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INVESTIGATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS IMPLEMENTING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Nicole Powell Mitchell

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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

To my husband, Paul, thank you for your love and support during this crazy journey and all the other journeys over the last 8 ½ years. I am looking forward to the journeys yet to come.

To my Mother, Effie Powell Ross, thank you for your constant belief in me throughout my life time. You provided the roots that allowed me to have wings.

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To the rest of my family and friends thank you for all the support that you provided over the last 4 years.

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ABSTRACT

INVESTIGATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS IMPLEMENTING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL

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Response to Intervention (RTI) models are currently being implemented in many school districts across the country. At a time when interest in RTI is high, teachers' experiences and the extent to which RTI is being implemented effectively in urban schools is largely unknown. There are less than 4,150 published academic studies on effectively implementing RTI in urban school settings. This research explores the phenomenon of implementing RTI using a theoretical lens of change management for elementary teachers in urban schools. The study contributes to the body of RTI knowledge by investigating the lived experiences of elementary school teachers who were involved in implementing RTI in an urban setting. The results of the study emphasize three themes that should be addressed during implementation: interventions, challenges, and training.

Keywords: Response to Intervention, Learning Disabilities, RTI Implementation, Change Management for RTI, Urban Elementary Schools

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act enacted by President Gerald Ford (1975) was the first federal policy addressing children with learning disabilities. In 1997, this landmark act was modified to become the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Public Law 94-142). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has been amended several times since its initial passage. On December 3, 2004, President George Bush signed into law the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). Congress reauthorized the Act, responding to a national request for educators to have access to appropriate methods to identify and respond to students with learning disabilities. IDEA differs from the newly revised version of IDEIA in one very important way; the previous law encouraged educators to use the IQ-achievement discrepancy model (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006) to identify students that had learning disabilities. However, the new version allows for alternative models. The implementation of IDEIA facilitated the use of Response to Intervention (RTI) as an alternative to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model. In addition to providing intervention, IDEIA allowed school districts to use up to 15% of funding for special education to fund activities for early intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

The 2006 Regulations to IDEIA specified that educators cannot label a student with a learning disability if one of the following criteria was met: (1) inadequate instruction in reading, including the essential components of reading; (2) inadequate instruction in

math; (3) limited English proficiency; (4) emotional disturbance; (5) cultural factors; or (6) environmental or economic disadvantage (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006). Unlike suburban and rural school districts, urban school districts operate in densely populated areas serving significantly more students. In comparison to suburban and rural districts, urban school districts are frequently marked by higher concentrations of poverty and more frequent rates of student mobility (Kincheloe, 2004, 2010).

After IDEIA was employed, students receiving special education services were moved into general classrooms, which was considered to be the least restricted environment. Under the new requirements, IDEIA teachers were to utilize Response to Intervention (RTI) to observe and monitor students while in the general classroom setting. Implementing the RTI model to identify and help children who may have a learning disability can be a challenging process. The development of RTI as an alternative model resulted from criticism of the current methods of determining learning disabilities in students. The concern was that students were being labeled as having a learning disability without a significant means of assessment (Harry & Klingner, 2014).

This researcher investigated the implementation of RTI using the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in an urban setting. There is a need for research that connects the experiences of general education teachers in urban classroom settings with other elementary school settings (Scott, & Blanchett, 2011). Within an urban setting professional development for teachers is important. Moreover, allowing the teacher to determine their path for professional development is equally important. A one size fits all approach to training is not effective for teachers implementing RTI. Historically, feedback from RTI implementation teams did not include feedback from the voice of the teacher

(Darling-Hammond, 2009). The researcher seeks to close the gap by providing empirical evidence that those voices and their feedback matter.

Problem Statement

RTI programs have been implemented at schools across the country for over 10 years. Almost all of the research that is available on the topic focuses on RTI as a structure with specific interventions. Limited research has been conducted (LaRocco, & Murdica, 2009; Lever-Tracy, 2012; Rinaldi, Averill, & Stuart, 2010) on the experiences of teachers implementing RTI at the elementary school level in urban settings, leaving many school districts, building leaders, and teachers at a loss for sources of empirical evidence. Despite the potential for an RTI model to improve the achievement of struggling students, based on a review of extant literature, there is limited evidence that provides the "how to" for teachers trying to implement RTI in their classrooms. The gaps and limitations found in the extant literature can be addressed by undertaking a phenomenological study aimed at investigating the lived experiences of teachers in urban elementary school settings. The study's results will provide a better understanding of how to implement RTI successfully within urban elementary school settings.

Background of the Problem

Urban schools are broken into three categories based on data from the census bureau. Those categories are city, suburban, and rural. Three additional subcategories are defined as large, medium, and small. For the purpose of this study, the definition of urban comes under the category of city and the subcategory of medium. Under the category of city, this study included students within metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia with a subcategory of medium sized, which means the population is less than 250,000 students.

The absence of direct guidelines from the federal government and state rules for execution of RTI can be problematic (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; Thomas and Collier, 2012). Each school district must set up a logical procedure in which to give support to students who require extra instructional or behavioral intervention plans through their K-12 educational experience. The implementation of RTI as an implementation framework is not very different among school districts (McInerney & Elledge, 2013). What is different about implementing RTI in an urban elementary school setting is the variety of negative social and economic factors (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Nogurera, 2011). For example, novice teachers, lack of resources, and limited teacher training are factors that impede the implementation of RTI in urban elementary schools.

There is a need for research that connects the experiences of general education teachers in urban classroom settings with other elementary school settings (Scott & Blanchett, 2011). Historically, feedback from RTI implementation teams did not include feedback from the voice of the teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2009). This study seeks to close that gap by providing empirical evidence that those voices and their feedback matter.

When considering the background of models and techniques used to assess and measure students with learning disabilities, RTI requires more comprehensive techniques for recognizing and assessing students with specific learning disabilities (Bender & Shores, 2012). The RTI model has been more extensively characterized as a general education initiative. RTI embraces a variation of models; however, identification and intervention services are often performed in the general education settings and led by

general education teachers. The primary purpose for implementing RTI in the general education setting is to provide early identification and improved instruction for every student as early as possible. The objective is to limit or prevent academic failure among students encountering learning challenges (Cortiella, 2006; Bender & Shores, 2012). In all RTI models, students receive targeted instruction which is delivered by general educator teachers. The student's response to this instruction is then used to help identify or rule out the existence of a learning disability or distinguish the presence of a learning inability (Bradley et al., 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Zirkel & Thomas, 2010; Bender & Shores, 2012; Thomas & Collier, 2012).

General education teachers who see the RTI model as being a special education initiative may not realize that they play a prominent role in the implementation of RTI as an education initiative versus an intervention (Richards, Pavri, Golez, Canges, & Murphy, 2007). Confusion about RTI as a general educational model can make it difficult to accomplish district and school-wide consistency when implementing RTI. There are no specific assessments or instructional programs or strategies that have been specified by the legislators. Consequently, there are no mandates or directives as to how the model should be implemented (Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, & Cardarelli, 2010). The U.S. Bureau of Education similarly does not support any one model (Bradley et al., 2007) and states like Georgia provide varying rules that define what RTI is and what it should resemble. From one perspective, RTI legislation gives local implementers a larger range for customizing the model (Greenfield et al., 2010; Zirkel & Thomas, 2010; Bender & Shores, 2012). The absence of any particular federal government or state direction leaves local school districts and instructional building leaders (principal, assistant principal)

with the duty of guaranteeing that parts of the RTI model are well adjusted to the needs of the local school and are adequately connected. Instructional building leaders must guarantee that teachers comprehend the reason and objectives of the RTI model and that they have procured the capacity expected to apply the model's fundamental parts across the school.

In theory, RTI is an ideal model for identifying learning disabilities through early intervention and research-based practices. The lack of teachers and administrators who have specialized knowledge inhibits the successful implementation of RTI (Haller & Davis, 1981). In order for RTI to be implemented effectively with fidelity in urban settings, it is important to understand the lived experiences and professional needs of teachers implementing RTI. This is especially important when implementing RTI in urban settings. When implemented successfully, RTI has proven to be a method that improves students' reading and mathematical skills, and more importantly, prevents the overuse of identifying students as needing a special education curriculum.

Personal Connection with the Research Topic

This researcher has been in the field of education for 22 years. The researcher has experience as a classroom teacher and has had to identify and provide service to students that could potentially receive Tier 2 or 3 interventions in the researcher’s classroom. The researcher also served as an intervention teacher and worked with identified students in the Tier 2/3 process. The researcher was always disturbed at the fact that she could not support additional students who were struggling and performing below grade level. It was realized that the teacher could not help all students; however, it seemed as though a large percentage of students were being identified as needing special educational services,

although they were simply suffering from the phenomenon of not being taught. This researcher watched many students move on to each grade level as they seemed to fall further behind because they did not blossom at the right time. This was due to the school using a "wait to fail" model. The "wait to fail" model entails waiting until the third grade to conduct assessments on student ability. By this point in time, students experiencing reading difficulty almost never become good readers (Coyne, Kame'enui, & Simmons, 2001, p. 69; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). Over the years this researcher continued her quest for learning the best practices that could potentially support students who struggle with reading. It is now this researcher's position to facilitate the RTI process at the Tier 2/3 level, which includes Student Support Teams (SST) and support teachers. In Georgia, these teams are in every school, and they operate using a defined problem-solving process. Presently, at the researcher's school district, the RTI process is beginning and some of the RTI protocol and guidelines are being revamped. Although RTI has been in existence and mandated by the State of Georgia, Georgia Department of Education (GADoE) since 2008, the district is now in the process of establishing district-wide plans for the RTI framework. The researcher's position was created at the beginning of the school year with no official training offered, except for a monthly meeting with two new RTI coordinators (the meetings are not mandatory, but helpful). Each day this researcher found herself trying to find solutions to support teachers as they tried to implement the RTI process in their classrooms. The researcher's current position has opened her eyes to all facets of the RTI process. It has been this researcher's experience that policy is often the driver of most educational reforms, such as RTI.

This researcher's experiences led her to view RTI through an epistemological lens of transformative research. There is a need to identify the experiences and concerns of teachers who play an important role in implementing RTI. The general idea is to provide a model that integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems. This is the definition used by the National Center on Response to Intervention (2010). Conducting research from a transformative epistemological view will focus on the lived experiences of teachers implementing RTI in urban settings. RTI has been researched in different aspects, such as examining issues that may promote or impede successful implementation of RTI in elementary schools (Greenfield et al., 2010; Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2011). Educators and schools are in different stages of RTI implementation, and teachers' perceptions and experiences with RTI differ. The goal of this study is to deconstruct teachers' experiences of RTI and investigate if, and how, these experiences can inform leaders in their efforts to implement RTI with fidelity in their schools.

Using an adopted definition of the transformative worldview, Creswell (2014) made the point that a transformative worldview is based on and should contain an "action agenda for the reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even researchers' lives" (p. 26). By investigating the lived experiences of urban elementary school teachers implementing RTI in their classrooms, transformative methods to bring about change in the practice of implementing RTI, with fidelity, can be found.

This study uses a transformative worldview perspective "focused on helping individuals free themselves from constraints found in the media, in language, in work

procedures, and in relationships of power in educational settings" (Creswell, 2014, p. 26). It is the intent of this study to empower teachers in the process of implementing RTI in their classroom settings. If schools can identify what teachers need and offer support based on those needs, then teachers can truly be empowered.

The transformative worldview, "is practical and collaborative because it is inquiry completed with others rather than on or to others" (Creswell, 2014, p.26). Significant to this study is the design of questions that describe teacher's lived experiences and how those lived experiences affect the RTI implementation process in urban schools within the state of Georgia. Transformative research focuses on the needs of identified groups and individuals that may often be disregarded. Teachers are the individuals of focus in this study. Ultimately the deciding factor to use the transformative worldview was the collaborative process that encouraged debate to promote critical thinking and bring about new discussions that facilitate change.

Educational reforms are introduced and are expected to be implemented to address school improvements in public school systems. Many theories, models, and strategies are introduced to educators in hopes that the strategies will aid the teachers with implementing innovations with fidelity. Research indicates that successful implementation of RTI is not like other initiatives in regard to necessary staff, instructional resources, professional development, and consistent leadership (Hall & Batsche, 2010; Bradley et al., 2007; Hilton, 2007).

Figure 1 depicts a visual of the researcher's conceptual framework that provides the meaning of the items that the researcher studied. The middle of the diagram represents the information that the researcher will gain when examining teacher

experiences with the implementation of RTI within the context of the educational change theory. This will help identify different aspects of the phenomenon of this study, and it will offer a different perspective to help empower teachers within the area of RTI implementations.

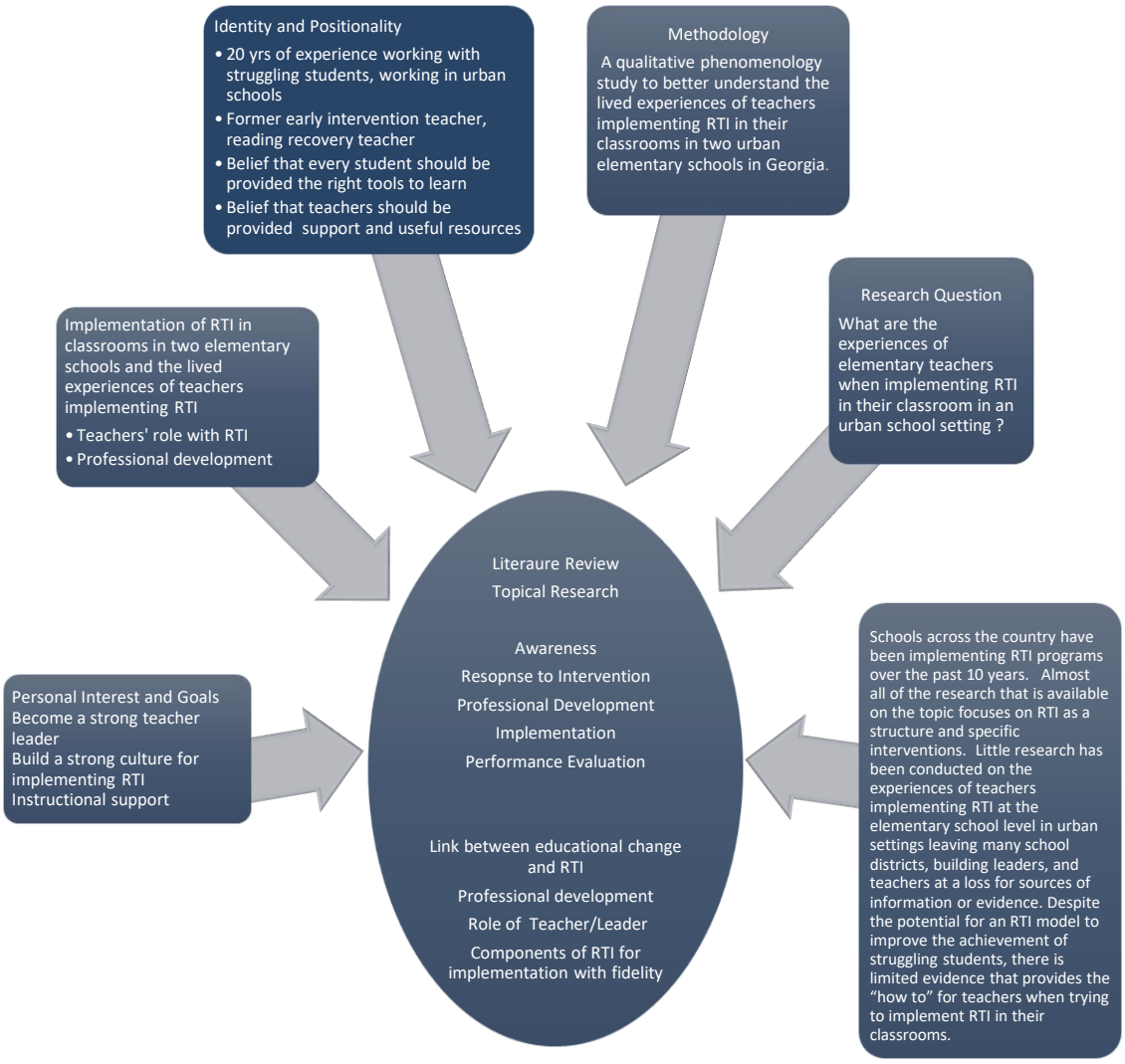

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework depicts the researcher's overarching argument for the work that was presented in this study. Ravitch and Riggan (2016) defined a conceptual framework as the argument about why the topic chosen by a researcher matters and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous. By argument, they mean that a conceptual framework is a series of sequenced, logical propositions, the purpose of which is to ground the study and convince readers of the study's importance and rigor. According to Ravitch and Riggan (2016), arguments for why a study "matters" vary greatly in scale, depending on the audience. In some scholarly work, the study may only matter to a small, esoteric community, but that does not change the fact that its conceptual framework should argue for its relevance within that community. By appropriate and rigorous, they believe that a conceptual framework should provide a convincing argument that provides the following things: research questions that are relevant, a research design map that flows with the study goals, questions, and context, data that is collected should provide the researcher with raw information needed to answer the research questions, and an analytic approach allows the researcher to effectively address the questions presented during the research.

Maxwell (2013) stated that "conceptual framework for your research is something that is constructed, not found. It incorporates pieces that are borrowed from elsewhere, but the structure, the overall coherence, is something that you build, not something that exists ready-made" (p. 41). The graphical representation provides a guide to the conceptual lens that the researcher used when viewing the implementation process of RTI in the two Georgian elementary schools in this study. Components of the

framework have been a part of numerous studies (cite some here). The information that is available about teachers' experiences of change, response to intervention, and educational change theory guided the researcher's effort to study what is not known about teacher experiences with implementing RTI in their classrooms in an urban setting.

Teachers' experience with change has been studied using many innovations. Researchers have studied instances where items were mandated or are simply an area of interest for educators. Change initiatives have been studied nationally and in local school settings. Studies have been completed looking at teacher experiences with leadership, collaborative programs, and even certain roles of implementing RTI (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Ehren, Laster, Watts-Taffe, 2009; Harn, Kame'enui & Simmons, 2007). The importance of this study is that it looks at the experiences of teachers from elementary schools that are demographically similar. The study gathers information to contribute to the current research on the implementation of RTI in urban settings. The information gained may offer empirical evidence to classroom teachers, giving them a point of reference to work from as they implement RTI in a similar setting. This may result in providing effective tools to help teachers close educational gaps of achievement in their classrooms when using the RTI framework.

Educational change theory has been the framework for many studies (Benjamin, 2011; Lopez, 2015, Mármol, 2014). It has been embraced by many researchers when looking at new initiatives adopted by educators across the United States; change is often difficult for many and hard to grasp because of the diversity of cultures in schools (cite). Fullan (2007) managed to dissect educational change and make it understandable, especially to education researchers.

Conceptual and Operational Definitions of Key Terms

- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA):** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-446), was enacted by the United States Congress on December 3, 2004; this is the most recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, a federal legislation which specifically focused on the educational experience for children with disabilities.
- **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB):** The NCLB law grew out of concern that the American education system was no longer internationally competitive. The federal government significantly increased the role of holding schools responsible for the academic progress of all students. A special focus on ensuring that states and schools boost the performance of certain groups of students, such as English-language learners, students in special education, and poor and minority children, whose achievement, on average, trails their peers. The NCLB of 2001 is no longer in effect; however, it was a precursor to the framework of the Response to Intervention model.
- **Progress monitoring**: A key component of RTI is the progress monitoring process. Progress monitoring is used to assess student progress or performance in at-risk areas in core content subjects such as reading, mathematics, and social behavior. Deficiencies are identified by the universal screening instrument which is administered three times a year (Dexter & Hughes, 2009).
- **Response to Intervention (RTI):** RTI is the practice of providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and using learning rate over

time and level of performance to make important educational decisions (Batsch et al., 2006).

- **Universal screening**: A tool used to identify students at risk for learning disabilities which targets students who struggle to learn even when provided a scientific 14 evidence-based general education (Jenkins, Healey, & Zetter, 2007). Universal screening measures present assessments focused on target skills that are research based and highly predictive of future outcomes. Screening is typically conducted at the elementary, middle school, and high school three times during the school year: fall, winter, and spring.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study includes topical research conducted on the study of RTI, RTI tiers, the role of the teacher, the role of the leader, and the change process related to RTI. The literature review is intended to frame the importance of the study, to show where the current phenomenon fits within the learning disability intervention literature, and to add to the body of knowledge of learning disability intervention models.

