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Helping children overcome reading difficulties using Response to Intervention

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HELPING CHILDREN OVERCOME READING DIFFICULTIES USING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

by

Corinne M. Sannino

A Dissertation

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Dissertation Chair: Beth A. Wassell, Ed.D.

Dedications

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my mother, Linda Sannino. She has always believed in me and has constantly told me how proud she is of me throughout my life. No matter how many times I failed, she was always there to pick me, never judge, and stand by my side to support me through whatever challenge I was facing.   I could have never made it to this point in my life without her. It gives me great pleasure to know I have made her proud. I thank her for showing me unconditional love, support, and being my biggest cheerleader.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, James Sannino. I know he is smiling down on me now and still bragging about my accomplishments.

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I am very thankful to the teachers that participated in my study. Their dedication to improving their craft is admirable and shows their commitment to their school and students.

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Abstract

Corinne Sannino

HELPING CHILDREN OVERCOME READING DIFFICULTIES USING RESPONSE
TO INTERVENTION
2018-2019
Beth A. Wassell, Ed.D.
Doctor of Education

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine if Argryis and Schön's (1974) Theory-of-Action framework could be used as a viable professional development tool to improve teachers' professional practices when providing Tier II literacy interventions within the context of a Response to Intervention (RTI) program in an elementary school. This multicase study sought to understand more deeply the espoused beliefs and theories-in-use of four elementary literacy interventionists' when delivering intensive literacy interventions to students not reading on grade level within the context of the RTI program by using semi-structured interviews, collection of student work, and classroom observations. Discrepancies were found between the interventionist's espoused theories and theories-in-use, therefore, confirming the need for educators to explore alignment between their two theories as a powerful tool for reflection and dialogue. This study contributes to the literature by presenting a description of belief systems and practices, along with identifying barriers potentially affecting implementation of RTI that can be used to implement positive system-wide change.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Susan, a third grader, has always had difficulty reading. She was enrolled into Sunny Brook Elementary School's Response to Intervention Program (RTI) and has been receiving Tier II interventions. As part of the RTI Program, the school uses progress monitoring as an ongoing assessment to monitor her response to specific interventions. This process allows the RTI Team to make clear and focused decisions on how to proceed and support Susan's learning. Figure 1 (see below) provides an example of Susan's reading progress monitoring data chart. It indicates her reading probe data points, comparison to a typical peer, and a trajectory "aim" line in order to close the achievement gap. The data in the graph shows a significant slope of progress, but her last two data points indicate that she is not making progress and still performing slightly below grade level expectations. Susan's current third grade teacher, Mrs. Atkins, informs the RTI team, "Susan just can't read," and insists there must be an underlying learning disability. Mrs. Atkins pressures the RTI Team to refer Susan to the Child Study Team to be evaluated further for special education eligibility.
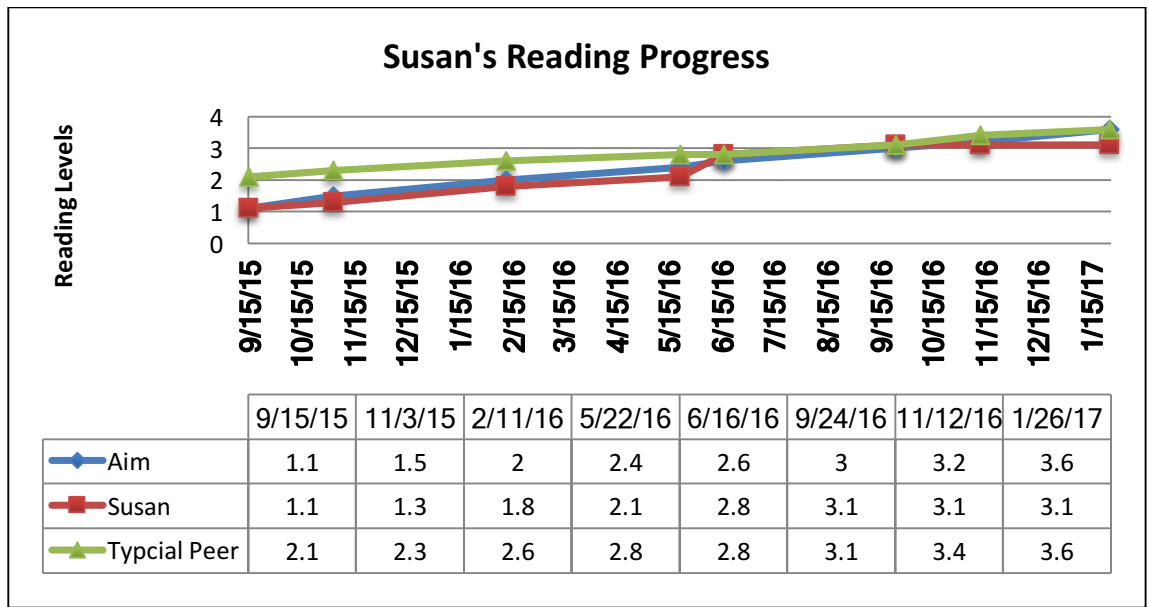
Figure 1. Susan's Reading Progress

	9/15/15	11/3/15	2/11/16	5/22/16	6/16/16	9/24/16	11/12/16	1/26/17
Aim	1.1	1.5	2	2.4	2.6	3	3.2	3.6
Susan	1.1	1.3	1.8	2.1	2.8	3.1	3.1	3.1
Typcial Peer	2.1	2.3	2.6	2.8	2.8	3.1	3.4	3.6

This brief vignette sounds all too familiar to me in my current role as an elementary school principal and these daily conversations are happening in schools across the country. Schools, administrators, and teachers have the power to make crucial instructional decisions that could have a lasting positive or negative impact on a child's academic future. With this immense responsibility, principals need to start by inquiring: Do educators believe that all students can succeed to high levels? What can teachers do to help our most struggling learners? Are teachers adequately using data in our decision-making process? What factors do schools try to rule out when making placement decisions for students? Do teachers believe that pre-referral interventions work, like the one provided for Susan above, or are teachers simply following the steps to classification? When teachers say that a student "can't read", what does that really mean? Are the interventions provided effective? These are the types of questions schools,

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administrators, and teachers need to ask themselves as our society tackles the achievement gap and seeks to improve student achievement outcomes for all students.

Overview of the Issues

It is well documented that schools are falling short of all students reading at or above grade level per our national report card (The Nation's Report Card, 2015). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2015 reading assessment measures students' reading comprehension at fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades by asking them to answer questions about grade-level texts. NAEP reports student performance by achievement level: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. A student with a proficient score has demonstrated solid academic performance for each grade assessed and competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situation, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter (NAEP, 2017). In 2015, 36 percent of fourth-grade, 34 percent of eighth-grade, and 37 percent of twelfth-graders scored at or above Proficient in reading across the nation (The Nation's Report Card, 2015). These results were not significantly different from 2013. The percentages of students with racial/ethnic groups performing at or above Proficient showed a significant gap in twelfth grade: 17 percent (Black); 25 percent (Hispanic); 28 percent (American Indian/Alaska Native); 46 percent (White); and 49 percent (Asian) (The Nation's Report Card, 2015). The NAEP results indicate that a significant gap exists between racial/ethnic groups and a low percentage of overall students are proficient readers.

NJ standards and teacher effectiveness. Our rapidly changing global society is calling for students to be problem solvers and critical thinkers, not simply follow steps and find the correct answer (Betts & Rose, 2001; Achieve, 2005; Fullan, 2010). To foster enhancement of these critical thinking skills, The New Jersey State Board of Education adopted the first set of standards in 1996 called the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS). The standards are revised every five years, and provide a framework for local school districts with clear and specific benchmarks for what students should know and be able to do by high school graduation (New Jersey Department of Education, 2017a). The language arts standards were revised and the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) were adopted in 2016, in collaboration with teams of teachers, parents, administrators, supervisors, and various other stakeholders. The NJSLS assert the importance of foundational skills in the early grades as students develop as readers, and stresses targeted, sustained interventions at any point that a student starts to have difficulty (New Jersey Department of Education, 2017b). These new standards are more rigorous and place a greater emphasis on students' analytical skills, problem solving, and critical thinking.

Along with new, more rigorous student learning standards, new accountability measures and standardized tests have been enacted to ensure all students are learning to the highest standard (Brighten & Hertberg, 2004) and teachers are held more accountable for student success. The *Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey Act* (TEACHNJ Act) is a tenure reform act that was signed into law in 2012. "The goal of the law is to raise student achievement by improving instruction through the adoption of evaluations that provide specific feedback to educators, inform the provision

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of aligned professional development, and inform personnel decisions (New Jersey Department of Education, 2017c)." The legislation applies to all "teaching staff" who work in public schools (e.g., teachers and administration), and the act outlines a process for earning and maintaining tenure status, specifically, basing the decision on multiple measures of student achievement (measured by Student Growth Objectives, and for a select group of teachers, Student Growth Percentiles) and teacher practice (measured by classroom observations). For example, for language arts and math teachers in grades 4-8, their final rating is based on 30% SGP (median in their students' change in achievement based on the state's standardized assessment), 15% SGO, and 55% Teacher practice. For teachers of non-tested grades and subjects, their overall evaluation rating is based on 15% of their SGO score and 85% is based on the evaluation tool approved by the school district (chosen from several state-approved instruments). Established on these measures, and the state-defined weightings, teaching staff will receive a final evaluation "summative rating" (New Jersey Department of Education, 2017d). All teaching staff will fall into an annual rating category: Highly Effective, Effective, Partially Effective, and ineffective.

The TEACH NJ Act has now revised the process for evaluating teachers and acquiring tenure or revoking tenure based on inefficiency. These decisions are now based upon the outcome of the summative evaluations, or final rating (highly effective, effective, partially effective, and ineffective). Prior the new legislation, teachers were rarely charged with inefficiency (New Jersey Department of Education, 2017c). All teaching staff acquire tenure based on the results of the summative evaluation (they must receive effective or highly effective rating in at least two of the three years) after four

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consecutive academic years, with employment at the beginning of the next succeeding year. In addition to acquiring tenure, removing tenure is based on the same summative evaluation final yearly ratings. Tenure revocation decisions are specifically triggered by multiple years of ineffective or partially effective summative ratings. Consecutive rating combinations must result in the superintendent discretion or directive to file a charge of inefficiency against the staff member (New Jersey Department of Education, 2017c).

The current accountability environment has created strong incentives for educators to systematically collect data and inform their instructional practices (Kerr, March, Darilek, & Barney, 2006). In order to meet this challenge, as leaders, we must expand our perspectives and revamp our outdated, traditional classrooms and instructional approaches to ensure success for all students (Green, 2014; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007; Jacobs, 2010). The *No Child Left Behind* legislation has served as the impetus for many state and national reform efforts to improve student achievement, including "a call for teachers to adjust curriculum, materials, and support to ensure that each student has equity of access to high-quality learning" (Tomlinson, et. al, 2003, pg. 120).

Federal mandates emphasizing reform. A new federal education law, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and replaces the NCLB legislation. Its purpose remains to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps (U.S Department of Education, 2017). The ESSA took effect in the 2017-2018 school year, and gives states more control in developing their own goals, including both short-term and long-term goals. The goals

must address grade-level proficiency on tests, English-language learner proficiency, graduation rates, and closing the achievement gap for all groups identified as farthest behind (Klein, 2016).

The New Jersey Department of Education (2007) recognizes that while some students are achieving at high levels across the state, more needs to be done to ensure all students receive the best possible education and that graduates with a New Jersey high school diploma are truly prepared for a successful future. The NAEP (2015) assessment results indicate New Jersey has significant achievement gaps between both lower- and higher-income students and between minority and white students. The gaps are mirrored by New Jersey's recent Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) results and, in prior years, were similarly reflected in the results from the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (New Jersey Department of Education, 2017). The New Jersey Department of Education's (2017) proposed long-term goal as per the new ESSA is:

> By 2030, at least 80 percent of all students and at least 80 percent of each
>
> subgroup of students in each tested grade will meet or exceed grade-level
>
> expectations on the statewide English language arts (ELA) and mathematics
>
> assessments. New Jersey has chosen 2030 as the timeline to achieve its long-
>
> term goals because 2030 is the year students entering kindergarten next
>
> school year (2017-2018), which is the first full year of *ESSA* implementation
>
> that students will graduate from high school. Therefore, the long-term goals
>
> will be accomplished by a full generation of school-aged children who have
>
> been educated under both the New Jersey Student Learning Standards

(NJSLS) and the *ESSA* state plan. (p. 8)

In an effort to improve the reading success of students, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and now the Every Child Succeeds Act of 2017, has incorporated systems for early identification and interventions for students identified at risk and promote data usage. Two of the most significant factors associated with improved outcomes for students at risk for reading problems are early identification through screening and early intervention (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, and Linan-Thompson, 2007). In order to address these two factors, we need successful models of school-wide programs that demonstrate best practices in literacy instruction, early identification of students at risk, and efficient and effective deployment of school resources (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, and Linan-Thompson, 2007). Response to Intervention (RTI) through the IDEA was introduced as a regular education and special education policy, and more specifically, as an additional model to use when making special education referrals. It provides increasingly more intensive layers of intervention as a means to identify and support students with reading difficulties. While tiers of instruction vary amongst schools, typically schools use three tiers of instruction: Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III. A consistent finding is that most traditional assessment practices may not accurately identify students with learning disabilities (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Vaughn & Klingner, 2007; President's Commission, 2002). A poor response to intensive levels of support may serve as a guide for determining those students who require special education (Vaughn & Klinger, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Therefore, school district's may use the Response to Intervention framework to determine if a child has a specific learning disability, not simply the current

special education eligibility process that uses an IQ Discrepancy Model (this will be explored in more depth later in the paper). The federal IDEA (2004) statute states:

> When determining whether a child has a specific learning disability as defined in § 602 (29), a local educational agency shall not be required to take into consideration whether a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading comprehension, mathematical calculation, or mathematical reasoning. In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as part of the evaluation procedures. (108-446 § 614(b)(6)

Response to intervention as a support. Response to Intervention (RTI) has been created to improve achievement for students who have been identified as at-risk and provide early interventions (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan, 2007; Allington, 2009; Moran & Petruzelli, 2011). RTI is a customized approach meant to be proactive, and not reactive, geared towards supporting students in the general education setting. In many instances, it is used as an alternative to the discrepancy model and used to identify students who potentially have more severe learning difficulties (President's Commission, 2002; Callender, 2007). Students would receive *pre-referral* supports prior to being classified. While this approach can yield positive results, it requires proper implementation (Moran & Petruzelli, 2011). Therefore, this study will focus specifically on how interventionists provide literacy instruction and implement RTI in one rural elementary school. By gaining a deeper understanding, I can support reflective practices

in order to move the RTI program forward and create a system-wide change in the best interest of improving our educational system for our students.

In our nation's high accountability, high-stakes environment, RTI is a potentially effective program to proactively provide intensive services prior to the referral process to prevent classification (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Vaughn & Klingner, 2007; Moran & Petruzzelli, 2011) and is based on the idea of data-driven decision-making (Callender, 2007; President's Commission, 2002; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). It is imperative to make vital intervention decisions on data supported by research, not simply our "gut" instincts. The data guide decision-making and ensure all students are treated equitably and have the same access to quality interventions (Moran & Petruzullli, 2011). Educators need to develop ways to study and analyze teaching and learning and consider their practice based on evidence and analysis, not simply opinion and preference (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Fullan, 2010; Moran & Petrezzulli, 2011). Using data to drive decision-making has emerged as a key strategy to foster school improvement (Coburn & turner, 2012; Kerr, March, Darilek, & Barney, 2006).

Using the RTI framework, once a student is identified as potentially at-risk, the RTI process begins. School practitioners measure the student's response to the intervention and monitor whether or not it is working. If not, the intervention must be changed or intensified. By monitoring the student's response to the intervention, we can continuously adjust our efforts until we start seeing positive progress. "Once we can define what is working and what is not working, then we know how instruction should proceed" (Beers, 2003, p. 24). Very often, we blame the student (e.g., lazy, unmotivated, not working hard enough) or the teacher (not delivering the intervention with fidelity)

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when an intervention does not result in improvement, but it may be the intervention itself (Moran & Petruzelli, 2011). By monitoring the student's progress, the intervention can be changed immediately when limited or no progress is made (Moran & Petruzzelli, 2011; Callender, 2007; Beers, 2003). Therefore, it is imperative that we use our knowledge of best literacy practices and data to guide our decisions.

Teacher beliefs versus practices. Tomlinson and Kalbfleish (1998) advise, based on brain research, that a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching can be detrimental to some students and unsuccessful for most. Too often teachers feel that they have too much to cover in too little time, and they present lessons utilizing one instructional approach and one way. Modifications are not made for struggling students, and teachers hope that that this single approach benefits all the students. Unfortunately, it is often not good enough. "If there is one thing on which both research and common sense agree, it is that kids are not the same and that they learn in different ways" (Tomlinson & Kalbefleish, 1998, p. 53). We need to create learning experiences where at-risk students who need more reading instruction actually receive more and better reading instruction (Allington, 2009).

