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RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL COUNSELORS' AWARENESS,
INVOLVEMENT, AND EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education
The University of Mississippi

by

AMANDA M. WINBURN, Ed.S.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to better clarify the role and experiences of school counselors within the Response to Intervention (RtI) model. This study explored school counselors' involvement with and understanding of the RtI model. An integrative approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods was used as part of this mixed method study. The research design for this study included a QUAN → QUAL process for data analysis. As part of the design, quantitative data collection was the priority method for the study, followed by qualitative data collection to continue to explore and expand upon the results from the quantitative section (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative data was obtained from the author originated Response to Intervention Survey. The survey results were formed into a descriptive analysis; the qualitative data in the study was used to expand upon information found in the quantitative portion of the study. Interviews were conducted with practicing school counselors regarding their experiences working within the RtI model and completed the qualitative portion of the study. The research findings in my study provide a foundation for understanding how school counselors are involved with, perceive, and experience the RtI model. These findings add to the knowledge of how school counselors operate and assume roles within the RtI process.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving husband, Jon
and my wonderful mother, Wilma

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

ACA American Counseling Association

ASCA American School Counseling Association

IDEIA Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

RtI Response to Intervention

TST Teacher Support Team

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When I think of all the wonderful people God has placed in my life to bring me to this point my cup truly runs over. From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank my family. From my mother who watched my precious girls every time I needed to study or work to my husband who is always supportive of anything I want to do and who loves and supports me no matter how stressed out I get. I want to thank my beautiful girls- Addison and Julia, who are always there to distract me and show me that life should be filled with laughter and love. My brothers and sisters (Rick, Diann, Mike, & John), wonderful in-laws, nephews and nieces, as well as extended family who have loved and supported me through this process also deserve special thanks. I'd also like to thank my dog Kelsey; she's kept me company many days during this writing process.

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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The study of response to intervention (RtI) and its impact on student achievement continues to be an important area of interest in education research (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Gersten & Dimino, 2001; Marston, 2005; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005). Response to intervention is an approach to help identify and remediate students who are experiencing academic difficulties. More specifically defined, RtI is a multi-tiered approach that requires school personnel to implement school wide, evidence-based research and monitor student progress in the domains of academics and behavior (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). In the last five years, there has been a growing emphasis placed on RtI; many school districts are in the process of adopting this approach to help identify and remediate academic and behavior deficits (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2011).

In the United States, RtI is a core focus of education research (Bender & Shores, 2007). Two studies (Bergen, 1977; Deno & Mirkin, 1977) form the basis of research support for RtI and its procedures. Bergen (1977) utilized a problem-solving approach to address behavioral concerns in special education students. The problem-solving model based upon the RTI approach considers environmental influences as they apply to students' struggles and provides interventions as the student demonstrates a need (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Deno and Mirkin (1977) implemented an approach in their research known as a curriculum based measurement. This technique assesses a student's academic progress over an extended period. Deno and Mirkin

then developed an intervention strategy to remediate students. These two studies led to the development of two distinct RtI models: the problem solving model and the standard protocol model. According to the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (2005), both of these approaches require evidenced-based interventions, progress monitoring, and measures to ensure the integrity and validity of the assessment.

Since 1977, there have been hundreds of studies on RtI and its effect on student achievement outcomes (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005). Also, researchers have examined the effects of RtI on behavioral outcomes (Sugai & Horner, 2005). Nevertheless, there continues to be a debate in the literature surrounding the proper implementation of RTI and its subsequent effectiveness (Abbott & Wills, 2012). Until the development of the RtI model, the discrepancy model had been traditionally used to identify students as having a disability. Researchers argue that a major flaw in the discrepancy model is the difficulty in focusing on early interventions with students (Walser, 2007). Using this model, students are relocated from the general classroom to the special education classroom based upon the discrepancy between their achievement on standardized tests and their IQ. It is not until there is a large enough gap between a student's IQ and his/her achievement that special services such as remediation are offered to the student. Ultimately, students who simply struggle academically or are slow learners never qualify for early interventions. Therefore, RtI was developed as an early intervention program for children who continue to fail to meet basic standards within the school system.

Literature on RtI is found not only in education, but also in the fields of social work, counseling, and school psychology (Barnett, et al. 2004; Hawkens, Vincent, & Schumann, 2008; Horner & Sugai, 2005; Noell, et al., 2002; Shores, 2009). Scholars in these fields often view RtI

as a powerful mechanism for delivering mental health interventions (Froiland, 2011). RtI can be utilized as a mental health tool for promoting the well-being of all students. Practitioners within the mental health field can work within the RtI process to further consult with schools and families to use evidenced-based interventions that promote students' mental health, academic achievement, and social awareness.

In spite of the numerous studies on RtI, there are few studies regarding school counselors and their role within RtI (Ryan, Kauffmanberger, Carroll, 2011; Gruman & Hoelzen, 2011). Nevertheless, the limited literature supports the role of school counselors within RtI and encourages school counselors to take an active membership in the identification process of students who are struggling in the core academic areas. These few studies find positive outcomes for students when school counselors become involved in the RtI process, and these studies argue for more research to define and formalize the role of the school counselor in terms of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 and other revised special education acts.

While there is some degree of support from the literature and governing bodies such as the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), the topic of school counselors and the RtI process requires further empirical validation and exploration. This should include the actual understanding, involvement, and perception of school counselors in general regarding RtI, as well as the experiences of school counselors who are currently working within the RtI model. These findings will help provide a basis for school counselors' current role within the RtI model. While the ASCA national model supports the role of school counselors as active participants within RtI, there is no current research to demonstrate school counselor involvement, understanding, or perceptions of the model.

To determine schools counselors' involvement, understanding, and perceptions of RtI, the researcher utilized two research methods. Phase one was a quantitative study in which the researcher conducted a survey to assess school counselors' awareness and involvement in RtI. The researcher utilized a self-created survey called the Response to Intervention survey. The survey was administered via the Internet. By collecting data at one point in time, the survey is considered cross-sectional (Creswell, 2009). A survey was selected as the method for data collection due to the fact that surveys can be used in a scientific manner to interview a representative sample instead of a whole population in a manner that is both economic and has a quick turnaround in data collection (Salant & Dillman, 1994). According to Creswell (2009), a survey design provides a quantitative description of attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population.

Using a descriptive analysis of the survey results, the researcher described the results through means and variations; through this analysis, the findings are able to make general claims about the understanding and involvement of school counselors and their role within the RtI model. Identifying the understanding, involvement, and perceptions of school counselors in RtI creates a knowledge base of the subject. From this foundation, the researcher began phase two of the research design, which consisted of using qualitative/interview methods to better understand the experiences of school counselors working within RtI. Using a purposeful sample of school counselors who are currently working within RtI, the researcher randomly selected 10 individuals who volunteered their contact information and conducted phone interviews with these individuals. Each interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis. Specifically in phase two, the researcher employed a phenomenological approach to expand upon survey data

collected to create an in-depth description of the experiences of school counselors who are operating within the RtI model.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to better clarify the role and experiences of school counselors within the RtI model. This study explored school counselors' involvement in and understanding of the RtI model. An integrative approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods was used as part of this mixed method study. The research design for this study included a QUAN → QUAL process for data analysis. As part of the design, quantitative data collection was the priority method for the study, followed by qualitative data collection to continue to explore and expand upon the results from the quantitative section (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative data was obtained from the author-originated Response to Intervention Survey. Once the results of the survey were formed into a descriptive analysis, the qualitative data in the study was used to expand upon information found in the quantitative portion of the study. Conducting interviews with practicing school counselors regarding their experiences working within the RtI model completed the qualitative portion of the study. The findings from both methods were synthesized in order to present information in a manner consistent with the research design.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

Primary Research Question:

What are the awareness, involvement, perceptions, and experiences of school counselors working within the response to intervention (RtI) model?

Quantitative Research Questions

1. What is the perception of the RtI model by school counselors?
2. How involved are school counselors within the RtI model?
3. What basic understanding do school counselors have regarding the RtI model?

Qualitative Research Question

What have school counselors' experiences been while working within the RtI model?

Qualitative Interview Questions

1. What is your perception of the RtI model?
2. How would you describe your role within RtI?
3. What function does RtI serve within your current school guidance program?
4. Do you feel like additional training from your district or a traditional counselor education program would be helpful to you?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the researcher used the following terms and definitions to describe the background of the study:

1. At-Risk: An outcome for a student who shows an early indication of unsatisfactory academic performance (Campbell & Ramsey, 1994).
2. Differentiated Instruction: The intent of differentiating instruction to maximize each student's growth and success while meeting the needs and learning styles of each student and assisting in the learning process (Hall, 2002).
3. Evidenced-Based Instruction: A form of instruction that refers to specific curriculum and educational interventions that have been proven through research to be effective. The research has been reported in scientific or peer-reviewed journals (National Association of School Psychologists, 2006).

4. Instructional Intervention: Any action of additional instruction that is given to struggling students that differs from current instruction within the student's regular academic program (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001).
5. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Federal law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the United States. IDEA governs how each state and public agency provides early intervention, special education, and other related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and young adults (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).
6. Learning Ability: a student's capacity or aptitude to master a skill, task, or concept (Dahir & Stone, 2006).
7. Response to Intervention (RtI): A model of evidenced-based interventions that seeks to redefine how students struggling to meet academic and behavior standards are identified and served within the public school system (Justice, 2006).
8. School Personnel: Regular education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, school counselors, school psychologists, and other certified employees.
9. Social Justice: The act of striving to simultaneously promote human development and the common good through addressing challenges related to both individual and distributive justice (Crether & Ratts, 2008).
10. Student Disability: a student's incapability to accomplish or acquire the same skills, tasks, or concepts in certain situations as their peers (Woolfolk, 2009).
11. Student Progress Monitoring: Assessment techniques required within RtI regulations. School personnel administer quick assessments (one to five minutes) weekly to

- monitor the improvement of students. These assessments provide information regarding the student's rate of learning and the effectiveness of each particular intervention (National Center of Student Progress Monitoring, 2007).
12. Teacher Support Team (TST): Teachers, school counselors, and other professionals who assist in addressing a student's needs based on the RtI problem-solving model (Munday, 2005).
 13. Three-Tier Instructional Intervention Model: Instruction intervention used to monitor a student's achievement and determine if there is adequate progress. The model identifies students who under-achieve and modifies instruction early on to ensure that students gain essential instruction and remediation before significant gaps in achievement take place (Munday, 2005).
 14. Universal Screening: A process to determine students who are determined to be "at risk" for not meeting grade-level standards. This process can be determined through the use of state tests or academic screening tests given within each grade level (National Association of School Psychologists, 2006).

Conceptual Framework

Due to the framework set forth by RtI for meeting students' instructional needs, RtI can prevent school failure for numerous students. Schools across the United States expend great effort to provide students with a quality education and work to accommodate all learners who struggle to succeed. According to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model (2012), school counselors work from the belief that all students can learn and demonstrate success. ASCA (2008) also released a statement saying that all students deserve a quality, challenging, and successful educational experience and that school counselors have an

ethical responsibility to protect the rights of all students. School counselors, who are serving as student advocates, work to ensure that students with learning and behavioral difficulties are treated with the same respect and are receiving the same opportunities as all other students who are considered part of the main student body or population.

Following these guidelines proposed by the ASCA National Model, school counselors are duty-bound to help all students reach their greatest academic achievement. RtI is one avenue that could greatly benefit students, and research has demonstrated significant improvement using the previously mentioned models (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Marston, 2005; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005). This study assessed the role of school counselors within the RtI process. It helped determine whether school counselors are advocating for students who are experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties. The study, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, evaluated a school counselor's level of awareness, understanding, and involvement in the RtI model and also provided a rich, descriptive reflection on the experiences of school counselors who are already working within the RtI model.

Limitations

1. There were differences and varying levels of knowledge regarding RtI among participants.
2. Self-reported data was collected through the survey and interviews and therefore cannot be independently verified.

Delimitations

1. Since the data was collected from members of the American School Counseling Association, the results may only be generalizable to school counselors who hold membership within that organization.

2. Surveys were sent to the 10 states primarily utilizing RtI as their concentrated method of identifying students with disabilities: Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Rhode Island, and West Virginia.
3. Qualitative interviews were limited to 10 individuals working within the RtI model.
4. Survey results were monitored for response bias each week during data collection to determine if there was a change in responses.

Role of the Researcher

For this study, my role as researcher was to act as a qualitative assessment instrument. This involved analyzing the interview data using my own competencies and skills. One important potential bias was my own pre-existing experience as a school counselor and experiences working within the RtI model. In order to compensate for this limitation, the researcher worked to manage personal assumptions and focused on the shared experiences of the participants.

Organization of the Study

The study was organized into five chapters. Each chapter has sections that address the quantitative and qualitative phases of investigation and data collection. Chapter I introduces the study, Chapter II reviews related literature to the study, Chapter III details the methodology, Chapter IV discusses the results of the data collected from both the quantitative and qualitative inquiry, and Chapter V is a discussion of the findings.

Summary

This introductory chapter has identified the purpose and significance of this study in relation to RtI and school counselors' role and experiences. The introduction chapter also began a description of RtI, which is the focus of the study. Chapter II provides an extensive review of

the literature on the history of RtI, foundational theories, research on RtI, and current theoretical debates in the field.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Much of the previous literature on RtI has supported and encouraged the model and its interventions as valuable tools in determining whether a student has a specific learning disability or behavior problem (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005; Kovalski, Gickling, Morrow, & Swank, 1999; Lau, Sieler, Muyskens, Canter, Vankeuren, & Marston, 2006). With the reauthorization of IDEA (2004), this support has driven and, in many cases, has replaced the discrepancy model in identifying students who are struggling to meet academic standards. Most state and local education agencies have adopted a version of the RtI model along with using other forms of screening, such as the discrepancy model (Samuels, 2011). To date, the majority of states continue to allow the use of the discrepancy model; however, 10 states (Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Rhode Island, and West Virginia) have prohibited or lessened the use of the discrepancy model and established requirements based upon RtI.

The RtI model is transforming how we educate students. Responding to children's needs in a timely manner is no new concept; in fact, it is a concept that has been around since the 1970's. However, with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), this notion has come to the forefront of the educational community that is helping struggling students in a systematically efficient and documented manner. RtI has been developed in response to critics of the discrepancy model as a means of addressing children's needs in the beginning of their academic struggles. The RtI model serves as an early intervention program that follows guidelines to ensure that evidence-based interventions are used in a time efficient manner.

This literature review focuses on the emergence of the RtI process, along with a description of the RtI model and implementation process. Additionally, the researcher sought to explore RtI and the importance of professional development and training for all involved personnel. Finally, the researcher reviewed current literature on roles within RtI, specifically involving school counselors and the RtI model.

Emergence of Response to Intervention

Thirty-seven years ago, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, PL 94-142 (1975), was passed, and, since that time, there has been endless debate about how to best serve students with disabilities. According to Ysseldyke, Algozzine, and Thurlow (2000), special education has been a controversial topic since the Education for all Handicapped Children was first mandated in 1975. This controversy directly contributed to debates regarding the diagnostic procedures used to identify students with possible disabilities. The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (1975) included the discrepancy model, which only labeled children as learning-disabled if there was significant gap in achievement compared to the student's score on the intelligence scale.

Gresham et al. (2004) stated that the discrepancy model was adopted largely due to the fact that, in 1977, there was no other widely accepted diagnostic model. Carbo (2010) argues that the discrepancy model defined students who had a severe discrepancy between their intellectual ability and their achievement. Additionally, Lipson and Wixson (2010) state, "Until the last few decades, no serious considerations has been given to the possibility that for a student with a discrepant profile between achievement and intelligence, the student's experience and instruction might be the locus of the disability" (p. 20).

The discrepancy model has come under tremendous criticism. Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle (2007) found that the model was not useful in enhancing services for students, particularly in the area of early intervention. These authors continued their criticisms by calling it a “wait-to-fail” model, stating that students did not receive services when first observed, but had to wait until there was a wide enough gap between achievement and intelligence scores to qualify for special education services.