Historical Aspects of Response to Intervention

Response to intervention is an alternative approach to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model for identifying specific learning disabilities (Burns, Jacob & Wagner, 2008). The origin of the response to intervention method is credited to a 1982 National Research Council Study (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). In one study, Heller, Holtzman, and Messick (1982) indicated that assessment should be a two-part process: assessment of the student's learning environment and then an assessment of the individual student only after it has been established that the student did not have a positive response to the different instructional strategies in a variation of settings. The learning environment assessment would include an examination of the curriculum being used to determine if the curriculum had been used effectively with similar groups of students; evidence that the curriculum has been implemented with fidelity for the child being studied; objective evidence that the student did not learn what was presented; and evidence that early systematic intervention was established and presented to the student. To assess an individual student, Lynn Fuchs (1995) operationalized the process for an evaluation framework utilizing curriculum-based measures (CBM) to access the student’s response

to intervention to determine a student's eligibility for specific learning disabilities (Fuchs, Fuchs & Speece, 2002; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

In 2004, IDEIA approved the utilization of RTI to help the process for establishing qualifications for specific learning disabilities. States are no longer required to utilize the IQ-achievement discrepancy model. Instead, the state may use an RTI model to determine if a student has learning disabilities. RTI can be utilized for all academic content areas; however, it is often utilized for reading (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Batsche, Kavale, and Kovaleski, (2006) gave the following meaning for response to intervention: "RTI is the practice of providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to the needs of the student and using learning ratings over time and level of performance to make important and educational choices" (p. 5).

Instruction for students in the RTI model is divided into tiers. A scientifically-based core program is a basic instruction that all students receive in Tier 1. The first step in RTI is to select a performance based or other testing measure to identify students performing below grade level expectations (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). These assessments are identified as universal screeners. According to Appelbaum (2009) and Hoover (2010), screening of all students should be conducted three times per year to determine which students fall below the identified benchmark for each grade level. The screening helps to identify the students who are partially at risk as well as to establish a baseline measurement. Lose (2007) states that teachers conducting the monitoring must be skilled in diagnosing students and able to identify the appropriate intervention for the student. All students are progress monitored, and students who are not meeting grade level desires are monitored more often to determine if they are actually responding to general

classroom instruction. If not, then an intervention is chosen and implemented, which moves the student into Tier 2 instructional guidelines. Fuchs and Deshler (2007) place caution on the idea of using one universal benchmarking from the fall semester as the only identifying factor to determine if a student belongs in a Tier 2 intervention.

The process for development of an intervention and implementation plan can be met by using a standard protocol treatment or a problem-solving method (Batsche et al., 2006). Standard protocol treatment is an intervention that has been identified for usage with groups of students exhibiting similar issues. Problem-solving treatment is developed when a problem-solving team meets and has to apply a problem-solving process to create an intervention plan for individual students.

This process has four steps. As the team moves through each step, there is a question that has to be answered. The opening question is: “What is the problem?” According to Batsche et al. (2006), a problem simply exists when there is a "discrepancy between a desired state and what is occurring" (p. 47). The team should follow with another question about, “Why is it happening?” The team then asks the question, “What are we going to do to get the student on track?” Finally, after a course of action has been selected and implemented, the appropriate question to ask is: “Is it working?”

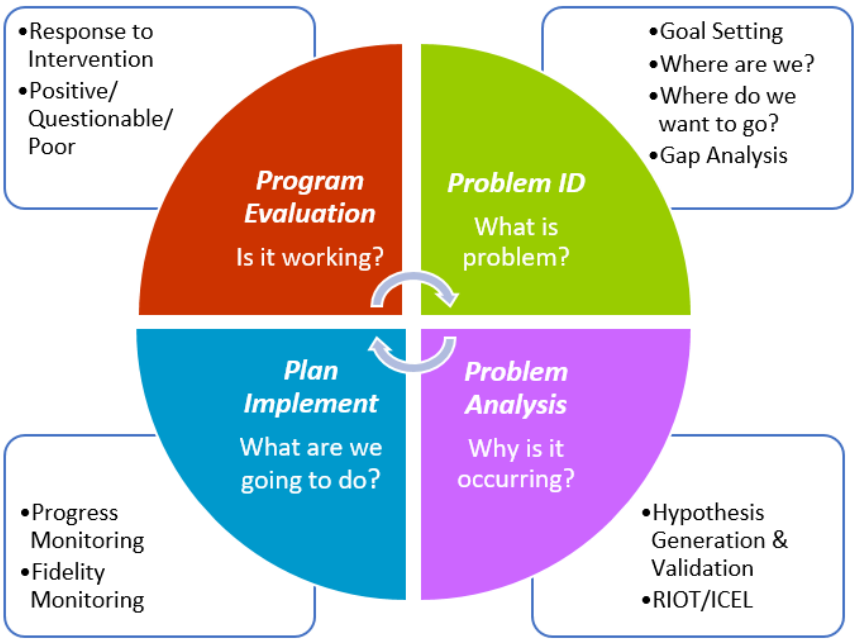

Figure 2. The RTI problem-solving method.

Each student has an intervention plan that is developed for a specific skill identified by the team. The plan is an individual prescription that clearly outlines the intervention that the student will receive, who will be responsible for providing the instruction, how often the intervention will be monitored for progress, and what tool will be used for progress monitoring. The plan is implemented, and the student is provided Tier 2 instruction identified in the plan. The final step allows the team to meet again to answer the question: Did the plan work? Progress monitoring is provided for the student, and if adequate progress is not made, the team meets again to make decisions regarding intervention, which can be adjusted or changed (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Those students

who receive instruction in Tier 2 and are identified as not making progress will then move to Tier 3. The process repeats until either the student's achievement meets the norm or standard for the class or the student is placed in special education. When a student does not have to "wait-to-fail" to receive interventions, and they can receive support and the immediacy of changing interventions, the result is a better opportunity for the student to meet their goals.

Components of Tier 1

The general education program that students receive in school is Tier 1 instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; NJCLD, 2005). In Tier 1, a universal core research-based program is presented to all students (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; NJCLD, 2005). Teachers present curriculum-based measures for screening and progress monitoring. A variety of research-supported teaching strategies are used to deliver differentiated instruction.

Research Supported Strategies, Approaches, and Core Programs

The primary instructional tool used by all teachers is a scientifically-based core program that is presented to all students in the grade level (Al Otaiba, Kosanovich-Grek, Torgesen, Hassler, & Wahl, 2005; Foorman, 2007; Simmons, Kame'enui, Stoolmiller, Coyne, & Harne, 2003). According to Foorman (2007), when educators select a core program for K-3 reading, it should address the five components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. In choosing a core program, Simmons et al. (2003) stated the selected reading programs that a district or school uses should have evidence of efficacy through experimental studies in schools which have similar student populations; it should also

reflect current and established research and provide explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics/decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring

At the beginning of the year, all students are screened for academic progress using a curriculum-based measure (Davis, Lindo, & Compton, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Curriculum-based measures (CBM) were originally developed for use by special education teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs (Deno, 2003). CBM is used as a core component of RTI because of the formative information it provides about student progress toward academic goals over time (Hosp & Howell, 2007 Hosp, Hosp, & Howell 2007; Marston et al., 2007; Rahn-Blakeslee, Ikeda, & Gustafson, 2005). The universal screening process helps identify students who are at risk. These students are monitored on a weekly basis for approximately five weeks to determine if the instruction within the core program provides the essential instructional support needed (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

CBM (R-CBM) reading selection is based upon the grade of the student and the skill that the student needs to obtain (Davis et al., 2007; Jenkins, Hudson, & Johnson, 2007). Students in kindergarten and first grade are at the beginning stage of obtaining phonemic awareness skills and letter sound association (Coyne & Harn, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2007). First grade students spend their academic school year building a strong foundation based on the skills learned in kindergarten, develop the ability to decode words, and begin reading text. Second and third grade students continue to improve their ability with fluency in decoding words, as well as increase vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies (Torgesen, 2002).

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction happens when teachers base their instruction on the needs of the individual learner (Kosanovich, Ladinsky, Nelson & Torgesen, n.d.). Differentiated instruction in an elementary reading classroom deals with organizing small homogenous groups based on data for each student and teacher observation. Differentiated instruction often takes place with small groups during the reading block.

Classroom teachers must adjust the type and frequency of instruction to provide differentiated instruction for struggling students in Tier 1 (Denton, Vaughn & Fletcher, 2003). It is suggested that the instruction be explicit. Explicit instruction is ideal because the modeling and direct instruction of skills and concepts by the teacher prevents the student from having "to make inferences that may lead to confusion in less-proficient learners" (Denton et al., 2003, p. 202). When students continue to show a pattern of performance below peers of the same grade level with differentiated instruction, they move on to Tier 2 (Davis et al., 2007).

Components of Tier 2

The objective of Tier 2 instruction for teachers in a RTI model is to provide students with the essential skills and strategies needed to accelerate their achievement so that they become equal to their grade level peers (Chard & Harn, 2008; Davis et al., 2007; Fuchs, Compton, Fuchs, Bryant, & Davis, 2008; NJCLD, 2005; Reschly, 2005; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). Research shows successful Tier 2 implementation in classrooms includes the following components: (a) the use of curriculum-based measures, (b) collaborative problem solving, (c) intensive research-based instruction/intervention, (d) progress monitoring, (e) assessment to ensure fidelity of implementation of

interventions/instruction, (f) parent inclusion, and (g) support for general education teachers (Bradley et al., 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Glover & DiPerna, 2007; Hollenbeck, 2007: NJCLD, 2005).

Collaborative Problem-Solving Process

Intervention plans for students in Tier 2 can be established using a problem-solving method (PSM) or a standard treatment protocol method (STP; Batsche et al., 2006; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; NCJLD 2005; Rathvon, 2008; Vaughn et al., 2008). When a problem-solving method is used for identifying interventions, a school-based team meets to build an individualized plan deemed to increase a student's achievement (Batsche et al. 2006; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Vaughn, & Roberts, 2007). In a standard treatment protocol, the school-based team puts together intervention plans that are evidence based and can be used for all students who are at risk (Batsche et al., 2006; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Rathvon, 2008). There is a difference in the two methods; with PSM, the team examines specific data to determine why the student is not progressing (Jenkins, Hudson, & Johnson, 2007). The standard treatment protocol method is based on the assumption that the selected intervention will meet the needs of all students who are experiencing similar academic difficulties (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). The problem-solving team serves as the RTI school-based team in many schools (Batsche et al., 2006). Based on research, the team should consist of the following individuals: the student's general education teacher, the school principal, content specialists, and support personnel (such as a special education teacher, school counselor, and school psychologist; Kovaleski, 2007; Kovaleski & Glew, 2006; Kurns & Tilly, 2008). The problem-solving team is charged with developing a plan that identifies the intervention as well as determines how often and how long the intervention

will occur and how often the student will be progress monitored (Batsche et al., 2006). The team also decides who will provide the instruction.

A combination of the two methods is recommended for schools (Batsche et al., 2006; NJCLD, 2005). The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (2005) recommended that all students entering Tier 2 should use the standard treatment protocol. Students who are unsuccessful with the intervention identified by the standard treatment protocol would then have an individualized intervention plan developed by the school problem-solving team.

Curriculum-Based Measures and Research-Based Interventions

CBM is used as a screening instrument in Tier 1. In Tier 2, CBM is used as a progress monitoring tool for at-risk students (Shinn, 2007). Differentiated explicit instruction is provided using scientific research-based interventions (Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003; Kamps & Greenwood, 2005; Reschly, 2005; Torgesen, 2002). The structure of instruction used in Tier 2 is more intense and provides students with more opportunities for practice and feedback than Tier 1 differentiated instruction provides (Reschly, 2005).

Several studies have identified how students in Tier 2 benefit from the use of additional supplemental reading intervention programs (Denton et al., 2006; Ritchey, Palombo, Silverman, & Speece, 2017). Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, and Francis (2006) found that using the Read Naturally supplemental program increased the degree of achievement for Tier 2 students. Reading Mastery which is a direct instruction was also successful (Foorman & Ciancio, 2005).

To increase the amount of time the student receives instruction is another way to increase intensity (Reschly, 2005). This can be accomplished by increasing the minutes, days, or the number of weeks the student receives the intervention instruction (Kamps & Greenwood, 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). The additional instructional time provided for students should occur far beyond the instructional time that students receive in the core program (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007).

Another technique to increase intensity is to decrease the number of students who are provided instruction within a group (Reschly, 2005; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). By reducing the number of students, each student is provided more individualized attention from the teacher. To provide the intensity needed for progress, groups in Tier 2 instruction should have no more than three to six students.

Progress Monitoring

When trying to determine how well the student is responding to a selected intervention, progress monitoring is conducted. Selecting a Reading Curriculum-Based Measurement (R-CBM) for progress monitoring requires a critical discussion about how well the selection will assess the targeted skill identified for the student and a method of determining if the student is making adequate progress in achievement (Fuchs, Compton, Fuchs, Bryant, & Davis, 2008).

The R-CBM is carefully chosen based on the reading skill targeted for the student (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Students who need intervention support with a skills deficit in phonemic awareness could be monitored using an activity for initial sound fluency or phoneme segmentation fluency (Hosp & Howell, 2007; Marston et al., 2007). Students who need interventions targeted at increasing their ability to decode words could be

assessed by using a test of nonsense word fluency, letter-sound fluency, or word identification fluency (Hosp, Hosp, & Howell, 2007). Appropriate assessments for fluency and comprehension skills are oral reading fluency activities (Miura Wayman, Wallace, Wiley, Ticha, & Espin, 2007). To evaluate progress, R-CBM scores are collected for students in Tier 2 on a bimonthly basis (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007).

Progress monitoring information is collected and used to determine if the student is responding in a positive way to the intervention (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). Fuchs et al. (2008) identified five crucial elements that researchers have used to determine responsiveness: end of treatment scores at or above a predetermined percentile, end of treatment scores that meet benchmark levels for the grade, rate of improvement during intervention above the median score of all students in the intervention, a combination of rate of improvement and end of treatment scores less than one standard deviation below peers, and slope of improvement above a level determined by peer norms. Identifying the most appropriate method has not been brought to consensus among researchers. Fuchs et al. (2008) stated that the slope of improvement has shown the most promise. Once a student has met their goal or the target of responsiveness and is no longer identified as being at risk, they may be exited from Tier 2 instruction (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). A percentage of students who may meet the criteria for progression, but still need support to meet benchmark levels, may remain in Tier 2 for additional support.

Assessment for Fidelity of Implementation

Fidelity of implementation deals with the degree to which a program is taught as designed when it was validated through research (Smith, Daunic, & Taylor, 2007).

Benefits for students using the intervention can be lost if the RTI program is not implemented in the manner it was intended.

Tier 2 research-based interventions must be implemented by teachers with a high level of fidelity (Reschly, 2005). The fidelity of the implementation of a selected intervention is important when trying to gauge the impact on student progress (Rathvon, 2008). The lack of fidelity in implementation could result in inappropriate decisions being made for students (Shinn, 2007).

Fidelity can be assessed in many ways, such as self-reports by teachers, direct observations, rating scales, and rubrics or checklists (Kurns & Tilly, 2008; Rathvon, 2008). One thing that should be clarified is that assessment needs to occur at the beginning and throughout intervention implementation to ensure the continuation of fidelity (Rathvon, 2008).

Parent Involvement

According to IDEIA 2004, during the progress monitoring phases in Tier 2, students receive intervention services, but this does not establish grounds for the school to conduct an evaluation. Therefore, parental consent is not required during this phase (Burns et al., 2008). However, based on the earlier law known as No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), parents are entitled to information about the curriculum used, the method used to assess and measure progress, a clear identification of proficiency levels, and the opportunities to attend meetings that will encompass decisions that will affect their child's education. Providing information to the parent and allowing them to be a part of the decision-making process is always considered to be a best practice when it relates to achieving academic success for all students.

The classroom teacher should notify parents as soon as the teacher realizes that the child is not progressing as expected (Ravthon, 2008). There are items that should be identified when the student is being considered for Tier 2 instruction; parents should know the content area where the child is identified at risk, the type of intervention selected, the person responsible for providing the instruction, and the goal score that is expected as a result of the intervention (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006).

Support for General Education Teachers

The load for teachers in the classroom grows larger every year. Within Tier 2, research indicates that the implementation will tend to be the responsibility of the general education classroom teacher (Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003; Rathvon, 2008; Richards et al., 2007). In addition to providing the instruction, the teacher will have to perform the progress monitoring of the students in their assigned Tier 2 groups (Kurns & Tilly, 2008).

To effectively monitor student progress in Tier 2, teachers need support and professional development to implement interventions (Danielson, Doolittle & Bradley et al. 2007; NJCLD, 2005). Richards et al. (2007) suggest that key areas such as "progress monitoring, using data to make instructional decisions and implementing evidence-based interventions" should be a key focus of professional development (p. 61). Many support personnel can be asked to provide support such as coaching provided by peers, experts, or members of the problem-solving team (Rathvon, 2008).

The general education teacher receiving support from the instructional leader of the school is always a strong factor in building a positive culture for implementing RTI. Vaughn and Roberts (2007) stated that "an essential component is...leadership that is

knowledgeable and supportive of the development and implementation of secondary implementations" (p. 45).

Students who are not successful with progress in Tier 2 over a period of time can be placed in Tier 3 instruction where the student can be considered for evaluation for learning disabilities (NJCLD, 2005).

Components of Tier 3

The most intense level of intervention on the pyramid for RTI is Tier 3. At Tier 3, the goal is for the teacher to provide remediation of an existing academic problem and prevention of more severe problems that may appear down the road. This is the tier where students who were unresponsive to Tier 1 instruction and Tier 2 support are candidates for Tier 3 intensive interventions.

After 8 to 12 weeks of intensive Tier 3 intervention, the problem-solving team meets to analyze the student data and makes a collaborative decision to support the student using only Tier 1 and Tier 2 intervention if the Tier 3 strategies have been successful. The team can recommend the continuation of Tier 3 instruction using different research-based strategies if the student shows growth, but the academic or behavior gap is not closing. The problem-solving team can then recommend that the student be provided with formal evaluation procedures for special education while continuing new Tier 3 strategies if Tier 3 intervention is unsuccessful

RTI is a success if teachers are able to move the students back down the pyramid or to show adequate growth. However, student eligibility for special education is often considered in Tier 3 (NJCLD, 2005). In the event that the team suspects the student has a

learning disability and will require special education services, the school must conduct a comprehensive evaluation (Burns et al., 2008).

Parental Rights/Consent

If the struggle the student is experiencing in Tier 2 is substantial and leads educators within the problem-solving team to suspect the student has a learning disability, then parental consent for evaluation would be the next step (NJCLD, 2005). If the parent suspects that their child has a disability, they have the legal right to request their child's public school evaluate them for special education. Regardless of where the child is in an RTI process, the amended act of IDEIA 2004 provides every parent with that legal right. It emphasizes that "either a parent or a public agency may initiate a request for an initial evaluation to determine if the child is a child with a disability" (IDEA 2004, 34 C.F.R. § 300.301(b)).

Comprehensive Evaluation

The comprehensive evaluation includes several data points that are collected from multiple assessments which can be standardized tests, observations, and student data collected in Tier 1 and 2 (NJCLD, 2005). Additionally, the team can gather other sources including background information on the student's academic history, history of development obtained from the parents, and vision and hearing screenings. These should be included as part of the evaluation conducted by the school (Ortiz & Lella, 2004). Schools often have to administer an IQ test in the evaluation process if there is a requirement to rule out an exclusionary measure such as mental retardation.

Procedural Safeguards

Schools that use the RTI method for identification must be aware that the procedural safeguards as dictated by IDEIA 2004 continue to be in effect (NJCLD, 2005).

The Role of the Teacher in RTI

An essential component for the success of RTI implementation is a teacher's ability to provide effective instruction. According to Howard (2009), to successfully implement the RTI literacy model, teachers must be a part of the entire process with specific emphasis on their own knowledge and ability to apply strong instructional skills. The RTI model requires the teacher to use their expertise when assessing and providing strong support to increase student achievement. There are a series of steps which teachers have to follow to integrate core instruction and strong assessment. Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2010) identified the following five steps: problem identification, problem definition, the design of intervention plans, implementation of intervention and progress monitoring, and problem solution. Teachers quite often have the sole responsibility for providing high-quality core instruction under RTI to effectively reach a variety of academic ability levels in their classrooms. The teacher has to possess the ability to identify the problem, find the level of discrepancy between their ability and satisfactory grade level achievement, develop a plan, progress monitor, and then reevaluate to determine if there is still a discrepancy to determine if additional intervention is needed. Teachers must be content experts to determine the level of need for interventions in reading and math for those struggling students. Howard (2009) stated that using various levels of text for comprehension has the potential to increase reading

fluency when dealing with students who function on different levels. Teachers who have a true understanding of their role in RTI seek others to collaborate with to provide appropriate instructional strategies and progress monitoring assessments (Fisher & Frey, 2011). Teachers need time to build their ability to analyze standardized assessments and collaborate with other teachers across grade levels to increase student achievement. RTI is a process that must be welcomed by the culture of the school; this starts with the support that is provided by the instructional leaders in the building. Similar to the researcher's personal experience implementing RTI, those who may need additional support and professional development to create an effective RTI model in their class, should be supported by fellow teacher leaders and ultimately the instructional leader of the building.

