. Present the findings to the district, campus, administrators, and teachers where the PD will take place to provide a rationale for its implementation.
2. Get a commitment to participate from all stakeholders involved in the PD.
3. Meet with district and campus administrators to establish a schedule for 3 full days or 6 half-days of PD.
4. Meet with administrators to schedule facilities and technology (e.g., projectors, computers, PowerPoint remotes/clickers, audio equipment, projection screens, etc.) needed for the PD.
5. Provide training materials to the district office to be copied. One packet will be required for each trainees and administrators present at training.
6. Conduct the PD sessions scheduled by district from August 2015 to June 2016.
7. At the conclusion of the PD, ask participants to complete an evaluation.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others**

I will ensure that each step in the time line will be implemented. I also will present each PD session during the 2015 school year because I developed the modules and have the most knowledge of their content, including the factors that will make the

training effective. I will provide the school district and school administrators with up-to-date information at the end of each module. The district and campus administrators will decide which teachers from Grades 3 and 4 will participate in the PD as well as the format of the PD (i.e., full- or half-day sessions). The allotted amount of time also will include the district and campus commitment that teachers who begin the training will be able to complete it. Administrators will meet with the teachers to obtain their support in a collaborative effort to meet district and campus goals through the PD.

### **Project Evaluation**

An evaluation was developed to measure the participant responses regarding the PD presentation. The evaluation was a summative Likert-type instrument conducted at the end of the presentation. Results will be provided to administrative stakeholders. Additional evaluation will be made within 6 months of the presentation to measure effectiveness of implementation.

I developed a 5-point Likert-type scale summative evaluation to measure the clarity and comprehensiveness of the training. The 5-point Likert-type scale was selected because it could be used to easily sum up the participant's ratings of the presentation. The ratings will be from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). The Likert-type scale evaluation will comprise three questions about each module and three questions about the overall PD to obtain the views of the participants. The ordinal scale was developed using the Likert design to analyze each evaluation item separately in terms of participant agreement.

The participant responses will be summed to determine the comprehensiveness of the presentation. The summative evaluation will be used at the conclusion of the PD. The

stakeholders in the PD would include the teachers and campus administration. All of the quantitative evaluation data will be reviewed, summarized, and then provided to the district and campus administrators involved. The evaluations will be confidential, and no names of any teachers will be on the documents, unless they willingly and voluntarily provide the information themselves.

After the project is implemented and presented to the teachers, which will be between 3 and 6 months, evidence of the effectiveness and success could be observed during administrator walk-throughs, use of the fidelity checklist, and teacher fidelity conferences. Evidence will include correct presentation and implementation of intervention strategies. Evidence also will include the correct use of the school district's data-gathering computer program to meet the students' academic needs in reading.

### **Implications for Social Change**

#### **Implications for the Local School**

The project might improve the academic performance in reading of students in Grades 3 and 4 at the local elementary school because the PD will help to ensure the correct implementation and fidelity of the RtI program at Clover Elementary. In addition, the PD modules were designed to improve students' academic performance in reading and ensure that the teachers are consistent in gathering and using the data. The research-based interventions that will be part of the PD will help the teachers to meet the varied and individualized needs of all students at Clover Elementary.



### **Far-Reaching Implications**

The project will benefit not only the research school but also other schools at large through dissemination on the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database and through presentations at state conferences such as the Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education, Access to General Curriculum, and Texas Behavior Support. Benefits include ensuring that students are receiving RtI interventions tailored to meet their specific academic needs. In addition, the administrator of Clover Elementary might be able to use the findings and recommendations to improve students' achievement on statewide assessments, reduce referrals to special education, and increase students' performance in reading.

As found in the review of the literature, collaboration, cooperation, and support from teachers and administrators are key to the successful implementation of RtI programs. PD can provide the impetus for RtI program implementation when the stakeholders understand the purpose, benefits, and uses of the program in daily classroom instruction. Quality instruction in reading can be achieved through participation in RtI programs.