Educational change is difficult, and it "depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and as complex as that" (Fullan, 2007, p. 129). Tomlinson et al. (2003) propose that the problems lie in beliefs and practices about teaching and learning. Perhaps the federal education legislation and the focus on teacher accountability and standardized tests has had the opposite intended effect, and instead, has forced teachers to focus less on students still having difficulty reading and provide classroom instruction that teaches to the middle, not differentiated for individual needs (Allington, 2009). Some students require more and better reading instruction in order to make one-year's-growth-

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per-year reading standard outlined by NJSLS (Allington, 2009). For too long we have focused on what is "wrong" with at-risk students and use cognitive deficits (not instructional deficits) as an explanation for why they are not adequately developing reading skills, leading to special education classification (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982; Allington, 2009; Moran & Petruzelli, 2011). We base our decisions on our "gut instincts" and not on data (Moran & Petruzelli, 2011). We wait until students fail to provide support, but we rarely believe that our additional support will help those students not reading on grade level to catch up to their peers (Allington, 2009; Donovan & Cross, 2002). In most schools, students at-risk only receive 10 to 20 percent of the instruction during the day based on their needs; therefore, they continue to struggle because they receive far less appropriate instruction than an achieving student (Allington, 2009). Unless we understand and address these systemic issues, it appears unlikely that any students with diverse learning needs will not be well served on a consistent basis in today's schools (Tomlinson et al., 2003; Allington, 2009). Therefore, there is a need to investigate and address teachers' perceptions and beliefs since it is these beliefs that play a role in teachers' approach to varying learners and the instruction that they deliver.

Due to the growing diversity in our classrooms across the nation and increased pressures on teacher accountability (Logan, 2008; Brighton & Hertberg, 2004; Friend & Pope, 2005), traditional methods of teaching can no longer be the cornerstone of our pedagogy. Diversity is representative of our current society and defined here in many ways. It can refer to a new student who speaks a second language, students with low socioeconomic status, a student struggling to learn due to stressors outside of school, a student identified with a disability that requires accommodations or modifications, or a

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student with a slower growth rate. Teachers are charged with finding ways to simultaneously teach the gifted students, those that learn at an average pace, and those that have difficulty learning (Friend & Pope, 2005). Revamping our classrooms to meet the needs of all of our students is a huge endeavor and a difficult, but a necessary one. It is our responsibility to create classrooms where all students succeed (Friends & Pope, 2005). By examining our own beliefs about teaching and student learning, educators can ensure that all students can achieve success (Friend & Pope, 2005). This immense challenge requires careful planning to ensure that it is implemented properly. The weight and importance of this deep cultural change rests on the shoulders of the educational leaders: anyone in charge of leading change including administrators and teacher leaders (Fullan, 2002).

It is essential to achieve whole system reform by continuously evaluating, reflecting, and working towards continuous progress in order to improve our methods of "collecting, linking, and analyzing data," which is essential to creating a strong system (Fullan, 2010, p. 28). Most people are unaware of their behaviors (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Argyris and Schön (1974) believe that people tend to espouse what is socially acceptable and fail to admit reality. The authors offer some plausible explanations that people may fear exposing ourselves, fear not fitting in, or maybe they do not want to the admit their own faults. Our defensiveness prevents us from recognizing the truth resulting in a failed opportunity to revamp our practices and ultimately our school systems.

Principal's role with teacher professional development. Principals must understand that teacher learning and growth is directly connected to students learning; therefore, successful school change and school improvement requires a focus on

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professional development (Bredeson, 2000). Professional development is a way to deepen teachers' understanding about the teaching and learning process and the students they teach, which needs to begin with effective pre-service programs and throughout a teacher's career (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996). The content of the professional development may involve multiple factors to focus on including, but not limited to, teacher knowledge base, subject matter knowledge, best practices, and ways students learn particular subject matter (Lee, 2005; Shulman, 1987; Ball & Cohen, 1999). Principals have a unique position to influence teachers' learning and development in their schools (Bredeson, 2000). This research provides a framework that could potentially support teachers' knowledge base regarding best instructional practices to help students having difficulty reading in the context of the RTI program.

We recognize that our traditional school system is failing a vast majority of our students (The Nation's Report Card, 2015) and a paradigm shift in thinking is necessary to revolutionize education and align our instructional methods with the research on best practices. This study focuses on one elementary school that is attempting to achieve this goal using an RTI framework and literacy interventions provided by interventionists. By exploring the practices of the interventionists in the RTI program, this study will seek to understand more deeply the RTI program and how interventionists work with and provide literacy interventions to students experiencing reading difficulties. This investigation will assist in creating system-wide change in order to improve student outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

"We can teach virtually every child to read; …however, the time has come to recognize that struggling readers still exist largely because of us" (Allington, 2013, pg.

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530). The typical school approach to students with reading difficulties assumes that the problem is "within the student" and that this a final condition (Boudett, City, and Munrane, 2013; Denton, 2012). It has been well documented in the literature that children not reading on grade level by third grade will likely continue to struggle with reading throughout the rest of their academic careers (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, and Linen, 2007; Allington, 2009). The majority of studies on RTI assert that at-risk students benefit from early identification and intensive literacy interventions offered through a multi-tier literacy instructional approach (Allington, 2009; Bollman, Silberglitt, & Gibbons, 2007; Callender, 2007; Cavendish, 2016; Ochieng-Sande, 2013; Donovan &cross, 2002; Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982; Moran & Petruzzelli, 2011: President's Commission, 2002). If every school implemented the interventions that researchers have verified and if every teacher who is attempting to teach children to read developed the needed expertise, struggling readers would all learn to read and become achieving readers (Allington, 2013; Callender, 2007).

Based on the available research, it is fair to expect that almost all struggling readers caught early can be on grade level by third grade (Allington, 2009). Some students will require additional support even after they have caught up, but not all (Allington, 2009). Almost no students should be lagging behind in their reading development and federal rules allow up to two to three percent of the total student population to not meet the one-year growth standard (Allington, 2009). Federal legislation realizes that some students require more and better reading instruction than other students in order to make the one-year's growth-per-year reading standard. Therefore, we need to create learning environments where students who require more and

better reading instruction receive more and better reading instruction, and we need to design intervention efforts to double or triple reading growth. Students not reading on grade level need more teacher-directed lessons, more intensive reading interventions, additional reading instruction, and lessons targeted to their specific instructional needs (Allington, 2009).

In 2015, at Sunny Brook Elementary School, it was determined that a large percentage of students are either not meeting proficiency levels on the state's standardized literacy assessment, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) literacy assessment, underperforming on the Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) achievement test, or currently read below grade level as measured using Fountas and Pinnell's Benchmark Assessment System used to determine a student's independent and instruction reading levels. As the researcher, principal of the school, I focused the school improvement plan on restructuring the RTI program, identifying students' strengths and weaknesses using multiple measures and using best instructional practices to address the gaps. The vision was to create a program that would close the achievement gap and support the district's commitment to evaluating and meeting individual students' needs through differentiated instruction, optimize student growth, develop the whole child, create enduring understandings, and instill a love of learning.

In the summer of 2015, as the principal of the school, I worked collaboratively with various stakeholders to develop the new RTI framework and staff handbook. This included providing research-based programs and professional development for interventionists to implement the new programs with fidelity. Structures were put into

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place to assess students periodically throughout the year to provide time for interventionists to meet to discuss the data, to create S.M.A.R.T. goals for individual students, and for interventionists to meet periodically to track student progress. The district's RTI program included large group instruction, small group instruction, and one-on-one tutoring. Increasing intensity throughout the tiers was achieved through the use of teacher-directed explicit instruction, increased frequency and duration of instruction, small groups, and use of one-on-one instruction. While some gains have been made, many students continue to not meet grade level reading standards. Factors such as teacher beliefs about RTI, literacy interventions, and staff's understanding of reading difficulties has raised questions about the actual implementation and fidelity of the RTI program.

This multicase study proposes that by examining the congruencies and incongruencies between the individual interventionists' beliefs about students with reading difficulties, RTI, and literacy interventions, and how their beliefs are aligned with their actual practices, will assist in understanding the RTI program more thoroughly (Ochieng-Sande, 2013; Cavendish, et. al., 2016; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Each interventionist, or case, will be unique in terms of what it can reveal about the RTI program (Stake, 2005). The challenge is that while RTI and best literacy instruction teaching practices are essential, educators are typically well versed in these concepts, there is little evidence that these understanding about RTI and effective literacy interventions are present in actual practices (Allington, 2009). Therefore, this evaluation is critical to identifying whether or not interventionists' beliefs are evident in their practices. The findings from this study will provide an empirical basis to promote dialogue with literacy interventionists about the alignment of their current understanding

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and instructional practices when providing interventions to students with reading difficulties in the context of RTI.

Purpose of the Study

I conducted a qualitative, multiple case study aimed at identifying both the espoused beliefs and actual behaviors of literacy interventionists' understanding of reading difficulties, enacting RTI, and delivering literacy interventions. It presents a "reality check" for interventionists to test whether or not their espoused and theories-in-use are congruent or incongruent, and explore the potential positive or negative impact this alignment or misalignment might have on students' academic outcomes. Argyris and Schön's (1974) Theory of Practice guided my inquiry along with exploring the impact of underlying belief systems, effective literacy interventions, and the related research about RTI. This qualitative multicase study proposes to add to the research on RTI by focusing on providing an in-depth investigation of literacy interventionists' espoused beliefs and theories-in-use when working with students with reading difficulties and knowledge and delivery of literacy interventions within the context of the schools' RTI program. It is imperative to ensure perspectives and practices provide a positive approach to supporting the needs of all children to become successful readers. This requires careful planning and attention to our practices.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following overarching research question: How are interventionists' beliefs about students with reading difficulties, literacy interventions, and RTI congruent or incongruent with practices when delivering Tier II literacy interventions in one rural elementary school in grades K-6 embedded in a RTI

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framework? The following sub-questions will guide the research and data analysis for this study:

1. How do literacy interventionists describe their work with students with reading difficulties?

2. How do literacy interventionists describe their espoused theories related to RTI and literacy interventions?

3. How do literacy interventionists enact RTI and literacy interventions? What does this indicate about their theories-in-use?

4. What similarities and differences exist between each interventionist's espoused theories and theories-in-use?

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant importance to the field of education. More and more schools are administering a massive amount of assessments along with the high-stakes state assessments to collect substantial amounts of student data, but it is unclear how the data is actually being used to improve teaching and learning (Little, 2012). Since schools and teachers are being held more accountable for student performance (Ysseldyke, et. al., 2005) it becomes imperative for educators to know how to properly collect and use data to drive instructional decisions (President's Commission, 2002; Callender, 2007). In addition, schools must address the ever-widening achievement gap perpetuating our educational organizations (The Nation's Report Card, 2015). This study is different than other studies because it focuses on a particular Preschool through sixth grade elementary school, specifically on interventionists delivering literacy interventions embedded in a unique RTI framework.

This research adopted Argyris and Schön's (1974) framework and questioning approach for each individual teacher participant to reflect upon her conceptual understanding and specific behaviors in the classroom. Not only do principals need to focus on teachers' actual performance, but on their beliefs about their performance. Interventionists' beliefs may lead them to ineffective practices, or they may be effective but not realized. Without reflective skills for improving practice, there is the likelihood of professionals being stuck in self-sealing theories and mediocre performance (Argyris & Shon, 1974). Typically, when one is asked about their behaviors in a certain situation, the person provides his or her espoused theory of action or what they want people to believe they do. Peoples' actual actions are their theories-in-use. Therefore, Argyris and Schön (1974) propose that people should not simply be asked about how they would approach a situation but should be inferred through examples of their actions or an actual examination of their behavior in an actual situation to truly identify their theory-in-use. Therefore, this study is important to investigate interventionists' beliefs about RTI and literacy interventions and how they actually implement RTI and provide interventions. This analysis assisted in understanding the RTI more deeply and potentially assist in system-wide change.

This research discovered how elementary school interventionists' beliefs and values expressed in interviews (espoused theories) guided and were present in their practices when providing literacy interventions embedded in one school's RTI program. Argyris and Schön's framework was specifically applied to communication behavior between individuals, and has not been applied in the specific context sought in this study. As an initial step in testing the usability of this model, this research study examined two

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core concepts of the model in relation to elementary literacy interventionists' Theories in Action (espoused and theory-in-use) when providing interventions to students not reading on grade level. This study analyzed literacy interventionists espoused and actual theories-in-us to determine if the Theory in Action Model could potentially be used to improve educator's practice in order to improve student learning outcomes. If this model was found to be a useful professional development tool in order to improve educators' practice, it would have to clearly articulate the individual's espoused theory and theory-in-use. Hence, the study could potentially uncover if the two concepts can be applied to interventionists' ability to provide literacy instruction embedded in a RTI framework in such a way that it can be used to improve practice.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations can pose potential weaknesses in a study (Creswell, 2014). Limitations may exist based on my research methodology, personal biases, access to the site, and limitation to one site. First, a small sample size of participants and limited selection based on purposeful sampling may not yield a true representation. Currently, there are only eleven interventionists available at the school to solicit participation. Second, and maybe most importantly, I was especially sensitive to the imbalances of power and authority when asking my teachers to partake in my study. I lessened the threat by reassuring them of the purpose of my research and potential benefits to them and the school. I stressed that this research study is not an evaluation of their teaching or student outcome evaluation. I sought what each interventionist believed and what they were doing, not assessments on how students are doing. However, it would be fair to acknowledge their potential hesitation to point out any negatives about a program that I

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directly oversee in fear of negative repercussions or negative judgement of their teaching practices. Participants may have been reluctant to express their true beliefs towards their students' academic abilities, especially if they are negative. While I do believe that I have a good working relationship with my staff and encourage honesty in our conversations, their responses may have still be influenced by that relationship, or I might have had my own skewed perception of reality and belief that I have created a culture conducive to open, honest dialogue.

In addition to the limitations based on my sample size and relationship to the participants, the length of the study and the fact that it is limited to one school may pose limitations. The data collection will include one interview and three observations over one cycle of RTI, which spans typically twenty-five to twenty-seven days. This constraint will prevent conducting a longitudinal study, which may have provided more accurate data on successful implementation of interventions and desired positive student outcomes. A good multicase study can be completed in a few months, but many reviewers of the report may judge it as lacking thoroughness and depth of interpretation (Stake, 2005). Furthermore, depending on the timeframe, the participants may have very busy schedules making it difficult to schedule interviews, conduct observations, collect information, and have full participation.

While the site, length of the study, relationship to the participants, and sample size are all considered limitations, I will need to pay close attention to my own biases prior to starting the study since they may have the potential to shape my perspective and analysis of the data. Since I already assume that most educators espoused theories and theories-in-use do not match, I may look for evidence to support my initial thoughts. I also carry the

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preconceived notion that more professional development is still needed to effectively implement interventions and support our students not performing on grade level. Also, there's a plethora of research that demonstrates when educators set achievable, high expectations for their students and believe children can achieve, they rise to the occasion. Too often I hear teachers reference a particular student and make excuses about outside, environmental factors, or excuses about how "low" they are and place blame elsewhere. Shifting our thinking form excuse making to what we can control will take a paradigm change in thinking. I believe that many educators believe whole-heartedly that they are doing what is best for the student. However, setting the bar low is a detriment, leads to excuse making, and does not push our children to continuously try to improve. I will have to be very careful when drawing conclusions to not simply look for evidence to support my preconceived notions.

Knowledge related to what constitutes good instruction and how students learn plays an important role in instructional decisions (Coburn, Toure, & Yamashita, 2009). My individual conception of what constitutes good teaching and understanding of how students learn best has led to my decisions regarding implementing the RTI program, assigning interventionists, and providing professional development. I need to recognize if my conclusions are not simply in favor of the program since I had a huge role in creating it. I may harbor my own underlying organizational defenses that may prevent me from acknowledging disparities negatively evaluating the RTI program. In order to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation and confirm that the right assumptions have been obtained, the research study will utilize a "member check" and triangulation (Stake, 2005). These two strategies will be explored in more depth in the methodology section.

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Definition of the Terms

For this research study, the operational definitions of technical terms referred to throughout are as defined:

Differentiation is a philosophy or framework that matches instruction to a student's readiness level, interests, and learning style through how a lesson is taught through the content, process, and product (Tomlinson & Kalbfleish, 1998).

Double – Loop Learning occurs when the system questions the underlying issues and policies (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Espoused Theories are the values people base their beliefs on and how one describes his or her own behavior (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Interventions are targeted academic support (Hall, 2011).

Response to Intervention is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Students identified as not meeting academic standards receive additional support through Tier II and Tier III interventions (Hall, 2011).

Practice of Data is the usage use of data to improve classroom instruction and student achievement (Little, 2012).

Single – Loop Learning occurs when a system allows to simply continue its current policies and objectives (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Theories- In-Use are the actual values applied by people's behavior and actions or the actual mental models they use (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

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Tier 1 is for all students, and is taught utilizing the core program for each content area as determined by the district during the general education setting with the general education teacher (Hall, 2011).

Tier II is used for students who do not respond to the general education instruction of Tier 1 and fail to meet academic benchmark standards and criteria established by the district. An interventionist in a small flexible group of 3-5 students provides this targeted, additional support (Hall, 2011).

Tier III is an additional layer of intensive support is available to address the small percentage of students who are experiencing severe learning difficulties, are at a high risk of developing secondary concerns as a result of persistent problems, and not making adequate progress in Tier 1 or Tier 2 (Hall, 2011).

Organization of the Study

Chapter One introduced the study in which the researcher focused on providing an in-depth perspective on the challenges educators face today when supporting our students not reading on grade level. This chapter included an overview of the issues, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, definition of terms, and organization of the study.