Leader's Role in RTI

A school reform initiative such as RTI will require a seismic shift in beliefs, attitudes, and practice (Fuchs et al., 2002, p. 40). Such a shift is challenging due to the slow adoption of change; however, educational leaders can promote a culture that embraces change. The principal is the instructional leader of the school and a key player when bringing a reform into the building and is also responsible for monitoring the implementation and development of the reform (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003). According to Datnow and Springfield (2000), a school reform initiative must be understood by the principal for the principal to provide effective leadership during implementation at their school. For principals to have a true understanding of RTI, it will require school districts to provide structured training, monitoring, and reinforcement, and lastly central office support (Hilton, 2007, p. 17).

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NCLD) *RTI: How to Do It* (2006) provides specific information on the role of the instructional leaders at each tier in RTI implementation. The role of instructional leader (which in this publication does limit leadership to the principal, but associates leader with the assistant principal and curriculum leaders in the building) centers on providing resources and relevant staff development, ensuring that implementation is done with fidelity, as well as leading the problem-solving approach.

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) and buy-in are two of the most common factors for implementation of effective and successful RTI process with fidelity (Harlacher & Siler, 2011). RTI implementation requires an array of new skills from staff (Tilly, 2008). A well-prepared teacher is one of the most important components of a child's learning experience, so proper training or professional development is a tool that must be present and available. Primarily, professional development (PD) should be embedded in the school day, ongoing, structured, and deliberate (Batsche, Curtís, Dormán, Castillo, & Porter, 2007; Peterson, Prasse, Shinn, & Swerdlik, 2007).

RTI can be successful in settings if those who are executing the initiative are knowledgeable about what they are presenting (Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012). This is only possible when teachers are provided opportunities to increase their ability to develop and deliver research-based instruction and interventions. Peterson et al. (2007) stated that professional development should focus on just that – development. Professional development includes ongoing coaching and ample opportunities to practice new skills with feedback. Teachers should receive professional development that

encourages knowledge improvement in content areas that will help them enhance the process of identifying appropriate assessment practices within an RTI system. Such knowledge will assist in using data to guide daily planning for instruction. Additionally, PD should include instruction to distinguish between individual problem-solving and group/school level problem-solving in small and large group training environments (Ikeda, Rahn-Blakeslee, Niebling, Gustafson, Allison, & Stumme, 2007; Abbott, Wills, Kamps, Greenwood, Dawson-Bannister, Kaufman, et al., 2008; Chard & Harn, 2008).

Ikeda et al. (2007) stated that PD must include a thorough understanding of why RTI is being implemented. Numerous studies (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Van Driel & Berry, 2012; Lumpe, Czemiak, Haney, & Beltyukova, 2012) explain that professional development is an important factor when implementing any district or school-wide initiative, and it also has to encompass thoughtful planning and monitoring. Along with providing useful PD for RTI, it is important to have staff buy-in that ultimately leads to implementing RTI with fidelity. This task includes understanding what RTI is, what it takes to implement RTI, and how it is unlike previous practices (Tucker & Sornson, 2007).

Summary

A review of current research and literature supports the implementation of RTI as a valid way to support those students who are struggling with learning and increasing the achievement in general education classrooms. Also, the literature supports the idea that RTI is a valid method for decreasing the number of special education students and for identifying those students who do qualify for special education individualized educational plans. Implementation of RTI requires schools to change the culture of instruction in their

classrooms; RTI requires a dramatic shift in the way teachers provide instruction in their classrooms. The realities that surround urban schools can promote an environment that is resistant to change due to a myriad of other issues such as novice teachers, students with behavioral challenges, and a lack of parental involvement. The RTI framework forces educators to ask different types of questions about the instruction presented in classrooms such as “Is the curriculum appropriate for the type of students?” and “Are the teachers receiving the appropriate professional development needed?” Teachers need to be comfortable with every component of the tiers in RTI to ensure that students are receiving the instruction they need.

A lack of research exists showing how classroom teachers in urban elementary settings have implemented RTI (Ritchey et al., 2010; Duoos, 2012; Murrah, 2016). Research on the lived experiences of teachers in urban settings will provide other teachers with information that may help them make needed adjustments to the day to day activities they use to implement RTI.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Researchers continue to call for additional research in areas that empower teachers' voices and close the gap on the experiences and roles of the teacher in the implementation of response to intervention (RTI; Phillips & Weingarten, 2013, p. 37). The research for RTI currently focuses on evaluating the RTI process, efficacy, and leadership roles. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of elementary school teachers implementing RTI in their classrooms in an urban setting. This chapter will define the selected theoretical framework, identify the purpose of the study, state the research context and participants, define the research question, design, sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and the data analysis process utilized for the study.

Theoretical Framework

This researcher has chosen Fullan's (2001) educational change model to serve as the theoretical framework for the study. This study focuses on the factors and experiences that affect the implementation of an innovation such as RTI and the role of the teacher in the change process. The target audience for this study includes teachers who have had experiences and knowledge of RTI and those that are immersed in implementing a district and state mandate.

The aforementioned research discovered many models of educational change that have been developed over the years (Kotter, 1996; Reigeluth & Garfinkle, 1994; Rogers, 2003); however, based on the topic of this study, Fullan's educational change model (Fullan, 2007) was identified as being most appropriate to accomplish the study's

objectives. Fullan's model brings attention and a focus on the human participants and their experiences when involved in the process of change and how their involvement affects the implementation process.

Fullan's three-phase model of educational change has been formative in shaping educational change research and has provided direction to researchers, policymakers, and educators over multiple decades (Datnow, 2006). Fullan (2007) identified the following three broad phases in the change process: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization:

- Phase 1: Variously labeled initiation, mobilization, or adoption, this phase consists of the process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with the change.
- Phase 2: This phase involves the implementation or initial use and first experiences of attempting to put an idea or reform into practice.
- Phase 3: Called continuation, incorporation, routinization, or institutionalization, this phase refers to whether the change gets built in as an ongoing part of the system or disappears by way of a decision to discard it through attrition. (p. 65)

Fullan's three-phase model of education appears to have direct applicability to the current practices of RTI (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008).

Fullan's Theory and RTI

Fullan's work is pertinent to the process of implementing an RTI model as noted by numerous researchers. Datnow (2006) attests that Fullan's model of educational change (1991, 2001, 2007) has been formative in shaping educational change research and has provided direction to researchers, policymakers, and educators over several

decades. Fullan's theory of educational change has guided the appropriateness of current practices of RTI. Additionally, Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) posited that the result of an absence of research that looks at components could "advance or hinder effective usage of RTI. It is valuable to survey earlier theoretical models and endeavors of educational change with the expectation of advising future educational practice" (p. 57). Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) particularly refer to the fact that Fullan's model appears to have direct applicability to the current practice of implementing RTI.

While investigating Fullan's theory of educational change and its relationship to executing RTI, Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) discovered particular links. The researchers' rationale is that Fullan's theory recommends that to influence change, instructional leaders and policymakers "must include teacher knowledge and beliefs, strong instructional leadership, collegiality, shared vision and, technical assistance and support learning" (p. 63). These are all valuable when trying to develop a program that is attempting to build capacity for an entire system and specifically for individual teachers.

Fullan's work has evolved into a framework for creating and executing change in schools. Applying Fullan's work to the implementation procedure of an RTI model provides a theoretical lens that outlines the change process. The process includes the lived experiences of teachers and their reactions when implementing a new, innovative program such as RTI. Fullan's work offers a foundation for implementing, evaluating, and institutionalizing best practices identified with productive changes in education.

The Change Process

Fullan (2007) distinguished three phases in the change process: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. As illustrated in Figure 3, the change process

phases overlap. In the initiation stage, the change is considered for adoption, and the choice to embrace or not is made. In the implementation stage, the change occurs in the first couple of years of utilization. In the institutionalization stage, the change either becomes a part of the culture or vanishes by choice or through the absence of usage.

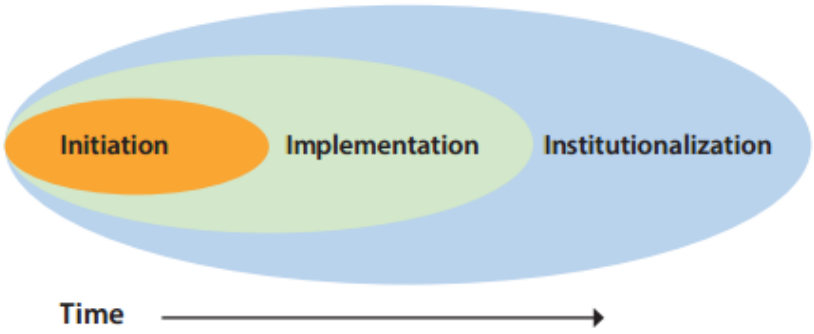

Figure 3. Phases of the change process. Adapted from Miles et al., 1987.

Fullan (2007) defines implementation as "the process of putting into place an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change" (p. 84). Fullan distinguished nine basic components that impact implementation and organized the components into three classes related to "(1) the characteristics of the innovation or change project, (2) local roles, and (3) external factors" (p. 87).

There are four attributes of the change model that were recognized by Fullan: need, clarity, complexity, and quality/practicality. Individuals executing the change ought to see a need for the change. The change needs to be clear about what individuals need to do differently. Complexity alludes to how troublesome and how broadly the change will influence the individual's responsibilities. Quality/practicality of the change is identified with the accessibility of the materials and resources required to encourage the change.

Fullan (2007) described how the local roles or characteristics refers to "the social conditions of change; the setting or group in which people work; and the planned and unplanned events and activities that sway whether or not the attempt to change will provide a productive outcome" (p. 93). The school district, board, community, principal, and teachers are all a part of the local roles. School change can occur independently without the support of the administrators at the district level; however, when looking beyond the individual school and trying to create a large initiative among many schools, district support and participation are needed.

The school board and the community play a local role that can have an adverse effect on change ranging from complete lack of interest for implementation or an active involvement to support or oppose it. The instructional leader plays a key role in the reception of the change at the school level. Teachers look to the principal for how and where they place the adoption to the change as a priority in the school and how invasive the implementation process will be. Teacher acceptance of the change can affect implementation as a group as well as individually. The influence of lived experiences with other change engagements (positive or negative) guide a teacher's decision to get

on-board or jump ship when it comes to adopting change. The teacher's attitude toward the change will affect the success of the implementation within their classroom.

Fullan (2007) stated that the third category affecting implementations are external factors. Educational state departments and federal agencies are external factors. Policies and initiation of change is often the concern of state departments and federal agencies placing emphasis on change implementation. Fullan does point out that governmental agencies are becoming more mindful about the "importance and difficulty of implementation" (p. 100) and are providing resources to mitigate the difficulties.

The literature on Fullan's change theory was reviewed. Fullan's three-phase model of educational change has been formative in shaping educational change research and has provided direction to researchers, policymakers, and educators over multiple decades (Datnow, 2006). Multiple factors can influence the outcome of change at each phase. These factors can be determined by the specific nature of a change program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of elementary school classroom teachers implementing RTI in an urban setting. The study results can be used to help promote effective practices for the development of new RTI programs and the revision of existing ones. The RTI model has the potential to augment student achievement within many urban classrooms. Future research in urban settings may prove instrumental in providing valuable information to teachers in their quest to implement RTI effectively and with fidelity. A qualitative phenomenology study of teachers' lived experiences provides empirical evidence for teachers, leaders, and districts when implementing RTI in urban elementary school settings.

Research Question

The research question for this study is: What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers implementing RTI in an urban elementary classroom setting?

In theory, RTI is an ideal model for identifying learning disabilities through early intervention and research-based practices. Unfortunately, the lack of specialized knowledge impedes the implementation of RTI in an urban setting (Haller & Davis, 1981). For RTI to work effectively in an urban setting, it is important to understand the thoughts and professional needs of teachers implementing the model. When implemented successfully, RTI has proven to be a model that improves a student's reading and mathematical skills, and more importantly, RTI prevents the over-identification and over-assignment of students to special education (Dexter & Hughes, 2009).

Research Tradition

The phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) is a scientific study that describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). The major concern of phenomenological analysis is to understand "how the everyday, inter-subjective world is constituted" (Schwandt, 2000) from the perspective of the participants. The researcher follows the descriptive phenomenological method which provides an opportunity to collect the lived-context of the participants. The lived experiences are obtained by focusing on the participants' perspectives without influencing or deceiving the participants (Giorgi, 2009). This method allows the researcher to become the microphone for the voice of the participants in the study without diminishing their viewpoint when performing analysis of the data.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of elementary school classroom teachers implementing RTI in an urban setting. The researcher interviewed elementary classroom teachers in that urban setting. Their lived experiences were thematically coded and analyzed. The results of the study enabled the researcher to determine unique characteristics related to implementing RTI in an urban elementary school setting. According to Creswell (1998), measuring the lived experiences of a subject emphasizes identifying the intentionality of consciousness. This means identifying the outward and inward appearance, based on the subjects' consciousness, image, memory, and meaning of the phenomenon being studied. The objective of this research was to gather the collective voices of those who assume an active role in the improvement of student achievement through the implementation of RTI in their classrooms. There are numerous research methods that could be used for studying the experiences of teachers implementing RTI in their classrooms, but this research sought meaning from the individual teacher's lived experiences. Since phenomenological research is designed to give voice to the experience being described (van Manen, 1990), it is an appropriate method for this study. The essence of any phenomenological study transforms the lived experiences of the subjects into textual expressions that describe the experience and provide meaning derived from the experience (van Manen, 1990). The concept of the contextual nature of a phenomenological study is graphically represented in Figure 4.

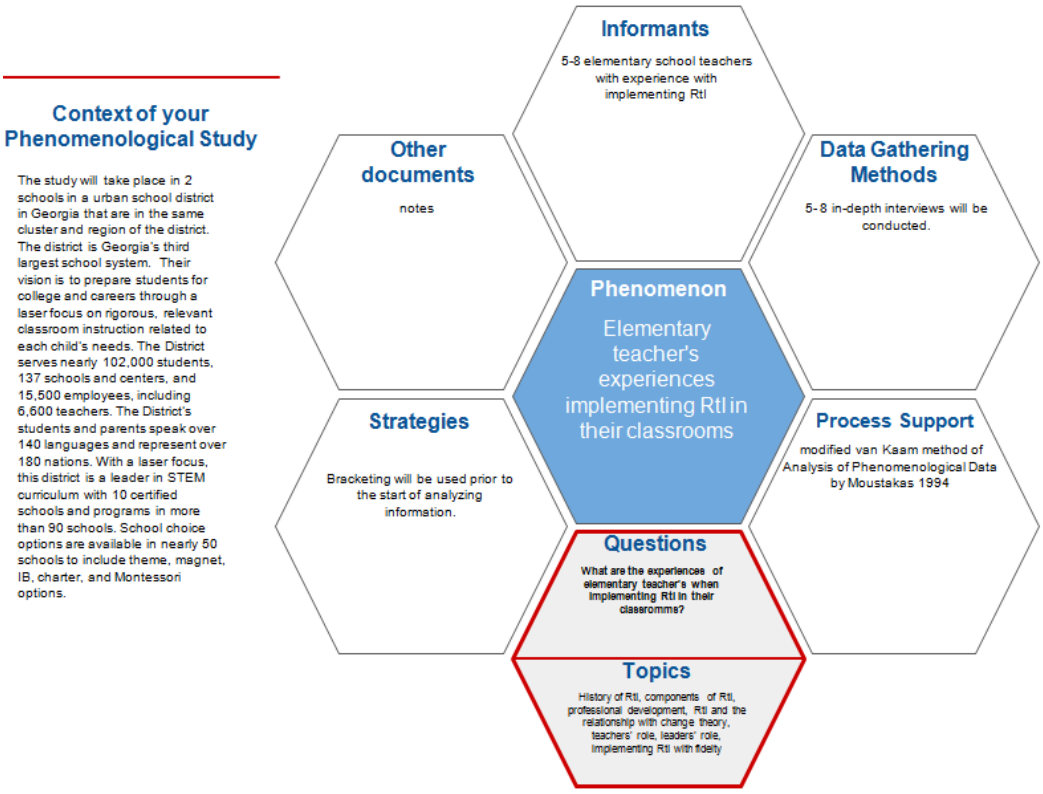

Figure 4. Graphic representation of the context for a phenomenological study.

Context and Participants

In this phenomenological study, the research context is urban elementary schools in a school district within the state of Georgia, in the United States.

The schools are in a district that serves nearly 102,000 students in 137 schools and centers, and its 15,500 employees includes 6,600 teachers. There are over 140 languages that are spoken by students and parents within this district, and they represent over 180 nations. The district is broken into five regions and then grouped together in elementary, middle, and high school clusters.

School A

This is a multi-cultural, technological school that provides students with a total education in the areas of academic, social, and emotional learning from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. It houses a Technology Magnet Program in grades 3 through 5. The faculty and staff consist of 55 teachers, including a variety of specialists (math, music, art, reading, and media) and 16 paraprofessionals. There are approximately 409 students enrolled in the Technology Magnet Program, of which 83% receive free or reduced lunch. Approximately 3% of the school's population includes students with disabilities. Approximately 3% of the students are English Language Learners (ELL). Each staff member participates in professional development required by the DeKalb County School System (DCSS) as well as meeting professional goals to enhance their careers. The faculty is very knowledgeable of the Best Teaching practices via the Teacher Keys training and evaluation instrument for this school. Teachers are expected to incorporate these practices into their daily instruction to continue on a path of excellence.

School B

The school opened at the beginning of the 1966-1967 school year. Presently, it houses grades pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school has been a stable influence in this community for over 50 years. The school has an enrollment of 580 students. The racial composition of the student body is 99.4% African-American, 0.28% Hispanic, and 0.28% Caucasian. The school's population also consists of 80% economically disadvantaged students and 1.5% of the students have disabilities. In this school, 100% of the students participate in the free lunch and breakfast program. The school has a wide

variety of technology available, including whiteboards, computers located in classrooms, the media center, and a computer lab.

Creswell (2007) stated that participants in a phenomenology study require that the individuals chosen should all have experienced the targeted phenomenon so that the researcher can investigate a common understanding. The participants for this study include certified elementary school teachers working in two urban elementary schools in a large school district in Georgia. Qualitative research seeks to find and explore relationships between specific phenomena and its impact on participants (Janesick, 2004). The participants for this study were asked to share their lived experiences regarding the phenomenon of implementing RTI within the natural course of scientific research.

Sample

Purposeful sampling was the sampling methodology selected for this study. This method was based on the nature of the topic of inquiry and the lived experiences of the participants. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. According to Patton (1990), "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term 'purposeful sampling'" (p.169). The first step in selecting the sample involved identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that were especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The purposeful sample included participants with at

least two years of experience with RTI implementation, attendance at a district RTI training, and willingness to participate in a one-on-one interview session.

To ensure the research was "information-rich," the researcher asked for the instructional leader (principal) of both schools to identify the newly recognized RTI teacher leaders for each grade level. Description occurs when the reader knows enough to understand the findings (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This method allowed those who read the study to conceptualize the data from two aspects: the intellectual and emotional levels.

Interview Protocol

Creswell (1998) stated that when conducting qualitative research, the use of interviews as the primary source of data is appropriate. Participants who had first-hand experience with the implementation of the RTI phenomena were purposefully selected to ensure information-rich data. The interview protocol was designed to hear the voices of those who experienced the phenomena by developing questions that allowed them to share their experiences (see Appendix B).

Each teacher received an introductory email (Appendix A) and questionnaire from the researcher (Appendix D). The questionnaire was designed to gather demographic information about each participant, information regarding any district training, grade level, and the number of years teaching. Once the questionnaires were received, the researcher identified six teachers and invited them to participate in the phenomenological study.

Positionality Statement

In observing the phenomenon of implementing RTI in an urban setting, this researcher acknowledges that the phenomenon was explored with particular biases. The researcher had experience that included being a classroom teacher, reading recovery teacher, intervention specialist, and an instructional support specialist for the last two years at an urban elementary school in Georgia.

This researcher entered the teaching profession with the belief that schools should provide all students with educational tools that prepare them for life. This researcher believes that the vision and mission for schools should always be to provide students with a positive experience prescribed for each student's educational needs. A major responsibility of the school is to teach all students and not let a child's socioeconomic background negatively impact his or her academic achievement. As an educator and an advocate for struggling students, this researcher has a favorable bias towards the implementation of Response to Invention in urban elementary schools. It is recognized that there are students who struggle with reading comprehension and study skills in many classroom settings.

As an active participant in various capacities within the elementary school setting, this researcher understands the concerns related to addressing the needs of students who are not performing well academically. The researcher supports and understands the importance of a program that recognizes struggling students and targets specific skill gaps. In practice, the researcher makes a conscious effort to identify struggling students before irreversible damage is done that could have a lasting impact on a student's educational advancement. There was a conscious effort to minimize the researcher's

personal biases regarding RTI as it relates to their impact on the research. As Denzin (1986) asserts, "Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher" (p. 12).

Authors who have written literature regarding the implementation of the Response to Intervention model tend to praise the model for its potential to increase academic achievement for struggling students (Brozo, 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). This researcher's educational teaching background and biases have guided the development of a positive predisposition toward the Response to Intervention model. The limited but strong literature regarding the implementation of Response to Invention in urban elementary school settings adds to this researcher's positive bias toward the topic.