### **Summary**

Section 3 was an overview of the PD modules developed from the qualitative data. Modules were developed to meet the needs of the school under study in an effort to bring about positive social change by providing teachers with administrative support, organizational consistency, and RtI program application. Section 3 concluded with a

description of how the PD would be implemented and evaluated, as well as the implications for social change. Reflections and conclusions are included in Section 4.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusion

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the implementation of an RtI program and its impact on student performance in reading at Clover Elementary (pseudonym), the lowest academically performing campus in a Texas school district. The accountability performance standards of schools in the United States had been increasing since implementation of the NCLB in 2001 (TEA, 2014). Teachers were required to implement the RtI program in the general education setting to address students' academic needs prior to the students being referred to special education for testing for possible disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

The purpose of Section 4 presents my reflections about the study findings. It includes a discussion of the project strengths; limitations, along with recommendations for remediation; scholarship; project development; leadership and change; the importance of the work; and implications, applications, and directions for future research.

### **Project Strengths**

A lack of fidelity in RtI programs can result in an increase in referrals to special education for testing of disabilities (Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009). Clover Elementary was lacking in fidelity of implementation, as noted by the principal's classroom observations (J. Jameson [pseudonym], personal communication, October 1, 2013). Because accountability for students' academic achievement has increased in the United States in recent years, schools implemented programs such as RtI to meet the standards stipulated by IDEA (2004). As the result of increased referrals to special education and more

stringent accountability mandates, school districts face challenges in providing RtI programs that were implemented with fidelity. The project had three strengths that improved its ability to address this problem at Clover Elementary: (a) it used data derived from the interviews about the teachers' perceptions of the RtI program, (b) incorporated research supporting PD development, and (c) used PD modules designed to meet the specific needs identified in the findings.

The project was strengthened by the participating teachers' willingness to share their perceptions of the Clover Elementary administration, of the fidelity of implementation of the RtI program, and of the PD provided by the school district. The literature review was used to identify strategies to meet the deficits identified by these teachers. I designed the PD modules based upon the findings and literature review to address the campus deficits.

### **Project Limitations and Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

I designed a project for Clover Elementary that required a commitment from the school of 3 full-day or 6 half-day PD sessions over the course of a school year. The funding for substitute teachers during the training might impact the school and district budget. There also is a cost for printing all of the training materials. Another consideration is the allocation of time for training, which could impact the district's PD calendar. School districts have a set number of PD dates for the entire school year, with specific training sessions being determined by central administration. Individual schools are allocated small windows of training.

The research had two limitations: (a) only Grade 3 and Grade 4 teachers volunteered to participate in the study, so Grade 5 teachers were not represented in the interviews, and (b) the school in this study had the lowest state academic performance in the district and did not represent all other schools in the district. The findings could not be applied to other schools inside or outside of the district.

The project presents only one recommended approach for improving fidelity in the RtI program with PD. Other approaches could include online PD, PD designed only for administrators, professional learning communities (PLC) for RtI, or the hiring of reading consultants for individual schools. I also produced several recommendations for the district and the school using the study and literature review findings:

1. Use the school's teachers in the RtI plan of implementation to establish support and commitment of staff.
2. Obtain a commitment from the district and school to PD to improve students' academic performance and state performance accountability.
3. Allocate 3 full days or 6 half days for PD on the district and campus calendar.
4. Allocate funding for substitute teachers and the copying of materials for PD.

### **Scholarship**

My doctoral journey has been one involving the pursuit of professional growth and scholarly learning through research. My goal was to gain an understanding of and expertise in conducting research and completing a project study that has the potential to facilitate positive social change in the public elementary school setting. The foundation that I obtained from the Walden University course, the supportive staff, and the

outstanding efforts of my committee members and chair allowed me to complete this project.

The project was designed based on the perceptions of teachers of students in Grades 3 and 4 regarding RtI implementation at a low-performing school in the area of reading. PD was a commonly cited component in the six interviews, as shown by the coding and theme development from the analysis of the interview transcriptions. As a result, I chose to develop PD modules addressing the teachers' concerns that can be used on other campuses to address the fidelity of implementation of RtI programs in reading.

Analysis of the data showed that the interviewed teachers believed that the previous implementation of the RtI program was not meeting the academic needs of their students. The teachers identified several problems with the then-current RtI program application, including lack of support from administrators, poor organization of the data-gathering process, inconsistent intervention forms, and the lack of timeliness of intervention training and guidance from the RtI team. The teachers also indicated that training was inadequate to meet the learning needs of their students. They noted that typical PD presentations were short and rushed, had no follow-up sessions, and lacked focus regarding correct implementation. Even though the district has provided training in RtI since 2006, the teachers perceived that this training did not meet their individualized classroom needs. Most of the training occurred at the beginning of the year, and only short PD sessions were provided during the rest of the school year.

The teachers also stated that there was a need for additional support from administration in the areas of ongoing supervision, progress monitoring, and retraining of

identified areas of teacher need. The teachers indicated that in previous years, the school administrator had made all RtI decisions with minimal teacher input. At the time of the study, the RtI team members made all decisions based upon student data gathered by teachers. However, although the teachers contributed data to this team, they did not know how the data were used or how decisions about RtI interventions and strategies were selected and student mobility between tiers was determined.

The PD modules developed for this project will help to improve the teachers' implementation of Tier 1 reading interventions. The modules also include empirical interventions to address the specific needs of students who are struggling to read. My goal in developing these PD modules was to help teachers to meet the varied and specific needs of all general education students in Grades 3 and 4 in reading development.

### **Project Development**

I developed this project based upon my desire to help a struggling school to meet the varied and specific needs of general education students in reading and to lower the number of referrals to special education for testing of disabilities. I believe that my research will provide the school and the teachers with a way to meet the students' academic needs, with the result being improvements on statewide assessments.

Throughout the development of this project, I used peer-reviewed research to gain an understanding of the needs of a struggling school. This new understanding will help me to improve my skills as an administrator to improve the academic performance of students by providing teachers with RtI training. The qualitative data were collected from

interviews, were analyzed and coded into themes that answered the research questions, and were used to guide the literature review and subsequent RtI implementation project.

### **Leadership and Change**

A school community can be successful when it has the tools to meet the needs of teachers and students. School leaders can be influential in determining whether programs succeed or fail (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012), so it is vital that they meet the needs of teachers by offering PD (Higgins-Averill et al., 2014). I developed this PD on RtI to help the teachers at Clover Elementary to implement their RtI program with fidelity and subsequently meet the students' academic needs in Tier I reading.

School leaders must be able to identify what motivates the teachers to learn and change to meet students' needs. Moreover, school leaders need to understand the theory of andragogy (i.e., adult learning) and use it to understand the teachers' six characteristics of learning:

- A need to know.
- Self-concept of the learner.
- The learner's prior experience.
- A readiness to learn.
- An orientation to learning.
- Motivation. (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 4)

School leaders who understand teachers need to know that prior experience, readiness to learn, self-concept as learners, and motivation can facilitate change (Knowles et al., 2005; Lewin & Gold, 1999). This movement is necessary to bring about



systemic change so that after it is in place, teachers will consider the new initiative a normal part of the school setting.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

As I reflect on my own growth and development as a student at Walden University, I realize that I gained an understanding of what it is to conduct scholarly research. I learned how to ensure the safety of the participants in my study through the ethics training that I received at the university. I developed a level of knowledge of RtI that I did not have before. I learned how to deal with participants who chose not to be part of my study. I also matured as a school administrator and leader, roles that will allow me to bring about social change in my future career and work with districts, schools, and educators.