Carbo (2010) says, “The use of the discrepancy model meant teachers could not help students with learning until they had fallen substantially behind and were struggling” (p. 121). Other critics of the model have identified it as culturally insensitive with its use being to over-identify minority students for special education services (De Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006; MacMillan & Reschly, 1998). In response to these critics, leaders within the field of education proposed changes to the way students are identified for special education services.

The National Research Council’s study conducted by Heller, Holtzman, and Messick (1982) inaugurated the emergence of Response to Intervention. As a result, researchers found that the quality of instruction and the organization of special education services have an impact on the effectiveness of student outcomes. In 1983, The U.S. Department of Education published the Nation at Risk report. This report once again spurred debate about the nation’s education system, stressed the need for educational reform, and increased discussion of accountability measures (Ravitch, 1999).

In 2001, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) required the measuring of every student’s educational skills and academic progress. This act included students who fell within the subgroup of special education and led to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) (2004) reauthorization law, which specified that students could not be

labeled as eligible for special education until “the child fails to achieve a rate of learning to make sufficient progress to meet state-approved results” (P.L. 108-446, 300.309). These two laws have established new guidelines for student identification as well as new accountability measures for students and teachers in both the general and special education classroom.

With these new guidelines, researchers and educational leaders have greatly enhanced the knowledge base from which educators now practice. Research on student learning and effective interventions have dramatically increased over the last two decades, and meta-analytic research has been able to identify best practices for learners (both with and without disabilities) who are struggling with core curriculum (Kavale & Forness, 1999; Swanson, Hoskyn, & Lee, 1999).

RtI was developed as an early intervention for children who continue to fail to meet basic standards within the school system. Several national studies, such as the Common Ground Report (2002), have made recommendations regarding identification, eligibility, and intervention for students who are experiencing difficulties. Researchers such as Marston (2005) studied national reports such as the Common Ground Report to see if RtI standards fulfilled the requirements outlined in the report. Marston found that RtI positively corresponded to each of the recommendation statements; thus, the research study concluded that RtI is a valid option for determining whether a student has a disability.

In 2004, the most recent re-authorization of IDEIA took place and continued to spur the debate about best practices. The law states that a local education agency “must use a process that determines if a child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation process” (P.L. No. 108-446 614 b 6 A). This law is the basis for a great deal of change and continued debate within the educational system (Burns & Gibbons, 2008).

In the reauthorization of IDEIA, the federal government outlined objectives to improve special education services within the United States, and, while RtI is not federally mandated, IDEIA does include RtI approaches within its regulations and guidelines. This suggests a systematic framework for screening, intervening, and monitoring to help determine a student's response to evidenced-based interventions (Burns & Gibbons, 2008).

The overall dissatisfaction with special education, the accountability movement, and increased knowledge of behavior and academic interventions have all contributed to the development of RtI. According to Bender and Shores (2007), RtI has risen to the top of the myriad of options for determining eligibility for special education services and should be considered the premier process for fair and equitable determination among students who are experiencing difficulties with core curriculum.

Response to Intervention

Hall (2008) defines RtI as a practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions that match the needs of the students while monitoring students' progress to make decisions about changes in their instructional goals and applying child response data to important instructional decisions. Carbo (2010) also defines RtI services as an approach that serves as a safety net to catch students at risk of failure early and immediately provide carefully monitored interventions to ensure academic and behavioral improvements. Simply put, RtI is a process of implementing high quality instructional practices that are based on students' needs, monitoring progress, and then adjusting instruction based upon the data collected from the students' responses.

Moore (2008) states that the goal of RtI is to prevent failure and ensure success for all students using early identification and progress monitoring, along with research-based

instruction. RtI focuses on evidenced-based interventions and proven data to drive instructional decisions that align with the goals of early intervention. Effectively used, RtI will allow teachers, counselors, and administrators to know how to identify students who are at-risk for failure using interventions grounded in research and shown to be valid and reliable. According to Fuchs, Fuchs, and Vaughn (2008), if these research-based interventions are introduced to students in the early stages of their education when struggles are initially identified, no longer will students have to “wait to fail.”

Batsche, et al., (2006) developed the core principles of the RtI process as part of the Policy Considerations and Implementation manual in conjunction with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. The policy makers outlined the Core Principles as follows:

1. Effectively Teaching All Children
2. Early Intervention
3. Multi-Tier Model of Delivery
4. Problem-Solving Methodology
5. Research-Based Interventions
6. Monitoring Student Progress
7. Using Data
8. Using Assessments

These core principles outline the function and role of RtI within the education system and guide the school personnel when using RtI.

Models for RtI are divided into a three-tier system. Howard (2010) states that the tiered system is designed to offer instructional support at increasing levels of intensity according to the

student's needs along with specific attributes. Each tier varies and is used to support the needs of all learners. The three tiers provide a framework for best practices.

Tier 1 is the initial tier that serves as a universal foundation for student learning. Allington (2006) states that Tier I interventions are the most critical. This tier contains core curriculum standards. Core curriculum helps determine if educators are delivering core instruction effectively to students. Tier 1 focuses on quality instructional strategies. Students who experience difficulties at the Tier 1 level and are not growing at a pace equal to their peers should be provided with additional differentiated instruction. According to Justice (2006), Tier 1 instruction should provide school personnel with the opportunity to provide direct services with a concentration on high-priority targets for academic or behavioral development. Other strategies can include small groups or other best practice interventions.

Tier 2 is for students who continue to demonstrate difficulty with academic and behavioral performances after receiving additional differentiated instruction. Tier 2 interventions are supplemental to Tier 1 instruction (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). Tier 2 interventions provide small group experiences for those students who were unable to experience success at the Tier 1 level. The Tier 2 groups are generally small so that school personnel can attend to the needs of the students while explicitly focusing on the skill in need of development. Gettinger (2007) states that Tier 2 interventions should be executed in small groups of four to six students and should be designed to provide a strong focus on skills that the students need in order to become proficient.

By design, Tier 2 is highly structured and consistent. Recommendations for Tier 2 interventions are that each intervention be provided within a 30 minute time frame and be monitored on a bi-weekly schedule (Martson, 2005). As cited in Martson (2005), Tilly states

that Tier 2 instruction is a combination of core instruction and supplemental instruction. These interventions should include structured tasks and be executed within an allotted amount of time. Previously conducted research suggests that, for Tier 2 instruction to be effective, the interventions should reinforce the learning goals and materials used in the Tier 1 instruction (Speece et al., 2003; Vellutin et al., 2003).

If students are still underperforming at the Tier 2 level, they are then referred to Tier 3 instruction. This level of intervention serves a small minority of the student population (Coyner et al. 2004). Tier 3 is a much more intensive set of instructional interventions. This level of instruction should provide more strategic planning and direct interventions than the previous two tiers. The frequency and intensity of the Tier 3 interventions should increase from the Tier 2 model.

Tier 3 interventions are the most intensive level of intervention available within general education. These interventions should center directly on the needs of the child (Stecker, 2007). At the tier 3 level, students are generally placed as individuals or in smaller groups (no more than three students) to receive personalized interventions. The time of interventions and frequency of progress monitoring typically are longer and more intensive than at the Tier 2 level. General education teachers often find the detail and involvement that is required with Tier 3 interventions to be overwhelming; therefore, additional school personnel can be instrumental at this level to help provide additional services to these Tier 3 students.

While Tier 3 instruction does not automatically qualify a student for special education services, it may indicate the possibility for additional testing and exploration of special education services. According to Kashi (2008) after a student has participated in Tier 3 instruction for

several weeks without any documented progress, the student is then in a situation for referral to special education services.

RtI Interventions and Assessments

The tiered model within RtI is categorized by intensive assessments and interventions and increased frequency of data collection and monitoring as students advance through the levels.

Tier 1, which is also known as the foundational tier, focuses on the general education classroom.

This tier is characterized by effective instructional and behavioral interventions. These interventions provide students with the opportunity to achieve proficiency according to standardized tests. This model gives general education teachers and school personnel the freedom to use a wide variety of interventions and measures on a daily basis. The RtI model is a tool to organize and assess multiple interventions that are available to school personnel; this tool helps to identify evidence-based research interventions (Howell, Patton, & Deiotte, 2008).

The purpose of Tier 1 assessments and interventions is to identify those students who need additional help mastering the core curriculum defined by the district or state. The focus at the Tier 1 level is on the core curriculum and the general classroom, rather than the individual student. Interventions at the Tier 1 level can come in all different forms, from simplistic to highly complex. Many Tier 1 interventions will involve changes in instructional strategies. Examples of Tier 1 strategies might include, but are not limited to, the following: Peer tutoring, differentiated instruction, additional instruction time, cooperative learning, or positive reinforcement (Bender & Shores, 2007).

According to Burns and Gibbons (2008), 20% of all students will not be successful in the general education classroom despite a high quality curriculum and use of effective instructional strategies. These students will ultimately advance from the Tier 1 level of RtI into Tier 2, where

they will receive additional interventions, typically small group instructional settings. Tier 2 interventions must check the student's response over time, and most researchers suggest that a minimum of six to eight weeks is necessary to gather sufficient data points to determine the impact of a Tier 2 intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2004; Marston, 2005; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003). Due to the importance of the Tier 2 level targeted interventions, school districts have invested a tremendous amount of resources into materials to ensure that Tier 2 interventions are effective. Burns (2006) suggests that interventions selected for Tier 2 should result in moderate effect size while being easy to implement and cost effective.

Interventions at this level should receive a team perspective with consultation from special education teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, and administrators. Individuals other than the general education teachers could offer interventions at the Tier 2 level and interventions could include any of the following: help with study skills, reading comprehension, play therapy, or reading centers (Bender & Shores, 2007).

Tier 3 interventions are available for students who do not achieve success at the Tier 2 level. This level includes additional data collection and individualized interventions. Tier 3 interventions are more intense and focused on the individual student than either Tier 1 or Tier 2. According to Burns, Appleton, and Steuhouwer (2005) approximately 5% of the student population will utilize a Tier 3 intervention; however, less than 2% of student population will ultimately get referred for special education services. Tier 3 interventions provide students the greatest frequency and duration of interventions and progress monitoring. The success of this level is determined by the efficiency and effectiveness of the interventions proposed. According to Burns, Vanderwood, and Ruby (2005), the Tier 3 process is not efficient, has yet to be

implemented properly, and lacks overall consistency. The critics point to a lack of personnel training and a cloud of confusion still hovering around the goals and purpose of the RtI process.

RtI Training and Professional Development

According to Vaughn and Roberts (2007), Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are most beneficial to students when staff is highly trained to implement the interventions. Professional development and defined roles within the RtI process will help better prepare teachers and other school personnel to effectively utilize interventions and monitor progress of students. According to Kratochwill et al. (2007), research indicates that there is a relationship between high quality professional development and student achievement outlined in the No Child Left Behind standards.

Therefore, the importance of quality professional development to train school personnel about how to effectively implement RtI should not be understated. RtI requires significant training, planning, and preparation. Teachers, counselors, and administrators must be provided with ongoing professional development to become proficient with RtI implementation.

Kratchowill et al., (2007) argue that, for an educator's skill development to increase student outcomes, the professional development he/she receives needs to be ongoing and systematic. Educators and counselors are exiting their graduating institutions with little or no training on systematic interventions (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005), and a majority of school counselors receive no training on children with disabilities or the special education system (Erford, 2003). While special education legislation has been the catalyst for RtI, it is a school- wide implementation that affects all school personnel. RtI is a framework for effective schools with implications for school personnel training and implementation of instruction and interventions to the student body. RtI requires a shift in mindset from the classroom to the individual student.

This shift in instruction will require specialized training for all school personnel to provide services needed and required by the RtI framework.

Successful implementation of the RtI process is challenging, and, without support and proper training, educators will fail to increase successful student outcomes. Drame & Xu (2008) state that training within RtI should incorporate curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are tailored to meet the needs of the students. To meet these needs, educators must be collaborators and cultivate a climate of high-quality professional development for the betterment of their schools. All educators within a school must also share a common vision for RtI to aid all participants in reaching a goal of success. Varying state departments of education have begun implementing collaborative relationships to involve various stakeholders in the process of understanding the impact of RtI (Berekely, 2009). By creating open communication about the goals and vision of RtI, accompanied with quality professional development, the opportunities for successful implementation will increase along with positive increases in student outcomes.

Advocating for Struggling Students

Advocacy for students has long played a central role within the field of school counseling. School counselors' primary responsibilities as student advocates should include helping students reach their academic, career, and personal/social potential. These tenets are reflected within the four themes of the ASCA National Model: leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2012).

According to the ASCA National Model, effective school counseling programs should provide outreach for every student, be comprehensive in scope, developmental in nature, and preventive in design (ASCA, 2012). Several scholars have supported school counselors adopting an approach that includes social advocacy as a central focus of their work (Bemak & Chung,

2005; Eriksen, 1997; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). Lee (2007) stated that school counselors have a moral and ethical responsibility to advocate for students while serving as change agents for social and political agendas.

School Counselors and RtI

Issues within the literature for RtI provide a framework for the responsibilities of school counselors. According to the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association, 2012), school counselors are encouraged to provide individual and group counseling, consultation, and coordination of services to all students. Clements & Sabella (2010) state that, once a counselor becomes familiar with the RtI process, he/she can begin to understand that the foundation of RtI highly correlates to the components of the comprehensive school counseling program outlined in the ASCA National Model. Specifically, the model stipulates that school counseling programs work to identify specialized services based on the student's level of risk (2012). School counselors utilizing the National Model as a guide for practice work adhere to the standards of using data-driven decision making to guide their counseling program development; advocate for students; and collaborate with teachers, parents, and community members.

School counselors play a critical role in the RtI process. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2005), counselors should have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of how to recognize barriers to equal educational opportunities for students. These early interventions are critical to students' success, and school counselors play an integral part in identifying students' needs and assisting teachers with differentiated instruction.

School counselors can assist teachers in identifying, consulting, and collaborating with teachers and administrators. School counselors are often the first school personnel to identify

when students are struggling in one or more subject areas. This is a crucial step to begin identifying students for Tier 1 services and begin collaboration with teachers. While teachers are the experts in classroom instructions, counselors are the experts in assessments, diagnostic measures, and using data-collection to monitor progress. Working together, schools can collaborate and function as a problem-solving team to implement RtI effectively.

The RtI team helps general education teachers to identify evidence-based interventions for use in the classroom. While the teachers do much of the implementation, school counselors can utilize their specialized skills to determine the success of these interventions by using data and progress monitoring. According to Dahir & Stone (2006), teachers and counselors working together on determining the use and success of interventions has the greatest impact for student success.

Summary

A significant portion of the literature points to research and studies that have concluded that the number of students evaluated and placed into special education has increased over the last two decades (McNamara, Hollinger, & Constance, 2003). Pre-referral interventions have been created in response to the increase in special education students. Measures such as Response to Intervention (RtI) were created by the No Child Left Behind Act to provide an accountability system to ensure that students were receiving interventions prior to their referral for special education. RtI is a three-tiered educational framework that provides an infrastructure to support the use of evidence-based practices. RtI is a problem-solving model for instructing and intervening on behalf of all students to help improve their achievement (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007).

School counselors play an important role in the implementation of RtI, particularly in being knowledgeable about data-driven interventions and progress monitoring. Having an increased knowledge of the role that school counselors play within the RtI process will help to increase not only the effectiveness of the school counselor, but it will help to meet the needs of the students and increase their ability to be successful in the school climate. This study helps to fill a gap in the literature by gaining a better understanding of the awareness, involvement, and perceptions that school counselors have regarding the RtI model. This study also explores school counselors' experiences and captures the essence of what school counselors are living in their day-to-day work with RtI. The next chapter discusses the methodology and the intended analysis for the research study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to better understand the role of school counselors within the RtI process, specifically the understanding, involvement and perceptions of school counselors, as well as their experiences while working within the RtI model. The researcher utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods within the research design.

The following chapter provides a description of the design, population and sample, procedures, instrumentation, and intended analysis. The purpose of the study was to answer the following primary research question: What are the awareness, involvement, perceptions, and experiences of school counselors working within the response to intervention (RtI) model?

Design

The research design for this study includes a QUAN → QUAL process for data analysis. As part of the design, quantitative data collection was the primary method for the study, followed by a qualitative data collection that expands upon the results from the quantitative section (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative data was obtained from the author originated Response to Intervention Survey. Once the results of the survey were formed into a descriptive analysis, the qualitative data in the study builds on the results from the quantitative portion of the study.

The researcher sent the survey to school counselors who are current members of the American School Counseling Association and are working within the 10 states that primarily utilize the RtI model (Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa,

Louisiana, Rhode Island, and West Virginia)(RtI Adoption Survey, 2011). State selection was based upon which Departments of Education are instructing their districts to primarily adhere to RtI. Since this survey is to seek out school counselors who are currently working within the RtI model, the researcher wanted to directly survey states that are currently practicing RtI and no other intervention models, such as the discrepancy model. According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (2011), all states allow the use of the RtI model. However, most of the states (40) allow for the districts to have the flexibility of using the RtI model, discrepancy model, or a combination of programs.

The survey requested that school counselors report their understanding, involvement, and perceptions of RtI. Conducting interviews with practicing school counselors regarding their experiences working within the RtI model completed the qualitative portion of the study. The findings from both methods were synthesized in order to present information in a manner consistent with the research design. The researcher began collecting data from the intended participants in the fall of 2012 upon receiving approval from her dissertation committee and the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Rational for Using Mixed Method Research

Using a mixed-method study provided both qualitative and quantitative data in one research design. According to Ivankova, Creswell, and Stick (2006), the data collected from both types of research merges to form a more complete picture of the research problem. One of the advantages of completing a mixed methods study is that the strengths of one type of method can offset the weaknesses of the other. Quantitative research does not allow for in-depth observations or exploration of participants' stories, while qualitative research limits the number of participants and can be weakened due to the researcher's active role in interpreting the data.

Therefore, using mixed methods can further validate the results by utilizing the strengths of both designs.

The use of qualitative data collection following a quantitative survey enhanced the findings of the study and allowed for further exploration of the topic. Researchers such as Creswell (2009) have argued for the use of such designs to strengthen data collection and interpretation. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) state that a mixed method study can be carried out in sequential steps or parallel to each other. The researcher collected data in sequential steps beginning with a quantitative survey followed by qualitative interviews. The Response to Intervention survey gathered information from school counselors regarding their understanding, involvement, and perceptions of the RtI model. Interviews followed the survey collection to further expand upon and illuminate the experiences of school counselors working within RtI.

Population and Sample

The participants in this study are male and female school counselors who are currently practicing at elementary or secondary grade levels. Participants were selected from a database collected from the American School Counseling Association (ASCA). ASCA currently has over 29,000 members. These members are practicing and retired school counselors, graduate students, faculty, and college counselors (ASCA, 2012). The researcher narrowed this list to currently practicing school counselors who are working within the 10 states that primarily utilize the RtI model (Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Rhode Island, and West Virginia). ASCA provided an electronic database in which the researcher selected a pool of currently practicing school counselors based on the above criteria. An initial search of the ASCA database indicated that there are one thousand, nine hundred and three members who met the above criteria. The search parameters included being a current

ASCA member, being from one of the 10 states listed above, and currently practicing as an elementary or secondary school counselor. Following the selection procedures, the researcher contacted potential participants via email. The large, national pool of professionals was helpful in providing generalizability of the results to a national audience. The researcher used a purposeful sampling procedure when selecting the pool of currently practicing school counselors from an electronic database provided by ASCA.

Quantitative Data Collection

Instrumentation

The participants were emailed an invitation to participate in the survey. The author-originated survey instrument is referred to as The Response to Intervention Survey. The purposes of The Response to Intervention Survey were to collect information regarding school counselors' understanding, involvement, and perceptions regarding RtI and to gather important demographic information, including items such as gender, educational background, current school information, and number of years practicing.

Response to Intervention Survey

This author-originated survey not only ascertained demographic information, but also asked questions regarding the counselor's previous experiences, both educational and professional, familiarity with RtI, current involvement in the RtI process, and perceptions of their role within RtI. To help ensure the quality of the instrument, the researcher took great strides to increase validity and reliability during development. Three separate faculty members and the Director of the Social Science Research Lab, which routinely executes survey research, reviewed the instrument. The web-based questionnaire utilized the Qualtrics computer software program to obtain the data for this study.

For the purpose of this study, the design of each item in the survey evaluated counselors' prior knowledge and experience with the RtI model. Where appropriate, items on the survey were rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, and 4= strongly agree). These items focused on the following topics: school counselors' understanding of RtI concepts, involvement in the RtI model, perceptions of RtI, training and qualifications on the use of RtI, and faculty and administration participation in the RtI process. The researcher distributed the survey via email and gave the participants the option to receive mailed paper copies if requested.

Procedures

Upon approval from the researcher's dissertation committee and the University of Mississippi's IRB board, the researcher piloted the Response the Intervention survey to a small sample of school counselors to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument. Upon revisions, the researcher sent a letter of invitation and a link to the survey via email to each school counselor selected from ASCA's database. The email requested the participation of the recipient along with a description and purpose of the study. The email included a link that allowed participants to access the online questionnaire using Qualtrics Software. The participants were able to complete the survey online. The participants were also informed of the right to withdraw at any time. The email informed participants that their answers are confidential, and that the survey would take 15-20 minutes of their time to complete. Participants were given the option of providing their email address to speak with the researcher further about their experiences working within the RtI model. Two weeks after the initial emails were sent, the researcher sent a follow-up email to encourage participation in the research study.

All completed surveys were coded for the protection and confidentiality of the participant. Completed surveys and any ancillary materials were stored electronically on a jump drive and kept in a personal office in a locked file cabinet.

Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

Primary Research Question:

What are the awareness, involvement, perceptions, and experiences of school counselors working within the response to intervention (RtI) model?

Quantitative Research Questions

1. What is the perception of the RtI model by school counselors?
2. How involved are school counselors within the RtI model?
3. What basic understanding do school counselors have regarding the RtI model?

Qualitative Research Question

What have school counselors experiences been while working within the RtI model?

Qualitative Interview Questions

1. What is your perception of the RtI model?
2. How would you describe your role within RtI?
3. What function does RtI serve within your current school guidance program?
4. Do you feel like additional training from your district or a traditional counselor education program would be helpful to you?

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher utilized Qualtrics to gather and organize data from the survey. For the analysis, the researcher utilized two statistical software packages: the Statistical Package of the

Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. In order to analyze the survey data, the researcher used descriptive statistics.

The first step within the descriptive analysis was to conduct univariate analyses of the survey data to identify participants' understanding, involvement, and perceptions of the RtI process. Univariate analysis is simply a method of statistics that allows the researcher to examine one variable at a time (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). This form of statistical evaluation allowed the researcher to determine patterns of responses to each variable. The researcher described average answers using the appropriate measure of central tendency along with the range or variation of values for each variable.

To perform the univariate analyses, each response on the 4-point Likert scale was assigned a numerical value. For example, strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, agree = 3, and strongly agree = 4. Answers requiring a yes or no answer were given a value of no = 1, yes = 2. For those questions requiring an actual numeric value, the actual score was entered. Each participant's response was entered into SPSS using the aforementioned value system, which allowed the researcher to determine frequency scores, as well as percentages. The researcher calculated the appropriate measures of central tendency and dispersion for each variable based on the level of measurement of the responses.

Following the descriptive analysis of the survey results, the researcher was able to make general claims about the understanding and involvement of school counselors and their role within the RtI model. Identifying the understanding, involvement, and perceptions of school counselors in RtI creates a base knowledge of the subject.

Quantitative Summary

Phase 1 of the research design empirically evaluated the role of school counselors within the RtI process. It helped to determine whether school counselors are advocating for students who are experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties. It also evaluated school counselors' level of understanding, involvement, and perceptions of the RtI model.

Qualitative Research Design

From the quantitative foundation built in phase 1, the researcher began phase 2 of the research design, which consisted of using qualitative/interview methods to better understand the experiences of school counselors working within RtI. Using a purposeful sample of school counselors who are currently working within RtI, the researcher randomly selected 10 individuals who volunteered their contact information and conducted phone interviews with them. According to Creswell (2009), a purposeful sample is when a qualitative researcher works to select individuals who best help them understand the research problem.

Next, the researcher recorded each interview and transcribed them for analysis. Specifically, in phase 2, the researcher employed a phenomenological approach to expand upon survey data collected to create an in-depth description of the experiences of school counselors who are operating within the RtI model. This section includes a description of the qualitative design, participants, procedures, and data analysis plan for phase 2 of the study.

Design

The researcher conducted individual interviews with 10 school counselors to explore their perspectives and experiences while working within the RtI model. During semi-structured interviews, each participant was asked open-ended questions to elicit narrative responses. The researcher estimated each interview to range between 30 and 45 minutes in length. Data from

the interviews were coded by themes to describe trends in school counselors' experiences in the RtI model. The researcher utilized NVivo Software to efficiently store and code data.

Participants

Ten ASCA members who are currently operating as school counselors and working within RtI were selected. These participants volunteered their contact information and stated an interest in further speaking with the researcher through the Response to Intervention survey. Participants were randomly selected from the pool of those who volunteered their contact information. Due to the limitations set upon the study, participants worked in one of the following states that primarily adhere to the RtI model (Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Rhode Island, and West Virginia).

Instruments

The instruments used for this study were a set of four open-ended research questions and the researcher. The goal of the research questions were to elicit narrative responses to school counselors' experiences while working within the RtI model. These interview questions were administered to participants in one-on-one interviews. The interview questions were developed after the completion of phase 1 in the research design. This allowed the data collected from the survey to help inform phase 2 of the research design and the interview questions. The questions fit within a phenomenological framework to encourage participants to make meaning of their experiences and share their perceptions and insights related to the field of school counseling and the RtI model.

Qualitative Research Question

1. What have school counselors' experiences been while working within the RtI model?

Qualitative Interview Questions

1. What is your perception of the RtI model?
2. How would you describe your role within RtI?
3. What function does RtI serve within your current school guidance program?
4. Do you feel like additional training from your district or a traditional counselor education program would be helpful to you?

Researcher's Background

Patton (2002) states that the researcher's background experience, prior training, and perspectives are important for establishing the credibility of the researcher. Patton also claimed that "the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry" (p. 566). Therefore, both personal and professional information about the researcher could potentially impact data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

As the researcher, my professional and personal experiences are what have led me to study this topic. Prior to the Fall of 2005, I served as a school counselor for two years and as a remediation teacher for one year. I entered into school counseling at the age of 25 and am currently completing a Ph.D. program in Counselor Education.

While working as a school counselor, most of my time was spent advocating for students who were experiencing both academic and behavioral difficulties. Within the realm of special education, I served as both the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and 504 plan coordinator. Much of my role as coordinator was to establish meetings and help to ensure that the best interest of the children and their needs were being met. All of my requirements within my position demanded that I have base knowledge of special education laws and requirements, along with specific interventions I could utilize to help assist students who were struggling to meet academic and behavioral standards.

From a personal perspective, I have worked with children in different capacities for over 10 years. I believe that all children have the right to a fair and equitable education and learning environment. My goal as an individual is to always advocate and volunteer to work with children with special needs in my local area.

Researcher Bias

The researcher may bring her own biases into the study from her previous experiences as a school counselor and educator. It is the researcher's hope that these biases have only enhanced the study and not detracted from the findings and interpretations. These background experiences have helped to develop questions, which will be applicable, as well as to elicit rich responses. The researcher's experiences as a counselor have helped to enhance her skills to be a good listener during the interviews. There are many other skills she learned as a counselor that have helped to enhance the researcher's ability to obtain quality interviews filled with rich, thick descriptions of school counselors' experiences with RtI. While my biases may affect my research, I believe that my experiences have been a greater benefit to the study than a negative, and, in the end, I believe the results reflect that.

Analysis, Interpretation, and Reporting

When considering whether qualitative data is trustworthy, it is important to consider both the potential validity and reliability of the data (Patton, 2002). Verifying data validity of qualitative research involves utilizing several steps by the researcher independently (Patton, 2002). However, verifying data reliability is also the process that ensures the researcher's approach is consistent with other, similar qualitative researchers' methods and projects (Creswell, 2009). In this section, the researcher discusses the steps used in order to increase confidence in the research findings.

In order to illustrate the rigor of the study, the researcher focused on two types of triangulation: methods triangulation and triangulation of sources. Methods triangulation refers to investigating the consistency of results (Creswell, 2009). This was accomplished by following several steps. First, the researcher analyzed the Response to Intervention survey results of each participant by using a statistical quantitative analysis. The researcher also compared the findings from interviews by using a qualitative method. Next, the researcher triangulated these sources through verifying the consistency of the data collected during the interviews. This involved having independent researchers analyze the transcripts of the interviews. The researcher then eliminated any themes in the data not in agreement between researchers. Methods triangulation was used to compare the survey results of each participant on the Response to Intervention survey with the data that was gathered from each participant's interview. Patton (2002) stated that combining quantitative and qualitative methods aids in synthesizing several research questions into a single, integrated interpretation of the results.

Next, the researcher compared the findings from each interview in order to triangulate the qualitative data sources and analyze the data that each participant verbally provided on each interview question. Triangulation of qualitative data sources provided more understanding about the reason behind the differences found in the data between participants (Patton, 2002).

Design checks were also utilized, since the design of the study implies using a purposeful sample of school counselors working within the RtI model. According to Patton (2002), this step helps the researchers understand how the design of the study influences the research results. This includes limitations based on the participants in this study and/or limitations of the period when the researcher collected the data.

Phenomenological Analysis

According to Creswell (2002), data preparation and analysis should involve six different steps: (1) Organizing and preparing the data; (2) double checking the data by reading over it multiple times; (3) coding the data; (4) producing a general description of participant responses and developing categories or themes from the data; (5) deciding how the data findings will be displayed or discussed; and, finally, (6) interpreting the data.

Step one in this process involved transcribing all of the interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim as to what the participants said during their interviews. Transcribing the session in this way, hopefully, provided an in-depth view of what each participant's perspective is, which is why the researcher selected this route (Patton, 2002). The researcher indicated in the transcripts exactly who is speaking and at what time during the session. After the transcripts were completed, the researcher began to organize the data (Creswell, 2002).

Step two, data organization, involved making sure that the data was labeled appropriately (e.g., the appropriate participant's speech was identified and not credited to another participant by mistake) and that the transcripts were not missing any pertinent information (e.g., every minute of the tape had been recorded and transcribed). The researcher read over the transcripts to get a broad overview of the information contained in the data (Creswell, 2002). This overview involved checking for the tone of the interviews as well as what ideas the participants were expressing. After considering these factors, the researcher analyzed the data using a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2002).

Step three entailed analyzing the data. The purpose of a phenomenological analysis is to grasp and clarify the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a particular group of individuals (Patton, 2002). This approach involved describing personal experiences, finding significant statements, creating themes, and writing a composite description that is the essence of

the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher also analyzed the data collected using codes and themes. Themes emerged as a result of the analysis and were defined into categories during coding.

For step four, the researcher described the setting and participant population by creating participant profiles for each of the interviewees. This involved writing a brief description of pertinent demographic information and a quote that best summarizes each participant's experiences (Patton, 2002). Step five involved a discussion of the themes and subthemes derived from the data, including direct quotes from the participants and illustrations of various participant perspectives and ideas. Finally, in step six, the researcher interpreted the data in order to see what relevant findings emerge from the data with regard to this specific population.

Ethical Considerations

In order to carry out an ethical study, the researcher established a framework to guide the study and created parameters in which to conduct the research. Within this framework, the researcher established the considerations for relevant content biases, prejudices, and perspectives. The framework also addressed the management of these items. The IRB approval from the university was the first step in ensuring an ethical study. The researcher also provided detailed information about the purpose and procedures of the research study to each participant.