Chapter Two presents the theoretical perspectives that serve as a framework for the proposed study. The groundwork for the research includes Argyris and Schön's Theory-in-Action and RTI framework. Chapter Two also provides an overview of research exploring teacher belief systems, reflective practice and continuous learning, effective literacy instruction and interventions. Lastly, a comprehensive overview is provided for the RTI framework, along with the most recent research on RTI, and a

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proposed new model for effectively monitoring struggling students' through RTI. This framework is proposed as an alternative special education identification model.

Chapter Three describes the research methodology, which includes a description of the research design, data collection, and data analysis. A detailed description of the proposed research site and participants is outlined. In addition, the role of the researcher and trustworthiness are discussed.

Chapter Four describes the results of obtaining and analyzing the data collection of the four case studies in which interventionists delivered Tier II literacy interventions to small groups of students. The interventions took place in the context of the school district's RTI Program and were delivered to students identified as having difficulty and performing below grade level standards. A description of the teaching philosophies in relation to literacy interventions, knowledge of RTI, understanding of students not reading on grade level, and audio recorded records of the instructional environment provided the context for an examination and comparison of belief systems and actual practices on how Tier II literacy interventions are delivered to struggling readers. This chapter explores whether or not espoused and theories-in-use are congruent or not congruent.

Chapter Five examines the findings of the study and conclusions are drawn based on the analysis. The actual implications for practices when working with students not reading on grade level, delivering literacy interventions, and implementing RTI are reviewed. Recommendations for future research are discussed.

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Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Several bodies of literature are relevant to this study developed around four central themes. The first section of this chapter provides an overview of Argyris and Schön's (1974) theoretical framework, Theories of Action. This framework provides a lens to explore the beliefs that educators hold and compares their espoused versus actual theories-in-use. The second section reviews literature on teacher beliefs and practices and how expectations shape teaching practices, especially when working with students with reading difficulties. Additional research areas will be addressed in order to understand the many causes of reading difficulties, along with an overview of effective literacy intervention instructional models. Finally, the literature review ends with a summary of the RTI framework to give the context for the roles of the interventionists, recent and relevant research pertaining to RTI, which has all led to the purpose of my research. The literature review provides a context for the study.

Theoretical Framework

This research study is guided by the theoretical framework of Argyris and Schön (1974), Theory-of-Action, in which contrasting theories, namely espoused theories and theories-in-use, are used to examine professional practice and explain human actions that occur in organizations. Each individual has an underlying set of values, beliefs, and assumptions that frame his or her perception of the world, which in turn determines how they approach a situation (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Savaya & Gardner, 2012). Therefore, it is imperative to analyze our theories-in-use and espoused theories. Espoused theories are what we think and believe and they change easily as we acquire new knowledge and

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experiences. On the contrary, theories-in-use influence behavior and develop through acculturation (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). These two theories are often incompatible and individuals are unable to see the discrepancy between the two theories. In the framework, Argyris and Schön (1974) describe the Theory-of-Action model and how it informs action, distinguish between espoused theory and theory-in-use, and how the two theories apply to single loop (Model I) and double loop learning (Model II). In order to achieve learning, an individual must align his or her espoused theory with their theory-in-use, and true change will occur.

Theories-of-action. The phenomenon under examination is literacy interventionists' description of practices (espoused theories) and observed practices (theories-in-use) regarding the enactment of the RTI program, delivery of effective literacy interventions, and work with students with reading difficulties and reading disabilities. In evaluating theories of action in organizations, Argyris and Schön (1974) propose questions that are useful for evaluating espoused theories and theories-in-use. Are the theories-in-use and espoused theories internally consistent? Is there congruence between espoused theories and theories-in-use? Are the theories effective? Are they testable? Internal consistency means the absence of self-contradiction. Congruence means that one's espoused theory matches one's theory-in-use, specifically, one's behavior fits the espoused theory of action. These two theories are often incompatible and individuals are unable to see the discrepancy (Arygris & Schön, 1974; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2001). If two or more variables are internally incongruent, a person cannot reach the highest level of performance (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Scott, 2004). Therefore, it is

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imperative to analyze our theories-in-use and espoused theories (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2001).

Several studies have shown the common incongruence between professionals' practices and perceptions of those practices (Savaya & Garnder, 2012; Harnett, 2012). The first study analyzes social workers' conflict between their professional and personal belief system, while the second study examined teachers' knowledge, thinking, and beliefs on the types of teaching they employed in the classroom. In the first study, Savaya and Garnder (2012) present a critical reflection (CR) process guiding one to identify the assumptions governing his or her actions, question them, and develop alternative behaviors. The article presents two cases whereas social workers use the process to bring awareness to the gaps between their "espoused theories" and "theories-in-use" and helps guide them through developing more effective practices based on what they learned through the inquiry process. In order to identify one's espoused theory, social workers presented a list of their espoused values pertaining to certain aspects of their professional code and then analyzed an incident to check for congruency. The authors concluded that CR should become an ongoing part of supporting individuals in the organization, providing a safe place to look within one's self, and emotional support to help them through the difficult process. Therefore, this process could potentially be used as an effective professional development tool.

In the second study, Harnett (2012) presents an action research study in which he investigated two veteran teachers' effects of their knowledge, and thinking, and beliefs on teacher-student interactions. Over a two-year period and four cycles of action research, Harnett gathered information through semi-structured interviews and classroom

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observation, and engaged the teachers in professional reading, reflection, and discussion. The findings of the study concluded that teachers' understandings of learning often lacked theoretical coherence. The interviews revealed that the teachers were using educational 'jargon' with little understanding of its meaning, and although they talked about building on prior knowledge, developing understanding, scaffolding student learning, and providing feedback to help students move forward, their practice was sometimes inconsistent with their stated beliefs. While discrepancies were found between their espoused theories and theories-in-use, through the reflection process, the teachers were able to make small, incremental improvements in their teaching. Again, this study supports the notion that this process could yield effective results as professional development tool.

Belief Systems, Reflective Practice, and Continuous Learning

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes are major factors that determine teacher practice and pedagogy (Nespor, 1987). Therefore, the belief system is an essential part of improving practice and teacher effectiveness (Nespor, 1987). People differ in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, which is strongly tied to their culture (Gurang & Prieto, 2009; Tolle, 1997; Lencioni, 2002; Scott, 2004; Ball & Cohen, 1999). Our belief systems are also constructed in many other forms including race and ethnicity, sex, gender, religion, geographical location, physical ability, and sexual orientation (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Gurang & Prieto, 2009; Lencioni, 2002; Scott, 2004; Tolle, 1997). Individuals' personal values, preference, attitude, and beliefs, may or may not differ from the professional values, grounded in our practice and decisions (Savaya & Gardner, 2012). These personal belief systems may lead to bias and errors in judgment and decisions that impair

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the effectiveness (Savaya & Gardner, 2012). Individuals need to be aware of the values that underlie their behaviors. It can be challenging to convince others that they may make value judgments based on unconscious beliefs (Arygris & Schön, 1974; Gurang & Prieto, 2009; Savaya & Garnder, 2012). According to Argyris and Schön (1974), "the most effective way of making informed decisions is to examine and change one's governing values. One must learn what values and beliefs actually guide one's actions (theories-in-use) and how they differ from the values one espouses (espoused theories) (p. 145)." This will lead to a change in one's belief system. This process will be explained further in the next section.

Challenging current belief systems. Changing beliefs starts by challenging beliefs. Once you start to doubt what you believe, change starts to become possible (Schier, 2014). Many are unaware of the gap between their own patterns of behavior and are often shocked and disappointed when they become aware (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Savaya & Gardner, 2012). It can be a very difficult process to confront unacknowledged or possibly undesirable qualities about one's self, evoking strong feelings (e.g., guilt, shame, or inadequacy). Not everyone is ready to look within him or herself and listen to constructive feedback and face these gaps (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Savaya & Gardner, 2012). Existing theories prevent individuals from learning new theories and many individuals tend to be "unaware of how their attitudes affect their behavior and also unaware of the negative impact of their behavior on others. These theories-in-use blind them of their ineffectiveness and are used to justify their behavior. Blindness to incongruity between one's theory-in-use and espoused theory may be culturally as well as individually caused and maintained" (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. xxix). The literacy

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interventionists would need to determine if their espoused theories and theories-in-use are aligned, and if not, "learn new theories of action in order to increase their effectiveness in school reform" (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. xxviii).

Reflective practice. Real change depends on a change in ideas and beliefs and unless educators examine and modify their mental models, there will be no important changes in behavior (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p. 8). This will only happen if practitioners participate in constant, reflective practices. Our theories-in-use, or deeply rooted assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors, are ingrained and dictate how we handle daily tasks (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). "All human beings-not only professional practitioners-need to become competent in taking action and simultaneously reflecting on their actions in order to learn from them" (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 4). We can identify our actual theories-in-use through careful observations of our actual behaviors and actions. This will help us discover why we do what we do. This process of reflective practice will "achieve deep and meaningful change by uncovering, exploring, and eventually modifying the basic assumptions that lead up to act in predictable, but often ineffective, ways (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p. 13).

Teacher professional learning. Professional development is critical to provide opportunities for educators to challenge their current practices, improve their subject matter knowledge, and understand the diverse needs of the students they teach. If not, traditional instruction is likely to persist (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Shulman, 1987). Teachers need to be active, continuous learners. They must challenge their longstanding beliefs about learning, including how students learn and best practices; therefore, they need to know pedagogy including learning from experience (reflection), track student growth

through evaluation of student data, and use the knowledge to improve their practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Professional development can be improved substantially if schools build the capacity for teachers to learn about practice in practice (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Ball & Cohen, 1999). Teachers need to develop ways to study and analyze teaching and learning and consider their practice based on evidence and analysis, not simply opinion and preference (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Another area teachers need to analyze is their belief systems about students with reading difficulties.

Differentiated professional development. Stein and Nelson (2003) advocate for *leadership content knowledge* and believe that it is a missing paradigm needed to guide school and district initiatives. Administrators need to understand how teachers learn best and create the conditions to build capacity for continuous learning. They must understand the learning needs of the teacher, arrange for appropriate tasks to encourage learning, and provide adequate resources to support learning. Through the process, it is important to uncover the teachers' assumptions and beliefs, understand how teachers learn best, and provide professional development differentiated for each teacher.

In a study conducted by An and Reigeluth (2012), the researchers examined K-12 teachers' beliefs, perceptions, barriers, and the support needed in order to create a technology rich, student-centered classroom. Using an online survey, 126 teachers participated, and the findings provided some insights into how to support teachers, provide professional development, and the need for a paradigm change. Ironically, it was reported by the teachers that a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development does not work. This study provides an approach used to understand how to approach educational change, which will provide ideas on how to approach my research,

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reinforcing the need to differentiate professional development. The standardized approaches to professional development fails to recognize the varied needs and experience of teachers and prescribe a traditional one-size-fits-all approach regardless of individual needs (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). It is important to uncover the teachers' assumptions and beliefs, understand how teachers learn best, and provide professional development differentiated for each teacher.

Belief systems about students with reading difficulties. Little (2012) contends that an often-overlooked factor is reflected in teachers' beliefs and values in ways that they classify and characterize students. This is manifested in their interpretation of data and decision making of appropriate instructional actions to take. It also directly relates to social order and maintenance of complex social systems (Anyon, 1980; Little, 2012). This practice can contribute to the unequal access to education perpetuating the achievement gap by making social power only available to privileged groups (Anyon, 1980). For example, classificatory talk suggests the power of such categories as the "fast kids" and "slow kids" and interpretations drawn inform instructional decisions (Little, 2012). Teachers need to hold the belief that every student can succeed by setting high standards and letting the students know that they believe they are capable of meeting those standards (Bandura, 1993; Resnick, 2010; Steele, 1999). In order to change peoples' belief systems, we need to first identify these misconceptions and work towards eradicating fallacies in thinking (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

In education, educators are too quick to judge our students based on our own hunches and not necessarily making rational, data-based decisions that also include looking at our students as a whole (Little, 2012, Bandura, 1993; Harnett, 2012). This may

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reinforcing the need to differentiate professional development. The standardized approaches to professional development fails to recognize the varied needs and experience of teachers and prescribe a traditional one-size-fits-all approach regardless of individual needs (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). It is important to uncover the teachers' assumptions and beliefs, understand how teachers learn best, and provide professional development differentiated for each teacher.

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In education, educators are too quick to judge our students based on our own hunches and not necessarily making rational, data-based decisions that also include looking at our students as a whole (Little, 2012, Bandura, 1993; Harnett, 2012). This may

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cause schools to misdiagnose and stereotype students. For example, when a student is failing, a teacher may conclude that a student is lazy, not motivated, capable but not applying herself, not putting enough effort, or it must be because of his or her home environment. Educational practitioners fail to diagnose other underlying problems. Too often we jump to conclusions that are not necessarily sound in reasoning and unconsciously influenced by other factors that each student presents (Groopman, 2007). RTI provides a critical thinking approach to understanding underlying factors affecting student achievement (Allington, 2009).

In order to transform our school systems, everyone must be dedicated to continuous improvement, both personally and collectively (Senge, 1990). We must rethink our practices that continue to create achievement gaps amongst our students (Senge, 1990). In summary, this section on teacher belief systems, reflection, and continuous learning presents a case for the need for teachers to be aware of their underlying beliefs and how they align to their practices (Argyris & Schön, 1974). This is especially important when it comes to working with students not reading on grade level and using the RTI model to make instructional decisions on how to support our students with reading difficulties and prevent unnecessary classification. This is an essential part of improving practice and teacher effectiveness. It is imperative that our students not reading on grade level learn from teachers who are well versed and trained in delivering literacy instruction that is effective and aligned to evidence-based practices and methodologies (NJ Department of Education, 2017e).

Current Understanding of Reading Difficulties and Effective Interventions

Poor readers are often the result of the system itself and product of a poor reading program or inadequate instruction (Callender, 2007; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Copton, 2004). At least 95% of all students should be reading at benchmark if literacy interventions provided in the RTI program are implemented with fidelity (Hall, 2008; Hall, 2011) and no one blames other factors (e.g. no support at home, not developmentally ready, late bloomers) (Hall, 2008). Students that leave first grade behind their peers in reading tend to remain behind (Allington, 2009; Hall, 2008). Teachers need to effectively teach all aspects of reading, monitor reading behaviors and abilities, and continuously monitor growth. To meet this challenge, teachers must have an adequate understanding of this process, be aware of factors that may prevent a child from learning to read, understand effective literacy instruction, and select and administer assessments to determine how to effectively teach children to read (Balajthy & Lipa-Wade, 2003; NJ Department of Education, 2017e).

Causes of reading difficulties. Reading problems can be found among every group and in every classroom and some primary causes include weak preparation from the preschool home environment, low socioeconomic status, low expectations for minority students, children who speak another language or have limited proficiency in English, low general intellectual ability, lack of motivation and interest, or lack of instruction (NJ Department of Education, 2017e; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Two main kinds of reading difficulties have traditionally been distinguished as "dyslexia" and "specific learning disability." Educators should ignore labels (i.e., dyslexia), and provide intensive, expert reading instruction to children for as long as it takes to catch them up to

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grade level (Allington, 2009). Good and poor readers differ in their reading ability as much because of differences in instruction as variations in individual learning styles or attitudes (Allington, 1983; Klinger, et. al., 2010). It is imperative that all students have the opportunity to learn from teachers well versed in delivering literacy instruction that aligns to evidence-based practices and methodologies (NJ Department of Education, 2017e). A large number of students who should be capable of reading are not, suggesting that instruction is not appropriate (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). This would suggest an instructional deficit, not cognitive deficit (e.g., SLD or dyslexia).

 Instructional deficit versus cognitive deficit. Early and long-term reading difficulties in most children are caused by instructional deficits rather than cognitive deficits (learning disabilities), which has led to the considerable attention for alternative models for special education identification (Callender, 2007; Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L., & Copton, 2004; Moran & Petruzezelli, 2011; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Ysseldyke, 2005). A host of conditions occur that can contribute to the risk imposed by poor schools including, but not limited to, low expectations, slow-paced, undemanding curriculum, and poorly trained teachers (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). It can be difficult to distinguish between students that require ongoing support of special education from inadequate opportunity to learn or support (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Unfortunately, when most students are referred to special education, their instructional histories are not taken into consideration and the "search for pathology" begins until some explanatory factor is found to account for the child's reading difficulty (Snow, Brown, & Griffin, 1998).

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Our educational system is founded on the premise that groups of children (typically 20 to 30) of similar chronological age will be taught a common curriculum and will all make approximately 1-year worth of growth each year. If students do not make one year worth of growth, the gap will continue to widen (Allington, 2009). Allington (2009) recommends that students in kindergarten and first grade benefit from 30 minutes additional, intensive reading support daily. In second grade and beyond, larger intervention blocks are typically necessary. For example, a fourth-grade student reading at the second-grade level historically has learned at roughly half of a year's growth in each full year. By doubling the student's current average reading growth (develop reading skills at a rate of one year per full year), the child maintains the two-year gap and his or her reading proficiency never catches up to peers. In order to close the gap, educators need to triple the rate over a four-year period, or quadruple the reading acquisition rate of learning over a two-year period.

The reauthorization of IDEA allows school districts to identify learning disabilities (LDs) by measuring student respond to scientifically, research-based instruction through RTI making the LD process more instructionally relevant (Callender, 2007; Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L., & Copton, 2004; Ysseldyke, 2005). RTI offers a new approach to support struggling readers and prevent classification by measuring a child's response to research-based instructional interventions, specifically in reading (Reschly, 2003, Vaugh & Fuchs, 2003; Ysseldyke, 2005). Effective early interventions can prevent instructional deficits (Allington, 2002; Callender, 2007). Only interventions aligned to specific skill deficits that are research based or scientifically based and used with fidelity should be used (Callender, 2007; Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L., & Copton, 2004; Fuchs & Fuchs,

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1995). If the poor readers are often the result of our own poor practices, we need to explore alternative approaches to differentiate between instructional deficits versus cognitive deficits (Callender, 2007; Ysseldyke, 2005).

