

A CASE STUDY ON EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEADER BEHAVIORS
THROUGHOUT RESPONSE-TO-INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION

by

Thomas Joel Strickland

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this two-case study was to describe the perceptions of middle school administrators and teachers concerning leader behaviors throughout the implementation of Response-to-Intervention (RTI) programs. The theory which guided this study is transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990) as it related directly to how administrators and teachers perceive leadership behaviors throughout the implementation of RTI programs. The importance of this study is significant to administrators, teachers, and other educational stakeholders as it is directly related to implementation of RTI programs in school, which aid in enhancing student performance. Participants included 2 administrators and 10 teachers who are employed at two public middle schools in Georgia. Photocopying of related program documents with permission, detailed note-taking during semi-structured interviews and focus groups, digital recording and transcription, along with maintaining a chain of evidence were methods used for data collection. Direct interpretation, pattern analysis, cross-referencing of documents and participant responses, and cross-case synthesis were utilized as data analysis methods. The results of the case study revealed perceptions that the importance of consistent and specific RTI communication throughout the implementation process cannot be underestimated when administrators are attempting to implement a school-wide program with numerous intangible and tangible components. Further qualitative studies that examine the impact of the application of transformational leadership characteristics affects on RTI program success are recommended in order for a systematic training approach to be developed for school leaders.

Keywords: administrator perceptions, behaviorism, case study, leadership behaviors, Response-to-Intervention implementation, teacher perceptions, transformational leadership

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List of Abbreviations

Below is a list of abbreviations that are used within this case study manuscript.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)

Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

Organizational Description Questionnaire (ODQ)

Response-to-Intervention (RTI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In recent years, education reform efforts to implement a system wide, problem solving process to ensure that all students are receiving the services they need to be successful has placed much responsibility on teachers to incorporate non-traditional teaching strategies (Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez, & Moore, 2014). Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act) was passed into legislation in order to ensure the educational needs of handicapped children in public schools were being met, protect the rights of handicapped children and their parents, assist state and local governments, and assess the effectiveness of the efforts to educate handicapped children (Smith, 2005). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) required schools to initiate transition planning and behavior intervention plans for students with behavior problems (Smith, 2005). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 was another reauthorization of the law that allowed for early responsiveness to intervention practices to be used as a method for identifying specific learning disabilities (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012) and created a window for educational reform due to the implementation of what became known as Responsiveness to Intervention (RTI) (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012; IDEA, 2004). Because of the uncertainty about how and to what extent comprehensive RTI models are actually being implemented continue to ask many questions about effective implementation practices (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Hauserman and Stick (2013) recommended additional qualitative studies on perceptions of current principals. School leaders considering this recommendation should reflectively note teachers' perceptions of their leadership behaviors and how those qualities could be applied to leading a school faculty through the implementation of a

school-specific, comprehensive RTI program for the purpose of enhancing student achievement (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014).

This chapter serves as an introduction to the proposed two case study on administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors throughout the implementation of RTI programs in middle schools. This case study does incorporate two specific middle schools and will be referred to as a two case study (Yin, 2014). Middle schools are defined as schools serving students in grades six, seven, and eight for this two-case study. Subsections included within this introduction are the background, situation to self, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, research plan, and delimitations and limitations. Definitions of related terms and a summary are provided at the end of the chapter to ensure clarity for the reader.

Background

In a historical context, responsiveness to intervention or instruction became an emerging practice in 2003 and became known as Response-to-Intervention (RTI) (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). All 50 states have adopted a RTI framework but are at various stages in providing guidance to local districts (Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013). Specific learning disability (SLD) was initially included as a category for disabilities in 1977 (Berkley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). Since 1977, SLD diagnoses have increased over 200%, causing concern about the possibility of misdiagnoses (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003). Bradley et al. (2005) noted that many students go unidentified until they reach secondary grades leaving them to struggle academically for several years. In essence, RTI is a framework that ensures students receive empirically based, high quality instruction (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

Early intervention models for students were incorporated into IDEA (2004), initiating states' departments of education to focus on school districts' implementation of the RTI process as an alternate method for special services referrals (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). According to Isbell and Szabo (2014), the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 was intended to ensure the use of research-based instructional strategies and improve language skills as a preventive measure taken against the over-identification of specific learning disabilities. Since 2004, the RTI framework has gained supporters and critics as teachers and administrators have identified benefits and barriers to implementation (Isbell & Szabo, 2014).

In recent years, many middle school administrators have attempted to implement RTI programs in their schools or are considering the need of such a program with intentions of helping struggling learners. King, Lemons, and Hill (2012) discovered that little empirical research had been conducted about RTI implementation at the secondary level. However, several notable studies on RTI program effectiveness in middle schools provide salient data and insights for current middle school administrators and lead teachers who are considering implementation of a comprehensive RTI program (Dulaney, 2012; Fagella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011; Prewett et al., 2012; Vaughn et al., 2010).

Isbell and Szabo (2014) emphasized the importance of administrative leadership to the RTI process and instructional change at the high school level. Linking effective leadership behaviors to RTI program implementation is essential to this proposed case study in order to ground the research in established theory, illustrate the significance of the study, and expand the practical application of transformational leadership theory and behaviorism to RTI implementation. The literature base is currently lacking case studies that focus on middle school

administrators' and teachers' perceptions about RTI program implementation (Dulaney, 2012; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Isbell & Szabo, 2014; Prewett et al., 2012; Werts & Carpenter, 2013).

Increasing the scope of knowledge regarding RTI by describing and investigating how administrators' and teachers' perceptions can influence effective leadership behaviors throughout RTI program implementation can fill an existing gap in RTI research as well as connect the theories of behaviorism and transformational leadership (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010; King, Lemons, & Hill, 2012). Hauserman and Stick (2013) outlined the importance of the application of transformational leadership theory to principals' behaviors in the school building. Allen (2007) linked behaviorism to leadership development and adult learning theory and suggested that the theories could be applied to developing interventions and environments that are conducive to learning. Transformational leadership theory and behaviorism are two distinct theories that form a conceptual framework with current RTI research for investigating and understanding educators' perceptions of leader behaviors throughout RTI program implementation in middle schools.

Situation to Self

My experience as an educator and interaction with other educators in Georgia has led me to form subjective meanings in an effort to understand the varying nature of views (Creswell, 2013) about leadership behaviors and RTI implementation. As a public school administrator at the middle school level, I am always looking for ways to promote the success of students and teachers. Throughout the RTI implementation process at the target school, the school leadership team sought various ways to provide teachers with resources in the restructuring of the school day to focus on the school-wide RTI plan. In addition, the leadership team changed the school's problem-solving process for struggling learners. As a result of this process, I began to consider

many behaviors of administrators, teachers, and students that became contingent upon the reinforcement of the new conditions in place. The theoretical explanation concerning interactions and behaviors among administrators and teachers is that a certain set of antecedent circumstances are present, a new stimulus is introduced into the environment, and a reinforcing consequence is produced (Skinner, 1969). I also considered the transformational leadership behaviors administrators exhibited throughout the implementation, including charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass, 1990). Although there is a personal and intrinsic element of perception involved in this case study, it will be considered collective as themes and patterns are recognized to allow for a degree of generalizability and transferability (Stake, 1995).

The proposed two case study seeks to investigate and describe administrators' and teachers' perceptions concerning leadership behaviors in conjunction with implementation of comprehensive RTI programs in Georgia middle schools. Examining educators' perceptions of leadership behaviors throughout RTI implementation requires a reliance upon the participants' views of situations (Creswell, 2013), thus defining social constructivism as the interpretive framework under an ontological philosophical assumption as being utilized for this study. Implications for this paradigm will be in the guidance of reporting of the various perceptions as patterns and themes emerge from the data that is collected and analyzed (Creswell, 2013). Linking transformational leadership theory, behaviorism, and RTI research will allow me to form a conceptual framework from which to investigate the educators' perceptions about leader behaviors throughout RTI implementation (Bass, 1990; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Skinner, 1969).

Problem Statement

The problem is the lack of empirical evidence provided from RTI case study research investigating middle school administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors throughout implementation of RTI programs. Qualitative case studies using purposive selection and emphasize school principals' transformational leadership behaviors should be conducted (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Few studies involving perceptions or reflexive communication from middle school or secondary teachers have been conducted regarding RTI implementation (Isbell & Szabo, 2014). Dulaney (2012) supported this claim by recommending future investigations on the feasibility and sustainability of RTI programs in secondary schools. Researchers have recognized that middle schools have started to implement various RTI models based on elementary school models and that further research on educator perceptions about RTI implementation should be conducted (Prewett et al., 2012). Werts and Carpenter (2013) also recommended future research to investigate the perceptions of those involved in the RTI process, including administrators and general education teachers. This two-case study will address the nature of the problem by increasing the scope of knowledge about descriptions of administrators' and teachers' perceptions concerning effective leadership throughout the implementation of RTI programs in middle schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this two-case study is to describe the perceptions of middle school administrators and lead teachers about leader behaviors throughout the implementation of comprehensive RTI programs at two middle schools. Castro-Villarreal et al. (2014) defined perceptions of middle school administrators and lead teachers who have implemented comprehensive RTI programs will be generally defined as their thoughts, ideas, understandings,

and attitudes. Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, and Cardearellia (2010) included descriptions of school change and plausible causes of program progress as a part of educator perceptions about RTI implementation. The implementation of RTI programs will be generally defined as restructuring the school day to operate within Georgia's RTI framework, using systematic procedures to ensure best practices concerning Georgia's RTI framework, and providing teachers with the necessary supports needed to make data-driven decisions within an RTI framework (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005).

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study section explains the theoretical, practical, and empirical relevance of this study to the existing body of literature regarding leadership behaviors and the implementation of comprehensive RTI programs in middle schools.

The two-case study will provide middle school administrators and lead teachers with practical examples of key leadership behaviors that are perceived by colleagues as necessary for the successful implementation of a comprehensive RTI program in a middle school setting. Perceptions about complex elements of the implementation process that require extensive planning and less significant elements will potentially be revealed as administrators and teachers respond to interview questions. The study will also provide reliable qualitative data for middle school administrators operating under Georgia's RTI model (<http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/Response-to-Intervention.aspx>) to consider for creating a feasible and sustainable RTI program tailored to meet the schools' and districts' needs. Classroom teachers will be able to examine the results of this study and understand the potential benefits and challenges to the implementation of a comprehensive RTI program for their students' success. State level officials in education could gain key insights

about leadership and RTI program implementation that will aid in statewide educational reform initiatives.

This study will be grounded in transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990) and behaviorism (Skinner, 1969). Linking these two theories in a conceptual framework will illustrate the significance of leadership behaviors throughout the RTI implementation process (Brownell et al., 2010). This connection of the theories will expand the scope of knowledge concerning literature about successful secondary RTI implementation, thus providing empirical contributions to the current body of research. Teachers, administrators, and state education officials will find this study significant to RTI program implementation and leadership training prior to program implementation.

Research Questions

Central Question

What are middle school administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors throughout the implementation of RTI programs?

The central research question is broad, focusing on the specific purpose of this case study by supplying both substance and form (Yin, 2014), which is to collect descriptions of middle grades educators' perceptions about leader behaviors throughout the RTI implementation process.

Subquestions

1. What are middle grades administrators' and teachers' perceptions about the types of leadership behaviors considered as important prior to implementing a new school-wide RTI program?

2. What are middle administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors during program implementation?

Subquestions 1 and 2 are exploratory in nature (Yin, 2014) and seek to gain descriptions about educator perceptions concerning the requisite leadership behaviors that support RTI program implementation at the classroom level prior to implementation and during initial implementation. Both questions align with research recommendations for future studies (Dulaney, 2012; Isbell & Szabo, 2014; Werts & Carpenter, 2013).

3. How do leadership behaviors of middle school administrators after implementation influence perceptions about RTI program sustainability?

Subquestion 3 emphasizes the need to understand how leader behaviors influence teacher perceptions about the sustainability of the program, which is appropriate for a case study (Yin, 2014). In the context of behaviorism (Skinner, 1969), it is logical to assume teachers' perception of a program based on leader behaviors, such as observations of lessons at each tier of intervention, may greatly influence the degree of fidelity they apply to implementation which leads to program sustainability (Berkeley et al., 2009). Subquestion 3 also specifically targets gathering information about implementation at middle schools, which also aligns with recommendations for future research due to the lack of research regarding RTI implementation at the secondary level (e.g. Dulaney, 2012; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Isbell & Szabo, 2014; Werts & Carpenter, 2013).

Research Plan

A qualitative approach , specifically a two case study (Yin, 2014), will be used in this study to describe the perceptions of middle school administrators and teachers who have contributed to the implementation of comprehensive RTI programs at two middle schools. A

two-case study design will be used for this proposed study, which is a common design used for examining school innovations (Yin, 2014). Using the collective case study (Stake, 1995) or multiple case study design for this plan will present a more compelling case study (Yin, 2014) for describing perception data and answering research questions about leadership behaviors and RTI program implementation. Using this design, specifically a two-case study (Yin, 2014), will allow the researcher to conduct a cross-case synthesis and to identify emerging themes or patterns. The researcher will utilize purposeful sampling procedures and include school administrators and teachers from two schools. The proposed methods for collecting data are interviews, focus groups, and examination of related documents for data triangulation (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The data will be analyzed using methods proposed by Yin (2014) that include direct interpretation that relies on theoretical prepositions for the interpretation for emerging themes, pattern matching, and cross-case synthesis. Using standard procedures or protocols will lead to a more accurate reporting of data (Stake, 1995).

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations for this study include purposive sampling of schools, selection of participants, controlled settings, and a topic chosen by the researcher. Purposive sampling of middle schools who have implemented a RTI program which includes a block time will be used. In addition, participants must have implemented a comprehensive RTI program in their school setting. Use of school conference rooms for interviews and focus groups will provide the opportunity for honest participant feedback, researcher note-taking, and accurate digital recording for transcription all provide a controlled setting. Using a semi-structured interview format will ensure that research questions are answered by individuals and focus groups while

still providing the opportunity for elaboration on the part of the participants (Creswell, 2013, Yin, 2014).

Limitations include the lack of statistical generalizability, the potential for biased responses, the potential for dishonest responses, and a lack of maximum variation (Creswell, 2013) between cases due to the small sampling field. One limitation is that the study is too small, including only two schools, to generalize from a quantitative standpoint but has the opportunity for qualitative analytic generalizability (Yin, 2014). Limitations involving response bias such as administrators and teachers responding in an overly positive manner concerning their perceptions about RTI program implementation is another limitation to the study. In addition, principals will select lead teachers or department chairs potentially resulting in biases in the perception data being revealed. These limitations cannot be controlled by the researcher.

Definitions

All terms that are pertinent to this case study are listed and defined below. Each definition is supported by the appropriate literature.

1. *Behaviorism* – the philosophy of the relationship between behavior analysis and neuroscience (Skinner, 1969).
2. *Chain of evidence* – linking evidence to the original research question throughout the data collection process by using guidelines of case study protocol in order to strengthen the reliability of research procedures (Yin, 2014).
3. *Construct validity* – the degree of accuracy with which a case reflects the concepts studied (Yin, 2014).
4. *Cross-case synthesis* – compiling data from more than one case and examining the results in order to observe emerging themes and patterns (Yin, 2014).

5. *Focus group* – a group counterpart to a single interview that may be used to obtain qualitative data for research purposes (Yin, 2014)
6. *Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004)* – legislation that permitted educators to use responsiveness-to-intervention (RTI) as an alternative system of special education referral for struggling student (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; IDEA, 2004).
7. *Multi-factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ)* – a questionnaire that evaluates the three distinct leadership styles of transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez faire leadership (Bass, 1990).
8. *Multiple case study* – the use of two or more cases in a case study, sometimes referred to as a two-case study or a collective case study (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014)
9. *Organizational Description Questionnaire* – a questionnaire used to determine perception data in order to characterize organizational culture as high-contrast culture, coasting culture, predominately to moderately contractual culture, pedestrian culture, or garbage-can culture depending on the degree of transformational qualities that were reported (Bass & Avolio, 1993).
10. *Pattern matching* – a method of analyzing case study data by comparing patterns found in the data with patterns identified prior to data collection (Yin, 2014).
11. *Pilot case study* – a preliminary case study used to refine protocols and procedures prior to a formal case study (Yin, 2014).
12. *Probe* – a brief, standardized achievement test prescribed periodically in the area of weakness to a student targeted for RTI due to low performance on a universal screening assessment (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005).

13. *Progress monitoring* – the measurement of progress using short assessments, usually referred to as probes, over a period of time to determine if a student is benefitting from an intervention session (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).
14. *Radical behaviorism* – Radical behaviorism is the branch of behaviorism that seeks to casually explain, predict, and theorize what causes responses or behaviors. (Skinner, 1945; 1953; 1957; 1969; 1972; 1978)
15. *Research-based intervention* – a scripted method or strategy, which may be referred to as a standard tutoring protocol, that has been scientifically validated (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005)
16. *Response-to-Intervention (RTI)* – a tiered student assessment and response model used to identify reasons for learning difficulties and find solutions to resolve the difficulty for the learner by using researched-based intervention sessions (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006).
17. *Servant leadership* – a style of leadership when the leader sets the example for the followers by serving others; a leadership style that is a way of life based an internal motivation of serving others (Greenleaf, 1977).
18. *Transactional leadership* – a leadership style where individuals contracts exchange of rewards for effort and good performance (Contingent Reward), takes corrective action when deviation from rules is noticed (Management by Exception) (Bass, 1990).
19. *Transformational leadership* – a leadership style that is employed by individuals who exhibit the characteristics and behaviors associated with charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass, 1990).

20. *Triangulation of data* – the use of multiple sources of data to confirm the consistency of a finding (Yin, 2014).
21. *Universal screening* – a brief assessment that emphasizes certain skills; used to identify skill levels in reading, math, writing, and behavior when applied in the context of an RTI model (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of existing literature concerning effective leadership behaviors and the implementation of RTI program models, including qualitative studies that emphasize perception data of administrators and teachers. A background of leadership theory, behaviorism, and RTI was discussed in the context of this study and under the paradigm of social constructivism. The problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, and research questions were noted. Personal inquiry concerning this study was discussed along with a general description and justification for the proposed research plan approach, design, and methods that included delimitations and limitations in order to address case boundaries and weaknesses. Definitions of terms that are significant to this case study were listed to provide further clarification for the reader.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This review of literature provides a conceptual framework for the proposed two case study on administrators' and teachers' perceptions of leadership behaviors throughout RTI program implementation that can be used to recognize themes and practical applications that are grounded in research (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990; 1995; 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1993) and behaviorism (Skinner, 1945; 1953; 1957; 1969; 1972; 1978) are described and discussed. A conceptual framework linking these two theories is needed in order to ground this case study and link the topics of leadership behaviors in schools to the implementation of comprehensive RTI programs. The conceptual framework serves as a foundation for thematic interpretation of the data collected throughout this case study.

Transformational leadership theory will be used to examine the perception data that is collected.

Literature concerning characteristics and behaviors of administrators in the field of education links transformational leadership theory to practice (Bass, 1990; Brownell et al., 2010; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; McCarley, Peters, & Decman, 2014; Nir & Hameiri, 2014). The body of literature concerning the perceptions of RTI implementation provides a knowledge base concerning the development and progression of RTI use in schools over time in both qualitative and quantitative contexts (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Tran et al., 2011). A review of current case studies (Dulaney, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2011; Griffin & Hattendorf, 2010; Orosco & Klinger, 2010; Robinson, Bursuck, & Sinclair, 2013; Summey & Lashley, 2014) concerning RTI implementation provides a context for this study and demonstrates the need for an emphasis on the relationship between leadership behaviors, RTI implementation, and program sustainability. Analyzing literature in the categories of leadership in education, RTI frameworks

and implementation, perception data studies on leadership and RTI implementation, and other related research provides a synthesis of the literature base and reveals gaps in the literature. Finally, the research is summarized to demonstrate the logical need for data collected from this case study based on administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors throughout RTI implementation at the middle school level to be examined using transformational leadership theory.

Conceptual Framework

This intrinsic interest (Stake, 1995) or motivation is what drives educational leaders to investigate cases to help students and teachers succeed. Transformational leadership theory, when applied with moral foundations, can greatly impact classroom performance and school processes (Bass, 1998). Transformational leaders are described as using a primary style of leadership while exhibiting the characteristics of charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1990). Bass (1990) compared the transformational leadership characteristics to the characteristics of a transactional leader, which included managing based on a contingent reward, by active and passive exceptions, and avoidance of decision making. Bass (1990) urged leaders to make a change from transactional to transformational leadership, especially in climates of uncertainty and organizational change.

When leaders embark on a mission to change organizational structure and culture, transformational leadership characteristics should be exhibited (Bass, 1990). However, specific leadership behaviors that are noticed by employees result in the acceptance or rejection of the organizational change since leaders and followers in a transformational culture share mutual interests and are interdependent (Bass & Avolio, 1993). In other situations, leaders must use some type of transactional stimulus to provoke a desired response and then reinforce the desired

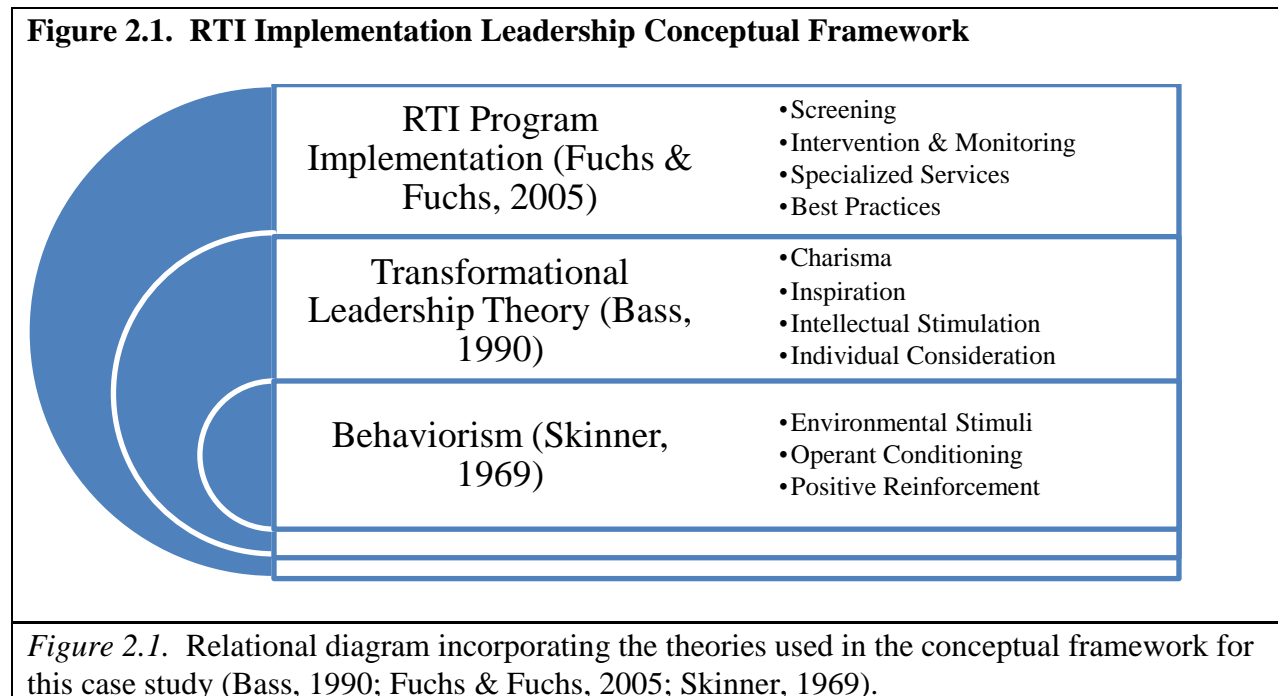
change in behavior that they desire to see from their employees (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Skinner, 1945). Radical behaviorism (Skinner, 1945; 1953; 1957; 1969; 1972; 1978) is the branch of behaviorism that seeks to casually explain, predict, and theorize what causes responses or behaviors. Moore (2011) described behaviorism as a philosophy supporting the science of behavior. Bass (1995) explained his study of behaviorism, contingent rewards, and reinforcements and how he considered contingent reinforcement to be one element in the leadership continuum.

By forming the link between transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990) and radical behaviorism (Skinner, 1969), it is logical to predict that the antecedent behaviors of the leader will result in general behaviors of the employees or their responses, and can be reinforced or deterred through praise, transaction, or reward as Bass and Avolio (1993) noted in the context of transformational culture. Bass & Avolio (1993) suggested that norms of a transformational culture cover a wide range of behaviors that individuals continually adapt to in order to assimilate into the culture when internal and external changes. Therefore, this conceptual framework that applies transformational leadership theory and radical behaviorism will be used to guide this case study on administrators' and teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors throughout the RTI implementation process because RTI is linked to both theories (Brownell et al., 2010).