Qualitative Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to clarify the experiences of school counselors working within the RtI model. Through semi-structured interviews, school counselors were able to describe and narrate their experiences. Phase 2 of the research design sought to expand upon data collected from the Response to Intervention survey and further clarify the understanding, involvement, perceptions, and experiences of school counselors.

Conclusions

The research methods outlined in chapter three served as a map to guide the mixed methods research design for the present study. The research follows both a quantitative and qualitative/phenomenological approach to explore the understanding, involvement, perceptions, and experiences of school counselors working within the RtI model. Chapter four provides a summary of the survey data and interview data for this exploratory study. Chapter four also describes the descriptive analysis along with the qualitative analysis and interpretations. Chapter five then contains the discussion, conclusions, and implications for the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to clarify and better understand the perceptions, awareness, knowledge, and experiences of school counselors who are currently working within the response to intervention (RtI) model. The primary research question for this study was: What are the awareness, involvement, perceptions, and experiences of school counselors working within the RtI model? In order to determine school counselors' levels of awareness, knowledge, perceptions, and experiences surrounding the RtI model, the researcher administered the Response to Intervention survey. Data was collected from a total of 355 participants and 10 volunteers from the survey were interviewed. The results of the study add to the research findings from previous studies conducted by Ryan, Kauffman, and Carroll (2011) and Gruman and Hoelzen (2011) that have explored RtI interventions and school counselors' involvement. This chapter provides the findings for this study and the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results.

Participants

The population for this study was school counselors working in states that primarily adhere to the RtI model. The sample was created from current ASCA members in these states, and these 1,904 individuals received an email invitation to complete the survey. After two reminders to complete the survey, 355 school counselors returned their surveys; however, only 270 of these were actually complete and used for the data analysis. The response rate for this study is 19%. According to Laguilles, Williams, and Saunders (2011) response rates higher than

50% are now anomalous for web based surveys, and rates lower than 40% are quite typical. The survey response yielded a 95% confidence level with a 5.5 confidence interval.

From the 270 completed surveys, 117 participants volunteered their contact information and stated that they would be willing to be interviewed by the researcher. From these 117 participants, the researcher used a purposeful sampling design to select interviewees. These participants were categorized according to grade level: elementary or secondary. The researcher then selected 10 total participants with five randomly selected from each grade level list. The researcher contacted the 10 participants via email to set up a time to be interviewed. In response to the first email, nine participants responded, and the researcher was able to set up interview times. After the tenth participant failed to respond to the second request, another participant was randomly selected from the elementary school counselors volunteer list.

Quantitative Data and Analysis

The quantitative data was obtained from the Response to Intervention survey, which included 33 Likert-type questions. This survey examined various views of school counselors regarding the RtI model. Once the survey was completed and submitted by each counselor, the researcher began to gather the data and transfer the information into an Excel spreadsheet. The data was then analyzed using a descriptive analysis to identify participant awareness, involvement, and perceptions of the RtI model. This form of statistical description allowed the researcher to determine patterns of responses to each question. The researcher described the responses using the appropriate measure of central tendency along with the range or variation of values for each question, when appropriate.

Study Revision

Prior to conducting the Response to Intervention survey, the researcher conducted a pilot study with one school district that met the criteria for the study. Each school counselor within the school district completed the Response to Intervention Survey. After the completion of the survey, the researcher met with each counselor (6 total) to complete an interview regarding his/her experience with the survey instrument. The researcher sought information about the participants' level of comprehension regarding the instrument, technical difficulties, and their overall view of the survey instrument. As a result of the pilot study, minor revisions were made to three questions to add further clarification to participants and an open-ended question was added to the end of the instrument to allow participant the opportunity for further illustrate their thoughts regarding RtI procedures.

Response to Intervention Survey

This author-originated survey ascertained demographic information and included questions regarding the counselor's previous experiences, both educational and professional, familiarity with RtI, current involvement in the RtI process, and perceptions of their role within RtI. Previous research influenced the design of the survey, such as Stargart's (2009) study which explored teacher's awareness and understanding of the RtI model. The design of each item in the survey was to evaluate counselors' prior knowledge and experience with the RtI model. Where appropriate, items on the survey were rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, and 4= strongly agree). These items focused on the following topics: school counselors' understanding of RtI concepts, involvement in the RtI model, perceptions of RtI, training and qualifications on the use of RtI, and faculty and administration participation in the RtI process.

State Selection

State selection was based upon which Departments of Education are instructing their districts to primarily adhere to RtI. Since this survey was designed to seek out school counselors who are currently working within the RtI model, the researcher wanted to directly survey states currently practicing RtI and no other intervention models, such as the discrepancy model. According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (2011) all states allow the use of the RtI model; however, most of the states (40), allow for the districts to have the flexibility of using the RtI model, discrepancy model, or a combination of programs.

As previously stated, 270 elementary and secondary school counselors in schools within 10 states (Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Rhode Island, and West Virginia) who are current ASCA members completed the survey and became the sample analyzed throughout this chapter. As shown in Table A, the largest portion of participants were employed in the State of Georgia (32%) with the second largest group of participants employed in Colorado (20%). Other states were represented by the following percentages: Connecticut (4%), Delaware (4%), Florida (14%), Iowa (6%), Indiana (6%), Louisiana (8%), Rhode Island (3%), and West Virginia (2%).

Table A

State Participants

State	Responses	%
Colorado	53	19.77
Connecticut	11	4.18
Delaware	11	4.18
Florida	38	14.07
Georgia	87	32.32
Iowa	17	6.46
Indiana	16	6.08
Louisiana	22	7.98
Rhode Island	8	2.66

West Virginia	7	2.28
Total	270	100

Within these 10 states, both public and private schools were represented within the data. However, the majority of school counselors were employed within public schools (98%) with only five school counselors currently working at a private school (2%). Participants worked at varying grade levels (see Table B); data collected shows that 41% of participants worked at an elementary school, 27% were employed at a middle school, and 27% worked at high schools. The majority of school counselors (47%) were employed at schools with populations between 501-1,000 students. Twenty-four percent worked at schools with student populations between 0-500, 16% worked at schools with a total number of students between 1,001-1,500, and 13% were employed at schools with populations of 1,501 students or more. Participants were given the opportunity to describe their school's setting as Urban, Rural, or Suburban. According to the participants, 47% served in suburban schools, while 29% of participants described their setting as rural and 23% chose urban.

Table B

School Demographics

School Level	Responses	%	School Population	Responses	%
Elementary	108	41	0-500	64	24
Middle	72	27	501-1,000	124	47
High	72	27	1,001-1,500	42	16
Other	14	5	1,501 +	33	13
Total	266	100		263	100
School Type	Responses	%	School Setting		
Public	258	98	Urban	61	23
Private	5	2	Rural	77	29
Total	263	100	Suburban	124	47

			Total	262	100
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Description of the Demographics

Section 1 of the Response to Intervention survey solicited demographic information about the school counselors’ gender, ethnicity, years of experience, and educational background. This data was collected to provide general descriptors of participants and provide opportunity for further analysis when analyzing possible relationships between variables.

Personal and Educational Background

As shown in Table C the majority of the survey participants were female (88%) for this study. The majority of respondents were Caucasian (84%). African Americans represented 9% of the sample, while Hispanic/Latino (4%), Other (2%), and Asian Americans (1%) rounded out the respondents. The educational background among participants varied. According to the survey responses, 45% of respondents had a Master’s degree plus an additional 30 credit hours, 12% held a Master’s degree plus an additional 15 credit hours, and 36% held a Master’s degree. Eight percent of respondents had a Ph.D. or Ed.D. The average counselor had 10.38 years experience or years employed as a school counselor with a range of experience between 1 and 47 years. As for teaching background, 58% had previous teaching experience.

Table C

Participant Demographics

Gender	Responses	%	Level of Education	Responses	%
Male	32	12	B.A./B.S.	1	0
Female	233	88	M.S.	94	36
Total	265	100	M.S. +15 Hours	31	12
			M.S. +30 Hours	118	45
Ethnicity	Responses	%	Ph.D. or Ed.D.	20	8
White/Caucasian	223	84	Total	264	100

Asian American	2	1			
African American	24	9	Teaching Experience	Responses	%
Hispanic/Latino	12	5	Yes	154	58
Other	5	2	No	110	42
Total	266	100	Total	264	100

Involvement and Training

The second section of the Response to Intervention survey was designed to ascertain information regarding school counselors' current involvement within the RtI model. When participants were questioned regarding whether or not they perceived RtI documentation and services to be part of their role as a school counselor, 61% stated Yes, and 39% stated No (see Table D). While only 61% believed RtI to be part of their responsibilities, 83% reported being currently involved within the RtI process. Of the 83% currently involved in RtI, 66% of those school counselors were spending one to five hours per week working with RtI with 24% reporting working between 6 and 10 hours, and 10% stating that they were spending 10 + hours per week with RtI (see Table D).

Table D

RtI Involvement

Perceive a Role in RtI	Responses	%	RtI Training	Responses	%
Yes	161	61	1-3 hours	42	19
No	102	39	4-6 hours	53	24
Total	263	100	7-9 hours	25	11
			10-12 hours	34	15
Involvement in RtI	Responses	%	13-15 hours	6	3
Yes	219	83	16 + hours	60	27
No	45	17	Total	220	100
Total	264	100			
Average Hours/Week	Reponses	%			
0 to 5	146	67			

6 to 10	49	23			
11 +	24	11			
Total	219	100			

Another descriptor that this survey sought to explore was the level of familiarity and training counselors currently held with the RtI process. When asked about hours of training that they had received, 27% had received 16+ hours of training, 24% had four to six hours, 19% had one to three hours, 15% had 10-12 hours, 11% had seven to nine hours, and 3% had 13-15 hours of training on RtI. While training hours varied among participants, when asked if they felt that they had received adequate training to work effectively within the RtI model, a slight majority of school counselors (54%) either agreed or strongly agreed. As for familiarity with RtI terms and founding principles, the majority (87%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were familiar with the terms and principles. Participants were questioned about Master-level graduate training programs. Seventy nine percent agreed or strongly agreed that these types of programs should provide more training and education on issues such as the RtI model and special education services. More specifically, only 14% of participants felt that their practicum and internship students they supervised were adequately prepared to work within the RtI model.

Awareness

In addition to previous survey items regarding levels of familiarity, the researcher designed questions to specifically look at school counselors' awareness of the RtI model. The survey included eight true/false questions to determine school counselors' level of awareness of RtI requirements, implementation, and use. On each of the eight questions, more than half of the participants scored correctly. The range of percentages correct varied from 58% to 93%, depending upon the question (see Table E).

Table E

Awareness

Correct Knowledge Questions	Correct Responses	% Correct	Total
RtI is Required by Law	181	70	258
Can Be Used To Identify Learning Disabilities	227	87	260
Students Can Enter at Any Tier	150	58	257
Most Students in Tier 1	240	93	258
RtI Is Precursor to Formal Testing	237	91	260
Only Used For Reading Difficulties	228	87	261
Only For At-Risk Students Assessed	233	90	260
Used In Place Of Special Education	162	63	259

Perceptions

The final section of the RtI survey focused on gathering data pertaining to the participants' perceptions regarding the RtI model and process. Questions sought to gain clarification around the role of school counselors and how they perceived the model and its effectiveness. According to data collected, the majority (61%) believed that RtI was part of their role as a school counselor, but it may or may not be a primary responsibility among their current position. As shown in Table F, when participants were asked whom they believed to be primarily responsible for RtI services within their school, the majority (55%) indicated the general classroom teachers. Other support staff was selected by 12% of respondents, followed by school counselors (10%), general administrators (9%), special education teachers (6%), special education administrators (5%), and school psychologists (4%).

Table F

Responsible Party

Perceive as Responsible for RtI	Responses	%
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General Administrators	23	9
Special Education Administrators	12	5
General Teachers	143	55
Special Education Teachers	15	6
School Counselors	27	10
School Psychologists	10	4
Other Support Staff	32	12
Total	262	100

Additional questions regarding the role of school counselors indicated that the majority of school counselors (72%) felt that they had a clear understanding of their role within RtI at their current school, and 77% also felt that their views are valued and desired when discussing and working within the RtI model and process. The majority of respondents (71%) also felt that, in order for RtI to be effective within their school, their participation is necessary.

The final battery of questions in the survey examined counselors' views of the effectiveness of RtI. Overall, 61% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they perceived RtI to have had a positive impact on classroom instruction within their school. Fifty-eight percent further indicated that they believed RtI has led to improved student achievement and behavior within their schools. When questioned about RtI and the effectiveness of data collection, 79% strongly agreed or agreed that they perceived RtI to be a positive method of collecting and using data to make instructional decisions. When specifically asked whether they utilized RtI to collect and use data within their school counseling program, 76% indicated they did, and 57% believed that RtI implementation has resulted in a proactive system that advocates for the needs of all students in their school.

From a broader school environmental perspective, data collected from respondents indicates that the majority (57%) believe that the implementation of an RtI model in their school has led to better collaboration among general education, special education, reading/Title 1

teachers, and other support staff (e.g., school counselors). Questions regarding support for RtI demonstrated that only 47% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the teachers/faculty at their school support the implementation and use of an RtI model. However, 75% agreed or strongly agreed that the administrators at their school support implementation and use of the RtI model (see Table G).

Table G

Perceptions

Perceptions of RtI	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total	Mean
Positive Impact on Instruction	3.07 (8)	6.90 (18)	28.74 (75)	44.06 (115)	17.24 (45)	261	3.66
Improved Student Outcomes	3.45 (9)	8.43 (22)	30.27 (79)	43.30 (113)	14.56 (38)	261	3.57
Effective Data Collection	2.29 (6)	5.34 (14)	12.98 (34)	57.25 (150)	22.14 (58)	262	3.92
Better Collaboration	3.46 (9)	16.54 (43)	23.08 (60)	41.54 (108)	15.38 (40)	260	3.49
Proactive System	3.83 (10)	9.58 (25)	29.50 (77)	39.85 (104)	17.24 (45)	261	3.57
Teacher/Faculty Support	5.36 (14)	19.54 (51)	27.97 (73)	36.78 (96)	10.34 (27)	261	3.27
Administrator Support	3.05 (8)	6.49 (17)	15.27 (40)	46.56 (122)	28.63 (75)	262	3.91

*Note. SD=Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

The final question on the RtI survey contained a qualitative open-ended response. The question sought to gain information about what school counselors perceived as most needed in helping their school implement RtI effectively. These results were determined by the researcher, who hand-coded the open-ended responses and clustered together similar topics to help form the emerging themes. Data collected from this response has been analyzed into two consistent and present themes: additional training and additional support staff.

According to previously-stated survey results, while the majority of school counselors (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that they themselves had received adequate training,

respondents articulated in the qualitative open-response question that additional training is needed for teachers, administrators, and support staff. Participants also stated that this additional training would provide better clarification and consistency, which would help increase RtI efficiency. One respondent stated: “We need clear and consistent understanding, clear and consistent procedures, adequate training, as well as school-wide buy-in.”

Another respondent stated:

“Our school needs the time to properly train all teachers and staff, detailed procedures and processes supported by administrators. I feel that the largest hurdle is trying to coordinate with so many different people who do not always see or understand the RtI model.”

The second theme presented by respondents was a need for additional support staff. Numerous participants stated that teachers and staff were overwhelmed by their caseload and were, therefore, not providing the students and interventions the attention that they needed. A staff member devoted to RtI who could be seen as the “expert” was needed to oversee and lead the RtI process. One respondent stated:

“Our school needs personnel dedicated to coordinate RTI, assist teachers with interventions and paperwork, follow-up with teachers on intervention monitoring, scheduling meetings, collecting and dis-aggregating data, following-up with teachers and parents, etc.”

In summary, these quantitative findings provide descriptive data regarding the levels of involvement, levels of awareness, and current perceptions of the RtI model and process held by school counselors. The qualitative question provided an additional description to perceptions of school counselors and what they feel is additionally needed to help RtI become more effective

within their schools. The next section of chapter four describes and discusses the qualitative analysis that stemmed from the Response to Intervention survey.