Entry and Reciprocity

Gaining entry to interview participants was guided by the researcher's current employment as an instructional support specialist at an elementary school. This researcher successfully approached teachers at the participating schools because she was viewed as a colleague who understood and had experience with the joys and challenges of working in an urban school setting. Her current position put her in contact with the day to day activities of many teachers who were implementing RTI in their classrooms. Providing an opportunity for teachers who volunteered to share their story was achieved by gaining approval from the Kennesaw State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and DeKalb County School District IRB systems. This process is designed to assure participants of their anonymity and contribution to the study. Also, the informed consent will guarantee participants that their identities will be kept confidential (See Appendix E).

An important characteristic of qualitative research is reciprocity. The voice provided to the teachers who participated in the study is the teacher's reciprocal benefit. According to Stokrocki (1997), phenomenological study participants are very important because their stories become the data that is analyzed and reviewed. Before the start of each participant's interview, the researcher explained the basic methodology of a phenomenology study and the reciprocal benefit for the participant.

Data Collection

The researcher utilized two data collection sources for the study: in-depth, semi-structured interviews and interpretive field notes recorded during the interviews.

In phenomenological studies, data is collected from participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon. Data collection in phenomenological studies consists of in-depth and multiple interviews with participants (Creswell, 2007), and "the researcher is the instrument" (Mertens, 2005, p.247; Maxwell, 1996, p. 66). The researcher gathered data solely through one-on-one interviews to gain insight into the lived experiences of the participants. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions which provided the participants the opportunity to describe their experiences fully. A minimal number of questions were asked to facilitate the responses that described the experiences the participants have when implementing RTI in their classrooms. This style of questioning was chosen because there was a sense of flexibility for how the researcher would gain an understanding of the lived experiences and true feelings of the participants in the study. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative data regarding participants' feelings about certain events or non-events help in providing a richer story of those happenings rather than simply reporting the occurrence itself. Moustakas's (1994)

focuses on epoche (bracketing), in which investigators set aside their experiences as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination. The researcher ensured that after the bracketing process, the questions used during the interviews elicited information related to the teachers' lived experiences with implementing RTI in their urban setting.

Participants for the study were contacted by the researcher via email or phone to develop a schedule for interviews that was most convenient for the participants. Duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour. The researcher obtained permission to record the interviews. Annotated notes were written during the interviews. Once the interview was concluded, the recordings were downloaded onto the storage drive of the researcher's personal computer. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Once the interviews were transcribed, a copy of the transcript was provided to participants to check for accuracy and validation. This process is known as member checking, which allows the participant to review his or her transcripts to clarify or reword any statement that may have been misunderstood or misinterpreted during the interview process (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) stated that data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. Once the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. Significant

statements, sentences, or quotes that provide awareness into how those who participate in the study experience the phenomenon were thematically coded.

This study utilized the van Kaam method of analysis as modified by Moustakas (1994). Analysis of the data followed the steps listed below:

- Epoche: The researcher bracketed out one's own experience by writing a description of their own experience with the phenomenon.
- Horizontalization: The researcher identified statements that were relevant to the study. Merit was provided equally to each statement as being an authentic lived experience.
- Reduction and elimination: Statements were eliminated or redacted by subjecting them to the following questions:
  - Does it contain an experience that is necessary and adequate for understanding it?
  - Is it possible to abstract and label it? If yes, it is a horizon of experience. (If it doesn't meet the two requirements above, it is eliminated.)
  - Are they overlapping, repetitive, or vague language (eliminate)?
  - If it remains, it is an invariant (unchanging) constituent of the experience.
- Clusters of meaning: place the significant statements into themes.
- Final identification: The researcher completed a repeat check of the statements that were left to make sure they were compatible with the themes.
- Individual textural description: Significant statements and themes were annotated to describe what the participants experienced.

- Individual structural description: A written description was provided to outline the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon.
- Composite description: The structural and textural descriptions were used to write a composite description that presented the essence of the participant's lived experiences.

Trustworthiness

The strength of the validity of a qualitative study can be addressed in a number of ways. Creswell (2013) suggest that researchers should use multiple trustworthiness strategies regardless of the type of qualitative research they are conducting. Validation strategies are triangulation, member checking, peer review or debriefing, rich, thick description, clarifying researcher bias, and external audits. This study employed four of the techniques listed: member checking, clarifying researcher bias, rich, thick description, and triangulation.

Member Checking

In member checking, the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and the interpretations (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Clarifying Researcher Bias

According, to Merriam (1988) clarifying researcher bias should be established at the outset of the study so that readers understand the researcher's position and any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a technique that uses different types of data to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon. It is a way to assure the validity of research through different methods of collecting data.

Schurink, Schurink, and Poggenpoel (1998) emphasize the truth-value of qualitative research and provide a number of ways in which one can achieve truth. The phenomenological research design that has been chosen contributes toward the truth. Participating in bracketing and recording each participant's experience also contributed to truthfulness.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for this study provides for participants with at least two years of experience with RTI, attendance at a district RTI training, and willingness to participate in a one–on-one interview session.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter covers the findings of the research, analysis of the findings, and a synthesis of the results. This chapter provides information on the perspectives of teachers who are participating in the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) in their classrooms. The study's research question was: What are the lived experiences of teachers implementing RTI in an urban setting?

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore the phenomenon of teachers' lived experiences with implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting. Using Moustakas' (1994) modified version of the van Kaam method, a qualitative approach was utilized to analyze the data resulting from audio recordings and transcription of one-on-one interviews. The approach included a purposeful sample of 6 teachers from a large urban school system. Teacher leaders who had been implementing RTI in the classroom for two or more years were invited to participate in this study voluntarily.

Participants in the study shared through their individual lived experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon of implementing RTI in their urban classroom. Themes were constructed through analysis of the data from semi-structured one-to-one interviews and annotated notes. The themes may provide educational leaders, district leaders, onsite school leaders, administrators, and teachers with insight and information to improve educational experiences for teachers and students.

Description of Response to Intervention (RTI)

Response to Intervention (RTI) integrates assessments and interventions within a school-wide, multi-level instructional system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. With RTI, schools can identify at-risk students that may have educational and behavioral challenges. RTI focuses on learning outcomes through monitoring student progress, providing evidence-based interventions, and adjusting the intensity and nature of those interventions depending upon a student's responsiveness. RTI may be used as part of the determination process for specific learning disabilities. The Three-Tier Model is described below:

- Tier 1- Focus on all students receiving high-quality, research-based instruction in the general education setting (Standards Based Learning).
- Tier 2- Focus on small-group instruction delivered by teachers and interventionists, based on the needs of the student in addition to core instruction (Needs Based Learning).
- Tier 3 - Focus on individualized intensified, comprehensive intervention in addition to core instruction (Student Support Team-SST).

Description of the Participants

Six teachers were selected for the study. The original purposeful sampling plan sought to recruit participants based on a list of RTI teacher leaders at each school. A total sample of twelve potential participants met the teacher leader role and two year or greater experience criteria for purposeful selection. The six teachers in the study have implemented RTI in their classrooms for two or more years. The researcher communicated with building administrators to purposefully select participants who had

experience of two or more years with implementing RTI in their classrooms. Initial contact with the participants included a letter requesting participation (see Appendix A for complete participation letter) before interview sessions. Six volunteers were willing to participate after being informed about the study. The six teachers selected represent a wide-ranging cross-section of elementary school teachers implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting in a large urban school system. Names used in the study are not the actual names of the teachers in the study, as the names were changed to protect the identity of the six teachers in the study and to maintain confidentiality.

Participant 1 (P1) is a Kindergarten teacher and has been teaching for 3 years. (P1) has been teaching at the current school for 3 years. (P1) serves as teacher leader for the Kindergarten grade level. (P1) completed a master's degree in early education last year. This participant began implementing RTI in the classroom as a novice teacher. (P1) has been teaching for three years.

Participant 2 (P2) is a novice teacher at the elementary school level. (P2) currently teaches the high achieving class for 1st grade. (P2) has been teaching for 3 years and has an advanced degree in early childhood education. (P2) relocated from Chicago 3 years ago and had previous experience with working early learners. (P2) began her teaching experience as a third grade teacher. It was noted that the 3rd grade is the first year that student testing is mandated. During the interview, (P2) was a little nervous but attentive. She has been implementing RTI in her classroom for three years.

Participant 3 (P3) is a novice teacher, with only three years of experience in the classroom. Currently. (P3) is teaching 2nd grade and is enrolled in a master's degree

program at a nearby college. During the interview (P3) was very comfortable sharing the RTI experiences. (P3) has been utilizing RTI in the classroom for three years.

Participant 4 (P4) is a teacher that took the nontraditional route for teaching, and was not an education major but decided on teaching as a vocation. This is (P4) third year teaching 2nd grade. (P4) displayed an outgoing and energetic personality during the interview. (P4) was eager to answer questions. (P4) has been utilizing RTI in her classroom since entering the profession.

Participant 5 (P5) is a veteran teacher who has been teaching at the present school for 2 years. (P5) is in the 10th year of teaching 3rd grade students. (P5) assists with new teachers and is actively involved with numerous programs within the school. During the interview, (P5) was cordially and confident. (P5) was previously selected as a Teacher of the Year at a different school.

Participant 6 (P6) has been teaching for 5 years. (P6) teaches 4th grade but has previously taught 5th grade. (P6) has taught in a neighboring suburban school system and has been at the present school for 3 years. (P6) is a part of the literacy and technology committee at the school. (P6) has been implementing RTI in the classroom for the past 3 years. (P6) was very vocal about the RTI experiences in the classroom.

Table 1 provides demographic data for participants used in this qualitative study.

Table 1

Participants' General Background Information

Participant	Grade	Years of Experience	Years of RTI Participation
1	Kindergarten	3	3
2	1st Grade	3	3
3	2nd Grade	3	3
4	2nd Grade	3	3
5	3rd Grade	10	7
6	4th Grade	5	3
Mean Score		4.5	3.6

Participants who were interviewed had from 3 to 10 years of experience. The mean number of years of experience for the participants in the research study was 4.5 years. The mean number of years of experience implementing RTI in the classroom was 3.6 years.

Each of the participants was asked to discuss their perspective and experiences regarding the implementation of Response to Intervention in their classroom as noted at the beginning of the chapter. Each participant was presented with 12 open-ended interview questions.

The interviews were conducted in each participant's classroom and the researcher scheduled time after school so that the interview would not interfere with the instructional day or the teacher's after-class responsibilities. The duration of the

interviews ranged from 30 to 50 minutes. Responses to twelve open-ended interview questions were digitally recorded, transcribed using an independent transcription editor, hand annotated, uploaded to Atlas T.I qualitative data analysis software program, and thematic codes were assigned to each transcribed document. The thematic codes were then reported using an excel spreadsheet to facilitate analysis. Statements that were not relevant to the interview questions were redacted.

Use of the modified Van Kaam method of analysis by Moustakas (1996) led to the emergence of three themes, which allowed for the creation of a description of the response to intervention (RTI) phenomenon.

The following steps were taken to complete the transcription of each interview and email journal response:

1. Horizontalization: Every expression or statement relevant to the RTI experience was listed.
2. Reduction and Elimination: Each expression or statement was tested to meet two requirements:
    - Does the expression contain a moment of the RTI experience or perception of the phenomenon that is sufficient and necessary to understanding RTI?
    - Is it possible to extract the statement or expression and label or categorize it? If so, it is considered to be a horizon of the experience or perception.
3. Clustering and Identifying Thematic Expressions: The perceptions and expressions that were related were clustered into a thematic label or

category. Expressions that were not applicable or were inappropriate for the identified thematic label were excluded. The clustered and labeled expressions are the core themes of the participants' RTI experience.

4. Validation: Final identification of the themes found in the clustered and labeled expressions.
5. Construction of a Textural Description: The deeper meanings and essences of the perceptions of the RTI phenomenon experience, incorporating the themes, was used to construct a textural description.

Results from the data collection of the research study are presented in this chapter. The emergent themes resulted in a description that identifies the essence of the participants' experiences in implementing RTI in their classrooms. The collection of data obtained from the participants during the process are presented through textural summaries, descriptions, and tables to detail the teacher participants' lived experiences vocalized during the one-on-one interview process of the study.

Findings

The semi-structured interviews conducted with the study's sample consisted of 12 open-ended questions and the researcher's annotated notes to reveal the participants' lived experiences related to the implementation of RTI in their classrooms. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used to study the lived experiences from a teacher's perspective to understand the true essence of the implementation of RTI in an urban classroom setting. Three dominant themes were constructed from the data analysis that best explained the experiences that impacted the implementation of RTI for teachers in urban classrooms: RTI Interventions, RTI Challenges, and RTI training. Tables are used

as visual representations of the teacher's lived experiences. Table 2 represents the results of the findings which were aggregated using the qualitative data analysis software tool, Atlas-ti8. The participants' verbal answers were used as the true source and account of what teachers experience when implementing RTI in their classrooms in an urban setting. This was accomplished by concentrating on the experiences that elementary teachers shared from the interview data using the modified Van Kamm process for data analysis. The results of this process are reported in Table 3.

Table 2

Atlas. T.I Excel Spreadsheet

Assessment influence	Collaboration influence	Communication influence	Decision making influence	I do feel like it could help in that way	I found it fairly difficult to implement	Intervention influence	Personal experience neg	Personal experience pos	Post-RIT	Pre-RTI	RTI Accountability	RTI Advantage	Supplemental Program influence	Supplemental resource influence	Training influence	Totals
4	2	1	1	1	1	8	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	2	14	44
0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	15
0	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	18
0	0	0	0	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	24
0	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	26
0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	17
0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	7
4	2	1	1	1	1	119	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	2	38	151

As reported in Table 3, specific quotes emerged from the answers given during the interviews which provided descriptions of the rich lived experiences of the teachers who were at the heart of the RTI phenomenon. These descriptions provide the most vivid picture of experiences related to implementing RTI in an urban setting. Phrases and key words also led to the development of prominent descriptors from the individual interviews and annotated notes that were identified to show the evolution from horizontalization to the building of a textural description of meanings. The information was taken from each participant's interview transcript as they related to each of the 12 questions from the research questionnaire instrument.

Table 3

Interview Questions and Participants' Responses

Interview Question	Participant's Response
1. Describe in detail your personal experience using RTI in the classroom.	• I really don't know how to do it, inputting data is way too much, no set time to pull kids to actually work with them effectively. It's stressful • weekly progress monitoring with students who have struggles with reading/math • fairly difficult to implement into my schedule, lot of stress, rushed, not consistent • Overwhelming, so much data, talk with others on how to do it, just a lot of work • implementing for 5yrs, a lot of work, allows me to have time to work with individual students on instructional level interesting, experience is less than the years I've been teaching
2. What are some of the challenges and advantages to using RTI in your classroom?	• Challenges: just me in the classroom, hard to do without a para or parent to help, it's a lot of work. Advantages: kids actually grow if done effectively, works perfectly if done the right amount of time • Challenges: not enough man power, having to teach full class, not enough resources for student's limits intervention time. Advantages: reaching the students that need the help, hitting the marks head on. • Challenges: creating different work for a whole other grade level. I'm a second grade and Keg teacher. Not consistent • Challenges: trying to make sure the data that I am collecting is right, might not be right. Advantages: collecting data can finally get students the help needed. • Challenges: lot of paperwork, lots of data to keep, process takes too long, lots of preparation. Advantages: student success, increases self-esteem • Challenges: finding the time, sticking a schedule. Advantages- proven if applied accurately & consistently, confident in the results
3. How do you make decisions for your students using the RTI framework?	• Have to differentiate instruction based on the level of work that they are supposed to do. I try to assess but I really don't know. • base it off of pretest, general observations • base it on data, MAP scores, observation in my classroom • see where they are on the grade level • use the Universal screener MAP, look at data and base it off deficits in content, once you find out the deficit you plan • based on who needs it the most, difficult in a school like mine
4. How do you collaborate and communicate with other teachers, intervention teachers, coaches, and administration about students in the RTI process?	• Collaborate: pull strategies & look at strategies together, try to keep my grade level informed about new ways. Communicate: would like for the interventionist to know what to do so it won't be extra pressure on me. Just the correct intervention. Coaches: wish they would coach me on interventions. Admin: need to come to my class, they need to see how it works and offer advice they have more experience • Collaborate/communicate: grade level meetings before new units, Intervention teacher- making sure were doing the same intervention so that it is consistent for the child. Admin/Coaches: same thing, we have weekly meetings • In grade level meetings we share resources & strategies but not much as far as RTI. We don't have interventionist she is filling in as a general ed. Teacher. Coaches: not much hand-on support. Admin: tell us it's a priority, speak about at meetings, they can't come to pull kids though.

	• Collaborate: talk with last year's teacher, ask teachers if they have similar situations. Intervention teacher: make sure I am putting the right data and if I am doing the intervention right. Admin: I don't talk with them about RTI (might be helpful because they know what the district wants) • Most important part of RTI is communication, meet every week with team, interventionist pulls kids and collects data, makes decisions based on committee to move them or keep them there. • Collaborate: meet weekly & discuss with my team, use cell phones, hard sometimes with different schedules. Admin: don't meet with them about RTI
5. What does assessment and progress monitoring with RTI look like in your classroom? Describe how this differs from before implementing RTI.	• I use a cool book from Carson Deluca, I use Station: it gives us tiers with graphs, charts, and data. I try to do it but I don't do it enough. Differs: have guidelines now, but not sure how to effectively do it • Start with pretest, weekly assessment sometimes teacher made or computer based. Progress Monitoring: pulling them for specific times, one-one sessions, doing the same intervention. Better now we have interventions blocks built in. • Assessment: I just check hit on the deficits, like checking on comprehension for reading. "Don't devote much to monitoring that much but I need to" Progress Monitoring: Is just hard to gauge because it's rushed "I kinda just throw it at them." • Assessment: I do running record to get Lexile. • Probes are done by the intervention teacher; they are completed every week. Progress monitoring: done daily and she tells me how they are doing. Before RTI it wouldn't be done, there was no process really. • Interventionist takes a lot of this off my plate, do running records. Progress monitoring: give opportunities for them to read. Difference is I'm forced to cut out a timeframe to do it.
6. Please specifically describe what experiences you have had with RTI in your classroom in Tier 2 and Tier 3. How do they differ?	• Tier 3 students get a lot of attention, constantly drilling, target them. Tier 2 I don't know, I really don't give Tier 2 extra attention. They get pulled • Tier 2 and Tier 3 just consistent pulling of those students, monitoring, constant assessments, and meetings so that everyone is on one accord. • Tier 2: they just need extra support, I just pull them. Tier 3- I have to create a whole other group. • Tier 2: they get a smaller group setting when they do work. Tier 3: I pull them all the time for reading every day. I don't see T2 as often as I would T3. • Tier 2: pretty much do interventions 20/30 minutes and probes every 2 weeks and watch for gain. Tier 3: pretty much do the same thing as Tier 3 but they now can possibly qualify for testing. • Tier 2 more focus on fluency/reading. Tier 3 need more phonics, lower level skills, and small groups.
7. What type of training have you received for RTI this year?	• Didn't get any training, no district, mentor teacher supports but if she doesn't know she'll ask. • Professional development from school, but no district • No official training, middle man who tells us about it, training should have been given based on all that we have to do. • none, want to learn how to successfully to implement RTI. • RTI specialist gives us information, had one through the county • Not aware of district training, I missed it.
8. What type of programs and resources have you tried with RTI in	• I-station for assessment-monthly, time consuming, hard for the students to get on for an hour. District intervention bank full of tons of things but really don't know what they are for. • Using Istation which is awesome for progress monitoring. We also have

your classroom?	district intervention bank, I use that too. • Programs-LLI for reading, its simple doesn't require a lot of training. To make sure I am doing it right, I should get training. • Packet they gave us, and that's what I stick with, not many resources • Computer programs and the intervention bank. • I use LLI and MAP skills program identifies the deficient in reading & math.
9. Describe what successful or unsuccessful interventions look like in your classroom?	• Success- when they just get excited about knowing their letters. Unsuccessful- the frustration when they don't get it. • Unsuccessful- students not engaged. Successful- have the undivided attention of the small group that's being pulled • Success- using things like flashcards, repetition, I see improvement • Success- when it clicks for the student, start making the gears in their brain work. Unsuccessful- when you have to go back the bank to find something else • Success- using Istation a computer program, it's an easy way to get data weekly. Unsuccessful- those created by paper • Success- when they actually apply the skill in assignment, when they integrate something that they previously learned
10. Do you have any recommendations for other teachers who are implementing RTI in the classroom/school?	• Get a better understanding, ask as many questions as possible. You have to do it, so just do it. Put your data weekly • Ask for specific training so teachers know what they are doing and understand why they are doing it. • don't stress out about it, ask for support, create time to get it done, be consistent • start early, set times & parts of the day for the intervention, talk with other people • Make sure you plan, know where your kids are, make sure interventions fit. • cut out the time
11. Describe how your classroom instruction and accountability have changed since implementing RTI.	• Classroom instruction-we have an intervention time blocked in our day for math and reading. Accountability- I don't think affects my accountability • Nothing in place really before, don't recall doing it my first year. We have more meaningful resources, Istations really works • a lot more accountability on me • CI-make sure students are where they need to be and collect data. Accountability- more responsibility on us as the teacher, we have to find interventions, test them, sit down and do it, putting it in the computer, retest, and keeping all that data. • CI- meeting the kids where they are and providing immediate support. Accountability- just make sure I keep data • CI- more direct instruction on a daily basis. Accountability- they need to growth
12. Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to tell me about your experiences with RTI that you believe would be important to know?	• I wish somebody was just tell us how to do it, training is the biggest barrier to getting this right. Continued support after training, not just train me and drop me off • Develop a system and stick with it. Consistent on a daily basis, make sure your record your data. • it's time consuming, lot of outside work, provide more resources, provide RTI specialist per grade level, it's double the work • So much work, overwhelming sometimes to the point where it's like I don't even car, but you gotta do it. Wish there was a better system, somebody to help. They need to have 2 teachers in each room

	• Reevaluate the process, it's too long. Make sure you make time for collaboration, have a day specifically for RTI • be committed, encourage each other, remind each other • Barrier-time and making time

Analysis

As noted in the findings section of this dissertation, an analysis of the findings identified three dominant themes related to the implementation of RTI in an urban classroom setting; Intervention, Challenges, and Training. This analysis includes interpretive discussion of the three dominant themes. A significant factor in implementing RTI in an urban setting is the sheer number of students that are advanced to the upper tiers. This phenomenon appears in the literature as characteristic of the urban setting, and it has the capability of exhausting a significant amount of resources (Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez, & Moore, 2014)). In an urban setting, students often have limited access to quality resources (Morales-James, Lopez, Wilkins, & Fergus, 2012). The dominant themes were analyzed based on their impact at each of the three tiers of a standard RTI implementation. A more thorough discussion will follow in chapter 5.

Theme 1: Intervention

Intervention at Tier 1. In Tier 1, there is the traditional teaching of the curriculum as identified by the school district. This is known as everyday teaching using best practices. The students are grouped based on data such as the universal screener. The screener identifies their strengths and weaknesses, and the teachers use that data to adjust to accommodate each student's needs. The teacher is consistently delivering differentiated and evidence-based instruction. This is critical because it ensures that a student's struggle is not the result of improper teaching methods. Typically, the needs of

the majority of students can be met with Tier 1 instruction done with fidelity. Teachers who are in urban settings often spend most of their time providing supplemental learning opportunities based on assessment results that place students below grade level ability. Moreover, most urban schools employ early intervention systems to identify struggling students, which are a critical component of any RTI framework (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011). Early intervention systems are important due to using the wait-to-fail method, which suggests that formal assessments of core content abilities be assessed initially at the third grade. Also, the transient student population (characteristic of the urban school setting) contributes to the need to provide supplemental learning opportunities. Some urban schools struggle with high mobility among transient student populations. This is particularly true of immigrant, homeless, and foster care students (Ripp, Jean-Pierre, & Fergus, 2011). Teachers in the urban setting are ultimately creating lessons that are on different grade levels to meet individual student needs. Teachers in an urban setting must be knowledgeable of explicit and differentiated instruction for their struggling students in Tier 1. Due to a large number of students that are typically associated with an urban classroom setting, many students will continue to struggle and need additional assistance at the next tier.

Intervention at Tier 2. Focuses on small group instruction delivered by teachers and interventionists, based on the needs of the student in addition to core instruction (needs based learning). Intervention in Tier 2 involves standard, evidence-based RTI planning activities; however, in an urban setting, it requires a significantly increased amount of planning. Teachers have to develop more focused instruction than a typical classroom in areas like reading instruction. The primary goals are to remediate skill

deficits, find time to reteach and review skills for Tier 1 lessons presented to the students, give students access to multiple opportunities to practice, and then provide immediate corrective feedback. This can be done with small numbers of students needing this level of support. According to Brown-Chidsey and Bickford (2015), Tier 2 instruction for academic deficits should be provided three to five days each week for about 30 minutes each day. However, it can be overwhelming if half the class requires this level of support services. Tier 2 activities may look different from school to school within urban settings. The lived experiences of one school's teachers included a specialist who identified and assisted at-risk students; however, at another school, the homeroom teachers were designated as the classroom teacher and the interventionist.

Similar to the issue of transient students identified in Tier 1, when Tier 2 interventions are implemented and documented for at-risk students, it is unknown what happens to the data if/when the student moves to another school or district. This is characteristic of urban and metropolitan school settings. In comparison to suburban and rural school settings, urban school settings are frequently marked by higher concentrations of poverty, greater racial and ethnic diversity, larger concentrations of immigrant populations and linguistic diversity, and more frequent rates of student mobility (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011).

Implementation of Tier 2 interventions will often call for teachers to receive support and training in areas such as using data and progress monitoring to make instructional decisions. If a student continues to struggle, the teacher collaborates with other teachers and will make recommendations to move the student to Tier 3.

Intervention at Tier 3. Tier 3 focuses on individualized intensified, comprehensive intervention in addition to core instruction (Student Support Team -SST). At Tier 3, RTI requires the most intense levels of intervention. In an urban setting, it requires extensive RTI planning. In most classrooms, only a small fraction of students who do not make adequate progress with support from Tier 2 intervention need to advance to Tier 3's more intensive, individualized intervention. Tier 3 intervention is usually delivered outside the general education classroom by someone who has specific training in providing individualized interventions and support in content areas such as reading or math. Harn, Kame'enui, and Simmons, (2007) discuss how general education teachers or specialists facilitate Tier 2, and more experienced teachers, such as a special education teacher, content specialist, or teacher with expertise in a content area, facilitate Tier 3. It was the lived experiences of the urban setting teachers that at Tier 3 the interventionist or the classroom teacher was consistently pulling students (selecting the student for Tier 3 interventions). Students can be recommended for evaluation if the intense interventions are unsuccessful. The evaluation may include psychological testing to determine the presence of specific learning disabilities, mild intellectual disabilities, or emotional behavior disorders. It was the lived experience of several teachers that subjective decisions are made at Tier 3. Due to the larger number of students that may require Tier 3 support, the teacher may subjectively select those students who could potentially benefit from Tier 3 support. One teacher commented that

> It is hard to select students objectively because of the large number who require the services. Unfortunately, decisions are made based on those students who need the service the most, in general. You try to do the best that you can to make space

> for those students that can move up academically; however, sometimes that is not possible. (Data retrieved from one-on-one interviews with a participant of the study)

The student can also be recommended for evaluation, or it is possible to move the student back down the pyramid to a lower tier, especially if the student demonstrates success and growth at the current tier. According to Ervin (2010), even when research-based risk criteria are available, schools serving high numbers of students at risk for reading and/or behavioral problems may not have sufficient resources to provide Tier 3 interventions to all students who fall into risk categories. Support at this level is essential but often limited in urban settings. This is due to the number of students needing support services that supersede the amount of personnel that can help on a regular basis. This can be a long process if the right interventions are not identified or interventions are not completed promptly and with fidelity.

Additional sub-themes that emerged during the analysis of RTI intervention. Three sub-themes emerged during an analysis of the findings and results of implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting. The sub-themes, Collaboration, Communication, and Decision-making, all appeared to provide some degree of influence as expressed by the participants of the study.

Influences of collaboration when implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting. At Tier1, there is minimal collaboration due to the curriculum that is mandated for each grade level. Collaboration is the interaction between professionals who offer different areas of expertise yet share responsibilities and goals (Murawski, & Hughes, 2009; Friend & Cook, 2007; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000).

At Tier 1, collaboration occurs between teachers at the same grade level to ensure that common instruction exists among the classrooms. The same grade level teachers support each other with strategies to facilitate daily instruction that is suited for students who may require differentiation based on learning deficits or advancements. In urban school settings, collaboration can be one of the most powerful tools due to a larger percentage of novice teachers who may need coaching and support to meet the needs of struggling students. Murawski, and Hughes (2009) stated that for RTI to be successful, a wide array of stakeholders need to collaborate. These include administrators, parents, students, staff, the community, and all types of educators. It was the lived experience of one teacher included in the study that collaboration was problematic because

> In grade level meetings resources and strategies were shared but not much as far as RTI was concerned. We don't have an interventionist because she is filling in as a general education teacher. The administrators tell us that it is important to collaborate, but they are not involved with the Tier 2/3 pulling of students through the RTI process. (Data retrieved from one-on-one interviews with a participant of the study)

At Tier 2, collaboration looks a little different because it often involves a reading and an RTI specialist who meet to discuss the progress or lack of progress for those students who have not shown improvement with regular core instruction in the classroom. Intervention plans are developed based on data collected that identifies deficits. The support from the additional teachers allows for the process to encompass a collaborative problem-solving approach. This type approach allows the team to build individualized plans that are used to increase a student's ability to achieve. This can

often be overwhelming for teachers in urban school settings due to the number of students in the urban classroom that may need these services. The lived experiences of one teacher involved in the study supported the overwhelming nature of implementing RTI in an urban setting.

> My administration just needs to come in my classroom and see what I'm doing so they will understand how it works, how hard it is, what goes into it, and maybe offer some advice seeing as though they are the administration. They have more experience. (Data retrieved from one-on-one interviews with a participant in the study)

According to Mortenson and Witt (1998), interventions are more likely to be used consistently when teachers are given feedback and coaching.

At Tier 3, collaboration involves a problem-solving team of people. In the state of Georgia, this group of people is called the Student Support Team (SST). These teams get together to discuss the needs of a student by analyzing student data and making collaborative decisions that determine the interventions for the student. Teams are also involved with dialogue among parents or guardians to ensure that they are informed and play a role in the educational decisions affecting their child. Early research shows how school-based intervention teams appear to increase collaboration among general and special education teachers (Powers, 2001; Kovaleski, Tucker, & Stevens, 1996) and between school personnel and parents (Powers, 2001; Will, 1986). In urban school settings, there are often larger caseloads which impede the RTI process due to the limited amount time and availability to meet as a collaborative team.

Influences of communication when implementing RTI in an urban setting.

Communication at Tier 1. Communication skills are keys to collaboration among educators, along with flexibility and mutual respect (Ehren, Laster, & Watts-Taffe. 2009; Bean, Grumet, & Bulazo, 1999). At Tier 1, administrative communication was evident among grade level teachers involved with this research study. Goals were set and communicated by the administrators for the expectation and learning outcomes for every grade level. Teachers also communicated via weekly meetings with their grade level counterparts to discuss plans for instruction, and share resources and strategies.

Communication at Tier 2. At Tier 2, in an urban setting, the majority of teachers implementing RTI are often interested in obtaining more guidance and direction. Due to the lack of support personnel, the Tier 2 teachers expressed the feelings of being overwhelmed and out-of-touch or disconnected from the normal lines of communication. It was the lived experience of one teacher that communication can be problematic.

> I wish that somebody would just tell us how to do it because it's the students who really fall through the cracks. If we are not doing RTI the right way, the students do not get the services they need because we are misinformed. (Data retrieved from one-on-one interviews with a participant of the study)

When all students have guaranteed access to rigorous curriculum and effective initial teaching, targeted and timely supplemental support, and personalized intensive support from highly trained educators, few will experience failure (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010; Sornson, Frost, & Burns, 2005). This researcher has found that it is the lack of communication within the district that exacerbates the problem.

Communication at Tier 3. The Georgia Response to Intervention Manual, identifies the Student Support Team as a "multi-disciplinary team which utilizes a

problem-solving process to investigate the educational needs of students who are experiencing academic and/or behavioral difficulties" (GADOE, 2008, p. 15) in the general education classroom. At Tier 3, the State of Georgia requires the Student Support Team (SST) to communicate the need for ongoing interventions, future placements for dispositions such as special education, or reclassification of a student to a lower level Tier. A communication disadvantage, in the urban setting, is the lack of communication with parents and guardians at Tier 3. Students often miss the opportunity to be provided the proper level of support to make adequate academic progress due to unresponsive parents or unsigned documents that prohibit Next Step interventions. Students at Tier 3 can be referred by the SST to receive special education (Special Ed.) services. This researcher found that parents dislike the stigma of their child being selected for evaluation for special education services.

Influences of decision-making when implementing RTI in an urban setting.

Decision-making at Tier 1. Decision-making at Tier 1 involves teachers presenting the general core curriculum after administering a universal screener a minimum of three times per year. Universal screeners are mechanism used for targeting students who struggle to learn when provided a scientific, evidence-based general education (Hughes, & Dexter, 2011; Jenkins, Hudson, & Johnson, 2007). In Tier 1, teachers are expected to make decisions based on the outcomes of the universal screener. The teacher must be able to identify current strengths and weaknesses for individual students and make adjustments as needed. If a student does not show positive growth, the teacher is expected to collaborate with other teachers to decide what can be done using in-class instruction. Grade level colleagues can contribute to the decision-making process

if the student needs additional support. In an urban classroom setting, the concentration of students who are at low achievement and low growth is typically higher than students in a suburban setting; therefore, teachers working in the urban setting are often left with higher levels of students moving on to Tier 2.

Decision-making at Tier 2. Decision-making at Tier 2 includes same grade-level teachers, interventionist, and RTI specialists who come together to make decisions and recommendations based on data that has been collected over a designated period. According to Sugai and Horner (2009), the participants on these teams oftentimes share the common purpose of identifying and resolving students' academic difficulties, often within a Response to Intervention framework. It is imperative that data guide the instructional decision-making process. The group must develop a system to consistently evaluate progress monitoring data by mapping a student's' growth or performance level. The homeroom teacher or team of teachers must use the mapping system, which they designed, to gather information and make informed decisions about when to increase or cease additional support to the student. In urban settings, teachers often find themselves deliberating over who will receive additional support due to a large number of students who qualify based on the system that identifies students who are performing two or three years below grade level. The lived experience of one teacher involved in the study expressed the challenge of deciding to provide differentiated instruction at multiple grade levels for an individual student. "It's like you have to develop individualization plans based on multiple grade levels for that particular student. It's like double and triple planning. I'm two teachers, a second grade teacher and kindergarten teacher" (Data retrieved from one-on-one interviews with a participant of the study).

Decision-making at Tier 3**.** Decision-making at Tier 3 includes the SST or problem-solving team (homeroom teacher, counselor, RTI specialist, lead special education teacher, psychologists, speech teachers, and the parent) making decisions based on evidence that a student was unresponsive to Tier 1 instruction and Tier 2 support. The team can decide to move the student back down the RTI pyramid (Tier 3 => Tier 2 => Tier 1), recommend continuation of services, or recommend that the student is provided with formal evaluation procedures while still receiving Tier 3 services. Decision making within RTI requires an understanding of the process that drives teams to integrate their use of data along with student judgement and student performance (Shapiro & Clemens, 2009). In urban classroom settings, this can be a prolonged process due to lack of data to support the deficits, no additional support to address students who are severely behind, and student attendance issues.

Theme 2: Challenges

The theme of challenges involves two sub-themes: assessment, and accountability. A major challenge for most of the participants in this study was the lack of time to conduct the assessments with fidelity to drive accountability. The participants expressed great concern over the challenge of managing RTI in an urban school setting, which included large student populations. Managing RTI was considered a challenge because in included providing assessments and interventions, conducting progress monitoring, collecting and entering data, collaborating with student support team members, and maintaining the teacher's basic classroom duties and responsibilities.

Assessment at Tier 1. Assessment data can be a powerful tool for all teachers when placed in their hands to inform instructional decisions for students in their

classrooms. During Tier 1, student assessment is addressed by using universal screening tools such as MAP which was preselected by the study's selected school district. At this tier, students who are identified as at-risk academically or behaviorally, receive differentiated instruction or interventions within the classrooms. Teachers conduct their progress monitoring of at-risk students to determine whether the interventions are working or more intense instruction is needed to improve the opportunity for educational success. Many students tend to respond successfully to Tier 1 support offered in their classrooms. Classrooms in urban settings often find themselves with larger numbers of students who are identified as at risk after being administered the fall semester universal screener. In addition, many teachers faced with meeting the needs of at-risk students, find that they have not been prepared to address the emotional and behavioral challenges that disadvantaged students often manifest (Brown-Chidsey, & Bickford, 2015; Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Phillips, Voran, Kisker, Howes, & Whitebrook, 1994). Teachers begin the year feeling as though they are unable to meet the needs of the children they serve, and often have to refer numerous students for Tier 2 support.

Assessment at Tier 2. When students are moved to Tier 2, there is collaboration among teachers who come together to identify needed modifications to instruction and progress monitoring procedures. Teams select the best instructional tool that will measure the student's difficulties. Teachers use bi-weekly assessments to identify specific strengths and weaknesses and progress monitoring for the affected students. The teachers are responsible for assessing what the student has mastered from the previous teaching in Tier 1 and the interventions offered in Tier 2. Progress monitoring data is critical when trying to determine whether students are responding to the support provided in Tier 2

(Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008). The data from these tools provide a deeper understanding of the students' needs and guide the instructional interventions. Finding the right measurement tool and the right intervention can be problematic for teachers who have not been adequately trained and who are working in urban settings. This is especially challenging for teachers working with larger populations of students in Tier 2. In Tier 2, progress monitoring is essential in documenting growth and identifying if a student needs more intense support.

Assessment at Tier 3. A small percentage of students will continually fall behind and not keep the pace for their grade level and require movement to Tier 3. In this tier, diagnostic testing and intensive progress monitoring are used for students who are not responsive to the previous tier intervention plans. Students must receive interventions daily, and assessments must be conducted weekly. Teachers who service students in urban settings can be overwhelmed with data collection at this tier due to the larger number of students needing to be served. Students at Tier 3 have a greater potential to be referred for evaluation that deems them eligible for special educational services (Special Ed.). This can be a prolonged process if the teacher is unable to collect assessment data that is relevant to the deficits of the student. Within the State of Georgia, the Student Support Team (SST) plays an important role in conducting and evaluating assessments. According to the GaDOE, its purpose is to find ways around roadblocks to success for any student referred to it. The SST is typically well trained and informed in the appropriate use of research-based interventions and assessment tools.

Accountability at Tier 1. Hunley and McNamara (2010) state that decisions in an RTI approach are based on data rather than subjective opinions or perceptions of

school personnel. Teachers are accountable for providing powerful classroom instruction daily in Tier 1 by using an evidence-based curriculum that has been adopted by their school district in conjunction with relevant data for each individual student. This can be complicated for those schools and classrooms that have students on numerous academic levels and tiers. The teachers are also charged with providing differentiated instruction that is designed to meet the specific needs of enrolled students. Core and evidence-based instruction within Tier 1 means meeting the student's basic educational needs and providing immediate support.

Accountability at Tier 2. Teachers who have students in need of Tier 2 services must be aware of and trained in the use of research-based interventions. The implementation of RTI can impact teachers in different ways, requiring them to gain a wide range of new knowledge, skills, and competencies for providing interventions in their classrooms (NJCLD, 2005). The interventions must be done with fidelity because they gauge if there is an impact on the student's progress by using the intervention. It is important to note that the data can become irrelevant if the intervention is not implemented. This could ultimately affect the decision not to escalate a student to a more intense tier to address their needs. In urban schools, teachers often feel as though they are constrained by time to implement and collect the data needed for interventions. This results in the student not progressing to minimizing their deficits. At this tier, teachers collaborate as a team; however, they are still individually responsible for the collection of the data.

Accountability at Tier 3. In Tier 3, teachers are accountable for providing remediation to an existing academic problem. The problem may have stemmed from

previous school years. At this tier, the objective is to prevent the problem from becoming more severe and to aid the student as they matriculate through elementary school. At this tier, teachers provide instruction for Tier 1 and Tier 2 goals. Teachers who are working with students at this tier are not alone. They are typically working with a problem-solving team or a student support team and content specialist. The heavy work load does not fall solely on the teacher, but they still play an important role in RTI documentation. According to the National Association of Special Education Teachers (*NASET) LD Report #5*, general education teachers play a vital role in designing and providing high quality instruction (National Association of Special Education Teachers, n.d.). Furthermore, they are in the best position to assess students' performance and progress against grade level standards in the general education curriculum RTI responsibility at this tier includes receiving and acting upon pullout services three to five days of the week which provides the problem-solving team with powerful data used to develop effective individual intervention plans. Pull-out services include withdrawing the student from the standard classroom environment to enable them to participate in the RTI intervention(s) identified for that specific week. This can be problematic in some urban schools due to the lack of support personnel. Where there is a lack of support personnel, it makes Tier 3's intense services the responsibility of the homeroom teacher. The responsibility of Tier 3 activities in the urban classroom setting is sometimes neglected by classroom teachers. This is due to the increased demand placed on teachers to perform activities that they are not adequately trained to perform, and due to the lack of support personnel. Burdette (2010) states the issue with professional development and support personnel are often challenges that are related to the lack of knowledge among leadership about current

trends in RTI and the needs of their teachers to improve the chances for success when implementing RTI with fidelity.

The final theme of the analysis was training. Overwhelmingly, the participants expressed the lack of training as a major cause for the lack of fidelity in implementing RTI. The lack of training also increased the stress level of the participants because they were not able to adequately plan for the individual needs of their students.

Theme 3: Training

Training at Tier 1. The RTI model offers an essential "paradigm shift" in the way in which teachers are trained to provide services to students who struggle within the general education classroom. The method in which teachers provide support to students requires an established set of skills and a greater level of collaboration that has not existed in the traditional educational setting. Teachers in Tier 1 must embody high-quality teaching practices that allow them to present the curriculum for the grade level that has been assigned to them. Also, they must identify key strengths and deficits for individual students after administering the universal screener. According to Shapiro (2014), the expectation is that if the Tier 1 program is implemented with a high degree of integrity and by highly trained teachers, then most of the students receiving this instruction will show outcomes upon assessment that indicate a level of proficiency that meets minimal benchmarks for performance in the skill area. The assumption then is that most students will be successful in this setting, but in certain situations there are students who will need additional assistance. In urban schools, teachers may have larger percentages of students who require additional support beyond their expertise. Teachers at this point may need specific and relevant training to provide services to students in

Tiers 2 and 3. A comment made by a participant in the study stated, "The teacher needs to reach out for specific training so that there can be a clear understanding of how RTI works. Specifically, what is the teacher's role, the student's role, and what the goals are?" (Data retrieved from one-on-one interviews with a participant in the study).

Training at Tier 2. According to Mellard (2008), in Tier 2 intensity can vary across group size, frequency and duration of intervention, and level of training of the professionals providing instruction or intervention. Teachers in Tier 2 are responsible for providing instruction to those students who failed to respond to the core curriculum in their homeroom class setting. Students will receive small-group instruction either from their teacher or content specialist if available. Teachers must be able to find the level of discrepancy between a Tier 2 student's ability and grade level achievement that is satisfactory, develop a plan with support and collaboration of teachers on the same grade levels , conduct progress monitoring, and reevaluate if there is still a deficit or if growth has occurred. Teachers must be content experts at this level to meet the need of the students. In urban schools, there is a lack of coherence because the teachers are bombarded with many initiatives that are deemed to help struggling students. Teachers may also face the issue of multiple training initiatives being implemented at the same time. This can become problematic for novice teachers, as well as veteran teachers working in urban settings. Urban school initiatives should be carefully chosen, with attention paid to what is already being implemented within the school district (Ahram et al., 2011).

Training at Tier 3. Tier 3 mirrors Tier 2 but requires more intensified instruction in a smaller setting, sometimes requiring one-on-one instruction if support personnel is

available. At this tier, a problem-solving team or a student support team (SST) is in place to help and ensure that the right intervention plan has been developed to meet the needs of the student. A large amount of data is collected during this tier, and it is vital that accurate information is collected and input into the data management system for further decision support. Students may be identified to receive a testing evaluation for special education services or moved back down the pyramid using the data that was collected over time. Extensive research has validated that teachers have a significant impact on student achievement (Ahram et al., 2011; Goldhaber, 2007; Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Sanders & Horn, 1994 Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Teachers should receive training at this level that helps them follow the best progress monitoring practices within the RTI process. It is this researcher's observation that teachers in urban school settings often struggle in Tier 3 due to the lack of proper training and a large number of students who qualify for this tier. They often ask for support from coaches or veteran teachers within in their building. One of the study's participants commented, "We lack instructional support. The support specialist has other responsibilities aside from coaching on interventions; however, I wish they would coach me on interventions" (Data retrieved from one-on-one interviews with a participant in the study).

In summary, the themes related to implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting has advantages for the participants. All six of the participants admitted there were some advantages to using RTI, "The students actually show growth if you do it effectively. If the frequency and duration of time are done correctly, then it works perfectly" said Participant 1. In regard to additional advantages, Participant 2 stated that,

“advantages are definitely reaching those students and getting them where they need to be. Also, just having more time to see what it is the student needs, as far as instruction, and just hitting those marks head on.” While discussing the advantages, Participant 2 stated, “before I didn't really have an understanding of how RTI worked and was a little confused about what should be done and what the student should be doing.” Participant 2 was unsure of their role for the students, “at first I didn’t even understand what the purpose was, but now I have more knowledge and understanding of the RTI process.” Every teacher should be supported to know exactly what students are expected to learn within their grade level, to map a calendar of instruction onto that timeline using resources beyond the textbook, and to assess student mastery of skills according to Van Der Heyden et al. (2016). Participant 3 felt as though it was not enough for the students. "RTI was getting them something, but I just don't feel like it’s enough." Participant 4 spoke on the advantages of RTI after collecting data. It was stated that "after collecting data, the student can finally and hopefully get the help that they need to be successful in a classroom because not all students are successful in the classroom on the first try." Participant 4 also talked about how students need different strategies and techniques and more one-on-one time. Participant 5 added that the advantage of using RTI led to "student success and academic gap improvements. RTI sometimes increases student’s self-esteem, so things they didn’t know at first, through RTI, they gained the confidence to do those different things that they’re working with.” Participant 5 also shared that collecting data has been a little easier since the school adopted some computer programs to help with RTI.

The advantages that were identified by Participant 6 had to do with one's confidence about RTI. “Using RTI is a process that is proven, once applied accurately and consistently, you get results.” It was also stated that “I feel more confident in the results, once it’s obtained.”

Overall, the teachers believed that RTI had its advantages because it was a process that could identify specific instructional needs for the diverse learners in their classrooms. When interventions go well within the tiers, teachers often become more accepting of the entire process regardless of the demanding amount of the work (Kovaleski, 2007). Interviewees admitted that implementing RTI was really challenging, but it showed how all students who have difficulties do not have to qualify for special education to get the help they need or the right type of instruction. VanDerHeyden et al. (2016) stated that the key challenge for implementation is getting the already-busy people in schools to implement RTI like an effective weight-loss plan, with a commitment to attaining long-term improvements for all students.

Schools and districts across the country continue to be confronted with challenges in implementing the essential RTI components. This is due to factors such as funding, teachers’ resistance to the need for change, and most importantly, fragile and not enough professional development (for teachers and administrators). These factors cause a knowledge gap in the implementation of RTI. Based on the lived experiences of the participants, it appears that implementing RTI in an urban setting presents significant challenges. Unlike suburban and rural school settings, urban school districts are located in heavily populated areas that have larger enrollments and greater levels of diversity (Ahram et al., 2011; Kincheloe, 2004, 2010), often where the pyramid is turned upside

down as it relates to RTI. For example, in the traditional school setting, 80 to 85% of enrolled students are Tier 1 students; 10 to 15% of enrolled students are Tier 2, and 5 to 10% of enrolled students are Tier 3 (See Figure 5).

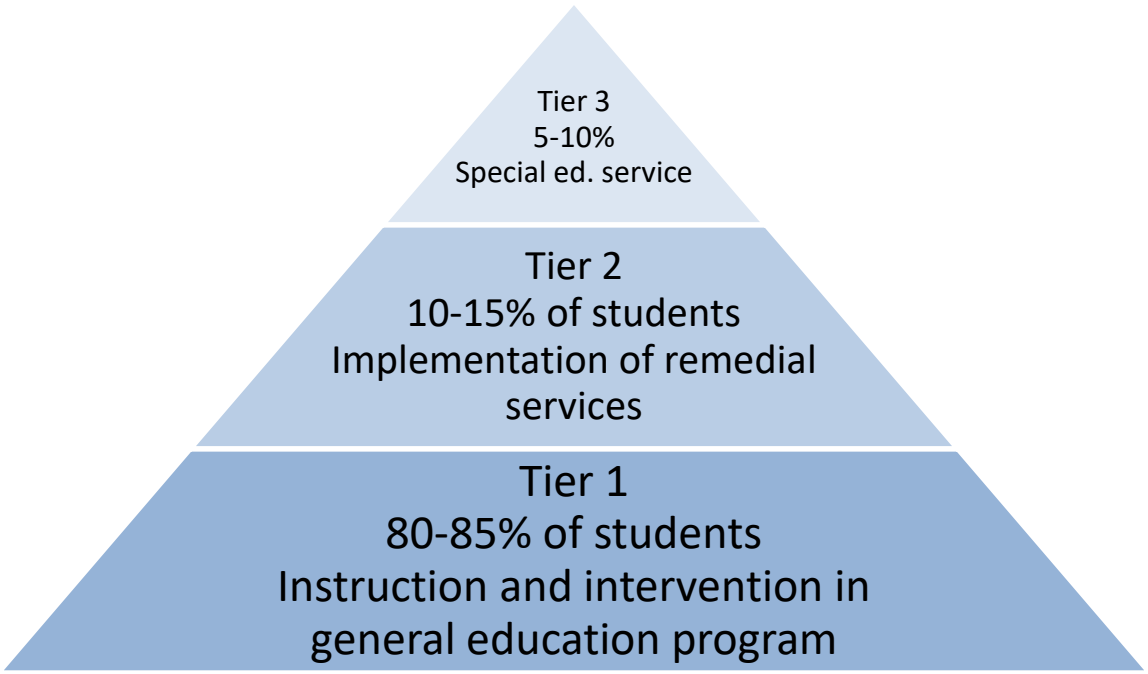

Figure 5. RTI pyramid.

Some of the challenges as stated by Participant 1 are, “It’s just me in the classroom, hard to do without a para-professional or parent to help, who is with you 100% of the time.” RTI is non-negotiable at the school, “It’s just stressful, it’s a lot of work, and I want my babies to show growth, but I can’t do it all.” Participant 2 also shared that “it’s just not enough manpower, it’s a lot having to teach a full class and provide sufficient amounts of interventions for those struggling students.” She also

addressed the issue of resources. “Resources are an issue as well, not enough resources for the students, so this limits their intervention time." Participant 3, when discussing challenges with the issues of time constraints stated, “It’s rushed, it’s hard to fit into my schedule.” For her, “It’s really like I’m two teachers, a second grade teacher, and a kindergarten teacher.”

One of the most important components of RTI in Tiers 2 and 3 is data collection. Participant 4 shared that one of the biggest challenges was “trying to make sure the data that I am collecting is useful data, not just data that might not be enough information or data that the district might not take it.” According to Wright, (n.d). “If you can’t name a problem, you can’t track it and you can’t fix it.” Participant 5 stated that “it’s a lot of paperwork, a lot of data to keep up with, lots of preparation depending on how many kids you have in the process.” Participant 6 expressed that the biggest challenge was "just finding the time because that’s something separate from teaching the content area." This teacher felt it was hard to stick to the schedule to get everything done.

The challenges that all of the teachers expressed had more similarities than differences. This was true even though the teachers taught different grade levels, but all in urban settings. The teachers shared the common issue that the RTI process was that it was time consuming. Also, the process increased their stress levels due to the lack of support to ensure a quality implementation with fidelity.

Synthesis

There are several approaches that can be used to perform research synthesis. Three common approaches are framework synthesis, textual narrative synthesis, and thematic synthesis. This study incorporates thematic synthesis based on a research

synthesis method developed by Thomas and Harden (2008). The Thomas and Harden method combines and adapts approaches from both meta-ethnography and grounded theory. The method was developed out of a need to conduct participant interviews that addressed questions relating to intervention need, appropriateness, and acceptability (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Free codes of findings are organized into descriptive themes, which are then further interpreted to yield analytical themes. This approach shares characteristics with later adaptations of meta-ethnography, in that the analytical themes are comparable to "third order interpretations." Also, the development of descriptive and analytical themes using coding invoke reciprocal "translation" or synthesis (Page-Barnett & Thomas, 2009). Thematic synthesis also shares much with grounded theory, in that the approach is inductive and themes are developed using a "constant comparison" method. A novel aspect of the Thomas and Harden method is the use of computer software to code the results of transcribed participant responses (line-by-line), thus borrowing another technique from methods usually used to analyze primary research (Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis, & Dillon, 2003, 45-46).

Implementing a Response to Intervention (RTI) initiative is a complex phenomenon that increases in complexity when trying to implement in an urban setting. Synthesis of the phenomenon provided additional and unique conceptualizations as to why and how RTI should and can be implemented in an urban classroom setting. The lived experiences of teachers involved in actual implementations provided both theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretically, RTI needs to be part of the academic curriculum for elementary education teacher preparation. The lived experience of participants in this study indicated

that RTI was not included in their professional education and preparation before them working in the classroom. This deficit was exacerbated by the participants working in an urban classroom setting.

In practice, RTI is mandatory for many school districts. It appears that the lack of teacher education and training impedes the implementation of RTI in the urban classroom setting. The study detailed several of the common themes that were articulated by the participants of the study. These themes included challenges when trying to provide student interventions, assessments, and classroom planning.

Overall, a major constraint to implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting is the lack of time to conduct critical implementation activities, such as classroom instructional planning, student assessments, and the use of RTI mapping utilities. Performing these activities with fidelity was considered a major challenge by all of the participants of the study.

This synthesis is suggestive as opposed to being recommended; however, it is based on the lived experiences of the study's participants. The suggestive nature of the synthesis implies that when implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting, contextual factors, including demographic implications, affect the fidelity of the RTI implementation within the context of an urban classroom setting.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting. This effort helps promote effective practices for the development of new RTI programs and revisions to existing ones. This final chapter considers how the study adds to the body of knowledge in the field of education and presents implications of the research. The literature review of the study identified a wealth of knowledge related to the structure of RTI and interventions. The extant literature was found to be evidence based and effective. Unfortunately, minimal research exists that provides an understanding of RTI from the view of classroom teachers who implemented RTI in urban settings.

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of urban elementary school teachers as they implemented RTI in their urban classrooms. Gaining this level of understanding is powerful for those involved with developing the scope and sequence for implementing an RTI program in their school. Having a clearer understanding of the experience from a teacher's point of view provides evidence that RTI works within demographically diverse school settings. It is this type of evidence that facilitates support to teachers who are implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used for this research. The Moustakas modification of the van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) was used as the model for data analysis of the study. Standardized as a phenomenological research methodology by Moustakas (1994), the modified van Kaam method involves understanding the essence, meaning, and structure of an individual's lived experiences. This methodology is used to look for patterns and trends by identifying shared beliefs that have yet to be addressed by existing

literature. The study answers the research question, What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers implementing RTI in an urban elementary classroom setting?

An acceptable sample of 6 elementary school education certified teachers from the state of Georgia were participants in this study (Creswell, 2005). The participants were employed at two urban elementary schools and had at least two years of experience with implementing RTI in their classrooms. The participants in the study exhibited similar experiences. The lived experiences of the participants revealed both advantages and challenges with implementing RTI in an urban setting.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of elementary school teachers implementing RTI in an urban elementary classroom setting. As with any research study, after reading through the introduction, literature review, methodology, and results, the reader is faced with a very significant question; What does all of this mean? How is the study relative to the reader's thoughts about the topic? What are new theoretical aspects of the topic not covered in other studies? Most importantly, how can a reader put new knowledge gained from this study into practice? These questions are addressed in this section of the research study.

Methodological Worldview

This study uses a transformative worldview perspective "focused on helping individuals free themselves from constraints found in the media, in language, in work procedures, and in relationships of power in educational settings" (Creswell, 2014, p. 26). It is the intent of this study to empower teachers in the process of implementing RTI in

their classroom settings. If schools can identify what teachers need and offer support based on those needs, then teachers can truly be empowered

Interpretation of the Data Analysis, Findings, and Results

As data were collected for the study, three themes were constructed. The themes emerged from an analysis of the data. The three constructed RTI themes were: Interventions, Challenges, and Training. There were also sub-themes, which were identified as collaboration, communication, decision-making, assessment, and accountability. Each of the themes and sub-themes were expressed by the teachers who were implementing RTI in their urban school classrooms. This discussion provides a practitioner's perspective as to why the theme is important and how it can be either beneficial or detrimental to the practitioner when implementing RTI in an urban setting.

Findings from the data analysis revealed that implementing a Response to Intervention (RTI) initiative is a complex phenomenon in any contextual setting (rural, suburban, and urban); however, the implementation increases in complexity when trying to implement RTI in an urban setting.

Considering that RTI is aimed at assessing and identifying the need for student special education services, it was the lived experience of the participants (teachers) of the study that the objective of RTI was not always understood. This was significant because the teachers were responsible for implementing an initiative, although they did not fully understand its purpose. This study aids in the understanding of RTI, especially when implementing it in an urban classroom setting. It is hoped that the study provides greater insight into the topic of RTI and some of the complexities of implementing it in an urban setting.

This study highlights the assumptions that enable RTI to be successfully implemented from a practitioner's perspective. There is a clearly defined process, various strategies, and measurements that enable a practitioner to achieve a successful RTI implementation. What is missing from this study and most of the extant literature on RTI, is the student perspective. A major insight of this study was the need for students to be performing at grade level for an RTI implementation to be successful. This is problematic when implementing RTI in an urban setting (Barnes, & Harlacher, 2008). Student grade-level performance is a basic assumption for practitioners (teachers), but is not the norm for students in an urban setting. So, what does that mean for the practitioner? It means that the teacher who is implementing RTI in an urban school classroom setting must identify those students who are not performing (i.e., reading or math skills) at grade level. This can be accomplished using general assessment tools such as a universal screener. Interpreting the results of the study revealed that the reason a student is not performing at grade-level may be due to an undiscovered learning disability or some other factor that is beyond the school's or teacher's control.

RTI is aimed at assessing and identifying a student's need for additional support or possible placement for special education. During the assessment and identification process, it is often found that the student may not need special education support services. To the contrary, the student may need remedial general education instruction, parental/guardian out-of-school support, or disciplinary intervention to address behavioral issues that are outside the domain of RTI. The need for these non-special education services is characteristic in the urban classroom setting. If not addressed as part of the RTI implementation, it could be detrimental to the initiative's success.

Interpretation of Core Themes

The themes that were constructed revealed the joys and frustrations teachers felt as they implemented RTI in their urban classroom settings. By using a qualitative methodological approach, the study was able to delve into the deeper meaning of those joys and frustrations. As objectively as possible, the researcher constructed interview questions and annotated the transcribed narratives of each participant's interview responses. What was revealed pointed to the stressful nature of being a member of an RTI implementation team. Although there were benefits that were identified for being a member of the implementation team; there was an abundance of evidence that indicated higher levels of stress for the teachers who were selected to become members of the RTI implementation team. One of the participants of the study expressed their role on the RTI implementation team as follows:

> For me, I actually have been using RTI probably for the last five or six years. Based on my personal experience, implementing RTI is a lot of work, but it benefits the students. It allows me to have time to work with individual students at their instructional (grade) level, and to improve their academic gaps where needed. Sometimes the students improve academically, and sometimes they don't. You just have to keep working the process to make sure they make some kind of gain.

Theme 1: Interventions

The first thematic group (Interventions) identified what typically takes places in the three tiers in RTI. It identified the responsibilities of the teacher when providing

instruction for a standard basic classroom. Interventions are a systematic compilation of well researched or evidence-based instructional strategies and techniques that include progress monitoring. (GA DOE RTI Manual).

In Tier 1, participants of the study were responsible for presenting the curriculum designed by the district and then providing differentiation for the needs of the students in their classes. The teachers used the utility called Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), as the universal screener for reading and math at the beginning of the school year to identify the learning ability of all of their students. For most of the teachers, they found this was good starting point to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Once this was completed many of the teachers felt overwhelmed by the number of students that performed below grade level at the beginning of the year. According to Wright (2012), Tier 1 interventions are intended for "red flag" students who struggle in the content area(s) and require additional individualized teacher support during core instruction. In urban schools, there are often numerous red flag students in a classroom performing below grade level. Some of the elements that hindered teachers at Tier 2 were the issue of feeling like they had to provide instruction for multiple grades without having the appropriate resources for many of the students that entered their classroom. Many of the teachers were disappointed at the scores that many of their students received. Some classes were filled to enrollment capacity with over half of the class identified as beginning learners. Teachers sometimes had the mindset that RTI/Tier 1 was a process that only helped the struggling; they felt like they had to quickly identify those students who needed interventions. This was the experience of urban teachers in this study. In Tier 1, they often felt overwhelmed due to the high number of students that arrived in their

class performing one to two years below grade level. The teachers knew that many of their students would be propelled into Tier 2, which would require the investment of additional planning, work, and time by the teachers.

In Tier 2, teachers are responsible for providing small-group instruction delivered by themselves and/or an interventionist, based on the needs of the student, in addition to core instruction (needs-based learning). Interventions at Tier 2 and above should be in alignment with Tier 1, not a divergence from it (Ripp & Fergus, 2017). The teachers seemed to have a basic understanding of what should take place with Tier 2 students. They knew that the students should be pulled, progress monitored, assessed, and that teachers needed to meet to talk about student growth. These steps were being taken by a limited number of teachers within the participant schools. In reality, many of the steps did not take place consistently, based on the experiences that the teachers shared, unless the intervention teacher performed them. The format of instruction used in Tier 2 was more intense and provided students with more opportunities for practice and feedback than what was provided in the Tier 1 differentiated instruction (Reschly, 2005).

In urban schools, teachers are often planning for lessons for numerous students on multiple learning levels which takes time and a strong instructional knowledge base in teaching reading and math. To provide students with additional support that is effective in small groups for Tier 2, there should not be more than three to six students in the group. Participant teachers often had multiple groups they were supporting on a regular basis. The schools that had an interventionist were limited to supporting a small number of students, although many more students required the interventionist's support. Teachers in urban schools, when implementing interventions for Tier 1 and 2, often have issues with

implementing with fidelity. According to Sansosti and Noltemyer (2008), administering the suggested interventions can be dependent upon the teacher's behavior. Several of the teachers in the study expressed that they pulled their students for small group instruction but often were not consistent; the interventionist did not pick the students up, the teacher just did not have time, or the teacher just was not sure what they were supposed to do. Many of the teachers struggled and were hesitant about collecting the RTI data, knowing that many of the students could potentially move to Tier 3, which is more intense and demanding within an urban setting.

An interesting factor of managing RTI in an urban setting at Tier 2 is the large population of transient students that have inconsistent cumulative data in their student files. Participant teachers expressed concern over the number of students the teacher collects data on; however, before interventions can be addressed, the student transfers to another school, county, or state. The responsibility of managing students when implementing RTI in an urban setting is exacerbated due to the large number of transient students.

In Tier 3, teachers were focused on providing individualized instruction that was very intense. The teachers were also responsible for ensuring that students were receiving the services needed in Tiers 1 and 2. Typically, Tier 3 should only contain a small number of students; however, in urban settings, there is a larger number of students requiring support services at this Tier. The teachers participating in the study expressed that their students were pulled by the interventionist for services, although one of the teachers expressed that they received no support because the identified specialist was being used as a homeroom teacher. This highlighted the lack of resources, typical in an

urban setting, and the over-utilization of specialists. Since the classroom teacher did not have access to a specialist, the classroom teacher had to perform as the interventionist. This increased the classroom teacher's stress level because the teacher did not feel qualified to perform the interventions at this Tier. As stated earlier in the study, teachers involved with the implementation of RTI must be a part of the entire process, with emphasis on their own knowledge and ability to apply strong instructional skills (Howard, 2009). The teachers providing RTI interventions at this tier felt overwhelmed due to the extensive amount of data collection required and the need for additional support. The teachers had little concern with the Services Support Team (SST) because they felt they were getting the support they needed if their student was assigned to Tier 3. Urban settings often experience the RTI pyramid turned upside-down, where more than 70% of the students need and receive Tier 2/3 services. Many of the teachers in this study had unusually high numbers of students assigned to Tier 2/3. It is believed that this is characteristic of RTI in an urban setting.

An in-depth exploration was gathered from the answers teachers provided on their experiences with interventions at Tiers 1, 2, and 3. One difficulty that was expressed by the teachers was that it was hard to implement interventions due to the large number of students who needed support in their class. Teachers were held accountable for providing interventions at the Tier 1, 2, and sometime 3. Teachers indicated that where often in need of support at the Tier2/3 due to the fact that had so many students struggling and often had to bypass students who clearly qualified for support from the interventionist in their building. There was some push back to not even refer students due to the amount work it would add to their plate. Teachers and schools in urban settings often have larger

caseloads so other aspects like collaboration, communication, and decision making were key items that were identified that could affect the implementation of RTI.

Sub-theme 1.1: Collaboration. According to Schrage (1995), "Collaboration is the process of shared creation: Two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on their own" (p. 33). Collaboration and communication in all tiers appeared to be important to most of the teachers in the study; there were some difference expressed by the teachers as the students progressed up the RTI pyramid.

In Tier 1, teachers received support from their grade-level counterparts. One teacher shared that the other grade-level teachers met; however, it was rarely about providing help, suggestions, or support for RTI. Finding time to collaborate by interacting and sharing with each other can be crucial in urban settings that may have high numbers of novice teachers or teachers with non-traditional pre-service training. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) studied the negative effects of a lack of time for collegial conversations. When implementing or revamping school-wide or district-wide initiatives, such as RTI, collaboration, conversation, and communication must be a common practice. Some teachers expressed that they shared resources among themselves and talked about how to work with students on different grade levels. At Tier 2, collaboration and communication looked a little different in the urban setting. At one of the schools, teachers had the opportunity to collaborate with an interventionist and a RTI specialist who supported them with developing plans and identifying the right interventions. At another school, there was a shortage of teachers, and the identified interventionist was being utilized as a homeroom teacher. The inconsistency within the school district

seemed to be a point where teachers expressed concern about doing the right thing and picking the right intervention. According to Howard (2009), teachers must be comfortable with their content to determine the level of need with picking an intervention for struggling students in reading and math. Schools in urban settings find it difficult to recruit seasoned and experienced teachers to fill positions. Some qualified teachers choose not to work in an urban environment where the demands are heavier due to the high percentage of struggling students. At Tier 3, collaboration and communication involved a Student Support Team that provided support for the teacher, student, and parent when developing an effective plan for RTI. The teachers in this study welcomed the support they received when they had students enter Tier 3. The teachers shared a dislike for the data collection process because it could be heavy for some of the teachers who had many students at Tier 3. Instructional caseload is heavier in urban schools. The heavier caseloads limit the number of meetings that can be placed on the calendar for the RTI team to meet. In the urban school district utilized for this study, many of the district-wide RTI team members were shared among many schools, and they were limited to providing only one day of interventional support at each school. The teachers expressed hope that this study would call attention to the need for an integrated approach to implementing RTI using collaboration and communication as part of the framework.

Sub-theme 1.2: Communication. One of the most important components of an RTI implementation is communication. According to Ehren, Laster, and Watts-Taffe 2009), RTI calls for deliberate, intentional, ongoing collaboration and communication. In reviewing the lived experiences of the teachers involved with this study, it was evident that communication with the RTI implementation team needed to include communication

with the student's parents/guardians. There was a noticeable disconnect between teachers and parents at the Tier 3 stage of the RTI implementation. The disconnection was due to the inability to get RTI documents returned or to get parents/guardians to come into the school to discuss the academic growth status of the student. In the urban school setting, it is imperative that teachers share the importance of the parents' or guardians' role as an integral part of the RTI team. Parental/guardian interaction was viewed positively when the parent/guardian was engaged early and kept informed throughout the school year. All but one of the teachers shared how they felt incapable of communicating with parents about RTI because they were not confident in their ability to disseminate information about the RTI process as the tiers went higher. This was a noteworthy issue because enhancing student competence is the goal of family/school collaboration and relationships within and across the three Tiers of RTI (Reschly & Christenson, in press).

Sub-theme 1.3: Decision-making. Decision making across the00 tiers of RTI are important at every level and is judged on different criteria. According to Barnes and Harlacher (2008), a critical element in the process of implementing RTI is a formal and organized assessment process. Most of the teachers felt comfortable with making decisions about the data received from assessments in Tier 1. One teacher did express an uncomfortable feeling about assessing her students because she did not know if it the assessments gave a true representation of her students. Teachers expressed the concern for the continuous cycle of students who performed typically below grade level, making them candidates for Tier 2 or 3. This seemed to worry most of the teachers and made them feel helpless because many of their students had low growth and low achievement ratings and scores. Many of the teachers felt defeated halfway into the first semester of

RTI implementation. The decisions that teachers made in Tier 1 with the grade level teams, set the stage for the students in Tier 2. The decisions facilitated bringing together a larger team that would support the development of their intervention plan and the assessment used on the students. The decision-making process at this level was hard for the teachers because most or all of their students needed additional support, but they made decisions based on who needed it the most. In urban schools, this can often leave many students unserved and unnoticed until a slot opens with the interventionist. Unintentionally, these students fall further behind because the school does not have enough support personnel. According to Van Der Heyden (2014), when large numbers of students in a grade or class are performing in the at-risk range (i.e., below benchmark), the teacher must examine the adequacy of core instruction and plan to make adjustments and monitor the success of those adjustments.

According to Brown-Chidsey and Bickford (2015), it is important that those educators who participate in Tier 3 data review understand the implications of the decisions they will make. At Tier 3, decision making involves many members of the RTI implementation team. At this tier, the participants felt more comfortable due to the overwhelming support provided by the Student Support Team. An additional issue that was identified by many of the teachers in this study was the difficulty in addressing student intervention decisions that were made previously by other schools or teachers within other school districts. This issue underscored the problem of working with highly transient students. The decisions of previous teachers, schools, and school districts affected RTI efficacy, especially for present teachers attempting to follow through on earlier steps performed in Tiers 1 and 2.

Theme 2: Challenges

According to Campsen (2013), schools and districts continue to struggle with the challenge of implementing all key RTI components due to funding problems, faculty resistance to change, and most importantly, weak and inadequate professional development (teachers and administrators). The impact of these challenges are as follows:

- Funding problems: RTI requires additional funding by school districts. Allocation of financial resources for support personnel, testing materials, and additional teacher work hours require approval from the school administrator. It was observed during this study that the schools participating in this study were underfunded to support their RTI implementation.
- Faculty resistance to change: Resistance to any change is anticipated by change agents. RTI implementation is no exception. Teachers included in this study showed evidence of resisting the RTI change initiative. Some of the teachers demonstrated their resistance by complaining about the RTI implementation process, refusing to complete steps required to properly conduct assessments, and failing to collect or enter data needed to monitor student academic growth and progress.
- Professional development: The most significant challenge identified in the survey was the lack of training provided to teachers implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting. The lack of training resulted in teachers not knowing how to perform vital steps and procedures to assess student's needs, perform appropriate interventions, and measure academic progress for reading and math skills. The concern was how the lack of teacher proficiency in implementing RTI would

adversely affect a student's assessment for needed resources, such as special education services.

The theme of Challenges also contained sub-themes in the areas of assessment and accountability.

Sub-theme 2.1 Assessment. All of the participants were required to use district-mandated assessments, but shared that one of the biggest challenges dealt with the lack of time to conduct assessments with fidelity for students who were being served in the RTI process. Since each teacher was expected to assess students and provide instruction based on their needs, it was assumed that teachers were comfortable with providing the needed services and that they had all of the tools needed to do so. Teachers in this study expressed that managing the numerous components of RTI in an urban setting was challenging due to the large number of students in their class that were performing significantly below grade-level in areas of reading and math. This was evident when reviewing the data of students in Tier 1.

In Tier 1, teachers involved in the study were comfortable with administering the assessments; however, they were discouraged with the outcomes. The assessment outcome identified that more than 50% of the students in one particular class were considered as at-risk students. Based on the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) 2002 case studies, teachers in urban school districts may feel overwhelmed by what they consider to be the high needs of their students, and thus lower their own expectations for student performance. During this study, one of the participants expressed that, "RTI wasn't worth doing because it classified the entire class as being at-risk." This participant expressed difficulty in knowing where to begin the RTI

intervention process. Managing large numbers of at-risk students is an issue in urban schools when trying to implement RTI with fidelity. Working with a large number of at-risk students is further complicated when teachers must make the decision to move students onto Tier 2 or retain them at Tier 1. Teacher bias enters into the decision-making process, in spite of the results of the evidentiary student assessment outcomes.

In Tier 2, teachers are responsible for identifying the best tool to assess those students who need additional support. Teachers shared that they are often unsure of what to do and need the support of those who have more experience and expertise in working with struggling students. Having an understanding of the importance of progress monitoring assessments, which help teachers identify skill gaps and specific non-proficiencies, is essential for the teacher at this point. According to Campsen (2013), these types of assessments provide the critical data needed to: a) identify students in need of additional skill-specific support; b) inform instructional planning and delivery; c) determine the effectiveness of instruction; and d) identify teachers who are in need of support in a particular content area. Tier 2 demands more time and planning for conducting effective progress monitoring and those efforts intensify at Tier 3. The intensification of effort is especially true for teachers in urban settings who may have to perform RTI assessments for multiple students within a short period of time.

In Tier 3, teachers expressed that they participated in more collaboration at the Tier 3 level because they were required to attend mandatory meetings. The teachers were responsible and held accountable for the data collection, just as they were in Tier 2; however, Tier 3 required more planning for activities, time management resolution, and assessments be conducted every week. In urban school settings, teachers had to prioritize

the numerous tasks that were assigned to them. Often, RTI responsibilities, such as progress monitoring and assessments, were put aside. The teachers shared the importance of having an experienced and knowledgeable team to support them in the process of identifying research-based interventions and assessment tools. Three of the six teachers expressed that progress monitoring would not be completed if it were not for the interventionist at their school and their ability to support the teacher. Other teachers expressed that their students were missing out due to the lack of support or the nonexistence of a trained interventionist. RTI has the flexibility of allowing the school to establish the level of progress monitoring that is both feasible (given the instructional demands of the classroom) and meaningful in obtaining knowledge of a student's response to instruction (Shapiro, 2014). In urban settings, flexibility is often unseen due to the large number of students who may need the service (there is not any wiggle room). In concluding the participant interviews and observations, all of the teachers acknowledged the value of progress monitoring and the use of an assessment tool to produce data that was valuable and rewarding for the student. One participant witnessed many of the students in the classroom having a better sense of accomplishment when they saw themselves growing academically. Other participants expressed that they could never stay on top of the data because they had so many students to track. The study identified the importance of collecting and using data to determine whether the instruction provided is working or not. When primary data is not collected with fidelity, the RTI team cannot determine if the interventional instruction works.

Sub-theme 2.2: Accountability. Accountability among the tiers in RTI varies. All of the teachers were aware that they were responsible for providing differentiated

instruction designed to meet the diverse level of learners in their classrooms. One teacher shared that in the first year of teaching, there seemed to be nothing in place to account for student progress. The teacher did not recall performing any type of student growth measurement. This was a consistent theme expressed by other teachers. Upon administrator-level inquiry, it was found that measurement processes were in place; however, the teachers were not made aware of how to perform the measurements. The teachers did believe that during the past two years, meaningful resources were put in place. The resources included technology software that facilitated capturing and reporting the data on academic growth measurement. All of the teachers expressed that their responsibilities and accountability could be stressful after moving past Tier 1. In Tiers 2/3, the teachers believed that more responsibility was placed on them to obtain RTI data. In practice, this means that in urban settings, the teacher has to find the intervention, pull multiple groups of students during regular instruction and small groups during the intervention block, test the students weekly, record and enter the data, retest the students, and retain the data for 4 or 5 students to establish baseline measurements.

Accountability seemed to be the area that frustrated teachers the most. The teacher's frustration with accountability was related to the need to provide additional support services for each student. In order for the support to be considered "performed with fidelity," the teacher had to provide the additional support services, regardless of the other normal school activities that also had to be performed. Teachers are being asked to provide regular core instruction for the grade level, as well as all of the other instructional activities identified in Tiers 2/3, and never substitute one for the other. The power of this type of intervention is that it gives the student the gift of increased instructional time and

sharply-focused support (Campsen, 2013). Teachers indicated that if given the appropriate level of support and time, they could implement RTI with fidelity. Teachers will continue to feel discontentment with the accountability aspect of RTI if it requires them to do everything without proper support and training. Based on the reviewed literature, this is also true for other contextual settings (rural, suburban, and urban). A key area that was discussed by Burke and Wang (2010) identified the lack of time and training as one of the specific barriers that teachers faced related to positive change with formative assessments.

Theme 3: Training

The last theme that was constructed during the study was training. In the world of education, this is called professional development. This theme speaks to the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) needed to implement RTI across the three tiers. Of the six teachers interviewed during the study, only one teacher shared that they participated or attended a district-sponsored training event related to RTI. In general, the teachers had not been formally introduced to RTI. It is safe to assume that the teachers were not totally sold or fluent with all of the components of RTI. Overall, the participants in the study presented a solid perception about their inability to implement RTI with fidelity due to the lack of quality and relevant professional development. It is noted that there were attempts to present training facilitated by the RTI support specialist within the school district utilized in this study. The support specialist offered to provide training related to Tier 1 activities, where teachers were generally responsible for providing instruction and differentiating content at specific grade levels.

In Tier 1, according to Grable (2009), if the curriculum is solid and teachers are using scientifically-validated instructional strategies, approximately 80% of the students should be successful. In urban schools, and for some of the teachers from this study, this model is often turned up-side-down and there are 80% the students who are unsuccessful with standard core instruction and performing significantly below grade level. Teachers expressed a sense of, “what should I do now”, when trying to identify who should get the extra help, when in reality, all of their students need the help. Without training that provides the who, what, how, and why of implementing RTI, many teachers felt powerless in Tier 1 and fearful of what may be expected for students in Tiers 2 and 3. "There is no substitute for a well-trained teacher’s knowledge, commitment, and ability to interact with the target population. These factors are fundamental to the success of any intervention" (Neuman, 2007).

In Tier 2, teachers were charged with providing more detailed instruction in small groups, but first they had to identify the student’s ability and how far they had to go to get the student to achieve satisfactory achievement for the grade level. To complete this process requires a teacher who has been trained to help those students who struggle and to identify research-based interventions and instructional tools. Teachers expressed that they felt a sense of abandonment or were set up to fail due to the fact that proper training and relevant professional development opportunities were never provided. The participants of this study felt powerless because they were left to get information from the middle man instead of having clear directives provided to them from the administrators at the beginning of the RTI implementation process. Teachers were interested in professional development that was appropriate to their needs, not just a one-time

presentation about RTI (and then they would be on their own). One teacher's comment was, "I just want to know how to do it once I move past Tier 2." Within the urban setting of the subjects' school district and schools participating in this study, RTI seems to be another initiative that was introduced without any formal introduction. This was problematic for novice teachers, as well as for veteran teachers. The Wisconsin RtI Center stated that professional development of educators operating within an RtI system is critical to the system's success in Tier 2 and especially Tier 3.

Tier 3 has similar requirements as Tier 2; however, Tier 3 requires more time and specialized teachers who have had additional training in specific content areas such as reading and math. Teachers involved in this study expressed frustration because support was not in place to help them complete the progress monitoring step for several students. It is critically important that teachers know why they are being asked to collect certain data, know when to move a student up or down the RTI pyramid, and know when to request parental consent to evaluate a student for special education services. For those teachers that were supported by interventionist, it seemed that they were less stressed throughout the RTI process. Perhaps this was because they did not have to perform the hard work of data collection, entry, and reporting. Teachers who were supported by interventionists were satisfied with performing the data entry part of the RTI process; however, they were discouraged when they could only refer two or three students for interventions when they needed to refer nine.

In any school setting, but especially in an urban setting, the International Reading Association states that reading specialists are among the best-trained professionals in leading schools to help develop, implement, and evaluate new models of service delivery

as well as deliver professional development. The teachers who did not have the benefit of interventionist support seemed to address Tier 3 interventions based on time availability. It appears that this decision was made by the teachers because they had other tasks and activities to do, and they did not understand the importance of managing RTI with fidelity.

In summary, RTI is not a solo type initiative. In urban settings, there must be a strong Student Support Team (SST) that is knowledgeable about the importance of their decisions, the RTI process, and the support they provide to teachers. Based on the participant interviews of this study, teachers were not sure if they had picked the right intervention or the assessment tool during Tiers 1 and 2. The participants of the study expressed the need to have additional support to help with interventions provided to students at Tier 3. There were clear indicators that both schools involved in this study could benefit from ongoing professional development and training in the areas of teacher pedagogy for implementing Tiers 2 and 3. According to Shapiro (2014), the delivery of effective tiered instruction depends on teachers being given the professional development needed to provide instructional programs with high degrees of fidelity and integrity.

Limitations of the Study

In research studies, identifying limitations of the study can be valuable because it acknowledges possible error or inclusions and exclusions of the study. Limitation factors that are often beyond the control of the researcher can affect the results of the study and how readers interpret the results. According to Creswell (2003), limitations that are acknowledged should not be thought of as excuses, but rather as factors that aid readers

of the research to grasp a valid sense of what the study means and how broadly the research can be generalized.

New teachers within the schools included in this study were allowed to provide Tier 1 core instruction without completing a traditional teacher education program, which provides elementary education pedagogy. This resulted in high teacher turnover. In this study, at Tier 1, there was a high percentage of teachers who lacked the ability to teach fundamental reading at the elementary school level. At Tier 1, 66% of the teachers who participated in this study had not completed a traditional teacher education program.

The following were limitations of this study:

Inclusions

- Only one school district was involved in the study.
- Only two schools were utilized based on their size within a large urban metropolitan school district.

Exclusions

- The RTI administrator's lived experiences were excluded from the study.
- The study excluded the lived experiences of ancillary support personnel (counselors, psychologist, reading interventionist, and math interventionist).
- The study did not have a representation of every grade level of the selected urban elementary schools.

Suggestions and Implications for Practice

The result of a qualitative study often provides implications for action or a call to awareness that will impact initiatives, such as RTI, and a teacher's instructional practices.

When addressing support personnel, time, and funding issues with an initiative such as RTI, it is suggested that policymakers consider the best rollout design that provides sufficient investment for needed resources. Providing sufficient resources ensures that teachers responsible for implementing RTI in the urban setting are provided with a viable RTI implementation model that can be successfully implemented.

When an initiative such as RTI is adopted, it is crucial for administrators to have an understanding of the needs of their teachers. The administrator should also have evidence-based knowledge to facilitate decision making and problem resolution for the RTI implementation. It is recommended that teachers collaborate with administrators to design a system that is capable of being implemented with fidelity in their classroom. Without the vision and support of the administrator, it is difficult for teachers to distinguish if they are executing the appropriate steps of the RTI implementation plan. Administrative support provides an environment that encourages teachers to reflect and grow. A result of the study implied that school administrators should prioritize training in key areas such as interventions and assessments. If evidence-based interventions are not identified and matched to a student's needs, there can be a misalignment in the growth of the student being served when applying the assessment component. Applying the wrong intervention followed by a flawed assessment produces no growth and the loss of needed instructional time. The RTI process is meant to meet the needs of diverse student learning levels. Interventions should be the tools teachers utilize to help struggling students. Educators can no longer accept the perspective of “wait to fail” when addressing student learning disabilities.

Many schools are at different levels of RTI implementation. It is vital that all participants involved with initiatives (such as RTI) receive training. Training in all of the components of RTI is supported by evidence-based research and pedagogical theories for teachers. Literature, such as this study, is vital in building a culture that believes and performs best practices, rituals, and routines for implementing RTI. The findings of this study implied that if teachers do not receive training on how to identify and plan evidence-based interventions, and are provided with continuous support, then RTI will not be implemented with fidelity.

To build a school culture that implements RTI with fidelity, one must provide an introduction that keeps the process simple for teachers to understand if they are to fully participate in the process. One of the most essential keys for successful implementation of Response to Intervention is to have full participation and cooperation from the regular classroom teacher. It was also implied that we must take a closer look at the core instruction in our classrooms. All of the support staff and teachers must be sure that as a whole, everything has been done to improve the quality of instruction that is presented to every student in all classrooms. Completed activities at Tier 1 should be identified as the school's first line of defense.

According to Quinn (2009) there are four areas of concentration when implementing Response to Intervention: First, one should think about Outstanding Classroom Instruction. Second, one should think about Professional Development that is Well-Planned and Well-Executed. Third, one must consider, Are your teachers making graphs? Finally, one should think about Having Interventions in Key Areas of Deficits. One area that teachers involved in the study identified as a major concern was the lack of

professional development and training to execute RTI with fidelity in their individual classrooms. A sample process would be to establish well-planned and well- executed teacher assessments prior to professional development for RTI. Teacher assessment includes skills such as problem solving, ability to identify research-based interventions, and the ability to monitor student progress. Before the end of the school year, or during pre-planning, it is suggested to provide the faculty with a survey that addresses their current knowledge and needs as it relates to RTI. The school could make their own survey or use the *RTI School Readiness Survey* created by Jim Wright (2009). The survey is an informal measure designed to help schools identify elements of RTI that they are proficient in, and those elements that need additional attention.

Illustrated in Table 4, this study provides a sample comprehensive outline for the implementation of RTI throughout an entire school year. Teachers will be able to envision what an entire school year would look like for implementing RTI at their grade level, and in their classrooms. This is intended to be a living document that can be adjusted to the individual needs of both faculty and students.

Table 4

Timeline for Response to Intervention Activities for Sample School

Time Period	Activities	Tier/Audience	Responsibility
August	1st DATA REVIEW TEAM MEETING ➢ Data will be reviewed by grade level & content area. 1st Administration of Screenings (MAP, GKIDS, & KDG Readiness Checklist) ➢ Review the process for transitioning previous RTI students and the current tier placement for the new school year. ➢ Students will be identified and targeted based on the results from the screeners and other data collected.	Tier 1 -Data of all Grade levels/ teams -Data of all students (previous Tier 2/3 students)	School admin., academic coaches, counselors, instructional support specialist, data review teams, classroom teachers, intervention teachers, school RTI chairperson
September	Criteria used for identifying students at risk. ➢ Retained students or students not on grade level ➢ Students with failing grades at progress report time ➢ Students reading below grade level ➢ Students performing below grade level in math ➢ Students with previous or current attendance problems ➢ Students with poor work habit or poor citizenship status ➢ Students with a significant discipline history ➢ New students who may not have records ➢ Previous year's Tier 2 or Tier 3 students Classroom teachers will begin monitoring Tier 1 core program. Local school will begin supportive interventions and supplemental programs (ex: before, during, and after school).	Tier 1 All students	School admin., academic coaches, counselors, instructional support specialist, data review teams, classroom teachers, intervention teachers, school RTI chairperson, data review team
	RTI meetings begin (discuss & develop plans for students at risk) Tier 1 students – Collaborative Grade Level Planning Tier 2 students –Tier 2 Leader Meetings/Child Study Talk (grade level) Tier 3 students – Weekly Child Study talks/Student Support Team meetings(SST)	Tiers 1, 2 and 3 All students	School RTI chairperson, classroom teachers, counselors, intervention teachers, psychologist, Lead Special Education Teacher

Time Period	Activities	Tier/Audience	Responsibility
October	2nd DATA REVIEW TEAM MEETING ➢ The team will review assessment data for all grade levels at the school, individual classrooms, and individual student levels. Ensure grades of all students are also reviewed. ➢ Conduct data review and chats as needed with these students. ➢ School RTI chairperson will provide interventions and resources to teachers in specific core content-areas (reading & math) to address unique needs of students.	Tiers 1 and 2 -Data of all departments/ teams -Data of all students	School admin., academic coaches, counselors, instructional support specialist, data review teams, classroom teachers, intervention teachers, school RTI chairperson, data review team
October-December	RTI meetings continued ➢ Continue with Collaborative planning on all grade levels (Tier 1) ➢ Progress monitor students and make necessary adjustments to individual Tier 2/3 plans.	Tiers 2 and 3	Classroom teachers and/or RTI teams, school RTI chairperson
By January	2nd Administration of Screenings (MAP, GKIDS) THIRD DATA REVIEW TEAM MEETING ➢ Data team will review list of identified students at risk. (If the student is not making adequate progress, the intervention plan for the student must be reviewed, revised, and implemented with fidelity. Team must confirm use of evidenced-based interventions.) ➢ Teachers will also continue monitoring Tier 1 core program. ➢ The school will also resume and continue supportive interventions and supplemental programs.	Tiers 1 and 2 -Data of all students -Data of students at risk	School admin., academic coaches, counselors, instructional support specialist, data review teams, classroom teachers, intervention teachers, school RTI chairperson, data review team
January-March	RTI meetings continued ➢ Continue progress monitoring students and making adjustments. ➢ Teachers will be asked to gather data on students in danger of being retained, to present to Tier 3/SST.	Tiers 2 and 3 -Data of students at risk	Classroom teachers or RTI grade level teams; school RTI chairperson
March	Teachers will continue collecting data on students in danger of being retained or failure to Tier 3/SST for additional suggestions for intensive interventions. - Continue supplemental program and implement intensive programs as recommended.	Tiers 2 and 3	RTI grade level teams, school RTI chairperson, school psychologist, school counselor
April/May	3rd Administration of Screenings (MAP, Georgia Milestones, GKIDS) ➢ Design summer programs and conduct RTI follow-ups. ➢ Teachers will continue to progress monitor all Tier 2/3students and collect data.	All students	School Admin., RTI grade level teams, school RTI chairperson, others (as needed)

Time Period	Activities	Tier/Audience	Responsibility
May	4th DATA REVIEW TEAM MEETING	All students	ALL
June	Summer School programs and local school programs. Data team will meet to plan and prepare research based and data-driven adjustments that are needed for the next school year.	Tiers 1, 2, and 3	As needed

Suggestions for Further Research

There are three areas that would add to the body of research as it relates to the implementation of RTI in urban settings. First, it is suggested that this study is replicated in another urban school district to determine if geography and demographics influence the lived experiences of teachers implementing RTI in urban elementary school settings. Second, the study should be replicated in urban middle and secondary schools to determine whether or not lived experiences of teachers in these settings are similar to those who implement RTI in urban elementary schools. Third, it is suggested that the study is replicated to identify the lived experiences of administrators implementing RTI in urban settings. As noted in the limitations section of this chapter, the administrator's lived experiences were excluded from this study.

Conclusion

The purpose of the phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers implementing RTI in an urban school setting. Six teachers shared their lived experiences, and three pragmatic themes were constructed. The themes were interventions, challenges, and training. Several of the themes had sub-

categories such as collaboration, communication, decision making, assessments, and accountability.

In synthesizing the lived experiences of the teachers, it is apparent that teachers need more support and training when trying to implement RTI effectively and with fidelity in an urban school setting. The results of the study can be used to develop a differentiated RTI implementation plan that may necessitate additional resources when implementing in an urban elementary school setting. The study revealed areas where teachers need additional support and evidence-based literature related to training, usage of assessments, time/scheduling for interventions, ancillary support, and interventions by tier. The results of this study can assist novice and veteran teachers with identifying effective and best practices for implementing RTI in their classrooms. Schools can use this study in the beginning stages of an RTI implementation and to guide those teachers and schools that have already started the RTI implementation process. Schools can use this research to develop relevant and efficient training and purchase the needed resources to implement and maintain their RTI initiative. Conclusively, this study will improve RTI implementations by filling the gap in the extant literature on the lived experiences of teachers implementing RTI in urban elementary school classroom settings.

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Appendix A|
Initial Email to Teachers' and Principals

Dear (Teacher or Principal Name),

My name is Nicole Powell Mitchell and I am pursuing my doctorate in Teacher Leadership from Kennesaw State University. I am also an employee of DeKalb County Public School System as an Instructional Support Specialist for an elementary school. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for this educational degree, I am writing a dissertation. I am requesting your participation for a research study to gain a better understanding of an identified topic or issue. You may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without any consequences if you decide to participate in the study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and will remain anonymous through assigned pseudonyms. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link your participation to the study. You will not be asked to write your name on any documents used in the study; this will ensure that your identity cannot be matched to the responses that you provide. If you agree to participate in the research study, you will be interviewed by one sole researcher. You will be asked questions about your experience with the implementation of RTI in an urban classroom setting. The one-on-one interviews are expected to last between 30-60 minutes and will be audio-recorded. If you would be interested in participating, I will provide you with additional details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. Please reply to this email (npowell6@kennesaw.edu) if you are interest in participating in this study.

Sincerely yours,

Nicole Powell Mitchell
Doctoral Candidate Teacher Leadership
npowell6@kennesaw.edu

Appendix B
Interview Protocol

1. Elementary teachers from two urban classroom settings will be sent invitations to participate in the study by an email to their school base email address from my Kennesaw State University-issued email account.
2. Participants will be provided the outline for the part of the study with the option to decline.
3. Interview questions will not be provided prior to the interview. For validity of results, the researcher did not want the teachers to have answers comprised before the interview.
4. Each participant will be interviewed one time. The interview will take place at School A or B or another location that is convenient for the participant.
5. The teacher and the researcher will be the only two individuals present during the interview process.
6. Interviews for each of the participants will be contained to no more than 60 minutes.
7. The interview will take place after the school day or the most convenient time for the participant.
8. The interview will be completed within one session, unless an unforeseen incident should occur.
9. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed after the session.
10. The researcher will code the data for emergent themes.

Appendix C
Interview Script

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Position of interviewee:

Script

Thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to interview with me today. This interview will take between 30 to 60 minutes to complete. The information gathered from this interview will inform my dissertation within a graduate program at Kennesaw State University. I am interested in learning more about the lived experiences of elementary teachers implementing RTI in an urban classroom setting. This interview will be used for this purpose only.

Participants' names will remain anonymous; participants will not be identified by name in the dissertation or in any discussion so please feel free to be open and honest. During the study, you have the right to stop and decline participation in the research study. I will use an audiotape to record your response to the questions so that I can have clear recording so that your responses can be accurately transcribed.

Interview Questions

The in-depth interview follows this flexible set of guiding questions:

1. Describe in detail your personal experience using RTI in the classroom.
2. What are some of the challenges and advantages to using RTI in your classroom?
3. How do you make decisions for your students using the RTI framework?
4. How do you collaborate and communicate with other teachers, intervention teachers, coaches, and administration about students in the RTI process?
5. What does assessment and progress monitoring with RTI look like in your classroom? Describe how this differs from before implementing RTI.

6. Please specifically describe what experiences you have had with RTI in your classroom in Tier 2 and Tier 3. How do they differ?
7. What type of training have you received for RTI this year?
8. What type of programs and resources have you tried with RTI in your classroom?
9. Describe what successful or unsuccessful interventions look like in your classroom?
10. Do you have any recommendations for other teachers who are implementing RTI in the classroom/school?
11. Describe how your classroom instruction and accountability have changed since implementing RTI.
12. Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to tell me about your experiences with RTI that you believe would be important to know?

(These questions will be used as a guide for the researcher during the interview. The researcher will provide the opportunity for the participants to share and move the direction in which they would like to share about their experiences with implementing RTI in their urban classroom settings. Information about RTI).

Thank you for participating and providing time to participate in my study.

Appendix D
Signed Consent Form

Title of Research Study: Investigating the Lived Experiences of Teachers Implementing Response to Intervention in an Urban Elementary School Setting: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

Researcher's Contact Information:
Nicole Mitchell, 404-931-3183, npowell6@kennesaw.edu

Researcher's sponsoring institution: Kennesaw State University
Megan Adams, PhD
Assistant Professor of Reading Education
Department of Secondary and Middle Grades Education
Kennesaw State University
Phone: 706-424-5387
Email: madam104@kennesaw.edu

Introduction
You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by doctoral student, Mrs. Nicole Mitchell of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Description of Project
The purpose of the study is to investigate the lived experiences of urban elementary school classroom teachers implementing RTI in an urban setting. The study can be used to help promote effective practices for the development of new RTI programs and the revision of existing ones. The RTI model has the potential to augment student achievement within many urban classrooms. Future research in urban settings may prove instrumental in providing valuable information to teachers in their quest to implement RTI effectively and with fidelity. A qualitative phenomenology study of teachers' experiences provides an empirical reference tool for teachers, leaders, and districts when implementing RTI in urban elementary school settings.

Explanation of Procedures
The participants will be asked to participate in interviews that will range from 30 minutes to an hour. The researcher will seek permission to record the interview pertaining to the research on RTI. Each interview will consist of open-ended questions from the interview protocol (see attachment). The researcher will also take brief written notes during the interview.

Once the interview has concluded the researcher will download all recordings to her personal computer. The interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Once the interviews are completed and transcribed the researcher will provide a copy of the transcript for the participants to check for accuracy and validation.

Our conversations will include topics such as what are some of your personal experiences with RTI, what has been some of your challenges and success with RTI, and how do you communicate and collaborate with other teachers about RTI.

Time Required
This research will begin on May 31, 2017 and end on October 31, 2017. It will require 30 to 60 minutes for each interview. There will be 5 to 8 teachers that are interviewed. Therefore, to complete the assigned task, it will take a minimum of 2 ½ hours to a maximum of 8 hours.

Risks or Discomforts
There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts for participants in this research. The participants will not experience any harm.

Benefits
Although there will be no direct benefits to you for taking part in the study, the researcher may learn more about lived experiences of elementary teachers implementing RTI in urban classroom settings, and gain a better understanding of the needs of teachers when implementing RTI with fidelity for students in need of academic and behavioral assistance. The benefit to humankind is in the possible growth of the educational system in relation to building programs that implement RTI effectively and with fidelity.

Compensation
The participants will not receive any compensation or credit for taking part in the study. Your participation in this project is voluntary. You will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decide that you will not participate in the research study. If you decide to participate in this project, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. You have the right to inspect any instrument or materials related to the proposal. Your request will be honored within a reasonable period after the request is received.

Confidentiality
Your name and all other personally identifiable information will be kept confidential. Participant's names will not be used in the process, and instead pseudonym names will be used. I will not need to look at your grades or test scores. All data will be secured in a locked file cabinet during the study. Participants are protected from any potential harmful future association to the data collected in the study by being allowed to use pseudonym names to hide their identity. To prevent harmful future use of the data, the teachers, school names and district will be omitted from the study.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation
The age of intended participants are as follows: 25-65(age)-Teachers
Teacher in a K-5 elementary setting

Signed Consent

I agree and give my consent to participate in this research project. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

_____
Signature of Participant or Authorized Representative, Date

_____
Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR BEFORE THE INTERVIEW STARTS

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3403, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-2268.

Study 18-214: Investigating the Lived Experiences of Teachers Implementing Response to Intervention in an Urban Elementary School Setting: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study
NM
Nicole Powell Mitchell <npowell6@students.kennesaw.edu>

Reply|
Thu 11/16/2017, 4:05 PM
Nicole Mitchell (Flat Shoals Elementary);
jiggyteacher@bellsouth.net
Inbox

From: irb@kennesaw.edu <irb@kennesaw.edu>
Sent: Thursday, November 16, 2017 1:44 PM
To: Nicole Powell Mitchell
Cc: irb; Megan Adams
Subject: Study 18-214: Investigating the Lived Experiences of Teachers Implementing Response to Intervention in an Urban Elementary School Setting: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

11/16/2017

Nicole Mitchell, Student

Re: Your follow-up submission of 11/8/2017, Study #18-214: Investigating the Lived Experiences of Teachers Implementing Response to Intervention in an Urban Elementary School Setting: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

Dear Ms. Mitchell,

Your application has been reviewed by IRB members. Your study is eligible for expedited review under the FDA and DHHS (OHRP) designation of category 7 - Individual or group characteristics or behavior.

This is to confirm that your application has been approved. The protocol approved is interviews and field notes to investigate the lived experiences of urban elementary school classroom teachers implementing RTI in an urban setting. The consent procedure described is in effect.

NOTE: All surveys, recruitment flyers/emails, and consent forms must include the IRB study number noted above, prominently displayed on the first page of all materials.

You are granted permission to conduct your study as described in your application effective immediately. The IRB calls your attention to the following obligations as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. The study is subject to continuing review on or before 11/16/2018. At least two weeks prior to that time, go to http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/progress-report-form.php to submit a progress report. Progress reports not received in a timely manner will result in expiration and closure of the study.

2. Any proposed changes to the approved study must be reported and approved prior to

implementation. This is accomplished through submission of a progress report along with revised consent forms and survey instruments.

3. All records relating to conducted research, including signed consent documents, must be retained for at least three years following completion of the research. You are responsible for ensuring that all records are accessible for inspection by authorized representatives as needed. Should you leave or end your professional relationship with KSU for any reason, you are responsible for providing the IRB with information regarding the housing of research records and who will maintain control over the records during this period.

4. Unanticipated problems or adverse events relating to the research must be reported promptly to the IRB. See http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/reporting-unanticipated-problems.php for definitions and reporting guidance.

5. A final progress report should be provided to the IRB at the closure of the study.

Contact the IRB at irb@kennesaw.edu or at (470) 578-2268 if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Christine Ziegler, Ph.D.
KSU Institutional Review Board Director and Chair

cc: Madam104@kennesaw.edu

Mr. Knox Phillips Dr. R. Stephen Green
Executive Director Superintendent

Research, Assessments, and Grants
1701 Mountain Industrial Boulevard
Stone Mountain, GA 30083-1027
678-676-0300

May 25, 2017
Ms. N. Mitchell
4019 Bigsage Drive
Atlanta, GA 30349

Reference: Investigating the Lived Experiences of Teachers Implementing Response to Intervention in an Urban Elementary School Setting: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study (File # 2017-016)

Dear Ms. N. Mitchell:

This letter is to inform you that your research proposal has been approved by the Department of
Research, Assessments, and Grants for implementation in the DeKalb County School District (DCSD).

When you begin your research, you must secure the approval of the principal/chief site administrator(s) for all schools named in the proposal. You should provide the application with all required attachments and this district approval letter to the principal(s) in order to inform their decision. **Please remember the principal/chief site administrator has the final right of approval or denial of the research proposal at that site. In addition, note that teachers and others may elect not to participate in your research study, even though the district has granted permission.**

The last day to collect data in schools in DCSD for the 2017-2018 school year is Friday, March 30, 2018. The deadline is to protect instructional time during the assessment season and end of the year activities scheduled at individual schools. This approval is valid for one year from the date on this approval letter. Should there be any changes, addenda, design changes, or adverse events to the approved protocol, a request for these changes must also be submitted in writing/email to the DCSD Department of Research, Assessments, and Grants during this one year approval period. Changes should not be initiated until written approval is received. Further,

should there be a need to extend the time requested for the project; the researcher must submit a written request for approval at least one month prior to the anniversary date of the most recent approval. If the time for which approval is given expires, it will be necessary to resubmit the proposal for another review by the DCSD Research Review Board.

Completed results are required to be submitted to the Department of Research, Assessments, and Grants.

Best wishes for a successful research project. Feel free to call 678.676.0325 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Knox Phillips	**Joy Mordica, Ph.D.**	**Michael J. Shaw**
Knox Phillips	Joy Mordica, Ph.D.	Michael J. Shaw
Executive Director	Coordinator III	Coordinator II