Educational researchers and teachers began utilizing concepts from behaviorism such as measuring treatments and responses that became known as RTI in an effort to measure student responsiveness to a particular intervention (Brownell et al., 2010). Students were presented with an intervention, or a standardized method of learning, over a specific period of time while their progress was quantified through their responses. Using a set of standard protocol procedures

provided reliable and valid results that could be used as data in the problem-solving process for struggling learners or as a feasible alternative method for identification of specific learning disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004) was enacted as legislation that allowed for early responsiveness to intervention practices and used as a method for identifying specific learning disabilities (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012), and it provided a window for educational reform due to the implementation of what became known as RTI. Numerous researchers provide suggested methods for RTI implementation (Dulaney, 2012; Fagella-Ruby & Wardwell, 2011; Fisher & Frey, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2004; Higgins-Averill, Baker, & Rinaldi, 2014), however, there is a definite gap in the literature concerning the specific actions, or application of behaviorism elements, that administrators utilize throughout RTI program implementation at the secondary level (Dulaney, 2012; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Isbell & Szabo, 2014; Werts & Carpenter, 2013).

Transformational leadership theory, behaviorism, and RTI literature must be reviewed and synthesized in order ground the study in an accepted conceptual framework. Using validated and accepted theories strengthens the argument for why this case study needs to be added to further the application of the theories and add to the existing body of RTI research (Yin, 2014).



Transformation Leadership Theory

Excellence in leadership involves engaging employees in looking beyond their own self-interests as part of achieving the vision that is communicated by the leader for the good of the organization (Bass, 1990). Contrary to this idea of selflessness, transactional leadership leads to mediocre employee performance and results (Bass, 1990). Depending on the variables of applied transformational or transactional leadership, Bass (1990) suggested that there are wide-ranging implications for employee recruitment, selection, promotion, transfer, and retention exists.

Bass stated, “Transformational leadership can be learned, and it can and should be the subject of management training and development.” (Bass, 1990, p. 27). Bass (1990) underscored the importance of moving from transactional leadership behaviors to transformational leadership behaviors while Wofford and Goodwin (1994) concluded that the training of managers should include a framework to help leaders recognize that they need to examine the coexistence of both

types of behaviors and how they should be applied for each situation that arises. These issues need to be taken into consideration when analyzing thematic patterns in perceptions of leadership behaviors in schools throughout this case study (Yin, 2014).

Transformational leadership and organizational culture. Transformational leadership characteristics such as charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration can lead to raising organizational expectations (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Bass and Avolio argued that shifting from a transactional culture to a transformational culture would help the organization develop a true sense of purpose by aligning interests in a coordinated effort to achieve the organization's vision. Bass and Avolio used perception data from the Organizational Description Questionnaire (ODQ) to characterize organizational culture as high-contrast, coasting, predominately to moderately contractual, pedestrian, or garbage-can depending on the degree of transformational qualities that were reported. The purpose of the study was to investigate a parallel connection between organizational culture and leadership behaviors (Bass & Avolio, 1993). This is consistent with the logical understanding that a person can learn almost everything about a leader's role by speaking with the followers within the organization (Avolio, 1999). When considering transformational leadership characteristics and organizational culture, it becomes obvious that transformational leadership has the potential to significantly impact classroom and school processes in a positive fashion (Bass, 1998). It is relevant and necessary to consider the perceptions of administrators and teachers about leadership behaviors throughout school-wide change involving the implementation of an RTI program that restructures the school day and methodology of the general problem-solving processes of educators within the specific schools for this study.

The relationship between leader attributes and behaviors. “Transformational leaders can be directive or participative, authoritarian, or democratic.” (Bass, 1995, 474). Bass (1995) concluded that transformational leaders behaved in a manner that could initiate followers to exceed the set level of expectation. The MLQ was criticized early in the development stage of the theory because it was perceived to measure more attributes than behaviors (Bass, 1995). In contrast, Bass (1995) also argued that the section of the MLQ pertaining to charisma measured attributes while the other three sections measured behaviors.

In a careful analysis of transformational leadership research, it is apparent that there is a need for observers to differentiate between perceptions of behavior and the behaviors that are actually enacted by the leader (Hoffman & Lord, 2013). Antonakis & Home (2014) indicated that the full range of leadership theory should be more comprehensive. Leadership measurement and categorization has the potential to help researchers gain a better understanding (Hoffman & Lord, 2013) of attributes and behaviors observed in leadership activities. Hoffman and Lord (2013) developed a taxonomy of event dimensions to help measure, describe, and understand the various dimensions of leader behaviors such as micro and macro, static and dynamic, familiar and novel, extraordinary and ordinary, positive and negative, relevant and irrelevant, as well as past, present, and future.

The implications for the proposed two-case study will be to look for emerging patterns in interview and focus group commentary that distinguish between attributes, behaviors, and leadership styles for given situations within the RTI implementation process and framework. By using transformational leadership theory to examine and describe perception data collected in this two-case study, the existing body of qualitative literature will have further and more specific practical applications for school administrators.

Leadership training and leadership behaviors. Participating in conferences, various courses, and trainings on how to become better leaders are a means to training leaders in all professions, including education (Urlick & Bowers, 2014; Wang et al., 2011). While transformational leadership is not noted as uncommon (Bass, 1990), such sessions may help develop leader behaviors such as charisma and individual consideration. For example, a manager who is trained on applying individual consideration behaviors decides to take notes as he speaks to individual employees when seeking input on procedural improvements within the facility. The manager's participation in the training led to implementation the transformational leadership behavior of individual consideration. The next behavioral assumption is that the employees feel like the leader provided individual consideration as he or she listened and took notes as a form of non-verbal communication to them that their input is valued. In turn, employees who feel like the leader listens and takes their suggestions seriously change their work ethic from mediocre to superior. Simple and purposeful interactions with followers are behaviors that may influence covert and overt reactions from followers such as increased intrinsic motivation or improved efficiency at completing daily tasks (Wofford & Goodwin, 1994). According to Camps and Rodriguez (2011), the positive correlation between transformational leadership dimensions and follower task performance is viable evidence of the importance of transformational leadership theory, therefore, justifying organizational investment in transformational leadership training.

Wang et al. (2011) noted that transformational leadership training was relevant and important for organizations emphasizing the importance of exhibiting transformational leadership behaviors when collaborating among employees. This is the important link between training to be a transformational leader and application of practice. Once the leader's training

becomes practice, employees' perceptions of the leader begin to change. Exploring the relationship between leader attributes and behaviors in a longitudinal training method has a practical implication of supporting and developing leaders while avoiding negative psychological outcomes for the leaders (Mason et al., 2014).

Exploring similarities between transformational and servant leadership. The morality of true transformational leadership must be grounded in foundational moral beliefs (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) unquestionably stated that transformational leadership literature is linked to and well-related to the Western ethical agenda, liberty, justice, and values leaders and followers collectively pursue. With this in mind, it is suitable to note that servant leadership is a viable theory (Parris & Peachey, 2012) that may be an applicable part of transformational leaders' attributes and behaviors. However, servant leadership is very broad in context and not well-defined. An analysis of empirical studies reveals a lack of consensus on the definition of servant leadership (Parris & Peachey, 2012). Coulter (2003) noted several historical Christian leaders such as Jesus Christ, Peter, Paul, and David who had unique personal experiences that prepared them for leadership roles they fulfilled later in their lives. Banke et al. (2012) found that the experiential learning of Christian school leaders helped them grow spiritually, develop a sense of purpose, and create a vision. Coulter (2003) suggested that communicating the purpose of the vision, development of clear and elevating goals, support of team members, competence, a standard of excellence, and principled leadership are behaviors that a servant leader exhibits. The primary goal of servant leadership is to make sure that the needs of others are being met (Greenleaf, 1970), a primary tenant of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990).

Transformational leadership and servant leadership styles have similar attributes such as individual consideration or meeting the needs of others, sharing a vision, having charisma, and communication of the ethical values embedded within the leader's vision (Bass, 1990; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Coutler, 2003; Greenleaf, 1970). School leaders perceive their personal foundational beliefs should be intentionally applied to their leadership style and active duties (Gibson, 2014). Intentional, influential, and appropriate professional expressions and behaviors on the part of school leaders (Gibson, 2014) through a change process, such as RTI program implementation, may affect morale of the faculty in a positive manner.

Application of transformational leadership to school leadership. Applying transformational leadership theory directly to the field of education, Geijsel et al. (2003) concluded that vision building by a school leader resulted in intellectual stimulation of teachers, a higher commitment level of teachers to school reform, and an elevated level of motivation. Leadership styles and behaviors, as well as good teaching styles require situational adaptation and individual consideration (Lorton et al., 2013). Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) claimed that transformational attributes are undeniably linked with moral and ethical behaviors. Balyer (2012) clearly linked principals' transformational leadership behaviors of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation to teachers' behaviors and creativity. Balyer inferred that the transformational leadership behavior affects the overall culture in areas of high expectations, consensus among faculty, and approaching how to reach group goals. Finally, Baylor (2012) also suggested that principals should receive transformational leadership training during college. Emphasizing the importance of leader behaviors in schools is relevant because it points to an application of transformational leadership theory as a component of school improvement along with the application of behaviorism theory

to leaders' antecedent behaviors, followers' contingent responses, and leaders' behaviors as reinforcements (Skinner, 1969) in order to implement and enhance RTI practices and procedures.

Transformational leadership theory has clearly informed the philosophy and behaviors of school leaders in the context of RTI implementation. Urick and Bowers (2014) expanded the application of transformational leadership to instructional and shared leadership noting that principals who display the associated behaviors promote greater student achievement. This proposed two-case study on administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leader behaviors throughout the RTI implementation process will expand current knowledge about the application of transformational leadership theory to RTI implementation, potentially leading to even greater student outcomes as a result applying transformational leadership theory to principals instructional leadership style throughout the RTI problem solving process.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism and the study of transformational leadership are inherently linked as a result of studying the behaviors of leaders and the environmental or cultural conditions that are established within any given workplace (Brownell et al., 2010). The two major behaviorism theorists are Watson (1913) and Skinner (1969). Watson (1913) focused on mechanical or external behaviors while Skinner (1969) emphasized behavior analysis. Moore (2011) noted that Skinner differed from Watson on the concept of operant behavior. Moore (2013) argued that radical behaviorism, which includes the emotions and thoughts of a person, is the exemplar view within the study of behaviorism.

In an effort to explain verbal behavior within the context of contingencies and reinforcements, Skinner (1945) analyzed multiple psychological terms. Skinner (1953) reasoned that human behavior was under the exclusive control of the environment in which the behavior is

reoccurring. The functional relationship between behavior and environment is complex and confusing (Skinner, 1957). Skinner (1957) argued that the reinforcing contingencies of any culture, specifically involving the effects of language on thought, impacted human behavior and response. A transformational leader may display a certain verbal behavior that leads to intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1990), in turn, provoking thought as a covert behavior (Skinner, 1953; 1957) in the mind of an employee.

Skinner (1969) explained much of human behavior in terms of neuroscience in an attempt to explain human thinking. For example, he compared the operations of a machine to human thinking (Skinner, 1969) in terms of environmental contingencies and reinforcement. Behaviors such as avoidance (Skinner, 1972) are explained as responses to negative reinforcements in a given environment. In an application to the learning or classroom environment, Skinner (1978) referred to a teacher as the operant in establishing learning conditions that prompts students to respond by learning. In other words, by strengthening the operant, it is more likely for the desired response to occur. Elements of behaviorism have contributed to the formation of RTI frameworks (Brownell et al., 2010) including environmental conditioning, treatment development, and student response analysis over time. Treatment application and student response analysis over time has become known as progress monitoring (Fuchs & Vaugh, 2012).

It is apparent that framework implementation includes major elements from both theories such as transformational leader behaviors and attributes along with treatments and responses for learners in the educational environment. Literature regarding RTI program implementation will be used in conjunction with transformational leadership theory and behaviorism in order to guide the focus of this case study. For example, O'Connor and Freeman (2012) reported that leadership, or the lack thereof, is discussed repeatedly among staff when the system or school is

engaged in RTI implementation. In turn, these leadership behaviors result in changing the conditions of the school culture and responses of teachers based on their perceptions in a similar manner to behaviorism contingency theory (Skinner, 1969). Being able to review the behaviors and conditions of a past circumstance will allow for the prediction of future behavior (Moore, 2013). Gathering various qualitative data such as administrator and teacher perceptions about the behaviors of school leaders is essential in gaining an understanding of the thought processes of school personnel and conditions during the RTI implementation process that lead them to certain responses (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Hauserman and Stick also suggested that follow-up qualitative research on how currently serving principals believe they act as leaders would be informative.

RTI Framework

Literature regarding RTI framework development and implementation (Averill, Baker, & Rinaldi, 2014; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012; Huges & Dexter, 2011; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003) is directly and indirectly related to the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory and behaviorism. Legislation passed in 2004 (IDEA, 2004) that allowed schools and their teachers to use RTI to replace IQ-achievement discrepancy for the purposes of identifying and qualifying students with learning disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Lenski, 2011). Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) created a manuscript outlining a blueprint for RTI implementation that included universal screenings for the general education student population, researched-based instructional practices that aligned content with curriculum standards in the general education classroom, and monitoring student responsiveness at each level of intervention. Lenski (2011) predicted that general education teachers would have to

significantly restructure how they teach and assess students in order for the potential of RTI to be maximized.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) prefer the implementation of a standard tutoring protocol method over a problem solving method in order to ensure the fidelity of intervention implementation and validity of student results. However, “Placing students with different reading needs in the same intervention has little chance of improving students’ achievement” (Lenski, 2011, p. 280). After implementation has occurred according to established guidelines, students may be successfully identified as having a learning disability by validation of dramatically inferior responses when results are compared to that of their peers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) emphasized that schools should decide on the number of tiers of intervention to use, how to target students for preventative intervention, what the intervention should look like or how it should be executed, how to classify student responses, and when to perform a comprehensive evaluation to determine qualification for special education services.

One of two RTI models, a problem-solving approach or a standard protocol approach, is usually followed in an effort to help students who are struggling academically and behaviorally (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Standard treatment and response measurement approaches have been found highly effective (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Problem-solving approaches rely heavily on student record-keeping maintenance (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) recommend utilizing a combination of these two approaches to standardize treatment for those students who need it and prevent other students from developing instructional gaps over time. Utilizing a well-defined, school-based team approach to implement key RTI elements (Nellis, 2012) as a part of an RTI program could maximize the potential of the framework and school-specific program.

Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, and Saunders (2009) stated that many states have not comprehensively implemented research-based interventions at each tier and do not have precise requirements for monitoring the fidelity of treatment intervention and student responses. It is also unclear how the consistency in RTI program implementation will be maintained from state to district and district to school (Berkeley et al., 2009). Hughes and Dexter (2011) reported that most research was conducted on RTI for programs and outcomes at the elementary level and that research in RTI program implementation should be characterized as emerging. Ongoing professional development, administrative support, teacher buy-in, and adequate teacher meeting time were noted as being necessary for successful program implementation (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

The relationship between successful RTI framework implementation with the application of behaviorism in education (Skinner, 1978; Brownell et al, 2010) is clearly focused on student outcomes. Emphasizing leadership behaviors in this case study shifts the focus onto school administrators where a theoretical framework including transformational leadership theory in education may be applied (Bass, 1990). Conceptualizing these three theoretical components forms a credible approach for data interpretation (Yin, 2014).

The Georgia Department of Education uses a pyramid of interventions that includes four tiers (<http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/Response-to-Intervention.aspx>). The pyramid of intervention is adapted from the three-tier model presented by Fuchs and Fuchs (2005). For this proposed study including participants from Georgia, it will be relevant to discuss Georgia's RTI model illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2.2 Georgia's RTI Pyramid of Interventions

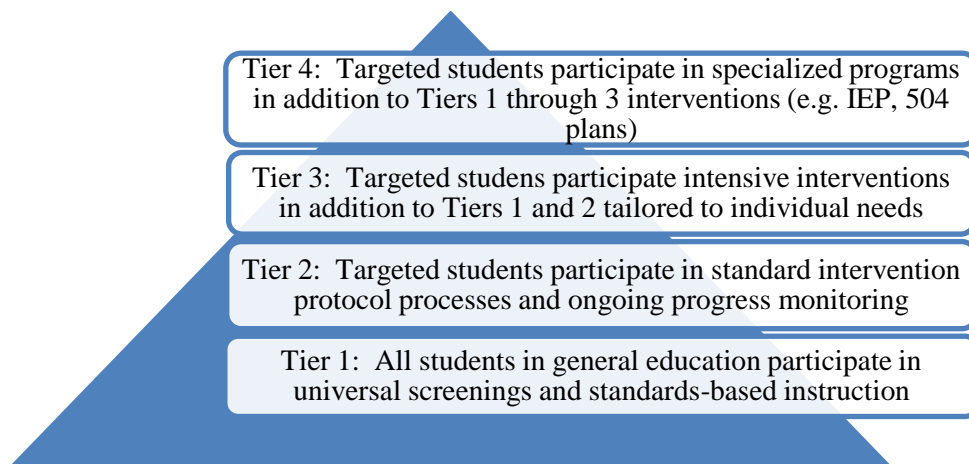


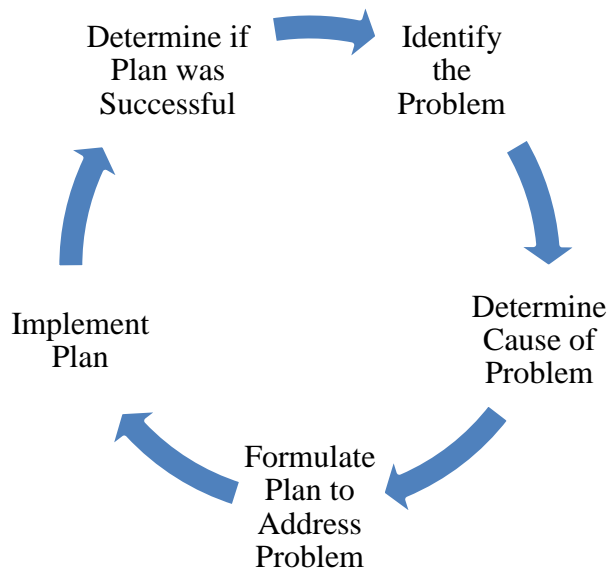
Figure 2.2. Adapted figure representing Georgia's Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions Graphic. Georgia Department of Education. (2015). Response to intervention: The Georgia student achievement pyramid of interventions. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/Response-to-Intervention.aspx>

Merging the standard protocol and problem solving RTI models.

The Georgia Department of Education endorsed using a blended approach when implementing a fully developed RTI program that utilizes student data teams and standard protocol interventions (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Most of the elements that Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) recommend align with Georgia's RTI framework (e.g. universal screenings, progress monitoring, fluid student movement between tiers). It is recommended that all students participate in a universal screening three times per year (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Data teams should then begin the school specific RTI problem-solving process as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 2.3. Georgia' Recommended Problem Solving Process for Each Tier of Intervention.

Figure 2.3. This graphic represents a summary of the RTI problem-solving process recommended by the Georgia Department of Education. Data team analyzes student assessment data to identify the specific weakness; data team attempts to logically determine the cause of the problem (e.g. curriculum, instructional, or student issue); data team formulates a plan (e.g. decide on appropriate research-based intervention and duration); data team implements the intervention (e.g. 30 minute intervention session in reading 3 times per week); data team evaluates the plan's effectiveness (e.g. evaluate results after intervention duration of 5 weeks). Georgia Department of Education. (2011). *Response to intervention: Georgia's student achievement pyramid of interventions.*



The problem-solving process illustrated in Figure 3 should be followed at each Tier. For example, students who do not meet cut scores on the universal screening, standardized test in reading, and have failing grades, are assigned to a flexible group session that is scheduled during the school's block time for interventions. The students then receive specific interventions for five weeks in a Tier 2. Their progress is monitored through the administration of specific probes that align with the specifically assigned interventions. Progress is charted for review at the end of the five week monitoring period. If the students improve and meet the cut score on the probes administered, their learning difficulty or instructional gap is considered resolved. At this point in the process, the students are no longer be required to have the intervention session.

If the problem persists for specific students, the data team schedules an RTI meeting with the parents, explains the process, and changes the intervention (Averill et al., 2014; Dulaney 2012). If the problem persists for 9 weeks after interventions have been implemented with fidelity, more frequent sessions are considered and the student is placed at Tier 3 status at the next RTI meeting under the consultation of the data team, parents, and school psychologist as part of the plan for collaboratively evaluating the data (Averill et al., 2014). The student's progress is monitored for 12 additional weeks at Tier 3 status with various interventions dependent upon the student's performance (Averill et al., 2014; Dulaney 2012). At the beginning of this 12 week period, parents may give permission for vision, hearing, and academic screenings to exclude various problems that may affect learning as a result of further student support team collaborative decisions (Averill et al., 2014). If adequate progress is not demonstrated at the end of the 12 week period, the data team would then consult with the parents and school psychologist regarding a comprehensive evaluation for learning disabilities in a collaborative decision-making effort (Averill et al., 2014). If the student is evaluated and is determined eligible, the parents can accept or decline special services.

Each district or individual school has various specific requirements pertaining to the RTI process. In order to build teacher capacity for implementing the process, the school leader must be able to demonstrate transformational leadership qualities to reinforce the implementation process and establish an environment that prompts consistent RTI process implementation in the classroom.

Related Literature

Literature regarding teacher and leader perceptions about the RTI framework and its implementation, administrator and teacher perceptions about school leaders' behaviors, RTI

blueprints and relevant case studies of implementation, and the influence of leadership in education is directly related to this case study on administrators' and teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors throughout the RTI implementation process (Lenski, 2011; McDaniel, Albritton, & Roach, 2013; Nellis, 2012; Stuebing, Fletcher, & Hughes, 2012; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003). When the existing related literature in these areas is interpreted in conjunction with the conceptual framework of this case study, the notion that leader behaviors greatly influence strategic planning, personnel responses, and RTI program success is supported (Griffin & Hattendorf, 2010). The gap in the literature is revealed as lack of research regarding administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors throughout the RTI program implementation process in middle schools (Dulaney, 2012; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Isbell & Szabo, 2014; Prewett et al., 2012; Werts & Carpenter, 2013). By implementing this case study, educational stakeholders will be able to potentially affect student achievement outcomes through establishing the necessary environmental conditions for successful RTI program implementation.

Leadership in Education

There is a national concern over the need for quality principals who have the ability to transform schools (Cray & Weiler, 2011). Transformational leadership theory is desired by teachers and applied by administrators within the field of education (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Hauserman, Ivankova, & Stick, 2013; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Kirby, Paradise, & King, 2014; McCarley et al., 2014; Urick & Bowers, 2014; Yang, 2014). Nir and Hameiri (2014) suggested that a blend of transformational and pedagogical qualities promote school effectiveness the most.

Multiple sources (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Hipp & Bredeson, 1995; Stone-Johnson, 2013) reported findings that

support the importance of the influence of the school principal on teacher professional performance. Various elements of leadership attributes and behaviors that positively influence school climate and teachers' perceptions are described as responsible, ethical, moral, spiritual, equitable, and visionary (Banke et al., 2012; Ehrich, Harris, Klenowski, Smeed, & Spina, 2015; Gibson, 2014; Paredes-Scribner, Crow, Lopez, & Murtadha, 2011). The existing gap in the literature concerning leadership in education, as applied to this case study, is that literature reporting perceptions of leadership behaviors throughout the specific school change process of RTI program implementation is deficient.

Blasé and Blasé (2000) found that two running themes, talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting professional growth, led to increased teacher motivation, satisfaction, self-esteem, and reflexivity which is similar to the transformational leadership attribute of individual consideration (Bass, 1990). Blasé and Blasé also noted that effective principal leaders used inquiry to help teachers examine practices which is similar to intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1990).

Perceptions about leadership in education. In order to determine the level of perception that transformational leadership was present among principals, Hauserman et al. (2013) used the MLQ (Bass, 1990) to gather some relevant quantitative data based on teacher perceptions of principals. In the second phase of the study, Hauserman et al. (2013) explored the influence of principals' leadership behaviors on teachers' perceptions of those behaviors using qualitative methods such as phone interviews to determine behaviors teachers want principals to start, stop, or continue. Quantitative results revealed no statistical difference between teachers' ratings of principals on the transformational subscale and the MLQ outcome variable of effectiveness (Hauserman et al., 2013). Qualitative results determined that transformational

leaders were trusted by teachers, built a high level of rapport with teachers, acknowledged contributions of faculty and staff, and were well respected (Hauserman et al., 2013). Hauserman et al. (2013) also suggested that further research should be conducted to enhance best leadership practices of school principals and aid in principal preparation programs.

Using a framework based on behaviorism and transformational leadership, Eyal and Roth (2011) explored the comparative relationship between transformational leadership and teachers' motivation using data retrieved from questionnaires. Findings of the study revealed that transformational leadership behaviors were negatively correlated with teacher burnout or lack of motivation and positively correlated with autonomous motivation (Eyal & Roth, 2011). The application of the findings of Eyal & Roth (2011) are significant in the context of supporting potential application of transformational leadership theory to RTI program implementation.