Qualitative Data and Analysis

The purpose of the second phase of data collection was to gain a greater understanding of how school counselors experience the RtI model. Using the quantitative data to inform the qualitative interviews, the researcher designed the questions to gain additional information from participants and help illuminate the experiences of school counselors working within the RtI model. The findings of this phenomenological study are presented in this chapter and include demographic data and participant profiles, followed by a narration of the themes recognized in the study.

Participants Summary

Data was gathered from 10 school counselors employed full time at public and private schools around the United States. All of the participants are current members of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) and hold current licenses within their state of practice. All 10 participants were selected using a purposeful sampling technique. The 117 survey participants who volunteered their contact information and stated that they would be willing to be interviewed by the researcher were divided according to the grade level (elementary or secondary) of the school at which they were currently employed. The researcher randomly selected five volunteers from each list for a total of 10 interviews. Each of these 10 participants were contacted via email to set up a time to be interviewed. Following a failed attempt at contacting one of the chosen participants, another participant was randomly selected from the elementary list. All of the participants acknowledged working within the RtI model, though to

varying roles and degrees. All participants worked in states where the use of the RtI model is required by their state department of education and their local school district.

Schools' Summary

The 10 interviewees were each employed in varying states and school districts. The schools and school districts were not specifically identified or sought, only the individual participants. The focus of the interviews was not on the schools or districts. Instead, the focus was on the experience and perspectives that describe/inform the work of school counselors within the RtI model or process. Therefore, the description of the schools is merely included in order to assist in contextualizing the stories and experiences of the participants.

Three school counseling participants worked in the state of Georgia. Two participants worked in Florida, and two more are from Colorado. The other three participants came from Rhode Island, West Virginia, and Louisiana, respectively. The participants were employed primarily at public schools (80%), with only two participants working at private institutions. The participants were employed at schools that varied in size, location, and racial diversity. Some of the schools were identified as being urban, while the majority were labeled as suburban (70%) according to the participants. The majority of school counselors (60%) worked in schools with populations of 500-1000 students. The largest school was identified as having a population of 1500-2000 students and the smallest had fewer than 500 students.

Demographic Data

Demographic data was gathered from the interviewees during the survey portion of the data collection process. Demographic data included participants' gender, age, ethnicity, education, and years of experience. Pseudonyms have been chosen by the researcher and used to

identify the research participants to help maintain their anonymity. Schools where the participants are currently employed are referenced by the state where they are located.

Women made up 80% of the participants; only two male counselors (20%) were interviewed. The participants' ages ranged from 29-60. The average age of the interviewees was 46 years old. Eighty percent (eight) of participants identified as White/Caucasian and 20% (two) identified as Hispanic/Latino (see Table H). Most of the participants stated that they had earned a Master's degree plus an additional 30 hours (60%), two stated that they had received a Master's degree plus an additional 15 hours, one participant stated that he/she had earned a Ph.D. or Ed.D., and one participant stated he/she had earned a Master's degree. The participants' years of experience ranged from 3-29 years, with the average years of experience being 11 years.

Table H

Qualitative Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Education Level
Mrs. Olson	Female	50	White	MS + 30
Mr. Sterling	Male	60	Hispanic	MS + 30
Mrs. Francis	Female	56	White	MS + 15
Mr. Draper	Male	29	White	MS + 30
Dr. Holloway	Female	43	White	Ph.D/Ed.D
Mrs. Campbell	Female	37	White	MS + 15
Mrs. Bishop	Female	50	White	MS + 30
Mrs. Cooper	Female	37	White	MS + 30
Mrs. Blankenship	Female	52	White	MS
Mrs. Cosgrove	Female	31	Hispanic	MS + 30

Participant Profiles

Following are profiles of each of the 10 research participants. They are identified using a pseudonym, and all identifiable information shared during the course of the interview has been omitted to help retain their privacy.

Mrs. Olson

At the age of 50, Mrs. Olson is a seasoned school counselor with almost 30 years of experience in education, and she works as a secondary school counselor. Mrs. Olson has an education background and spent many years in the classroom. She is currently involved in the RtI model and has had 16+ hours of RtI training. When questioned about her experiences with RtI, Mrs. Olson stated “I like the idea of RtI, I like the idea of people being responsible for actually doing what they are supposed to be doing.”

Mr. Sterling

One of the two male participants in the qualitative portion of the study, Mr. Sterling identified himself as 60 years of age, Hispanic, and having 9 years of experience working as an elementary school counselor. Mr. Sterling came from a non-traditional background, working in a private business for years before he decided to go back and get his degree in counseling and become a school counselor. Due to his experience in business, Mr. Sterling says he enjoys the career-counseling component of his job best and believes that career is an area of strength for him as a counselor. When asked about his experiences with RtI, Mr. Sterling stated “ I believe that RtI is a great model, an extremely important cog in the work that we do as a whole here at my school.”

Mrs. Francis

Identified as a white, female participant at the age of 56, Mrs. Francis describes herself as a data junky. Mrs. Francis has 10 years experience working as a secondary school counselor. According to her statements, her district thrives on assessments and academic testing, which suits her just fine; she finds this aspect of her job extremely satisfying and thinks that RtI is a great model to utilize when gathering data. She states, “While often I focus more on the

behavioral aspects of RtI, I have found the model greatly beneficial for us to gather and track both academic and behavioral data on students.”

Mr. Draper

The second male participant that identified himself as white, 29-years-old, and is one of the newest to the field of school counseling, with only four years experience. Mr. Draper works in a small (0-500 students) elementary building and states that RtI is just a way of life to him. According to Mr. Draper, he’s been working with RtI since he started his practicum. This experience has given him the opportunity to do RtI at multiple sites and see how different school counselors and different schools handle RtI. He states “RtI can be a very valuable tool if it is implemented correctly.” However, he goes on to state “unfortunately, my school is not so great; our resources are limited and often we find ourselves struggling.”

Dr. Holloway

Dr. Holloway is a 43-year-old white female with a Ph.D in Education. She has over 10 years experience working as a secondary school counselor and comes from a psychology background before entering into education. According to the participant, she currently works as an RtI consultant and works with her fellow colleagues to ensure that RtI is being properly implemented. She states, “I think if it’s done properly, it works. In other words, if it’s done right, it’s extremely effective. I’ve seen it work.”

Mrs. Campbell

Mrs. Campbell identified as a 37-year-old white, female school counselor with nine years of experience as a secondary level school counselor. She comes from a psychology and counseling background and has no experience working as a teacher. She states that her work within RtI is to collaborate with other colleagues and work within a team approach. She calls

herself a "vital team member" to drive the work of RtI within her school. She also states "I've been working with RtI for many years; it is a problem-solving approach, and I enjoy getting together as a team and working to help these struggling students."

Mrs. Bishop

A 50-year-old white, female school counselor, Mrs. Bishop is the first participant to identify himself or herself as a leader within RtI. Mrs. Bishop has 15 years experience working as an elementary school counselor and comes from a traditional teaching background before entering into school counseling. She states that her experience within the classroom, as well as her work as a school counselor, help her to take on a leadership position within RtI. At her school, she coordinates a team approach, which she supervises and directs with a vigilant eye. She states "I lead the RtI taskforce within my school; we work to help children in a variety of ways, we work to ensure that no students slip through the cracks-not on my watch."

Mrs. Cooper

Mrs. Cooper describes herself as a 37-year-old white, female school counselor. She currently has 10 years experience working as a school counselor at the secondary-school level and does not have a teaching background. Mrs. Cooper strives to be an advocate for her students and stated that she feels RtI is one sure way to do just that. She stated, "I feel that the tiered process is an excellent way to intervene and work to address student needs. Through my work with RtI, I can advocate for students prior to a crisis situation. I don't have to wait for something to happen; I can be preventive in my work."

Mrs. Blankenship

This participant identifies herself as a 52-year-old white, female school counselor with five years experience working as an elementary school counselor. Mrs. Blankenship currently

works at a private school and works as a liaison between public and private schools. She works to help private schools in her area provide RtI interventions to struggling students. She describes herself as well-trained and possibly an expert within the RtI process. She stated “I work with my school and others to help struggling students who have been identified through screenings or teacher observations. I specialize in helping other counselors and teachers when interventions aren’t working, how to take a closer look at that student and come up with a different plan.”

Mrs. Cosgrove

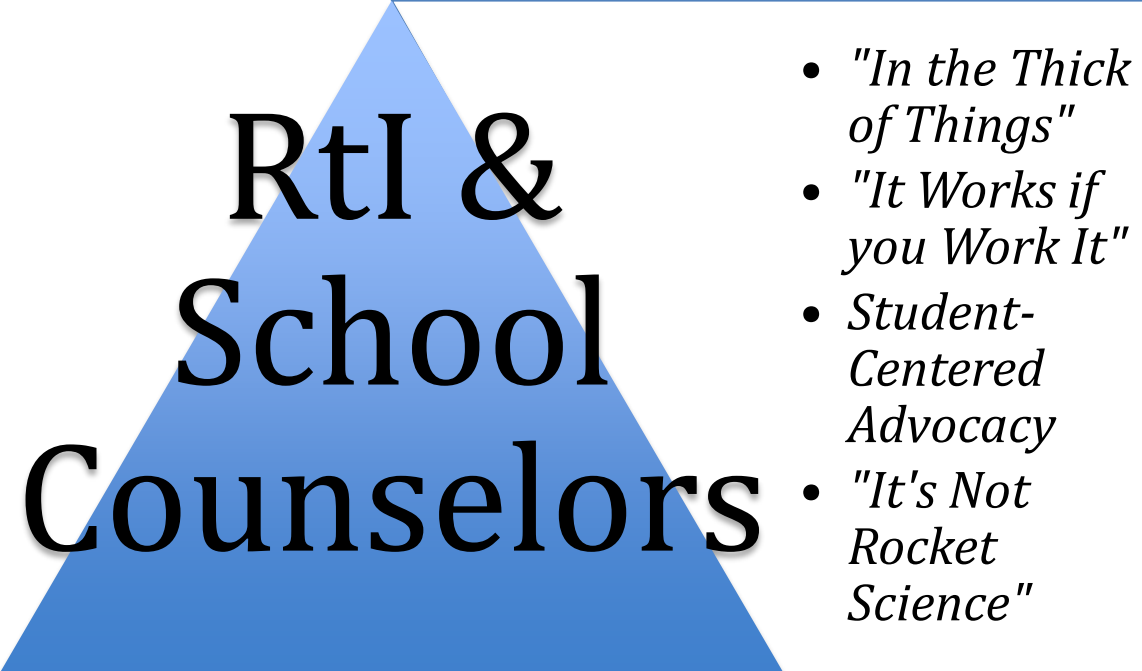
Mrs. Cosgrove identified herself as a 31- year-old female school counselor. She is the newest of all participants to the field of school counseling, with only three years experience. Mrs. Cosgrove admits that she is still new to the RtI process and did not have the opportunity to work much with the model during her practicum and internship. She currently works as an elementary counselor and is still learning the RtI process. She stated that “initially, I was confused by the model and the process, but each year it becomes clearer and I feel that the process works better and better.”

Themes

Emerging Themes

Utilizing Creswell’s (2009) six steps to qualitative analysis, the researcher coded the interviews using the NVivo Software package to produce the following themes: “In the Thicket of Things,” “It Works if you Work It,” Student-Centered Advocacy, and “It’s Not Rocket Science” (see Table I). Each one of these themes has subcategories, which will be discussed in the following section.

Table I



RtI &
School
Counselors

- *"In the Thick of Things"*
- *"It Works if you Work It"*
- *Student-Centered Advocacy*
- *"It's Not Rocket Science"*

“In the Thick of Things”

The first theme presented explores the experiences of school counselors and the roles that school counselors assume while working within the RtI model. This theme focuses on the involvement that school counselors are experiencing on a daily basis. This data describes the experiences of participants and how they interact with others through the RtI model.

Subcategories that detail this theme are as follows: Collaborator, Consultant, and Expert.

Collaborator. A repeated phrase throughout these 10 interviews highlighted the collaborative effort being driven by school counselors when working within the RtI model. This model is made for a team approach, as no individual can enact these procedures alone. It is only through a collaborative school effort that this model can be implemented effectively. Several participants shared their experiences about working within a collaborative role. Dr. Holloway stated:

“I am part of the team. We have monthly RtI meetings where I sit down and we talk about students who need to or are struggling more than just the usual. We bring them up and we figure out what interventions we want to put in place and progress monitor. I mean, it is something that we all participate in-this is a school effort to make RtI work.”

Other participants discussed their experiences with RtI and academics and mentioned that, while they felt they had been traditionally looked to for behavioral interventions, this allowed them to become more involved with academics. By working within RtI, school counselors reported an increase in their involvement with teachers and looked directly at interventions and approaches taking place in the classroom. Mrs. Francis stated:

“I also really like this piece as a school counselor, to be involved in the academic part of RtI and helping set up those meetings and be able to be involved with the records, working with teachers to find out specifically where a student is struggling and trying to find out what is happening. We look at is it motivation, teaching strategies, behavior, something at home. We come together to work for these students.”

Working within RtI allows school counselors to not only work collaboratively with their colleagues directly in their building, but also with those across the district. RtI is a district and state-level objective; therefore, opportunities to work with others is numerous. Mrs. Bishop had this to say about working together in their district:

“I meet with all the school counselors in our district, especially our elementary school counselors. Throughout the year, we look at list of students and the elementary counselor tells me about their situation and progress. It allows me to collaborate with other people outside my building and helps me to be able to work with students when they get here to my doorstep.”

Collaboration is just one of the many ways that school counselors can experience and operate within the RtI model. While collaborating as a team member within RtI, often school counselors will find themselves assuming other positions as well such as a consultant, which will be discussed within the next subtheme.

Consultant. Consulting the Teacher Support Team (TST) was one common way school counselors reported being asked to work with RtI along with other modes at various levels of the interventions. While some school counselors were not asked to work directly on the RtI committee or TST, they were asked to come in and serve as a consultant concerning students experiencing behavioral or emotional difficulties. This role allowed school counselors to work directly with students who were at risk and provide direct counseling interventions. When asked about providing services in such a manner, Mrs. Olson stated the following:

“At our school, we see both academic and behavioral difficulties, but I tend to focus on behavioral interventions. Often times I’m asked by our team to come in and work with students who are having trouble staying in the classroom. So, I really focus on how to keep this kid's behavior in balance so they don’t have to be removed, get in trouble, and lose the class time that they so desperately need.”

RtI is one avenue that school counselors can follow the ASCA model (2012) and provide direct services to students who are at-risk and need progress monitoring. Mrs. Cooper stated the following:

“RtI allows me to give direct counseling services to those sometimes before I even know they need it. I work individually, in groups, whatever is needed at the time. And I like it because the progress-monitoring component is already there; I’m supposed to be doing that anyways. So it works.”

The NVivo analysis revealed that participants often work within the RtI model directly or indirectly. With RtI in effect, schools are targeting their counselors to provide direct services and serve as experts in behavioral interventions.

Expert. According to the ASCA National Model (2012) school counselors should be spending 80% of their time providing direct services to their students. RtI interventions are one avenue that school counselors can advocate for time that is more direct with students, and according to data provided by participants, they are seeing an increase in being called upon as a behavioral expert to provide these much needed interventions to at risk students experiencing behavior difficulties. Ms. Blankenship stated:

“I am being asked to work with tier 2 and tier 3 students, our most severe cases. I am able to work directly or in groups with these kids through different forms of interventions. It allows me to do what I do best, counseling.”

It is not only the TST recognizing the need for students to have direct interventions from the school counselors, but administrators as well. According to Mr. Draper:

“My administrators came to me and wanted me to make RtI a priority and work directly with those students who needed behavior interventions the most. They did not want the school psychologist; they wanted me to provide those services. Now, I work with these kids every day and have daily contact.”

According to the interviewee’s descriptive narrative, these counselors are increasing their involvement in RtI in different capacities, and, while it is important to understand how school counselors are operating and experiencing the RtI model. it is also important to understand how they perceive the effectiveness and workings of this model. Our next theme, “It works if you work it,” discusses how school counselors view RtI and its ability to work with at-risk students.

“It Works if You Work It”

The second theme presented from participants is “It Works if You Work It.” This theme reflects participants’ views on the RtI model and its effectiveness in their school. Data collected from this theme clarifies participants’ views around the impact that RtI has had on their students and schools. Both positive and negative impacts are discussed within this theme, along with the additional resources participants felt were needed to continue their work within the RtI model. Subthemes include Positive Impact, Negative Impact, and Resources.

Positive Impact. When individuals were asked about their overall perception of RtI, the majority shared a positive view of the RtI model and its impact upon their students. While some interviewees discussed their general feelings and beliefs of the model, some spoke about specific instances where RtI had a positive impact. For example, Mrs. Cosgrove stated:

“In my school, it’s been positive. We’ve used it to help teachers and staff members as well as our counselors to really look at and identify, you know, where students are challenged, and it helps us put interventions in place to make sure that we are addressing needs. And I really like the tiered approach; I think it’s simple and helps us make sure that we’re covering all of our bases.”

Many participants reflected these types of feelings regarding RtI and even spoke more generally about the components of model, such as when Mr. Draper stated:

“I really like the idea of having goals. I like the idea of counselors having to be accountable to students. This model holds us responsible to these kids who are at-risk. I also like the idea of progress monitoring. I think it’s a great model overall.”

While most interviewees believe RtI has a positive impact on their students and schools, several participants expressed the need for specific changes that would increase the model's effectiveness. Mr. Sterling stated:

“I think RtI definitely has its place in the school counseling program; it's designed to help students, and that's great. But, there could be a tweak here and a tweak there. Sometimes I think it's made out to be harder than what it's supposed to be. If it's done correctly, it can be extremely beneficial to our kids.”

The overriding message from interviewees was that, if RtI is instituted correctly, the model will work to benefit all students. RtI is designed to help schools preventively work with students who are at-risk for failure. School counselors interviewed liked the idea of the model and what it is proposed to do. However, not all school counselors felt like the model was being fully utilized within the schools, and those views are further explored in the next section.

Negative Impact. While the overall views of RtI were positive in nature, not all interviewees felt that RtI had benefited their students and schools as intended. The RtI model has several components and often requires large amounts of documentation and data gathering. Some interviewees reported feeling frustrated by the RtI model. Mrs. Cooper stated the following:

“For some time I have been confused and frustrated with it. The problem here at our school is that it seems to keep changing from week to week. Paperwork, policies, procedures, to be honest it's driving me nuts....”

Another interviewee spoke more about her frustrations with the RtI model and its impact on students. Mrs. Olson stated:

“I get frustrated, I think with the RtI process, you know, especially when we see a child with severe limitations and deficits but they still make us go through the tiers. I know some feel that it’s a good thing for students, which, do not get me wrong, I’ve seen it, but I’ve also seen it be a limitation for our students as well. I really think it’s just more hoops for us to jump through in our education system.”

One participant also spoke to the frustrations she believed were not just limited to school counselors but also being felt by her fellow teaching colleagues. Mrs. Blankenship stated:

“RtI is a lot of work. And some of our teachers are already overwhelmed and have enough on their plate, and, sometimes, I think they view RtI as just one more thing to do.”

While the majority of these participants felt that the tenets of RtI were positive, they felt overwhelmed and frustrated with the process. These frustrations were illustrated by a call for additional resources to help these struggling districts work more efficiently within the RtI process, which are further discussed in the next subtheme.

Resources. The endeavors of working within the RtI model can be quite overwhelming, according to some interviewees. Based on statements coded into the prior subtheme, the researcher formed the “Resources” subtheme to encapsulate participant recommendations. Several interviewees discussed the need for additional resources to continue their efforts and increase their effectiveness within the model. Mrs. Campbell stated the following:

“It’s been a challenge for us, to say the least. Our teachers are already overwhelmed and they find RtI and its requirements crazy sometimes. We need more help; we need specialized trained staff to work with RtI. It’s just too much to put on the regular classroom teachers and counselors.”

This call for specialized, trained staff was continued by participants stating that they needed additional guidance and help in knowing what evidence-based interventions to use and when.

Dr. Holloway stated:

“Teachers and myself included need to know what evidence-based interventions to use. We need list or have some idea of what those are exactly. I feel like we just throw out goals and interventions, you know, and we do not always know what is the best thing to try. We need a little more guidance and expertise in this area.”

Those overwhelmed by the RtI process stated that their districts are strapped for resources on a good day and now they find themselves struggling to meet the requirements of RtI. While these interviewees may agree with the goals and objectives of RtI, they feel that, to meet the requirements, additional resources will be needed within their districts to properly employ the RtI model.

Student-Centered Advocacy

The third theme to present itself from the data is Student-Centered Advocacy. Overwhelmingly, the participants interviewed spoke of how the RtI model was a mode of advocacy for their students. When participants were asked how RtI fit into their school counseling guidance program, the term advocacy was repeated over 100 times. This theme is divided into two subthemes: advocacy and relationships.

Advocacy. According to the ASCA National Model (2012), advocacy to help meet the need of all students is a central tenet in the role of a school counselor. Interviewees who were questioned about the use of RtI within their school counseling guidance program suggested that they utilized the framework of the model to advocate for some of their students who were at the greatest risk for failure. Mrs. Francis stated:

“I love this component of RtI. Because these are the kids that I need to be seeing any way, so I have the opportunity to not only help them with their reading and their academics, but I also get to check on them and make sure that they're being successful and doing ok and meeting their social and emotional needs at the same time. I love the new position RtI puts me in.”

These school counselors found themselves being asked to step into more of an academic role with some students, but instead of seeing it as a negative, they have used it as an opportunity to further their agenda as counselors. Ms. Bishop said:

“I love having these kids that I get to know through RtI. RtI has actually helped me to identify the students who might benefit from more intensive counseling services.”

Some participants stated that, through the model, they were finding new ways to branch out and provide additional services that they would have otherwise not known were needed. RtI is becoming an avenue to work preventively with students, not only for academics, but for social and emotional issues as well. Mrs. Cosgrove commented on her experiences:

“I feel like with RtI it allows me to be a proactive counselor. I'm not just responding to incidents that are brought in, I'm getting to form real relationships with these kids and help them work on issues before problems arise. As soon as red flags come up in the classroom, because of the RtI procedures in place, I now know about them much sooner than I did before, and I can go ahead and begin to think about interventions to put in place to help these kids.”

By working with RtI and advocating for the needs of students, these interviewees stated that they are forming new and meaningful relationships, not only with students, but with parents as well.

These relationships are furthering participants' counseling agenda and furthering their ability to advocate for students at risk. These relationships are further explored in the following subtheme.

Relationships. Forming relationships is an essential component to the counseling process. These relationships drive a school counselor's agenda and ability to be successful within his or her school. Some interviewees have found that RtI is a great way to establish working relationships with students as well as with their parents. Mr. Draper stated the following about his experiences:

“RtI is a great opportunity to work with students and their parents. I think their parents really do appreciate what RtI does, and it allows me to support them and their kids. I've found that they're very willing to work with me throughout the RtI process and, you know, help their kids get the help they need to be successful.”

Participants commented that these relationships are key and fundamental to the success of their program and that they are always looking for avenues to reach out to parents at home. Dr. Holloway stated:

“Having a parent/home connection is critical, and it's so important to me as a counselor. If I can, um, build that connection, you know, I feel like I've been successful at my job. I actually had a father this morning come in and say how much better his son was doing on his behavior due to the work we were using with him through RtI. It was a great opportunity for me to sit down with this dad and talk to him about his son and what he's doing in class every day.”

Several interviewees told stories of their ability to advocate for students and parents through the RtI model. By reaching out to those in need, relationships had flourished and their ability to connect with those in need had been greatly enhanced. One participant stated that she

had so much success through advocacy and parent collaboration that she wanted to make RtI a top priority in the next school year. Mrs. Blankenship stated:

“I want parents to know more about RtI and the rights that their children have for a quality education that meets the needs of their children. I want to do more to work with these parents to help them understand, you know, and how they can help their kids improve and be better students. I mean, tier 1 is for everyone, so, um, this is something every parent should know about.”

Due to their work in RtI, these participants described stronger working relationships and greater parent collaboration. By working within the model, establishing relationships with students, and collaborating with parents, these interviewees described their successes and hopes for continuation in the coming years.

“It’s Not Rocket Science”

The final theme presented is “It’s Not Rocket Science.” This theme shares participants’ experiences during their RtI training. All participants describe themselves as well trained, and all participants have received eight+ hours of RtI training. Only two participants received RtI training from their graduate program, and the majority of participants stated that their training was primarily received from their local school district.

When participants were asked if they felt that they had received adequate training to work effectively within the RtI model, the majority felt that they had received enough training, and Mrs. Olson stated the following about her training experiences:

“You know RtI, I mean, it’s not rocket science. It is just a different way of thinking about it.”

But, not all participants found the process so easy. Mrs. Cooper said the following about her level of understanding.

“I think I can safely speak for everyone here at my school when I say there is still a lot of confusion around RtI, um, even from our administrators. You know, we still, um, need more training for our teachers so that we can all get on the same page.”

Some participants went on to speak specifically about the training that was provided by their district. Dr. Holloway stated:

“We’ve had a lot of good training opportunities. They have really, um, helped me kind of, um, understand and work with our academic strategist to and the different faculty involved in RtI here. I would definitely say, um, that we have a strong, well-trained team here at our school, and most importantly, um, we work well together, so that helps.”

Mr. Sterling commented:

“In our district, RtI training is not a one-time deal. We have meetings on RtI at least a couple of times a semester. It’s always evolving and improving. Each year, (pause) it seems the process gets a little clearer and I seem to understand my role better.”

The training experiences of these school counselors seemed to be a mix, and, according to the interviewees, seemed to depend upon the resources of the school district in which they were working. Mrs. Francis reported being “lucky.” She stated:

“I’m one of the lucky ones; we’ve had a lot of good training here in my district. But, I go to meetings and hear counselors talk, you know, about RtI, and it’s like they’ve just had to do it on their own, create forms, that sort of thing. Luckily, here I don’t have to worry about that; we have people in our district office that handle that.”

But, regardless of their luck, participants all agreed that their district could be more consistent on training. All 10 participants commented that their staff had each been trained at separate sessions, which had caused a lot of confusion when trying to work as a team. Mrs. Bishop had the following to say about her experience:

“It makes life harder for us if we're all going to different trainings. It's a pretty simple model, but each trainer has his or her own catch words and phrases and this inconsistency makes it hard for us. If we're going to work together, we should be trained together.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented the data collected from the Response to Intervention survey along with data collected from the qualitative interviews. The data in this research study described the involvement, understanding, perceptions, and experiences of school counselors working within RtI using a mixed method approach. The analysis of survey data described the current level of involvement, level of awareness, and perceptions of school counselors regarding the RtI model.

The interviews conducted focused on the personal experiences of school counselors and their involvement within the RtI model. School counselors shared information about their role within RtI, experiences, and training within the model. The study saw themes emerge pertaining to roles, perceptions, advocacy, and training. Data collected from this study provides a foundation to determine how school counselors are operating within and perceive the RtI model. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of this foundational study along with a discussion of the survey data and themes. Implications for practice, policy, and future research will also be discussed.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to gain a greater understanding of how school counselors engage in the RtI model. The researcher focused on (1) how the school counselors were involved, (2) how school counselors perceived the RtI model, (3) levels of RtI awareness, and (4) school counselors' experiences within the model. The researcher conducted the Response to Intervention survey and, from those results, interviewed 10 volunteers. The quantitative data consisted of 270 completed surveys, and the interviews were obtained from 10 school counselors currently involved in RtI. The data from the survey was organized into a descriptive analysis, and the qualitative data was analyzed into themes. This chapter provides an overview of the study, a discussion of findings in relation to the research questions, and implications for future research and practice.

Overview of the Study

The study on school counselors' involvement, understanding, and experiences within RtI used a mixed methods approach that involved both a survey research design and a phenomenological inquiry. Using a descriptive analysis of the survey results, the researcher described the results through means and variances, and through this analysis, made general claims about the understanding and involvement of school counselors and their role within the RtI model.

Identifying the understanding, involvement, and perceptions of school counselors in RtI creates a knowledge base of the subject. From this foundation, the qualitative portion of data

analysis, which consisted of 10 interviews, explored the experiences of school counselors working within RtI. The researcher used a purposeful sample to select participants. Volunteers were divided into two categories, elementary and secondary, from each of which five counselors were randomly selected, for a total of 10 participants. Each interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis. A phenomenological approach was used to expand upon survey data collected to create an in-depth description of the experiences of school counselors who are operating within the RtI model.

After a descriptive analysis of survey data and transcribing and analyzing of the qualitative data from the 10 interviews was completed, four themes and eight subthemes emerged. The results of each research question from both the quantitative and qualitative portion of the study will be discussed in the following section.

Quantitative Research Questions

What is the perception of the RtI model by school counselors?

Questions from the Response to Intervention survey sought to gain clarification around the role of school counselors and how they perceived the model and its effectiveness. According to data collected, the majority (61%) of participants believed that RtI was part of their role as a school counselor, but it may or may not be a primary responsibility among their current position. While the majority agreed that RtI was part of their perceived role as a school counselor, 39% disagreed with that statement. According to the ASCA National Model (2012), school counselors should be taking part in preventative programs and models such as RtI. Comprehensive school counseling programs should be addressing the immediate needs for students, and RtI is one avenue to provide such services, however, according to survey results

there is obviously still a substantial population (39%) of school counselors who do not perceive the execution of RtI as part of their role.

When asked about primary responsibility for RtI, the majority (55%) indicated the general classroom teachers. These results indicate that, while school counselors are operating within this model, they typically do not see it as their primary responsibility. Therefore, they may have different roles while operating within this model. These results informed one of the qualitative questions, which sought to take a more in-depth look at school counselors' roles. The results from the qualitative inquiry will be further discussed in a later portion of this chapter.

Additional questions regarding the role of school counselors indicated that the majority of school counselors (72%) felt that they had a clear understanding of their role within RtI at their current school, and 77% also felt that their views are valued and desired when discussing and working within the RtI model and process. From these results, it is clear that the majority of participants identify one of their roles as being within their RtI or TST teams. From these roles, school counselors are being valued and consulted as to the interventions and strategies to employ with these students. These beliefs have been further validated by 71% of participants stating that, in order for RtI to be effective, their participation was necessary.

Survey questions surrounding perceptions of RtI effectiveness, indicated that 61% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they perceived RtI to have had a positive impact on classroom instruction within their school. Fifty-eight percent further indicated that they believed RtI has led to improved student achievement and behavior within their schools. These results indicate that these participants believe that RtI has made positive academic and behavioral improvements in their school. Research supports these views that RtI is an effective, efficient, data-driven process that makes significant improvements in both academics and behavior, when

implemented properly (Burns and Gibbons, 2008). According to the ASCA position statement on RtI (2008), school counselors should assist in academic/behavioral development and work to analyze academic and behavioral data that helps to identify struggling students. By utilizing the components of the RtI model, school counselors can collaborate with pre-existing RTI and TST teams to enhance their comprehensive school counseling program to address both the academic and behavioral needs of their students.

When questioned about RtI and the effectiveness of data collection, 79% either strongly agreed or agreed that RtI is a positive method of collecting and using data to make instructional decisions. Seventy-six percent of the respondents indicated they utilize RtI to collect and use data within their school counseling program. According to Erford (2007), as accountability within schools increases, school counselors must also increase their ability to collect data and utilize those measures within their comprehensive school counseling programs. A foundational component of RtI is the ability to track and measure the success of the interventions used with each student. When participants were asked about the effectiveness of RtI and its ability to track and collect data, school counselors overwhelmingly agreed that it was a useful tool. When they were asked specifically about their participation in RtI and data collection, they overwhelmingly stated they were utilizing RtI to collect data and measure student outcomes. The ASCA National Model reinforces the ability to track and document data as it states that a comprehensive school counseling program requires school counselors to be proficient in collecting and interpreting data.

Participants were questioned about their overall perception of RtI and student advocacy. Fifty-seven percent of participants believed that RtI was a proactive system that had benefitted the at-risk students in their school. Advocacy is a vital component to working with students who

are struggling with academics and behavior, and school counselors can be in a pivotal role to help these students and ensure that they receive the services that they need to become successful. Advocacy emerged as a subtheme within the qualitative portion of the data collection process and will be discussed later within this chapter.

Lastly, survey data was collected to try to evaluate participants' perceptions of the RtI model and its impact on the broader school culture. Data collected from respondents indicated that the majority (57%) believed that the implementation of an RtI model in their school has led to better collaboration among general education, special education, reading/Title 1 teachers, and other support staff (e.g., school counselors). RtI and TST teams allow an opportunity for school counselors and classroom teachers to become collaborative and work together to improve academics and behavior within their school. It also allows an opportunity for school counselors to increase their involvement in academics. When school counselors work within RtI, they get the opportunity to become highly involved in the interventions and strategies being executed within the classroom. This collaborative effort helps the school community work together to problem-solve and create interventions that work to help students become more successful.

Questions regarding support for RtI demonstrated that only 47% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the teachers/faculty at their school support the implementation and use of an RtI model. However, 75% agreed or strongly agreed that the administrators at their school support implementation and use of the RtI model. Using open-ended questions, the qualitative portion of the survey further articulated the need for schools to increase the effectiveness of RtI. Many participants commented that their teachers felt overwhelmed with RtI and, with resources continually being reduced each year, this was just one more requirement that they were being asked to complete without ample resources to do it. Participants also commented that, while

administrators supported this measure, they felt like school leaders were not providing the resources and funds necessary for the schools to be as effective as they could be while working within the RtI model.

The overall results from the survey indicate that participants held a positive perception of the RtI model within their school. Participants felt that RtI had strengthened instruction and helped students to achieve academic success. They also perceived RtI has having a positive impact upon behavior as well as academics, but that, often, more resources were needed to implement effective interventions.

How involved are school counselors within the RtI model?

According to survey results, 83% of school counselors reported being currently involved within the RtI process. Of those participants involved, 66% of those school counselors were spending one to five hours per week working with RtI. Of the remaining 34%, 24% reported working between 6-10 hours, and 10% stated that they were spending 10 + hours per week with RtI. The majority of participants reported at least one to five hours per week, which can be a significant amount of time for a counselor who is running a multi-faceted school counseling program.

School counselors are required to meet the needs of all students, according to the ASCA National Model (2012); therefore, any one model that is taking up at least one hour per school day needs to be running efficiently to benefit a maximum number of students. Thirty-four percent of participants reported spending six + hours a week on RtI, which would indicate that they have taken on more than a collaborative or consulting role within the model. Interview participants who indicated a higher level of involvement (i.e.- six + hours) reported a more direct

role in RtI, such as being a member of the RtI or TST team or even assuming the RtI coordinator position.

Another descriptor that this survey sought to explore was the level of familiarity and training counselors currently held with the RtI process. The level of training received by school counselors might indicate how involved school districts want their counselors to be within the RtI process. Some Departments of Education, such as Georgia and Kansas, have even outlined and graphed school counselors' RtI involvement by creating pyramids, which outline desired guidance services at each tier level (see Appendices A and B).

When asked about hours of training, the participants reported that 27% had received 16+ hours of training, 24% reported four to six hours, 19% reported one to three hours, 15% reported 10-12 hours, 11% reported seven to nine hours, and 3% reported 13-15 hours of training on RtI. While training hours varied among participants, when asked if they felt they had received adequate training to work effectively within the RtI model, the majority of school counselors (54%) either agreed or strongly agreed. These findings indicate that the majority of participants feel comfortable with the level of professional development that they have received and their ability to function effectively within the model. The variance in training hours influenced the exploration of training in the qualitative portion of the study.

What basic understanding do school counselors have regarding the RtI model?

When participants were asked about their familiarity with the terms and founding principles of the RtI model, the majority (87%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were familiar with the terms and principles. The researcher used eight true/false questions to describe school counselors' level of awareness of RtI requirements, implementation, and use. On each of the

eight questions, more than half of the participants scored correctly. The range of correct answers varied from 58% to 93%.

Based upon survey results, eight of the questions received a correct score of 70% or higher. Two of the True/False questions received a 58% and a 60% correct score. Question 3, which stated “Students can enter at any tier?” received a 58% correct score. According to Shapiro (2011), students can be placed at any tier, especially those students who already have an IEP in place. These students may be placed at the tier 2 or tier 3 level to receive services that are more intensive. The question asking if RtI can be used to place students in Special Education had the lowest percentage of correct responses. Howell, Patton, and Deiotte (2008) clearly state that RtI is not meant to replace Special Education, but to align with the goals and resources of the special education program and work to provide support to all students in need.

These two questions were identified because, while participants felt that they were familiar with the terms and founding principles of RtI, there are still areas in which there is confusion with RtI services and procedures. However, this variance could be explained due to differences in state and district policies concerning RtI. With that said, the knowledge questions do indicate that, while the majority of participants answer the True/False questions correctly, there are still areas in RtI training that could be improved upon to possibly increase awareness of RtI procedures and principles. These results influenced the exploration of training quality and RtI awareness in the qualitative portion of the study.

Qualitative Research Questions

What is your perception of the RtI model?

One of the four themes presented from participants was “It Works if You Work It.” This theme reflects participants’ views on the RtI model and its effectiveness in their school. Data

collected from this theme clarifies participants' views around the impact that RtI has had upon their students and schools. Both positive and negative impacts were discussed within this theme, along with additional resources that these participants felt were needed to continue their work within the RtI model. Subthemes included Positive Impact, Negative Impact, and Resources.

Positive Impact. When individuals were asked about their overall perception of RtI, the majority shared a positive view of the RtI model and its impact upon their students. These narratives mirrored the results of the Response to Intervention survey. While some interviewees discussed their general feelings and beliefs of the model, some spoke about specific instances where RtI had made a positive impact. These positive experiences ranged in topic from student outcomes, to instruction, and to strengthened relationships. From the general to the specific examples, the interviewees discussed situations where RtI had benefitted their students and school.

One of the greatest strengths of RtI discussed by the interviewees is the fact that they have been able to build stronger collaborative relationships. Several participants discussed the ability to work with students, fellow colleagues, and parents to enrich the experiences of their students. Through collaborative efforts, these interviewees cited great success and a strengthened bond with students and parents, which greatly increased the likelihood of success, at least according to one participant.

The ASCA National Model (2012) describes RtI as “effective and efficient,” and the participants further illustrated this description. Many of the participants felt that, if RtI was utilized correctly, it could have a great impact on their students. Due to the RtI model, some participants felt that their school was highly operational and experiencing academic and behavior

success. However, others felt like their school needed a tweak here or there before they could achieve success.

Negative Impact. All of the participants agreed with the tenets that support and frame the RtI model. They applauded the idea of data collection, collaboration, and developing strategies to help struggling and at-risk students. Yet, a few participants felt that their school had yet to achieve the goals set out for RtI. The reasons cited varied, but all cited that, for different reasons, their school had not yet mastered the intentions of the model.

One participant described his school as underfunded and lacking the resources necessary to fully staff some of the interventions needed to assist students. Tier 2 and 3 interventions are intensive in time and require individual and small group attention. This participant's school lacked the resources necessary to orchestrate these objectives, and staff often found themselves overwhelmed and working long hours before and after school. These requirements were not meeting the needs of the students, and the additional burden was having a negative impact upon staff.

All of the negative impacts felt by schools were attributed to the requirements under which the RtI model operates and lack of resources. The negative descriptions of RtI were lined with hope that, with additional time, training, and staff, the schools would begin to achieve success for their students. RtI is a lengthy process that requires staff, skills, and resources. While many schools are cutting budgets each year, one participant cited frustration that RtI is just one more demand being required of schools that are being required to do more with less money each year.

Resources. Several interviewees described the resources utilized and needed within their school to facilitate the requirements of the RtI model. While a few participants stated that their

district was fortunate and had been able to fund training and staff to fulfill the requirements of RtI, they knew of many neighboring districts and fellow school counseling colleagues who had not been so fortunate. Some participants had similar experiences as those unfortunate neighbors and shared stories of their school struggling to find staff and resources to provide intensive interventions to those students who struggle the most.

RtI is typically a three-tiered process, and, as a student progresses higher within the tiers, their interventions become longer and more intensive to meet the demands of the struggling student. Tier 2 and 3 interventions require trained staff and materials, which, often, resource-strapped school districts do not have. One participant reported feeling overwhelmed by the “burden” of RtI. He described his school as having a staff that wanted to work and help struggling students, but simply needed more help and more staff to truly benefit these students and adhere to the guidelines set forth by RtI.

These responses aligned with the open-ended question that closed the Response to Intervention survey. Respondents were asked what their school needed to be more successful. Overwhelmingly, participants reported more specialized trained staff and additional resources. One participant stated.

“I want our school to be successful, I want to be involved in RtI, but if we don’t have staff to do these interventions or materials to do them, what good is it, nothing just a bunch of words.”

Districts must work to meet the needs of their staff if they want RtI to be successful. RtI does require staff and resources to effectively work with at-risk and struggling students. My participants describe schools that want to work within RtI, want to be successful for their

students and communities, but find their hands tied due to reduced funding and a shortage of resources.

How would you describe your role within RtI?

The theme “In the Thick of Things” explores the experiences of school counselors and the roles that school counselors assume while working within the RtI model. This theme focuses on the involvement that school counselors are experiencing on a daily basis. This data illuminates the experiences of participants and how they interact with others through the RtI model.

Subcategories that detail this theme are as follows: Collaborator, Consultant, and Expert.

Collaborator. The ASCA National Model (2012) suggests that “school counselors collaborate in many ways, within the school, school counselors build effective teams by encouraging collaboration among students, teachers, administrators, and school staff to work together towards the common goals of equity and academic success for every student” (p. 6). Through collaboration, school counselors can build guidance programs that enhance school environments to encourage academic success for each and every child. RtI is one model that is collaborative in nature. RtI is typically delivered through a team format. Several participants interviewed described their role within RtI as collaborative.

Collaboration was a repeated phrase throughout these 10 interviews, most often described as being driven by school counselors when working within the RtI model. “This model is designed and meant to be utilized for a team approach,” stated one participant. The ASCA National Model (2012) has also recognized the role of collaboration as key and essential to the success of any comprehensive school counseling program. The model suggests, “school counselors are in the perfect position to both support and lead the collaboration needed to achieve student success and to ensure student needs remain at the center of all decisions” (p. 18).

During their interviews, several participants shared their experiences about working within a collaborative role. Other participants discussed their experiences with RtI and academics and noted that while, traditionally, they felt their colleagues only looked to them for behavioral interventions, this allowed them to become more involved with academics. By working within RtI, school counselors reported an increase in their involvement with teachers and looked directly at interventions and approaches taking place in the classroom. Working within RtI allows school counselors to not only collaborate with their colleagues directly in their building, but also with colleagues across the district. RtI is a district and state-level objective; therefore, opportunities to work with others is numerous. Collaboration is just one of the many ways that school counselors can experience and operate within the RtI model. Often time, while collaborating as a team member within RtI, school counselors will find themselves assuming other roles as well, such as a consultant or expert.

Consultant. While working within the RtI model, interviewees reported being asked to serve several roles, including working as a consultant to the TST. While some school counselor participants were not asked to work directly on the RtI committee or TST, they were asked to come in and serve as a consultant. This role was typically described as someone who was there to support the needs of the TST itself, as well as the needs of those students with which the team was trying to intervene. This role allowed school counselors to work directly with students who were at risk and provide direct counseling interventions. When asked about providing services in such a manner, one participant described her role as mainly consulting on behavioral intervention. She attended TST meetings and worked closely with both the students and parents while their child was navigating through the tiers of interventions.

The ASCA National Model (2012) encourages school counselors to provide direct services to students who are at-risk and monitor students' progress through data collection, and RtI is one avenue that school counselors can use to follow those recommendations. One participant described her role within RtI as delivering direct counseling services to those students in need. Those services were delivered both individually and within groups. Participants revealed that they are often called upon to work within the RtI model directly or indirectly. Data collected indicates that school counselors are being individually targeted to consult with TST members as well as to provide direct services. Participants stated that, within these direct services, as a mental health professional, they felt part of their role was to consult and serve as an expert in behavioral interventions.

Expert. The ASCA National Model (2012) states that school counselors should be spending 80% of their time providing direct services to their students as part of a comprehensive school counseling program. These direct services should be defined as spending direct time with students and delivering much needed services. These services vary depending upon the needs of students and the school as a whole.

The tiered interventions within RtI are one way that school counselors can advocate for more direct time with students, and participants indicated that they are seeing an increase in being called upon as a behavioral expert to provide these much needed interventions to at risk students experiencing difficulties. Participants described interventions that they routinely delivered with students. Numerous participants described daily check-ins with students who were experiencing difficulties with behavior. These daily check-ins while part of an RtI intervention allowed the school counselor to provide direct services and form relationships with these students who desperately needed counseling services. The data showed school counselors taking the RtI

model and using the model to pull from their expertise and advocate for all students experiencing difficulties.

What function does RtI serve within your current school guidance program?

Participants described the use of RtI from varying viewpoints, but the underlying message seemed to be consistent. While these interviewees had different approaches and styles, they each utilized RtI to advocate for student needs and to help form relationships. This approach not only helped to build stronger, more successful RtI programs, but the work infiltrated their school counseling program and helped to build upon work in other areas.

Advocacy. Participants interviewed overwhelmingly spoke of how the RtI model was a mode of advocacy for their students. Specifically, when questioned about the use of RtI within their school counseling guidance program, participants suggested that they utilized the tenets of the model to advocate for their students who were experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties. As detailed in chapter four, participants described several different scenarios in which they as the school counselor were able to act as an advocate for students and their families while working within the RtI model.

The ASCA National Model (2012) suggests that the role of the school counselor requires advocacy to help meet the needs of all students. Advocacy for behavioral and academic success is a key role for school counselors and places them in a vital position to promote growth for each and every student. Through advocacy, school counselors can promote academic, career, and personal/social development to ensure that all students have success. This form of advocacy empowers students, and, through assessments and interventions, school counselors, along with their colleagues, can identify barriers and help students develop skills in response to those barriers.

To promote student achievement, school counselors can utilize RtI to help those students who are experiencing difficulties. The RtI model was developed as a preventative program to advocate for those students who were at-risk for failure. Therefore, school counselors can easily incorporate RtI into their comprehensive school counseling program to act with students and on behalf of students through direct and indirect services.

Relationships. Forming relationships is an essential component to the counseling process. These relationships drive a school counselor's agenda and ability to be successful within their school. Some interviewees found that RtI is a great way to establish working relationships with students as well as their parents. Through roles such as consultations and collaborative work, these interviewees described the ability to form stronger relationships with some students who were not even on their radar before the TST brought them to their attention. RtI is a great mechanism for screening. Students are brought to the attention of an interventionist (such as the school counselor) often as a preventative measure or at the first signs of a struggle. When this happens, school counselors no longer have to be reactive or provide responsive services; they can concentrate on preventive services.

These relationships are not just limited to students, but can extend to forming stronger working relationships with parents. These RtI interventions are only enhanced when parents are on board and helping to provide support when students leave the school and go home in the evenings. When school counselors have good working relationships with parents, they can work together to benefit the students and improve their chances of academic and behavioral success.

Lastly, RtI provides an opportunity for enhanced relationships with colleagues. RtI implementation is a team approach and therefore provides the opportunity for school counselors to work closely with teachers and administrators. Interviewees described experiences in which

their presence in the classrooms had increased and been strongly encouraged and welcomed through their work with RtI. Through an increased presence in the classroom and core curriculum support, school counselors can collaboratively work with their colleagues to provide direct services to children who are at potential at risk for academic and behavioral difficulties.

Do you feel like additional training from your district or a traditional counselor education program would be helpful to you?

Participants described their RtI training experiences. These experiences varied, and seemed to depend greatly upon the participant's view of their district's finances and resources. Those from "lucky" districts described their training as adequate to very good. However, there were also those participants who stated that their districts were struggling for additional resources and professional development was often done in house. These participants described their training as inconsistent and this inconsistency as one possible reason for their district not having much success with the RtI model.

All of the participants, however, felt like they themselves did not need additional training. The consensus seemed to be on an additional need for training for teachers. There were a few interviewees who desired more consistent training for their entire districts. Some described trainings that contained different training models depending upon the role of personnel, such as teacher, administrator, or counselor. This divided training based upon roles seemed to be causing confusion and a lack of consistency within RtI teams. Participants also stated that there was a need for additional training on specific interventions to use with students. Numerous interviewees described RtI teams that were unsure of what specific interventions to use, especially at the Tier 2 and 3 levels.

The importance of quality professional development when implementing RtI should not be understated. RtI requires significant training, planning, and preparation. School counselors, teachers, and administrators need ongoing professional development to become proficient in RtI implementation. Professional development and defined roles within the RtI process will help better prepare school personnel to effectively utilize interventions and monitor the progress of students.

Response to Intervention and The ASCA National Model

The ASCA National Model (2012) has been described as helping move school counseling from a responsive service provider for some students to a program developed to meet the needs of all students. The National Model helps to guide school counselors as they build and develop their comprehensive school program. The model provides a vision for all school counselors and allows school counseling leaders to demonstrate advanced implementation of developmental programs. Under this model, schools can utilize programs to help all students further their academic, personal/social, and career development. RtI is one of those programs outlined by the 2012 National Model. The ASCA National Model describes RtI as “effective, efficient, data-driven, and a highly collaborative process” (p. 73).

If utilized properly, the RtI model offers numerous opportunities for school counselors to work and act with students on both individual and group levels. School counselors can apply the model to both advocate for and empower their students to great success. Through consultation, collaboration, and direct services, school counselors can be at the center of a successful RtI program that advocates for the needs of all students. The creed of the RtI model aligns naturally with the goals of a comprehensive school guidance program, as school counselors are in a unique position to work to parallel both programs and work simultaneously within the goals of each to

facilitate an agenda that dynamically works to meet the academic, career, and personal/social needs of their students.

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Research

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to better clarify the role and experiences of school counselors within the Response to Intervention (RtI) model. This study explored school counselors' involvement, understanding, and experiences of the RtI model. The researcher employed an integrative approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods as part of this mixed method study. The results from this study provide a descriptive foundation for how school counselors working within RtI are currently functioning in the field. School counselors can apply these findings to their current practices and policies while researchers can use the findings to direct future research.

Practices. When school counselors follow the guidelines set forth by the ASCA National Model (2012), they are encouraged to follow four main themes: Leadership, Advocacy, Collaboration, and Systemic Change. These four themes provide a foundation for any successful school counseling program, and, when working with RtI, counselors can practice all four of these themes in the model.

According to the ASCA National Model (2012), school counseling leadership supports academic achievement along with student development. The RtI model is one way that school counselors can provide leadership within their school. By working within RtI, school counselors can support all academic endeavors and ensure that all students receive a fair and equitable education. A school counselor who is providing leadership and working with RtI can help to build a foundation for effective learning, design strategies for growth, and help to implement an effective RtI program that helps to meet the needs of all students.

Advocacy within the schools focuses on serving the needs of every student to ensure that they experience academic, career, and personal/social success. The RtI model is a preventative model that works to meet the needs of every student. The model is comprehensive in scope and works to ensure that students no longer have to fail before receiving services. RtI is a model that, if effectively employed, can support and promote every student's opportunity to achieve success. Through RtI, school counselors can advocate for students through direct and indirect services. This advocacy is to act on the behalf of students to help identify barriers and create strategies in response to those barriers.

This study has identified collaboration as a key and vital role for school counselors working within the RtI model. School counselors can collaborate with stakeholders within the school as part of a successful RtI program. Collaboration is possible in numerous ways, and interviewees in chapter four have described many roles that school counselors can assume while working within the RtI model. Whether working with TST/RtI teams or working directly with academic or behavioral interventions, school counselors can collaboratively partner with students, parents, and colleagues to create an environment where RtI can become a successful and vital program. Through collaborative effort from the school counselor, this study has described how the RtI model can enhance a school's environment and campaign for every student's success.

The goals of systemic change and the RtI model align with uniformity. Systemic change, according to the ASCA National Model (2012) can be measured by "the closing of achievement, opportunity, and attainment gaps" (p. 10). The RtI model is one avenue through which school counselors can work to enhance their school's achievement, opportunity, and attainment goals. This study has described how the RtI model, through school counselors' involvement, has

facilitated change within schools. This systemic changing program can help to reduce barriers and increase educational opportunities among students. Through data-driven interventions and effective use of the tiered system, school counselors can help to create systemic change through supporting RtI and working to develop its capabilities within each school.

These four themes describe how school counselors can use the ASCA National Model to guide and facilitate the growth of RtI within their schools. Effective school counseling programs focus their time and skills on programs that work to meet the needs of their students and are research based. The foundation, structure, and goals of RtI are valued and encouraged in a comprehensive school counseling program. Through developing a comprehensive school counseling program that encompass the four themes provided by ASCA, school counselors can enhance the work of RtI and ultimately have a positive impact upon their students, parents, and school environment.

Policy. In 2008, ACSA published a position statement regarding RtI titled “The Professional School Counselor and Response to Intervention.” This position statement supports the use of RtI and details the involvement of school counselors in the model. However, this study's findings reveal a large proportion of school counselors who do not see the implementation of RtI as part of their role, since 39% of the survey respondents did not think RtI was part of their role as school counselor. Yet, according to the same survey results, 83% of school counselors reported being currently involved within the RtI process, and of the 39% who indicated that RtI was not part of their role, 76% actively participated in RtI.

Therefore, these results indicate that, while 39% of respondents may not feel that RtI services are part of their role, they are still, however, involved in some manner. The ASCA position statement details numerous ways that school counselors should be involved within the

RtI process, from analyzing academic and behavioral data to working collaboratively with administrators regarding RtI implementation. States such as Kansas and Georgia have provided their school counselors with detailed guidelines of how they want to see their school counselors involved and working within each tier. While the majority of states have not provided such detail, participants located in these areas reported that these guidelines were helpful in knowing how to operate within RtI and how to perform at each tier.

With the current position statement on RtI being five years old, the researcher would encourage ASCA to consider updating its position and continue to outline school counselor objectives within the RtI model. Further development of school counselor's roles and objectives within each tier will provide additional guidance and help school counselors to become efficient and effective within the RtI model.

Future Research. In spite of the numerous studies on RtI, there are few studies on the role of school counselors in RtI (Ryan, Kauffmanberger, Carroll, 2011; Gruman & Hoelzen, 2011). Nevertheless, the limited literature supports the role of school counselors within RtI and encourages school counselors to take an active membership in the identification process of students who are struggling in the core academic areas. These few studies find positive outcomes for students when school counselors become involved in the RtI process, and these studies argue for more research to define and formalize the role of the school counselor in terms of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) and other revised special education acts. While there is limited support from the literature and governing bodies such as the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), the topic of school counselors and the RtI process requires further empirical validation and exploration.

School counselors play an important role in the implementation of RtI, particularly in being knowledgeable about data-driven interventions, collaboration, and progress monitoring. This study provided a foundation of knowledge that determined the involvement, perceptions, and experiences of school counselors while working within the RtI model. Yet, there are still many questions left unanswered and yet to be discovered by future research.

One suggestion for future research is to look at specific factors or relationships that could potentially impact a school counselor's involvement, perception, or awareness within the RtI process. Secondly, after listening to the experiences of school counselors, there seems to be a great struggle for counselors to know what the best practices and interventions to utilize at the tier 2 and 3 levels for both individual and group behavioral interventions are. Further empirical research is needed in this area to help counselors determine the best evidence-based interventions for school counselors to utilize with students at the tier 2 and tier 3 levels who are experiencing behavioral difficulties.

The ASCA National Model (2012), declared, "RtI is not going away anytime soon" (p. 73). Over the years, educational programs have come and gone. With its roots in No Child Left Behind and a growing support of practitioners in the field and research studies, RtI appears to have a growing place in the educational landscape. Therefore, future research will be vital to help school counselors further develop a role within RtI and work as efficiently and effectively as possible within the model to help meet the needs of every student.

Conclusion

The research findings in my study provide a foundation for understanding how school counselors are involved, perceive, and experience the RtI model. These findings add to the knowledge of how school counselors operate and assume roles within the RtI process. I feel that

the participant who stated, “It works if you work it!” described it best. If school counselors adhere to the guidelines set forth by the ASCA National Model (2012), they can incorporate the RtI model with ease into any comprehensive school counseling program. Once school counselors become familiar with the practices and principles of RtI, they can begin to realize how the tenets of both models (RtI & ASCA National Model) align with similar goals and objectives. RtI is changing the way we educate our students, and RtI is an opportunity to create a process for school counselors to utilize their strengths and work more efficiently, effectively, and collaboratively with their students, parents, and colleagues.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION SURVEY

Informed Consent for online Response to Intervention Survey

Title: RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL COUNSELORS' AWARENESS, INVOLVEMENT, AND EXPERIENCES

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Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to evaluate school counselors' involvement and awareness of Response to Intervention (RtI) models. In order to better understand the role of school counselors working within RtI it is of the utmost importance to understand how involved school counselors are and their level of awareness regarding the program.

What will be done: You will complete a survey, which will take 15-20 minutes to complete. The survey includes questions about Response to Intervention. The survey will also ask some demographic questions such as gender, work history, etc.. so that we can accurately describe general traits of the group of individuals who participated in the study.

Benefits of this study: You will be contributing to the knowledge about Response to Intervention and school counselors. After the researcher has finished data collection, for those who volunteer their contact information, the researcher will randomly select participants to interview specifically on their experiences with RtI.

Risks or discomforts: No risks or discomforts are anticipated from taking part in this study. If you feel uncomfortable with a question(s), you can skip that question or withdraw from the study altogether. Remember participation is completely voluntarily.

Confidentiality: Your responses will be kept completely confidential. The researcher will not know your IP address when you respond to the internet survey. The survey has no link to your identity or any identifiable markers that could ever link you to the your answers. Your blog name and address will not be stored with data from your survey. Survey answers will remain confidential and stored in a locked filing cabinet. After we have finished data collection participants email addresses will be destroyed. For those individuals who volunteer their contact information (Name and email address only) this information will be kept on a USB drive and stored in a locked file cabinet only accessible to the investigator.

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions related to Response to Intervention. Answer the questions to the best of your knowledge. Thank you for your time.

Gender

Male

Female

Age (Please enter numeric age)

Ethnicity

- White/Caucasian
- Asian American
- African American
- Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- Other

Highest level of education

- B.A./B.S.
- M.S.
- M.S. +15 Hours
- M.S. +30 Hours
- Ph.D. or Ed.D.

Employment Status

- Full Time
- Part Time

Number of years working as a school counselor

Do you currently work at a public or private school?

- Public
- Private

Estimate the population of students at your current school

- 0-500
- 500-1000
- 1000-1500
- 1500+

What is the grade level of students that you serve?

- Elementary
- Middle
- High
- Other

What type of community do you serve?

- Urban
- Rural
- Suburban

In what state do you work?

What is your schools zip code?

Do you have a teaching degree or a teaching background?

- Yes
- No

Please estimate the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunches in your school or district:

Have you received training on RtI?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how many hours?

- 1-3 hours
- 4-6 hours
- 7-9 hours
- 10-12 hours
- 13-15 hours
- 16 + hours

Please answer the following questions about the current school for which you are employed. At what stage is your district in the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) procedures?

- Investigation /Planning Stage
- Implementing RtI in limited number of classrooms or buildings
- 1st year of implementation
- Multiple years of implementation

What is your district planning on using or currently using RtI procedures for? (Please check all that apply).

- As a pre-referral system to identify at-risk students for early intervention services and supports
- As a system to identify students with learning disabilities for special education services
- As a system to identify students with emotional and behavioral disorders
- To determine the effectiveness of instruction for struggling learners
- Other

In your school who is seen as the RtI coordinator?

- General Administrators
- Special Education Administrators
- General Education Teachers
- Special Education Teachers
- School Counselor
- School Psychologist
- Other support staff

Are you currently involved with the RtI process at your school?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how many hours per week do you spend working with RtI?

Are you a member of the student support or intervention team?

- Yes
- No

Do you believe as a school counselor, it is part of your role to provide interventions and document RtI services?

- Yes
- No

If No, do you believe it should be the responsibility of others to provide tiered interventions and to document Response to Interventions (RtI) services?

- Yes
- No

Who do you view as primarily responsible for most of the work involving RtI interventions in your school?

- General Administrators
- Special Education Administrators
- General Teachers
- Special Education Teachers
- School Counselors
- School Psychologist
- Other support staff

Do you currently utilize RtI to document and collect data for student's academic and behavior achievements?

- Yes
- No

The following questions address your familiarity with and role as a counselor in RtI:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am familiar with the terms and principles of RtI	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a clear understanding of my role as a counselor within the RtI model used in my school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe my views, as a school counselor, is both valued and desired on RtI services.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In order for RtI to be effective, I feel that I must be an active participant.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The following questions relate to your views of RtI implementation:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe that the implementation of an RtI model in my school has had a positive impact on instruction in the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that the implementation of an RtI model in my school has led to improved student achievement and behavior.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that RtI is an effective way to collect data and measure student progress.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that the implementation of an RtI model in my school has led to better collaboration among general education, special education, reading/Title 1 teachers, and other support staff (e.g., school counselors).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>I believe that the implementation of an RtI model in my school has resulted in a proactive system that advocates for the needs of all students in my school.</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>In my opinion, the teachers/faculty at my school supports the implementation and use of an RtI model.</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>The administrators at my school support the implementation and use of a RtI model</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The following questions deal with your educational and professional training related to RtI:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have had adequate professional development and training opportunities to effectively assist in RtI implementation in my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to see counselor education programs provide additional training on RtI and other methods to advocate for students with special needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School Counseling Practicum and Internship students that you have supervised are adequately prepared and have adequate knowledge to address RtI and TST programs upon entering a K-12 setting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

When answering the following questions please begin with "It is my understanding that"

	True	False
RtI is required by law.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RtI can be used to identify students with learning disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students can enter the RtI process at any tier	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tier 1 includes the majority of students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RtI can serve as a precursor to formalized testing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RtI can be used only to address reading difficulties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Only students who are at-risk need to be assessed in a RtI model	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RtI can be used to place students in Special Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What do you think is most needed in helping schools to implement RtI properly and effectively?

By listing your name and email address below you will be indicating that you are willing to briefly speak with the researcher about your specific experiences while working with RtI. Thank you so much for your participation and willingness to add to the field of school counseling.

VITA

Amanda Micheal Winburn was born in Madisonville, Kentucky on August 4, 1978. Her educational degrees include: a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from Kentucky Wesleyan College in 2000; a Master of Science in Education in School Counseling from Indiana University in 2005; a Specialist in Education in Educational Leadership from the University of Mississippi in 2009; and a Doctorate of Philosophy in Counselor Education from the University of Mississippi in 2013.

Mrs. Winburn began her career in social work and from there entered into the field of counseling. Since her focus was K-12 during her training, Mrs. Winburn gained experience in the classroom by teaching summer school programs as well as teaching remedial eighth grade mathematics in 2004 for the Monroe County School District in Bloomington, IN. After completing her Master's degree, she went on to be a school counselor at East Robertson High School in Cross Plains, TN. There she worked as a high school counselor for two years.

After her family relocated to Mississippi, she decided to return to school to complete her educational goals. In 2009, she was awarded a Specialist degree and from there she decided to continue her work towards her Doctorate. Since entering the Ph.D. program in 2010, Mrs. Winburn has been a graduate assistant for the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education, Child Advocacy and Play Therapy Institute, as well as the Department of Teacher Education.