The RTI model can be used to reduce teacher-biased referrals and increase the probability that students classified as LD are the students with the greatest academic risk (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982). Teachers who believe that poor performance represents a LD are more likely to refer students to special education than teachers that have other interpretations for low performance (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982). Thus, by reducing teacher biased belief systems, misidentification of students with LD would be greatly reduced. Many resources are presently used to identify students for LD; however, little connection exists between the assessment data used and the resulting instruction (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982). By using the RTI model, focus is maintained on the student's learning and whether or not the instructional plan is working, thus, if the individual goals are being met. "Once we can define what is working and what is not working, then we know how instruction should proceed (Beers, 2003, p. 24)." This approach would ensure that student progress and the effectiveness of the instruction is monitored (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982).

Heller, Holtzman, and Messick (1982) further explain that traditionally, a disability is viewed as a deficit that resides "within" the individual and is a permanent (not temporary) condition. On the contrary, RTI focuses on the environment using a preventative trial of intensive interventions and adaptations in the general education environment, and tracking student response. This process eliminates contextual variables as an explanation for academic failure (e.g., instructional deficit). If a child fails to learn

in an environment where the majority of other children are successful, then it can be inferred that the child's deficits require special education. Therefore, it can be determined that the deficits reside in the individual (within), not the environment or instructional program (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Copton, 2004; Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982). RTI can provide a different approach to guide schools in making more evidence-based decisions about students not reading on grade level.

   Overclassification. Mislabeling of students is one of the most controversial issues facing special education today, and one of the fundamental issues confronting special education classification is to identify and use nondiscriminatory devices and procedures (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Currently, the most prevalent disability category for students ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA is identified as having a specific Learning Disability (LD) than any other type of disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). During the last several decades, the number of students identified as LD has increased substantially from about 1.8 percent in 1976-1977 to 3.4 percent in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Just over thirty-nine percent of all students identified for special education in the United States are classified as LD (approximately 3.4 percent of the school-age population). In low-incident categories typically diagnosed by medical professional (e.g., deaf, blind, orthopedic impairment) where the problem is observable outside the school context, no marked disproportion exists (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The higher disproportion is in high-incident categories (e.g., mild mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and learning disabilities), in which the problem is identified first in the school context without confirmation of an organic cause (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Practitioners tend to still interpret the RTI program in

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terms of the traditional approach to special education classification and simply a place to send "failing" students (Cavendish, et. al., 2016). This is directly connected to educator's belief systems about students with diverse (dis)abilities. Educators need to believe that pre-referral interventions work and that all students are capable of learning at high levels. Students at risk, as well as students with disabilities, can learn at high levels if they receive the right kind of literacy interventions (Allington, 2009; Kilpatrick, 2015).

We need to start rethinking our response to students that have difficulty reading and design reading interventions that accelerate reading development to resolve reading difficulties that some students experience (McGill-Granzen & Allington, 2001). We can accomplish this goal if RTI programs are designed around these research-based design principles (Allington, 2009; Kilpatrick, 2015). The intent of RTI is to reduce the number of students classified with disabilities and increase the number of students reading on grade level. Many struggling readers can be caught up to grade level, but instead, they are simply classified without ever receiving an intensive intervention (Torgeson & Hudson, 2006).

Effective literacy interventions. Since many students have difficulty reading due to poor instruction, it becomes imperative to determine what type of supplemental intervention is likely to help (Kilpatrick, 2015; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Research proposes that effective literacy interventions have common features (Allington, 2002; Denton, et. al., 2014; National Reading Panel, 2000). Therefore, I will explore several features in the following sections including analyzing the key areas of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), explicit instruction, the amount of time spent on various reading activities, opportunities to apply skills and

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strategies with teacher feedback, and the use of data to provide targeted instruction (Allington, 2009; Allington, 1983; Allington & McGill-Franzen; Juel, 1988; Denton, et. al., 2014; Klinger, et. al., 2010 National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffon, 1998; and Stanovich & Cunningham, 1998).

Integrated instruction. Interventions should be integrated into the key areas of reading, targeting students' needs: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2010; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). A significant number of teachers do not use the components of effective instruction (Ysseldyke, 2005). Phonological awareness has been pinpointed as the most valid predictor contributing to initial reading acquisition (Kilpatrick, 2015, National Reading Panel, 2010; Stanovich, 1986; Juel, 1998; Stanovich & Cunningham, 1998) and it is necessary during a child's early development because the absence of this ability can initiate a casual chain of escalating negative effects (Kilpatrick, 2015; Stanovich, 1986). Other indicators include vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension (Stanovich, 1986). Delays in the development of fluency in turn hinders comprehension leading to avoidance or tolerance without true engagement and learning (Stanovich & Cunningham, 1998; Stanovich, 1986). Since reading acquisition itself facilitates these skills, it creates a reciprocal, negative causation effect.

Phonemic awareness and phonics. Phonemic awareness and letter knowledge have been shown in many studies as the two best school entry predictors of how well children will learn to read during their first two years in school (National Reading Panel, 2010). Phonological awareness is the basic alphabetic understanding that spoken language is made up strings of separable words and can be turned into sequences of

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syllables and phonemes within syllables. It is important to differentiate between phonemic awareness and phonics. Systematic phonics instruction refers to instructional practices that stress the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences and their use to read and spell words. Phonics instruction is an effective intervention for children having difficulty learning to read (National Reading Panel, 2010; Snow, Burns, & Griffon, 1998). For example, the letter c represents the phoneme /K/ and can be found in words such as cat and kit. However, in conventional phonics programs, children lack phonological awareness and fail to internalize their phonics lessons. This results in students having difficulty sounding out and blending words, retaining words, and learning to spell. Therefore, learning to read can be facilitated by providing explicit instruction that focuses on phonological awareness and the structure of words.

Fluency. Fluent readers can read text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression and it is an essential ingredient for successful reading development (National Reading Panel, 2010). Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) pose that "adequate progress in learning to read … depends on sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different texts" (p. 223), and it is recommended that "because the ability to obtain meaning from print depends so strongly on the development of word recognition accuracy and reading fluency, both the latter should be regularly assessed in the classroom, permitting timely and effective instructional response when difficulty or delay is apparent" (p. 7). Fluency is a byproduct of having a large sight word vocabulary of easily accessible words (Kilpatrick 2015). Repeated reading and other guided oral reading procedures have shown to improve the speed and accuracy of practiced passages and improvements in reading fluency (Kilpatrick, 2015; National Reading Panel, 2010); however, techniques

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that do not promote interaction with the precise sequence of the words are not likely to efficiently turn unfamiliar words into instantly recognized words via repeated readings and have limited value in promoting fluency (Kilpatrick, 2015). Phonemic awareness is a necessary condition for the development of phonics; phonics knowledge is necessary for word recognition; word recognition is necessary for fluency; and fluency is necessary for reading comprehension (Eldredge, 2005).

Comprehension. Comprehension is a very complex process. The National Reading Panel (2010) offers that "reading comprehension is the construction of the meaning of a written text through a reciprocal interchange of ideas between the reader and the message in a particular text" (p. 4-4). The National Reading Panel (2010) addressed two main aspects of reading comprehension: vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies. First, directly teaching students reading comprehension strategies and skills has demonstrated to be beneficial for poor comprehension skills (Kilpatrick, 2015). Comprehension strategies are specific procedures that guide students to become aware of how well they are comprehending as they attempt to read and write. Explicit instruction of these strategies is believed to lead to improvement in text understanding and information use by demonstrating, modeling, or guiding a reader in how to use these skills (National Reading Panel, 2010). "In typical practice, students are asked to apply comprehension strategies (e.g., "Read these paragraphs and choose the best main idea statement.") without being directly taught how to do so. Providing more explicit and carefully sequenced instruction and more opportunity for practice is especially important for students with learning difficulties (Denton, et., al., 2014, p. 21)."

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Even though reading comprehension was one of the main instructional areas emphasized by the National Reading Panel (2000), most special education teachers provide limited reading comprehension instruction to their students with LD. Interventions should focus on direct instruction about comprehension strategies such as summarizing, inferencing, predicting, and monitoring through independent reading or being read aloud (Snow, Burns, & Griffon, 1998). In a study conducted by Klinger et. al (2010), the researchers observed 41 special education teachers 124 times reading to their third through fifth-grade students with learning disabilities to determine the extent to which they promoted comprehension. Thirty-four percent of the time, no comprehension instruction was observed, and only low-level, rote questions, mostly factual in nature, were asked 24 percent of time during the observations. Few teachers engaged students in meaningful dialogue to promote understanding. Higher-level strategies including finding the main idea or summarizing were rarely used. The researchers concluded that that teachers seemed unsure of how to promote reading comprehension and many missed opportunities were noted.

Based on the findings of this study, there should be greater emphasis in teacher education on the teaching of reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2010). "Teachers need training to become effective in explaining fully what it is that they are teaching (what to do, why, how, and when), modeling their own thinking processes for their students, encouraging students to ask questions and discuss possible answers and problem solutions among themselves, and keeping students engaged in their reading by providing tasks that demand active involvement. Such instruction should begin during preservice training, and it should be extensive, especially with respect to preparing

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teachers to teach comprehension strategies (National Reading Panel, 2010, p. 4-8)."
Intensive strategy instruction for teachers can lead to improvement in the performance of
their students (National Reading Panel, 2010).

Vocabulary. In addition to teaching comprehension strategies, teaching
vocabulary is central to reading comprehension*.* "Vocabulary occupies an important
position in learning to read. As a learner begins to read, reading vocabulary encountered
in texts is mapped onto the oral vocabulary the learner brings to the task. The reader
learns to translate the (relatively) unfamiliar words in print into speech, with the
expectation that the speech forms will be easier to comprehend. Benefits in understanding
text by applying letter-sound correspondences to printed material come about only if the
target word is in the learner's oral vocabulary" (National Reading Panel, 2010, p. 4-15).
Reading vocabulary is crucial to the comprehension processes of a skilled reader.

Explicit instruction. Explicit instruction is instruction that "does not leave
anything to chance and does not make assumptions about skills and knowledge that
children need to acquire on their own. Lessons are based on clear objectives and progress
systematically in complexity and difficulty. It requires direct explanations and modeling
of concepts, skills, and strategies, along with guided practice embedded in texts and
corrective feedback (Denton, et. al., 2014). In a study conducted by Denton, et. al.
(2014), the researchers studied 214 first graders that were identified as at risk for reading
difficulties and provided either supplemental small-group interventions using explicit
instruction, guided reading, or a non-research validated approaches. It was concluded that
explicit approaches to reading instruction that provides practice and application with
connected text is associated with stronger effects on students' phonemic decoding and

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word recognition, text reading fluency, and reading comprehension (Denton, et. al., 2014).

     Time spent on various activities. Allington (1983) conducted his own empirical research along with analyzing a range of other studies and found that inconsistencies in the type of instruction provided to good and struggling readers and unintended consequences. He examined the amount of time allocated for reading instruction given to readers in different reading ability groups, the instructional emphases during the reading instruction, and the verbal behaviors of teachers in response to errors students make when reading aloud. He found the following incongruities: 1) Engagement (struggling readers are off-task more than good readers); 2) Struggling readers' instruction emphasizes decoding and skills and good readers focus on meaning of texts they read; 3) Type of reading (oral for the struggling and silent for the good); 4) Types of interruptions (Teachers most often interrupt struggling readers to correct errors and ignore errors of good readers); 5) Exposure to reading (good readers read, on average, three times the number of words than struggling readers). Allington (1983) poses that changing the instructional environment of poor readers to replicate that of good readers offers a potential approach for improving the reading skills for struggling readers. Not only do we need to focus on the time spent on various activities, but we need to focus on the type of reading instruction.

Many special education reading observation studies have focused on the amount of time students spent on various tasks (National Reading Panel, 2000; Allington & McGill-Franzen; Klinger, et.al. 2010). Allington and McGill-Franzen (1989) observed 64 students in second, fourth, and eighth grade for one full school day, and compared

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students in special education program and general education classes. The students in the special education classrooms spent the least amount of time engaged in reading instruction, and the largest proportion of their time completing independent, seat work activities. Haynes and Jenkins (1986) found similar results when observing fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students with disabilities compared to their general education peers. While the reading instruction varied immensely across the programs, it was noted that the actual reading instruction was significantly lower for students placed in special education resource rooms. Over half of the time was spent completing independent seat work, only 19% of the time was dedicated to small group instruction, and a small percentage was dedicated to individual one-on-one support.

Reading volume. Time spent reading is one of the best predictors of several measures of reading achievement (Allington, 1980; Allington, 2014; Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Stanovich & Cunnigham, 1998). Interventions that increase book reading time have desirable effects and the amount of time a child spends reading books is related to a child's reading level in the fifth grade and reading growth from the second to the fifth grade (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988). Exposure to more reading is a major source of knowledge about sentence structure, text structure, topics, vocabulary acquisition, and reading fluency (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, Wilkinson, 1985). "Too often we have designed reading intervention programs where the students engage in everything but actual reading. This is one reason interventions seldom accelerate reading growth (Allington, 2009, g. 59)."

In Allington's (1977) article, "If they don't read much, how they ever gonna get good," he argues that struggling readers may remain struggling readers based on the

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instruction they receive and how they are treated in reading classrooms. Reading volume is central to development of reading proficiencies and generally no one monitors the actual quantity students engage in and most commonly time is filled with low-level questioning and worksheets (Allington, 2014). Struggling readers need to be provided with ample reading opportunities to experience success in reading real texts. If a child does not want to read, reading achievement is greatly diminished (Allington, 2009; Juel, 1998; Stanovich & Cunningham, 1998). These students will avoid forgoing the critical task of practicing, a necessary task to improve reading (Cunningham, 2005; Edmunds & Bauseman, 2006; Juel, 1998). Early success at reading acquisition and exposure to as many reading experiences as possible is the key to fostering a lifetime of reading habits (Stanovich & Cunningham, 1998).

Juel's (1988) longitudinal student of 54 children's' reading and writing acquisition from first through fourth grade focused on the two areas that are thought to be responsible for literacy development, decoding and comprehension. The evidence in this study indicates that a struggling first-grade reader almost evidently remains a struggling reader by the end of fourth grade. Struggling fourth grader readers were found to be lacking decoding skills and comprehension (listening) skills, and a primary factor that seemed to keep poor readers from improving was their poor decoding skill and lack of exposure to print and reading. Struggling readers often reported that reading was "boring" and read little voluntarily. More frequent reading experiences likely contributed to the widening gap in listening comprehension (i.e., vocabulary acquisition, concepts, text structures, syntax, and pragmatics) between good readers and struggling readers. This study highlights the importance of early identification and prevention of reading

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difficulties along with identifying phonological awareness, comprehension, and exposure to more reading a predictive factor of reading success. In addition to expanding student opportunities to read, they need opportunities to apply the skills and strategies.

Application of skills and strategies. "Teachers must be skillful in their instruction and must respond flexibly and opportunistically to students' needs for instructive feedback as they read. To be able to do this, teachers must themselves have a firm grasp not only of the strategies that they are teaching the children but also of instructional strategies that they can employ to achieve their goal. Many teachers find this type of teaching a challenge, most likely because they have not been trained to do such teaching (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 4-7).

Data driven instruction. A key to RTI is in the capacity to make informed instructional decisions (Callender, 2007; President's Commission, 2002). Progress monitoring is used as part of the identification process, especially to make the decision less subjective, and should entail a careful evaluation of the child's response to instruction (President's Commission, 2002). Children should not be identified for special education without documenting what methods have been used to facilitate the child's learning and adaptation to the general education classroom. The child's response to scientifically based interventions attempted in the context of general education should be evaluated with performance measures, such as pre- and post-administration of norm-referenced tests and progress monitoring. In the absence of this documentation, many children who are placed into special education are essentially instructional casualties and not students with disabilities (President's Commission, 2002).

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"Reading failure is caused by the interaction between the features of instruction and materials used and student characteristics – instruction makes the difference (Denton, 2012)." Teachers must address research-to-practice issues, so that literacy interventions are aligned with effective practices in order to teach students with reading difficulties (Vaughn, Levy, Coleman, & Bos, 2002). Teacher quality affects student academic growth more than any other single factor (Reutzel & Cooter, 20013). Teachers must have the necessary knowledge to effectively approach literacy interventions, which requires an understanding of the necessary reading skills that must be learned including a trajectory in which the skills must be taught (Reutzel & Cooter, 20013). Transitioning to RTI will shift the emphasis in special education away from the current focus, which is on determining whether students are eligible for special education services, towards providing students the interventions they need to successfully learn using data based decisions (President's Commission on Excellence, 2002).

Response to Intervention

Response to intervention is a "practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions (Hall, 2008, p. 17)." RTI is a paradigm, or way of thinking that supports implementation of early identification and intervention for all students to be successful utilizing a framework for making data-driven decisions informing instructional practices. Most of research is based on early reading interventions along with a wealth of well-researched early literacy screening instruments. Along with using the screener to identify students at risk, other forms of assessments are used to support the data received

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and provide additional information. The staff must be committed to systematically solving academic problems, motivated to change, and trained to possess foundational knowledge on how to support and teach struggling students (Hall, 2008; Fullan, 2010).

RTI emerged through the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), but it is not simply a special education initiative. School districts compile data from the universal screener and afterwards, students not reaching benchmark receive alternative tiers of instruction. Every student participates in the core instruction (Tier I) and students in need of additional support participate in Tier II and receive 40 minutes of extra reading instruction using a diverse array of curriculum materials focusing on the instruction needed (Hall, 2008). The Tier III program is more systematic, explicit, and sequential using a slower pace and more repetition. Some students are assessed more or less depending on teacher recommendation and current tier. This study proposes to conduct an integrity check and analyze elementary literacy interventionist's understanding of effective literacy interventions and RTI and how their beliefs align with their actual practices while delivering Tier II literacy interventions to students in the RTI program.

Reading improvement and reduction in special education. Effective RTI programs require thoughtful planning and implementation and require a philosophical shift in how we view problems along with the school's responsibility in addressing the needs of all students (Callender, 2007). Most of the current research on RTI has focused primarily in literacy and many studies have shown positive implications when implementing RTI (Bollman, Silberglitt, & Gibbons, 2007; Callender, 2007; O'Connor, Harty, & Fulmer, 2005; Balu, et. al., 2005; Cavendish, et. al., 2016; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Not only has RTI shown positive results with increasing reading achievement, it

has shown that when students are identified early and receive interventions it decreases reading difficulties, thus reducing special education classification rates (Bollman et. al., 2007; Callendar, 2007; O'Connor, Harty, Flumer, 2005). Many studies have explored teachers' and administrators' perceptions of RTI and the roles the school culture, personal beliefs, and knowledge of RTI play a role in implementing RTI (Ochieng-Sande, 2013; Cavendish et. al., 2016; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Few studies have been published comparing intended RTI practices, specifically when delivering literacy instruction and data usage, versus enacted practices as they occur in the actual school setting (Cavendish, et. al., 2016; Orosco & Klingner, 2010).

Many studies have found positive results when implementing RTI showing an overall improvement in reading outcomes and decrease in special education placements (Bollman, Silberglitt, Gibbons, 2007; Callender, 2007; O'Connor, Harty, & Fulmer, 2005). Bollman, Silberglitt, & Gibbons (2007) studied the St. Croix River Education District (SCRED) and their usage of RTI over the past two decades. The SCRED includes five school districts in Minnesota with a total population of approximately 9000 students. They have implemented a RTI framework focusing on three critical elements: 1) Ongoing progress monitoring; 2) Evidence-based instruction; and 3) Schoolwide system organization to ensure the best possible program for each student. SCRED has been collecting data since 1996, and since that time, they have shown a steady increase in reading performance, as well as in other general outcome measures of early literacy and mathematics. The percentage of students in 1998 reaching grade level standards on standardized assessments has increased from 51% to 80% in 2005. This was shown to be a slightly faster increase than the overall state. The greatest gains have been made in

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reducing the number of students in the lowest level on the statewide assessment (Level 1 representing the lowest level and 3 and above representing students reading grade-level standards) from 20% to only 6% in 2005. In addition, the LD classification rate dramatically decreased over a decade by 40% preventing many potential LDs by providing effective interventions early on.

Bollman, Silberglitt, and Gibbons (2007) concluded that the St. Croix River Education District's reading success and reduction in special education placement was due largely to two key factors: 1) Students identified as at-risk were provided with scientifically based interventions (90-150 additional minutes per week) including progress monitoring and implementation fidelity checks. If a student shows little to no growth on the first intervention, a second intervention with greater intensity or specificity was provided along with the same progress monitoring and instructional fidelity checks. This study concluded that ongoing professional development for staff was imperative to ensure that the core instruction and interventions were delivered with high levels of integrity.

In another large-scale study, based on a description of Idaho's statewide implementation of RTI, also known as the Results-Based Model (RBM), Callender (2007) explored many of the major lessons learned at the state and local level including the result of experience, program evaluation, and school feedback. Starting in 1997 and as of 2005, approximately 150 elementary and secondary schools had been trained and implemented RTI. When a disproportionate number of students were performing below grade level, it was often found to be the school's system itself as a contributing factor. The primary systematic concerns that surfaced were a lack of effective interventions for

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struggling readers, use of non-research based reading programs, no method for monitoring student program, and an overall system limited in its design to support struggling readers. Between Fall of 2002 -2003 and Fall of 2004-2005, the enrollment statewide in special education increased by 1% whereas districts participating in the RBM demonstrated a 3% decrease in special education. A comprehensive study of 1400 K-3 students showed students with intervention plans (enrolled in RBM) progressed significantly more than those without intervention plans. Callender (2007) found that the key to a successful RTI program was the school's capacity to make informed instructional decisions based on student response to interventions. Therefore, it imperative that teachers receive targeted professional development focusing on effective literacy interventions.

O'Conner, Harty, and Fulmer (2005) studied the effects of increasing levels of reading interventions (Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III) for a cohort of students in grades kindergarten through third grade to determine if the severity of the reading difficulty could be reduced or remediated and the resulting effect on special education placements by the end of the third grade. Additional instruction was provided to students who were identified as at-risk based on below grade level performance. Tier I consisted of professional development on reading instruction to staff. Tier II interventions consisted of small-group reading instruction provided three times per week. Tier III provided daily instruction individually or in pairs. Children who were identified in Kindergarten as at-risk showed moderate to large differences in reading achievement favoring students in the tiered interventions showing gains in decoding, word identification, fluency, and reading comprehension. The historical data at the research site showed the percentage of special

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education placements averaged fifteen percent. After four years of participation in the study, the rate of placement was reduced to eight percent. This study concluded that early intervention may decrease the severity or incidence of reading disabilities when children are identified in kindergarten or 1st grade, progress is monitored frequently so that treatments are used for the length of time needed (long term can be costly), and more research must be conducted to determine the ideal duration and intensity of early intervention.

Conversely, a federal study released in 2015 that evaluated the effectiveness of RTI for reading instruction and interventions in grades 1-3 involving over 20,000 students, in 146 elementary schools, across 13 states found statistically significant negative effects for RTI interventions on reading performance for students identified as just below grade level at the beginning of the school year (Balu, Zhu, Doolittle, Schiller, Jenkins, & Gersten, 2015). This study exposes issues related to proper implementation of RTI. For example, students should receive the recommended ninety minutes of literacy instruction during Tier I instruction (core instruction), and interventions for students in Tier II and Tier II should be supplemental (in addition to the core instruction). Other plausible factors that the researchers concluded might have been related to the negative impact included incorrect identification of students at-risk, mismatch of the reading intervention to individual student needs, and poor alignment between the reading intervention and core reading program. This study suggests ways for how schools might update and refine their RTI framework to avoid factors that had a negative impact.

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Perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of RTI. Many studies have explored practitioners' perceptions of RTI and the roles the school culture, personal beliefs, and knowledge of RTI play a role in implementing RTI (Ochieng-Sande, 2013; Cavendish, et. al., 2016; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Cavendish et. al (2016) conducted a study to examine school personnel's perceptions of students' responsiveness to research based interventions within the RTI program and how that information was used in conjunction to special education identification (data usage), to focus on intended practices (espoused) versus enacted practices (theory-in-use) as they occur in the actual school setting, and to provide recommendations to improve practices. This study exposed the many challenges when implementing RTI related to monitoring student responsiveness and making data-based decisions about special education identification, professional development gaps, school personnel's' assumptions about diverse learners, and external pressures from standardized tests and accountability measures. A lack of understanding was evident through observations and interview data in regards to the RTI components as well as the actual purpose of RTI, which is to provide pre-referral supports to prevent over referral to special education for learning disabilities. This study identified barriers to implementation and systematic factors that need to be changed in order to support RTI implementation. More research is needed to understand and identify the specific systematic issues and a process on how they can be addressed.

Ocheing-Sande (2013) explored from a qualitative perspective information about teachers' and administrators' perceptions of RTI and the roles that school culture, personal beliefs, and knowledge of RTI may play in its implementation. Program knowledge was found to be essential when implementing an educational reform. While

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RTI is a general education initiative, the study found that general education teachers knew very little about its purpose and goal. As a preliminary step, RTI cannot be effectively implemented unless all practitioners understand it and can articulate its purpose in the instruction for all children. While some practitioners could describe the purpose and process, variability was evident especially at the pre-referral stage and the information was used differently. For example, many skipped the RTI process and went directly to the referral stage for special education. This study concluded that effective implementation of reform efforts will occur when it blends into the culture of the school, belief systems are aligned to the purpose of the program, and the staff has the necessary knowledge for effectively implementing the program.

Few studies have been published comparing intended RTI practices, specifically when delivering literacy instruction and data usage, versus enacted practices as they occur in the actual school setting (Cavendish, et. al., 2016; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Orosco and Klingner (2010) analyzed and evaluated how a RTI model was implemented in an urban elementary school with a high percentage of English language learners experiencing reading difficulties at the primary level (K-2). The authors explored the teachers' perceptions of RTI, understandings, beliefs, judgements, and professional development that affected the RTI literacy instruction decision-making process through a qualitative, in-depth description on how the RTI model was implemented. Through the study, it was found that the school's RTI policy was ineffective because participants were unable to transform the "one-size-fits-all" policy into effective learning environments for all learners. One of the most startling findings was that the majority of the teachers cast judgement based on biased beliefs (middle-class upbringing) on what was right or wrong,

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good or bad, without fully understanding the cultural norms of the students. The negative school culture affected assessment and instructional values, expectations, and practices.   It was concluded that the school needed more guidance on how to coordinate curriculum and assessments, address practitioners' professional development needs, tackle school climate and cultural issues, and effective ways to address the needs of all students. Furthermore, the critical theme found in this study was the importance of understanding how teachers' perspectives influenced the development of RTI in the school.

No specific guidance is given to schools on how to mitigate poor student performance and close the achievement gap (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). RTI offers a way to identify at-risk students early and provide early interventions to struggling readers before their academic performance falls significantly behind peers, preventing long term reading difficulties and placement into special education (Bollman, Silberglitt, & Gibbons, 2007; Callender, 2007; Cavendish, 2016; Ochieng-Sande, 2013; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982; Moran & Petruzzelli, 2011). Many of the studies on RTI exposed systematic barriers mitigating effective implementation of RTI, including lack of effective evidence based interventions for struggling readers (Bollman, Silberglitt, & Gibbons, 2007; Callender, 2007; Balu, et. al., 2015), difficulty monitoring student progress and school's lack of capacity in making informed instructional decisions based on student RTIs (Bollman, Silberglitt, & Gibbons, 2007; Callender, 2007; Cavendish, 2016), lack of knowledge in regards to the RTI components and actual purpose of RTI (Cavendish, 2016; Ochieng-Sande, 2013), and school personnel's biased belief systems about diverse learners (Ochieng-Sande, 2013; Orosco &

Klingner, 2016; Cavendish, 2016). This proposed study seeks to fill in the gaps in the literature regarding the barriers identified by various studies regarding specific literacy instruction that interventionists are utilizing to deliver Tier II instruction to struggling readers (students performing below grade level) in the context of one elementary school's RTI program. This study will explore the intended practices and actual practices related to enacting RTI and literacy instruction, and underlying belief systems about students not reading on grade level.

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to present Argyris and Schön's theoretical framework, Theories-of-Action, and explore the research related to the beliefs educators hold and the importance of comparing their espoused versus actual theories-in-use. Along with this, it is also clear that teacher belief systems shape teaching practices. This field of inquiry is very important as it is the center of concern when helping struggling readers. Enhanced reading proficiency ultimately rests in the hands of exemplary teachers providing explicit, expert reading instruction based on instruction responsive to students' needs (Allington, 2002). Struggling readers require more and better reading instruction (Allington, 2009). If we want "every student to succeed" we need to invest in effective teachers. Designing programs to meet the needs of struggling readers must start with an examination of the quality of the classroom instruction they are receiving (Allington, 2009). Lack of data indicating the extent as to which the pre-ferral interventions were effective fails to support our at-risk readers. Failure to provide struggling students with effective interventions will result in a mislabeling of reading disabilities due to a lack of instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000). This study

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proposes to better understand all the factors necessary to provide effective literacy

instruction to struggling readers through the RTI program.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This qualitative, multicase study sought to increase our knowledge of Sunny Brook Elementary School's RTI program by examining individual interventionists' espoused beliefs and actual theories-in-use about Response to Intervention, literacy interventions, and working with students not reading on grade level. The study examined the extent to which elementary level interventionists' espoused beliefs and actual theories-in-use are congruent or incongruent when providing interventions in the context of the RTI program. Argyris and Schön's Theory-of-Action (1974) guided the inquiry along with examining implementation of the RTI program and literacy instruction.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following overarching research question: How are literacy interventionists' beliefs about students with reading difficulties, literacy interventions, and RTI congruent or incongruent with practices when delivering Tier II literacy interventions in one rural elementary school in grades K-6 embedded in a RTI framework? The following sub-questions will guide the research and data analysis for this study:

1. How do literacy interventionists describe their work with students with reading difficulties?

2. How do literacy interventionists describe their espoused theories related to RTI and literacy interventions?

3. How do literacy interventionists enact RTI and literacy interventions? What does this indicate about their theories-in-use?

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4. What similarities and differences exist between each interventionist's espoused

    theories and theories-in-use?

Research Design

Multicase research starts with the quintain. A quintain is an object or phenomenon

or condition to be studied (Stake, 2005), and in this study the quintain is the RTI

program, specifically at Sunny Brook Elementary School, a small, rural school district

that houses grades Preschool through 6th grade. Multicase study allows a special way to

examine something with many parts, while focusing on one small collection, and in this

study, interventionists are studied in detail (Stake, 2005). The primary issue focuses on

how participants interpret their beliefs about RTI, students with reading difficulties, and

capacity to execute literacy interventions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Through this study,

guided by Argyris and Schön's (1974) theoretical framework, Theory-in-Action, a

description is provided of each interventionist' experience. The primary concentration is

on how each teacher espouses her enactment of RTI, the literacy interventions they

provide, while exploring the participants' actual behaviors through this experience. The

units of analysis in this particular study are teachers serving as interventionists delivering

supplemental support to students enrolled in the RTI program, Tier II. Interventionists

were invited to participate in one semi-structured interview, direct observations of the

actual phenomena of interest, analysis of artifacts relevant to the study, and collection of

notes throughout the data collection process.

Multicase study. Qualitative case study research requires investigation of real

situations within the contextual conditions pertinent to the case where the researcher is

not trying to manipulate the events and has little or no control over the events (Stake,

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2005; Yin, 2013). I will seek to gain a deeper understanding regarding the quintain (RTI program) and understanding of how each literacy interventionist provides literacy interventions to students not reading on grade level through the context of the schools' RTI program. I will use themes to describe the teachers' espoused beliefs and actual theories in use describing their enactment of RTI and delivery of effective interventions allowing continuous interactions between the themes and data collected (Yin, 2013). I will further concentrate on factors that may have promoted or impeded the participants' inability to create a congruency between their espoused and actual theories-in-use.

A common concern about case studies is that they provide little support for scientific generalizations. However, such generalizations are based on replications of the same phenomenon under various conditions; therefore, if the findings are grounded and supported by a theory (Argyris and Schön's Theory in Action), a logical and sound argument can be made to show how these findings can be generalized to similar situations (Yin, 2010). The goal for this case study is to expand and make an analytic generalization, not a statistical generalization (Yin, 2009). Yin (2010) describes an approach for making an analytic generalization by demonstrating how the case study findings are grounded in a particular theoretical framework and phenomenon. In the particular study, the research is grounded in Argyris and Schön's Theory in Action and embedded in an RTI framework analyzing how each literacy interventionist provides literacy interventions to small groups of students having reading difficulties. Therefore, the theoretical framework will enhance the study's findings and lay the base of analytic generalizations (Yin, 2014). This would implicate situations in which similar events might occur (Yin, 2010).

In order to properly carry out the study, the researcher must separate and organize the data gathering and reporting of each individual case. Each case will have issues in common including working with students with reading difficulties, enacting the RTI program, effective literacy interventions, and how belief systems play a role, and some will have issues that arise that are particular to each (Stake, 2005). First, the individual cases will be studied to learn about their situational uniqueness and studied in depth based on the selected issues, not the case as a whole. This analysis of each case study will answer the research questions. Second, the four case studies will be compared and contrasted to identify similarities and differences that may have a direct impact on the RTI program. This multicase study is not a necessarily a study of the RTI program as it is a study of each case for what they can tell us about the RTI program (Stake, 2005).

Setting. This study will be conducted at Sunny Brook Elementary School, a small, rural elementary school housing 367 students in Preschool through 6th grade. This location was purposely selected due to convenience and the researcher's own desire to gain a deeper understanding of the main phenomenon, or quintain in the study. A small sample size, and a few participants will yield a deeper inquiry (Creswell, 2014). Table 1 below summarizes the demographics and characteristics for the school including the number of students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and students receiving supplemental services through the Response to Intervention Program.

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Table 1

Staff and Student Characteristics of Sunny Brook Elementary School

Characteristic	n	%
Teachers	35	N/A
Gender		
Male	1	0.02%
Female	34	99%
Interventionists	13	37.1%
Total Student Enrollment	367	N/A
Free and Reduced	45	12.2%
Ethnicity		
White	314	86.3%
Black	11	2.9%
Hispanic	23	6.2%
Asian	6	1.6%
Mixed	13	3.5%
Special Education		
IEPs	66	17.9%
Speech/Language	23	6.2%
Autistic	2	0.5%
Communication Impaired	9	2.4%
Orthopedically Impaired	1	0.27%
Other Health Impaired	7	1.9%
Preschool Child with a Disability	11	2.9%
Specific Learning Disability	13	3.5%
504s	27	7.3%
Response to Intervention	70	19%
Tier I Support	22	5.9%
Tier II Interventions	48	13%
Tier III Interventions	0	0%

Core reading program. During the 2016-17 school year, administrators, the reading specialist, and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers vetted several new literacy series and chose Schoolwide Reading Fundamentals as the new school-wide literacy program for core instruction. At the end of the school year, teachers were supplied the resources and materials for the program, and a two-day workshop was delivered to review the new program. The new program was officially launched at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year. All ELA classroom teachers and special education teachers participated in one day of professional development to learn how to properly launch the

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program, two coaching/lesson demonstration sessions, and one observation with feedback. During the first coaching session, a trainer from the program modeled a mini-lesson for each grade-level and held a brief reflection/discussion time. During the second coaching session, the trainer spent forty-minutes with grade-level ELA teams to discuss the Schoolwide mini-lesson and review how to chunk and pace the mini-lesson into several days. This allowed an opportunity for each grade-level ELA team to pose questions and troubleshoot concerns with the trainer. During the observation, the trainer observed each ELA teacher teaching a mini-lesson and debriefed with them afterwards to provide feedback and an opportunity to reflect. In addition, Sunny Brook Elementary School's reading specialist is full-time and provides individual coaching support to teachers in order to properly implement the new literacy program.

Interventionists and training. In the 2016-17 school year, all interventionists participated in three days of professional development on how to effectively use several research based interventions. Starting in 2016, interventionists have participated in twelve forty-minute "data meetings" to analyze student running records and develop student action plans and goals with support from the reading specialist. As mentioned earlier, the reading specialist is available to provide individual coaching support and oversees implementation of the RTI program.

Participants. The criterion for selecting participants for this study will be based on those currently serving as interventionists in the RTI program. Specifically, participants will be selected based on convenience, including the current teachers serving as interventionists who provide Tier II instruction. There are currently 11 interventionists at Sunny Brook Elementary School. A small sample of participants, will yield a deeper

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inquiry of each individual involved (Creswell, 1998). The interventionists teach kindergarten through 6th grade. An email was sent to all interventionists explaining the research project along with reassurance of confidentiality. Once a participant agreed to participate, they were asked to sign the consent form and a date and time was arranged for the interview and observations. I allowed them to choose the location so that they were comfortable during the interview.

Data Collection

Gathering data is a discovery process and interviewing, observing, and studying material culture are a primary way to discover and learn (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). For multicase studies, the most common methods are observation, interview, coding, data management, and interpretation (Stake, 2005). It is recommended when conducting a case study to collect as many different sources of evidence as possible, and when done properly, this approach strengthens and establishes construct validity, reliability, and triangulation (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). Case studies that use multiple sources of evidence are higher quality and overall findings and conclusions will be more convincing and accurate. First, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the interventionists to elicit their espoused theories about RTI and how they provide Tier II interventions to students not reading on grade level. Next, I observed the interventionists providing the literacy interventions within the context of the RTI program, and I collected relevant documents (e.g., lesson plans, student work) that revealed information about the phenomenon being studied (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Finally, throughout the collection process, I maintained a record of my field notes in a research journal. These multiple methods supported triangulation.

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Triangulation is predominately a process of repetitious data gathering (e.g., interviews, observations, artifacts, and field notes) and critical review of what is being espoused (Stake, 2005). Perceptions are open to interpretation so it is imperative to record interpretations precisely by recording interviews and taping audio during observations (Stake, 2005). Good researchers want assurance of what they are seeing and hearing, that they are not oversimplifying, and that the reader is interpreting what they intended to convey. Stake (2005) recommends that each important finding has at least three confirmations and assurances that key meanings are not being overlooked. Triangulation is expected to lead either to confirmation that the observation means what they think it means or to ideas about how the observation would be interpreted differently by different people (Stake, 2005). The various methods of data gathering will be explored in the following section.

Semi-structured interviews. Each participant partook in one semi-structured, in-depth interview utilizing questions prepared in advance (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2014). Prior to starting the interview, I shared the interview questions and obtained consent to record the interview. I thanked them for participating in my study and shared the steps I took to maintain confidentiality. Afterwards, I conducted "member-checking" by providing a summary of the main assumptions made and asked them to change, add information, and provide a final seal of approval (Stake, 2005).

The semi-structured interview questions were developed from multiple sources by examining, drawing from, and adapting other survey instruments, observation tools, and procedures, including components of Allington's (2009) framework and rubric for evaluating reading intervention programs, an observation tool and artifact form, and a

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survey used in a recent study to examine the RTI implementation process (Cavendish, et. al., 2016). The interventionists were interviewed to gain insights into their beliefs about students not reading on grade level, RTI, and their delivery of Tier II literacy interventions to students within the context of the RTI framework (see Appendix A).

Observations. Observation is a fundamental part of qualitative inquiry as it allows the researcher to note body language and affect in addition to the participant's words (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The purpose of the observation in the context of this study is not to evaluate teaching. Instead, observing the teachers in action allows the researcher to assess the extent to which each interventionist's espoused beliefs and reported practices correlate to her theories-in-use. It is also serves as data to support triangulation of all data sources. The observations were holistic descriptions of the instruction and were audio taped to capture verbatim dialogue between the interventionist and the students and to create a permanent record for subsequent analysis (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). I recorded interactions and my interpretations in my research journal (described below).

Work samples. "Qualitative researchers often supplement observing and interviewing with studying aspects of material culture produced in the course of everyday events" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 196). Gathering artifacts is potentially rich in portraying the values and beliefs in an organization (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). These documents may include the lesson plans followed by the interventionists, worksheets, and photocopies or pictures of work given to students. During the on-site data collection period, I collected and took pictures of all relevant documents. This source of evidence

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provided a deeper perspective of the interventions than simply interviews and observations (Yin, 20014).

Research journal. Field notes will be used to systematically record impressions, insights, and emerging hypotheses (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). I recorded all decisions and activities related to the research study in a personal journal, beginning from the time I sought approval to conduct the research at the site, until completion of my data analysis. During the on-site data collection period, I documented all conversations I had with interventionists, my perceptions of the interventionists' attitudes during interviews, observations, and casual conversations during the process. During the data analysis process, the journal was used to record any emerging themes and initial interpretations.

Data Analysis

"Analysis takes you step by step from the raw data in your interviews," observations, documents, and journal "to clear and convincing answers to your research questions" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 190). My analysis involved several steps (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each analysis will focus on one single case, each participant serving as an interventionist (Stake, 2005). The qualitative data for this study included interventionists' responses to open-ended interview questions, observations, documents, and researcher journal. First, I transcribed and summarized each piece of data set by participant. Second, I coded the data by defining, finding, and marking in each piece of data the relevant examples and concepts. Third, I found excerpts across all pieces of data with the same code, sorted them into one file, and summarized the contents. Fourth, I sorted the material within each file, and summarized the results of each sorting. Finally, I combined the

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concepts to generate my own descriptions I present in my study. My analysis is described in detail below.

After the data collection process was completed, it was organized, transcribed, and summarized by each case. Initially, I started by listening to the recorded interview and observations. Next, I read through the transcriptions and wrote down any thoughts that occurred to me, including but not limited to, a book or article I may have read, or any bias I detect, or notable quotes I wanted to explore further (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Afterwards, I summarized each interview and observation to help me later on when I wanted to compare across data. My summary included the "main points expressed, along with the pseudonym of the participant, the reasons for the interview being included, and how long the interview took" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Second, I used a descriptive coding technique to capture any concepts, themes, events, examples, or topical markers for each case (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2009). I started the coding with concepts and themes that I explicitly asked for and paid close attention to concepts and explanations that each participant emphasized. I manually assigned specific attributes to words, phrases, and sentences throughout the transcriptions based on patterns or useful concepts (Saldaña, 2009; Yin, 2014). This guided my analytic path and suggested further relationships (Yin, 2014). For example, I looked for concepts and themes that are emphasized in literature. At the next level of analysis, the second round of coding further filtered the data to generate specific categories (Saldaña, 2009) that were used in creating my codebook. My codebook included the code's name, a description, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and an example from the data. During this stage, I rearranged and reclassified some of the coded data into new categories. The

findings reflect my interpretation of the data connected to interventionist's espoused theories and theories-in-use and literature.

After I coded the data, I sorted, summarized, and compared all excerpts that I coded with the same label across each piece of data and sorted them into one file. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest asking certain questions when summarizing: 1) What new information was provided? 2) How did the participant define key concepts and terms? Each time I sorted and compared, I wrote a summary of what I found out. The purpose of this phase was primarily descriptive (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), and I looked for related concepts that answered my research questions. I tested my ideas by testing them against alternatives (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I explored the coded examples not just for evidence for my explanations, but for evidence against them (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). My goal for data analysis was to create accurate and detailed descriptions to answer my research questions.

After analyzing each data set by participant and answering my research questions, I started sorting the material within each file and compared each participant's espoused beliefs and theories-in-use (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and created an overall picture using the descriptions of the phenomenon. The purpose of this data analysis was to compare and contrast the four case studies and identify systematic factors either hindering or facilitating successful implementation of the school district's RTI program, and guidance for leadership.

Validity and Reliability

A research design can be judged by the quality of the design and certain logical tests including trustworthiness, credibility, and validity (Yin, 2014). Triangulation of data

was achieved by collecting data from multiple measures, including semi-structured interviews, observations, collection of documents, and maintaining a journal. Development of this type of convergent evidence strengthens the construct validity of my research (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). Member checks were used to allow participants to check their own interpretation of the interviews and provide feedback (Maxwell, 2005; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). In addition, I shared my initial findings with trusted colleagues to test my own interpretations, present possible rival explanations, and prevent my own biases from driving my findings (Yin, 2014; Stake, 2005).

Internal validity may pose a possible threat if conclusions are drawn without taking all factors into consideration (Yin, 2014). A significant threat to internal validity of my study is due to the effects of my participants knowing they are involved in my study, which could change their natural behavior. For example, if I explain to the interventionists that their belief systems about literacy interventions is being measured along with observations to capture their delivery of those interventions, they may answer and behave in a certain way to give positive results. Furthermore, I was careful about making inferences based on events that I did not directly observe (Yin, 2014). By gathering multiple data points along with exploring potential rival explanations, I tackled issues that might have arose when making inferences (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014).

Along with issues pertaining to construct validity and internal validity, external validity is a third problem dealing with the study's findings and making analytic generalizations (Yin, 2014). It is difficult to make analytic generalizations depending on the types of questions and initial research questions. To strengthen the study, my case study design and questions will be framed using a "how" question (Yin, 2014). In order

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to make analytic generalizations, the case study findings must be grounded in the theoretical frameworks and phenomenon and then the findings must be applied to refute or support the theories (Yin, 2014). This was taken into consideration during the initial design of my study.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were provided with written information detailing the study's goals, their roles, confidentially, and ability to stop participating at any time. After the interviews, all participants were offered copies of the transcripts and allowed ample time to review, add, or make changes to ensure their espoused beliefs were accurately captured. As a researcher, it is important to understand my own biases as to question my own findings and not substantiate a preconceived notion I have about the research topic (Yin, 2014). As recommended by Yin (2014) and Stake (2005), the initial findings were presented to a critical friend and they agreed or offered alternative explanations and this information was used to research contrary findings. I worked hard as a researcher to present my findings as honestly as possible, while also divulging limitations to my work (Yin, 2014). This approach assisted in examining plausible rival explanations as an analytic strategy along with following my theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014).

Researcher Positionality

It is critical for researchers to consider positionality and the power relations that are inherent in the research process in order to undertake ethical research (Sultana, 2007). This may include a researcher's world view and position that they have chosen in relation to the quintain or phenomenon being studied. First, researchers must clarify the values that govern their everyday lives and understand their worldly view. As individuals

uncover their moral values and worldly views, they can let go of petty self-interests and give back to those in need. As leaders take responsibility to create the perfect world, they can serve the values of justice and equality (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). One of these beliefs is that education needs to be fair but not necessarily equal (Wormeli, 2006). Everyone needs to receive what he or she needs to succeed. I focus my energy on the students that need me most, but I still make sure to push those that need to be challenged. The RTI program outlined in this study is part of my passion for proactively supporting the students that need us most.

In addition to a researcher's world view, my positionality as the school principal may have been a limitation to this study. As an insider committed to the success of the RTI program, my positionality may have been beneficial in terms of access. However, it may have limited my perspective as a researcher due to my part in the launching the program, and it may have affected the interview responses and classroom observations. My conceptions about the RTI program and teaching practices influenced the way I analyzed the data. In addition, the fact that I am the direct supervisor may have affected the participants' responses and their overall attitude towards me as a researcher. I acknowledge and recognize my presence as the researcher may have unduly influenced these outcomes.

Lastly, our current educational system is not meeting the needs of all students. In order to bring about positive system-wide change, educators need to be more reflective in their practices. RTI provides a framework that can effectively deliver supplemental support to our students not reading on grade level. In order for the program to work, educators need to be able to deliver effective interventions based on students' individual

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needs. It is not simply enough that educators can speak about the phenomenon under investigation, but they must demonstrate it in their actual practice. Therefore, Argyris and Shon's (1974) Theory of Practice will guide this research study to understand more deeply educators' espoused beliefs in comparison to their actual theories-in-use when delivering intensive literacy interventions to students not reading on grade level within the context of the RTI program (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Summary

"The call to duty is a challenging one: providing better futures for students, overhauling outdated systems, knocking down barriers, altering culture, broadening leadership and developing highly effective schools" (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009, p. 215). We need to improve the entire system and not continue to recycle the same ideas over and over. System-wide change starts with our values (Burns, 2003; Patterson, 2005; Scott, 2004; Lenocini, 2002; Arygris and Schön, 1974; Savaya and Garnder, 2012). Argyris and Schön (1974), Cunningham (1982), Blake and McCanse (1991), and Sagor and Barnett (1994) suggest that the best first step in improving organizational functioning is for practitioners to discover and make explicit any differences between espoused theory and theory-in-use. Argyris and Schön (1978) propose that people should not simply be asked about how they would approach a situation but should be inferred through examples of their actions or an actual examination of their behavior in an actual situation to truly identify their theory-in-use.

This chapter has presented the research questions, design, research instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis used in this study, which seeks to investigate more deeply he RTI program at Sunny Brook Elementary School.

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Descriptions of the coding process and analysis were provided to strengthen

trustworthiness and transparency. The results of the data gathered will be presented in the

next chapter.

Findings

The purpose of this research study was to identify and understand both the espoused beliefs and actual behaviors of four literacy interventionists when working with students having reading difficulties, enacting Response to Intervention (RTI), and delivering literacy interventions during Tier 2 in the context of the school's RTI program. This study was conducted during the spring trimester of the 2017-18 school year during the months of March and April. Each case study is divided into three main sections: (1) Espoused beliefs (working with students having difficulty reading, perceptions of RTI, and literacy interventions); (2) Theories-In-Use (Tier 2 instructional practices) and comparison between espoused theories and theories-in-use; and (3) a summary of each case study. In the first section, a brief description of each interventionist's teaching background, role as an interventionist, and the students is presented. Next, each interventionist's espoused beliefs are described through her own words. The second section provides an illustration of the instructional practices observed for each interventionist and an exploration of the similarities and differences that exist between the espoused theories and theories-in-use. The last section provides an interpretation and summary. Each case study is unique in terms of the grade level of the students receiving the Tier 2 interventions, the literacy interventions employed by the interventionist, and the students' needs addressed during the Tier 2 intervention.

Ms. Simmons

The first case study illustrates the major findings discovered through analyzing the data collected from Ms. Simmons. Ms. Simmons has over 15 years of experience

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teaching fourth, fifth, and sixth grade in all subject areas. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and Masters in School Counseling. During the last ten years, she has taught solely English Language Arts (ELA). In recent years, she was awarded Teacher of the Year, mentored new teachers, designed curriculum, and facilitated professional development. She has been a teacher and interventionist at Sunny Brook Elementary School for the past two years. Prior to becoming an interventionist, Ms. Simmons attended a three-day training session on how to use the Leveled Literacy Intervention Program. During the past two years, she has participated in coaching sessions and data discussions with the instructional coach and reading specialist.

At the time of the study, Ms. Simmons was serving as a literacy interventionist providing Tier 2 literacy interventions to a small group of four fifth grade students (two girls and two boys), who were identified as reading below grade level based on multiple measures. The Tier 2 intervention sessions were held from 8:48 am to 9:28 am, for forty-minutes five days per week. Ms. Simmons used a research-based program, Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), as her main resource and running records as her assessment tool. As show in Table 2, three students had the same S.M.A.R.T goal focusing on summarizing, and one student had a different goal focusing on spelling words specific to the student's instructional reading level.

Table 2

Literacy S.M.A.R.T goals for students in Ms. Simmons's intervention group

Student	Gender	Grade	S.M.A.R.T. Goal
Student 1	F	5th	Summarize the story read, including the who, when, where, and what of the story 6 out of 6 times by the end of the RTI rotation (6 weeks).
Student 2	F	5th	Summarize the story read, including the who, when, where, and what of the story 6 out of 6 times by the end of the RTI rotation (6 weeks).
Student 3	M	5th	Summarize the story read, including the who, when, where, and what of the story 6 out of 6 times by the end of the RTI rotation (6 weeks).
Student 4	M	5th	Spell words specific to each level with 85% accuracy by the end of the RTI rotation (6 weeks).

Ms. Simmons's espoused beliefs. This first section highlights Ms. Simmons's beliefs about working with students having difficulty reading, perceptions about RTI, and understanding of literacy interventions. A semi-structured interview was used to capture Ms. Simmons's espoused beliefs. The interview lasted thirty-six minutes. Her responses during the interview were used to interpret her espoused beliefs in the subsections to follow.

Beliefs about students having reading difficulties. During the semi-structured interview, Ms. Simmons described her experiences with teaching students that had difficulty reading and those students that she suspected had a learning disability. To paraphrase, she has found that if she suspected that a child had a disability and tried to use strategies that she has used previously for students with the same disability, the same strategies did not always work even though the disability may have been the

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same. She continued to explain that she felt students may have difficulty with reading because teachers establish strategies and goals that are too *lofty*. She stated,

> I do believe in focusing on one weakness area that pinpoints the student's need the most. So, for example, is it fluency, is it decoding, or is it comprehension and then decide, okay, which one of those would be our best bet to start off with? So, oftentimes, decoding is where I would go first and then just pick one area of decoding to focus on, so like, for example, self-monitoring, self-correcting would be my only focus for a short period of time, and so they have that under their belt, so to speak, and then go on to another reading goal with another list of strategies, but kind of keeping it small instead of reaching all over the place.

Through Ms. Simmons experiences teaching students with reading difficulties, she has found the same interventions do not always work for students with similar disabilities, and that it is best to focus the intervention on one goal at a time. However, she did not reference using a diagnostic to pinpoint the specific deficit and she relies solely on teaching strategies (e.g., self-monitoring) as her intervention.

Ms. Simmons believes that some causes of reading difficulties stem from "some sort of delay in early childhood development during the primary grades, a student transient between schools, or if a student had an illness … and missed instructional time." Inequities between schools is one of the main things that [she has] seen more recently. Based on these inhibiting factors, she was an advocate for the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative as a way to minimize the gaps if a student transfers from school to school. To address early childhood delays, she believes in "catching students when they are young" and providing early interventions through RTI. In terms of her

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beliefs about special education eligibility, she shared that it should be considered "after a lot of intervention and a lot of data has been collected, and when [the school] has exhausted all strategies and measures, … [it would] prompt testing [a student's] IQ to …see if there's some sort of discrepancy [between] …how they are performing and their ability level." She continued to share that this decision should only be made when the student has not shown any progress even after receiving intensive, research based interventions in the RTI program.

In the above section and quote, Ms. Simmons indicates her espoused beliefs about working with students having difficulties, some of the inhibiting factors that may cause these difficulties, and when she supposes a student should be considered for special education. She believes in establishing one goal for each student based on individual need(s). She has found that the same strategies do not always work for the same type of deficit and that each child's needs are unique, making the case for differentiated instruction. She does not stipulate using data or any specific diagnostic to identify a student's weakness area. However, later in the interview when discussing the RTI process, she does reference using a running or reading record as a diagnostic assessment. As a way to remedy reading difficulties, she promotes using RTI to provide early detection and prevention. She believes that a student should be tested for special education eligibility if they do not show any progress after receiving intensive interventions in RTI.

Perceptions of RTI. In reference to Ms. Simmons's perceptions about RTI, she had a very positive opinion and feels that it is "phenomenal program for students because they are in a small group, they get their individual needs met, a lot of direct instruction, a

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lot of demonstration from the teacher, and a lot of time for kids to practice those demonstrations on their own instructional level." She shared many strengths including a strong RTI framework, organization, materials, support from colleagues and literacy coach, time to review and discuss data, and small group sizes. First, from an interventionist's perspective, Ms. Simmons believes that Sunny Brook Elementary School has a very structured and organized RTI program. "On my end, [RTI] seems to run seamlessly. The materials are organized and the groups are organized. Second, there are many opportunities to analyze data. "I get to analyze the data frequently with my colleagues and can really dive deep into the data and analyze, what does this [data] say? Should we move [a student's] group? Should we keep [a student's] reading goal? What are some strategies I could use to teach this reading goal?" These conversations are fostered by the support of the literacy coach and colleagues. "I feel like the support that I have from my colleagues and the literacy coach has greatly helped me determine what these goals are and ways to achieve them. Lastly, she believes that the group sizes remain small. "I think it's crucial that the groups are small. I know the need is to get as many kids in as possible, but I really do believe a group of four, maximum five, is the best. That way you can really hone in on these kids." Ms. Simmons points out the importance of small group sizes and resources as the key to the RTI program's success.

A major challenge that Ms. Simmons points out that could be a potential issue when implementing RTI is the overall logistics and scheduling; however, she did not feel that this was a challenge at the Sunny Brook Elementary School. Personally, Ms. Simmons has found her biggest challenge stems from the inability to identify an

intervention to support the needs of every student. She shares a story about one particular student that is not making progress:

> I have a student that I have created a reading goal for, and I have used multiple strategies to teach the goal from every angle I can imagine, and I'm not seeing the growth that I would like to with the student. Although I am using the program with fidelity, I have used multiple strategies, and I have analyzed what they do one on one with me in a small group and their reading records, I have yet to find a strategy that's making a huge dent in this reading goal for this particular student. I'm not sure if the LLI program is benefiting her… [and] not making much progress in more than six weeks… can be frustrating. I think there may be something else going on. Where I feel like the other kids each have an individual reading goal and they are making progress using multiple teaching strategies…and then with that student it's not working.

Ms. Simmons shares her frustration when a student does not make progress. She understands that no two students struggling to read are exactly the same and no single program is going to meet every child's needs. However, when a student continues to struggles, she admitted thinking that there "must be something else going on," eluding a learning disability, instead of the cause being her instruction.

Ms. Simmons further reiterates that it is very important to determine one reading goal and empower students to track their own progress. By picking one reading goal at a time, it allows both the teacher and student to focus. She shared her believe and approach:

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I think [picking one goal] has greatly helped me to hone in one reading goal at a

time. [Teachers] have the tendency to tackle everything we notice where I have to

stop myself because… I don't want to say, "Oh, and then this and this and this". I

always say what is my one goal right now and I focus only on that…and then [I'm

not] confusing the students and overwhelming them.

Ms. Simmons believes in empowering the students by giving them their own reading goal

and recording it on their personal bookmark. "So every time I meet with them I say, what

are you working on as a reader, and they are able to say that back to me, and I think that's

very powerful. Making sure the students know their reading goal, track their reading goal,

and are able to talk about their reading goal with the teacher, …their classmates, and with

their parents…[is] very important." Ms. Simmons believes that incorporating the reading

bookmark as a supplement to the LLI program has been highly beneficial.

Ms. Simmons shared an example of a reading bookmark strategy that she uses to

assist the students in tracking their learning towards their reading goal (figure 1):

I currently am using a bookmark that the literacy coach shared with me where at

the top it states their current reading goal and then there are strategies that they're

currently using to attain that reading goal and then there are boxes for them to

check off. Anytime that they are using those strategies to attain that goal, they

make a check-mark whether it's with me or by themselves or with their peer. I

really do think that that's awesome.

As shown in Figure 2, each student is given his or her own Reading Bookmark, along

with his or her individual reading goal, strategies to use, and they maintain a record of

how many times he or she has practiced his or her strategies to meet the reading goal.

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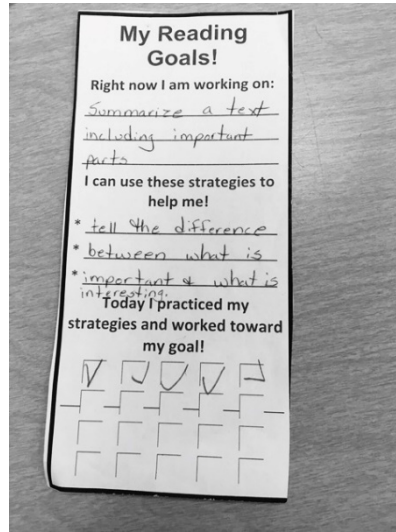
Figure 2. Student 2's Reading Bookmark, Ms. Simmons's classroom, March 19, 2018

Ms. Simmons reveals in her interview that for the majority of the RTI period, she is instructing the students using the LLI program, and when students are reading independently, she pulls students one on one to work on their individual reading goals. The students track their progress on a *reading bookmark.* This is also important to note regarding her beliefs about literacy interventions and will be included in the summary of her espoused beliefs about literacy interventions. During this time is where Ms. Simmons indicates that she is not making progress with this one particular student mentioned above and she suspects that there "may be something else going on." This has left her frustrated because she feels she has exhausted multiple approaches and strategies with no progress. She alludes that the student may potentially have a learning disability because he is not making progress. Overall, Ms. Simmons perception of the RTI program is very positive and she feels that it is working for most students.

Beliefs regarding literacy interventions. To gain a deeper understanding of Ms. Simmons's espoused beliefs regarding literacy interventions, she shares a brief description of a typical lesson. First, she shares what she typically does prior to reading:

> To start a typical lesson, I introduce the students to the book. They access what do they already know about the book. They read the summary. They discuss what they're thinking. Making connections, things like that. The genre is always discussed. There's always something that I pre-teach like, Look there's a word in page two. I want you to take a look at that. This is how I would tackle the word. Take a look at the picture on page five. Notice how the characters' feeling blah, blah, blah. Then that's where I go into what I want them to notice while they read.

Ms. Simmons believes in engaging the students in pre-reading activities to activate prior knowledge, pre-teach difficult concepts and vocabulary, and introduce key ideas in the text.

After Ms. Simmons' previews the book, she "sets a purpose for what [she] wants them to look for while they are reading so they are ready to talk about it as soon as [they] come back into the group. After the students are done reading, they regroup, and Ms. Simmons "asks the students lots of questions." They share their thinking and then [she] demonstrates some more with another teaching point that has already been pre-planned. Afterwards,

> they work with words and then every other lesson, they write about the book. Sometimes it's a dictated writing, …, but it's often independent writing. That's where all the kids are working independently. I would just work with each individual student and just look at what they need at the moment. Also, every

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other lesson is the assessment piece where the students are asked to reread again for a different purpose. That's when [she] meets with the students to assess and analyze their running record.

In Ms. Simmons's description of a typical literacy intervention, she sets a purpose for reading, but did not share any strategies during reading to help the students make connections, monitor their understanding, or generate questions. She shared that after they finish reading, she will ask them a lot of questions and finish the lesson with the original teaching point. Depending on the lesson, it might include a writing activity or assessment.

To further illustrate Ms. Simmons's beliefs, she shared what she feels constitutes an effective literacy intervention. She believes that it "needs to be done consistently and modeled like crazy. It's explicitly taught and demonstrated by the teacher and students are guided through the practice with the teacher and able to practice it on their own." During the Tier 2 intervention, she feels that at least half of the intervention time slot is dedicated to time spent reading, approximately twenty-minutes.

In Ms. Simmons's opinion, comprehension most positively influences a student's reading ability in fifth and sixth grade, and decoding in the preceding grades. Currently, three out of four students in her intervention group are working on summarizing as their reading goal. To paraphrase how she teaches comprehension, she explains that she starts by unpacking the skill and figuring out exactly what students need to know in order to use the comprehension skill effectively. In regards to teaching students to summarize, she feels that it is important to start by determining what is important versus what's interesting, identify the main idea and supporting details, and teach the kids to put it all

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together without retelling every detail. Ms. Simmons further shares how she uses a demonstration notebook or using a wipe-off board to demonstrate the skill.

In the above section summarizing Ms. Simmons's espoused beliefs regarding working with students having difficulty reading, enacting RTI, and literacy interventions, she expresses many effective components of literacy interventions and some roadblocks she has encountered. She shared that she starts each literacy intervention lesson by reviewing and activating students' prior skills and knowledge and establishing a clear lesson objection. During each intervention period, she shared that students are either working in a small group or one-on-one with the teacher on his or her individual reading goal. When Ms. Simmons is working one-on-one with a student, the other students are reading independently. This constitutes approximately twenty minutes of the forty-minute period. Previously, she mentioned that each student has one reading goal that she addresses one-on-one, and each student tracks his or her progress on a *reading bookmark*. She adamantly expressed the need to provide explicit instruction by demonstrating the strategy or skill that they are working on and providing guided practice and independent practice. She shared that she uses running records to determine the students' reading goals and instructional levels. She is currently frustrated because one student is not making progress leading her to search for causes, potentially a learning disability. In the next section, Ms. Simmons's theory-in-use will be explored based on actual instructional practices observed when delivering Tier 2 interventions to students having reading difficulties.

Ms. Simmons's instructional practices during tier 2. To gain a deeper understanding of Ms. Simmons's actual theory-in-use, I observed three of her intervention periods during RTI on March 19, 2018, March 21, 2018, and March 26, 2018 for approximately forty-minutes each observation. During the preliminary analysis of observation data from Ms. Simmons's classroom, I focused on the amount of time students participated in various grouping structures during classroom activities (Table 3).

Table 3

Minutes spent in different grouping structures in Ms. Simmons's class

Grouping Structures Observed	Observation 1 3/19/18	Observation 2 3/21/18	Observation 3 3/26/18
Small Group Instruction	27	18	26
Individualized Instruction (1:1)	12 (Student 1)	6 (Student 2) 5 (Student 3) 5 (Student 4)	5 (Student 1) 8 (Student 2)

As seen in Table 3, across three observations, Ms. Simmons provided small group instruction and one-on-one instruction to students. Table 3 highlights the actual minutes each grouping structure was observed. In the previous section, Ms. Simmons's described her typical intervention lesson and the amount of time students spent reading independently. A brief vignette is provided to summarize the individualized instruction observed during the Tier 2 literacy intervention lesson on April 21st, 2018. I chose this particular vignette because it was representative of the other lessons in which

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individualized instruction was provided and it provided dialogue between the interventionist and student. The brief vignette is provided:

> Ms. Simmons was working one-on-one with a student to practice their reading goal - summarizing. Ms. Simmons started the lesson by asking the student, "What are you working on as a reader?" After the student stated her goal, Ms. Simmons set the purpose for reading the next two pages – read and summarize the important details. After the student finished reading, the student gave some details, but gave ones that were not the most important. Ms. Simmons gave feedback about what she did well, and what she needed to still practice. Ms. Simmons reminded her to use the strategy she had been working on in class.

This lesson is representative of the individualized lessons observed. Ms. Simmons ensured a clear purpose was established for the lesson, the student demonstrated awareness of her reading goal, and the reading goal was clearly defined on the student's reading bookmark as shown in Figure 2. The individualized lesson provided a guided practice opportunity for the student to practice her individual reading goal.

Ms. Simmons expressed that during her literacy intervention block the students spend approximately twenty minutes reading independently during each Tier 2 lesson and that during that time she is working one-on-one with each student on his or her individual reading goal. She noted that on days she conducts writing lessons, less time would be spent reading independently reading and providing differentiated instruction. This acknowledgment coincides with Observation 1 on April 19th, 2018, which was a guided writing lesson and less time was spent reading independently. Individualized instruction occurred six times over the three observations and during each of the six interactions, Ms.

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Simmons was observed working with each student on his or her individual reading goal. Based on the data collected, Ms. Simmons's espoused theories were congruent with her actual theories-in-use because she espoused that she uses both small group instruction and individualized one-on-one instruction aligned to the students reading goal, and when she is working with students individually, the others students are reading independently, which is congruent with her actual practices.

During the subsequent analysis of Ms. Simmons's observation data, I determined specific instructional approaches and pedagogy to target when observing Ms. Simmons based on her espoused theory regarding literacy interventions; those espoused beliefs are listed below in Table 4. I used this list of espoused literacy instructional beliefs as a checklist to assess whether or not the actual practices were present in Ms. Simmons's observed lessons. Upon careful analysis of each observed lesson, I noted whether or not I observed each instructional approach. Afterwards, I compared each espoused belief to the actual practices observed during three observations to either confirm or refute congruency between Ms. Simmons's espoused theories and actual theories-in-use. Ms. Simmons's espoused literacy instructional approaches were found to be congruent with her actual theory-in-use if it was observed at least one time over the course of three observations.

Table 4

Espoused beliefs regarding literacy interventions compared to actual instructional approaches observed in Ms. Simmons's class

Espoused Literacy Intervention Instructional Approaches	Observation 1 3/19/18	Observation 2 3/21/18	Observation 3 3/26/18	Congruency Check
Brief Description of Small Group Lesson Activities	Guided writing practice	Guided practice focused on techniques the author used to build suspense	Guided practice focused on author's purpose and previewing new novel	
Identify clear objective and lesson goals	X	X	X	X
Review prior skills and knowledge		X	X	X
Organized and focused lesson	X	X	X	X
Provide examples	X			X
Model/demonstrate/and "think aloud"				
Provide guided and supported practice	X	X	X	X
Provide distributed practice				
Teacher Feedback	X	X	X	X

Ms. Simmons fulfilled many aspects of her espoused beliefs regarding students having reading difficulties, RTI, and literacy interventions. First, her espoused theories regarding grouping structures, time allocated during Tier 2 for independent reading, individual student reading goals, and usage of reading bookmarks were found to be congruent with her actual theories-in-use. Her espoused beliefs regarding explicit instruction based on modeling and demonstrating the skill and usage of independent practice activities to solidify mastery of the skill(s) were not present during any of the observations. She had mentioned the usage of a demonstration notebook to explicitly model the skill; however, this strategy was not observed. In terms of her espoused

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literacy intervention instructional approaches, Ms. Simmons's espoused theories and actual theories-in-use were found to be congruent for six out of eight instructional approaches.

Ms. Henry

The second case study captures the findings discovered through analyzing the data collected from Ms. Henry. Ms. Henry has been teaching for thirteen years, eleven years at Sunny Brook Elementary School. She received her Bachelors in Sociology, a Masters in Science of Teaching, and an Associates in School Library Media. Ms. Henry assisted in developing the RTI program at Sunny Brook Elementary and served as the coordinator for three years. She has taught computers, gifted and talented, second grade, fourth grade English language arts, library, basic skills, and currently third grade. This is Ms. Henry's first year serving as an interventionist using the Leveled Literacy Intervention Program. Since Ms. Henry was part of the team to implement RTI, she conducted her own independent research, visited other school districts using the RTI model and participated in multiple trainings using LLI, administering the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment, and analyzing running records. Ms. Henry receives ongoing support and training directly from the reading specialist.

Ms. Henry serves as a literacy interventionist providing Tier 2 literacy interventions to a small group of four sixth grade students (one girl and three boys), who were identified as performing below grade level based on multiple assessment measures. As show in Table 5, two students had the same S.M.A.R.T goals focusing on decoding multisyllabic words, and two students had a different goal on a comprehension, specifically summarizing.

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Table 5

Literacy S.M.A.R.T goals for students in Ms. Henry's intervention group

Student	Gender	Grade	S.M.A.R.T Goal
Student 1	F	6th	Decode multisyllabic words (two, three, and four syllable words) with 85% accuracy by the endo of the RTI rotation (6 weeks).
Student 2	M	6th	Decode multisyllabic words (two, three, and four syllable words) with 85% accuracy by the endo of the RTI rotation (6 weeks).
Student 3	M	6th	Summarize the story read, including the who, when, where, and what of the story four out of six times by the end of the rotation (six weeks).
Student 4	M	6th	Summarize the story read, including the who, when, where, and what of the story four out of six times by the end of the rotation (six weeks).

The Tier 2 intervention sessions were held from 8:48 am to 9:28 am, for forty-minutes five days per week. Ms. Henry used a research-based program, Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), as her main resource and running records as her assessment tool. Ms. Henry's case presents many similarities to the first case study.

Ms. Henry's espoused beliefs. Featured in this first section, Ms. Henry shares her beliefs about students with reading difficulties, perceptions about RTI, and understanding of literacy interventions. A semi-structured interview was used to capture Ms. Henry's espoused beliefs. The interview lasted thirty-two minutes. Her responses during the interview were used to interpret her espoused beliefs in the subsections detailed below.

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Beliefs about students having reading difficulties. During the semi-structured interview, Ms. Henry described her experiences with teaching students having reading difficulties. When a student continues to struggle, she suspects he has a learning disability. She shared:

> I actually have a student now who is not progressing in RTI and suspected that he was not tracking words correctly. I suspected he had dyslexia. I actually worked with the reading specialist and had her come in and look at him as well. She noticed that he was pulling letters from below and above the words, and so was able to offer some strategies to try to help him with that and which has helped him. However, he continues to have difficulties in that area, so we're moving on to the next step (a referral to the Child Study Team).

Based on Ms. Henry's experience, if a student is not making progress after receiving interventions, she suspects that the student may have a learning disability and may need to be evaluated by the Child Study Team.

> She explains:

> I think that often [educators] either think we know what a problem is or think that maybe a child just isn't trying hard enough or think we know the solution, and if we just work harder and get them to work harder then that's going to be what solves the problem. I think that sometimes we're so-- our vision is so tunneled that we're not able to look outside of that to see that there might be other things going on (learning disability).

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Ms. Henry's explanation exposes that she still believes that pre-referral interventions may not work for all students who struggle because they may have an underlying learning disability.

When gaining an understanding of Ms. Henry's beliefs about the root causes for reading difficulties, she shared that that she believes that students are not reading books appropriate for their instructional reading level, lack prerequisite skills and background knowledge, they do not spend enough time reading, and lack foundational skills, especially decoding skills. First, Ms. Henry believes that students may not read books on their appropriate reading level. "I think often kids want to read books that are too hard for them, especially in the upper grades, where they don't want to be seen reading books that are too easy. So, instead they pick books that are too hard, and so they continue to struggle." Second, she believes they lack prerequisite skills but waivers between whether or not it is an instructional deficit or learning disability.

> I think that often they don't have the prerequisite skills of really understanding letter sounds to be able to figure out what-- break down words and figure out what they say. There may be other learning disabilities that go along with that, but I think usually, it's probably that they missed something along the way and that's kind of causing a roadblock for them now. Some kids who can do-- they know that this letter makes this sound, don't understand that you have to look at the whole word, and at some point, you can't just keep breaking each little letter down.

Lastly, Ms. Henry believes that another one of the big issues with kids who have difficulty reading, is that "they do not spend enough time reading and they are not getting

the practice that they need to get better. So, I think those are some of the issues that I see." Ms. Henry believes that some readers may struggle because they have received inadequate instruction, read books that are too difficult, and they do not spend enough time reading. She still maintains the possibly that a student may struggle due to an underlying learning disability.

Ms. Henry believes that a student "should be considered for special education eligibility when multiple interventions have been tried and when the student continues to not make any progress at closing the gap. Then it should be looked at to see if there is something else going on that is blocking the student. If they are getting the correct instruction but it is still not closing his or her gap, then there is probably something else going on." This philosophy would be based on the premise that the instruction the student is receiving is adequate and his lack of progress may indicate that they have a learning disability, not a problem of instructional practice.

Perceptions of RTI. In reference to Ms. Henry's perceptions about the multi-tiered model of RTI, she articulated a depiction of the RTI model used at Sunny Brook Elementary School. She explained the purpose of the tiers and gave a descriptive portrait of the model and how her school was implementing it. She explained that the "Tier Two instruction is for a student that has fallen behind and needs some extra time outside of the regular classroom to continue working on his or her weakness area." She expressed a positive opinion about the program, supports the transition away from pull out programs, feels the students are appropriately identified, and points out that the program is continuously improving. She stated:

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I think that the process generally works pretty well. I think that the fact that students are not pulled out of regular classroom time is a huge part of what is good about the process. I think that generally speaking, the kids who should be in Tier Two are put in to Tier Two. We are starting to add new interventions. So, one of the things that I would like to see going forward is that, and it's starting to happen, that we have different interventions for kids [including] writing interventions … and phonics interventions. I think that that is one of the things that is great about our program, is that we're constantly trying to add on to what we have. Overall, I think that the model has worked well for our school.

In addition to the strengths mentioned above, Ms. Henry shared several highlights including a shift to supplemental instruction, usage of multiple measures to identify and track student progress, and support from the literacy coach and instructional coach. One of the biggest strengths of the RTI program is the "shift away from a basic skills mentality and no long pulling students out of their core program." The intervention does not supplant the student's core instructional program. Instead, it is supplemental instruction that is in addition to the core instruction; therefore, it increases the amount of instructional time and a student receives instruction geared towards his or her instructional level. Ms. Henry describes various other strengths, which include the program's process for identifying students at risk and the ability to diagnose weakness areas. "Kids are being identified, their areas of weakness are being identified. I think that as we've developed, we've gotten better and better at breaking down the skills that the students need and we are able to pinpoint those skills and really just hit the students hard with strategies for one specific skill, and then not move on until they get it." Ms. Henry

further explained "that our measurements and reporting guidelines are manageable for teachers and provide good data that is usable." Lastly, she noted that the reading specialist and math coach were excellent resources and supportive to teachers.

In regards to challenges that Ms. Henry faces when implementing RTI, Ms. Henry feels that she still needs more training, more interventions for the diverse needs of the students, and more training on when to change an intervention. First, "there's just never enough time for enough training. I feel like generally, [I'm] doing a good job with what I know how to do, but I wish I knew more. You get different scenarios with different kids and you say, I don't know what to do here." She expressed that she would like to "have more interventions to try with the kids because maybe the specific intervention… in Tier Two is what's not working." This would require more training on recognizing when you need to change the intervention. At what point, do you say, this really isn't working at all. We need to go in a completely different direction. Again, then you need the resources to be able to implement something in a completely different direction." Ms. Henry expressed the need for continuous, on-going training, more interventions to try with students when they are not making progress, and more training on how to monitor progress and make appropriate changes to a child's intervention.

Ms. Henry expressed that continuous, on-going professional development is key to the RTI program's success. She felt that it is very important to maintain appropriate group sizes during interventions. She expressed a personal goal to understand more about what to do when an intervention is not working. Her responses often contracted with whether or not a student's skill deficit was instructionally related or based on a learning disability. Earlier, she mentioned a student that she suspected had dyslexia, and she was

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concerned that he is not making progress on his individual goal. When a child is not making progress with the current intervention, she would like more interventions and resources to use to teach lessons aligned with the student's specific skill deficit. Later, she admits that she is not confident in teaching phonemic awareness and phonics; however, one of her students had a decoding deficit, which she suspects has dyslexia. These contradictions challenge whether or not this child's learner centered problem is a problem based on teacher practices or a disability.

Beliefs regarding literacy interventions. To better understand Ms. Henry's espoused beliefs regarding effective literacy instruction, she depicted a description of a typical 40-minute literacy intervention. First, Ms. Henry shares how she prepares for the intervention:

> The first thing I do is look at the students who I have, …look at their running records, and look at the area of focus for that particular student. Because I'm using the LLI program, the books are already provided. So, it's not a matter necessarily of picking the book, but using whatever book we are using as a method of having the students practice the skill that they need. I look at the students' action plans, and within our time together, look at what they're doing as they're reading with me. Then take the LLI lesson and the LLI book, and determine for each of the kids how those skills are going to be practiced with them with that particular book.

To prepare for the intervention, Ms. Henry reviews each student's action plan and analyzes his or her running record to determine a specific goal. Based on the LLI lesson

and the book included in the lesson, Ms. Henry plans how she is going to practice the goal with each student.

During the actual lesson, Ms. Henry determines the objective for the lesson and prior to the students reading a new book, and then uses some pre-reading strategies to help students increase their comprehension. "If it's a new book for the day, then we would spend a period of time previewing the book and looking at getting background knowledge. Then I would be discussing the skills with each of the students before they go off to read independently." While the students are reading independently, "I would be going around the room individually and listening to them read and conferencing with them about what they've read, depending on what their skill is that they're working on." Lastly, when all of the students have finished reading the book, they "would come back together and I would pick the skill that I think all of them would benefit from as we conference together about the book we've just read. It might also involve doing word work with them, where I'm teaching a specific skill with them and having them practice it in their notebooks, or having them do a writing assignment based on the book that we've read. Again, with an instructional emphasis on specific writing skill." Ms. Henry uses pre-reading strategies to activate prior knowledge, and while the students are reading independently, Ms. Henry is working one on one with students and practicing their individual skill. After reading, Ms. Henry facilitates a wrap-up at the end of the lesson to quickly review what they have learned and sometimes she includes word work or a writing activity.

To further understand Ms. Henry's espoused beliefs regarding effective literacy interventions, she shared what she feels are the most important aspects. First, she thinks

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that it is important to have a "research-based program that has data to back it up, that it's effective. A program that requires the students to read, a program that provides time for direct instruction to the students and the skills that they need to master." Ms. Henry previously shared that she uses the research-based LLI program. Second, she believes that she must provide *explicit instruction* in the critical areas that the students need by modeling and practicing. "I would model …, and then I would have them practice." Ms. Henry referenced having just learned about a teaching strategy using a demonstration notebook. "I would use the notebook to show them different strategies visually and then have them practice those strategies with the books that we're reading. Again, it's direct instruction and showing them how to do that, and then giving them time to practice." Lastly, Ms. Henry feels that the amount of time students spend reading has the most positive impact on a student's reading ability. "Reading, their time to read. I think their time where I'm sitting with them and they are reading independently, but I am guiding them to work on the skill that they need to be working on at this point in time has the biggest impact." Ms. Henry felt that the time spent reading varies from day to day. "Some days probably thirty-five minutes, other days it might be twenty -minutes. If they're doing writing, it might be less than twenty-minutes, just because [the students] will end up needing a good amount of time to do the writing to go along with it." Ms. Henry advocates for research-based programs, explicit instruction, and opportunities to read more. In the next section, Ms. Henry's theory-in-use will be analyzed based on actual instructional practices observed when delivering Tier 2 interventions to students having reading difficulties.

Ms. Henry's instructional practices during tier 2. To gain a deeper understanding of Ms. Henry's actual theory-in-use, I observed three of her intervention periods during RTI on March 20, 2018, March 23, 2018, and March 27, 2018 for approximately forty-minutes each observation. During the preliminary analysis of observation data from Ms. Henry's classroom, I focused on the amount of time students participated in various grouping structures during classroom activities detailed in Table 6.

Table 6

Minutes spent in different grouping structures in Ms. Henry's class

Grouping Structures Observed	Observation 1 3/20/18	Observation 2 3/23/18	Observation 3 3/27/18
Small Group Instruction	14	21	24
Independent Reading (No 1:1)	9	0	0
Individualized Instruction (1:1)	11 (Student 1) 4 (Student 3)	6 (Student 1) 5 (Student 2) 5 (Student 3)	9 (Student 1) 8 (Student 2)

Based on data collected during three observations, as seen in Table 6, Ms. Henry provided small group instruction and one-on-one instruction to students. Table 6 captures the actual minutes each grouping structure was observed. In the previous section, Ms. Henry described her typical intervention lesson and the amount of time students spent reading independently. Typically, when students were reading independently, Ms. Henry circulated to work with each student one-on-one with their individual reading goal, except during the first observation. During that particular observation, Ms. Henry

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gathered and organized class materials while the four students read for nine minutes. For example, during an individual lesson with a student, Ms. Henry listened to the student read. When the student encountered a word that he could not decode or mispronounced, Ms. Henry reminded the student to use his strategies to decode the word and guided the student through the process. For example, a student mispronounced the word "pronunciation." Ms. Henry reminded the student to use his decoding strategy and break the written word down to its individual parts and determine the pronunciation based on the sound/letter patterns (e.g., pro·nun·ci·a·tion). The student pronounced the beginning two syllables correctly, but he continued to mispronounce the entire word. Ms. Henry provided corrective feedback by pointing out that he had already pronounced the beginning correct, but he needed to work on the rest. This process continued until the student correctly pronounced the word. This guided practice helped the student pronoun this one word. Ms. Henry provided practice opportunities when the student struggled with decoding a word while reading. However, using running records alone as a diagnostic, Ms. Henry has not identified the specific skills each student has mastered and which ones they are missing as determined on the developmental continuum, and Ms. Henry is not explicitly teaching these skills to mastery.

During the subsequent analysis of Ms. Henry's observation data, I determined specific instructional approaches and pedagogy to target based on Ms. Henry's espoused theory regarding literacy interventions; those espoused beliefs are listed below in Table 5. I used this list of espoused literacy instructional beliefs as a checklist to assess whether or not the actual practices were present in Ms. Henry's observed lessons. Upon careful analysis of each observed lesson, I noted whether or not I observed each instructional

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approach. Afterwards, I compared each espoused belief to the actual practices observed during three observations to either confirm or refute congruency between Ms. Henry's espoused theories and actual theories-in-use. Ms. Henry's espoused literacy instructional approaches were found to be congruent with her actual theory-in-use if it was observed at least one time over the course of three observations.

Table 7

Espoused beliefs regarding literacy interventions compared to actual instructional approaches observed in Ms. Henry's class

Espoused Literacy Intervention Instructional Approaches	Observation 1 3/20/18	Observation 2 3/23/18	Observation 3 3/27/18	Congruency Check
Brief Description of Small Group Lesson Activities	Guided practice focused on text features or author's position	Guided practice focused on techniques the author used to build suspense	Guided practice focused on author's purpose and previewing new novel	
Identify clear objective and lesson goals		X		X
Review prior skills and knowledge		X	X	X
Organized and focused lesson	X	X		X
Model/demonstrate/and "think aloud"				
Provide guided and supported practice	X	X	X	X
Provide distributed practice				
Teacher Feedback	X	X	X	X

Ms. Henry fulfilled many aspects of her espoused beliefs regarding students having reading difficulties, RTI, and literacy interventions. First, her espoused theories regarding grouping structures, time allocated during Tier 2 for independent reading, and individual student reading goals were found be congruent the majority of the time. Each

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class lesson consisted of both classroom grouping structures. In terms of time spent reading, the students spent 15-20 minutes reading each class period. In regards to Ms. Henry's espoused literacy intervention instructional approaches, Ms. Henry's espoused theories and actual theories-in-use were found to be congruent for five out of seven instructional approaches. This was determined if Ms. Henry's espoused theory was observed at least one time during any of the three observations. Her espoused beliefs regarding explicit instruction based on modeling and demonstrating the skill and usage of independent practice activities to solidify mastery of the skill(s) were not present during any of the observations. Practice consisted of reading, but no evidence of students independently practicing any specific skill was present. Therefore, these two espoused beliefs are incongruent with her theory-in-use.

Ms. Engle

The third case study presents Ms. Engle's espoused theories and theories-in-use regarding students having difficulty reading, RTI, and literacy interventions, which was determined through the data collected from Ms. Engle. Ms. Engle majored in Elementary Education with a concentration in Early Childhood Education. She has taught first grade, a second-grade multiage classroom, and second grade in an inclusion setting for twelve years, nine years at Sunny Brook Elementary School. She has served as an interventionist for two years, and received job-embedded professional development along with ongoing support from the reading specialist. Ms. Engle is currently using Wilson Fundations Fluency as her research based intervention.

As detailed in Table 6, