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Intervention Specialists' Perceptions of a Tutoring Program for High School Students with Disabilities

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Students with disabilities (SWD) at an urban high school in Midwestern United States experienced academic, social, and emotional problems. When SWD experience difficulties in high school, they may drop out and face potentially life-long problems. The purpose of this case study was to understand how a Response to Intervention (RTI) tutoring program addressed the academic, social, and emotional needs of students using the RTI model as a conceptual framework. The research questions addressed intervention specialists' perceptions of how use of the RTI model helped them meet SWD needs and what tutoring documents revealed about tutoring practices. Data sources consisted of interviews with 7 purposely selected intervention specialists who worked as special education teachers at the research site for at least 2 years, lesson plans provided by participants, and reviews of 20 student work samples including pre and post assessments. The data were analyzed by coding for emerging ideas related to interventions within the RTI framework and academic and social/emotional issues. The findings revealed that intervention specialists perceived the overarching academic difficulty for SWD was reading deficits, the out-of-class tutoring program was beneficial for SWD academically by using one-on-one and small-group instruction to scaffold success, and RTI was successful socially/emotionally by guiding students to use appropriate classroom behaviors. The results of the documentary data was that the created lessons were academically appropriate for the SWD they taught in the tutoring center. This study can contribute to positive social change by providing guidance to intervention specialists for increasing SWD social and academic success.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my loving mother, Alyse Calhoun; my father, Jerry Calhoun; and my son, Jaylen Harris. Without them, this study would not have been possible. Their constant words of encouragement gave me the spirit of determination and inspiration I needed to run this race. I also dedicate this work to my savior, who has shown me unconditional love and unmerited favor. Finally, I dedicate this educational experience as an honor in the name of Florence Bell, my maternal grandmother—the first educator of the family. She has inspired three generations of educators.

Acknowledgments

Most importantly, I wish to acknowledge Dr. Mary Lou Morton for helping me to complete this process. I also wish to acknowledge other Walden faculty and staff members including my methodologist, Dr. Jaimie Jones, and my university research reviewer, Dr. Paul Englesberg. Thanks, also, to my brother, Jeremy Calhoun, (my "Mini-Me" smiles), who kept pressing me to complete my degree. To my extended Calhoun and Bell families, you have entrusted me to become our first doctoral student. I also wish to give a very special acknowledgement to the interview participants at the study site.

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Section 1: Introduction of the Study

The focus of this case study was on special education intervention specialists' perceptions of how students with disabilities (SWD) benefited academically, socially, and emotionally from their participation in an out-of-class tutoring program. The program was part of a Response to Intervention (RTI) strategy used at an urban high school in the Midwestern region of the United States. RTI is a multileveled behavioral and academic plan that educators use to foster improvements in the academic, social, and emotional well-being of adolescent SWD (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010; Giles, Wilson, & Elias, 2010). Researchers have examined RTI interventions involving tutoring among SWD (Fitzell, 2011; Jackson, 2012; Windram, Bollman, & Johnson, 2015). The lack of on-time graduation and academic achievement demonstrates the need for this study. These studies offer sugestions for RTI strategies of rsecondary teachers. Additionally, researchers have examined RTI interventions involving tutoring among SWD (Fitzell, 2011; Jackson, 2012; Windram, Bollman, & Johnson, 2015). Key findings were that RTI is needed so educators do not assume that students know how to behave or perform academically. Instead, educators employ strategies to help foster academic and behavioral skills via tiered support systems. There will be additional discussion about the problem in Section 2.

Problem Statement

SWD have not been succeeding in high school in a Midwestern U.S. city. Lack of success has caused problems for these students academically, socially, and emotionally

(Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison, 2006; Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, & Royer, 2009; Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Witmer, 2013). Students with learning difficulties make gains in reading and math at a slower pace than nondisabled peers. Students with behavioral disorders also make academic gains at a lower pace than nondisabled peers as well (Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Witmer, 2013). These authors noted that this slower pace is, in part, because students with emotional issues exibit behaviors that impede the academic environment for themselves and their classs. The SWD's lack of success in school poses a problem for them because their behavioral and academic issues impede graduation and employment.

Statewide Issues

In the Midwestern state where the school is located, the governor determined that the state's workforce was adversely affected by the low completion rate of high school students. In 2014, 82% of the students graduated in years, and 81% graduated in 5 years. The governor chose to include the graduation statistics of SWD with the population at large. After identifying the problem, the governor implemented a recovery plan for high school dropouts in 2014 as a mechanism to address the unprepared workforce. The unemployment rate is approximately 5% in the state and in the county, according to 2016 statistics from the state's department of education.

The governor determined that the preponderance of low graduation rates warranted intervention to produce economic sustainability in the state. As part of this plan, in the 2013-14 school year, state leaders implemented a new report card system that measured performance indicators and included an index with a mathematical formula that

the state created to determine whether students' scores were proficient or not in each grade and subject test. The state department of education anticpates an 80% completion rate for high school graduation and that schools will show proficiency on state tests by 2024.

State officials released a new report card in 2014 and executed the new assessments in the 2015 school year. State officials intended for the new report card and assessments to result in students becoming equipped and better prepared for the workforce. However, despite the IEP team's option to exempt SWD from the consquences of not passing the mandatory graduation assessments, state department of education does not calculated scores for SWD separately from those of their nondisabled peers. Therefore, it is difficult to understand how to apply interventions and strategies specific to the needs of SWD.

In the 2016 report card, based on decisions of the local district and state, graduation rates for SWD are calculated according to the number of students who earned a diploma within 4 years. This calculation divides the number of students who graduate in 4 years or less by the total number of students that form the adjusted graduating class. The state employees used this method to determine if a school met performance indicators. The judgment was based on scores from state tests such as the state achievement tests for Grades 10-12 and the Next Generation tests for Grades 4-9. Students needed to pass the state test to graduate. The test was used to measure each student's attainment in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. These Next Generation tests cover the areas of English/language arts (ELA), mathematics,

social studies, and science, and school districts were held responsible for test administration in the 2015 school year. The higher the performance of each individual student, the more points a school and the district receive.

The new report card has an A through F grading scale and progress measures for all students including gifted and SWD, as well as those who scored in the lowest 20% of achievement statewide. The state department of education's expectation from this new mandate is that SWD will receive scores that are proficient on state-mandated tests unless the students' Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) teams opt to exempt or excuse the SWD from the consequences of not meeting expectations of the high school examination. In such cases, the SWD is not penalized for not passing the graduation test.

The objective of the state department of education is to increase the overall graduation rate by 5%, proportionate to the graduation rate and statewide tests scores of racial and ethnic minorities. This push to increase scores is intended to make all the students in the state ready for college. These recently changed state objectives are being addressed with a program entitled Race to the Top, the Obama administration reform initiated in 2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). As part of Race to the Top, failing schools in the state are able to receive school improvement funds (United States Department of Education, 2015). Schools across the state implemented three or four levels of RTI interventions to help students to meet the higher goals for graduation.

Issues at the Research Site

The purpose of this study was to understand how SWD at one urban high school in the Midwest region of the United States benefited academically, socially, and

emotionally through their participation in an RTI, out-of-class tutoring program. Other interventions were used by educators in classrooms to improve behavioral as well as academic achievement for all students. The tiers or levels of instruction implemented in the RTI program at the focus high school can be summarized as follows:

- Tier 1 interventions took place in the general education class.
- Tier 2 interventions followed with core instruction infused into the general education classroom through differentiated instruction, which means that students at different levels of ability were given different materials and instructions.
- Tier 3 involved group interventions with more intensive academic structure and ongoing assessments, along with requests for additional family support.
- Tier 4 involved out-of-class supports such as the tutoring center at the research site.

The administration, intervention specialists, and teachers at the research site added an after-school and out-of-classroom intervention to serve the students receiving Tier 3 and 4 interventions as a way to address needs caused by family, emotional, or social issues, which might interfere with academic achievement.

Issues that Interfer with Academic Success and Graduation of SWD

The graduation rate for the entire district is at 66%, but SWD dropped out at 34% (see Table 1). State officials recently ranked this school at a D level because of its 54% Performance Index and gave the school an F for failing to meeting any of its indicators of improvement. The limited success and low graduation rate in the district and at the

research site are consistent with national trends regarding the success of SWD (DePaoli, Balfanz & Bridgeland, 2016). These students tend to be less likely to complete high school (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014).

Table 1

District Graduation Rates Versus Dropout Rates for District SWD

Year	District graduation rate	SWD Dropout rate
2010-11	64%	36%
2011-12	73%	27%
2012-13	73%	27%
2013-14	64%	35%
2014-15	66%	34%

Note. Data were compiled from district and state statistics published in 2016.

In addition, the trend at the research site follows a broader trend within the larger school districts in the state. In 2010, the Midwestern region in which the study took place had over 1,600 dropouts. From 2006 to present, most U.S. schools had a substantially lower dropout rate (US Department of Education, 2017). Statewide, 62.7% of the high schools had fewer than 50 dropouts total; however, 23 schools, including the research site, had more than 1,000 dropouts during this same time period. These schools accounted for over 40% of the dropouts in this state, and students from districts such as the research site are over six times more likely to drop out (Hawley, Kortyka, Porter, Schill & Zagarsky, 2013). Despite the inconsistent improvement in the graduation rates

at the research site since 2014, the administrators reported that the district has yet to meet its target criteria for SWD.

For the 2012-2013 school year until the time of the study, the focus school's graduation rate lagged behind both the district and state (see Table 2). The graduation rate for this school was also scored as an F in the state report card, with 66% of the students graduating in 4 years and 78% in 5 years. The school's graduation rate is almost 17% lower compared to the state average.

Table 2

Four- and Five-Year Graduation Rates for Research Site Compared to District-State Rates

Years in school	Research site	District	State
4	53%	59%	82%
5	58%	63%	81%

Note. Data were compiled from district and state statistics published in 2016.

When compared to the district and state percentages, graduation rates at the research site also reflected a period of moderate improvement followed by a decline in performance for four-year graduates (see Table 3).

Table 3

Graduation Rate Trends for Research Site from 2010-2014

Graduation rate	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
4-year rate	43%	49%	53%	55%	57%
5-year rate	44%	58%	58%	NA	69%

Note. Data were compiled from district and state statistics published in 2016.

However, even with this success, the graduation rates show that educators at the research site only managed to prepare a little over half of school graduates for life beyond high school. With the transition from No Child Left Behind to Race to the Top, federal and state governments in the United States have prioritized helping students, including SWD, to meet consistent educational standards. This investigation matters because it is the professional obligation of educators and educational policymakers to provide SWD every opportunity to be successful.

Nature of the Study

Seven intervention specialists participated in this case study, which took place in an urban district in the U.S. Midwest. I interviewed the participants and reviewed the work samples and lesson plans that they provided. I formulated three research questions to gain insight about how the tutoring program improved academic and noncognitive performance of SWD. The research questions were as follows:

Research Question 1: What are intervention specialists' perceptions of how an RTI out-of-class tutoring program at the research site helped SWD' academic needs?

Research Question 2: What are intervention specialists' perceptions of how an RTI out-of-class tutoring program at the research site helped SWD's social and emotional needs?

Research Question 3: What does a review of the tutoring center documents show about how a tutoring center at the research site helped SWD academically?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how an RTI out-of-class tutoring program served the academic, social, and emotional needs of students who attended an urban high school in the U.S. Midwest. By understanding the perceptions of intervention specialists who work at the tutoring center and reviewing documents from the tutoring center, staff at the school may be able to continue to improve academic, social, and emotional outcomes for SWD and improve their overall development (DePaoli, Balfanz & Bridgeland, 2016). Improving the academic, social, and emotional needs of the SWD will improve their overall success in the school and prepare them for life after graduation.

Conceptual Framework

I used the RTI program (Castillo et al., 2015; Fuchs et al., 2010) to interpret and support data analysis in this case study. Using the RTI framework, I also reviewed documents to support and triangulate information obtained from my interviews with the intervention specialists who participated in the study.

An RTI is a three- and, sometimes, four-layered system of interventions that was developed to modify teaching and strategies to serve different students' needs (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008). The interventions are implemented by the student's educators and the guardian. At the time of this study, RTI was mandated in the state of study for all local school agencies. Intervention specialists use RTI interventions to help create an effective learning environment, which can offer success to each student. RTI is a federally regulated educational system of interventions that requires highly qualified special education teachers to implement best instructional practices for individual student success

(Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010; Giles, Wilson, & Elias, 2010). Using interventions requires training educators with the latest research-based instructional strategies when using the RTI delivery modality to increase the knowledge of students in all tiers including SWD (Brownell et al., 2010; Sansosti, Noltemeyer, & Goss, 2010).

The tiered approach begins with screening students so that appropriate and needed interventions for both behavior and academics can be developed for them (Fuchs, Fuchs, Bouton, Compton, & Caffrey, 2011). The approach demonstrates that collaboration between teachers, support staff, and parents can help to plan educational outcomes for students and keep them in the general education setting whenever possible. An RTI program can have four tiers at some schools, while other districts may opt to implement Tiers 1-3 only. The tiers are used to identify students' risk for failure in the least restrictive setting with progress monitoring and multisystemic, disciplinary prevention practices (Scholastic, 2012). The goal is for students to receive individualized instruction (Basham, Israel, Graden, Poth, & Winston, 2010).

Tier 1 in the RTI program consists of students identified as general education students (Fuchs, Fuchs, Bouton, Compton, & Caffrey, 2011). Students who qualify for Tier 2 require modifications in teaching or an intervention (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010; Fuchs et al., 2011; Mellard, McKnight, & Jordan, 2010). Students who qualify for Tier 3 are a part of a targeted intervention that can incorporate behavioral supports as well, if needed (Fuchs et al., 2011). In addition, some districts include special education services in Tier 3. Other students who require intense interventions are categorized as Tier 4. Students who qualify for Tier 4 interventions may require services that exceed the

continuum of services offered by public education programs in their classrooms (McCook, 2006; Scholastic, 2012). In many instances, Tier 4 interventions can include referrals to behavioral and special educational services provided by alternative educational facilities with partial to full-time day treatment facilities (Fitzell, 2011). The tiers of RTI interventions can be modified by the student's team members at any time.

Operational Definitions

The operational terms and jargon used in this study are as follows:

Delinquency: An illegal activity conducted by youth. Delinquency is characterized by activities such as gang involvement, theft, drug use and distribution, murder, and other harmful acts (Garfinkel, 2010).

Dropout: Students who did not graduate with a diploma even if they received their GED (Aud et al., 2011; Landmark et al., 2013).

Four-year graduation rate: A measure and formula used to calculate the number of students who complete high school within a cohort beginning in the 9th grade year and who meet criteria to graduate at the end of 12th grade. Students who transfer, die, or emigrate are subtracted (United States Department of Education, 2008).

Individual educational plan (IEP): A team that consists of a student's parents, an intervention specialist, a general education teacher, a related service professional (if assigned), and a district representative, who meet annually and determine what a student with a disability needs educationally in a written plan. This plan allows the SWD to have access to a general education classroom or curriculum in the student's least restrictive environment with specially designed instruction (Landmark & Zhang, 2013).

Intervention specialist: A special education teacher who provides educational services for SWD and is the person responsible for implementing the IEP (State Department of Education, 2014).

Prevention: The act of deterring an occurrence of some behavior (Randolph, Fincham, & Radey, 2009). In the school setting, prevention generally refers to deterring negative behaviors or outcomes (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2017).

Response to Intervention (RTI): Interventional strategies, and the formally coined term "Tiers," that educators use to refer to academic and behavioral assistance to students. Three or four RTI tiers are typically used (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009; Fitzell, 2011; Fuchs, Compton, Fuchs, Bouton, & Caffrey, 2011; Mellard et al., 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012).

Social/emotional learning: Learning by children in various forms other than textbook and academic strategies. Students also learn from their teachers, peers, and family members (Durlak, Dynmicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011; Zins et al., 2007).

Social learning theory: The concept that behaviors are learned and adopted via observation. Through internalization, young learners model observed behaviors (Bandura, 1977, 2002; Stinson, Sales, & Becker, 2008).

Specific learning disability: A disorder in one or more psychological developments. This disability also includes the interpreting and/or use of spoken or written language (Shannon & Edmondson, 2010). This condition can affect students'

speech, spelling, and mathematical abilities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Fulcher, 2015; Scott, Wishart & Bowyer, 2006).

Student with a disability (SWD): Students who require educational services with specially designed instruction and who have been identified as having an educational disability. This term can be interchanged with the term *special education* student (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Urban: Referes to location in the inner city, often in areas with diversity and possibly low socioeconomic populations. In the context of this study, urban often suggests a low-performing school consisting of families with lower socioeconomic status (Demsey, Bramley, & Power, 2011).

Whole child philosophy and approach: A well-researched body of knowledge in which the focus is on educating a child by attending to both academic and social/emotional needs (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development 2014; Diamond, 2010; Miller, 2010).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

This study is constructed with certain assumptions, limitations, and parameters because of constraints of time, resources, and ability. The intent of discussing assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations as they pertain to this study is to provide transparency. Case study research contains shortcomings; in particular, aspects that this proposed study may not encompass. This section provides a review of the missing elements that this study did not explore.

Assumptions

The first assumption for this study includes the expectation that participants would answer honestly. Also, I assume that the participants would give answers based on their first-hand experiences with the problem. In addition, I assumed that the answers and responses would be transferrable and of use to other school settings. These insights also applied to other school populations.

Concerning data collection, I assumed that face-to-face interviews, follow-up interviews, observations, and data analysis are basic qualitative research strategies, and that this approach provided accurate results for the research questions (Hatch, 2002). I have developed research questions to align with the problem and questions in order to provide well-developed answers to the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

It is assumed that the tutoring program at the research site is aligned with the national framework for RTI. In addition, it is assumed that a tutoring program implemented with fidelity is aligned with the RTI tiers. Further, I assumed that specific factors have inspired the creation of a tutoring program to help SWD. Likewise, I assumed that certain faculty had a direct role with the success of this tutoring program, along with other staff members who were indirectly involved with its success. Finally, I assumed that the success of this tutoring program might be transferable to other student populations who face similar challenges at the research site.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included the following: the single location, the select group of educators, short time frame, the validity of qualitative research, and the use of a

conceptual framework. First, the study only took place at the research site, which may be a problem when transferring the results to other high schools or age-level schools. Second, the study only focused upon the perceptions of select educators who had a direct connection with the tutoring program at the research site; their experiences may not mirror other teacher populations. Third, it is possible that the two-week time frame of the study limited the depth and relevance of the findings. Fourth, by using qualitative research that relies upon the self-reported nature of interviews, the validity of the study had potential limits (Yin, 2013). Stake (2013) noted that qualitative research contains weaknesses linked to the lack of statistical validity. This study had a qualitative interview design; however, qualitative research can sometimes be described as skewed and personal. I worked as objectively as possible in the research process so that the data can have universal appeal.

Scope

The scope of this study was participants who took part in a successful tutoring program as a part of an overall intervention strategy that helped SWD achieve academic and social/emotional well-being at the research site. The purpose of this study was to understand how an out-of-class tutoring program helped SWD at one high school in the Midwest. I tried to understand the program through perceptions of the intervention specialists who work in the tutoring center as well as through documents from the center. The scope was defined by this single location, the tutoring center, which worked with SWD in an out-of-classroom intervention. Participants in this study included the intervention specialists who directly engaged with SWD. Once identified, these

participants were asked interview questions in an attempt to understand the tutoring program. I triangulated the interviews with review of documents from the center including work produced by the students. The student work was de-identified so that no names of students were known during the research.

Delimitations

The delimitations are the boundaries for the case study (Yin, 2013). This study did not cover future implications for successful teaching strategies that will deter SWD high school students from discontinuing high school; nor did it attempt to provide a comprehensive program that might help to improve the academic and social/emotional well- being and development of SWD. This study did not include those who were recently hired by the research site and, therefore, would not have experienced the initial improvement with the SWD graduation rate. Elementary and middle school personnel were not included within the population that defined this case. In addition, this case study does not focus upon whether the students and their experiences were successful. This study also omitted educators of student populations with high socioeconomic backgrounds, or other groups that are not related to at-risk urban students. This study was bounded by a focus on the intervention by way of an RTI tutoring center and the perceptions of those educators who participated in the center.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant because the RTI intervention (the tutoring program) can serve as a model of how schools can help prepare SWD students to develop socially, emotionally, and academically. In addition, the study is important because the tutoring

program could serve as a model from the understanding gleaned from the intervention specialists. This program has been so successful that more students now graduate from the high school under study than in previous years; the school was in danger of being taken over by the state department if graduation rates did not increase.

Application to Local Problem

Although the graduation rate for SWD was increasing, the problem remains, and the graduation rate for SWD was below state expectancy at the school of study. Further examination of the SWD tutoring program in an urban school may prove critical in increasing the graduation rate of SWD. This examination will affect the local level by helping to shed light on what could serve as a template to increase the graduation rate of SWD. The significance of the information obtained is crucial for this school because in 2012, over 47% of the students did not complete high school (State Department of Education, 2014). Imminent action is necessary so that the SWD graduation rate will increase, and the State Department of Education will not decide to take over (Starzyk, 2013).

Professional Application

Reversing the trend of a low graduation rate at the urban high school for SWD was a challenge. Providing all students with an adequate education (Sanders & Lewis, 2005) and preparing them to be globally competitive in the 21st century is the responsibility of the educational system; the increase in high school graduation is critical to the future well-being of both students as individuals and the nation as a whole (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2010). Unfortunately, educational practices, policymakers, the state

report card, and research do not always support best practices in the area of SWD and graduation. SWD who do not complete graduation requirements directly correlate with negative outcomes at the national and local levels. Although The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network has identified prevention programs (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007), Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) suggested that it can be difficult to measure the success of such programs; therefore, conducting a study of the perceptions of intervention specialists on how to increase high school graduation for SWD within parameters of the RTI is of grave importance.

Implications for Social Change

The negative characteristics and consequences of dropouts from high school include unemployment, imprisonment, and psychological maladaptive behaviors (Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy, & Weiss, 2007; Weiss, Bouffard, & Bridglall, & Gordan, 2010). These maladaptive tendencies can lead to low success or drop out behavior in SWD. Although this study focuses on gradation and social/emotional issues of SWD, the impact of not obtaining a diploma cannot be overlooked. When students do not complete high school, the economic competitiveness of a nation can be challenged, including lost wages and an increase burden on the public sector (Princiotta & Reyna 2009; Rumberger, 2011). When students do not complete high school requirements, then, there can be negative economic and social consequences for the community. These negative consequences can affect individuals and society, locally and nationally. The implications of social change indicate that graduation rates can increase with interventions. SWD face additional challenges that their same-aged non-disabled peers do not face, such as

educators not wanting to embrace them, prejudices from other students, or any other factors that can disturb and interrupt their educational performance (IDEA, 2012). This study may bring about social change in this small context of this urban high school.

Summary

One high school in the Midwest used a tutoring program to improve the graduation rate for SWD. The purpose of this study was to understand an RTI out of class tutoring program at one high school in the Midwest. Response to Intervention was used to better understand the factors that might have increased the graduation rate of SWD. In Section 2, a review of literature identified themes that are associated with SWD and poor academic, social, and emotional issues.

In Section 2, I identify the following thematic ideas: RTI, parental and family issues and involvement to include community and motivation, and personal factors of SWD such as mental health issues and juvenile court involvement. Finally, Section 2 identifies why high school interventions for social, emotional, and academic categories are relevant and needed, and the implications for social change. Section 3 will display the justification and practical application of using a qualitative case study to review the tutoring program for this proposal. Once the proposal was approved and research conducted, Section 4 includes results from the study, and Section 5 includes a discussion of the conclusions.

Section 2: Literature Review

Section 2 includes literature related to the framework and rationale of the study. I researched literature via the Walden University, Cleveland State University, and John Carroll University libraries. I used EBSCO Host, ERIC database and Google Scholar. Walden dissertation data base from the Walden Library and ProQuest, were also accessed. Key search terms were *RTI, SWD, high school, reading strategies for high school students, social/emotional, whole child, dropout, learning and behavioral disabilities and tutoring*. I used these sources to guide my library research. In addition, for this literature review I also explored search terms such as i*nterviews* and *case study,* which are related to qualitative research methodology.

Literature Review of Conceptual Framework

I applied the conceptual framework of RTI in the study and data collection to understand how teachers supported SWD. RTI is a pedagogical framework (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). The RTI program is a nationally used, research-based intervention program used in schools (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012).

Response to Intervention (RTI)

According to Hughes and Dexter (2011), RTI is a systematic process that increases capacity and strengthens core instruction. The program encompasses strategies that address both academic and behavioral interventions through a tiered system (Tomlinson, & Imbeau, 2010). This system allows the student to receive interventions

before, during, and after school if needed (Tomlinson, & Imbeau, 2010). The benefit is the added focus on the whole child (Diamond, 2010; Miller, 2010).

RTI is very frequently implemented in elementary schools as early intervention. It has been an effective model in middle and high school secondary education as well (Johnson, Smith, & Harris, 2009; Jones, 2010). Johnson et al. (2009) and Jones (2010) credited RTI with having the potential to decrease a student's experience of stress when transitioning from middle school to high school. Overall, as students participate in a tutoring program, they demonstrate improvement in their performance on standardized tests (Rothman & Henderson, 2011). Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) conducted a meta-analytical study regarding benefits of out-of-class and after-school programs such as the RTI. Their study showed that after-school tutoring helped students acquire the skill set to over-perform significantly on standardized tests (Durlak et al., 2010). Although the RTI has been helpful for elementary, middle, and high school, Piasta and Wagner (2010) found that tutoring was ineffective in alphabet learning instruction for early learners. In the high school of my research study, RTI had a positive effect.

RTI and Positive Behavioral Supports (PBIS, also referred to as SW-PBIS; United States Department of Education, 2014) work together. The evidenced intervention practices consist of five unique components embedded in the tiers: School-wide, individual, classroom, nonclassroom, and family engagement (State Department of Education, 2016). The school's leadership team performs ongoing monitoring of each student's data. The teams maintain frequent contact with families. Tier 1 supports all students, and Tiers 2 and 3 support students who are in need of additional or more

intensive support (Windram et al., 2015). Educators and parents need to come together to review the data and determine if the interventions are successful, or if additional interventions should be put in place.

The Four Tiers of RTI

RTI is an intervention model to enhance instruction and is systematically researched by the state. The local state describes this research and evidence-based model as scientific because its design involves rigorous data analysis including randomly assigned experiments that are peer-reviewed by independent researchers. For SWD, Tiers 1 and 2 focus on deterring the suspicion of a disability and making use of the skills of teachers by infusing academic and behavioral interventions. Tiers 2 and 3 offer school-wide positive behavioral supports (Mitchell, Bruhn, & Lewis, 2015). Tier 1 is for all students, and instruction is not specifically tailored to the individual needs of the students.

Tier 1

The term *universal interventions* denotes academic and behavioral pathways for all students. Students receive access to the state standards in the general education setting. Differentiation is embedded in the instruction (Jones, 2010). Differentiation can encompasss teaching each student with multiple modes of styles at the unique level of the individual student (Fuchs et al., 2010; Fuchs, Fuchs, Bouton, & Caffrey, 2011; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Eighty to 90% of the tier is targeted for all students (Fuchs et al., 2010).

Universal interventions are the academic and behavioral pathways for students who have not exceeded the supports of Tiers 1. Fuchs et al. (2010) noted that in this school-wide approach, all students obtain preventative and proactive academic instruction. Universal behavioral interventions exist in all settings with very clear expectations, comprehensive instruction, and correction of systems as needed. Students in need of more assistance move through the triad to Tier 2.

Tier 2

Tier 2 includes students who are identified as needing additional assistance that exceeds universal interventions or one way of teaching for all students. These students move through the triad system and proceed into Tier 2. Tier 2 academic and behavioral interventions are 5-10% targeted group interventions (Mitchell et al., 2015). Academically, targeted group interventions are for students at-risk of dropping behind grade expectations. Assessments are administered in an efficient rapid response modality (Everette, Sugai, Fallen, Simonsen, & O' Keeffe, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2015). Targeted interventions for behaviors are for students identified as being in jeopardy of failing and who need social skills groups, a Check-in/Check-out (CICO) system, and other referrals as identified by the team (Campbell & Anderson, 2008, 2011). If Tier 2 interventions are ineffective, students in will be helped with Tier 3 instruction.

Tier 3

The term *intensive, individual interventions* refers to the academic and behavioral pathways for all students. Students identified as needing a Tier 3 level intervention have exceeded universal interventions (Fuchs et al., 2011). This tier should consist of 1-5% of

students with intensive, individualized interventions that meet the needs of students through rigorous research-based assessments (Nese, Park, Alonzo, & Tindal, 2011). Certain behavior systems that can be employed at this level are Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA), Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs), and a CICO system (Campbell & Anderson, 2008, 2011). Teacher- based teams monitor these assessments weekly per state expectations; Johnson et al., 2009; Mitchell et al., 2015). Students who are deemed in need of a more restrictive classroom and school environment are categorized as Tier 4 students.

Tier 4

Although RTI is typically a three-tiered, layered approach, depending on a district's need and size, a fourth layer of instruction and intervention can be embedded (McCook, 2006; Scholastic, 2012). This tier can include out-of-district placements. In some districts, this tier is referred to as "special education" or "individualized special programs" (Collier, 2010). Students in need of these extensive interventions are considered to need widespread help that far exceeds what the public school can offer (Tomlinson, & Imbeau, 2010). Tier 4 can consist of restrictive, specially designed behavior supports or functional and adaptive curriculums (Collier, 2010). In some instances, students need a combination of the two.

The educational placements in restrictive settings are evaluated over an observable and measurable amount of time. These decisions are teamed and are made with district approval. The cost of such schooling and transportation is provided by the student's residential district of responsibility (Collier, 2010). It is important that RTI is

not used solely for classifying SWD, as this is an issue with unclear communication between from IDEA and districts that are mandated to use RTI, particularly with the classification of SLD students (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). However, Fisher and Frey (2013) concluded that RTI can improve achievement, attendance, grade point averages, and decreases in special education referrals.

Historical Implications of RTI

The historical implications of RTI date back to the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind [NCLB] (2002), IDEA (2001 & 2012), and the Each Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 (Rowntree, 2015). Historical reasons for first advocating research centering within the framework of RTI were based on the results of intelligence and other norm-referenced tests for SWD. Intelligence and norm-referenced tests were not the only predictors of best practices for educating students (Fuchs et al., 2010). Instead, educational reformers were interested in helping students succeed with research-based instructional interventions. Therefore, RTI tiered interventions were established to help practitioners meet the differing individual needs and issues of their students at their various levels of knowledge. In addition, RTI can help educators collaborate with interventions for struggling learners in the classroom (Berliner, 2014; Sansosti et al., 2010; Windram et al., 2015). As a result of the research, educators began to view RTI as an avenue for referring students for special education services, compliance mandates, or a way to raise test scores (Brownell et al., 2010). When RTI is implemented with devotion, it is evidenced both inside and outside of the school environment.

Response to Intervention Inside of the Classroom

Practitioners are required to monitor students' progress via assessments to formulize data for making decisions when they implement RTI in the classroom (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008). In other words, data drives the decision-making process, and the data results are interpreted so that individualized professional opinions are not the driving force for placing students. Upon receiving data about individual student ability and level of learning, teachers can tailor an individual learning plan. The plan can be structured through tiered interventions based on proven strategies and systematic interventions in the RTI tiered system. Again, the premise behind RTI is that differentiation (the process of using multiple means to present information to individualize instruction) is at the core and center of instructional strategies in the classroom (Tomlinson, & Imbeau, 2010; Fuchs et al., 2010). The tiered interventions often looks like a combination of inclusive practices paired with coteaching. In other instances, especially in the high school setting, RTI can include tutoring services that extend beyond the classroom and school day (Windram et al., 2015).

Some students may require services that are extensive enough to include tutoring both during the school day and outside of the classroom. Through RTI, students who need individualized instruction receive as much academic support as possible in order to have multiple exposures to the material. As such, RTI uses a team approach. This means that decisions are not obtained independently. The other important factor to note is that RTI is research-based, and districts are required to provide up-to-date training for teachers. The unfortunate reality is that many times, professionals do not provide

differentiated instruction consistently or use best teaching practices aligned with research-based curriculum (McCray & McHatton, 2015). Sometimes, when this occurs, students may be referred to special education supports without prior interventions of the tiered program. These special education referrals result in children being misdiagnosed and disproportionate numbers in student referrals for special education services when they could have been serviced in a regular education classroom with support (Brownell et al., 2010). In a system with four tiers, an out-of-class intervention can provide students an opportunity for personalization that otherwise may not take place in the classrooms or the entire school building.

Although RTI is expressed as an academic intervention system, it integrates social and emotional aspects of educating high school students. The fourth tier of RTI, the out-of-classroom support, is especially effective for helping students in a holistic manner. One public school tutoring program demonstrated effective planning and supports, which altered the dropout epidemic in New York City for high school students (Balfanz, Andrekopolous, Hertz & Kilmamen, 2012). According to the same researchers, when tutoring is implemented using a teaching/instructional practice that requires teachers to be aggressive as they deliver specific content to students and give students multiple exposures to it, then students can make academic gains.

Literature Related to the Problem

Factors that Influence the Academic Issues of SWD

Many factors can influence students with disabilities. These influences can manifest in the SWD in a positive or negative way. Some influences of SWD academic

obstacles are influenced by parental involvement, social and emotional awareness, as well as internal and external factors. These aspects of SWD students' lives will be discussed next.

Parental Involvement and Academic Performance

In recent years, 16 million students dropped out of high school in the US, which equates to roughly 35% of young adults between the ages of 16-24 (NCES, 2013). One strategy that may deter a high school student from dropping out is to encourage parental involvement, especially for at-risk students. Increasing parental involvement is a feasible solution to dropout reduction because parents are the first teachers for students. According to Rumberger (2011), a student's family can provide valuable information about what their child does well and also what their child might need educationally. As this fact is evident, IEPs offer two distinct places for parents to include future goals and strengths and weaknesses of their SWD. The concept that parents/guardians are, in fact, teachers can be adopted at the school level and used as a school and home connection to gather information that could signal potential dropout behavior.

Promoting parental involvement decreases problematic behaviors that correlate with increases in dropout rates and poor academic performance. In one study, the Social and Health Assessment (SAHA) survey was used to examine school and family outcomes for students with violent behaviors (Frey, Ruchkin, Martin, & Schwab-Stone, 2009). Parental control was discovered as the associated factor for academic motivation and positive behaviors within the school culture. This research is also relevant for immigrant families in the United States. It has been documented that Hispanic/Latino students have

better educational outcomes with active parental involvement (Jeynes, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Teachers should be creative with their efforts to engage parents because these efforts can help support students' interest and success in school (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Stephens, 2007).

Issues Related to Lack of Parental Involvement

Student success may be inhibited by the failure of parents to engage or instill expectations for youth. Boutelle (2009) documented a lack of parental involvement for SWD, especially when they become adolescents. In one study, researchers followed 179 low-income people from the ages of birth through 23. The findings indicated that adults' expectations or lack of expectations strongly influenced graduation outcomes for children (Englund, Egeland, & Collins, 2008).

As children grow older, parents may face barriers in their efforts to remain committed to the children and their needs (Garfinkel, 2010). Finnan and Chasin (2007) interviewed an urban African American male, Anthony, who had dropped out of school. This young man described his disengagement in school and his mother's lack of support for his educational efforts. The interviewers stated that Anthony's story is reminiscent of many high school dropouts. Anthony's parents were not able to help him educationally as he became older. This lack of support affected him academically, socially, and emotionally.

The absence of parental involvement correlates highly with the academic issues and social/emotional characteristics that can impede SWD; literature on the characteristics of parental involvement may prove germane to this study (Harris &

Goodall, 2008; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2012; Stephens, 2007). In one study, the researcher examined parental involvement in larger schools (Goldkind & Farmer, 2013; Jeynes, 2012). According to the work of Jeynes (2012), parental involvement optimized student behavior and increased student achievement. However, additional contributing factors increased and decreased parental involvement. The Jeynes study determines that as the size of the school increased, parental involvement decreased. Although parental involvement influenced the increases in standardized test scores, the quality of the school also influenced parental involvement.

Parents of students with behavioral issues often do not have the resources or skill set to deal with the emotional needs of the students. As another example of how the parents' role constraints can impede academic and social/emotional functioning of students is evidenced in Garfinkel (2010). This study conducted an examination of interventions such as family integration programs and family therapy to promote parental involvement to reduce student dropout. The high school in the study collaborated with the local county juvenile court system so that juvenile offenders were educated inside and outside of incarceration. This practice prevents the juvenile offender from falling behind in school while incarcerated. Special education services are also available for SWD.

In general, as student autonomy increases, parental involvement decreases (Jeynes, 2005, 2012; Kreider et al., 2007). Various aspects of the home situation such as the manner of parenting, home-school relationships, and helping students take responsibility for learning can affect adolescent outcomes. Examples include paying attention to grades, passing standardized tests, gaining a sense of self-worth, social and

emotional management and awareness, plans for advanced education, and participation in extracurricular activities (Kreider et al., 2007). In addition, this study found that when parents are in contact with school personnel and support school policies and practices, students see a connection between their family life and success in school. Family involvement is important for every grade level; it is equally important in the middle and high school years because in those years, students gain autonomy and formulate decisions about whether to remain in school or not. Parental support can motivate students to remain in school until they graduate.

Reed et al. (2000) offered the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model to explain "motivational factors that influence parents' decisions to become involved in the children's education" (p. 3). This model attempts to illuminate why parents become involved in their children's education. Parental role constraints, or what they believe their parental involvement should be, parental self-efficacy, and parents' perceptions of general invitations, opportunities, and demands for involvement play a crucial role in their involvement in their children's education. Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, and Henderson (2013) elaborated on the Hoover-Dempsey Model and explained the powerful influence that parental involvement plays on the student's academic success or failure.

Parental role constraints (what parents believe their parental involvement should be) and parental sense of efficacy about their ability to be involved can determine the part they play in their students' education. Parents' sense of effectiveness in being involved with their children improved parent/school partnerships. In the Hoover- Dempsey Model, one factor that contributed to the parents' ability to be involved was that the

research site assigned a staff person to coordinate and work with the community and parents (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007; Reed, Jones, Walker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2000). This person worked closely with families and the community to provide programs and activities that involved parents.

School leadership can be an important aspect in school personnel's use of parental involvement strategies. Richardson (2009) conducted a study to examine the principal's role and understanding of parental involvement in eight urban school districts. According to the research, one primary role of the school is to ensure continuity in parental involvement from elementary through high school. Parental involvement is directly influenced by the attitude of school personnel and actions the school principal takes to implement effective programs to invite parental involvement.

School personnel need to find ways that parents can be genuinely a part of their children's education if schools are going to serve the public (Richardson, 2009). This study supports the prevailing research, which indicates the importance of schools, families, and students working together (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2005; Reed et al., 2000; Stephens, 2007). Graduation rates increase when schools and families collaborate; lack of parental involvement has been associated with low graduation rates (Ouimette, Feldman, & Tung, 2011; Ziomek-Daigle, 2010). School and family partnerships and collaborations are important interventions for graduation. Parental involvement can help students develop successful behavioral and academic outcomes.

Social and Emotional Learning

SWD sometimes suffer with interpersonal issues that inhibit their school performance. These noncognitive attributes can hinder students from obtaining a quality education and/or internally receiving the quality instruction that is afforded to them (Durlak et al., 2011). Integrating aspects of social and emotional learning into the curriculum enables educators to reach children by teaching them how to be socially appropriate and giving them the social life skills needed for high school and beyond. Social and emotional curriculum and teaching is critical for SWD because many of them have disabilities that prohibit them from understanding social cues. In fact, Salvia et al. (2013) recommended RTI assessment strategies and ideas for special education and inclusion teachers to use for students in making multidimensional decisions.

Implementing a skills training program that teaches students social skills and replacement behavior strategies is important for SWD. Anyon et al. (2016) detailed specific behavioral teacher interventions used to reduce the rate of suspension for minority students. These interventions were achieved with a school reform program that reviewed how minority groups were overrepresented in suspension in discipline incidents. The participants in this study were provided with what was referred to as "restorative" interventions, which assist in positive behavior supports, to reduce the behavioral patterns of the minority groups (Anyon et al., 2016). Gregory et al. (2016) recommended providing professional development and coaching to teachers of black students to decrease disproportionalities in higher rates of discipline. Seven behavior outcomes that teachers can plan to provide behavioral interventions for are social skills,

antisocial skills, substance abuse, positive self-image, academic achievement, mental health, and pro-social behavior (Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteijn, 2012). Teaching specific strategies and offering behavioral intervention skills increase social/emotional learning. In addition, specific behavior word competency curriculums teach students social, leadership, and study skills (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012). Helping students learn replacement behaviors reduces negative behavior incidents.

In addition to academic deficits, some SWD have identified and unidentified emotional/mental health issues that impede them from receiving intra- and interpersonal emotional skills and techniques (Durlak et al., 2011; Kieling et al., 2011). Moreover, Sullivan and Simonson (2016) discussed how schools partnering with mental health agencies can benefit academic growth. Teaching and engaging with every student individually are some of the attributes of the whole child approach (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014; Diamond, 2010; State Department of Education, 2015).

Providing social skills training, intervention, and curriculum is important in high school settings because some SWD have identified and unidentified emotional/mental health issues that impede them from receiving intra- and interpersonal emotional techniques. Teaching and engaging every student individually, ensuring his/her safety and health, and infusing community and stakeholder participation are some of the attributes of the whole child approach (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014; Diamond, 2010; PARCC, 2015). Due to new state demands,

schools are forced to combine social/emotional-learning practices. These learning practices are integrated into such programs as STEM, computer-based, and project-based learning. These learning practices are the mandates of educational school reformers, which prepare students for what the state refers to as next generation assessments (State Department of Education, 2016). Educating all aspects of the student—emotional, social, and academic, or the whole child—is an approach associated with No Child Left Behind (Dee & Jacob, 2011; Diamond, 2010; Miller, 2010; NCLB, 2001) and adopted by the Association for Supervisors and Curriculum Development (ASCD), U.S. Center for Control and Prevention (CDC), and (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2017). ASCD has designed a whole child approach for SWD to ensure that each child passes mandated standardized tests according to his/her IEP or any other learning plan (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2017).

Salvia et al. (2013) offered RTI assessment strategies and ideas for special education and inclusion teachers to use for students in making multidimensional decisions. RTI has been beneficial in uncovering how an in-school tutoring program, such as the one at the research site, taught high school students social skills (Durlak et al., 2010). Their report found that research-based social and emotional programs are more effective than teacher-made or nonresearch-based programs. RTI, PBIS, and MTSS are evidence- and research-based interventional systems that embed learning and social emotional interventions even for students with emotional disturbances (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012; Pierce, Lambert, & Alamer, 2016; Wigleswarth et al., 2016). One report measured the belief of teachers regarding RTI. The authors provided their

rating instrument to thousands of teachers over a span of one academic school year. The results were a positive belief system rating from teachers and the school psychologist on the effects of RTI and SWD (Castillo et al., 2015).

Academic Issues that Result from Social or Emotional Issues

SWD are characterized with low graduation rates from high school. Wagner, Kutash, Duchmowski, Epstein, and Sumi (2005) and Durlak et al. (2011) suggested that of the SWD, those with emotional disturbances (ED) have the highest dropout rates, even when receiving special education services. These researchers contended that the functional characteristics such as cognitive and non-cognitive skills, which include social, emotional, and communicative skills, are predictors of a student's ability to adjust after high school (Wagner et al., 2005). Data from the state's research center showed that 1,000 disabled students drop out of school annually, along with economically disadvantaged students, who drop out at high rates as well (Gorski & Pothini, 2013). The findings of these studies indicated that teachers, policymakers, and parents can pull together to improve the quality of life for SWD, including those with ED or those who are economically disadvantaged. Wagner et al. (2005) stated that higher education employees should train the professionals who work with SWD more efficiently in all areas, not just academic areas and to improve the quality of life for school-aged students. Overall, promoting behavioral supports during instruction promotes learning, which is beneficial for students and teachers (Buffum et al., 2009; Lane et al., 2013b; O'Day & Smith, 2016). Moreover, providing interventions to students that give them replacement behaviors creates a safe learning environment (O'Day & Smith, 2016). In fact, students

who have an ED benefit best from evidence-based interventions such as those provided in RTI and other tiered programs (Pierce et al., 2016). SWD who exhibit behavioral issues and are not taught replacement strategies suffer from educational and life-long issues (Ahram, 2012).

In addition, to address behavioral issues, Anyon et al. (2016) found that providing behavioral interventions decreased suspensions for minorities, males, and SWD in urban districts such as that represented in this case study. Another related aspect of this issue is racial disparities, which demonstrate that African Americans are disciplined at higher rates (Gregory et al., 2016). In this study, teachers were trained to provide behavioral teaching to African American students. The study found that coaching was beneficial for the teachers over a 2-year span. Both diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health and educationally behavioral problems can manifest as behavioral impediments that interfere with the education of individual students and others around them. These behavioral impediments are both external and internal factors that the SWD may or may not have the ability to control, particularly in school communities with racial and economic disparities.

External and Internal Factors

Many high school students exit school prematurely as a result of disengagement, lack of motivation, and real-world events. However, academic challenges are the main reason that most students fail to complete school. Educators should note that students show early signs of disengagement. These indicators have led researchers to ask, "What helps students remain in school?" Teachers who make curriculum engaging, support

struggling students, and provide strong adult and student relationships can be a part of the process that can answer that question (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Academic failure and dropping out is a silent epidemic that affects urban students of low economic status in large urban inner city public schools (Lessard et al., 2009). The degree of an individual SWD's external and internal motivation increases his/her participation in a tutoring program and the likelihood that the SWD will attend tutoring (Kuperminc, Smith, & Henrich, 2012). External and internal influences contribute to the motivation of an SWD's participation in school and overall academic and behavioral success. Students are more likely to engage in school when they are intrinsically motivated to do so.

Although school achievement is linked to peer status in all positive forms, disadvantaged male peer status exists with negative connotations for disadvantaged boys. Staff and Krieger (2008) stated that violence and not meeting graduation requirements for high school completion are linked with positive peer status for subgroups in the inner city. Boutelle (2009) and Schaps (2005) addressed the lack of a community at school that would provide security and a sense of caring, along with minimal chances for extracurricular activities as factors that correlate highly with poor academic success. Schools that lack a sense of community or fail to provide security often fail to engage parents or other community members (Boutelle, 2009; Schaps, 2005; Staff & Krieger, 2008). In addition, low expectations from the community and nonaccountability for youth contribute to the failure of SWD in low-income areas.

Unfortunately, half of Black and Latino students do not graduate from high school (Marschall, 2006; Losen, Orfield & Balfanz, 2006; Whiting, 2009). Neiland, Stoner, and

Fortsenberg (2008) affirmed that most urban dropouts have not earned enough credits for promotion to tenth grade. This fact indicates that ninth grade outcomes may predict delay of or later graduation. Thus, students that earn tenth grade credits by the end of their ninth grade year generally graduate on time. Whiting conducted a summer program called the Summer Scholar Identity Institute at Vanderbilt University to teach about behavior choices that may lead to school success. The program helps Black and Latino males deal with the issues of self-efficacy, future orientation, willingness to make sacrifices, internal locus of control, self-awareness, and needs for achievement. Research has suggested that disadvantaged and minority SWD as well as non-disabled students benefit from specific skill set training dealing with internal and external factors that are out of their control and can impede academic achievement.

Neighborhoods can present socialization issues for students with disabilities that are then transferred to the academic environments. An under-researched aspect of urban neighborhoods that is related to the failure or success of SWD is the subject of gentrifying neighborhoods. Freeman (2009) provided many definitions for the term gentrification. Simplified, the term gentrification describes neighborhood proximity between affluent households and lower-income households that share space. As a result, the property values often increase, and the impoverished families are often forced to relocate. Little research has been done to explore how gentrification may directly impact urban school districts and student achievement as the affluent and urban families share living space and school communities. Some higher socioeconomic parents, who move into neighborhoods due to gentrification and choose private schools or other school

options, may consider metropolitan public schools to be inadequate (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2013; Smith & Williams, 2013; Stillman, 2012). Unstable environments due to gentrification and inadequate schools may negatively influence experiences in school for SWD from lower SES backgrounds.

Lack of Motivation

Springs and Kristonis (2007) described the occurrence of dropout rates when students were not motivated because motivation is an integral aspect of success. The authors stated that students who are at risk need a lot of support from teachers and other support professionals to build self-concept and confidence. Building self-concepts entails helping students develop internal and external motivation, which enables them to set goals as well (Bland, 2012; Springs & Kristonis, 2007; Stover, Hoffman, de la Inglesa, & Liporace, 2014).

Building motivation is important to this study because internal motivation has been linked with factors associated with graduating. Motivating SWD to do well in school is a possible solution to improving their overall student outcomes and increasing their motivation through the school/community programs (Lessard et al., 2009; Stover et al., 2014). In fact, Cheung and Pomerantz (2012) indicated that parent motivation directly benefits a student's academic progress. This finding implies that both the student and the parent need to be motivated to make a difference in educational outcomes and successes.

Other issues can create a lack of motivation or affect internal process and cause school failure. Students with learning disabilities often drop out of high school.

Attendance rates and certain behaviors can also determine whether or not a student drops out. Sweeten (2006) stated that with the exposure to one court appearance, a delinquent student has a higher chance of becoming a high school dropout. Juvenile offenders also have a significantly higher dropout rate. Garfinkel (2010) and Greenwood (2008) found that juvenile offenders are often referred to the juvenile court system based on school offenses that lead to court referrals.

Another predictor of student success can be attributed to the individual qualities of the student. Fine, Stoudt, and Futch (2005) completed a mixed-methods analysis of internal cohort graduation rates in which interviews with 159 New York City high school students were conducted. This study revealed that the participants' emotions, desires, and learned experiences from the International High School were believed to be a measure of student success. In this case study, the researchers drew their conclusions from gathering qualitative data and reported that students' success could not solely be described by the 4-year graduation rate.

Learning Issues with SWD

Another aspect of SWD and graduation completion is the propensity for a specific learning difficulty within the SWD population. A learning difficulty such as poor reading ability can be described as a determining factor associated with suicidal ideations and student dropout (Daniel, 2006; Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). Researchers Murray and Naranjo (2008) conducted a study about the dropout rate of learning disabled (LD) African American students. These students had a graduation rate of 32%. The students were in six times greater jeopardy of dropping out than their middle-upper

income counterparts. Fortunately, studies have demonstrated the positive effects that tiered interventions give LD students in the academic area of reading strategies to enhance reading abilities (Hulme, Bowyer-Crane, Carroll, Duff, & Snowling, 2012; Shannon & Edmondson, 2010). Hulme et al. (2012) reminded educators that both phonemic awareness and letter-sound recognition can be used as predictors of reading ability, as also reported by Melby-Lervag, Lyster, and Hulme (2012). RTI includes methods that address phonemic instruction, which addresses the skill deficits of SWD.

Nationally, students with learning disabilities drop out 25% more often than students with average ability (Murray & Naranjo, 2008). Murray and Naranjo's qualitative case study consisted of 11 low-income African American students with LD. The authors suggested that some factors that contribute to dropout rates are a lack of family, individual, peer, and teacher relationships. They also spent 3 years investigating students with LD who were, therefore, classified as at risk. The researchers found one emerging theme regarding parental support: management and structure. These characteristics are most often found in middle-class parenting styles and are most effective in deterring deviant student behaviors that may potentially lead a student to discontinue high school.

Why Support Matters

Providing intervention and other resources such as an RTI programs can aid in overall success rates academically, as well as social and emotional development for SWD. The cost of producing graduates is lower than the cost for taxpayers to pay for a high school dropout (Belfield & Levin, 2007). Researchers explained that increasing

salaries for teachers, and therefore improving teacher quality, would increase the pre- and post-secondary success of SWD. In an effort to secure accountability at the research site, seniority privileges were removed from the teachers' contracts, and performance pay was instituted for the current school year upon state legislation. Other incentives for improving student outcomes include reducing class sizes and providing additional funding for preschool. Specific secondary interventions elsewhere included small learning communities such as a program entitled "First Things First," employment readiness, and a Latino and inner city secondary school program (Belfield & Levin, 2007).

Providing all children with an adequate education and preparing them to be globally competitive is the responsibility of the educational system (Sanders & Lewis, 2005). Continuing success by increasing high school graduation for SWD is critical to the future well-being of those children as individuals and the nation as a whole (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2010). Warren and Halpern-Manners argued that not completing high school is an important issue for a community with implications directly related to the national labor force, educational policy, and practice patterns of economic and racial equality. Evidence of lost wages may be observed at the local level in the lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Low graduation rates hinder the economic competitiveness of a nation, according to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). For example, dropouts cost the United States more than $300 billion in lost wages and increase the burden or responsibility of the taxpayer (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009; Rumberger, 2011).

Students who do not complete high school directly relate to negative outcomes at the national and local level. Although The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network has identified numerous prevention programs (Hammond et al., 2007), Tyler and Loftsman (2009) suggested that the effectiveness of these programs and their implementation could be difficult to monitor. Therefore, further examination of effective practices in urban schools may prove critical in increasing the graduation rate and other student outcomes. These efforts will affect the local level as a means of implementing more prevention programs for at-risk students (such as the tutoring program charter school). To address this need, the building administrators and teaching staff have incorporated innovative incentives to market and become competitive against other schools and in today's modern and global job force. SWD are also encouraged to enroll in state-of-the-art schools such as charter or magnet schools and Career and Technological Educational (CTE) programs. Another enticing incentive is the open enrollment option, which allows parents to choose options such as non-neighborhood or home schools for alternative school choice options.

The open enrollment option invites nonresidents to enroll as well. The state also offers parents of SWD other school choice options. Students with disabilities can apply annually for two scholarships that will allow them to receive free appropriate public education (FAPE) at non-public or private schools. Students who attend school need to feel safe. Students who feel safe are more likely to attend and complete school (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Johnson, 2014; Osher et al., 2008). One study of 100 students was conducted over a 6-month period. Students in grades six and up were asked

to what extent they felt safe, both emotionally and physically, based on three-tiered findings. Recommendations such as adding security and referring students to community mental health agencies were provided for intervention purposes (Osher et al., 2008). Several characteristics that have been identified in some high school students, including delinquency, psychological disorders, learning difficulties, and parental expectations, may be associated with those who do not complete school.

Special Education and Urban and/or Underprivileged School Communities

All homeless students, including SWD, are protected by homeless educational laws (State Department of Education, 2017). Homeless and impoverished students have high mobility rates and have been linked to poor academic performance, specifically deficits in reading (Herbers et al., 2012). The term "disproportionality" has commonly been referenced in scholarly literature regarding urban special education students. Disproportionality of impoverished SWD in part refers to the overwhelming majority of Latino, Native Americans, and African Americans who live in impoverished communities, attend urban schools, and are commonly identified as SWD compared to white students. In addition, Sullivan (2011) discussed the overwhelming numbers of subgroups such as English learners identified as having learning disabilities. Urban schools are challenged with addressing the serious needs that students living in poverty and/or homelessness experience.

Ahram (2012) stated that the outcomes for impoverished SWD result in low academic achievement, lower graduation expectancies, and unsuccessful post-secondary outcomes. Similarly, Tienken (2012) also deemed poverty as associated with poor

academic and test performance. Specifically, the reading abilities of SWD diminish in low socioeconomic status students (Wei, Blackorby, & Schiller, 2011). In addition to low academic performance, impoverished and urban students are identified as having learning disabilities at higher identification rates (Breger, 2016). Although other reasons may exist to explain the trend of underprivileged students being identified with learning disabilities, Breger (2016) argued that school size and student attendance were indicators of low test scores in the Chicago Public School District.

Equitable educational resources for the K-12 system exist for urban students. O'Day and Smith (2016) reported that systematic disparities made educational outcomes leading into adulthood a reality for underprivileged students. In a study conducted by Brown, Benkovitz, Mutillo, and Urban (2011), the educational effects of equity were reduced when principals used teamwork approaches to monitor high expectations for student learning. In this instance, high expectations for students outweighed the trends of low equity, large schools, and minority status. Teachers can be more impactful and successful in educating impoverished students if they are trained to do so (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). The specific learning targets for new teachers unfamiliar with the impact of poverty are to identify the methodologies of poverty and education. The methodologies of the learning targets are designed to enhance student and teacher relationships and provide in-service opportunities for teachers so that they can ask insightful questions regarding their misconceptions of teaching impoverished students. Overall, SWD have many obstacles to overcome, and poverty is an added barrier to negative contributing factors that impact educating SWD. Marginalized students run the

risk of being identified as SWD, and the educational leadership teams and staff that work with this group should be mindful of the inequalities, educational barriers, and other obstacles that these students face.

Review of the Literature Related to Methodology

A case study is a qualitative research method used to explore and understand a phenomenon (Creswell, 2002). A qualitative research case study is the preferred method in this study because it involves a collective way to search for meaning and analysis of an environment (Hays & Singh, 2011). In addition, Yin (2013) reported that a case study is the study of a social or collective environment. Yin further described a qualitative case study research as bounded with an authentic setting, a specified case that uses multiple data sources. Further, Yin defined qualitative case studies as using multiple sources of data that answer broad questions with sub-questions such as this study proposal. It is via the questioning that participants refine emergent themes from their subjective experiences. Yin then refined the definition to include the fact that the data are gleaned from the subjective experiences of the participants. Merriam (2009) noted that case studies could be effective for understanding a particular context of a subject within a given setting. Creswell (2013) also emphasized the specific, limited, and bounded nature of the system to be studied. Creswell further noted that a bounded study is separated from other locations by purpose, place, and in some cases, time. Because of the clear and focused boundaries of the selected case (i.e., the after-school tutoring program), a case study appears to be a reasonable research design. Finally, the case study design answered the "what" questions suggested in the research questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2015;

Hoy, 2010; Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton, & Nicholls, 2013). The qualitative case study approach was the best approach for this study because I planned to determine teachers' perspectives, a method that would require interviews. Some researchers have argued that authenticity and lack of rigor are missing in case studies (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Care was taken to provide thorough and detailed evidence for the case study.

Case studies may be classified as intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2013). An intrinsic case focuses upon one particular case that appears to be idiosyncratic and of interest in itself. An instrumental case study is used to probe and give insight about an area of focus (Stake, 2005). Finally, another kind of study, the collective case study, compares multiple cases or perceptions in order to gain a broader insight into a specifically defined case. The SWD students and intervention specialists involved in the RTI tutoring program were the case for this research study, similarly to a case study conducted about SWD by Gersten and Dimino (2006). This bounded case within the context of a broader educational problem of low graduation rates suggests that an instrumental case study should be a good match for this study.

Ethical considerations can arise about whether the data collected are accurate, and whether the participants were truthful in the data they gave (Grinyer, 2009). One possible way to ascertain if the information is genuine is a diagnostic interview approach to understand how teachers can better reach students who qualify for tier-2 interventions and help improve instruction for students who struggle with mathematics (Hodges, Rose,

& Hicks, 2012). Case studies of how the tiers of RTI are used in the classroom can shed light on whether the practice is helpful and how it can be improved.

Summary and Transition

Researchers attribute the non-graduation of students from high school to many factors such as parents, home environment, internal and external factors, and social and emotional issues that contribute to the success or failure of students, especially the SWD. The collaboration of external stakeholders, parents, policymakers, and educational school reformers, new school reforms, and next-generational mandates can assist educators both in and outside of the classroom. It is important for those working in schools to join with community members to decrease barriers that are associated with the positive development of SWD. Schools must use many strategies, or tiers, both in and out of the classroom, to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Students with disabilities face many barriers. Not all students lag in school completion due to learning difficulties or poor grades. In fact, some SWD have been identified as gifted. Other students drop out of school due to noncognitive and/or social/emotional reasons (Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2013; Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011). This fact leads to the assumption that if academic barriers or SWD services alone are not indicators of high school graduation, then other social, economic, or unknown factors can contribute to high school graduation or the lack of it.

Providing research-based strategies and school-wide academic and behavioral expectations are inferred and exhibited in the culture of that building. The literature on tiered systems has found that structuring instructional practices maintains success and

structure in buildings and in school settings (Fitzell et al., 2011; Mellard et al., 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). However, SWD have been identified as needing interventions and specially/individual instruction that exceeds the during-school class time. The out-of-class tutoring program allows additional time for intervention specialists to further expand what is already being reinforced in the classroom and provides additional opportunities for student success, modeling, and mastery.

Section 3: Research Method

I used a case study design to investigate intervention specialists' perceptions of how a tutoring program helped address the academic, social, and emotional needs of SWD who attended an urban high school in the U.S. Midwest. I interviewed seven intervention specialists, whom I asked to share deidentified materials from their students. Section 3 includes the research question, research design, and the selection of the participants, considerations for ethical protection, and the validity of the study.

Design

When considering the research design for this qualitative research study, I examined these approaches: quantitative, mixed-methods, and qualitative. A qualitative design with its emphasis on thick and rich narrative best served the purposes of this study, considering the open-ended aspect of the research questions used in interviews (Stake, 2005). Furthermore, qualitative research allowed me to locate myself as an observer at the research site itself (Creswell, 2007). By placing myself in the research site, the qualitative research generated meaning and findings that might not otherwise have been available (Berg, 2009). I formulated my observations into emerging themes to answer the research questions. Qualitative findings are made more credible by providing trustworthiness with triangulation and member checking (Park & Lee, 2010). Information from lesson plans and work samples was triangulated with the interviews.

For this study, qualitative research was appropriate because themes emerged in the process of collecting and analyzing interview data. These themes reflected the perspectives of the individuals involved with the tutoring program in the context of the

tutoring center; perspectives triangulated with lesson plans and student work reviews to help understand the case (Gorski & Pothini, 2013; Hancock & Algozzine, 2015). Because one clear case has emerged as the unit of study, this qualitative research design was an instrumental case study.

Case Study Tradition Selection

Within the qualitative research tradition, several research designs are available and include biography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and ethnography (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2013). Researchers use biographical research studies to learn about individuals' daily lives and interpret the experiences of their lives through interviews (Creswell, 2009). Grounded theorists generalize broad themes as they seek to generate an original theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The aim is to dvelop a theory based upon the coding. Therfore, a better method for garnishing theory and not "perceptions" theory, as that is the aim of this study. Phenomenological observers focus solely on one aspect of a phenomenon or an occurance, such as participant observations (Merriam, 2009). The observer is not participating in the occurance but soley observing. Observing is not best suited for this study because it would be presumptuous of me to assume the perceptions of my partciapnts. Finally, ethnography involves in-depth field observations, which researchers use to explore the lived experiences of the individuals being studied (Creswell, 2009). According to Burgess (2012), through studying ethnography, researchers learn how to listen actively to participants, for only those participants know their personal experiences. The goal of this study was to investigate teachers'

perspectives in interviews, and not to carry out observations as an ethnography includes, so I chose not to use the ethnographic approach.

Yin (2013) defined a case study "as the study of a social phenomenon" (p. 13). The definition is further refined to include the following:

- a bounded system within an authentic setting.
- a specified time to study the case.
- the use of multiple data sources to answer an initially broad question that often has several subquestions.
- constant refinement of the questioning process to discover emergent themes from the subjective experiences of the participants (Yin, 2013).

Merriam (2002) also noted that case studies can be effective for understanding a particular context of a subject within a particular setting. Creswell (2007) and Stake (2013) also emphasized the specific, limited, and bounded nature of the system to be studied. Creswell (2003) further described this bounded nature of the case study as "separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries" (p. 485). Finally, the how and why questions suggested in the research questions were best answered by use of case-study design (Yin, 2013). The how and why questions of this study entailed how the program employed successful RTI startegies to SWD and why the tutoring program was the intervention of choice used by the intervention specialists. The researcher's questions are answered directly by the participants at the time of the study. Because of the clear and focused boundaries of the selected case, the after-school tutoring

program, I concluded that a case study was an appropriate research design for my investigation.

Case studies may be classified as intrinsic, instrumental, or collective (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013). Stake cautioned, "Because we simultaneously have several interests, often changing, there is no clear line distinguishing [cases], rather a zone of combined purposes separates them" (p. 237). Stake explained that in an intrinsic case, the researcher focuses upon one particular case that appears to be idiosyncratic and of interest in itself. An instrumental case "is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory" (Stake, 1995, p. 237). Finally, Stake explained that authors use collective case studies to compare multiple cases or perceptions to gain a broader insight into a specifically defined case. The RTI tutoring program for SWD was the bounded case for this research study. Within the context of a broader educational problem of low graduation rates, an instrumental case study was the best match for this study.

Quantitative and mixed-methods research frameworks are not considered appropriate for this proposed study. Aliaga and Gunderson (2000) defined quantitative research as "explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods" (p. 5). Muijs (2004) emphasized the numerical nature of quantitative analysis data, often in the form of specific statistics, which are essential for its positivistic nature. Creswell (2007) described a mixed-methods research design as one that incorporates both qualitative interviews with quantitative statistics. Although graduation data and school report card scores help to justify the problem for this study, no other numerical data or statistical analysis was used to answer the research questions;

therefore, designs that were not be considered for this study were quantitative and mixed-methods research designs. Instead, a qualitative research design was better employed to understand the themes that might emerge from the possible verbal data sources: The semi-structured interviews, other documentation and data collection from the tutoring program, and anonymous student work samples were the primary documentation used for the data in this study.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how an RTI out-of-class tutoring program served the academic, social, and emotional needs of students who attended an urban high school in the Midwest. According to Shannon and Bylsma (2006), certain educational programs could lead to better performance for students with disabilities.

Research Question 1: What are intervention specialists' perceptions of how an RTI out-of-class tutoring program at the research site helped SWD's academic needs?

Research Question 2: What are intervention specialists' perceptions of how an RTI out-of-class tutoring program research site helped SWD's social and emotional needs?

Research Question 3: What does a review of the tutoring center documents show about how a tutoring center at the research site helped SWD academically?

The participants were drawn from a sample of the intervention specialists at the school site. The site consists of approximately 300 SWD and approximately 20 intervention specialists. The school is comproed of students with disabilities in multiple and cross-categories, such as Learning and Intellectual Disabilities, Emotional

Disturbance, Mentally Handicapped Disabilities, and Autism. The SWD population comprises nearly one fourth of the entire student body, which is considerably high for a high school population. The justification for using the research design aligned with the problem of SWD performing at low levels due to academic and other issues. The sample for this study consisted of seven intervention specialist participants.

Context

As indicated, a case study is defined as a bounded study with the ability to define a social phenomenon (Yin, 2013). Qualitative research focuses a different kind of data collection, which looks for answers to why and how. The existing bounded system concept frames the specific parameters and allows in-depth information to be gathered from participants in an information-rich format within the context of the problem being studied. In this case study, the problem of a high rate of secondary school dropout rates requires generalizations that may only be gleaned through in-depth interviews with faculty who have direct connections to this at-risk population (Stake, 2005).

Because SWD high school graduation rates are in need of improvement, future researchers can utilize this study, as well as this qualitative design, to intervene in schools across the United States. This study aligned with the research site's plan as it relates to student achievement and the overall goal for high school SWD to graduate (District, 2016). The objectives of the research questions were to determine what factors of the tutoring program contributed to improving the graduation rate, and how intervention specialists could assist using effective prevention and teaching strategies for SWD. This goal was measured through the use of an interview tool distributed to the intervention

specialists. Case study interviews were used to identify strategies that assisted intervention specialists in team building and collaborating with parents for further improvements.

Purposeful Sampling of Participants

The main criterion for selecting the perspective participants was choosing intervention specialists who currently or previously worked with the tutoring program. These specialists were considered to be the professional experts in this area of study. Purposeful sampling is the qualitative method used in this study to select participants because this type of sampling allows the selection of participants based on criteria that best serves the aim of the research (Creswell, 2013; Mason, 2010; Punch, 2013; Yin, 2013). The sample for this study was selected from the intervention specialists at the research site who worked with SWD at the tutoring center. These intervention specialists were participants with the knowledge of special education law, curriculum, and specially designed instructional methods used for the best practices of servicing SWD. Their educational duties include teaching, managing cases to include IEP writing and holding meetings, modifying the regular education curriculum, differentiating instruction, and maintaining accurate grades and progress reports.

Selected intervention specialists had at least 1 or more years of teaching experience prior to the current academic school year. Their teaching experiences were estimated to be from 2 to 35 years of teaching. The intervention specialists held at least a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education and Master of Education Degrees in either Mild, Moderate, or Intensive Special Education. All of the teachers were highly qualified

in one or more core subject areas as deemed and monitored by the State Department of Education (2016).

Measures of Ethical Protection of Participants

Before the research begins, I procured a letter of approval from the school district that permitted me to conduct research at the research site. I was transparent and open with the school district about the procedural safeguards of this case study. The district's policy for research and evaluation aligns with IRB. District policy requires external researchers to provide a detailed description of the proposed research, demonstrate educational value, and contact one of two specific administrative individuals (District, 2016).

I gained IRB approval from Walden University, which required informed consent of the participants, which included review of the data collection instruments and the purpose of the study. In addition, I gained access to the school site from appropriate district personnel. The participants were informed of the role they play in the study and how many other participants were interviewed. These individuals were also made aware of a participant privacy clause in the consent form. They were provided with the researcher's contact information to answer any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or me. Each participant was made aware that the interview could be terminated at any time without questions or negative consequences of any kind.

I protected the rights of the participants for the duration of the study by adhering to ethical requirements (Grinyer, 2009). The data were generated from interviews, student work samples, formal and information lesson plans for the tutoring program, and

any other relevant articles. Confidentiality was established by using pseudonyms for all of the participants. On student work samples, names and any identifying characteristics were masked, and the specialists were given student identification codes before my viewing. Finally, all lesson plans for the RTI tutoring program were treated collectively rather than as created by individuals by removing any identification that might reveal who crafted them. The district's population of teachers and students is transient. There was a possibility that I would know the prospective participants because I was their former special education administrator for the research site in previous years.

Role of the Researcher

From 2008 until August 2013, I was previously employed as a Central Office Administrator at the district of the research site. In the district where the school of this study is located, I was a Special Education Administrator who ensured compliance with federal and state laws for K-12 schools within the district regarding SWD. The school of study was one of my former schools of responsibility. In addition, I serviced students with all disabilities, but most specifically, students with emotional disturbances, other health impairments, medical fragility, autism, specific learning disabilities, visual impairments, and intellectual disabilities.

I also supervised teachers, modeled instruction, and developed and conducted professional development. Finally, as of August 26, 2013, I no longer had direct supervision over the teachers, and they were no longer subordinates because I became the Supervisor of Special Education for another school district. I posed as the interviewer in this study and used an open-ended interview to discover the perceptions of intervention

specialists, learn about their creation of an RTI tutoring program for SWD, and understand the improvement of the current graduation trends at the school site.

Methods used to establish the researcher-participant working relationship began with building trust. For example, I informed the participants of their rights, which included a disclosure that the participants could remove themselves from the research without penalty or consequences at any time. The method used to establish openness from participants included the statements for confidentiality. An alternative location was considered as a way to encourage openness; however, the convenience and comfort for all participants were honored (Merriam, 2009). I assumed the role as the key instrument (Creswell, 2009). Other roles that I assumed include gathering multiple sources of data and shaping meanings and themes during the research process. I safeguarded the rights of the participants during all phases of the study. Although in October of 2016 I returned to the district as a Special Education Administrator, I had no direct supervision over the participants.

Data Collection

Both Creswell (2013) and Yin (2013) suggested that informational sources such as interviews, artifacts, documents, and observations are appropriate for qualitative research. Incorporating multiple types of data into a study enables the researcher to use triangulation as a means for generating specific themes that will be derived during the study (Creswell, 2011). In this research study, data sources included in-depth interviews, archival records, and documentary data. I collected in-depth interview data from seven intervention specialists. Artifacts included samples of student work generated during the

tutoring program. Documentary data included teacher notes, tutoring lesson plans, and teacher logs. These data sources provided a way to triangulate the teachers' perceptions and served as support for what was discussed in the interviews. Data types that were collected were in-depth interviews and school data. The data sources were the interviewed intervention specialaists. The artifacts collected were student work samples, teacher notes, lesson plans, and teacher logs.

Interviews

Willing (2013) noted that qualitative data collection helps to determine underlying meaning through interviews. The advantage to an open-ended interview is that respondents are able to answer freely (Muijs, 2004). Kvale (2007) supported the use of interviews because they are a conversational approach to understanding world experiences through direct interactions. I used interviews to answer the research questions previously identified in the narrative of this study.

The interviews were 30-45 minutes in length unless more time was needed. Each interviewee participated in a one-on-one interview. The interviews occurred at either the school location or at a location requested by a participant. Each prospective participant was asked the same questions. I developed the interview questions to provide in-depth answers (see Appendix A). I recorded the interviews with a digital recorder after the participants granted their permission. I stored the research data in a locked cabinet located in the office of my home. I will be the only person who has access to the locked and stored data for at least 7 remaining years. A small battery-operated tape recorder and a flash drive were available for backup in the event that they were needed. Any

information stored on my personal computer was password protected. Transcriptions were transcribed by hand. Section 3 discusses the actual artifacts that were analyzed in this study.

Artifacts

Intervention specialists gave me anonymous student samples to serve as archival records, which supported and triangulated their perceptions with their interview responses. Student samples were pertinent to this study because they demonstrated and supported what teachers discussed in the interviews and corroborated how the tutoring center helped students academically. Work samples were in the form of worksheets or original work that the students completed during the tutoring program. Upon the conclusion of this study, artifacts were stored and secured in the cabinet located in my home office.

Documentary Data

Documentary data in this study included teacher-generated logs from the tutoring program, any other data such as notes and lesson plans that the intervention specialists created for the tutoring program, and test data results with content area analysis. Analysis of documentary data and interview responses provided additional evidence related to teachers' perceptions and how the tutoring center helped students academically (see Appendix B for the document review protocols). Finally, reviewing reports from the tutoring program helped to demonstrate that the intervention specialists designed tutoring that was specific for the individual needs of the students. Documentary data were vital to this study because they provided the information about the perceptions of the learning

specialists and corroborated other data collected. Documentary data were collected and safeguarded in a locked filing cabinet in my home office and only reviewed once the interviews were completed. All names and identifying words were removed from the documentary data.

Procedures to Gain Access

I had access to the participants and interviewed them at the site or a place of the participant's choice. I was familiar with the tutoring program from a previous professional relationship with the district as a special education administrator. This previous relationship helped to identify prospective participants for this study; however, an administrator identified the participants. I made sure that the participants were free of other teaching duties and offered to meet them at a location convenient to each participant.

In order to gain participants for this study, I emailed all intervention specialists at the selected school and invited them to take part in the study. Initially, an administrator identified the interviewees. Once identified, I emailed the participants and invited them to participate in an interview. Those who agreed to participate were asked to respond within 1 week. Once the participants agreed to complete the study, they were contacted via email to set up the time, date, and location of the interview.

Data Analysis

I used the following steps to analyze the data. First, I transcribed the interviews as I carefully listened to my recorded interviews on the tape recorder. I typed the words

exactly as they were recorded onto a double-spaced document on my computer. I then saved each participant's responses in separate files. Last, I reviewed the lesson plans.

Transcriptions

In an effort to prepare for analyzing the interviews, I transcribed participants' responses word-for-word. While transcribing, I reviewed the notes I took during the interviews to check for accuracy. My research notes and my reflection on the similar responses that the intervention specialists provided informed the transcriptions. This process of reviewing the interviews assisted in developing themes, and later, the codes. Afterwards, I printed the transcriptions and prepared to analyze them. I then reread all of the transcriptions and coded the emerging themes. I created a separate document where I listed the recorded and repeated phrases and themes. I developed 18 total themes (see Appendix C). Next, I reread the interviews and the separate *themed* document to ensure that I had captured all of the ideas. After recording the list of emerging ideas and assigned codes, I organized the codes into categories and developedthemes. As Yin (2013) suggested, I interpreted and analyzed data to craft themes that I developed to address the central research questions.

Review of Lesson Plans

Following analysis of interviews, I reviewed six lesson plans, of which one was a coteaching lesson. Lesson plans were analyzed by comparing them to what the intervention specialists stated during the interview and checking to ensure that they aligned with the state standards (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). After determining

that the standards were aligned with the content being taught, I looked at the assessments described in the lesson and determined if the assessment was formative or summative and if it was also aligned with the lesson being taught. Finally, the goals and objectives were reviwed within the lesson plans. The goals and objectives included descriptions of what misconceptions students might have and what prerequisite knowledge they needed before being exposed to the content.

Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Cases

Merriam (2009) referred to discrepant cases as negative cases that require a special look or understanding. These cases often reflect themes and ideas that contradict the larger analysis and conclusions. At their worst, these cases can reflect personal biases (Yin, 2013). Any answers or documentary data that did not follow anticipated or emerging patterns would have been documented and considered in the analysis process and explored further to understand the discrepancy. However, there were no discrepancies. I was objective while reviewing the themes and data to account for discrepant cases. In Sections 4 and 5 of this study, I documented and discussed that there were no emerging discrepant cases from the findings.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credible qualitative studies should be trustworthy (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The same authors referenced Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definition of validity as a process that involves participants and validates themes and findings as belonging to a terminology borrowed from quantitative research. However, Marshall and Rossman

referred to qualitative terminology as credible, dependable, and transferable. In this study, the term validity will denote dependability and trustworthiness.

To assess establish credibility of the resource process, I used multiple sources of data. These sources included an analysis of data from interviews about the tutoring center and documentary data from the center as well (Yin, 2013). I used the documentary data to triangulate and back up participants' perceptions. To minimize threats to integrity, I kept field notes throughout the process to write my thoughts and analyses as they occurred. Data were gathered until saturation was completed, or until the patterns and themes continued to repeat data already documented. This study considered that participant characteristics can arise as a potential threat. To control for threats and sample characteristics, I recognized my biases to avoid influencing the data (Creswell, 2009). The two measures used in this study to establish integrity and trustworthiness were member checking and triangulation. I used interviews and lesson plan reviews for triangulation to answer the RQs (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness helps to promote internal reliability and credibility by using multiple data sources to maintain theme continuity (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2013). I used interviews, documentary data, and public records to explore the accuracy of the data and findings. Transcribing was important because I used data sources to present consistency as I reviewed and coded the transcripts of intervention specialists' perceptions of a tutoring program and the strategies that proved effective for

SWD at the school of study for the academic and social/emotional success of the SWD at the school site.

Member Checking

Member checking established validity of the interviews. It became important to use feedback both during and after the interview process (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2002). Yin (2013) referred to member checking as a positive way to clarify or elaborate upon the participants' answers for error so that the data of interview transcripts reflect accuracy. Upon the completion of transcription, I requested that all participants review the transcripts that I wrote up after the conclusion of the interviews. I presented the trancripts to the partcipants in person. I waited while each participant individually reviewed the transcript; then I asked for commentary and invited them to call or email if there were any changes needed (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). Although I asked for feedback, they did not want to provide it and instead extended best wishes. INT 2 reiterated her desire to have more parental involvement. INT 7 provided more details of actual accounts and examples that transpired during tutoring sessions in a storytelling/reminiscence fashion. I conducted my study by utilizing the following timeline.

Timeline

The Walden IRB form was completed and submitted to the Walden University URR. After receiving approval from URR and the Walden IRB, I emailed the principal of the research site of study and informed him that he would receive an email from me later that day requesting assistance. Upon the principal's recommendation of intervention

specialists, I contacted the prospective participants and requested that they take part in the study via email and began collecting data.

Thereafter, I began transcribing the interviews within 2 days. After the interview, I sent participants the transcriptions and gave them the opportunity to delete or edit their responses. I began coding and analyzing the data in order to answer the research questions. Furthermore, the findings were shared with the participants.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to understand how a RTI out-of-class tutoring program helped the academic, social, and emotional needs of students who attended an urban high school in the Midwest. In addition, the study aims to understand how the tutoring program has been successful, including how the program has improved graduation rates and the overall social and emotional success of SWD. Three research questions were answered concerning factors that have improved the graduation rate at the research site via the implementation of a tutoring program. I have described the data collection methods that fit with the purpose of this study to create thick and rich descriptions, as well as consistent data (documentary data and archival data), to answer the research questions. This section also presented the methods to maintain ethical standards for research, as well as how I protected the rights of each participant upon IRB approval. I have also explained the procedures that I used to gain access to the participants and to the data for this study; how I analyzed this data, including use of multiple sources, to understand discrepant cases; and how validity and trustworthiness were ensured. I limited error and bias in the study. The strategies that I used to minimize

error and bias included trustworthiness, member checking, and triangulation. Section 4 will present the results gained from the in-depth interviews, documentary data from the tutoring program, and the analysis of archival data.

Section 4: Results

Generating, Gathering, and Recording Data

The study took place at an urban district in the U.S. Midwest. In this study, I addressed the problems of SWD at the research site who were having difficulty in academic and social/emotional areas and the intervention specialists who worked with them. In extreme cases, SWD problems have interfered with the SWD ability to graduate from high school. Staff at the research site intervened by implementing a tiered level of supports that entailed out-of-class tutoring. The focus of this study was to ask the particpants their perceptions of the effectiveness of the tutoring program. I obtained permission before I gathered information or contacted the participants. I obtained a Letter of Cooperation from the building's principal. I also received permission to contact the intervention specialists to interview them. IRB approval was obtained from Walden University on October 21, 2016 (approval number: 2016.10.2112:58:56-05'00'). The National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research issued my certificate for completing the human subjects training on January 6, 2013 (number: 1070449).

Upon receiving permission from the Walden University's Institutional Review Board to contact prospective participants, I e-mailed a letter of invitation to a list of available intervention specialists provided to me by the school's administration. Nine intervention specialists were employed at the research site at the time of the study. Three responded to the invitation email and confirmed that they would participate. Four participants agreed to participate orally and scheduled a time to meet in person. One intervention specialist declined to participate in writing, and another intervention

specialist would not commit to being interviewed. Thus, the final participant number was seven. Each participant signed the Informed Letter of Consent before beginning the interview.

Process for Recording the Data

I recorded the interviews on a handheld recording device. I used a smart phone as a backup recording device. The interviews lasted 15-45 minutes. Upon the completion of each interview, I transcribed the interview into a document on my computer. To protect the identity of each participant, I used pseudonyms such as "Interview 1" and "INT 1." I stored the handheld recording devices in a locked cabinet located in my home. I stored the backup recordings in an external password-protected location and will be deleted after 5 years.

System for Keeping Track of Data and Emerging Themes

Upon completion of each interview, I transcribed the data within 2 days. Transcribing the data involved repeated listening to the tape recordings for transcription accuracy and finding themes. Along the left-hand side of each transcribed interview, I added comments. I placed the emerging themes in the comment section with a different color or font so that I did not confuse the codes or themes. I used a separate document to record the the codes and emerging themes. Making comments and notes during transcription was beneficial to help me organize the data. Transcribing the data as closely as possible after completion of each interview, while the interview was fresh on my mind, was also helpful.

Topics that emerged from the interviews were consistent with the findings of the literature in Sections 1-3. After I recorded the emerging themes in the comment portion and left-hand side of the transcribed interviews, I separated them in a new typed document. I tracked and categorized the 18 coded themes based upon similarities in themes and/or responses provided in the questioning during the interview. When proposing this research, I expected to track the emerging themes on a tracking self-generated mechanism based upon what I anticipated as themes related to the topics of academics, social/emotional issues, and general impressions of the tutoring program. However, when I completed the interviews, transcribed the recordings, and began coding emerging ideas, I developed a system of using comment notes on the left-hand side of my Word document. Every time a common theme emerged, I would use a color-coding system to organize the different themes. Afterward, I reviewed the transcription many times and organized the themes. When I finished taking notes on the emerging themes and color coding, I developed a separate document entitled "Emerging Themes and Abbreviations" (see Appendix C). In the Emerging Themes document, I then developed a two- or three-letter abbreviation for each theme.

Findings

I designed a qualitative case study to investigate the perceptions of intervention specialists regarding an RTI tutoring program to address the academic and social/emotional needs of high school SWD. Three research questions guided this study. Interviewee quotes to substantiate statements in the findings are presented using INT 1-7 (labels to each interviewee). I present the themes developed from the responses to interview questions related to each research question.

Research Question 1

The first research question was, "What are intervention specialists' perceptions of how an RTI out-of-class tutoring program at the research site helped SWD's academic needs?"

Theme #1: **Reading Instruction was the main concern of the intervention specialists.** The RTI was scheduled after school. The school's adminstrators identified SWD participants based on benchmark scores and referred them for tutoring. Intervention specialists met with the SWD 5 hours per week, either daily for an hour or twice a week in 2.5-hour increments at the availability of the student and with permission from the parent. Other arrangements for tutoring could be made based upon the agreement of the student, parent, and teacher. Regardless of the individual SWD's educational qualified disability category, the participants (INT 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7) discussed that SWD lacked reading skills and had deficits that impeded them from achieving grade-level academic and behavioral expectations. INT 7 noted that poor reading comprehension hinders SWD from obtaining academic success when they are outside the

smaller group-tutoring program. In six out of seven interviews, participants reported that the tutoring program was a mechanism to help the students build the fundamental skills of reading and writing. In addition, most of the intervention specialists stated that the SWD lacked phonemic awareness and vocabulary skills. Poor reading ability was a predominant finding identified as a reason that SWD needed tutoring. The intervention specialists also perceived themselves as competent in teaching reading content and able to design instruction and provide accommodations in the tutoring environment. This paper will explain specific comments about the RTI experiences in the following paragraphs.

INT 1 stated that reading comprehension was a problem: "A lot of them will shut down if the reading comprehension is difficult. It's odd because they have created their own language with the cell phones." She also explained how she addressed reading comprehension or reading in general. "When it comes to literacy text, they won't get that."

INT 1 continued:

> Extra time, reinforcement and encouragement such as: "Hey, you can do this!" They refuse to go back and read it again until they get it. . . It has to be in context (a sentence in a passage). There are simple sight words that they don't recognize in high school. Their strategy is to skip it {the unrecognized word}, like it doesn't exist in the sentence. They don't see the importance in reading, and they say they want to go on to post-secondary. This is low reading, and it affects the

> rest of their life. The English language is too big; now you can Google it (dictionary). Now I tell them to "Pull out your phone."

Another interviewee explained in-depth aspects of SWD proficiency in reading that provided challenges beyond comprehension. INT 7 stated, "Students lack basic sight words, and the out-of-class tutoring program is an opportunity to teach specific skill sets and interventions that enhance reading abilities for my students." INT 2 discussed how reading skills were the most common deficit for students with a cognitive disability. This participant explained that focusing on vocabulary and phonemic awareness builds the reading ability of the SWD. INT 5 explained, "I had to go back to the basics… Phonemic awareness." This professional discussed how teaching the SWD the fundamentals of phonics helped them improve their reading comprehension and fluency. INT 4 expressed that the SWD have reading deficits. These deficits contribute to poor student behavior and lack of vocabulary knowledge. The intervention specialist attempted to build the SWD's capacity in learning word identification, fluency, and behavioral expectations during the tutoring sessions. In essence, this interviewee meant that misbehavior is associated with a student covering up for not understanding classwork as way to avoid the task at hand.

INT 3 stated:

> Let's say writing concept. I'll use a graphic organizer to help them understand and organize their thoughts. I also use a paragraph that is below their grade level to help them feel more successful. Then I'll use something closer to their grade level with more vocabulary because it is not as hard. [Intervention Specialist then gave

an example of foreshadowing with a book]. Having them talk out their thoughts to turn it into words. I find that with tutoring, most kids really need one-on-one, especially with writing. Especially when you have problems with writing and recall.

In summary, the main academic area of concern that the intervention specialists identified was reading, which spans across all content areas. However, they also identified writing as a deficit. The intervention specialists tutored to bring the students up academically and as close to on grade level as possible by teaching the foundations of reading and then introducing grade-level content. Reading is a skill set that goes across all content areas; the inability to read can influence areas of life outside of skill learning in school. It can impede life skill areas that require reading, such as understanding directions at a job and taking public transportation. The intervention specialists perceived the RTI tutoring program as a process for them to provide intense and immediate feedback and acknowledged that reading skill intervention helped the SWD increase their reading abilities.

In reviewing the documents, the evidence shows that the intervention specialists focused on teaching decoding, comprehension, and language skills. These skills are early-learning literacy skills in which the SWD needed reteaching, especially in the areas of reading fluency and reading comprehension. I reviewed a vocabulary packet from a practice book that had many fill-in-the-blank questions. The last page was a short answer response that asks the student to write about the story. Another reading work sample asks

to summarize text. The sample document revealed that the SWD was able to demonstrate an understanding of the task with small grammatical errors.

The lesson plans included reading strategies and work samples that coordinated with the lesson plans. Some examples of the work samples included graded tests, such as perfect score on a "bad body smells" quiz, in which the objective was to provide a 1 to 10 ranking of offensive smells for Health and Hygiene. Other examples included multiple work samples in which the teacher provided specific feedback on the content and standard, for example, comments on the exit note card that captured what the student learned after one lesson. The teacher would mark a check mark indicating that he/she had reviewed the exit ticket and that the student was able to demonstrate new knowledge and understanding of the content. All of the lesson plans had the district's requirements for a lesson: the standard, objectives of what the student should know, activities, assessments and materials, and a component of differentiation. In addition to lesson plans that reinforced reading content for inside and outside of the classroom, the work was at the current skill level of the student.

Research Question 2

What are intervention specialists' perceptions of how an RTI Out-of-class tutoring program at the research site helped SWD's social and emotional needs?

Theme #2: SWD need individualization and autonomy/independence.

The intervention specialists perceived SWD high schoolers as wanting to fit in with their nondisabled peers; they did not want to be singled out or classified as a student

with a disability. In some instances, SWD did not meet class and school behavior expectations of attempting to make connections with their peers. High school SWD are physically age appropriate but in some instances, emotional delays result in an overcompensation to present to peers and staff as *normal*. Others overcompensate for deficits. Intervention specialists reported in three out of seven interviews that the tutoring program was an opportunity to teach behavior expectations and alternative behaviors. The behavior expectations are for students to come to class prepared and on time in dress code, remain seated, keep hands and feet to themselves, and demonstrate what has been identified as *appropriate* school behavior per teacher. INT 6 described the two different aspects in which one-on-one support helped the students, both academically and socially/emotionally, stating: "Small group. Sometimes they just like to be alone. Maybe they have behavior issues and don't get along with others in the classroom." INT 1 indicated, "Mostly they need small group one-on-one instruction" because the students feel more comfortable in the smaller setting and away from peers. INT 2 stated, "How to behave! They don't know appropriate behavior because they lack appropriate age-related behavior skills." A final example of the individualization that occurred in the tutoring program was the comment of INT 3: "I find that with tutoring, most kids really need one on one."

All the interviewees except for INT 4 and INT 5 mentioned the one-on-one and/or small group aspect as the value of RTI. In fact, one-on-one was described as an academic and behavioral intervention, or as an intervention that boosted the confidence of the students in the tutoring session. The teachers expressed how the small group instruction

allowed them to enhance the confidence of the individual SWD scholar; the tutoring center provided the support that SWD preferred so that the SWD could receive correction without peer criticism or embarrassment. As an example, INT 2 explained that negative behavior is decreased in the one-on-one setting because the students often feel embarrassed by their deficits in front of peers.

INT4 described behavior as more of an internal hindrance in students. In particular SLD, SWD behavior is often demonstrated in low self-confidence to perform academic tasks. In this case, one-on-one instruction helps to build "confidence" in students. INT 5 did not reference SWD as exemplifying negative behaviors inside of the classroom. Instead, the participant stated that SWD are "bullied" by other students because they do not know the content. This participant viewed the one-on-one setting as an avenue to build trust between the student and the adult so that scholars can have the self-confidence to work on deficits.

INT 7 stated that he was rarely absent, established good rapport with his students, and used food as an incentive. Thus, the interviewees provided evidence as to how one-on-one can allow for more intensive behavior support and instruction. Overall, the intervention specialists at the research site viewed the tutoring center as a valuable intervention that aids in the behavioral development of SWD. In addition to dialogue from the intervention specialist, the review of the documents supports theme #4.

Teachers' individualization was demonstrated in the work samples, assessments, and the lesson plans. For example, there was a student exit ticket (a type of formative assessment). The intervention specialists provided prewritten questions that allowed the

SWD to show mastery, or at least a good amount of understanding, of the tutored lesson on the exit ticket. Nondisabled same-aged peers do not need prewritten question preparation by their teachers. In addition, the academic lessons incorporated social skills practice.

One submitted assignment was entitled "Teen Curfews." This assignment required the SWD to provide concrete written examples of the pros and cons of having a curfew. The student in this instance wrote three pros describing why her parents gave her a curfew ("so that my parents don't have to worry about me"). The SWD also provided three examples that supported her need for autonomy and reasons why she did not feel she needed a curfew. Lesson plans were individualized for the SWD. In each lesson plan offered, the intervention specialists had an area entitled "demonstrating knowledge of students." In that section of the lesson plan, the intervention specialist used prior knowledge of the student to predict what the student was expected to learn after the lesson.

Theme #3: The tutoring program enhances the rapport of the intervention specialist and the SWD, allowing the intervention specialists to assist the SWD in reducing negative classroom behaviors. Participants reported that the relationship between the teacher and SWD is important because gaining trust helps to reduce anxiety and makes the SWD feel less vulnerable in exposing barriers and past educational defeats. Therefore, the adult can teach and help the SWD overcome past failures, both academically and behaviorally.

Overall, the word "behavior" was referenced 12 times throughout the seven interviews. The interviews revealed that working with SWD independently or in a small setting outside of the classroom fostered the relationship between the student and the teacher. The adult can enhance the academic performance of the student and provide social skills training as well. In many instances, the intervention specialist reported gaining a deeper and more personal relationship with students.

Comments regarding this theme include INT 4, who stated, "Students have anger, so behaviors lead to fear, which leads to decreased work…The behavior [challenged] kids, they shut down…. They are the smartest kids in the building. This group [of SWD students] now are low-behavior [problem] kids (referring to an academic and behavior combination of disabilities)." INT 5 stated, "We go through the whole spiel of managing your behavior, homework, and school." INT 2 said, "How to behave—they don't know appropriate behavior because they lack appropriate age-related behavior."

In the tutoring sessions, trust is gained in a reciprocal manner. All intervention specialists in this study described the reciprocity of enhancing student growth by developing the trust of a student. For example, Interviewee number 5 stated:

> I've learned that the majority of them want to learn and want to be a good person. With all these other barriers, they hide their true self because they are scared. If they trust you, they will open up and say, "I need help! Can you help me?" You will get the toughest one, when they get to them after school. The true *them* comes out! Everybody has a need, and there's a way to tap into the individual needs while we have them. When they leave here, they are asking for help; they

> want to be independent in society. They want someone to motivate them to do better.

The interviewee felt that RTI helped to build connections with the students. Connecting with students was important because the smaller class setting was an opportunity to enhance both cognitive and noncognitive skills of the SWD.

The topic of gaining trust and its relation to helping students build self-confidence was discussed at length. INT 1 explained: "When you break their confidence, it's hard to build it back up and lose their trust. Then I have to regain their trust and have empathy."

INT 3 explained her efforts to help students' self-confidence:

> A lot of the time they lack confidence, and that interferes with their ability to stay focused on what they need to do. If I give them too much time, that's a lot of time for them to feel unsuccessful. That's why I walk around. I tell them, "You are on track" to build their confidence, maybe the failure that they've had… I build it [student's confidence] and try not to grade them as hard. Then they feel more confident to work themselves up. The students' lack of confidence makes them easily embarrassed when they don't know things. The ones that don't get it will shut down if others get it.

INT 3 above speaks of making informal observations of students and assessing when rigor needs to be academically challenging, or whether a student would benefit from less rigor to demonstrate success and tolerance for a more challenging experience. INT 3 believes these kinds of teacher and student relationships boost the academic self-confidence of SWD. A positive student and teacher relationship between the intervention

specialists and the SWD was an important factor in educating the students in the RTI out-of-class tutoring program. As another example, INT 7 stated,

> When they come to tutoring, they know me and my expectations. They are different children because there are no peers to impress. When they are around peers, they have to revert back to common trends and language. I learned that one to one, they want it but don't know how to ask for it. They want more than they present publically with friends around.

In these instances, the intervention specialists perceived that their ability to form a better relationship with the student was enhanced in the intimate tutoring stetting.

Theme #4: Challenges for students living in poverty. The intervention specialists reported some examples of the ways that the issues of poverty impacted the school environment and influenced SWD's academic and social/emotional experiences. Although this topic was not anticipated or directly asked, it came up as interviewees discussed its impact on their ability to address the various needs of the students in the RTI out-of-class setting. INT 5 stated:

> The way they dress, their appearance/their hair. Sometimes their parents can't afford a haircut. I tell them, "Get dishwashing liquid and wash your clothes in the sink, and they'll be clean." To me, it's not being addressed in the building. We don't have those group meetings. We don't have a building-wide assembly on certain issues (suicide/homelessness). Last year my student told me that her whole family was sleeping in a car. You can't want rigor, and she's not thinking

> about school. They go to a gas station to wash up. There are programs, but she never said anything about it until the end of the year.

This excerpt of the interview demonstrates how intervention specialists perceive their role as being limited or even expanded as an instructor. INT 2 said she was feeling like a "social worker and nurse as well as a teacher." The above interview excerpt also reveals the compassion and empathy that these professionals have towards their students. Although the intervention specialist was empathetic, she is also had concerns for the SWD and their living environment. To further elaborate about the teachers and intervention specialists' concerns about the welfare of their students in and outside of the classroom, INT 7 stated:

> I think it's [reason for troubles with school demands] home environment. I think there is a lot of instability in the homes. I grew up in this neighborhood, but when there was a Thanksgiving basket giveaway, I went to some of these homes and asked myself, "People live like this?" These kids move a couple of times a school year. A lot of parents don't own their homes, and they seem to move a lot. When I grew up, we didn't move. A lot of them are homeless, and they [the actual SWD homeless student] don't know the meaning of homeless. Then we have a lot of foster kids. They are tough at school, so I can only imagine how tough they are outside. A lot have single parents. It's tough raising kids by yourself.

The intervention specialists are busy addressing academic, behavioral, and emotional needs of students. The combination of teaching academic and behavioral skills complicates the topic of RTI; however, it helps students succeed.

Because of issues related to poverty that some SWD face, the intervention specialists are required to be resourceful in educating students who are faced with social and economic issues. Due to these problems, the role of the intervention specialists is much more complex than just teaching academics. INT 7 provided some evidence of the complexity related to poverty. This interviewee told me that he did home visits and provided extra food so that his students could take it home and have dinner. INT 7 also disclosed incorporating McDonalds in mathematics lessons, which motivates the students to participate in the lesson, feeds them, and serves as a behavior incentive. The intervention specialists service a SWD population of students with multidimensional needs. Consequently, the intervention specialists felt that their primary roles as educators were compromised. Two intervention specialists stated that they felt like social workers. INT 6 exemplified a lack of trust in his superiors' willingness to support the considerable needs of his students:

> They (refers to administration) try, but I don't think they really try. You have certain individuals who understand the type of kids we deal with. Then, we have those that say the data shows…. (Referring to central office concerns with test scores and not the social/emotional issues that may impede learning and academic progress). Then we have those who understand that a kid didn't eat last night.

> What would I do? I don't know! If I have a young lady who has a lot of trust in me, I may say, "Come here, put your head down and make up the work later." Then someone from central office could come up. So, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't.

The remarks of INT 6 reveal how teachers felt marginalized as they juggled the immediate survival needs of students and the demands that are placed upon them by the requirements of their positions. Interviewees felt pressure from school administration to use RTI as a way to increase test scores without recognition of the difficulty students confront; this was an area where the intervention specialists felt that the schools needed to improve (Rothman & Henderson, 2011).

Issues related to poverty interfere with educating SWD and affect both the student and the intervention specialists. Although the intervention specialists perceived their roles as being instructor or educator, the intervention specialists perceived their role as extending beyond teaching. This duality is that of a teacher and a case manager. However, the SWD may be unable to separate social and home issues during the school day. For example, education may seem unimportant to a student who has to worry about food and shelter. The intervention specialists reported some examples of the different ways that the issues of poverty impacted the school environment and influenced SWD's academic and social/emotional experiences. Although this topic was not anticipated, it came up as interviewees discussed various needs of students and how they addressed them in the RTI out-of-class setting.

Theme #5: **SWD often feel embarrassed to ask for help, are afraid to be singled out or ridiculed by peers, and show a need for belonging.** These factors lead to an increase in negative classroom behaviors that are exemplified inside the larger classroom setting. SWD who felt embarrassed, lacked trust, and had low self-esteem or self-worth and/or confidence with regard to their abilities to succeed academically were mentioned in every interview. The intervention specialists perceived the SWD as having been ridiculed by adults (in many cases, other teachers) and their peers. This, in turn, made the students feel incompetent or unable to perform in front of both their same-aged disabled and nondisabled peers. The tutoring provided a safe place for the SWD to ask questions and even reveal their academic insecurities.

INT 5 said, "Sometimes they are embarrassed to get the tutoring after school and during school…They did open up [about their] lack of knowing [in RTI]. They weren't embarrassed and were able to focus." INT 7 added that SWD want to improve but are a little embarrassed about where they are: "They know where they are, but don't want to improve." The interviewee stated that the students understand their shortcomings but don't want to change because they have not been shown alternative options of receiving better educational outcomes.

To summarize, some SWD at the research site were embarrassed about having a disability. The interviewees expressed that SWD embarrassment is sometimes reflected in misbehavior in and out of class. The intervention specialists' perception of the tutoring program's success in academic and behavioral concerns was one of success because they were able to deal with the

overt problem of poverty and the impacts it has on the students' daily lives in and out of class. Regarding research question two, the intervention specialists perceived the tutoring center as a way to problem solve with their SWD who exhibit emotional issues.

Research Question 3

What does a review of the tutoring center documents show about how a tutoring center at the research site helped SWD academically?

Theme #6: **The intervention specialists created documents that were academically appropriate for the SWD they taught in the tutoring center.** The intervention specialists are required to maintain accurate records for accountability and aligning instruction that is tailored for the needs of their SWD. The six lesson plans that were offered by the intervention specialists were aligned with the state's standards and included differentiation strategies that met the unique needs of the students. An example of the content addressed was detailed in interviewee # 5's lesson plan, ELA & S & L CCS Standard(s) RL. 9.10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases in context and literary works. The supporting work samples demonstrated the literary focus of foreshadowing. The student had to provide three examples of foreshadowing in a horror story. The students were to compose complete sentences that began with capitalization and ended in the correct punctuation. However, the students wrote incomplete sentences that included errors in punctuation and spelling. An example of a written response with an incomplete sentence and missing punctuation was, "Sunshine passed away." The writing was also very slanted and difficult to read. Another intervention specialist

provided a work sample that was assessed by the intervention specialists. The work sample was completed by a student who had multiple disabilities. The directions were to fill in the circle by the correct answer. The test sample question was "Dan ran_____," and the choices were up, down, and got. This student received a 40% without adult assistance. When the teacher retested and assisted by reading the questions (vocabulary and comprehension), the student received a 50%. The increased score to 50% is not mastery, but it is indicative of improvement. There was a variability in the extent of mastery, which could be attributed to the different disabilities and leaning abilities of the students. Although there were different levels of mastery, the work samples demonstrated increases in grades as per the remarks of the intervention specialists on the graded work samples.

Other documents that were collected and reviewed were 20 student work samples. Included in the student work samples was a pre- and post-reading and language skills assessment. The 20 student work samples were also outlined within the six lesson plans and included examples of students who demonstrated progress in learning the expected concepts. For example, the students' test scores increased over the duration of the tutoring.

Information learned through triangulation of the documents in line with the district and state tests scores revealed that these SWD of the intervention specialists did not reach proficient or growth scores on the fall and winter benchmark testing. Unfortunately, some students had a decrease in benchmark scores from the 2015 to the 2016 school year. However, the documents showed evidence of the SWD learning or

rather enhancing their skills, which were below grade level, in the tutoring program; students were making progress but were not on grade level. Examples of such improved skills included writing paragraphs and essays. The information obtained from the provided documentation showing student progress compares to the findings of the school's benchmark and state data, which revealed below proficiency scores.

The SWD were already identified as being below the state's grade level expectations. The tutoring program did not help the students meet the grade level expectations, but it did assist with improvements in classroom performance. As stated, the intervention specialists perceived reading difficulties as the primary problem. The lesson plans included reading strategies that were outlined in the lesson plans. Some examples of the work samples included graded tests. Other examples included multiple work samples in which the teacher provided compliments that were specific to the content and standard. All the lesson plans had the district's requirements for a lesson: the standard, objectives—what the student should know, activities, assessments, materials, and a component of differentiation. In addition to lesson plans to reinforce reading content for in and outside of the classroom, the work was at the current skill level of the student.

Procedures for Delaing with Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases refer to confirming or disconfirming data (Cohen, Manion, & Marion, 2013). In addition, addressing discrepant cases rules out negative cases or contradictions in the data analysis (Cohen et al., 2013; Glesne, 2011). This case study resulted in no discrepant cases in the seven interviews. The intervention specialists

deemed reading deficits to be the main area of concern. Although I discovered unexpected results in the responses, it was interesting to note how similarly the participants responded. The interviews were consistent about reported attitudes and perceptions from one participant to another. However, the outliers, based on the degree of their reactions, were Interviewees 2 and 7, who shared being more frustrated than their peers regarding lack of parental support.

Evidence of Quality

Triangulation

To establish triangulation, multiple sources of data were examined, such as analyzing the interviews and reviewing the documents of the state report card and the school's benchmark data, participants' lesson plans, and student work samples that the intervention specialists provided (Yin, 2013). I triangulated this study within the interview data, between interview data, and with other types of data such as a lesson plan review and archived testing of SWD. Other ways to present this study as credible were member-checking and trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness

I did the following to establish trustworthiness: First, I excluded my biases. Next, I analyzed every person's responses by reading and re-reading the data (Creswell, 2009). Thirdly, I had the participants check my initial transcripts and asked them to respond to the initial conclusions. As a final measure of trustworthiness, I was careful to disclose that my role as the researcher was separate from my role as a district employee.

As a part of member-checking, I had the participants check the transcriptions for clarification. After completion of the interviews, I hand-delivered a packet to each participant that explained the initial conclusions and asked them to contact me with any additional questions or feedback. However, the teachers gave no suggestions, corrections, or recommendations.

Summary

In Section 4, I presented the findings of the data of seven intervention specialists who participated in an RTI out-of-class tutoring center and review of lesson plans. An analysis of the qualitative data resulted in six major themes throughout the seven independent interviews provided in the discussion of this section. The intervention specialists perceived that their instruction in the smaller or one-on-one settings helped them increase reading proficiency and vocabulary with SWD. Additionally, the intervention specialists felt that they built trusting relationships with the SWD when in a small setting. Due to the previous school failures that SWD had experienced, as well as issues related to parenting and poverty, intervention specialists perceived the tutoring as a way to build the confidence of their students. Overall, the intervention specialists perceived the tutoring as beneficial for improving SWD in the areas of academics and behavior strategies; lesson plans demonstrated the progress students made. Section 5 includes the discussion and interpretation of findings, conclusions, and future recommendations.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In Section 5, I discuss and interpret the findings. At the research site, the intervention specialists provided an out-of-class instruction that afforded SWD individual and small group specialized instruction. The problem identified in this research study was the inadequate progress of SWD at the focus high school. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the perceptions of intervention specialists at the research site regarding the effectiveness of the out-of-class RTI tutoring program to promote academic and social/emotional gains for SWD at the school. Empirical research has demonstrated how effective tutoring and RTI can be for promoting the success of SWD (Durlak et al., 2011; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; NCES, 2013).

The three research questions were:

Research Question 1: What are intervention specialists' perceptions of how an RTI out-of-class tutoring program at the research site helped SWD's academic needs?

Research Question 2: What are intervention specialists' perceptions of how an RTI out-of-class tutoring program research site helped SWD's social and emotional needs?

Research Question 3: What does a review of the tutoring center documents show about how a tutoring center at the research site helped SWD academically?

I identified six themes related to the research questions:

- Theme 1: Reading Instruction was the main concern of the intervention specialists.
- Theme 2: SWD needed individualization and autonomy/independence.

- Theme 3: The tutoring program enhanced the rapport of the intervention specialist and the SWD and allowed the intervention specialists to assist the SWD in reducing negative classroom behaviors.
- Theme 4: SWD often faced the challenges of living in poverty.
- Theme 5: SWD often felt embarrassed when asking for help, were afraid of being singled out or ridiculed by peers, and demonstrated a need for belonging.
- Theme 6: The intervention specialists created documents that were academically appropriate for the SWD they serviced in the tutoring center.

Section 5 includes an interpretation of the findings as they relate to the research questions and themes, discussion of the conclusions, and recommendations. Theme 1 relates to Research Question 1, Themes 2-5 relate to Reseacrh Question 2, and Theme 6 relates to Research Question 3.

Interpretation of the Findings

RTI is a systematic approach used to address learning difficulties for SWDs (Gersten & Dimino, 2006; King, Lemons, & Hill, 2012; Wixson, 2011). The individualized instruction that the RTI tiered approach utilizes empowers intervention specialists to use research-based strategies to assist with specific difficulties in the core content areas (Basham et al., 2010; Green, McLaughlin, Derby, & Lee, 2010). I interviewed seven intervention specialists at the research site, a high school. The interviews lasted 15-45 minutes.

I asked participants about their perceptions of the effects of the tutoring program

on the academic and social/emotional needs of SWD. The interviewees were intervention specialists in the research site's tutoring program involved in an academic intervention for students who require modifications in teaching or intervention that exceeded those in the classroom. Teaching SWD skills such as decoding, sight word recognition, and helping struggling readers develop and/or improve in phonological awareness are some RTI approaches that intervention specialists provide as suggested by Pressley and Allington (2015). I identified six themes in relation to the research questions.

- Theme 1: Reading Instruction was the main concern of the intervention specialists. Theme 1 addressed RQ 1.
- Theme 2: SWD have a need for individualization and autonomy/independence.
- Theme 3: The tutoring program enhances the rapport of the intervention specialist and the SWD and allows the intervention specialists to assist the SWD in reducing negative classroom behaviors.
- Theme 4: SWD face the challenges of living in poverty.
- Theme 5: SWD often feel embarrassed to ask for help, are afraid to be singled out or ridiculed by peers, and show a need for belonging. Themes 2-5 addressed RQ 2.
- Theme 6: The intervention specialists created documents that were academically appropriate for the SWD they serviced in the tutoring center. Theme addressed RQ3.

Theme 1 addresses reading as a deficit that the SWD had in common. The intervention specialists in the study provided direct instruction and additional specifically designed instruction, as documented in lesson plans and student work, to help meet the individual educational needs of each SWD. The second theme was that SWD in high school have a need for autonomy in learning and development. Autonomy means that the students took responsibility for their learning and actions while they received guidance from their teachers about appropriate ways to seek assistance as needed. According to the participants, the students have an understanding that they have a disability but require strategies that will help them become as independent as possible and give them skills for high school and beyond. Another theme that the participants perceived about the SWD was their embarrassment when their peers realized their learning deficits. The intervention specialists in the study reported that they were able to use the tutoring center as an avenue to provide whole child approaches to help the students succeed and process through such issues. Overall, what became a critical topic in the interviews of the intervention specialists was how poverty creates barriers to the education of students, and SWD in particular. After uncovering the significance of the effects of poverty in relation to this study, I further explored the effects that poverty has on urban education and SWD.

Teachers can use RTI to build motivation and self-esteem and foster the overall success of SWD in the out-of-class setting. The RTI framework helps teachers structure an in-school tutoring program to teach high school students social skills (Durlak et al., 2010). The intervention specialists in the study said that the social skills that the students learn in the smaller setting can be transferred into the larger school setting and help

reduce segregation of the general and special education populations. Another benefit that INT 7 discussed was that the SWD can receive the social behavior strategies that they would not otherwise receive in a self-contained or single-class special education setting.

I learned from doing this study that the name of the program, intervention, or strategy used to help students grow is irrelevant. The interviewees simply reported that they provided "tutoring" without referring to any special program. To help the students, it is important for teachers to use best practices in the classroom and pedagogical strategies that are individualized to the learners. In addition, the students received high scores on their teacher assessments and class work samples provided in the tutoring sessions. However, the benchmark data revealed low percentage scores. These statistics reflected that the norm-based data do not provide the same measure as the state tests and benchmark testing, which are the data points for the school's report card. Thus, the SWD need assistance on skill development for mastery and proficiency on test-taking strategies and overall practice skills for taking the state tests. In addition, the last school report card demonstrated that the school received an A for increasing the state test scores of the lowest 20% of students, which includes SWD. Therefore, I believe that the RTI program influenced the SWD in a positive way.

The SWD's reading skills and deficits impeded them from achieving grade-level academic and behavioral expectations. The interviewees' words about reading deficiencies confirm what Melby-Lervag et al. (2012) found about phonemic awareness deficits of students with learning disabilities. Of course, knowing the alphabet and the sounds that each letter makes are fundamental skills of reading. Understanding spoken

language, a concept of phonemic awareness, and letter sounds are also concepts of reading. The above-mentioned researchers contended that knowledge of letters and sounds increases reading. Ultimately, the findings presented interviewees' perceptions confirming the association between phonemic awareness and difficulties in reading. Phonemic awareness and letter sound recognition is a skill set required for reading as well.

Strategies that assist with reading and spelling, or reading intervention, give students significant improvements in literacy (Hulme et al., 2012). Learning difficulties such as a poor reading ability are linked with SWD across all disability categories and are not solely those identified with a learning disability (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Difficulties in reading, in some instances, have been linked with dropping out of high school (Daniel, 2006; Thurlow et al., 2002). Along with high association with reading difficulties and dropping out of school, limited reading fluency has been attributed to lifelong challenges (Kaufman, McLaughlin, Derby, & Waco, 2011; Melby-Lervag et al., 2012).

Reading deficits in SWD can be addressed with instructional strategies such as teaching sight words and other comprehensive service delivery options (Fuchs et al., 2012; Kaufman et al., 2011). Another reading intervention that was found to be beneficial for students in need of basic skills was teaching *The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS) (Dougherty Stahl, Keane, & Simic, 2013; Shannon & Edmondson, 2010). Although DIBELS had been used by the intervention specialists previously, the tutoring center used sight words. Overall, the implementation of RTI

across the country has aided in identifying students with behavior concerns, learning disabilities, gifted characteristics, and the appropriate criteria that prevent districts from overidentifying SWD students (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2015).

Pressley and Allington (2015) provided detailed strategies that help develop readers in primary grades, such as decoding and sight-word recognition. Although the intervention specialists work with high school SWD, the data on their student populations demonstrated reading abilities of those in primary grades. The intervention specialists who participated in this study discussed how the tutoring center gave them the intimate opportunity to reteach skills and develop the foundations of reading and mathematics. Pressley and Allington explained that before active skilled reading is developed, the reader must have prior understanding of the content that can provide background for students. Hence, the SWD who received tutoring at the research site were taught early reading strategies that, over time, helped them to be closer to grade level. RTI Tier 2 is for students who are identified as needing additional assistance that exceeds the universal interventions in the general education classroom. Tier 2 academic and behavioral interventions are 5-10% targeted group interventions of the school day (Mitchell et al., 2015; State Department of Education, 2016). Support provided by the intervention specialists within the tutoring center was within the RTI framework.

Accommodations such as guided practice and one/one academic intervention, small group work, or allowing extended time as specially designed instruction during tutoring sessions increased success for SWD, which manifested later in the traditional classroom setting. Researchers have explained the relationship between academic

impediments and behavioral issues that SWD demonstrate. Students' goals and motivation for learning, which are cognitive behaviors, are key factors in teaching students with reading disabilities how to read (Shannon & Edmondson, 2010). These issues are exhibited in class and can exceed life post-high school (Kaufman et al., 2011; Melby-Lervag et al., 2012). The RTI program provided accommodations such as small group instruction that coincided with the individualized educational plans of the SWD.

It can be stated that functional characteristics that include cognitive and non-cognitive skills such as social, emotional, and communicative skills, are predictors of a student's ability to adjust after high school (Gorski & Pothini, 2013; Lane et al., 2013a). Participants reported that the relationship they formed with the SWD in the tutoring center decreased academic and behavioral impediments. It ultimately decreased the internal and external barriers that are evidenced in the normal classroom such as worries about being embarrassed and not being able to respond on grade level. The intervention specialists revealed that the SWD are ashamed of having a disability and sometimes misbehave to compensate. Other examples of students feeling embarrassed included being afraid or ashamed to ask for assistance when needed. These barriers are demonstrated in urban students of low economic status in large urban inner-city public schools (Anyon et al., 2016; Lessard et al., 2009). Intervention specialists in this study perceived the tutoring program as beneficial for building the self-esteem of the SWD.

The literature has supported the intervention specialists' beliefs that building trusting relationships enhances student success (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). The capacity for building trust appears to be more crucial for the SWD because they have

experienced failures in the past, as the interviews demonstrated. Van Maele, Van Houtte, and Forsyth (2014) discussed the four interrelated areas of trust and school settings as: learning, teaching, leading, and bridging. This research deemed trust as fostering a good learning community. The disability and past academic failures often demotivate SWD from attempting academic challenges. Researchers have detailed trust as a mechanism to foster parent and student relationships, which can in turn lead to student success (Green et al., 2010; Reed et al., 2000). This finding is one reason that the whole child approach is necessary (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014). The whole child approach is important because the concepts embody both social/emotional needs and academics. The approach explains that educating children means meeting them where they are cognitively and emotionally. The RTI tiered system and the whole child approach infuse academic and behavioral interventions and supports for students, and they foster reading competencies and life skills that can help students beyond graduation (State Department of Education, 2017). As the interviewees reported, when teachers have trusting relationships with students, and when they have high expectations for their students' performances, students in turn are more apt to trust their teachers (Carpenter, 2013; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011; Van Maele et al., 2014). The intervention specialists at the research site discussed their overall compassion that extends beyond the school day for their SWD.

The literature related to SWD and academic failures depicts interpersonal issues that obstruct their school performance. These noncognitive and/or cover-up behaviors can hinder students from obtaining a quality education (Benner, Kutash, Nelson, &

Fisher, 2013; Durlak et al., 2011; Harris et al., 2011). Instead of focusing on the instruction at hand, SWD are concerned that their peers will discover their deficits. Incorporating social/emotional learning into the curriculum enables educators to reach SWD, teach them how to be socially appropriate, and decrease antisocial behaviors (Sklad et al., 2012). Unfortunately, SWD sometimes fail to pick up on social cues. SWD who are exposed to the same state standards as nondisabled peers show an increase in graduation rate and have a greater chance of learning how to socialize with same-aged, non-disabled peers (Christensen & Byrne, 2014; Goodman, Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Duffy, & Kitta, 2011).

In addition, past failures also inhibit SWD from performing in the classroom. Motivating SWD is easier in smaller settings versus the larger class setting, where SWD may feel victimized because of their disabilities (Cornell et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2011). A review of building motivation in SWD in high school students disclosed external and intrinsic motivation of students during after-school programs as the determinant of the sustainability of participation (Kuperminc et al., 2016). What this means is that if a student is motivated to stay after school for a tutoring program, that student will have a longer duration of attendance in the tutoring program. Unleashing the motivation for students should help adults bring out the potential of the students. Internal motivation has been associated with factors to suggest that motivating SWD supports their attainment in successful academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Lessard et al., 2009; Stover et al., 2014). The intervention specialists at the research site designed instruction

to prevent SWD from disengaging in school due to their deficits, which previously stifled academic and behavioral progress.

RTI can assist with building motivation, self-esteem, and increase overall success of SWD in the out-of-class setting. Teachers who motivate and encourage their students increase academic and behavioral success for these students. Because the intervention specialists at the research site are dedicated to the well-being and overall academic and behavioral achievement of their SWD, the participants managed to increase classroom achievement. This result was evidenced in the work samples that the intervention specialists provided as documentary data. Teachers should receive specific training to help foster these trusting relationships, and in particular, teachers who work in urban districts (Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

Tutoring Decreases Behavioral Issues

The instructional specialists felt that building trusting relationships increased academic and behavioral success for students. RTI embeds the teaming approach as an accountability mechanism for student achievement (Fuchs et al., 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). The triad tiered system also infuses research-based and best practice teaching strategies (Brownell et al., 2010; Sansosti et al., 2010). Moreover, RTI is federally regulated and state imposed in the research site's location. Therefore, doing what is best for students is the expectation. Providing interventions for students who exhibit behavioral issues decreases the amount of suspensions and other discipline-related incidents (Anyon et al., 2016; Learned, 2016). Moreover, SWD need to be in school so that they can receive both instruction and content.

This study demonstrates how students' negative behaviors are addressed in the smaller setting when SWD receive instruction at their level. It was revealed that the intervention specialists perceived their targeted teaching strategies helped the SWD improve academically and behaviorally. The desired outcome of the intervention specialists was that the skills obtained in the smaller setting, or tutoring center, transferred across all learning environments and throughout larger school settings.

Issues Related to Poverty at the Research Site

Issues related to poverty and homelessness were unexpected topics that the interviewees reported. The topic of homelessness and poverty and the effects they have on both the teacher and the student was omitted in my original literature review, but it was an unexpected topic that emerged in the interviews. Disadvantaged youth have lower academic performances compared to their nondisadvantaged counterparts. In addition, the disadvantaged and homeless youth lack supporting communities (Boutelle, 2009; Schaps, 2005). Unfortunately, the barriers of poverty do not disappear when students arrive at school and are expected to meet criteria needed for graduation.

Poverty is often associated with low student achievement such as that described by Breger (2016). Breger's study, which was conducted in the Chicago Public Schools, revealed the same trends: Lower family income is linked to poor attendance, inadequate student achievement, and larger class sizes. Disenfranchised students do not have equal access to education. California is making gains in providing quality education to "underserved youth" by providing targeted intervention (O' Day & Smith, 2016). Specifically, the researchers labeled Second Step and "Step to Success" as the social and emotional learning programs that have contributed to a safe school environment. Sullivan and Simonson (2016) reviewed social and emotional interventions for traumatized youth. In their study, mental health services were found to be most beneficial for assisting with the well-being of disadvantaged students. Searching for methods to best serve students who are homeless and at economic disadvantage is a topic that is suggested for further exploration.

Conclusions

The purpose of the interviews and the review of lesson plans and student work was to determine what the participants thought about how the RTI tutoring program that intervention specialists provided helped SWD academically and socially/emotionally. In addition, I sought to explore whether the intervention specialists perceived their tutoring intervention as a specific avenue to address the academic and social/emotional of SWD. The conclusions are presented in below.

Conclusion #1.

The RTI framework was an appropriate norm-referencing model for the tutoring program as described by the intervention specialists. The intervention specialists perceived the tutoring program as an out-of-class intervention. In many cases, it was described as a good strategy for enhancing the skills of SWD. Although RTI is a state model, and the intervention specialists were comfortable with the interview questions that referred to the tutoring as an RTI tiered intervention, they did not refer to the tutoring program as RTI; they simply referred to their services as tutoring. This was an unexpected discovery because RTI is a framework mandated by the state that I assumed was applied in their teaching practices. It is possible that the school does not refer to their level of tiered interventions as the RTI model; instead, they are simply doing what they feel is best for students without naming or referencing a model. The RTI framework embodies research-based instructional practices and is a leveled preventative system that strengthens core instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Fuchs et al., 2012; Harris et al., 2012). The premise is that the SWD are receiving the best instruction possible in their current

settings. The instruction should be done with fidelity, and differentiation is embedded. A student would move from tier to tier if the current placement proved ineffective. In this instance, the intervention specialists felt that the tutoring program was beneficial for the SWD, who needed more individualized supports for both behavioral and academic areas.

The school's SWD benchmark testing for the fall demonstrated a decrease in the reading and mathematics scores from grades 8 to grade 9 before out-of-class tutoring intervention took place. Grade 10 school benchmark testing for SWD demonstrated poor academic scores as well. At the time of reporting, the intervention specialists predicted that the scores would increase due to tutoring as an intervention, as this mechanism was used to intervene and improve both the state testing scores and overall school's graduation rate.

Conclusion #2.

The intervention specialists perceived their out-of-class and individual tutoring as a way to enhance the personal (outside of the school's environment) and academic lives of their students. The intervention specialists interviewed were compassionate toward the students they worked with on a daily basis. For example, INT 7 mentioned growing up in the neighborhood of the research site. More recently, IN 7 as a teacher participated in neighborhood canvasing and delivering food pantry items in a collaborative effort to support the scholars. Therefore, the research site seemed to embrace the *whole student* approach. RTI and the whole child approach help to meet the students where they are academically and social/emotionally (Association for Supervision and Curriculum

Development, 2014; Diamond, 2010; Miller, 2010). The intervention specialists perceived themselves as providing individualized instruction for students, who were shy or felt inhibited to inform their teachers of their needs in the classroom. This hesitance, in part, stemmed from fear of judgment from adults and peers. In many cases, the students exhibited negative behaviors to cover up their deficits. The intervention specialists disclosed that the students felt safe in the tutoring environment. Due to the feelings of safety, the intervention specialists perceived their ability to teach the students reading and mathematics fundamental skills that would, in turn, enable the classroom teachers to help the SWD progress even further.

Furthermore, all the interview participants provided specific strategies that they used both in and outside the classroom to enhance academic achievement. Many of the respondents utilized very specific accommodations, modification to curriculum, and other forms of specially designed instruction to individualize the academic content and curriculum for their exceptional learners. There were vast similarities in the teaching strategies that the intervention specialists used. It appears that the accommodation of one-on-one instruction was the preferred intervention for SWD and for the intervention specialists.

Conclusion #3.

The intervention specialists perceived that issues related to poverty were major deterrents to academic and social/emotional skills of the SWD. In most of the interviews, the intervention specialists mentioned students being homeless, without food and clothing. Overall, the issues related to poverty that the SWD suffered carried over into

the school experience. Moreover, the intervention specialists perceived the one-on-one tutoring as beneficial because it helped them to know their students academically and emotionally. This finding is similar to the findings of Ullucci and Howard (2014). It is recommended that teachers are trained and primed for educating students who live in poverty, such as some of the students at the research site (Ullucci & Howard, 2014). In essence, teachers need to have rigor and stimulating instruction.

Implications for Social Change

Considering the intervention specialists' perceptions of an RTI out-of-class tutoring program for SWD in high school settings is crucial for many reasons. The expectation of educational institutions is that students will graduate with the academic and social skills needed to be college or career ready (State Department of Education, 2016). It seems logical that interviewing the intervention specialists in lieu of other professionals would be the first step in obtaining inquiry into how to address the problem of effective RTI. The findings of this study could assist the intervention specialists at the research site in their delivery of services. In addition, it could help the intervention specialists collectively create better interventions for SWD inside the tutoring program, which could translate to inside the classroom by just getting to know each student's learning styles independently. Lastly, intervention specialists may not feel as isolated when they review the similarities in responses generated from this study. These similarities are important because open conversation directed towards student mastery and SWD needs can be addressed. More importantly, students who have acquired new skills and progress towards their IEPs can be reflected on more frequently.

This research can assist with collaboration among colleagues. As stated, many of the respondents replied in similar fashions. Reviewing the responses could facilitate greater discussion among the intervention specialists that will lead towards revising interventions as needed. In addition, students who no longer need intensive supports can move up in tiered support to a least restrictive interventional need. Ultimately, the more SWD who have access to their grade level curriculum will increase academic performance and proficiency on the state tests, which is the desire of all of the stakeholders.

Many of the SWD participate in departmentalized classes. Intervention specialists who collaborate with each other benefit students because collaboration enhances collegial partnerships and helps professionals identify strategies for students just from knowing the students. Bettini et al. (2016) explained that teacher collaboration helps to cultivate effective teaching and student achievement. Teacher collaboration facilitates conversations with regular education teachers, helps them gain new ideas for interventions and academic enrichment, and is practiced at the research site.

Discussions between regular education teachers and intervention specialists could foster greater academic and social/emotional progress for all students. In addition, these discussions could decrease the stigma that is associated with the "your kids and my kids" division between general education students and SWD if one exists at the research site. At the site, it was not evident that enough collaboration occurred between the special and general education teachers to increase the academic performance of the SWD. In addition, the evidence collected did not demonstrate collaboration between the general

and special education teachers. However, the lesson plans provided demonstrate collaborative lesson planning does take place between the intervention specialists. The intervention specialists were concerned about the school support for students living in poverty and homelessness. The effects of homelessness need to be a topic for future action, as suggested by some of the participants.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the findings from the interviews and documentary data, I am making four recommendations for action to foster the ongoing delivery of academic and behavioral instructional strategies for SWD at the tutoring site.

Recommendation #1.

Professional Development (PD) for more inclusionary practices and RTI for the regular education teachers and intervention specialists. This recommendation is based upon the idea that the RTI framework in Tier 1 is inclusive to best instructional and research-based practices for all students (Fuchs et al., 2010; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Research has supported the idea of providing inclusive professional development for all teachers (McCray & McHatton, 2015). Professional development would function as a tool that assists with trust building among colleagues (Buffum et al., 2010). Researchers have concluded that the general education teacher usually refers students for tiers 2 and 3, and special education teachers implement the interventions (Werts & Carpenter, 2013). PD can help the teachers collaborate more effectively so that the intervention specialist does not perceive that interventions were not tried before the identification process occurred. Furthermore, I recommend PD for inclusionary practices for the teachers

because it will ultimately enhance their professionalism, use of helpful instructional practices for all students, and build teacher capacity for addressing all student needs (Male, 2011; O'Gorman & Drudy, 2010). General and special education teachers will learn how to plan lessons, grade, and case manage students in a collaborative manner, which would reduce the teachers' work load. Reading strategies such as those outlined in Pressley and Allington (2015) can be a resource.

Professional development changes the attitudes of regular education teachers and teaches professionals how to accommodate and accept special education students (Naraian & Oyler, 2013; Male, 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009). The intervention specialists expressed that SWD felt inferior towards other teachers and students. Increasing the tolerance of the regular education teachers may evoke social skills lessons on tolerance for the nondisabled peers. Overall, when the teachers feel that they have the necessary skill set, curriculum, and professional competencies, they can enhance the academic and behavioral competencies of students. In particular, SWD will receive indirect benefits when their teachers participate in explicit and meaningful PD. Of additional benefit to the SWD was a conclusion that professional development should be relevant and meaningful to the specific needs of the students and staff (Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2015).

Recommendation #2.

Based on findings of this study, I recommend that local administrators organize a forum for intervention specialists to have open and honest dialogue with the administration about the impact that poverty has inside the school setting. This dialogue

should come without punitive measures against the intervention specialists, such as a teacher receiving unfair ratings as part of teacher evaluation for being open and transparent during the courageous conversation. All the intervention specialists described the hardship of educating SWD who are impoverished. The issue of poverty was an overwhelming response as one of the reasons why the students were academically behind, and why they exhibited negative behaviors inside and outside the classroom. In addition, three of the seven intervention specialists perceived that the administrators, either at the building or the district level, were unsupportive of the diverse needs of impoverished SWD learners.

The intervention specialists perceived themselves as being able to deal with the educational and behavioral needs of the students because they have even more autonomy in a small class setting. They also perceived district and school mandates as interfering with their autonomy in educating the "whole student." For example, the social and community needs of the students outweighed educational importance for both the students and their parents. Research has revealed that impoverished students exhibit a higher rate of being identified as having educational disabilities (Breger, 2016; Green et al., 2010; Wei et al., 2011; & Ullucci & Howard, 2015). The IDEA (2004) and Title 1 reform enable SWD to have what is termed a "Free and Appropriate Public Education" (FAPE). The mandates regarding FAPE and an SWD's least restrictive environment or type of classroom setting have contributed to educator frustrations and misinterpretation of how to design education for SWD and implement the guidelines (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2012). Therefore, it is not uncommon

for administrators to have disputes about best practices for students. Furthermore, teachers perceive the attitudes and feelings of their administrators and want to feel supported by them (Adams & Myskel, 2016). The staff may choose to elicit the help from the same educational diversity consulting group or another nonbiased agency to lead open and honest discussions between the teaching staff and administration.

Recommendation #3.

Unfortunately, the barriers of poverty do not disappear when students arrive at school and are expected to meet scholarly expectations. Collaboration among all of the school's partners, including the faculty, to mainstream resources specifically for the homeless population needs to be considered. Along with the previously mentioned recommendations, the school site should specifically partner with the food bank and other agencies to help homeless students. It can be noted that the school does have community partnerships and district family and community engagement staff who assist the referred families. However, a partnership that assists with more immediate housing and food resources may further help the homeless students. In addition, the district has a department dedicated to providing resources for homeless students in the event that the family discloses their homelessness to the district. Aid that the homeless support department provides includes transportation assistance to and from school and uniform assistance, and such resources remain with the student up to one year after permanent housing is established. It can also be noted that the school mandates a student dress code. School administration distributes dress code-compliant shirts if a student is in need. Somewhere, there is a disconnect in the intervention specialists' perceptions of the

resources available to their SWD. The open forum may reduce misconceptions or aid the adults in offering recommendations to administration for the SWD. It could also assist with getting more dress code and non-dress code clothes for the students. A simpler strategy to counter the effects of poverty is to follow the suggestions of Brown et al. (2011) and have the administrators monitor staff's high expectation practices for student achievement.

Recommendations for Further Study

In this case study, I investigated participants' perceptions of the academic and nonacademic issues of SWDs in a tutoring program. I provided inquiry into the perceptions that intervention specialists had about an RTI tutoring program that offered academic and behavioral support for SWD. Future research is needed in the subject area of SWD and RTI in high schools holistically, as this is an under-researched topic (King et al., 2012). The new push is from RTI to a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) (Chard, 2013; Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015; Sailor, 2015). This advanced tiered layer of supports includes research-based intervention, inclusionary practices of the new era of standards, and the universally designed learning (Sailor, 2015). Since the onset of MTSS, the state has promoted early literacy to assist with school climate and discipline, and to promote graduation (State Department of Education, 2017). As this new wave of tiered supports becomes mandated, more research will be needed to determine if MTSS is more beneficial than RTI and if it enhances the academic and behavioral competencies of SWD. SWD living in poverty or homelessness may benefit from future research to examine the educational barriers that poverty has on high school SWD.

Although I examined the perceptions of intervention specialists in this study, additional research is needed to examine specific PD and other resources needed for SWD teachers. Other necessary explorative inquiries could involve trying behavioral interventions and instructional strategies that would be beneficial in Tiers 1 and 2 for SWD (King et al., 2012). It is helpful for intervention specialists to understand the tiers of RTI and MTSS more thoroughly because it will assist with improving core instruction in the classroom.

Summary

Participants considered the RTI tutoring program to be successful in improving academic and social/emotional issues of SWD, and the out-of-class tutoring program to be effective. Intervention specialists perceived the program as an intervention that provides direct one-on-one support to SWD that cannot be intensively addressed within the classroom. The intervention specialists perceived the relationship between the teacher and student as being enhanced, and they perceived the SWD as being more comfortable and relaxed in the tutoring program. This relationship enabled the intervention specialist to assess, re-assess, and instruct upon identifying the specific skill sets needed for enhancement of the SWD.

My summary of RQ 1 is that the SWD lacked reading skills and had deficits that impeded them from achieving grade-level academic expectations. In RQ 2, the interviewees perceived the tutoring to benefit the SWD in social and emotional learning. Finally, with regards to RQ 3, upon my review of the documents, the tutoring program

was an overall success for SWD and their academic and behavioral needs. Overall, I learned that the tutoring program was beneficial for the academic and behavioral enrichment of SWD. In RQ 1, the intervention specialists perceived their tutoring strategies as beneficial. However, I am unsure that they had the opportunity to review the progress that was made with each individual SWD. For RQ 2, I learned that small group instruction is an opportunity for the student to connect with the teacher and for the teacher to gain a connection with the student. Through this connection, the student and the adult can discuss the social/emotional behavior strategies that the SWD could demonstrate across all school settings. I was unsure if the documents would connect to the lesson. Nevertheless, I was pleased that the lesson plans and the school data revealed moderate improvements for the SWD academically.

This case study unexpectedly revealed teachers' concerns about the impact that poverty has on educating high school students with disabilities. In my reflection after this research experience, I recognized the vulnerability and the compassion that the intervention specialists have for their students. The dedication that the intervention specialists have reaches far past their workday.

My biases stemmed from the fact that I already knew the interviewees, and I was not sure about their level of openness during the interviews. The intervention specialists are a very vocal group of professionals. I also expected that their responses would be more divergentfrom one another. Another bias was marginalizing the intervention specialists and expecting that their responses would focus only on the strength of the students; however, I learned that they were even more compassionate than I previously

thought them to be. Interviewing the participants gave me the opportunity to know the intervention specialists on a deeper and more individualized level. Fortunately, the one-on-one time spent with the interviewees will have a lasting impression on me because I admire their candidness and open responses.

In addition, intervention specialists' outspokenness during the discussions makes me want to provide more resources to them that will aid them in their service to students. It allowed me to see the teachers' vulnerabilities and their challenges in educating disadvantaged students. I thought that I could predict most of the answers to the interview questions due to our familiarity, yet, by putting aside my preconceived notions, I developed a greater understanding of the intervention specialists' work. As mentioned, there were few discrepancies in the interviews; the similarities in the responses impressed me and demonstrated the teachers' connectedness towards one another, efforts in lesson development, and overall teacher coordination of students. I hope that the insight gained from this research contributes to the growth and academic performance of SWD at the school and has influence beyond the scope of the research site.

Lastly, this empirical research also demonstrates a need for further exploration of the topic of special education, RTI, and the impact of homelessness/poverty on SWD school performance (Boutelle, 2009; King et al., 2012; Schaps, 2005). Interviewees perceived that students benefited from individualized instruction, and that a one-size model or framework is not the solution for educating SWD. Overall, intervention specialists thought that teaching reading strategies and developing a trusting relationship helped the overall academic and social/emotional success of the SWD. Finally, school

employees should consider the needs and develop strategies for students living in poverty and those who are homeless to support their progress in school. This work can be done in collaboration and partnerships with community and government agencies.

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Appendix A: Intervention Specialists' Interview Protocol

School Name_____ (optional) Identification Number _____

Please provide answers to the following questions to the best of your ability. The answers will be recorded to identify specific strategies that will aid teachers in collaboration with parents and other professionals when working with Students with Disabilities.

In-depth Questions

Academic Issues

1. Based on your experiences, what are academic issues that SWD face in the classroom?
2. Do they need extended time or small group instruction?
3. Explain activities at the tutoring program. What did a typical day look like?
4. What different categories of SWD came to the tutoring program?
5. How does the tutoring program work in conjunction with the RTI program in the classrooms?
6. How was this instruction different from that which you gave in the classroom?

Non-academic/Social/Emotional Issues

7. Based on your experiences, what are the social or emotional issues for SWD in school?
8. What kinds of social and emotional issues did the SWD have in the tutoring center**?**
9. Did the school address social and emotional issues that impeded the SWD's academic success? If so, how? If not, why not? The tutoring center?

Overall Reflections

10. Based on your experience, what was most challenging about the tutoring program for SWD?
11. In hindsight, what could be done in the future that would add value to this tutoring program?
12. What kind of documents did you keep to monitor the SWD's work?
13. What did you learn from the SWD's work at the tutoring center?
14. What impressions do you have from working with and observing SWD in the out-of-class setting?

Appendix B: Document Review Protocols

Interviewees 1 and 4

	Categories	Academic	Social/emotional	Overall Issue of SWD
Student samples	Assessment pre-test Work sample-Decoding (Vowels: phonemes, Diagraphs: sound-letter relationship, Comprehension)	Decoding Comprehension Language Functional and life skills Curriculum	Social issues	Low cognition Disability: ID Classroom type: MH/MD
Tutoring program lesson plans	N/A			

Interviewee 3

	Categories	Academic	Social/emotional	Overall Issue of SWD
Student samples	✓ Math Project ✓ ELA Poem and Essay	✓ Performs 3 grades or more below grade level in ELA and Math ✓ Has below-proficient state and district benchmark testing	n/a	Disability: SLD Classroom type: Cross Categorical single-class
Tutoring program lesson plans	Math Target: ✓ Algebra II- I can create equations and inequalities in one or more variables to solve problems ✓ I can create equations to show relationships between quantities ELA Writing Target: ✓ I can write an essay geared toward			

	producing clear ideas ✓ I can show evidence from informational texts to help support findings			
Other	✓ Teacher provides a syllabus to students ✓ Teacher keeps the individual class schedule for each student tutored so that she can collaborate with all of the student's teachers ✓ Teacher has the state testing schedule per student			

Interviewees 5 and 6

	Categories	Academic	Social/emotional	Overall Issue of SWD
Student samples	✓ Reading Skill Sheet (entertain, inform, persuade) ✓ Writing Web (graphic Organizer) ✓ Writing Sample ✓ Exit Ticket as a formal assessment	Reading and Math disability Performs below grade level proficiency as evidenced in district bench-mark tests	Social- Awareness of safety in his environment (fear of not being safe or being "locked up") Condition for Learning (CFL, which is tracked by the school and district to monitor each student's perceived feelings of being safe in school)	Disability: SLD Classroom type: Cross Categorical Single-Class
Tutoring program lesson plans	ELA 9 and 10 Target: ✓ I can analyze the structure of a text to explain how the author unfolds a series of ideas for effect ✓ I can understand why figurative language is used in different texts			

	✓ I can complete a graphic organizer to analyze author's structure of events in text			

Appendix C: Emergent Themes and Abbreviations

1. Phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and reading as a core weakness (PA, Voc, R).
2. Small group as a needed accommodation (SG).
3. 1:1/one on one/Individual instruction (1:1).
4. Peer pressure or negative relationships with peers (PR for peer relations).
5. Resources (Res).
6. Trusting relationships with intervention specialists (TIS).
7. Parental Support (PS).
8. Behavior problems (Beh).
9. SWD lacking confidence (LC).
10. SWD inventing coping mechanisms to shield insecurities or performing below abilities (CM).
11. Teacher-initiated strategy (TS).
12. SWD embarrassment (E).
13. Lack of confidence/fear (LC/F).
14. SWD need for consistency (NC).
15. Expectations of the intervention specialist (EIS), which can be low or high. This theme is similar to relationship with teacher.
16. Issues related to poverty (P).
17. Motivation (M).
18. Intervention specialists feeling like more than a teacher; professional duties or dual roles of a teacher (DR).