It is apparent that teachers want principals to be transformational leaders (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). In general, employees would rather work for transformational leaders rather than contingent-reward leaders (Kirby et al., 1992). Applying the tenets of transformational leadership to educational leadership results in higher levels of teacher satisfaction and sustained motivation (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Yang (2014) explained that the principal's transformational leadership behaviors are directly related to prompt school improvement. Urlick and Bowers (2014) reiterated that principals' behaviors such as communication of the school's mission, instructional leadership, along with restructuring schools for shared leadership and problem-solving processes were desirable. However, directive leadership behaviors and communication that translated as oppressive were unwanted (McCarley et al., 2014). Further propositions for study on district and school administrators' contribution to transformational and

instructional leadership dynamics throughout RTI policy implementation is recommended (Printy & Williams, 2014).

Several behavioral considerations are also mentioned throughout the body of literature on school leadership such as social networking with faculty (Moolenaar & Slegers, 2015), ethical leadership (Ehrich et al., 2015), spiritual leadership (Banke et al., 2012; Gibson, 2014), and instructional leadership (Paredes-Scribner et al., 2011). Based on perception data, Moolenaar & Slegers (2015) found that principals who socially networked were more likely be perceived as being approachable. In addition, ethical leadership by principals is required to maintain a balance between all school stakeholders (Ehrich et al., 2015). Synthesizing ethical behavior with social networking behavior would consistently help principals avoid relationships that create a conflict of interest. Administrators and teachers recognize that spirituality influences leadership style and behavior (Gibson, 2014). For example, a principal of a rural public school in a predominantly Christian community may consistently pray before faculty meetings and faculty events. Most teachers in Gibson's (2014) study perceived that administrator spirituality influenced them through the quality of their behaviors. For example, a principal may have a personal behavior of visiting the funeral home for employees that experience a death in their immediate family. Linking perceptions about leadership behaviors to the implementation of the RTI process can advance the conceptual framework of this proposed case study.

Perceptions about RTI

Educator perceptions about RTI program implementation are valuable data providing key insights about school leadership, practical applications, feasibility, human resources, and school improvement. Numerous studies have given insight into educators' perceptions about RTI and the effectiveness of various RTI programs (Tran et al., 2011). Some narrative manuscripts (e.g.,

Sylvester, Lewis, & Severance, 2012, Thompson, 2013) have communicated individuals' positive and negative perceptions about RTI implementation and components. Many teachers feel as if there is a lack of adequate professional development training available regarding RTI to inform their instructional practices and have expressed their concerns (Wilcox et al., 2013). Secondary teachers perceive concerns about professional development as well (Isbell & Szabo, 2014). However, numerous educators perceive that RTI is helpful to students and to the school in which they work (Gonzalez, 2014).

Quantitative results concerning RTI. Quantitative studies overwhelmingly suggest that RTI procedures improve student outcomes (Tran et al., 2011). However, Stuebing, Fletcher, and Hughes (2012) questioned the validity of those results (Tran, et al., (2011), citing that most RTI studies used randomized controlled studies of inadequate sizes. The evidence of the dissention between these two articles illustrates the diversity of methods that may be used among published researchers. Karcher (2014) reported a quantitative disconnection between special education and general education teachers. However, other studies reported of collaborative efforts between special education and general education teachers (e.g. Sanger, Snow, Colburn, Gergen, and Ruf, 2012; Werts & Carpenter 2013). Collaborative efforts on the part of data teams' decisions are usually consistent with screening results (Shapiro et al., 2012). However, incorrect diagnosis using assessment or screening data can be problematic (Lipson, Chomsky-Higgins, & Kanfer, 2011). Furthermore, a lack of implementation integrity (Noltemeyer, Boone, & Sansosti, 2014) or fidelity in RTI can lead to a false diagnosis. RTI studies' results, school level action research, and leadership support have most likely have influenced teacher perceptions of the RTI framework.

Educator Perceptions. Many teachers feel that they are change agents for school reform when they successfully implement RTI programs in their respective schools (Averill et al., 2011). School reform often involves discussions about interactions with various stakeholders in the educational process and the behaviors associated with those interactions (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). Understanding teachers' perceptions of RTI in their respective schools could be a potential first step in eliminating inappropriate referrals for special services and begin reform in the teacher problem-solving arena (Greenfield et al., 2010). Debnam, Pas, and Bradshaw (2011) emphasized that staff roles, organizational health or school climate, greatly influences staff perceptions concerning RTI. In addition, Isbell and Szabo (2014) stated after examining perception data, "In order to understand and address concerns about an innovation such as RTI, teachers and administrators must engage in purposeful professional communication" (p. 14).

Educator perceptions about RTI program implementation are valuable data sets providing key insights about school leadership, practical applications, feasibility, human resources, and school improvement. Ryan, Kaffenberger, and Carrol (2011) provided evidence about the innovative practice of utilizing counselors as a part of an RTI program. Teachers strongly agreed that school counselor advocacy for students, coordination of RTI meetings, and communication with parents contributed to the success of the program (Ryan et al., 2011).

Printy and Williams (2014) gathered perception data from principals of six middle schools on RTI program implementation. Because math and reading RTI practices are out of the norm for middle schools, principals begin to form their own understanding of RTI processes in the context of available school specific facilities, resources, and personnel (Printy & Willams, 2014). Principals had the perception that the presence or absence of superintendent support in

the RTI implementation process (Printy & Williams, 2014) impacted the degree of implementation.

Superintendents perceived that using data through the RTI or Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) process can help improve overall student achievement and the problem-solving models should be the focus of professional development for principals and teachers (Dulany, Hallam, & Wall, 2013). Superintendents also perceived that the collaboration that is involved with RTI implementation impacts school culture positively (Dulany et al., 2013).

Superintendents' perceptions of RTI are important because of the influence they have over systems' pursuit of RTI program implementation and the professional development emphasis of school principals in the area of RTI implementation (Dulaney et al., 2013). Superintendents perceived that building capacity for RTI implementation among teachers and administrators lessens resistance to school change (Dulaney et al., 2013). The proposed case study will provide relevant perception data at the school level that could potentially inform superintendent selection or development of quality professional training sessions on RTI implementation, allowing principals to build implementation capacity among teachers (Dulaney et al., 2013).

RTI Implementation and Relevant Case Studies

Examining similar case studies regarding RTI implementation in schools prior to undertaking a similar study is necessary because RTI is not a one dimensional problem-solving approach to helping struggling learners (Johnson & Smith, 2011). Various case studies involving elementary schools (Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox, 2012; Orosco & Klinger, 2010; Robinson et al., 2013; Shepard & Salembier, 2011; Summey & Lashley, 2014; White et al., 2012) present multiple lenses through which RTI implementation may be analyzed from a qualitative perspective. Several case studies involving secondary schools (Dulaney, 2012;

Fagella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011; Fisher & Frey, 2011; Griffin & Hattendorf, 2010; Johnson & Smith, 2011; Thompson, 2013; Werts, Carpenter, & Fewell, 2014) provide qualitative evidence and suggestions regarding successes, failures, challenges, barriers, benefits, and future research needs.

RTI program implementation in elementary schools. Schools should decide upon the manner in which they implement the RTI model (Orosco & Klingner, 2010) based on the model adopted by the state in which the school is located and the needs of the student body. Orosco and Klingner (2010) investigated the perceptions of teachers concerning RTI implementation with a school population that consisted mainly of English language learners. Perception data revealed that teachers needed necessary and appropriate professional training prior to implementation. Shepherd and Salembier (2011) described several themes that emerged from the study (e.g., expanding teacher leadership, strong instructional leadership; building systematic structures) that can contribute to RTI program sustainability based on a cross-case analysis of three schools. White et al., (2012) found that principal leadership and commitment was a key factor for RTI success based on perception data. Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox (2012) pointed to perception data that revealed the necessity for strong leadership and future research about RTI programs. Robinson et al., (2013) stated that case study results are valuable for other schools.

RTI program implementation in secondary schools. Protecting intervention time is a difficult task at the secondary level (Griffin & Hattendorf, 2010). Griffin and Hattendorf (2010), two school administrators who provided information on how each of their schools implemented RTI at their respective middle schools, failed to link the successful implementation and sustainability of the program to their leadership behaviors beyond simply providing some general statements concerning practical processes and procedures that were implemented. Their study

failed to discuss or link their successes as school administrators to transformational leadership theory or any other leadership theory, an important consideration of any school leader prior to implementing school change.

King et al. (2012) suggested that RTI implementation at the middle school level was not effective considering a less than robust effect on student achievement pertaining to specific programs. However, other studies support RTI implementation at middle schools and suggest new ideas (Dulaney, 2012; Griffin & Hattendorf, 2010) For example one new idea included speech-language pathologists' participation in intervention implementation (King et al., 2012). However, Sanger et al. (2012) investigated speech-language pathologists' perceptions about participation in the RTI implementation process and found that approximately one-third of the participants held perceptions of broad support. King et al. (2012) recommended for administrators to inform themselves about RTI and proceed with implementation using caution, be ready to foster a pioneering attitude with teachers, and be ready to devote time to develop the process at their schools.

Dulaney (2012) provided case study results revealing a middle school's systematic process of implementing an RTI process including facilitation and collaboration processes. One of the most important findings was that school leaders must support and guide teachers through a school reform process (Dulaney, 2012). In addition, Fisher and Frey (2011) noted the importance of staff professional development on RTI implementation.

Fisher and Frey (2011) chronicled their efforts at RTI implementation for two years at the high school level and failed to link leadership behaviors with successful program implementation, instead choosing to focus on how instruction and interventions were organized. Fisher and Frey (2011) described many leadership behaviors (e.g., adopting a school-wide RTI

approach, scheduling interventions to supplement instruction, monitoring student progress), but neglected to discuss the importance of how their behaviors and interactions with teachers influenced buy-in executions of procedures with fidelity.

“RTI requires schools to make a cultural shift,” (Johnson & Smith, 2011, p. 29). In this narrative, the implementation process occurred over six years and was described as an ongoing process (Johnson & Smith, 2011). Johnson and Smith (2011) noted that collaborative leadership and having a vision were contributions necessary for program success and overcoming significant challenges with implementation. Even though leadership was emphasized in this narrative about RTI implementation at the middle school level, a detailed connections between transformational leadership theory and behaviorism was not discussed.

Fagella-Luby and Wardwell (2011) investigated RTI application at the middle school level using a quantitative methodology. A post-test design was used to measure treatment responses and progress over time. Findings revealed a lack of statistical difference (Fagella-Luby & Wardwell (2011) in instructional treatments. Even though qualitative methods are not used in this case study, the statistical data leads to the discussion concerning future research about necessary RTI components at the middle school level.

Dulaney (2012) sought to understand whether or not elementary RTI practices could be easily applied in the middle grades setting, the roles of key RTI facilitators, the processes implemented, and the implications of the middle school’s practices on future research recommendations. Field notes, focus groups, interviews, and observations were methods utilized for data collection (Dulaney, 2012). Building consensus through shared leadership was necessary for RTI program implementation to be a success, that leadership must identify and utilize school resources efficiently, data-driven decisions must be made, and ongoing

professional development for teacher are all necessary (Dulaney, 2012). Dulaney (2012) recommended that more case studies and research was needed concerning RTI in middle schools to add to the existing empirical evidence for RTI program sustainability.

RTI program sustainability depends on district level support of school principals in many cases (Thompson, 2013). RTI implementation in middle schools has potential for success (Prewett et al., 2012). Teacher buy-in is important for program success (Thompson, 2013). Considering these two factors leads to the conclusion that leadership matters in RTI program implementation. Thompson (2013) precisely stated multiple concerns about program sustainability. Thompson concluded that RTI was promising, but that the school needed improved teacher morale, school discipline, and community relations before being able to succeed.

Prewett et al., (2012) discussed results from a collective case study involving middle schools. All administrators referred to RTI as a process for closing the achievement gap because remediation was occurring for struggling learners (Prewett et al., 2012). Most middle schools in the study reported having at least universal screenings (Prewett et al. 2012).

RTI Case Study Research Conclusions

Case study research demonstrates repeatedly that there is a clear need for further research concerning RTI program implementation, especially in middle schools and secondary schools because of the potential benefits to students in terms of achievement and progress (Dulaney, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2011; Johnson & Smith, 2011; Thomson, 2013). Case studies at the elementary level (Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox, 2012; Robinson et al., 2013; Summey & Lashley, 2014) often allude to the need for strong leadership and further research for application in secondary schools. Further case study research concerning administrators' and teachers'

perceptions about leadership behaviors throughout the implementation process of a comprehensive and systematic RTI program that requires a restructuring of the school day (e.g. Averill et al., 2014; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005) within the specific context of examining the relationship between transformational leadership and behaviorism (Brownell et al., 2010). Perception data gleaned from the proposed study will fill a gap in the literature, and expand the application of transformational leadership theory and behaviorism to educational practice. Additionally, the proposed two-case study will provide state and district officials, middle school administrators and teachers key insights about RTI implementation by examining perceptions of administrators and teachers about leadership behaviors using transformational leadership theory. Finally, high school administrators will be able to examine perception data and consider leader behaviors using transformational leadership theory prior to RTI program implementation at their respective schools.

Summary

This chapter outlines literature that serves as the conceptual framework upon which this study is based and literature related to the topic of this study in order to illustrate the theoretical and practical significance of the study. More specifically, this outline provides a credible argument and sufficient empirical evidence supporting the rationale for the use of the conceptual framework consisting of transformational leadership theory, behaviorism, and recent RTI practices to ground this study. Also, the literature that is related to perceptions about RTI, relevant and school-specific case studies of RTI program implementation, teacher perceptions of school leaders' behaviors, and the influence of leadership in schools provides a synthesis illustrating the relationship between them. The existing body of literature is still emerging, mostly consisting of short-term quantitative intervention studies (e.g. Lipson, Chomsky-Higgins,

& Kanfer, 2011; Sanger, Snow, Colburn, Gergen, and Ruf, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2012; Stuebing, Fletcher, and Hughes, 2012; Tran et al., 2011; Werts & Carpenter 2013;) as secondary school leaders are beginning to undertake various school-specific, comprehensive approaches to RTI implementation to require a restructuring of the school day (Dougherty-Stahl, Keane, & Simic, 2012). The existing body of literature remains deficient (McDaniel, Kizzy, & Roach, 2013) in research that links specific school leaders' behaviors to the implementation of comprehensive RTI programs in middle schools through the descriptions of administrators' and teachers' perceptions. Therefore, the proposed two-case study is an opportunity to fill a significant gap in the literature as well as helping district level personnel, middle school administrators and teachers implement an RTI framework for the purpose of changing school culture and increasing student achievement by describing perceptions of leadership behaviors throughout the RTI program implementation process.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Methods used for this study is the primary focus of this chapter. It is important to note that detailed descriptions of the role of the researcher, the site, participants, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are needed to communicate a full understanding of the research methods. In this chapter, the nature of this study will be described through a series of sections and subsections with necessary attention to detail concerning research design, research questions, site, participants, procedures, the researcher's role, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations are noted at the conclusion of this chapter.

Design

A qualitative approach is used to interpret phenomena that occur in natural settings through data collections (Creswell, 2013). Case study research design is used to illustrate different perspectives or perceptions on a specific issue within a bounded setting (Yin, 2014). Case study design has been previously thought of as one type of quasi-experimental design but is now recognized as its own design (Yin, 2014). There are no standard manuals for case study designs (Yin, 2014). However, Yin (2014) recommended five essential components for effective case study design including research questions, propositions, units of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings.

Quantitative is not appropriate for this specific study because the purpose is to describe middle school administrators' and teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors and RTI program implementation. Designing a study around open-ended research questions that help the researcher describe and investigate a key phenomenon in the real world is the appropriate design for this study (Yin, 2014). Using a case-study design allows for the

description and investigation of a causal relationship and the possibility of analytic generalization as opposed to statistical generalization used to assess the strength of the relationship between the sample and the population (Yin, 2014).

In order to develop a more robust research design (Yin, 2014), a collective case study replication design will be utilized. Specifically, two middle schools in Georgia that have implemented a comprehensive RTI program will be selected. Using two cases as an instrumental approach will allow for cross-case conclusions (Yin, 2014). As a result of this design, effective leadership behaviors linked with comprehensive RTI program implementation will have more substantial and detailed descriptions leading to a better understanding about the research focus in its entirety for the field of education.

Specifically for this two-case study, individual semi-structured interviews with each school administrator consisting of 14 questions each, will be used. Teachers will also participate in individual semi-structured interviews consisting of 14 questions each. Focus groups will also be semi-structured and consist of five questions. All questions will be logically linked to the central question and sub-questions of the study. Both participating schools will be chosen from a pool of schools with exemplary student outcomes (Yin, 2014) resulting from RTI program implementation. No propositions will be stated since the topic of the case study is the subject of exploration (Yin, 2014).

The units of analysis for this two-case study are the educators at the two schools or case settings, as defined by the central research question (Yin, 2014), not the actual schools where RTI programs have been implemented successfully. Linking data between the two cases will be accomplished by utilizing methods such as pattern-matching and cross case synthesis (Yin, 2014) once the data is collected. Using the conceptual framework consisting of transformational

leadership theory (Bass, 1990), behaviorism (Skinner, 1969), and RTI framework (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005), patterns will be coded from each case and matched. The research design allows for emerging themes and patterns to be synthesized from case to case (Yin, 2014).

Research Questions

The focus of the case study or central phenomena being investigated are descriptions of middle grades educators' perceptions concerning the successful implementation of comprehensive RTI programs in their respective schools.

Central Question

What are middle school administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors throughout the implementation of RTI programs?

Sub-questions

1. What are middle grades administrators' and teachers' perceptions about the types of leadership behaviors considered as important prior to implementing a new school-wide RTI program?
2. What are middle administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors during program implementation?
3. How do leadership behaviors of middle school administrators after implementation influence perceptions about RTI program sustainability?

The Researcher's Role

My role in this proposed two-case study will be defined as the key instrument (Creswell, 2013) as I collect data through interviews, focus groups, and related documents. I will directly interpret the data under the foundation of a conceptual framework, look for emerging themes and patterns, and write a detailed description of the perceptions of middle school administrators in

Georgia concerning effective leadership behaviors and RTI program implementation. During the period of data collections, I will develop collegial relationships with the key personnel at two Georgia middle schools, however, I will have no prior affiliation with the two school settings.

A background in financial management and experience as a business education teacher has helped shape my systematic approach to solving problems. Experiences as a coach and an administrator have helped me to learn how to motivate, gain buy-in, and sustain maximum effort in difficult situations. Also, my experience with implementing a comprehensive RTI program that restructured a school's approach to problem-solving increased my interest in leadership behaviors throughout the implementation process at other schools in Georgia. My personal bias will exist, but I will adhere to not compromising the integrity of the research and using existing research and literature to guide the study design, procedures, and interview questions (Yin, 2014).

Setting

The setting for research will be at two public middle schools in Georgia. Each school will vary in size and demographics. The organizational structure of the middle schools will be aligned with a middle school team concept (Shapiro et al., 2012) that consists of teams of teachers for each academic subject with paraprofessional support, school counselors per grade level, special education teachers per grade level, department chairs by subject, assistant principals per grade level, and one school principal. The history of each school site will vary. However, the consistent historical element will be that a unique, systematic, and comprehensive RTI program that has changed the schools' traditional method of helping struggling learners within the classroom or in a restructured schedule that includes a block of time for intervention sessions (Averill, Baker, & Rinaldi, 2014).

AB Middle School is a school that has approximately 500 students with a diverse student population consisting of 55% male, 45% female, 51% Caucasian, 41% Hispanic, 2% African-American, 6% Multiracial, students with 74% of those students qualifying for the free lunch meal program. AB Middle School is one of three middle schools within the school system. AB Middle School operates on a modified schedule that incorporates five class periods. One of the class periods is utilized for RTI interventions. AB Middle School has one principal, one assistant principal, and one RTI Coordinator. AB Middle School was chosen for this case study because it utilizes a systematic, school-wide RTI program that emphasizes Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions during a block period of time rather than incorporating intervention within regular academic classes. Students are targeted for research-based interventions in reading and math during intervention class period and are flexibly grouped.

CD Middle School is a school that has approximately 600 students with a diverse student population consisting of 52% male, 48% female, 4% Asian, 64% Caucasian, 25% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, and 4% African-American students with 68% of those students qualifying for the school's free lunch meal program. Middle School B is one of three middle schools within the school system. CD Middle School uses a modified schedule that incorporates a block period of time for Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention sessions during the school day. CD Middle School has one principal and one assistant principal. CD Middle School was chosen for this case study because it utilizes a systematic, school-wide RTI program that emphasizes Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions during a block time.

Participants

Participants from each school site will be comparative in structure, specifically in regard to race, language, sex, and age (Yin, 2014). Participants will include two middle school

administrators and 10 lead teachers from two public middle schools in Georgia who have been a part of the implementation of a comprehensive RTI program. The administrators will include one principal and one RTI coordinator. Lead teachers will consist of 10 teachers volunteering for participation in this study who are involved with the RTI process within the school.

Purposeful sampling will be used for this two-case study to focus on best administrative practices concerning RTI programs. The sample of middle schools in Georgia will be narrowed to those schools that are invited to present information about their RTI programs at a professional conference in Georgia. Two schools will be selected for participation in this study from a list provided by Georgia's student support organization, which includes nominee schools for promising practices in RTI. Participants will hold a position as an administrator or department chair, with necessary certification, at a middle school in Georgia. School principals will be contacted to gain permission to conduct the study (Yin, 2014). Pseudonyms will identify each participant in order to maintain anonymity of comments (Yin, 2014). Participants will be diverse in ethnicity, age, experience, and educational background to ensure perspectives of different individuals (Yin, 2014). Once this proposal is accepted and IRB approval is given, each participant will be described in detail regarding position or content affiliation, years of experience in the field of education, years of experience with RTI implementation, years of experience with the school-specific RTI program, and other relevant demographic information (Yin, 2014).

Procedures

Standard procedures for proposed research studies will be followed for this study. The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval will be secured before any element of the study begins. Appropriate consent will be obtained in writing prior to

participation (Yin, 2014). Once the study is approved, a pilot study including one administrator and two teachers will be conducted prior to the actual study to refine interview questions and procedures (Yin, 2014). Afterwards, school administrators for the actual will be contacted to inform them about the study and to seek their consent. Once school site approval is gained, I will contact administrators to obtain recommended teacher participants contact information and consent. Another letter will be sent via email to inform all participants' about the study, schedule interviews, and obtain their consent for participation. Participant consent forms will be presented for signatures on the day that interviews, focus groups, and document collection begins as recommended by Creswell (2013), Stake (1995), and Yin (2014). The researcher will then conduct interviews, followed by data collection and data analysis. Once all of the information is gathered, then findings will be reported, discussed, and conclusions will be drawn.

Each participant will be interviewed in a secured conference room. Confidentiality of responses will be granted to all participants to ensure their responses do not place them in a compromising position (Yin, 2014). The researcher will ensure that responses remain confidential and explain procedures for protecting confidentiality. At the beginning of each interview, a brief overview of the case study will be shared with the participant along with the credentials and approval forms for the study (Yin, 2014). A scripted set of questions will be there to guide each semi-structured interview along with a notepad for use by the interviewer to keep detailed notes. Prior to the start of the interview, each participant will be informed that the interview will be digitally recorded (Yin, 2014) for transcription purposes only. The interviewer will allow participants to make additional comments and share their perceptions. The interviewer will allow for additional comments and perceptions to be shared or elaborated on as desired by each interviewee. This process will be replicated for focus group sessions. The

researcher will conference with each administrator regarding supporting RTI artifacts that are provided to teachers for RTI program support and fidelity purposes. The researcher will maintain a chain of evidence that notes and links each artifact provided by school administrators to participant perceptions commentary. Each artifact will be stored in a binder. Each artifact will also be stored electronically.

Data Collection

Semi-structured individual interviews, focus group sessions, and artifacts will be used as three forms of data collection (Yin, 2014). This semi-structured method will allow for open-ended questions that move from simple to complex in interviews and focus groups, allowing additional time for participant elaboration to take place as necessary. The researcher will take notes during the interviews and focus group sessions as recommended by Yin (2014). All interviews and focus group sessions will be digitally recorded and transcribed to increase confirmability (Yin, 2014). Documents such as RTI block schedules, probing schedules, intervention teaching assignments rooms, and targeting data that excludes student information will be collected and photocopied with permission (Yin, 2014) as a third form of data. A chain of evidence will be maintained for reliability (Yin, 2014). All of these forms of data collection are noted as acceptable for case studies (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

Interviews

Interview perception data will serve as a key element in providing necessary data for this collective case study. Interviews will be targeted in order to focus on the topics (Yin, 2014) of leadership behaviors and RTI program implementation in middle schools. Interview questions will be carefully phrased and open-ended, but conducted in a shorter case study interview format that is semi-structured with standardized questions for each interviewee.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation

(questions asked to teachers)

1. Please describe the leadership behaviors that teachers have demonstrated before, during, and after the RTI program implementation.
2. Please describe the leadership behaviors that school administrators have demonstrated before, during, and after RTI program implementation.
3. What is your perception concerning the influence of leadership behaviors on teacher buy-in of the RTI program implementation?
4. What is your perception about school climate conditions that have been created throughout RTI program implementation that influenced your teaching behaviors?
5. What is your perception about school climate conditions that have been created throughout RTI program implementation that influenced your students' learning behaviors?
6. How do administrators reinforce the fidelity of the RTI program's implementation?
7. How have leadership behaviors of school administrators influenced your perception about RTI program implementation?
8. How do you think program sustainability will be influenced by leadership behaviors?

Administrators' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program

Implementation (questions asked to administrators)

1. Please describe the leadership behaviors that teachers have demonstrated before, during, and after, the RTI program implementation.

2. Please describe the leadership behaviors that school administrators have demonstrated before, during, and after the RTI program implementation.
3. What leadership behaviors have you purposefully displayed to gain teacher buy-in of the RTI program?
4. How do you perceive teachers feel about school climate considering RTI program implementation?
5. Why do you perceive the behaviors you described in Question 3 to be vital to your school RTI program's success?
6. How did you develop a vision for RTI program implementation?
7. How do you think your leadership behaviors have influenced teachers throughout RTI program implementation?
8. Why do you think program sustainability will be influenced by leadership behaviors?

Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School (questions asked to all participants)

1. Please describe your experience in teaching or leading at a school before, during, and after the implementation of an RTI program.
2. What are your strongest leadership behaviors?
3. What are your weakest leadership behaviors?
4. How did you decide what leadership behaviors display before, during, after the implementation of an RTI program?
5. Why do you believe the leadership behaviors you chose to display throughout implementation are important?
6. What types of leadership behaviors have positively impacted program implementation?

7. Why are the leadership behaviors described in Question 6 perceived as positive leadership behaviors?
8. What types of leadership behaviors have negatively impacted program implementation?
9. Why are the leadership behaviors described in Question 8 perceived as negative leadership behaviors?
10. What school documents or artifacts provided by school leaders do you consider as helpful to the implementation of the RTI program at your school?
11. Why are school the school documents or artifacts you described in Question 7 helpful to the RTI program?
12. How have leadership behaviors of administrators influenced perceptions about the RTI framework sustainability?

Questions 1 through 8 for each set concerning teachers' and administrators' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors and RTI program implementation were developed to collect perception data about teacher beliefs pertaining to effective leadership behaviors within their particular schools and determine which behaviors could be universal in terms of analytic generalization. Questions 1 and 2 are level 1 questions (Yin, 2014) that were specifically designed to gain insight about the interviewees' self-perception and perception about their own school. Questions 3 and 4 were purposefully phrased to collect perception data about leadership characteristics (Bass, 1990). Questions 5 through 8 were phrased explicitly to collect perception data about leadership behaviors that establish environmental contingencies and reinforcements for behavior (Skinner, 1969) of school faculty and staff.

Questions 1 through 12 pertain to the implementation of RTI programs in middle schools. Questions 1 through 5 were designed to allow the interviewees to describe their personal experiences prior to and during RTI program implementation for the purpose of gaining insight into RTI implementation (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). The purpose of questions 6 through 9 is to aid in obtaining data about administrative support on school policy and school change. Debman et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of obtaining insight about necessary administrative supports on Tier implementation. Questions 10 and 11 were specifically phrased to gather data about procedures and documents that could be later cross-referenced and analyzed (Yin, 2014). Question 12 is asked to derive information that could potentially help school leaders anticipate challenges to program sustainability that will need to be planned for if RTI program implementation is a future consideration. Dulaney (2012) recommended future research concerning the sustainability of RTI programs.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a counterpart to the individual interview (Yin, 2014). A small group of teachers at each site will be interviewed for the purpose of moderating a discussion (Yin, 2014) about the relationship between administrative leadership behaviors and successful RTI program implementation in middle schools. Utilizing the focus group interview will help to minimize reflexivity or influence between the researcher and a single interviewee (Yin, 2014).

Standardized Focus Group Open-Ended Questions

Universal Aspects of Effective Leadership Behaviors and Successful RTI Program

Implementation

1. What professional leadership behaviors exhibited by administrators are considered to be effective in creating conditions for successfully implementing a comprehensive RTI program in your school?
2. What professional leadership behaviors exhibited by teachers are perceived to be effective in creating conditions for successfully implementing a comprehensive RTI program in your school?
3. What are the most important leadership behaviors that were displayed before implementation?
4. What are the most important leadership behaviors that were displayed during implementation?
5. What are the most important leadership behaviors that have been displayed after initial implementation in order to sustain program fidelity?
6. What role does teacher accountability play in RTI program success?
7. How are administrators' leadership characteristics and behaviors related to the implementation of a comprehensive RTI program in your school?
8. How do leaders and teachers sustain a successful RTI program in your school?
9. What routines and procedures have been established by administrators that help teachers manage their time for RTI program implementation?
10. What routines and procedures or program requirements could be considered a hindrance to RTI program implementation?

The purpose of questions 1 through 5 are to gather descriptions of effective leadership

behaviors that need to be observable and wanted by teachers (Hauserman & Stick, 2013) in order to establish a positive school climate that helps an RTI program to be successful. Questions 6 and 7 were specifically designed to retrieve perception data about the relationship between leadership behaviors of administrators and teachers and an RTI program in order to address concerns that RTI may not work (Orosco & Klinger, 2010) in the context of accountability. Question 8 pertains to gaining an understanding how of program sustainability can be maintained once the program has been established through responsible leadership (Stone-Johnson, 2013). Questions 9 and 10 emphasize obtaining perception data on leadership characteristics that may be barriers to program implementation or that may prevent barriers to program implementation from arising. Averill, Baker, and Rinaldi (2014) concluded that there was no guidance for helping teachers manage RTI program block time effectively.

Artifacts

Various school documents and artifacts will be collected in order to cross-reference with interviewee and focus group commentary. Relevant schedules, RTI lists, forms, flowcharts, timelines, meeting notes, and training notes will be important in illustrating (Yin, 2014) a successful RTI program implementation and demonstrate supports provided by school leaders and are addressed in questions 1-4. Such artifacts and documents will provide a broader perspective for the researcher and audience beyond interviewee and focus group commentary (Yin, 2014).

Questions Concerning School Artifacts and Documents (for administrators)

1. Please share and describe any school artifacts or documents that you created as administrators as part of the RTI implementation process. No artifacts or documents

shared should contain confidential student or teacher information. Please be sure to explain how each artifact or document aids in the RTI implementation process.

2. What are your behaviors as leaders regarding the context of this artifact's or document's usage? How do you sustain the use of the artifact or document?
3. What are your teachers' behaviors regarding the context of this artifact's or document's usage? How do you sustain teachers' behaviors regarding the use of the artifact or document?
4. Repeat questions 1-3 for each artifact or document.

Data Analysis

Data will be triangulated between interviews, focus groups, and documents to strengthen construct validity (Yin, 2014). Initial interviews will be analyzed for emerging themes and patterns. Yin (2014) referred to this as pattern matching logic. In order to increase the internal validity of each case study (Yin, 2014), a descriptive prediction will be made regarding leadership characteristics and environmental conditions at the case sites that reinforce desired behaviors (Bass, 1990) from faculty and staff prior to data collection.

Each case in this proposed two-case study will be independently analyzed and written up (Patton & Patton, 2002). Responses will be analyzed across the two cases or schools to determine cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2014). Tables will be created with categorized data collected from each study. Categories of data will include perceived transformational leadership attributes that are mentioned in interviews and focus groups, leadership behaviors that are described by interviewees pertaining to the RTI program, school culture conditions described by interviews, and comparable school documents. The grouping or organization of question responses by category is an appropriate data analysis method (Patton & Patton, 2002) for this

type of case study that seeks to derive themes and behaviors from perception data. Analytic generalizations (Yin, 2014) will then be derived through the cross-case synthesis. Focus group session questions will emphasize specific aspects of leadership behaviors and RTI program implementation (Yin, 2014) in order to gain group perceptions in regard to the research questions. Cross-referencing of documents (Yin, 2014) will be employed in order to connect supports for teachers described by interviewees to artifacts. All data will be analyzed with a reliance on the conceptual framework established in this study as recommended by Yin (2014).

The assembling, condensation, classification, and thematic analysis of raw data is a standard process in constructing a case study for the purpose of pattern, theme, and content analysis (Patton & Patton, 2002). All responses and data analysis will be recorded in a spreadsheet. In addition, the researcher will address epoche by creating a bracketed list of personal RTI implementation experiences concerning teacher and student interactions, document production, and perceived results from program implementation (Creswell, 2013). Below is a list of procedures that may be helpful for replication of this proposed case study.

1. A manageable system of coding for key words and themes (Patton & Patton, 2014; Yin, 2014) will be established for the specific case.
2. A list all teachers' and administrators' responses will be recorded in a spreadsheet from the *Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation* interview questions.
3. A key-word table of interviewee responses from the *Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation* categories in order to condense information (Patton & Patton, 2002) will be created.

4. Key words will be analyzed to find patterns (Patton & Patton, 2002; Yin, 2014) in responses from the *Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation*.
5. A further analysis of patterns of responses in the context of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990) will be conducted to identify themes and analyst-constructed typologies (Patton & Patton, 2002; Yin, 2014) to present categories of leader behaviors or attributes as described by the interviewees. Patton and Patton (2002) described this type of analysis as inductive analysis and a key characteristic of case studies.
6. Steps 1 through 4 for questions 3 and 4 will be repeated.
7. Steps 1 through 4 for questions 5 through 8 regarding school environmental conditions established by leadership behaviors, contingencies, and reinforcing behaviors of the administrators will be repeated.
8. Steps 1 through 4 for questions 1 through 5 of *Universal Aspects of Effective Leadership Behaviors and Success RTI Program Implementation* questions will be repeated.
9. Steps 1 through 4 for the focus groups' questions will be repeated.
10. All relevant documents will be collected, including process descriptions or school procedures that leaders provide within the school.
11. An analysis of all data will be conducted to determine the substantive significance (Patton & Patton, 2002) by looking at consistency, coherence, confirmability, and usefulness.

12. Documents will be linked to interview responses in a matrix for logical analysis (Patton & Patton, 2002).
13. Documents will be linked to focus groups' responses for logical analysis (Patton & Patton, 2002).
14. Documents will be linked to RTI program implementation in a matrix for logical analysis (Patton & Patton, 2002).
15. Steps 1 through 14 will be repeated for the second case in the study.
16. A cross-case synthesis of information will be completed in order to determine content analysis of data and determine the lessons to be learned (Patton & Patton, 2002) that may be applied to future case studies, real life practice, and to find meanings and answers to the sub-questions and the central question.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness, a conceptual framework will be used to add to the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2013). Standard case study methods will be used as recommended by Yin (2014) to increase the reliability and transferability of the proposed study. All perception data will be digitally recorded and transcribed for increased dependability and confirmability of data (Creswell, 2013). Member-checking, an important validation method (Creswell, 2013), will be utilized so that the participants may verify the accuracy of the reporting of perception data. In order to further substantiate the trustworthiness of this case study, the researcher will avoid biases and note all contrary evidence (Yin, 2014).

Credibility

The conceptual framework for this study includes applying the assumptions of behaviorism and the contingencies of reinforcement (Skinner, 1969) along with transformational

leadership theory (Bass, 1990). The application of these two theories to this two-case study on RTI framework implementation in middle schools will advance the theories and their applications to practical environments (Yin, 2014). Analytic generalizations concerning the theories will be made possible as a result of the study and most likely emerge as school procedures and policies (Yin, 2014) are examined during the study in the context of RTI and the conceptual framework, thus increasing external validity (Yin, 2014) and giving justification for application in other schools by administrators who decide on attempting implementation.

Dependability

Collecting evidence from multiple sources including interviews, focus group sessions, and school documents allows for triangulation of data (Yin, 2014) throughout each case study. Triangulation of data will be utilized at each case study site. Data will be collected and organized in a database for each case that can be analyzed separately from the report in order to increase the reliability of the entire collective case study (Yin, 2014). Analysis of the data will be organized as a result of each created database (Yin, 2014). Throughout this proposed case study, a chain of evidence will be maintained in order to aid in understanding how data was collected and how questions were formulated, moving forward and backward in the chain (Yin, 2014). Caution will be used in selecting the specific cases by allowing a key gatekeeper in the study to advise concerning the electronic sources that should be used (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) suggested that using multiple sources of data, creating a database, maintaining a chain of evidence, and using caution when considering electronic sources helps to counter issues of dependability and reliability in a case study.

Transferability

Specifically stating all procedures in detail (Creswell, 2013) concerning data collection and analysis will be a key element in reporting about the cases studies. Yin (2014) suggested that the needs of the audience of the report should drive the form of the report. Transferability will be increased by utilizing a linear-analytic compositions structure in order to describe (Yin, 2014) administrators' and teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors and the effective implementation of RTI programs in middle schools so that those procedures obtaining perceptions about leadership behaviors and RTI implementation can possibly be repeated with the same reliable results.

Confirmability

Confirmability of the study will be enhanced by the digital recording and transcription of interviews and focus group sessions (Yin, 2014). A list of documents and artifacts with explanations that are utilized by each school or each case in the study will be maintained in order to corroborate statements made by the interviewees and focus groups in response to the prepared questions. These documents will also enhance the confirmability as part of the set of data collections protocols (Creswell, 2013). Analyzed data and transcriptions will be stored on computer files and detailed analytic notes will be taken throughout the interview and focus group sessions. Notes will be organized into the categories of descriptive and reflective (Creswell, 2013). Also, a data collection matrix will be created in order to locate data for confirmation and analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure that the two-case study is carried out in an ethical manner, IRB approval will be gained prior to the study's inception (Creswell, 2013). Local approval will be

sought from system level RTI coordinators, principals, and school level RTI coordinators before arriving at the school site or contacting various school personnel concerning participation (Creswell, 2013). All participants will be contacted and asked to sign the required participation consent forms (Yin, 2014) at the beginning of the study to inform them about the purpose of the study and how the data collected will be utilized (Creswell, 2013).

Privacy of all participants will be respected throughout the data collection and data analysis phases of the research by assigning fictitious names (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Questions that will be asked during the interviews and focus group sessions will not be leading questions or side with one particular view about RTI implementation in order to enable the reporting of unbiased information and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Honest reporting that utilizes composite information and avoids bias (Yin, 2014) will be used during publication in order to further protect the identities of individual participants (Creswell, 2013). Practical results will be shared with the participants, results from other publications will not be used, and there will be no conflicts of interest that lead to financial gain or profit from the study in order to ensure that the publication process is completely ethical (Creswell, 2013, Yin, 2014).

Summary

This proposed research plan addresses the multiple issues involved in planning a two-case study. The research design and questions support the purpose of the study and are appropriate for this type of study. A discussion about the researcher's role provided insight to the motivation of the researcher, identified potential bias, and addressed precautions that will be taken to ensure the integrity of the study. Procedures are outlined that follow standard protocols for case studies such as conducting a pilot study, clearly defining data collection methods, and ensuring that data analysis methods are grounded in the conceptual framework of the study.

Trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study are explained. In conclusion, a detailed methodology is proposed for this two-case study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to present the context and full array of data gained from this two-case study. The purpose of this two-case study is to describe the perceptions of middle school administrators and lead teachers about leader behaviors throughout the implementation of comprehensive RTI programs at two middle schools. Castro-Villarreal et al. (2014) defined perceptions of middle school administrators and lead teachers' thoughts, ideas, understandings, and attitudes. Detailed descriptions of each participant using pseudonyms will be presented to aid in providing a proper cultural context for the study. Quotations from participants are included to illustrate perceptions about leader behaviors and the RTI process.

Results are presented through several means including a summary of participants' responses to semi-structured interview questions and focus group questions, descriptions of school artifacts and participants' explanations of and uses of the artifacts, presentation of key words and themes using a coding system, a list of all participants' responses, a table and summary of all data collected linking documents to participants' responses in the interview and focus group sessions, and key-word tables derived from participants' responses, and explanations of each data table or set of results. Results are presented for each case study. Finally, a cross-case synthesis of information is presented. Once all information is reviewed, a summary of participant descriptions and study results is presented.

Participants

Participants in this two-case study included 2 administrators and 10 teachers. Throughout the semi-structured interview process and focus group interviews, participants revealed their personalities, thoughts about teaching as a profession, perceptions about

administrative leadership behaviors, leadership behaviors of teachers, and how these factors have impacted their perceptions before, during and after the implementation of their own school's RTI program. A general description of each participant in the two-case study is listed below.

Mrs. Adams

Mrs. Adams has been teaching between 3 and 5 years at AB Middle most recently as a math intervention teacher. Her enthusiasm for helping struggling learners is evident in her tone. She stated excitedly at one point in her interview, "We are constantly interacting with them (students) even though they are working on the computer." She repeatedly described what her role is in the RTI process and feels she contributes to the success of many students in her school. When asked her own experience and leadership, she replied:

Those students that are right on that line or the ones that need a lot of help...they will come back and say I need back in your class because that really helped me in math class. So I feel like (RTI) is very important.

Mrs. Adams spoke of one co-worker often and how they continually collaborate. Mrs. Adams has an overall positive perspective of teacher and administrator leadership behaviors in the context of the RTI process at AB Middle School.

Mr. Robinson

Mr. Robinson is the RTI Coordinator for AB Middle School. His experience consists of about 20 years in teaching and administrative roles. He has great passion for helping teachers succeed and, in turn, helping students succeed. Mr. Robinson stated:

I was hired as an academic coach and to take over RTI. I am in everything. I am big on listening putting myself in their (teachers) shoes. So I will do a lot of things for them to make it easier on them so that they can do the job of teaching.

Mr. Robinson holds the opinion that teachers have too much paperwork and wants to ease the workload so that teachers can focus on helping students. He was proud his teachers' accomplishments in the classroom as he states, "They have a lot of tradition." He also emphasized that higher level administrators are very supportive and stated, "They're always talking about what is happening positively with RTI." Mr. Robinson is an RTI Coordinator who understands the process and empathizes with the challenges teachers face when implementing the RTI process.

Mrs. Smith

Mrs. Smith described the leadership behaviors she has seen at AB Middle before, during, and after the implementation of the current RTI program and replied, "I wouldn't know the leadership that went into developing the program here at AB Middle, but I can tell you about the current leadership." She went on to describe her role in the RTI process and the positive leadership behaviors that she has observed. Mrs. Smith has been teaching less than 5 years with the past two years at AB Middle in a language arts position. She stated that these are the only two years she has taught at the middle school level because she was previously an elementary school teacher. She spoke positively about leadership behaviors of the administration at AB Middle saying, "I'm not worried about having to provide interventions during my regular class time. I feel like it is a much better program here than putting all the responsibility on the classroom teacher." She was confused about the process at her previous elementary school, but now has a clear understanding of the process. She is a young teacher who loves using technology to share information between colleagues.

Mrs. Abernathy

Mrs. Abernathy is a veteran math teacher with over 20 years experience. She described her leadership role as a lead math teacher. Mrs. Abernathy said that she has observed strong, consistent leadership from numerous administrators and staff at AB Middle School over the course of her career. She loves the feeling of helping students get on grade level concerning their math skills. She stated, "I'm here every day by 7:15. I know the curriculum. I don't believe in failure. I'll do whatever it takes to get you on grade level." Mrs. Abernathy emphasized the importance of having a positive attitude when helping students who are struggling with math saying, "I am trying to get them to learn. I need to be positive and I need to work with them to help them because I want them to be successful." Mrs. Abernathy is a math interventionist who has a vision and plan for student success in her classroom.

Mrs. Webb

Mrs. Webb is a math teacher at AB Middle School with more than 20 years experience teaching. She expressed that she has taught math for the majority of her career, but has also taught social studies and science. She stated, "We've been doing RTI for some time now. Pretty much, our roles have remained consistent. We always meet as a group and discuss students and student concerns." She is enthusiastic about helping students and working with administration. She also stated, "I can't think of a teacher in this building that when they see a student struggle that doesn't try to fix it." It is obvious that Mrs. Webb is passionate about helping students and thinks highly about the attitude and behaviors of her colleagues.

Mrs. Duncan

Mrs. Duncan is a veteran language arts teacher with over 20 years experience. She has experienced the RTI process for several years at the school and feels like it has helped students

in the context of having a time set aside for intervention. She states before the implementation of the program, “Personally, I’m not sure classroom teachers really understand their role.”

However, she also stated, “When they put Mr. Robinson in control of the program was when it all came together.” She spoke often about helping students in language arts and using interventions. She loves her school and has invested much of her career at AB Middle and its students.

Mrs. Oliver

Mrs. Oliver serves as an administrator CD Middle School and has more than 15 years of experience in education. Mrs. Oliver described herself as an organized individual with high expectations for teachers and students. She precisely described the RTI process implemented at CD Middle School after she attended a state-wide RTI conference. She explained that she knew her school needed a system. Her tone in the interview suggested that she takes her job seriously and is systematic in every approach of the RTI program. She stated, “We have a process. We maintain a master list of RTI students, hold monthly RTI meetings to go over data, progress monitor students, and RTI teachers complete action plans for all tiered students.” She provided many artifacts including procedures and expectations for both academic and behavior RTI procedures. Mrs. Oliver said that she has made the implementation of the research-based RTI process a priority at CD Middle School.

Mr. Davis

Mr. Davis communicated that he works hard at CD Middle School to help struggling learners. He is a former coach and communicated his love for helping students. He stated, “Students have the opportunity to be there best. If they have an instructional gap, it gets filled. We work hard at this every day.” Mr. Davis has been a math teacher for more than 10 years. He

looks very stern and seems to want to have students get to work quickly and work hard. Mr. Davis stated, “This gives us (teachers) a means to help students and students an opportunity to get the extra help they need while they are here at school.” Mr. Davis seems to be supportive of the RTI program at CD Middle School, however, is very concise in his communication.

Mrs. Brady

Mrs. Brady is a language arts teacher at CD Middle with more than 10 years of experience. She also has experience teaching math. She expressed positive feelings about CD Middle’s climate and administrative support. She stated, “I was allowed to go to a state-wide meeting about the RTI process. My administrators helped me get to that, and that was helpful because there’s just a lot of ambiguity in the whole RTI process.” Even though there is a block time for RTI with intervention classes at CD Middle, Mrs. Brady states, “I don’t feel it has been explained. I think we need some more defining as a whole system and a whole county.” Mrs. Brady loves collaboration as she stated, “I like working with people and sharing ideas.” She admits to feeling overwhelmed by the RTI process at her school, but says, “I realized this doesn’t have to be the big bad boogie man.” It is apparent that Mrs. Brady loves to teach and is working towards learning more about the RTI process and her role at her individual school.

Mrs. Dooley

Mrs. Dooley is a language arts teacher committed to helping struggling students. She has less than 10 years experience teaching in public schools. She also has experience teaching abroad. She states, “The student comes first. I think it (RTI) is a mutual thing (between administration and teachers) where we see it is just as beneficial to us (teachers) to make sure this happens as it is for the administration.” She believes that teachers need to close gaps for certain students and the RTI process can help. She stated, “The RTI program, when done right,

can definitely fill gaps with reading and math, especially reading. I teach language arts because I feel like it's the most important subject." Her passion for teaching language arts is apparent.

Mrs. Bell

Mrs. Bell is a teacher, who has taught both math and language arts, who arrived at CD Middle School during the implementation of the current RTI program with a block time set aside for interventions. She has more than 10 years experience, but has only been teaching a few years at CD Middle School. However, she stated, "Before RTI we, as classroom teachers, took care of whatever needs students had on our own." She communicated that the administration led them through the process. She has enjoyed being able to utilize various software programs as part of students' interventions. She feels like students being scheduled appropriately into remedial classes when the need is recognized is an essential part of the RTI process. She stated, "I like the structure that is in place now. It is difficult for a classroom teacher to provide interventions with fidelity." Mrs. Bell clearly believes she has helped students. She stated, "I was a horrible math kid. I had a teacher that would explain every little part until I got it. So, I have a real passion for it."

Mrs. Sinkey

Mrs. Sinkey has taught more than 10 years as a math teacher. She currently teaches at CD Middle School. She stated, "I'm big on relationships. If the kids don't know that we believe in them, how are they going to believe in themselves." Mrs. Sinkey has a passion for the content, but more passion for seeing students succeed. She also stated, "They've got to have that support team there to push them, but also to be that positive influence to kind of find the positives where they (students) may not see the positive sometimes." Mrs. Sinkey recognized building relationships with students as a strength in terms of her own personal leadership

behaviors. She explained, “Our administrators are in tune with the data, but they also know kids by name.” Mrs. Sinkey’s responses indicated that her overall teaching philosophy hinges upon appropriate student relationships and educators demonstrating leadership behaviors that influence students positively.

General Participant Descriptions

Maintaining a chain of evidence is a vitally important principle in the data collection process for a case study (Yin, 2014). For the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, pseudonyms are used and years of experience are not listed specifically (Yin, 2014). The information below is a list of participants in tabular format and is a part of the database for this case study.

Table 1

List of participant pseudonyms (in order of interview) with database codenames and corresponding non-identifiable years of experience.

Participant Pseudonym	Database Code Name	Years of Experience
Mrs. Adams	AB-Adams-T	>5
Mr. Robinson	AB-Robinson-A	<20
Mrs. Smith	AB-Smith-T	>5
Mrs. Abernathy	AB-Abernathy-T	>20
Mrs. Webb	AB-Webb-T	>20
Mrs. Duncan	AB-Duncan-T	>20
Mrs. Oliver	CD-Oliver-A	>15
Mrs. Davis	CD-Davis-T	>10
Mrs. Brady	CD-Brady-T	>10
Mrs. Dooley	CD-Dooley-T	<10
Mrs. Bell	CD-Bell-T	>10
Mrs. Sinkey	CD-Sinkey-T	>10

Each participant is labeled with a database code name. The code name is comprised of the prefix of two capital letters designates the school pseudonym. Following the school pseudonym is the participant pseudonym. The remaining letter identifies the participants’ position in the school,

either teacher (T) or administrator (A). For example, the database code name for Mrs. Adams is AB-Adams-T. The table further clarifies in the third column that Mrs. Adams has less than 5 years experience as a teacher.

Results

Results are reported for each case study. Results include a key-word analysis for each participant, each school's focus group, and each school's artifact analysis. Each participant's responses are included in table format. Also included in the results are key-word and pattern analyses for each group of questions as described in Chapter 3. For the key-word and pattern analyses by questions, tables were formatted by filtering and sorting the participant response database by question code in order to easily observe patterns in participants' responses.

AB Middle School Case Study Results

AB Middle School is one of three middle schools within the district. Many teachers have more than 5 years of experience and have taught at the middle school for a majority of their careers. The RTI Coordinator, Mr. Robinson affirmed, "We have a lot of tradition here at AB Middle School." The participants in this case study answer the research questions and provide their perception of leader behaviors, teacher behaviors, and school climate before, during, and after the implementation of the school's current RTI program. Data collected from each participant is reviewed followed by data collected from the focus group session. Artifacts collected from AB Middle School are then described and analyzed. Keyword categories from the semi-structured individual interviews and focus group settings are presented. A pattern analysis is presented concerning the semi-structured individual interviews and the focus group setting. Finally, responses are compared to the transformational leadership principles of charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass, 1990).

Key-word analysis of Mrs. Adams' responses. Mrs. Adams' responses to semi-structured interview questions included key words and their frequency by question. The key words with the highest frequency included I, meetings, not, she, they and we. Summarized responses were analyzed and themes were derived from each response that included climate, collaboration, informed administrators, interventions, progress monitoring, RTI communication, and scheduling. The most frequently occurring theme from Mrs. Adams' responses was RTI Communication, occurring in 8 out of 28 responses. Progress monitoring, collaboration, and climate themes were inferred from 4 out of 28 responses each. Minor themes of interventions, scheduling, and informed administrators could be inferred from 3 or less out of 28 responses each.

Mrs. Adams' responses included many positive perceptions of leader behaviors before, during, and after the implementation of the RTI program at AB Middle School. Mrs. Adams was not employed at AB Middle School prior to the implementation of the school's RTI program. However, she stated that the administration scheduled a block time for interventions as part of the program and her job. In response to questions concerning administrator behaviors during implementation, Mrs. Adams repeatedly referred to teacher collaboration in planning and RTI meetings as integral to the success of the program and how administrators schedule and attend the meetings. Mrs. Adams then elaborated about how students continue to rely on interventionists' help and that the success of the RTI program at AB Middle depends upon the tier recommendations after implementation. She stated, "After implementing the interventions, we make recommendations for students. Administrators are involved and hear what we have to say."

Key-word analysis of Mr. Robinson's responses. Mr. Robinson's responses to semi-structured interview questions included key words and their frequency by question. Mr. Robinson stated, "There is no stigma for any student at any level." Mr. Robinson used the word stigma on 6 occasions in his response to question IRMS-6. Mr. Robinson also used the word tier on 6 occasions in his response to question ASSII-8. The words communication or communicate appeared as a key word in 4 out of 43 responses with a frequency of 9 throughout responses to AASSI-2-PN, ASSII-2during, AASSI-2-PD, and ASSII2after. Success was identified as a key word in 3 out of 48 responses with a frequency of 15. The word interventionist or intervention appeared as a key word in 3 out of 43 responses with a frequency of 8 throughout those 3 responses. RTI Communication between school administration and teachers was derived as a theme from 10 out of 48 responses. Collaboration between teachers emerged as a theme in 6 out of 48 responses from Mr. Robinson. The importance of the RTI implementation process was noted as an important theme from five of his responses. The word use occurs as a key word in 9 out of 48 of his responses, specifically in the section of questions referring to school artifacts. Themes of school climate, progress monitoring of students, implementation of interventions, and administrative consistency were derived from the remainder of the responses.

Mr. Robinson's responses reflected an extremely positive perception of leader and teacher behaviors before, during, and after the implementation of the RTI program at AB Middle School. Mr. Robinson stated that before the implementation of the RTI Program, "We planned for how to provide interventions and scheduled a block time. Our teachers are dedicated to struggling learners." He repeatedly emphasized the importance of his style of leadership and communication that involved an attitude of helpfulness to teachers and students to promote success. Mr. Robinson named communication, helpfulness, and flexibility with teachers as

important components to RTI program success in his responses to questions ASSII-1during, ASSII-2during, IRMS-1during, and IRMS4during that focused on his behaviors during the RTI program implementation. He stated, “Leading and inspiring teachers and students for success is important.” Concerning RTI program sustainability and the leadership behaviors he perceived as vital after implementation, he mentioned that continual communication, monitoring, and changes must occur.

Key-word analysis of Mrs. Smith’s responses. Mr. Smith’s responses to semi-structured interview questions included key words and their frequency by question. Mrs. Smith uses the word I on numerous occasions, specifically, in her responses to questions TSSII-1before, TSSII2-before, IRMS-1after, IRMS-2, IRMS-3, IRMS-4before, and IRMS4after. She used the word I on 37 occasions. The word students appeared as a key word, according to frequency in her responses, in 5 out of 28 responses. The word intervention or interventionist appeared as a key word in 4 out of 28 responses with a frequency of 14. The theme of RTI communication was derived most frequently from Mrs. Smith’s responses, specifically, from 14 out of 28 responses. The themes of collaboration, scheduling, progress monitoring, climate, and school vision were derived from the remainder of her responses.

Mrs. Smith was not employed with AB Middle School before the RTI program implementation began. However, in her responses to questions TSSII-1during, TSSII-during, IRMS-1during, and IRMS-2during she repeatedly referred to RTI communication being organized and focused on students in a collaborative context. Mrs. Smith stated, “Continued communication is important. It is important to revisit the students’ progress and the recommendation for intervention after the program has been implemented.”

Key-word analysis of Mrs. Abernathy’s responses. Mrs. Abernathy repeatedly referred to her experience as a lead math teacher as a guiding factor that helped her throughout the RTI program implementation at AB Middle School. She stated, “My experience helps me decide how to best help the students with whatever they are struggling with in math.” She made similar statements concerning her experience in 7 out of 28 responses. She used the word I frequently in her responses. The word I appeared as a key word in 7 out of 28 responses with a frequency of 30 during her responses to those 7 questions. She was very focused on her job as a math interventionist and repeatedly mentioned setting goals for students, monitoring their progress, and communicating about the data with other teachers. Progress monitoring of students was derived as a theme from 10 out of 28 of her responses. RTI Communication was derived as a theme from 9 out of 28 of her responses. Other themes such as positive school climate, consistency, the RTI implementation process, and informed administrators were derived from her responses.

Mrs. Abernathy emphasized that she relied on her experience as a past leader in the math department to help the school prior to the implementation of the current RTI program. She stated, “Prior to the program’s implementation administrators were investigating the process and planning things out.” She stated that AB Middle School has a strong administration and that they communicated frequently about the process before the program was implemented as revealed in her summary responses to questions TSSII-1before, TSSII-2before, IRMS-1before, and IRMS-1before. Mrs. Abernathy suggested that the administration, specifically Mr. Robinson, was very helpful during the process concerning data collection, implementation, and follow-through on the special education referral process. Mrs. Abernathy referred to her experience as helping her make data-driven decisions based on student progress after significant

implementation of interventions. She noted that teachers help administrators troubleshoot the process and look for ways to make the program better. Mrs. Abernathy stated, “Mr. Robinson always helps us get what we need to serve the students.”

Key-word analysis of Mrs. Webb’s responses. Responses were summarized from Mrs. Webb’s semi-structured interview and included numerous key words. Only a few key words were repeated including I on 4 occasions, we on 3 occasions, time on 2 occasions, and data on 2 occasions. The theme of RTI communication was derived from 11 out of 28 of her responses. A theme of teacher collaboration occurred in 5 out of 28 responses. Other themes inferred from her response that noted perceived leader behaviors throughout the RTI program’s implementation included setting a positive climate, consistency in communication and procedures, progress monitoring, scheduling carefully, and having a vision for the program.

Mrs. Webb noted that teachers took care of students’ needs in the classroom before the RTI program at AB Middle School was implemented. She stated that teachers planned out what a support class should include. She stated that the teachers knew the administrators were planning out a process for AB Middle School prior to the program’s implementation. Mrs. Webb stated, “During the implementation process, they met with us frequently,” as she described some behaviors that administrators demonstrated during the implementation process. Mrs. Webb frequently mentioned collaborative planning after implementation stating, “We are always looking to improve the RTI program.” She also stated that more communication about student progress occurred after the implementation of the RTI program at AB Middle School.

Key-word analysis of Mrs. Duncan’s responses. Mrs. Duncan responded frequently using the word they when describing administrator behaviors in the context of the RTI program at AB Middle School, which occurred as a key word in 10 out of 28 of her responses. She had a

very positive perception about the administration, specifically Mr. Robinson, at AB Middle School. She frequently mentioned administrator involvement that included willingness to attend meetings, help with teacher collaboration, careful planning, and scheduling. Mrs. Duncan reported that administrative paperwork is still excessive, which was a negative comment. In the context of discussing leadership behaviors throughout the RTI program's implementation, RTI communication was derived as a reoccurring theme from 9 out of 28 of Mrs. Duncan's responses. Teachers having time to collaborate also emerged as a theme from 5 out of 28 of her responses. Other themes that emerged from her responses included positive climate, administrative consistency, promotion and clarity of the implementation process, scheduling, and progress monitoring of students.

Mrs. Duncan's reported that she like helping students stating, "I like providing individual help to students in the classroom." She stated, "Teachers listened and received instructions about the new RTI program before we did it." She indicated some planning, a program description in writing, and forms that were required as mentioned in questions TSSII-1before, TSSII-2before, IRMS-1before, and IRMS-4before. Mrs. Duncan reported that once the implementation of the new RTI program began that general education classroom teachers began to collaborate more with remedial teachers. Mrs. Duncan stated, "Classroom teachers began sharing information with interventionists after we worked to identify needs we saw in the classroom." She stated, "I've continued to help all kids, but the block time has made it easier," referring to administrator scheduling of a block time for students to receive interventions from a remedial teacher. After program implementation occurred, Mrs. Duncan simply stated, "We pass the information along to the next grade level." She repeated commented that teachers planned for the next year and tried to make sure interventions continued for struggling students.

Key-word analysis of AB Middle School’s focus group responses. Focus groups are a counterpart to the individual interview as previously stated in Chapter 3 (Yin, 2014). A small group of teachers at AB Middle School was interviewed for the purpose of moderating a discussion (Yin, 2014) about the relationship between administrative leadership behaviors and successful RTI program implementation in middle schools. Participants reconvened after individual semi-structured interviews to a focus group setting. Results are presented in Table 5.

Table 2

List of participants’ (AB Middle School Focus Group) Summarized Responses

Question Code	Summary of Participants’ Response	Theme	Key Word	Key Word Frequency
ABFG-1	Research, high standards, communication, and consistency	Informed Administrators	Consistency	2
ABFG-2	Encouragement, consistency, and flexibility	Consistency	Encourage	3
ABFG-3before	Research, hiring of key personnel, scheduling, best practice	Scheduling	Hiring	3
ABFG-4during	Consistency of implementation and communication	Consistency	Consistency	2
ABFG-5after	Consistency of procedures and consistent communication	Consistency	Consistent	2
ABFG-6	Student and teacher support, identify struggling learners	Interventions	Support	2
ABFG-7	RTI would be difficult without administrator support	RTI Communication	Correlated	1
ABFG-8	Proactively and consistently tracking student progress	Progress Monitoring	Proactive	1
ABFG-9	Block time, monthly schedule, calendar of meetings	Scheduling	Schedule	1
ABFG-10	Lack of funding, materials, and teachers are barriers	Scheduling	Lack	3

Consistency from administrators concerning implementation and sustainability of the RTI program appeared as a main theme, reoccurring for 3 out of 10 questions. The words consistency or consistent were defined as key words for 3 out of 10 questions with it being used in conjunction with the word encouragement in question ABFG-2. Teachers emphasized the importance of consistency in many aspects of the RTI program including administrators' involvement, planning, scheduling, flexibility, establishment of procedures, and communication with staff. Scheduling also appeared as a recurring theme in 3 out of 10 questions as teachers talked about administrators researching the process, hiring personnel, providing a block time for teachers to implement interventions, targeting and scheduling the correct students for interventions, creating a monthly schedule, and creating a calendar for scheduling meetings.

The purpose of questions 1 through 5 is to gather descriptions of effective leadership behaviors that need to be observable and wanted by teachers in order to establish a positive school climate that helps an RTI program to be successful (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Responses from AB Middle School focus group participants to questions 1 through 5 provided some insightful information. Participants were asked question 1 from the standardized focus group open-ended question set, "What professional leadership behaviors exhibited administrators are considered to be effective in creating conditions for a comprehensive RTI program in your school?" The first participant to answer alluded to administrators setting up a model and scheduling a block of time where teachers referred to as interventionists could implement the interventions. This focus group participant stated, "It's not left up to the classroom teacher to have to try to figure out with everything else they've got to do. A participant interjected, "...Which is nice." Another participant agreed and stated, "I wouldn't have time." Once participant agreed that built in intervention time was essential, also alluding to the

administration's behavior of scheduling a block time separate from the regular academic course segmented time.

Participants were asked question 2 from the standardized focus group open-ended question set, "What professional leadership behaviors exhibited by teachers are perceived to be effective in creating conditions for successfully implementing a comprehensive RTI program in your school?" A participant communicated that she perceived collaboration between the classroom teacher and the interventionist was one behavior that teachers have exhibited that creates a successful RTI program. Several other participants spoke in agreement with like statements. Another participant stated that using an interactive spreadsheet was effective in creating the conditions for success.

Participants were then asked question 3 from the standardized focus group open-ended question set, "What are the most important leadership behaviors that were displayed before implementation?" One participant stated, "I wasn't here when it first started." The next participant then stated, "Before RTI it largely fell on the counselor to be the head of the student support team services. Then the data was not specific. The RTI Coordinator now takes the bulk of work concerning that now." Other participants were shaking their heads in agreement. Her statement implied that the school designated an RTI Coordinator and began collecting student data instead of expecting teachers to collect data.

Next, participants were asked question 4 of the standardized focus group questions, "What are the most important leadership behaviors that were displayed during implementation?" The initial respondent stated, "They're definitely committed to it. So it has been consistent." In semi-structured format a follow-up question was asked, "How do they show their commitment?" The same participant stated, "Well, they give us freedom obviously to meet and discuss it

without them being there. They allow the teacher to take charge of that and actually make a recommendation.” Another participant interjected, “And they’ve made sure we are all trained.” The next participant stated, “And I was going to say the collaboration between everyone.” Another participant spoke up, “Everybody has access to it.” A final participant stated, “They created a model that works.”

For question 5 of the focus group session, all participants’ responses were similar to the previous questions, implying that administrators applied the same behaviors year after year such as scheduling, collecting data, consistent procedures, providing training, clear communication, and providing an interactive venue of communication through Google. One significant statement from a participant alluded to administrators actively providing resources, “We have a huge resource in things we can do to help students try to overcome some of their struggles. And they’ve (administrators) provided us handouts and knowledge charts.”

Questions 6 and 7 were specifically designed to retrieve perception data about the relationship between leadership behaviors of administrators and teachers and an RTI program in order to address concerns that RTI may not work (Orosco & Klinger, 2010) in the context of accountability. One participant stated, “Basically, their role is to know their students and know where they struggle.” Another participant agreed, “Yeah.” At this time the participants began talking to each other, remembering a training meeting they had attended where they were provided with intervention packets. One participant then stated, “It all has to be noted for every student.” They each implied that they worked together and documented everything for accountability purposes. Question 7 was then asked to the focus group, “How are administrators’ leadership characteristics and behaviors related to the implementation of a comprehensive RTI program in your school?” Each participant listed characteristics and

behaviors concerning how good communication by the administrators related to the implementation of a comprehensive RTI program.

Question 8 pertained to gaining an understanding how of program sustainability can be maintained once the program has been established through responsible leadership (Stone-Johnson, 2013). The focus group was asked question 8, “How do leaders and teachers sustain a successful RTI program in your school?” Good communication was the focal point of the responses.

Questions 9 and 10 were designed to obtain perception data on leadership characteristics that may be barriers to program implementation or that may prevent barriers to program implementation from arising. Averill, Baker, and Rinaldi (2014) concluded that there was no guidance for helping teachers manage RTI program block time effectively. The focus group was asked question 9, “What routines and procedures have been established by administrators that help teachers manage their time for RTI program implementation?” Once participant stated, “We have monthly meetings. He (the RTI Coordinator), comes with an agenda and the meetings move pretty quickly.” Another participant interjected, “On the Google Drive. So, the interactive component has really been helpful when the interventionist cannot be at the meeting.” The participants each reviewed what was already discussed about the administrators adjusting the daily schedule to provide a block time for interventions, scheduling monthly meetings, and using Google to aid in time management and communication.

Question 10 was then asked, “What routines and procedures or program requirements could be considered a hindrance to RTI program implementation?” One participant looked at the others and stated, “Don’t you think we’ve done that? I mean have we not modified?” Another participant responded, “Yeah, we are constantly.” Participants were implying that they have

been able to work with administrators to reduce hindrances to RTI program implementation. A follow-up question was asked, “What are the most recent things that you’ve taken out that were hindrances?” One participant stated, “We would go through every child and some teachers, for lack of a better word, would vent about that student rather than looking at the academic component. So, we’ve removed that component from the meeting.” Participants also stated and agreed that they have tried to focus on simply the students needing their plan adjusted rather than discussing every student in order to finish and document efficiently. Another participant positively compared the current meeting procedure to the past procedure of multiple meetings and said, “Now we just come talk all together so it kind of weeds out the middle man.”

In summary, the word consistency is routinely utilized by the focus group participants in such a pattern as to conclude that consistent leadership behaviors have been demonstrated throughout the implementation of the RTI program at AB Middle School that include the derived themes based on key words used by participants such as RTI communication in all forms, collaboration with teachers, progress monitoring, scheduling, and the development of an implementation process. The word consistency was not utilized at a high frequency in individual interview, which contain a higher quantity of more specific questions. It may be inferred that bringing the focus group participants together builds consensus that the consistency of administrator leadership behaviors throughout the RTI program implementation process was an overarching leadership behavior that appears to be important to teachers.

Artifact analysis from AB Middle School. During the semi-structured interview using the *Questions Concerning School Artifacts and Documents* document, Mr. Robinson presented several school artifacts that are used for various types of documentation. Types of

documentation included providing descriptions of duties to teachers and aiding in collaboration to make data-driven decisions. Mr. Robinson summarized the purpose of each document.

Mr. Robinson provided teachers with program description documents. Mr. Robinson answered questions about this document. Questions pertaining to this document are labeled with the suffix PD. This document is typed using word processing format, contains an introductory paragraph, a 10-item bulleted list of guidelines, and a summary paragraph. The introductory paragraph briefly defines RTI, lists the RTI functions that teacher teams perform during the scheduled time, and states the main goal of the RTI program at AB Middle School. The bulleted lists is comprised of two sections that include Tier 2 guidelines and Tier 3 guidelines such as required minutes for interventions at each tier, approximate class size, interventions, progress monitoring tools, and the software applications that may be utilized. The summary paragraph emphasizes the use of assessment data to guide decision making for providing students' academic needs and the importance of parental involvement throughout the process.

Mr. Robinson provided teachers with a standardized parental notification document. Mr. Robinson answered questions about this document. Questions pertaining to this document are labeled with the suffix PN. This document is typed using word processing letter format including the date, greeting line, description of student difficulty, description of student supports, current student grades, current student performance levels, and an invitation line for communication that includes the school's contact information.

Mr. Robinson provided teachers with a student concerns sheet. Mr. Robinson answered questions about this document. Questions pertaining to this document are labeled with the suffix SCS. A chart showing student scores from intervention probes over time is attached.

Mr. Robinson provided teachers with a student action plan document that is to be used for Tier 3 students. It is used for collaboration purposes and also may be used as a visual for parents during meetings. Questions pertaining to this document are labeled with the suffix SAP. This document contains a data table that provides relevant student information. The teachers use this document to record their decision regarding tier status or the option of placing a referral for a special education comprehensive evaluation.

Mr. Robinson provided teachers with a special education referral checklist. Mr. Robinson answered questions about this document. Questions pertaining to this document were labeled with the suffix RC. This document is typed in word processing format. Action steps and procedures for teachers are listed on the document. Required documentation is also listed.

Key-word and pattern analysis of AB Middle School interviewee responses.

Questions 1 and 2 from *Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation* were asked to gain insight concerning participant self-perception and perceptions about AB Middle School. Participants' responses to Question 1 clearly focused on their own teaching of students and their duties concerning helping students who were struggling academically. Participants described behaviors that they observed administrators displaying in order to promote and plan for the implementation of the RTI Program at AB Middle School. The pattern of perceived administrator planning concerning the schedule and RTI process is revealed when the data is filtered and then sorted by Question Code. Participant responses indicated that during the process of RTI program implementation teachers should collaborate and make sure to monitor student progress while administrators should be scheduling and attending meetings. Participant responses revealed the theme of continued RTI communication as an essential

leadership behavior for RTI program success after the implementation of the program has occurred.

Questions 3 and 4 were intentionally asked to collect perception data about the leadership characteristics displayed by the administration at AB Middle School.

Participants emphasized the perception that administrators were knowledgeable about RTI, had a plan, consistently talked about it in a positive manner, and scheduled a block of time for student interventions to take place. Participants' responses to Question 4 focused on their own perceptions of stress relief, positive climate, collegial collaboration, and the use of student data to make decisions. The pattern of responses indicated that a positive climate exists concerning the RTI program due to administrators scheduling and planning for a block time to help struggling learners was revealed when the data was filtered and then sorted by question code.

Questions 5 through 8 were phrased to collect perception data about leadership behaviors displayed by the administration at AB Middle School that established contingencies and reinforcements of desired school faculty behaviors (Skinner, 1969). Participants' responses to questions 5 through 8 mainly revealed perceptions about administrators' methods of communication and the climate of the school within the context of talking about the RTI program. Mrs. Webb stated in her response to question 5, "Students seem to do better in class after intervention time." The remainder of the participants all used the word positive to describe the climate conditions that have been created at AB Middle School. In responses to question 6, participants' statements agreed that administrators were involved and attended meetings. All 5 teacher participants made comments about how the leadership behaviors of administrators have positively influenced their perception of the RTI program and process at AB Middle School in

response to question 7. In regard to question 8, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Abernathy made similar comments about how administrators established a clear RTI process that could be followed by teachers while Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Webb, and Mrs. Duncan emphasized that the current RTI program at AB Middle School could be sustained if new administrators actively listened to teachers about the established program.

In the second phase of the semi-structured interviews participants were asked a series of 12 questions on the *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* document. Questions 1 through 5 on the document were designed to collect perception data about participants' personal experiences specifically relating to the RTI program's implementation. Participants' responses to question 1 revealed that teachers perceived helping other teachers and providing individual help to students were leadership behaviors they demonstrated prior to the implementation of the RTI program. Mr. Robinson, the RTI Coordinator for AB Middle School emphasized his self-perceived leadership behavior prior to program implementation was providing inspiration to teachers and students to succeed. During the process, once the RTI program had been implemented at AB Middle School, teachers perceived that their leadership behaviors included using RTI software to help identify struggling students, monitor their progress, and communicate about student data. Mr. Robinson indicated that he perceived continued inspiration and communication to be his contributing leadership behaviors during the implementation of the RTI program. After the program had been implemented, teacher responses appeared to show a perception that providing interventions to students and communication about ways to improve the process were vitally important for program success.

Participants' perception of their strongest leadership behaviors included organizational skill with student data, collaboration with teachers, instructional planning, setting high

expectations for students, communicating effectively with stakeholders, and inspiring students. Mr. Robinson perceived his strongest leadership behaviors to include his interpersonal communication skills, willingness to help teachers, and concern for students. Participants' perception of their weakest leadership behaviors included time management, lack of focus, frustration with unmotivated students, failure to maximize communication with colleagues, and failure to look at long-term goals. Mr. Robinson stated, "It is hard for me to prioritize my duties on some days. I feel like I cannot dedicate the time I would like to dedicate to the RTI program."

In regard to question 4, the pattern of collaboration was revealed through participants' responses about their self-perceptions concerning how they decided to go about the RTI program implementation. When participants spoke of how they decide what leadership behaviors to use before, during, and after implementation, they most often perceived collaboration with others as a means of deciding what to do at each stage of the process. For example, Mrs. Adams stated, "I relied on the more experienced interventionist for training." Mrs. Smith stated, "When we collaborate, we plan for instruction and know what to do." Mrs. Webb made a similar comment, "We planned out what a support class should look like." Statements from Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Webb indicate that experience with teaching and collaboration with others helps teachers make decisions that they are confident will help students. In regard to question 5, participants perceived that their behaviors in the classrooms helped students through the use of the RTI program at AB Middle School and are therefore important.

Interview questions 6 through 9 from the *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* document were asked to obtain perception data regarding school policy, change implementation, and the supports needed from school administration throughout implementation. Patterns from participants' responses are revealed through filtering and sorting the database.

Participants perceived that administrative organization, communication with staff, consistency with program implementation procedures, hiring of key personnel, planning for adequate intervention time, and general involvement in the program are leadership behaviors that have positively impacted the RTI program at AB Middle School. Participants also perceived that the above mentioned behaviors are vital to the success of the program because of the communication from administration about the RTI progress when responses to question 7 are examined.

Participants perceived various barriers to the RTI program's success that included negative criticism from staff, lack of communication at times, and tedious paperwork that is required as a part of the RTI process. The pattern derived from participant responses to questions 6 through 9 is that the lack of the identified themes, which include various leadership behaviors, would negatively impact the RTI program at AB Middle School.

Questions 10 and 11 from the *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* document were phrased to collect data about procedures and documents utilized in the RTI program at AB Middle School. Data was filtered and sorted to be able to identify patterns in participants' perceptions specific to RTI procedures and documents.

The emerging theme that is identified from the data is that progress monitoring of students requires documentation. The teachers and school administration have developed various artifacts to help record important information about student progress. Teachers' perceptions, indicated by their responses to questions 10 and 11, reveal that some documents are used as a reference or guideline to help them remember duties and procedures while others are used as a method of tracking and sharing student data that is to be used as an aid in deciding what level of interventions students should received. In other words, the artifacts outline and guide the RTI Program at AB Middle School.

Question 12 from the *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* document was designed to collect perception data that could potentially help school leaders identify leadership behaviors that could promote RTI program sustainability within a school. Participants' responses indicate that administrators have successfully implemented an RTI program at AB Middle School that can continue in a positive manner by transferring RTI responsibilities to an interventionist during a block period of time that is dedicated specifically to helping struggling learners. It is clear from participants' perceptions that teachers were allowed to provide feedback about the program, allowed time to work through the process, and that administrators demonstrated leadership behaviors in a consistent manner before, during, and after the implementation of the RTI program at AB Middle School.

CD Middle School Case Study Results

CD Middle School is one of three middle schools within the district. CD Middle School is a relatively new school. It was built a few years ago as a result of growth in the student population within the district. The participants in this case study answered the research questions and provide their perception of leader behaviors, teacher behaviors, and school climate before, during, and after the implementation of the school's current RTI program. Data collected from each participant is reviewed followed by data collected from the focus group session. Artifacts collected from AB Middle School are described and analyzed. Keyword categories from the semi-structured individual interviews and focus group settings are presented. A pattern analysis is presented concerning the semi-structured individual interviews and the focus group setting. Finally, responses are compared to the transformational leadership principles of charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass, 1990).

Key-word analysis of Mrs. Oliver's responses. Mrs. Oliver's responses to semi-structured interview questions included key words and their frequency. The key words with the highest frequency included coaching, data, description, I, meetings, positive or positively, teachers, use or refer. Summarized responses were analyzed and themes were derived from each response that included climate, collaboration, informed administrators, interventions, progress monitoring, RTI communication, and scheduling. The most frequently occurring theme from Mrs. Oliver's responses was RTI Communication, occurring in 16 out of 43 responses. Implementation Process was a major emphasis or theme derived from 11 out of 43 responses. Collaboration was a theme derived from 8 out of 43 responses. Minor themes of climate, informed administrators, and progress monitoring occurred on several occasions throughout Mrs. Oliver's responses.

Mrs. Oliver's conveyed an extremely positive perception about leader and teacher behaviors before, during, and after the implementation of the RTI program at CD Middle School. It should be noted that her bias as the Principal and RTI Coordinator at CD Middle School be taken into account when interpreting her responses, however, her responses are corroborated by other participants employed at CD Middle School. Mrs. Oliver stated that before the implementation of the RTI Program, "We worked with teachers to develop a system that fit our school." She repeatedly emphasized the importance of her style of leadership and communication that involved coaching teachers and modeling the process for teachers. Mrs. Oliver stated, "I try to make it easier for teachers." In her responses to questions ASSII-1 during, ASSII-2 during, IRMS-1 during, and IRMS4 during she communicated that she exhibited a helpful attitude toward teachers and participated in sharing leadership at her school. She stated, "Teachers worked together to develop a tiered system. Teachers implemented a tiered system."

Concerning RTI program sustainability and the leadership behaviors she perceived as vital after implementation, she mentioned that continual teacher and administrator involvement must occur. Mrs. Oliver stated, “I have modeled the process.”

Key-word analysis of Mr. Davis’ responses. Mr. Davis’ responses to semi-structured interview questions included key words and their frequency. The key words with the highest frequency included data, I, kids or them, procedures, teachers, and administrators or they. Summarized responses were analyzed and themes were derived from each response that included climate, collaboration, informed administrators, interventions, progress monitoring, RTI communication, and scheduling. The most frequently occurring theme from Mr. Davis’ responses was RTI Communication, occurring in 6 out of 28 responses. The theme of interventions was derived from 5 out of 28 of his responses. Minor themes of climate, collaboration, consistency, implementation process, and progress monitoring occurred several times each.

Mr. Davis’ responses reflected an overall positive perception of leader behaviors before, during, and after the implementation of the RTI program at CD Middle School. Mr. Davis’ responses indirectly implied that teachers worked together to form a system prior to implementation and then to adjust it as needed. Mr. Davis also stated, “I know they planned for a while and then got us into groups.” In response to questions concerning administrator behaviors during implementation, Mr. Davis said, “Administrators outlined the process and led us through the process. They provided us with documents and procedures.” After the process, Mr. Davis reported, “They (administrators) helped us stick to planning based on the data by data teams.” His perceptions concerning leader behaviors at the school were very positive. When asked about his perception of teacher buy-in of the RTI program, school climate and

administrator influence, Mr. Davis replied, “Very positive. We trust them. Teachers have bought in.”

Key-word analysis of Mrs. Brady’s responses. Mr. Brady’s responses to semi-structured interview questions included key words and their frequency. Mrs. Brady uses the word I on 9 occasions in response to questions IRMS-1before, IRMS-2, and IRMS-3. The word I also appears as a key word in 3 out of 28 responses. Mrs. Brady uses the word consistent on 8 occasions, specifically, in her responses to questions TSSII-2during, TSSII-2after, IRMS6, and IRMS7. The themes of RTI communication and implementation process occur in 7 out of 28 responses each. The theme of collaboration appears in 6 out of 28 responses. Other themes derived from Mrs. Brady’s responses include consistency, interventions, progress monitoring, and scheduling.

Mrs. Brady described the planning process before implementation stating, “The administrators planned the program and executed the implementation. They consistently planned and communicated with teachers.” She also emphasized that during the implementation process administrators became familiar with the students’ data and knew the students. Mrs. Brady stated, “Continued communication is essential after the program has been implemented to ensure students continue in their progress.”

Key-word analysis of Mrs. Dooley’s responses. A key-word analysis of Mrs. Dooley’s responses revealed that the words we, they, I, database, and consistently appeared as the most frequently used words. The word we appeared as a key word on 3 occasions with a frequency of 14 in reference to teachers planning, encouraging students, and meeting together. The word they appeared as a key word on 2 occasions with a frequency of 7 in reference to administrators demonstrating flexibility within the program and taking the ideas of teachers into consideration.

The word I appeared as a key word on 2 occasions with a frequency of 6 in reference to her duties within the RTI implementation process. She uses the word consistency 4 times during 2 of her responses. She uses the word database 3 times during 2 of her responses. The theme of interventions appeared in 7 out of 28 responses. The theme of implementation process appeared in 5 out of 28 responses. Other themes revealed from Mrs. Dooley's responses included school climate, collaboration, consistency, progress monitoring, and RTI communication.

Mrs. Dooley responded to several questions pertaining to RTI prior to the implementation of the RTI program at CD Middle School. She stated, "As a language arts teacher, I love to fill gaps. I feel helping students comprehend is essential." She stated that administrators were flexible with teachers and took their ideas into consideration. During the implementation process, Mrs. Dooley communicated that administrators continued to be flexible with teachers and listened to their ideas. She did not address any components about administrator or teacher behaviors after the implementation of the RTI program at CD Middle School.

Key-word analysis of Mrs. Bell's responses. Responses summarized from Mrs. Bell's semi-structured interview included numerous key words. The word teachers appeared as a key word on 3 occasions with a frequency of 8. The word I appeared as a key word on 2 occasions with a frequency of 8. The word time appeared as a key word on 2 occasions with a frequency of 5. The most prevalent themes derived from Mrs. Bell's responses were RTI communications and interventions. RTI communication was derived as a theme from 7 out of 28 responses. Intervention was derived as a theme from 6 out of 28 responses.

Mrs. Bell was not employed before the implementation of the RTI program at CD Middle School. She described utilizing software programs to aid with intervention implementation as she worked with students during the implementation process. She stated, "Administrators

walked us through the process.” She described various behaviors after the implementation such as data participating in team meetings and communicating with the RTI Coordinator. She emphasized, “It is always good to communicate with everyone after it has been implemented. Data team meetings were held to schedule students for the next year.”

Key-word analysis of Mrs. Sinkey’s responses. The word know was identified as a key word in 2 of Mrs. Sinkey’s responses as she used it a total of 7 times. The word communicated appeared as a key word on 2 occasions with a frequency of 6. The main themes derived from Mrs. Sinkey’s responses included implementation process, interventions, and RTI communication. RTI communication appeared as a theme in 9 out of 28 responses. Interventions appeared as a theme in 8 out of 28 responses. Implementation process appeared in 5 out of 28 responses. Other themes derived from her responses included climate, collaboration, consistency, progress monitoring, and scheduling.

Mrs. Sinkey stated that she taught math for a number of years saying, “Before the implementation of the RTI program, it seemed natural to just want to know what motivates kids.” She stated that building relationships with kids was her strength. During the process, Mrs. Sinkey emphasized that data collection was important, “During the process I consistently collect the data, so consistency is a major behavior that is important to the process.” After the process, Mrs. Sinkey communicated that teachers meet regularly to decide on student placements. She stated, “Communication is essential to the process.”

Key-word analysis of CD Middle School’s focus group responses. Focus groups are a counterpart to the individual interview (Yin, 2014) as previously stated in Chapter 3. A group of five teachers at CD Middle School was interviewed for the purpose of moderating a discussion (Yin, 2014) about the relationship between administrative leadership behaviors and successful

RTI program implementation in middle schools. Participants reconvened after individual semi-structured interviews to a focus group setting. The focus group's responses are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

List of participants' (CD Middle School Focus Group) Summarized Responses

Question Code	Summary of Participants' Response	Theme	Key Word	Key Word Frequency
CDFG-1	Administration schedule, hiring interventionists, time, model	Scheduling	Time	8
CDFG-2	Collaboration between classroom teacher and interventionist	Collaboration	Time	3
CDFG-3before	Regular meetings, feedback, looking at data, RTI leader	RTI Communication	Meetings	2
CDFG-4during	Commitment, consistency, flexibility, guidance, teacher input	Consistency	Administrators	3
CDFG-5after	Made sure teachers are continually trained, communication	RTI Communication	Meetings	2
CDFG-6	Integral to process, know their students, resources, planning	Implementation Process	Plans	4
CDFG-7	Commitment of administrators leads to success of program	RTI Communication	Commitment	2
CDFG-8	Communication from everyone, commitment, consistency	RTI Communication	Communication	3
CDFG-9	Monthly meetings, administrator comes with agenda	RTI Communication	Meet	3
CDFG-10	We have modified over times; not sticking to meeting agenda	Consistency	Focus	3

Communication regarding the RTI program at CD Middle School was revealed as the main theme appearing in 4 out of 10 questions. Specifically, communication appeared as a key word in one question, CDFG-8, with a frequency of 3. However, communication regarding meetings, communication methods of administrators, training, commitment, and consistency pertaining to the RTI program could be inferred from participants' responses to questions CDFG-2 through CDFG-5 and CDFG-7 through CDFG-9. Teachers' perceptions about the RTI program emphasize that communication by administrators on many levels is required for the implementation of an RTI program to be successful.

The purpose of questions 1 through 5 is to gather descriptions of effective leadership behaviors that need to be observable and wanted by teachers in order to establish a positive school climate that helps an RTI program to be successful (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Responses from CD Middle School focus group participants to questions 1 through 5 provided some insightful information. Question 1 was asked, "What professional leadership behaviors exhibited by administrators are considered to be effective in creating conditions for successfully implementing a comprehensive RTI program in your school?" In response to question 1 a participant answered, "Consistency." Another participant followed up stating, "...And I think researching best practices." The next participant responded, "High standards. Making sure it is done well." The other participants then began to discuss among themselves about the importance of communication of the same expectations for all staff at the school.

Question 2 was posed, "What professional leadership behaviors exhibited by teachers are perceived to be effective in creating conditions for successfully implementing a comprehensive RTI program in your school?" The first participant to respond stated, "Well, from time to time, in my opinion, we change. The process remains the same." The participant implied that the

teachers exhibit leadership qualities to continuing to follow the process together. Other participants listed perceived leadership behaviors such as providing encouragement to students, supporting them academically, and building relationships with students.

Question 3 was posed, “What are the most important leadership behaviors that were displayed before implementation?” Participants described perceived leadership behaviors that were displayed before implementation as researching best practices, hiring of specific personnel to implement interventions, and implementing a block time for interventions within the school schedule. One participant responded, “I really think it is researching (before implementation) what was best for our school and our students.”

Question 4 was presented, “What are the most important leadership behaviors that were displayed during implementation?” Participants began to talk among themselves concerning their school’s academic coach organizing interventions and resources, setting meetings once per month, and making sure that a student is receiving implementation of best practice before a special education referral is made, and conveying student information to Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention teachers so that effective remediation can occur.

Question 5 was posed, “What are the most important leadership behaviors that have been displayed after initial implementation in order to sustain program fidelity?” Several participants communicated that teachers from each grade level gather the data and then pass it along to the next grade level or school so that the process continues for each child. One participant stated, “The whole process goes all the way beginning whenever they’re being tracked for remediation. It starts and continues on. Even when they exit the program, we still are looking at maintaining that they have been successful in the classroom.”

Questions 6 and 7 were specifically designed to retrieve perception data about the relationship between leadership behaviors of administrators and teachers and an RTI program in order to address concerns that RTI may not work (Orosco & Klinger, 2010) in the context of accountability. Question 6 was asked, “What role does teacher accountability play in the RTI program success?” Participants agreed that accountability of teachers played a major role in program success. The participants’ communicated that the teachers took ownership of their responsibility to form productive student relationships, encourage students, know how the students are performing, track their progress, and ultimately be a constant positive influence in pushing the students to succeed. Question 7 was then presented, “How are administrators’ leadership characteristics and behaviors related to the implementation of a comprehensive RTI program in your school?” One participant responded, “They know the kids by name. Sometimes they know things that we don’t know. They are proactive.” Another participant suggested that there was a correlation between administrators being proactive and the success of the program. Another participant interjected, “They are data gurus. Thank goodness, because I can’t.” The participants communicated that proactive research and communication by an administrator was essential to the success of the program.

Question 8 pertains to gaining an understanding how of program sustainability can be maintained once the program has been established through responsible leadership (Stone-Johnson, 2013). Question 8 was presented, “How do leaders and teachers sustain a successful RTI program in your school?” The consensus among participants was that consistent communication about student data and steps in the RTI process sustained the program.

Questions 9 and 10 emphasize obtaining perception data on leadership characteristics that may be barriers to program implementation or that may prevent barriers to program

implementation from arising. Question 9 was asked, “What routines and procedures have been established by administrators that help teachers manage their time for RTI program implementation?” Participants restated some of their previous comments alluding to organization of documents, daily routines built in to the school schedule, monthly meetings that are scheduled, and using a Google calendar to keep everyone organized. One participant replied simply, “Great communication.” Another participant stated, “We know that the third Tuesday of every month is our RTI time to meet.”

Question 10 was posed as the last question of the focus group session, “What routines and procedures or program requirements could be considered a hindrance to RTI program implementation?” Participants immediately responded that a lack of funding and the need for more teachers were definite hindrances. One participant responded to another participant, “More teachers. Absolutely. That way you can make smaller groups or students could be pulled because there is so much going on.”

Artifact analysis from CD Middle School. During the semi-structured interview using the *Questions Concerning School Artifacts and Documents* document, Mrs. Oliver presented several school artifacts that are used for various types of documentation, to provide descriptions of duties to teachers, and to aid in collaboration to make data-driven decisions.

Mrs. Oliver began with describing the RTI Procedures and Expectations for CD Middle School which using the suffix PE to notate the document. This document is in word processing format using a bulleted list that contains 6 sections including guidelines for intervention and progress monitoring for students performing at tier 2 and tier 3 levels. Mrs. Oliver also had this in a classification chart. She explained, “This RTI Procedures/Expectations document helps

teacher and is used as a reference to ensure the process is implemented with fidelity. I want to make it easy to understand for teachers.”

Next, Mrs. Oliver described the document that she provided to her teachers as a guide to move students to various tiers. The suffix TC is used to identify questions pertaining to the document. The document was simplified from the RTI Procedures and Expectations documents. It simply listed directions in 4 steps for teachers in numbered format for moving students from tier 1 status to tier 2. The document also listed 3 steps for teachers to proceed with in order to move a student from tier 2 status to tier 3.

Mrs. Oliver also provided another document that divided duties between the classroom teacher, remedial teacher or interventionist, and the RTI Coordinator. Questions concerning this document are identified with the suffix R. On the document, the RTI Coordinator had 7 duties listed in bulleted format. The RTI remediation teacher had 3 duties listed in bulleted format. The classroom teacher had 4 duties listed in bulleted format.

Another artifact that was provided in the semi-structured interview with Mrs. Oliver is the meeting checklist. It is a simple word document with items listed that are needed for each RTI meeting. Mrs. Oliver stated that teachers used it to help them keep up with the documentation required for each student who is performing at tier 2 or tier 3 levels.

Mrs. Oliver also provided a copy of a blank tracking sheet, which is labeled with the suffix TS, which is used to aid teachers with progress monitoring of RTI students. She stated that she also uses a similar tracking sheet for students who are being tracked for behavior issues. Again, she emphasized that she desires to make the process easy for teachers.

Key-word and pattern analysis of CD Middle School interviewee responses.

Questions 1 and 2 from *Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI*

Program Implementation were asked to gain insight concerning participant self-perception and perceptions about CD Middle School.

Participants emphasized teachers working with students and their duties concerning helping students who were struggling academically in response to question 1. Participants focused on behaviors that they perceived administrators participating in to promote and plan for the implementation of the RTI Program at CD Middle School in response to question 2. The pattern of perceived administrator planning concerning the schedule and RTI process is revealed when the data is filtered and then sorted by question code. Participant responses indicated that during the process of RTI program implementation teachers felt a strong need to positively encourage students as they work with administrators in following RTI procedures. Participant responses revealed the theme of continued RTI communication through collaborative meetings with teachers and administrators was essential after program implementation.

Questions 3 and 4 were intentionally asked to collect perception data about the leadership characteristics displayed by the administration at CD Middle School.

Participants' responses to Question 3 emphasized the perception that administrators had provided guidance through positive communication concerning the RTI program at CD Middle School. Participants' responses to Question 4 focused on their own perceptions of positive climate, collegial collaboration, and the use of the RTI process to improve student achievement. The pattern of the perception that a positive climate is the result of consistent communication and guidance from the administrators at CD Middle School is revealed when the participant response data is filtered and then sorted by Question Code.

Questions 5 through 8 were phrased to collect perception data about leadership behaviors displayed by the administration at CD Middle School that established contingencies and reinforcements (Skinner, 1969) of desired school faculty behaviors.

Participants' responses to questions 5 through 8 revealed a pattern that administrative communication about the RTI process at CD Middle School led to teacher familiarization. Participants' responses to Question 5 emphasized a perception that teachers have always helped struggling learners and that the RTI process at CD Middle School provides for their learning needs through scheduling, interventions, and progress monitoring. Mrs. Brady stated, "We've always helped struggling kids. Kids now have a block time to receive help." Participants responded to question 6 by summarizing that administrators had positively influenced their perception about the RTI program. All five teacher participants made comments about how the leadership behaviors of administrators have positively influenced their perception of the RTI program and process at CD Middle School in response to question 6. Question 7 revealed further positive perceptions about the level of support they received from administrators concerning the RTI program. In regard to question 8, participants had similar perceptions that the RTI program could be maintained at CD Middle School because teachers are all familiar with the process.

In the second phase of the semi-structured interview participants were asked a series of 12 questions on the *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* document. Questions 1 through 5 on the document were designed to collect perception data about participants' personal experiences specifically relating to the RTI program's implementation.

Participants' responses to question 1 revealed that teachers perceived helping students by working together and sharing ideas as important before the implementation of the RTI program

at CD Middle School. Before implementation of the program Mrs. Oliver stated, “I’ve demonstrated shared leadership and planning.” Once the program was implemented, Mrs. Oliver stated, “I modeled the process and tried to help teachers.” Other teachers’ responses revealed the perception that they experienced a personal challenge to get to know the students, utilize software programs, and to collaborate more often with each other during the process. Participants agreed that after the program was implemented they perceived that communication and collaboration with each other was essential.

Perceptions about leadership behaviors were revealed by participants as they responded to questions 2 and 3. Mrs. Oliver stated, “I am cooperative and non-emotional when working with teachers. This is my strength.” This is somewhat contradictory to the perception of Mrs. Sinkey. Mrs. Sinkey stated, “Building relationships with kids is my strength.” Other teachers’ responses seemed to have consensus about having high expectations for students, helping students, and being consistent in their approaches to help students. Mrs. Oliver shared her self-perception about her weakness stating, “I have a hard time delegating. I’m controlling.” However, Mrs. Oliver’s self-perceived weakness may have been necessary to promote the success of the RTI program at CD Middle School according to the responses and self-perceptions of the teachers. For example, each teacher participant either directly describe a weakness that would give justification to the argument that he or she would not be ready for the administrator to fully delegate certain duties when the RTI program was first implemented. Mrs. Bell confirmed this notion by stating, “My weak point is organization, but the administrator checklists and databases have helped me.”

Participants summarized how they decided what leadership behaviors were appropriate to display before, during, and after the implementation of the RTI program at CD Middle School in

their response to question 4. Before implementation of the program, teachers decided to set goals, share ideas, and help students in general based on the responses. During the implementation process, teachers perceived that consistency in providing interventions and collecting data was important along with collaboration with each other. After the implementation process, participants' responses showed agreement that further collaboration about students' progress was needed to make decisions about the next year. In question 5, participants expressed that their behaviors were important for various reasons.

Interview questions 6 through 9 from the *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* document were designed to glean perception data regarding school policy, change implementation, and the supports needed from school administration throughout implementation. Participants responded in a similar manner to question 6. The consistent implementation from of procedures and communication about the program positively impacted the implementation of the program at CD Middle School according to the participants. Consistency was seen as a positive impact because there was a logical and systematic process in place according to perceptions gleaned from question 7. Participants acknowledged behaviors, which negatively impacted the program's implementation such as poor attitudes among teachers, a lack of detailed training, a lack of collaboration between other schools in the system, and excessive paperwork in their responses to question 8. Participants perceived that the negative behaviors led to natural negative consequences such as a more negative climate within the school, teachers not knowing what to do in some cases, hindrance of student achievement, and potential feelings of being overwhelmed or experience of negative stress according to responses from question 9.

Questions 10 and 11 from the *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* document were phrased to collect data about procedures and documents utilized in the RTI

program at CD Middle School. Data was filtered and sorted to be able to identify patterns in participants' perceptions specific to RTI procedures and documents.

The emerging themes or patterns that can be identified from the data are RTI communication, progress monitoring, and the implementation process. Participants indicated that some documents are used as a reference or guideline to help them remember duties and procedures while others are used as a method of tracking and sharing student data that is to be used as an aid in deciding what level of interventions students should received in their responses to questions 10 and 11. In other words, the artifacts outline and guide the RTI Program at CD Middle School.

Question 12 from the *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* document was designed to collect perception data that could potentially help school leaders identify leadership behaviors that could promote RTI program sustainability within a school. Participants indicated that administrators have successfully implemented an RTI program at CD Middle School. Mrs. Davis stated, "The program can continue if a new administration listens to us." Mrs. Dooley's statement agrees with Mrs. Davis' statement, "Students will need help. It will continue as long as people are willing." Mrs. Bell stated, "The program's impact is definitely positive. Teachers have input to help students." Mrs. Brady replied to question 12, "I believe they are trying their best and have put some good things in place." Overall, participants perceived that the behaviors of their administrators have positively influenced perceptions about the RTI framework and its sustainability at CD Middle School.

Cross Case Synthesis

The case study results from AB Middle School and CD Middle School were synthesized in order to analyze data and review any key words and patterns from semi-structured interviews,

focus groups, and school artifacts. All participants' responses were recorded in a database which allows filtering by question code and participant. Synthesized findings were similar to individual case study findings.

Synthesized Key Word Analysis. The 10 most frequent key words from all participant responses, including participants from AB Middle School and CD Middle School, are listed in the Table 4. The key word, the number of appearances as a key word per participant response, and the frequency of appearance in each of those responses is recorded.

Table 4

Key Word Synthesis from AB Middle School and CD Middle School Participant Responses

Key Word	Appearance as a Key Word	Frequency of Appearance in Participant Responses
Consistent or Consistency	6	12
Data or Database	9	23
Helps	7	19
I	25	112
Interventions	6	12
Students	4	18
Success	3	15
Teachers or We	15	50
They or Administrators	8	22
Time	5	20

The word I appears as a key word most frequently and also appears with the highest frequency within the participant responses where it is identified as a key word. The word teachers, which may be interchanged with the word we, is also a frequently key word. The words data or database ranks as the third most used key word. The words administrators or they, that is when they is used to reference administrators when a participant referred to his or her supervisors, ranks as the fourth most used key word.

Synthesized Pattern Analysis. The patterns or themes derived from participants' responses and key word appearances are noteworthy. The 10 themes derived from participants' responses included climate, collaboration, consistency, implementation process, informed administrators, interventions, progress monitoring, RTI communication, scheduling, and vision. Sorting the database by the prescribed theme of each participant response revealed that RTI Communication was the most frequently occurring theme throughout each participant's responses. Table 5 notes each theme in alphabetical order aligned to the frequency of occurrences by participant response.

Table 5

Frequency of Themes Derived From Participant Responses (AB and CD Middle School Participants)

Theme	Frequency
Climate	34
Collaboration	46
Consistency	23
Implementation Process	48
Informed Administrators	5
Interventions	37
Progress Monitoring	40
RTI Communication	127
Scheduling	17
Vision	2

The most frequently theme derived from participant responses was RTI communication with 127 occurrences as a theme or main idea. Implementation process, collaboration, and progress monitoring were also major themes among all participants' responses. Patterns about each theme may be observed in Table 6.

Table 6

Synthesized Results for Frequency of Themes Sorted by Question Code

Question Code(s)	Most Frequently Derived Theme	Frequency
TSSII-1before, TSSII-2before, ASSII-1before, ASSII-2before, IRMS-1before, IRMS-4before	RTI Communication	11
TSSII-1during, TSSII-2during, ASSII-1during, ASSII-2during, IRMS-1during, IRMS-4during	RTI Communication	13
TSSII-1after, TSSII-2after, ASSII-1after, ASSII-2after, IRMS-1after, IRMS-4after	RTI Communication	23
ASSII-3	RTI Communication	2
ASSII-4	Climate	2
ASSII-5	RTI Communication	2
ASSII-6	RTI Communication	2
ASSII-7	Climate / RTI Communication	1/1
ASSII-8	Progress Monitoring/RTI Communication	1/1
TSSII-3	RTI Communication	3
TSSII-4	Climate	7
TSSII-5	Climate	5
TSSII-6	RTI Communication	8
TSSII-7	RTI Communication	5
TSSII-8	RTI Communication	6
IRMS-2	Interventions/RTI Communication	3/3
IRMS-3	Implementation Process	3
IRMS-5	Interventions	4
IRMS-6	Consistency/RTI Communication	5/5
IRMS-7	RTI Communication	7
IRMS-8	Climate	4
IRMS-9	Climate/RTI Communication	3/3
IRMS-10	Progress Monitoring	6
IRMS-11	Progress Monitoring	5
IRMS-12	Climate	6

RTI communication before, during, and after the implementation at both AB Middle School and CD Middle School was a recurring theme based upon the frequency of participants' perceptions concerning communication. Both school leaders perceive that RTI communication is important based on their responses. Participant responses to questions TSSII 3 through 5 align with the focus of the questions showing that teacher buy-in influences school climate as the themes of climate and RTI communication appear as the most frequent themes. The theme of RTI communication again appears most frequently as participants were asked questions TSII 6 through 8 concerning leader behaviors and their influence over teacher perceptions about the RTI programs of each school. Themes of climate, progress monitoring, RTI communication, interventions, consistency, and the implementation process are derived from IRMS 2, 3, and 5 through 12.

Synthesized Focus Group Response Analysis. A cross-case synthesis of data regarding the focus groups from AB Middle School and CD Middle School reveals that the key words of consistency, meetings, and time occur more than once in participants' responses. Consistency occurs as a key word on 3 occasions with a frequency of 6. The word, meetings, occurs as a key word on 2 occasions with a frequency of 4. The word time occurs as a key word on 2 occasions with a frequency of 11. The theme of RTI communication occurred on 6 occasions. The theme of consistency occurred on 5 occasions. The focus groups' responses to question FG-4 were in agreement as consistency appeared as the theme from each group. The focus groups' responses to question FG-7 were agreement as RTI communication appeared as the theme from each group. Each group's derived themes were diverse for each question on all other questions.

Synthesized Artifact Analysis. Results from each Administrator Artifact Sharing Session Instrument were synthesized by filtering the database to exclude all other questions.

Key words appearing in administrator responses included communication, description, inform, need, plan, role, and use. The word use appeared as a key word on 19 occasions with a frequency of 29. The word description appeared as a key word on 5 occasions with a frequency of 5. The themes of collaboration, consistency, implementation process, progress monitoring, and RTI communication were derived from administrators' responses. The most frequently derived theme was implementation process.

Synthesized Behaviorism Analysis. Results from all responses were analyzed in the context of behaviorism which included the derivation of perceived stimuli and perceived response behaviors by the participants. Behaviorism is one part of the conceptual framework of this study. Analyzing perceived behaviors of teachers and administrators through the analysis of participants' responses provides a theoretical lens from which to view this two-case through. Results were filtered and sorted from the database by question code and displayed in table format using derived descriptions of stimuli and responses. Each question had 10 responses. The data are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

Synthesized Results of Perceived Stimuli and Response Behaviors of Participants

Question Code	Most Frequently Perceived Stimulus by Teachers	Percentage by Response	Most Frequently Described Response	Percentage by Response
TSSII1-before	Self-motivated concern	30%	Helps students	70%
TSSII1-during	Self-motivated concern	30%	Helps students	50%
TSSII1-after	Completed RTI duties	60%	Collaboration	90%
TSSII2-before	Administrator planning	40%	Collaboration	40%
TSSII2-during	Administrator involvement	40%	Participation	90%
TSSII2-after	Administrator involvement/communication	60%	Collaboration	60%
TSSII3	Administrator involvement/communication	50%	Implementation	50%
TSSII4	Administrator involvement/communication	90%	Implementation	70%
TSSII5	Student engagement	60%	Continued implementation	80%
TSSII6	Administrator involvement/communication	100%	Continued implementation	80%
TSSII7	Administrator involvement/communication	70%	Continued implementation	100%
TSSII8	Administrator involvement/communication	100%	Continued implementation	60%

Administrator involvement and communication prompts teachers to think, plan, and implement the RTI process at both schools. It appears that teachers are initially driven by concern for struggling students. However, it is apparent that administrators continually show involvement-type behaviors such as communication about the RTI program, planning for program implementation, scheduling time for program implementation, attending RTI meetings, and providing guidance about the process to teachers, then teachers will continue to implement the program according to the guidance or system that is provided. This information corroborates

Skinner's research (1978) that strengthening operant in establishing learning conditions that prompts students to respond by learning. In other words, by strengthening the operant, it is more likely for the desired response to occur, which in this case study, may be applied to the administrator-teacher relationship.

Synthesized transformational leadership pattern analysis. Each participant's responses were analyzed under the conceptual lens of transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990). Results were displayed in terms of derived patterns in participant responses that could be interpreted as displays of charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. The results are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8

Synthesized Results of Transformational Leadership Characteristics

Question Code	Summary of Most Frequent Leader Behaviors Described in Participants' Responses	Most Frequent Transformational Leadership Characteristic Identified
TSSII1-before	Teachers have generally tried to help struggling learners as needed before the implementation of the RTI program.	Individual Consideration
TSSII1-during	Teachers identified struggling learners based on data according to RTI program guidelines.	Intellectual Stimulation
TSSII1-after	Teachers attempted to improve the RTI program after its implementation.	Intellectual Stimulation
TSSII2-before	Teachers knew administrators were researching, planning, and working on establishing a systematic RTI program.	Intellectual Stimulation
TSSII2-during	Administrators asked questions that lead to discussions during the implementation of the RTI program.	Intellectual Stimulation
TSSII2-after	Administrators continually led discussions about student placements, student data, and how to improve the RTI program.	Intellectual Stimulation
TSSII3	Administrators' behaviors influence teacher buy-in because they know the student, know the data, consistently talk about the process, provide guidance, and are generally helpful.	Intellectual Stimulation
TSSII4	Administrators have established a positive environment for teachers which allows time for collaboration about RTI and time for the implementation of the RTI program.	Intellectual Stimulation
TSSII5	Teachers' behaviors such as implementing a process for struggling learners have positively influenced students' learning behaviors.	Intellectual Stimulation
TSSII6	Administrators have reinforced fidelity of the RTI program by holding and attending regular meetings, using a database, providing guidelines to teachers, emphasizing program importance, and consistently discussing issues with us.	Intellectual Stimulation
TSSII7	Administrators' behaviors have positively influenced perception through use of data, knowing the kids, staying involved, supporting teachers, and providing guidance.	Intellectual Stimulation
TSSII8	If new administrators will come in and listen to teachers, then the RTI program or process will continue	Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation was the most frequently occurring identifiable transformational leadership characteristic from participants' responses. Individual consideration also appears to

occur at a significant level. It appears that charisma, inspiration, and individual consideration are the stimulating characteristics that initially gain the interest of teachers while intellectual stimulation must occur on a continual basis in order to drive the implementation of each school's RTI program.

Research Question Responses

The focus of the case study or central phenomena being investigated are descriptions of middle grades educators' perceptions concerning the successful implementation of comprehensive RTI programs in their respective schools.

Findings Applied to Sub-question 1

Findings in this section contain information derived from participant responses related to middle grades administrators' and teachers' perceptions about various types of leadership behaviors which are considered as important prior to implementing a new school-wide RTI program. The purpose of sub-question 1 was to guide the case study in obtaining data concerning the perceptions of educators about the types of leadership behaviors prior to the implementation of each school's RTI program. Findings aligned with participants' responses to sub-question 1 were reviewed.

AB Middle School participants' responses from the *Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation* interview questions revealed teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors prior to the implementation of a school-wide RTI program, specifically in response to instrument questions 1-before and 2-before. The most prevalent themes derived from participant responses was RTI communication, which emerged from 4 out of 10 participants' responses. Secondary themes included scheduling, implementation process, and progress monitoring. The repeated pattern of the theme of RTI

communication suggests that teachers perceived that effective administrator communication about RTI, the implementation process, and how the schedule will work to benefit students was essential prior to the RTI program's implementation at AB Middle School.

The *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* instrument's questions were posed to all participants, administrators and teachers. The theme of RTI communication emerged once again, re-occurring in 4 out of 6 of the participants' responses. The theme of collaboration emerged in 3 out of 6 responses, along with the theme of RTI communication in 1 out of 6 responses. The conclusion that teachers refer to communication received from administration as communication and that they refer to their communication with each other about how to proceed as collaboration can be logically reached based on participants' responses.

AB Middle School's focus group participants perceived that scheduling by administrators was an important leadership behavior. Scheduling was commented on in terms of the scheduling of students for interventions and the physical schedule of a block of time so that appropriate personnel could implement interventions. Evidence was mainly derived from questions 1-3 of the focus group instrument.

The artifact analysis from AB Middle School presented various behaviors from administrators that are important prior to implementation according to the RTI Coordinator. The RTI Coordinator created most of the forms prior to implementation in an effort to help teachers with data collection and the implementation process. Themes of implementation process, RTI communication, collaboration, and consistency emerged as questions were asked about each document or artifact. Collaboration and RTI Communication were the two most common themes derived from the artifact analysis session. The RTI coordinator perceived that creating

school documents as an essential leadership behavior prior to implementation of a new RTI program.

CD Middle School participants' responses from the *Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation* interview questions revealed teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors prior to the implementation of a school-wide RTI program, specifically in response to instrument questions 1-before and 2-before. The most prevalent themes derived from participant responses were RTI communication and Interventions. Each theme emerged from 3 out of 10 participants' responses. Secondary themes included collaboration, scheduling, implementation process, and climate. The repeated patterns of the theme of RTI communication and interventions suggests that teachers perceived that effective administrator communication about RTI, the implementation process, and how the schedule will work, as well as the planning of common interventions to benefit students were essential prior to the RTI program's implementation at CD Middle School.

The *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* instrument's questions were posed to all participants, administrators and teachers. The theme of collaboration, which occurs in 3 out of 6 of the participants' responses, shows that teacher collaboration is perceived as an important leadership behavior prior to program implementation. The theme of interventions emerged in 3 out of 6 responses. The conclusion that teachers perceive that collaborative planning for interventions is an important leadership behavior prior to the implementation of the RTI program can be logically reached based on participants' responses.

CD Middle School's focus group participants perceived that RTI Communication was an important leadership behavior prior to the implementation of the program. Collaboration

between classroom teachers was emphasized as an important leadership behavior. Evidence was mainly derived from questions 1-3 of the focus group instrument.

The artifact analysis from CD Middle School presented various behaviors from administrators that are important prior to implementation according to the RTI Coordinator. The administrator created most of the forms prior to implementation in a effort to help teachers with data collection and the implementation process. Themes of implementation process, RTI communication, collaboration, and progress monitoring emerged as questions were asked about each document or artifact. Implementation process was the major theme derived from the artifact analysis session. It may be concluded that the administrator perceives that creating school documents to support the implementation process is an important leadership behavior and essential component prior to implementing a new RTI program.

A cross-case synthesis of data revealed that RTI communication was the most frequent theme derived when the database is filtered by questions associated with participants' perceptions about important leadership behaviors displayed prior to the implementation of the RTI program at each school. Focus groups' perceptions differed as the AB Middle School focus group emphasized RTI communication and CD Middle School's focus group emphasized scheduling as important administrator leadership behaviors prior to implementation of the new RTI program at each school. The synthesized artifact analysis revealed administrators' perceptions that school documents or artifacts are an essential component of the RTI communication about the implementation process prior to the actual implementation of the RTI program.

Findings Applied to Sub-question 2

Findings in this section contain information derived from participant responses related to middle grades administrators' and teachers' perceptions about various types of leadership behaviors which are considered as important during the implementation of a new school-wide RTI program. The purpose of sub-question 2 was to guide the case study in obtaining data concerning the perceptions of educators about the types of leadership behaviors during the implementation of each school's RTI program. Findings aligned with participants' responses to sub-question 2 were reviewed.

AB Middle School participants' responses from the *Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation* interview questions revealed teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors during the implementation of a school-wide RTI program, specifically in response to instrument questions 1-during and 2-during. The most prevalent themes derived from participant responses to sub-question 2 were RTI communication and progress monitoring, which emerged from 3 participants' responses each. Secondary themes included collaboration, scheduling, and implementation process. The repeated patterns of the theme of RTI communication and progress monitoring suggests that teachers perceived that effective administrator communication about RTI, along with developing a consist system of monitoring students' progress are important leadership behavior that were displayed by administrators at AB Middle School.

The *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* instrument's questions were posed to all participants, administrators and teachers. The theme of collaboration emerged in 3 out of 6 responses. Teachers have clearly perceived that collaboration is an important leadership behavior that is needed during the implementation of the RTI program at AB Middle School in

order for the program to be successful. The conclusion that teachers refer to communication received from administration as communication and that they refer to their communication with each other about how to proceed as collaboration can be logically reached based on frequency of participants' responses.

AB Middle School's focus group participants perceived that consistency was an important leadership behavior displayed by administrators. Comments included main ideas such as administrators consistently showing up at meetings, communicating with teachers, and following the procedures they had set for the RTI program. Evidence was mainly derived from responses to question 4 of the focus group instrument.

The artifact analysis from AB Middle School presented various behaviors from administrators that are important during the implementation process according to the RTI Coordinator. Themes of implementation process, RTI communication, collaboration, and consistency emerged as questions were asked about each document or artifact. Collaboration and RTI Communication were the two most common themes derived from the artifact analysis session. It may be concluded that the RTI coordinator perceives that using the artifacts as check lists to proceed with meetings and teachers using the documents for collaborative, data-sharing tools are important leadership behaviors that must be displayed during the implementation process in order for the RTI program to be successful.

CD Middle School participants' responses from the *Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation* interview questions revealed teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors during the implementation of a school-wide RTI program, specifically in response to instrument questions 1-during and 2-during. The most prevalent theme derived from participant responses were RTI communication.

RTI communication emerged as a theme from 3 out of 10 participants' responses. Secondary themes included interventions, implementation process, consistency, and climate. The repeated patterns of the theme of RTI communication suggests that teachers perceived that continued effective administrator communication about RTI during the process is an essential behavior that promotes the program's consistent implementation at CD Middle School.

The *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* instrument's questions were posed to all participants, administrators and teachers. The theme of collaboration, which occurs in 3 out of 6 of the participants' responses, shows that teacher collaboration is perceived as an important leadership behavior during the program's implementation. The theme of intervention also appears in 3 out of 6 participants' responses, emphasizing the importance of teachers displaying the leadership behavior of implementing interventions with fidelity. The theme of consistency emerged in 2 out of 6 responses. The conclusion that teachers perceive that consistency is an important leadership behavior to display during the implementation of the RTI program can be logically reached based on participants' responses.

CD Middle School's focus group participants perceived that consistency was an important leadership behavior during the implementation of the program. Comments included main ideas such as administrators demonstrating consistent behaviors such as commitment to the program, flexibility with teachers, and consistent guidance. Evidence was derived from question 4 of the focus group instrument.

The artifact analysis from CD Middle School revealed various behaviors from the administrator that are considered important during the implementation of the RTI program. The administrator indicated that consistent follow-up with teachers about student progress and the documentation of that progress were important behaviors. The administrator emphasized that

teachers should consistently use and refer to the documents throughout the implementation process.

A cross-case synthesis of data revealed that RTI communication was the most frequent theme derived when the database is filtered by questions associated with participants' perceptions about important leadership behaviors displayed during the implementation of the RTI program at each school. Focus groups perceptions differed as the AB Middle School focus group emphasized RTI communication and CD Middle School's focus group emphasized consistency as important administrator leadership behaviors during the implementation of the new RTI program at each school. The synthesized artifact analysis revealed administrators' perceptions that school documents or artifacts should be used regularly during the implementation of the RTI program at each school

Findings Applied to Sub-question 3

Findings in this section contain information derived from participant responses related to middle grades administrators' and teachers' perceptions about various types of leadership behaviors which are considered as important after the implementation of a new school-wide RTI program. The purpose of sub-question 3 was to guide the case study in obtaining data concerning the perceptions of educators about the types of leadership behaviors after the implementation of each school's RTI program. Findings aligned with participants' responses to sub-question 3 are reviewed.

AB Middle School participants' responses from the *Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation* interview questions revealed teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors during the implementation of a school-wide RTI program, specifically in response to instrument questions 1-after and 2-after.

The most prevalent theme derived from participant responses to sub-question 3 was RTI communication, which emerged from 6 out of 10 participants' responses. Secondary themes included collaboration and progress monitoring. The repeated pattern of the theme of RTI communication suggests that teachers perceived that effective administrator communication about RTI after the implementation of the program is a leadership behavior.

The *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* instrument's questions were posed to all participants, administrators and teachers. Participants perceived the most important leadership behavior displayed after the implementation of the new RTI to be RTI communication. The theme of RTI communication emerged in 3 out of 6 responses. Teachers have clearly perceived that RTI communication is an important leadership behavior that is needed after the implementation of the RTI program at AB Middle School in order for the program to be successful. The conclusion that teachers refer to communication received from administration as communication and that they refer to their communication with each other about how to proceed as collaboration can be logically reached based on participants' responses.

AB Middle School's focus group participants perceived that consistency was an important leadership behavior displayed by administrators. Comments included main ideas such as administrators consistently followed procedures after program implementation and communicated with all stakeholders. Evidence was derived from responses to question 5 of the focus group instrument.

The artifact analysis from AB Middle School presented various behaviors from administrators that are important after the implementation process according to the RTI Coordinator. Themes of implementation process, RTI communication, collaboration, and consistency emerged as questions were asked about each document or artifact. Collaboration

and RTI Communication were the two most common themes derived from the artifact analysis session. It may be concluded that the RTI coordinator perceives the documents as essential student data that should be used after the implementation of the program in making decisions for students' placements for the next school year.

CD Middle School participants' responses from the *Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation* interview questions revealed teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors after the implementation of a school-wide RTI program, specifically in response to instrument questions 1-after and 2-after. The most prevalent theme derived from participant responses were RTI communication. RTI communication emerged as a theme from 4 out of 10 participants' responses. Secondary themes included collaboration, progress monitoring, and consistency. The repeated pattern of the theme of RTI communication suggests that teachers perceived that effective administrator communication about RTI after the implementation of the program is a leadership behavior.

The *Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School* instrument's questions were posed to all participants, administrators and teachers. The theme of RTI communication, which occurs in 2 out of 6 of the participants' responses, shows that teacher collaboration is perceived as an important leadership behavior after the program's implementation. The theme of RTI communication emerged in 2 out of 6 responses. The conclusion that teachers perceive that RTI communication is an important leadership behavior to display after the implementation of the RTI program can be logically reached based on participants' responses.

CD Middle School's focus group participants perceived that RTI communication was an important leadership behavior after the implementation of the program. Comments included main ideas such as the desire for administrators to continually provide communication and

training about the program. Evidence was derived from question 5 of the focus group instrument.

The artifact analysis from CD Middle School presented various behaviors from administrators that are considered important after the implementation of the RTI program. The administrator expressed that documentation was required at all meetings. The administrator indicated that consistent involvement with RTI meetings was essential. The administrator emphasized that teachers should consistently use and refer to the documents after the implementation process in order to make decisions about student placement and sustain the program.

A cross-case synthesis of data revealed that RTI communication was the most frequent theme derived when the database is filtered by questions associated with participants' perceptions about important leadership behaviors displayed after the implementation of the RTI program at each school. Focus groups perceptions differed as the AB Middle School focus group emphasized consistency and CD Middle School's focus group emphasized RTI communication as important administrator leadership behaviors after the implementation of the new RTI program at each school. The synthesized artifact analysis revealed administrators' perceptions that school documents or artifacts should be used after the implementation of the RTI program at each school in order to make decisions about student placement for the next school year.

Findings Applied to the Central Question

Middle grades administrators' and teachers' perceptions concerning leadership behaviors that are displayed throughout the implementation of RTI programs are generally positive for both cases in this study. AB Middle School participants' perceptions include feeling supported by

informed administrators who communicated effectively and consistently with them throughout the implementation of their school's RTI program. CD Middle School participants' perceptions were similarly positive. Data derived from participants' individual responses shows that RTI communication from administrators before, during, and after the implementation of the program is perceived as the most influential leadership behavior displayed by their administrators.

Administrators also perceive what, how, when, and why they communicate about the various aspects of their respective programs as the most essential leadership behavior they have displayed through the implementation process. Leadership behaviors were grouped and labeled by the following themes: climate, collaboration, consistency, implementation process, informed administrators, interventions, progress monitoring, RTI communication, scheduling, and vision. Findings reveal that administrators and teachers at each school or case study take actions associated with each derived theme throughout the implementation process that are perceived as important, influential, and essential to the perceived success of their respective RTI programs.

Summary

An overview of the framework for Chapter 4 was provided in order to show a logical sequence of findings in terms of key words and patterns derived from participant responses to interview questions, focus group questions, and questions about school artifacts. Each participant was described and Table 4.1 was provided to illustrate pseudonyms, database code names, and years of experience in a manner to maintain participant confidentiality.

Results were reported for each case study in terms of participants' responses in the form of a key word analysis for each participant. AB Middle School's results were reported initially. The results from CD Middle School are reported following the reported results from AB Middle School. Individual data tables were provided for each participant's responses. A key word

analysis was provided that was derived from each school's focus group. An artifact analysis was provided that was derived from questions posed to AB Middle School's RTI administrator.

After individual response results were reported, a key word and pattern analysis for the school was reported. The school results were organized by responses to various questions as described in Chapter 3. A data table for each sub-group of questions was provided in order to illustrate patterns in responses to each set of questions organized by question code, summary of response, theme, key word, and key word frequency. Also, each set of responses was reported in the context of the research sub-questions about the leadership behaviors observed before, during, and after the implementation of each school's RTI program.

Finally, a cross-case synthesis was provided to illustrate the combined responses or perceptions of participants from both case studies. A key word analysis, pattern analysis, and focus group analysis, and artifact analysis was included using synthesized responses from each case study. A pattern analysis was conducted under the lens of behaviorism (Skinner, 1969). Then a pattern analysis was conducted under the lens of transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990). In summary, findings were reported in a logical and methodical manner which was described in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Discussions, conclusions, and recommendations are presented in a logical and sequential order within Chapter 5. A summary of the findings, including key-word and pattern analyses of individual participant's responses, key-word and pattern analysis of each case study, and a cross case synthesis of this two-case study are reported and related to research sub-questions along with the central question of the study. Current findings are discussed and used to illustrate corroboration of the findings and previous research, divergence of the findings from previous research, and a novel approach to research in the areas of behaviorism, transformational leadership, and RTI frameworks. Theoretical, practical, and empirical implications of the two-case study are summarized. Limitations of the study are then reviewed. Finally, recommendations for future research are presented prior to a complete summarization of the findings.

Summary of Findings

Findings are summarized in this section as they are related to the central research question and sub-questions. Each question is posed and subsequently followed by corresponding findings derived from participant responses. Findings include perceptions of participants about behaviors of teachers and administrators before, during, and after the implementation of the RTI program at their respective schools.

Central Question

What are middle school administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors throughout the implementation of RTI programs?

Findings Applied to the Central Question

Middle grades administrators' and teachers' perceptions concerning leadership behaviors that are displayed throughout the implementation of RTI programs are generally positive for both cases in this study. AB Middle School participants' perceptions include feeling supported by informed administrators who communicated effectively and consistently with them throughout the implementation of their school's RTI program. CD Middle School participants' perceptions were similarly positive. Data derived from participants' individual responses shows that RTI communication from administrators before, during, and after the implementation of the program is perceived as the most influential leadership behavior displayed by their administrators. Administrators also perceive what, how, when, and why they communicate about the various aspects of their respective programs as the most essential leadership behavior they have displayed through the implementation process. Leadership behaviors were grouped and labeled by the following themes: climate, collaboration, consistency, implementation process, informed administrators, interventions, progress monitoring, RTI communication, scheduling, and vision. Findings reveal that administrators and teachers at each school or case study take actions associated with each derived theme throughout the implementation process that are perceived as important, influential, and essential to the perceived success of their respective RTI programs.

Sub-questions

1. What are middle grades administrators' and teachers' perceptions about the types of leadership behaviors considered as important prior to implementing a new school-wide RTI program?
2. What are middle administrators' and teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors during program implementation?

3. How do leadership behaviors of middle school administrators after implementation influence perceptions about RTI program sustainability?

Findings Applied to the Sub-questions

According to participant responses, administrators and teachers perceive that consistent communication and behaviors that include following RTI procedures are essential in order for the program to be successful. Focus group responses indicated that administrator scheduling, hiring of key personnel for the RTI program, and administrator communication about RTI are important prior to implementing a new school-wide RTI program. Focus group responses indicated that consistency in communication and RTI meeting attendance by administrators were important behaviors during program implementation. Focus group responses also included the perception that consistent communication regarding the continuation of the RTI process after program implementation was essential for program sustainability.

Participants' responses to interview questions ASSI-1, ASSII-2, TSSII-, and TSSII-2, which directly apply to the research sub-questions, included perceptions of administrators and teachers that RTI communication and administrative planning were essential behaviors exhibited before, during, and after the implementation of a new RTI program. Findings also included that participant's perceived that teachers helped students in a general manner before and during the implementation of the program. Findings included participants' perceptions that teachers were self-motivated out of a concern for the students before and during the implementation of the program. Responses also included perceptions that collaboration was an important behavior that teachers began to exhibit after implementation.

Discussion

The discussion of the findings of this two-case study includes examining the relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Findings are discussed in the context of confirmation, corroboration, divergence, and extension of research from previous studies. Novel contributions of this study are summarized within the context of the conceptual framework of this case study.

Empirical Research

Multiple elementary school case studies (Murakami-Ramalho & Wilcox, 2012; Orosco and Klingner, 2010; Shepherd and Salembier, 2011; White et al., 2012;) revealed that teachers perceived training prior to implementation of an RTI program, expansion of teacher leadership, building systematic processes for the program, and leadership commitment to the program as key factors that contribute to the success of each program. Findings from this two-case study corroborated perceptions revealed from previous elementary school teachers about RTI program implementation. This study extends the research and applies similar practices to the setting of two middle schools.

Griffin and Hattendorf (2010) communicated their perceptions and observations about the RTI programs at their respective schools by simply providing some general statements concerning practical processes and procedures that were implemented. Findings in this two-case study extend beyond the reports of Griffin and Hattendorf (2010) to include perceived important leadership behaviors before, during, and after the implementation of an RTI program. Findings in this case study are also reported in a manner that allows for the researcher to interpret various participants' responses about leadership behaviors within the context of a conceptual framework that includes behaviorism, transformational leadership theory, and current RTI frameworks.

King et al. (2012) recommended that administrators familiarize themselves about RTI and proceed with implementation using caution, be ready to foster a pioneering attitude with teachers, and be ready to devote time to develop the process at their schools as reviewed in Chapter 2. This case study corroborates King's (2012) recommendations that administrators should be informed about RTI prior to implementing a program. This study also extends King's et al.'s (2012) study by gathering perception data from teachers and administrators before, during, and after the implementation and deriving themes and patterns from participants' responses.

One of the most important findings from previous case study research involving middle school RTI programs was that school leaders must support and guide teachers through a school reform process (Dulaney, 2012). Findings in this two-case study corroborate Dulaney's (2012) findings in that RTI communication concerning procedures and guidelines was repeatedly noted as a main idea or theme from participants' responses. This two-case study also extends research beyond Dulaney's (2012) study by illustrating perceptions about demonstrated leadership behaviors throughout the implementation process.

Fisher and Frey (2011) described many leadership behaviors demonstrated at the high school level (e.g., adopting a school-wide RTI approach, scheduling interventions to supplement instruction, monitoring student progress), but neglected to discuss the importance of how administrators' behaviors and interactions with teachers influenced teachers' executions of procedures with fidelity. This two-case study corroborates information about leadership behavior descriptions, as well as providing insight to educators' perceptions about teacher buy-in.

The current study confirms previous research cited in this section and in Chapter Two. The most important extension of the current body of research was that this two-case study provided findings concerning educators' perceptions which were developed into 10 important themes that involve specific leadership behaviors. The novel contribution to the research that this study provided included the development of the themes derived from participant perceptions which were analyzed according to stages of RTI program implementation. In other words, information can be extracted from this case study that is relevant for current administrators to use in planning the implementation of an RTI Program. In addition, this two-case study also extends studies on behaviorism and transformational leadership within the context of educational leadership behaviors of teachers and administrators implementing RTI programs.

Theoretical Research

The theories of transformational leadership and behaviorism were utilized as two parts of the conceptual framework for this two-case study. Theoretical research regarding these theories is confirmed by this two-case study. This two-case study also extends the previous research, makes a novel contribution to the research in terms of empirical evidence supporting the theories through a context analysis. The context analysis extends insight into how each theory can be applied to educational leadership and the implementation of new RTI programs within schools.

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership characteristics such as charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration can lead to raising organizational expectations (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Bass and Avolio argued that shifting from a transactional culture to a transformational culture would help the organization develop a true sense of purpose by aligning interests in a coordinated effort to achieve the organization's vision. Bass and Avolio used perception data from the Organizational Description Questionnaire

(ODQ) to characterize organizational culture as high-contrast, coasting, predominately to moderately contractual, pedestrian, or garbage-can depending on the degree of transformational qualities that were reported. The purpose of the study was to investigate a parallel connection between organizational culture and leadership behaviors (Bass & Avolio, 1993). This is consistent with the logical understanding that a person can learn almost everything about a leader's role by speaking with the followers within the organization (Avolio, 1999). When considering transformational leadership characteristics and organizational culture, it becomes obvious that transformational leadership has the potential to significantly impact classroom and school processes in a positive fashion (Bass, 1998).

This two-case study provides empirical research that corroborates transformational leadership theory in terms of illustrating how administrators may apply the theory to their RTI implementation process. This study also extends the application of transformational leadership theory to both leaders' behaviors and teachers' behaviors in schools, specifically, how administrators could potentially exhibit transformational leaders attributes such as individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspiration, and charisma throughout the RTI implementation process. This study also provides a novel contribution to transformational leadership studies by analyzing participant responses within the context of transformational leadership theory, in turn, extending the theory of transformational leadership for practical application by administrators within schools for the purpose of maximizing change in the organizational culture.

Behaviorism. The two major behaviorism theorists are Watson (1913) and Skinner (1969). Watson (1913) focused on mechanical or external behaviors while Skinner (1969) emphasized behavior analysis. Moore (2011) noted that Skinner differed from Watson on the

concept of operant behavior. Moore (2013) argued that radical behaviorism, which includes the emotions and thoughts of a person, is the exemplar view within the study of behaviorism.

Skinner (1969) explained much of human behavior in terms of neuroscience in an attempt to explain human thinking. For example, he compared the operations of a machine to human thinking (Skinner, 1969) in terms of environmental contingencies and reinforcement. Behaviors such as avoidance (Skinner, 1972) are explained as responses to negative reinforcements in a given environment. In an application to the learning or classroom environment, Skinner (1978) referred to a teacher as the operant in establishing learning conditions that prompts students to respond by learning. In other words, by strengthening the operant, it is more likely for the desired response to occur.

This two-case study provides empirical research that corroborates behaviorism in terms of illustrating how administrators may strengthen various behaviors on their parts which, in turn, may prompt teachers to consistently implement a new RTI program within a school. This study also extends the application of behaviorism to leaders' behaviors in schools being specifically utilized to have teachers behave in a desired manner in terms of implementing a new program with fidelity. This study also provides a novel contribution to behaviorism studies in that participant responses are analyzed within the context of behaviorism, in turn, extending the theory of behaviorism for practical application by administrators within schools to prompt the desired result of RTI program implementation by teachers.

Implications

Theoretical, empirical, and practical implications are discussed in this section.

Theoretical implications involve the effect that the findings of this two-case study may have on behaviorism (Skinner, 1969) and transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990). Empirical

conclusions or implications are then drawn that expand the scope of knowledge to the current body of research. Practical implications of significance are then discussed so that stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, and government education officials may review and use as an aid in their decision process for the implementation of RTI programs in middle schools.

Theoretical Implications

The conceptual framework of this two-case study applies transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990) and radical behaviorism (Skinner, 1969) to RTI implementation by examining administrators' and teachers' perceptions about effective leadership behaviors. RTI is linked to both theories (Brownell et al., 2010). Administrators could potentially use behaviorism theory to prompt teachers to think and act by increasing the frequency of their behaviors, which have been identified as 10 themes in this two-case study. Administrators could also intentionally implement transformational leadership theory to their individual schools.

Potentially, a perceived antecedent behavior on the part of the administrator could be identified from each participant's response. Also, a response behavior could be identified from each participant's response. In an application to the learning or classroom environment, Skinner (1978) referred to a teacher as the operant in establishing learning conditions that prompts students to respond by learning. In other words, by strengthening the operant, it is more likely for the desired response to occur. Elements of behaviorism have contributed to the formation of RTI frameworks (Brownell et al., 2010) including environmental conditioning, treatment development, and student response analysis over time. The theoretical implication for behaviorism is that this study examined how the strengthening administrator's behaviors concerning RTI implementation is more likely to produce the desired response from teachers in terms of RTI program implementation.

In addition to the link between behaviorism and RTI practices, transformational leadership theory should be considered when examining the leadership behaviors of administrators throughout the implementation of an RTI program. Transformational leadership characteristics such as charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration can lead to raising organizational expectations (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Blasé and Blasé (2000) found that two themes, talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting professional growth, led to increased teacher motivation, satisfaction, self-esteem, and reflexivity which is similar to the transformational leadership attribute of individual consideration (Bass, 1990) as reviewed in Chapter 2. Blasé and Blasé also noted that effective principal leaders used inquiry to help teachers examine practices which is similar to intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1990), which was also reviewed in Chapter 2. The theoretical implications for transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1990) that may be gleaned from this two-case study are that the transformational leadership characteristics may be used as a lens to view RTI program implementation prior to proceeding with the implementation in order to positively influence teacher perception of the program.

Empirical Implications

The literature concerning leadership in education, as applied to this two-case study, is that literature reporting perceptions of leadership behaviors throughout RTI program implementation is deficient as reviewed in Chapter 1. The findings from this two-case study increased the existing body of research by emphasizing participants' perceptions of leader behaviors throughout the process rather than the effectiveness of the process itself, specifically at the middle grades level of education. This qualitative study extends the scope of the body of research concerning transformational leadership theory and RTI program implementation as

recommended by several research studies (Dulaney, 2012; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Isbell & Szabo, 2014; Prewett et al., 2012; Werts & Carpenter, 2013).

Practical Implications

“Transformational leadership can be learned, and it can and should be the subject of management training and development.” (Bass, 1990, p. 27). Bass (1990) underscored the importance of moving from transactional leadership behaviors to transformational leadership behaviors while Wofford and Goodwin (1994) concluded that the training of managers should include a framework to help leaders recognize that they need to examine the coexistence of both types of behaviors and how they should be applied for each situation that arises as discussed in Chapter 2. There is a national concern over the need for quality principals who have the ability to transform schools (Cray & Weiler, 2011). Transformational leadership theory is desired by teachers but not always applied by administrators within the field of education (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Hauserman, Ivankova, & Stick, 2013; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Kirby, Paradise, & King, 2014; McCarley et al., 2014; Urick & Bowers, 2014; Yang, 2014).

The practical implications for administrators include using the results of this two-case study to methodically plan how to use a combination of transformational leadership characteristics before, during, and after the implementation of a comprehensive RTI program in a middle school setting. Administrators should strategically be transparent about the planning phase before implementation, provide positive guidance and support through continuous communication during implementation, and conduct feedback sessions for teachers after the initial implementation in order to gain teacher buy-in, avoid teacher resistance and other barriers to implementation, and provide sustainability through the fidelity of program practices. Practical implications for teachers that may be gleaned from this study include gaining knowledge of the

RTI process, using the knowledge from this case study to provide feedback to administrators, and recognizing the leadership qualities necessary to positively influence other teachers. Teachers can identify the barriers to RTI program implementation as well. The Georgia Department of Education, as well as other states' education departments, can glean vital information that could be used to further train school leaders in the area of RTI program implementation.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations were reviewed in Chapter 1. Delimitations for this study include purposive sampling of schools, selection of participants, controlled settings, and a topic chosen by the researcher. Purposive sampling of middle schools who have implemented a RTI program which included a block time were used. In addition, participants must have implemented a comprehensive RTI program in their school setting. The setting of school conference rooms for interviews and focus groups provided the opportunity for honest participant feedback, researcher note-taking, and accurate digital recording for transcription. A semi-structured interview format was used to ensure that research questions are answered by individuals and focus groups while still providing the opportunity for elaboration on the part of the participants (Creswell, 2013, Yin, 2014).

Limitations to this two-case study were reviewed in Chapter 1. Limitations include the lack of statistical generalizability, the potential for biased responses, the potential for dishonest responses, and a lack of maximum variation (Creswell, 2013) between cases due to the small sampling field. The scope of the study did not allow for quantitative generalization but has the opportunity for qualitative analytic generalizability (Yin, 2014). The scope of the study did not impact the findings. The potential for biased or dishonest participant responses is always

present, but minimized through confidentiality procedures. School administrators may have selected a homogeneous group of individuals who may have been in support of the RTI program at their school resulting in a lack of maximum variation. Bias and the lack of maximum variation may have influenced the findings in that participants may have responded more positively to the interview questions. These limitations could not be controlled by the researcher. The limitations may have potentially influenced the findings of the study in an overly positive manner.

Recommendations for Future Research

More questions can be raised specific to RTI program implementation success, the impact of using behaviorism to purposefully establish a specific climate within a school, and the use of specific transformational leadership characteristics in various phases of RTI program implementation to influence perception, teacher buy-in, and teacher implementation fidelity. Further qualitative studies that examine administrators' intentional use of behaviorism techniques to increase the desired responses from teachers are needed to extend the current body of research. Further qualitative studies are also needed to examine the impact of the application of transformational leadership characteristics affects on RTI program success is needed. These studies are needed in order for a systematic training approach to be developed for administrators so that RTI programs may be implemented with more consistency and fidelity over time. As future studies occur, states will be able to develop training programs that show administrators a time line of implementations for RTI components, strategically applying behaviorism techniques to influence teachers' behaviors, and timeliness of the display of transformational leadership characteristics at various phases of RTI program implementation.

Summary

Findings were summarized as they applied to the central question and sub-questions of this two-case study. Findings were then discussed in terms of their corroboration, extension, and novel contribution to the current body of research. Theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the findings were presented. Delimitations and limitations of this two-case study were reviewed. Recommendations for future research were then presented. In conclusion, leadership behaviors of middle grades educators have a defined influence before, during, and after the implementation of an RTI program at the middle grades level. For this two-case study, it was concluded that the importance of consistent and specific RTI communication throughout the implementation process cannot be underestimated when administrators are attempting to implement a school-wide program with numerous intangible and tangible components.

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Appendix A: Superintendent Permission Research Request

September 1, 2015

[Recipient], Superintendent
[Company]
[Address 1]

Dear Superintendent:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The title of my research project is *A Case Study on Educators' Perceptions of Leader Behaviors Throughout Response-to-Intervention Implementation*. The purpose of my research is to collect data about the perceptions of administrators and teachers concerning leader behaviors throughout the Response-to-Intervention (RTI) implementation process in order to provide Georgia educators with key insights and practical behaviors that may help support teachers throughout the RTI process.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at School A in your school district and contact the building administrator to provide an invitation to participate in the study.

Participants will be asked to attend an individual interview session and a focus group session. Administrators will be asked to share any artifacts or documents they have provided for teachers to use during the RTI process. No private student or employee data will be needed for the study. The data will be used to identify key leader behaviors and reoccurring patterns in behavior that are associated with RTI program implementation. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond to the email attaching a statement granting your permission for me to invite your employees to participate in educational research on official school system letterhead.

Sincerely,

Mr. Thomas Joel Strickland, Graduate Student
Liberty University
tjstrickland@liberty.edu

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

A CASE STUDY ON EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEADER BEHAVIORS THROUGHOUT RESPONSE-TO-INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION

Thomas Joel Strickland
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of educator perceptions about leader behaviors throughout the Response-to-Intervention (RTI) process at your school. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation in the RTI process at your school. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Thomas Joel Strickland, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is understand educators' perceptions about leader behaviors throughout the implementation of an RTI program.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in semi-structured, individual interview session consisting of 14 questions. This session will take approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. All answers will remain confidential.
2. Participate in a semi-structured focus group session consisting of 5 questions. This session will take approximately 60 minutes. The session will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used in published results of the study.
3. If you are a school administrator, participate in a session with other school administrators where school artifacts and documents are shared and their use is described. Shared documents will contain no private student data. This session will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Hard copies of documents shared will be stored securely in a locked office. Electronic copies of documents will be stored securely in a password protected file.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks involved in this study are minimal and no more than you would experience in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits that will be received by you for participating in this study. The benefits to participation are societal because of the key insights that will be gained from analysis of educators' perception data about leader behaviors throughout the RTI process. Teachers, administrators, district officials, and state officials will benefit from your contribution of time and perception sharing because they will be able to understand how leaders' behaviors can potentially effect the implementation and sustainability of a school-wide RTI program.

Compensation:

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

All subject responses to individual interview questions will be digitally recorded (audio only) and transcribed. Recorded files will be saved on a password protected computer file. All transcriptions and notes taken will also serve as collected data and be stored in a locked office. All data will be destroyed by electronic deletion or paper shredding when necessary. All audio recordings will be saved on a password protected electronic file and then deleted. Only the researcher, Thomas Joel Strickland, will have access to the data. All individual interview responses will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used for published responses so that subjects cannot be identified. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for focus group session responses, however, pseudonyms will be used in published responses to ensure participant privacy as much as possible.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Thomas Joel Strickland. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at tjstrickland@liberty.edu. You may also contact the research's faculty advisor, Dr. Gary Kimball, at glkimball@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Semi-structured Individual Interview Instrument (Teacher)

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

Teachers' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program Implementation

(questions asked to teachers)

1. Please describe the leadership behaviors that teachers have demonstrated before, during, and after the RTI program implementation.
2. Please describe the leadership behaviors that school administrators have demonstrated before, during, and after RTI program implementation.
3. What is your perception concerning the influence of leadership behaviors on teacher buy-in of the RTI program implementation?
4. What is your perception about school climate conditions that have been created throughout RTI program implementation that influenced your teaching behaviors?
5. What is your perception about school climate conditions that have been created throughout RTI program implementation that influenced your students' learning behaviors?
6. How do administrators reinforce the fidelity of the RTI program's implementation?
7. How have leadership behaviors of school administrators influenced your perception about RTI program implementation?
8. How do you think program sustainability will be influenced by leadership behaviors?

Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School (questions asked to all participants)

1. Please describe your experience in teaching or leading at a school before, during, and after the implementation of an RTI program.
2. What are your strongest leadership behaviors?

3. What are your weakest leadership behaviors?
4. How did you decide what leadership behaviors display before, during, after the implementation of an RTI program?
5. Why do you believe the leadership behaviors you chose to display throughout implementation are important?
6. What types of leadership behaviors have positively impacted program implementation?
7. Why are the leadership behaviors described in Question 6 perceived as positive leadership behaviors?
8. What types of leadership behaviors have negatively impacted program implementation?
9. Why are the leadership behaviors described in Question 8 perceived as negative leadership behaviors?
10. What school documents or artifacts provided by school leaders do you consider as helpful to the implementation of the RTI program at your school?
11. Why are school the school documents or artifacts you described in Question 7 helpful to the RTI program?
12. How have leadership behaviors of administrators influenced perceptions about the RTI framework sustainability?

Appendix D: Semi-structured Individual Interview Instrument (Administrator)

Administrators' Perceptions about Effective Leadership Behaviors and RTI Program

Implementation (questions asked to administrators)

1. Please describe the leadership behaviors that teachers have demonstrated before, during, and after, the RTI program implementation.
2. Please describe the leadership behaviors that school administrators have demonstrated before, during, and after the RTI program implementation.
3. What leadership behaviors have you purposefully displayed to gain teacher buy-in of the RTI program?
4. How do you perceive teachers feel about school climate considering RTI program implementation?
5. Why do you perceive the behaviors you described in Question 3 to be vital to your school RTI program's success?
6. How did you develop a vision for RTI program implementation?
7. How do you think your leadership behaviors have influenced teachers throughout RTI program implementation?
8. Why do you think program sustainability will be influenced by leadership behaviors?

Implementation of an RTI Program in a Middle School (questions asked to all participants)

1. Please describe your experience in teaching or leading at a school before, during, and after the implementation of an RTI program.
2. What are your strongest leadership behaviors?
3. What are your weakest leadership behaviors?

4. How did you decide what leadership behaviors display before, during, after the implementation of an RTI program?
5. Why do you believe the leadership behaviors you chose to display throughout implementation are important?
6. What types of leadership behaviors have positively impacted program implementation?
7. Why are the leadership behaviors described in Question 6 perceived as positive leadership behaviors?
8. What types of leadership behaviors have negatively impacted program implementation?
9. Why are the leadership behaviors described in Question 8 perceived as negative leadership behaviors?
10. What school documents or artifacts provided by school leaders do you consider as helpful to the implementation of the RTI program at your school?
11. Why are school the school documents or artifacts you described in Question 7 helpful to the RTI program?
12. How have leadership behaviors of administrators influenced perceptions about the RTI framework sustainability?

Appendix E: Semi-structured Focus Group Session Instrument

Universal Aspects of Effective Leadership Behaviors and Success RTI Program Implementation

1. What professional leadership behaviors exhibited by administrators are considered to be effective in creating conditions for successfully implementing a comprehensive RTI program in your school?
2. What professional leadership behaviors exhibited by teachers are perceived to be effective in creating conditions for successfully implementing a comprehensive RTI program in your school?
3. What are the most important leadership behaviors that were displayed before implementation?
4. What are the most important leadership behaviors that were displayed during implementation?
5. What are the most important leadership behaviors that have been displayed after initial implementation in order to sustain program fidelity?
6. What role does teacher accountability play in RTI program success?
7. How are administrators' leadership characteristics and behaviors related to the implementation of a comprehensive RTI program in your school?
8. How do leaders and teachers sustain a successful RTI program in your school?
9. What routines and procedures have been established by administrators that help teachers manage their time for RTI program implementation?
10. What routines and procedures or program requirements could be considered a hindrance to RTI program implementation?

Appendix F: Administrator Artifact Sharing Session Instrument

1. Please share and describe any school artifacts or documents that you created as administrators as part of the RTI implementation process. No artifacts or documents shared should contain confidential student or teacher information. Please be sure to explain how each artifact or document aids in the RTI implementation process.
2. What are your behaviors as leaders regarding the context of this artifact's or document's usage? How do you sustain the use of the artifact or document?
3. What are your teachers' behaviors regarding the context of this artifact's or document's usage? How do you sustain teachers' behaviors regarding the use of the artifact or document?
4. Repeat questions 1-3 for each artifact or document.