### **Analysis of Self as a Practitioner**

The research process allowed me to grow as a researcher and facilitate change in the educational setting. The goals that I established in collaboration with my committee allowed me to improve my research capabilities and construct a project that met the high standards of Walden University. The doctoral journey required great commitment and perseverance on my part, and I fully acknowledge the support and guidance of my committee in this journey. I am grateful for the support that I received from my school district and the guidance that I had from the school district's executive director, who met with me and my committee to guide me toward producing a high-quality project study. The participants gave willingly of their time and shared their perceptions honestly about

the problems that they were experiencing trying to implement the RtI program. My final goal as a practitioner is to implement the project at Clover Elementary.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

As a project developer, I gained the ability to develop and implement a research project that has the potential to facilitate positive social change in a public elementary school. My project began with what I observed to be a need in districts across the state of Texas. When I attended PD in different cities in Texas, I had conversations regarding the RtI program and its implementation. I found that most concerns centered on program fidelity. As I worked with my dissertation committee, I honed my skills and focused on my goal of helping schools to address this deficit. When I began reviewing public data in my school district, I found a school that had the lowest academic performance in the district. With the help of my committee, I was able to focus on the needs of the school and the specific grades that could benefit from the PD that would emerge from this project study.

### **Potential Impact of the Project on Social Change**

The qualitative data indicated that PD sessions on implementation of the RtI program could give the teachers the skills necessary to meet the needs of their students. Their incorrect implementation of the program had prohibited students' academic achievement. Past PD sessions had not met the needs of the teachers because they were too brief, were done too quickly, and held inconsistent content. The PD modules will give the teachers 3 full days of training in the ways to implement, monitor, and support a strong RtI program correctly. Sun et al. (2013) found that for PD sessions to be effective,

they must offer consistent training for at least 30 hours. The PD will provide approximately that same amount of training. In addition, there will be ongoing administrative support of teachers in their implementation of RtI.

As a result of meeting the teachers' needs to implement RtI correctly by offering this PD throughout the school year, I believe that student performance on statewide assessments and in the classroom setting will improve. Teachers will benefit from the PD sessions because the training will give them the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues to plan the RtI program, guide its implementation, and oversee its continued growth. By helping the teachers to implement the RtI program correctly, it is possible that the number of referrals to special education to test for disabilities will decrease. Students' performance on statewide assessments also will improve, resulting in the school's rating to improve as it begins to meet state and federal requirements.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

One application of the project is implementation at the school under study, Clover Elementary. I also want to present the findings at statewide educational conferences and in legal digests and peer-reviewed educational journals. Another future direction could entail research at the secondary school level. IDEA (2004) requires RtI use in all grade levels. Future researchers could find additional needs at higher grade levels and subsequently offer guidance (e.g., PD) to teachers struggling to meet the specific needs of students. Even though most referrals to special education for testing occur at the elementary level, some students also are referred at the secondary level. Finally, PD

could be used to train administrators to provide support, guidance, and leadership to other members of the school community.

### **Conclusion**

This study identified the ways in which learning can benefit elementary schools struggling to implement their own RtI programs successfully. Self-reflection allowed me to understand the importance of social change in RtI implementation and its impact on student and school performance. The RtI project was developed to meet the perceived needs of teachers in a low-performing elementary school and to improve the effectiveness of the RtI reading intervention program resulting in improved student academic achievement.

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## Appendix A: RtI Implementation Project

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## Purpose

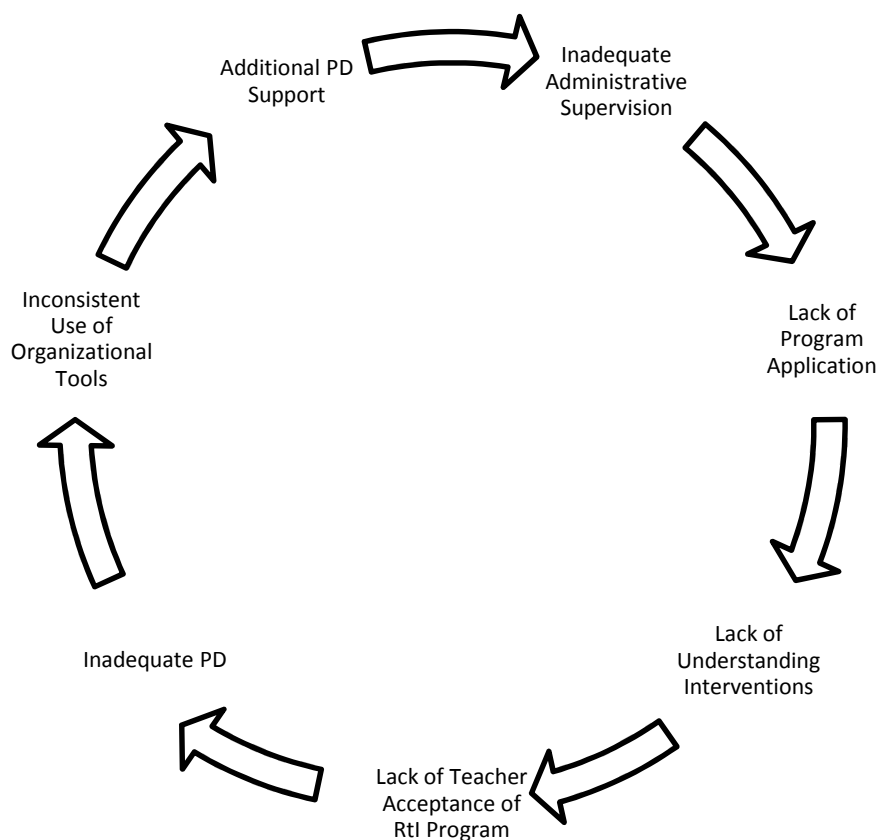
The purpose of this professional development presentation (PD) is to provide teachers and administrators in a school in south Texas with training that addresses the teachers' concerns of effectively implementing the Response to Intervention (RtI) program in their Grades 3 and 4 reading classrooms. This training resulted from an in-depth study of teachers at a low-performing school who experienced difficulty implementing RtI program strategies to address the needs of students failing to meet statewide assessment standards in reading. The analysis of the data from this research resulted in the identification of seven themes that the teachers stated they needed help with in order to effectively implement the RtI program. The seven themes were: inadequate administrative supervision, lack of program application, lack of understanding interventions, lack of teacher acceptance of the RtI program, inadequate PD, inconsistent use of organizational tools, and additional PD needed (see Table 1).

Table 1

### *Themes and Descriptions*

Theme	Description
Inadequate administrative supervision	Administration not present in classrooms on regular basis to provide guidance.
Lack of program application	Teachers are incorrectly applying the program guidelines.
Lack of understanding interventions	Teachers do not understand the reading interventions.
Lack of Teacher Acceptance of RtI Program	Teachers do not accept the RtI program.
Inadequate PD	Teachers are receiving inadequate PD.
Inconsistent use of organizational tools	Organizational tools are not consistent and training is not provided.
Additional PD needed	PD is needed to help teachers to understand and implement RtI program with fidelity.

The cyclical relationship of the seven themes is illustrated in Figure 1. The seven identified themes were interrelated through their impact on each other. The teachers believed that there was inadequate administrative supervision, which then led to a lack of program application. This lack of application was subsequently related to a lack of understanding of the ways in which to implement the program. PD was inadequate, again resulting in program application being impacted. The teachers did not accept the RtI program because of their lack of understanding of the program and the inconsistent tools used to gather data. These identified themes showed that PD might be able to provide the teachers with the tools necessary to implement the RtI program correctly.



*Figure 1.* A chart showing the cyclical relationship between themes.



## Materials

The materials needed for the PD modules training are:

- Copies of all materials located at the following link:  
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/21am9ymtebk63m1/AADjaYxldOcC-26ttUXfGbPga?dl=0>
- Wireless laptop computer.
- Wireless internet access.
- Wired desktop computers may be substituted depending on location restrictions.
- A copy of the Day 1 PowerPoint handout for each staff member in attendance.
- A copy of the Day 2 PowerPoint handout for each staff member in attendance.
- A copy of the Day 3 PowerPoint handout for each staff member in attendance.
- A copy of the Progress Monitoring Form for each staff member in attendance.
- A copy of the Fidelity Checklist for Teachers Self-Check for each staff member in attendance.
- A copy of the Fidelity Checklist for Administrators for each staff member in attendance.
- A copy of the agenda for each staff member in attendance.

- A copy of the Special Education Referral Checklist Form for each staff member in attendance.
- A copy of the Special Education Health Screening for each staff member in attendance.
- A copy of the Special Education Required Information for Referral Form for each staff member in attendance.
- A copy of the Special Education Refusal to Test Letter Form for each staff member in attendance.
- A copy of the evaluation for each staff member in attendance.
- Easel for presentation writing pad.
- Large easel writing pad.
- Large post-it pad.
- Markers, highlighters, post-its, note flags, pens, pencils, etc.

## Timeline

1. Reserve the necessary facilities and provide district with list of needed technology equipment (e.g., projectors, computers, PowerPoint remotes/clickers, audio equipment, projection screens, etc.). (July 2015)
2. Provide training materials to the district office to be copied. One packet will be required for each trainee and administrator present at training. (July 2015)
3. Obtain list of teachers and staff to be in attendance at PD. (July 2015)
4. Conduct the PD sessions scheduled by district from August 2015 through June 2016. (August 2015)
5. If 6 half-days are requested by the district, schedule dates based on 2015-2016 school year adopted calendar. (2015-2016)
6. After the PD modules have been presented, provide participants with an evaluation. The information gathered from the evaluations will be used to determine the effectiveness of the PD modules. (August 2015)

## Agenda

The PD will occur during a 3-day training period. The PD also can be divided into 6 half-day training sessions, depending on the district's staff development calendar. The 6 modules will be presented as follows: Day 1 – Modules I and II, Day 2 – Modules III and IV, and Day 5 – Modules V and VI.

### **Day 1**

#### Module I – History of RtI and IDEA

- History of RtI
- IDEA law

#### Module II – Fidelity of Implementation and Benefits of Program

- Fidelity information and law
- Benefits of program according to research
- Fidelity checklist for administrators during walk-thru's
- Fidelity checklist for teachers self-check
- Fidelity conference between administrator and teachers

### **Day 2**

#### Module III – Scientifically Research-Based Interventions

- Websites
- Activities
- List of interventions with explanations
- Types of reading interventions
- Research on types of interventions

- Differentiation of instruction prior to selecting intervention
- How to select an intervention

#### Module IV – Progress Monitoring Documentation

- Progress monitoring forms
- Training on form use
- Teacher self-checklist for gathering progress monitoring data
- Training on use of district data program

### **Day 3**

#### Module V – Administrative Supervision, Guidance, and Support

- Administrative supervision – research and how often/documentation
- Guidance – research/documentation
- Support – research/documentation
- Checklist for walk-thru
- Interventions list from teachers so administrators now what to look for – posted on wall in classroom with lesson plans

#### Module VI – RtI Collaboration: Teacher, Administrator, and Team

- Research on collaboration
- Research on teacher support
- Research on professional development
- Teacher support importance
- Teacher needs to be part of all decision making for ownership of own students and accountability

- Administrators hold teachers accountable for own students for accountability, but only if teachers part of it
- Time issues for gathering data and data dissemination back to teachers with interventions
- Teachers need understanding of how progress monitoring data was used, how interventions selected, and what other interventions can be selected to compliment instruction
- Teacher/administrator collaboration
- Teacher/RtI team collaboration

## Module 1

The findings of this research revealed that teachers needed to understand the history of RtI. Additionally, teachers stated a desire to obtain a deeper comprehension of the IDEA laws and requirements that support struggling students. There was an identified need to help teachers with fidelity of implementation of the RtI program.

Based on these findings, Module 1 provides an overview of the history of RtI. There is clear explanation of the purpose of RtI, the different models, and the three tiers in the models. During this session there is a review of IDEA, laws and regulations pertaining to RtI, the impact on referrals to special education, and the impact on general education.

The PowerPoint for Module 1 is located at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/21am9ymtebk63m1/AADjaYxldOcC-26ttUXfGbPga?dl=0>

## Module 2

Module 2 provides information concerning the fidelity of implementation of the RtI program, the importance of implementing the program as designed, and the potential positive impact on student and school academics and performance on statewide assessment. Additionally, there is a review of the benefits of the RtI program. This module also provides a checklist for teachers to assist them with implementing RtI protocols in their classrooms, a fidelity checklist for administrators, and includes a discussion concerning fidelity indicators during a possible follow-up conference between administrators and teachers.

Based on the findings from this study, teachers indicated that there was a need for PD for fidelity of implementation and understanding how the RtI program was to be effectively implemented. This study indicated that teachers needed to be reminded of the benefits of the RtI program and how the program could impact academic performance of struggling students. Module 2 seeks to help teachers confidently implement the RtI program in their classrooms.

The PowerPoint for module 2 is located at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/21am9ymtebk63m1/AADjaYxldOcC-26ttUXfGbPga?dl=0>



### Module 3

Based on the findings of this study, teachers indicated a need for PD learning about scientifically research-based interventions. Teachers stated that PD was needed to fully understand the interventions and how to correctly implement them. There was an identified need for PD that would help teachers with fidelity of implementation.

Module 3 provides this information and is a review of scientifically research-based interventions in the area of reading. Participant activities in this module provide examples and ideas of strategies and techniques that can be used in the classroom and promotes discussions on how to use these interventions and implement correctly. This module reviews different types of reading interventions and provides researched evidence of the success for the various strategies. Lists of interventions are provided with examples along with websites for future reference. The teachers and participants of this PD will be encouraged to review these interventions during this session.

The PowerPoint for module 3 is located at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/21am9ymtebk63m1/AADjaYxldOcC-26ttUXfGbPga?dl=0>

## Module 4

In the current study, teachers indicated a need for PD training in specific progress monitoring reporting and how to document use of the various interventions the children used in their classrooms. Teachers requested specific training on how to correctly use the data gathering form and the district computerized program. Each of these components would help teachers to implement the RtI program with fidelity and assist children in their academic achievement.

Because of these stated needs, Module 4 provides a review of RtI student progress monitoring. A review of how often progress monitoring needs to occur to gather sufficient data for the RtI team to make decisions is presented. Training is provided on form use and the importance of consistency of data collection. The district data gathering program is reviewed and training is provided on each part of the program including how to input information, where to locate it, creating files, etc. Teachers and participants will use laptops and desktop computers to access the computer program and receive hands-on instruction during the presentation.

The PowerPoint for module 4 is located at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/21am9ymtebk63m1/AADjaYxldOcC-26ttUXfGbPga?dl=0>

## Module 5

Module 5 provides a review of administrative supervision, research findings, and how often administrators should conduct walk-throughs. A discussion during this session includes how to document RtI observations in a classroom and document teacher feedback. Administrative guidance and support for teachers will be reviewed. The administrator and teacher self-check fidelity checklists will be reviewed so that participants what administrators will be observing during walk-throughs and conversations to be reviewed during follow-up conferences. Lesson plans and intervention list locations are also discussed.

This module was created because the teachers in this study indicated a need for PD concerning administrative support and supervision. Teachers stated they needed guidance on how to implement the program and provide specific feedback of their implementation of the RtI interventions an administrator would observe in their classrooms. This module specifically addresses the identified need for PD to assist teachers with fidelity of implementation of the RtI protocols in their classrooms. Additionally, the module provides guidance and support to administrative supervisors with to perform observations with effective feedback based on RtI observations.

The PowerPoint for module 5 is located at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/21am9ymtebk63m1/AADjaYxldOcC-26ttUXfGbPga?dl=0>

## Module 6

The research in this study revealed a need for PD that would help teachers implement the RtI program with fidelity and provide instruction for administrative supervision, guidance, and support. The teachers in this study stated a desire to learn how to build collegial skills between teachers, administrators, and the campus RtI team. Teachers also stated that collaboration with other teachers and administrators would better allow them to understand how to implement the RtI program and how to become effective instructors.

To meet these needs, Module 6 reviews the importance of collaboration between teachers, administrators, and the campus RtI team. The module as provides ample time for discussion during this session to address the impact of collaboration on teachers and administrators to allow them to see the benefits of the RtI program when implemented with fidelity. Research on importance of continued PD is presented. Time issues for teachers to collect student progress data as well as the importance of timely responses from the campus RtI team is discussed. A review of the process for using collected data for tier movement is discussed.

The PowerPoint for module 6 is located at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/21am9ymtebk63m1/AADjaYxldOcC-26ttUXfGbPga?dl=0>

## References

Cody, A. Two ways to lead. *Educational Leadership*, 71, P. 68-71. Retrieved from

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[http://framework.esc18.net/Documents/Pro\\_Safeguards\\_ENG.pdf](http://framework.esc18.net/Documents/Pro_Safeguards_ENG.pdf)

## Evaluation

A summative evaluation that I created will be used at the conclusion of the PD to determine the effectiveness of the training. All of the quantitative evaluation data will be reviewed, summarized, and then provided to the district and campus administrators involved. The evaluation will comprise three questions about each module and three questions about the overall PD to obtain the views of the participants. The evaluations will be confidential, and no names of any teachers will be on the documents, unless they willingly and voluntarily provide the information themselves.

**Response to Intervention  
Program Implementation  
Presentation Evaluation**

<b>Instructions: Rate each item under each module.</b>	<u>Disagree</u>				<u>Agree</u>
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>I. Module I – History of RtI and IDEA</b>					
1. Materials met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Presentation met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Presenter facilitated presentation well.	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
<b>II. Module II – Fidelity of Implementation and Benefits of Program</b>					
1. Materials met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Presentation met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Presenter facilitated presentation well.	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
<b>III. Module III – Scientifically Research-Based Interventions</b>					
1. Materials met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Presentation met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Presenter facilitated presentation well.	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
<b>IV. Module IV – Progress Monitoring Documentation</b>					
1. Materials met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Presentation met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Presenter facilitated presentation well.	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
<b>V. Module V – Administrative Supervision, Guidance, and Support</b>					
1. Materials met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Presentation met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Presenter facilitated presentation well.	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
<b>VI. Module VI – RtI Collaboration: Teacher, Administrator, and Team</b>					
1. Materials met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Presentation met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Presenter facilitated presentation well.	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
<b>VII. Summative Evaluation</b>					
1. Overall materials met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Overall presentation met established goals.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Overall presenter facilitated presentation well.	1	2	3	4	5
Comments: (Please use back of form for additional comments.)					

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What are your roles and responsibilities with RtI implementation at the school?
2. What do you see as the benefits to the implementation of RtI?
3. What do you see as the drawbacks to the implementation of RtI?
4. What is your overall assessment of how the RtI program is working at the school?
5. What are your thoughts about the effectiveness and appropriateness of the RtI Tier structure?
6. What aspects of the RtI program implementation do you feel you could benefit from with more training?
7. What types of support would improve your capacity to implement the RtI tier interventions in the classrooms?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about the RtI program?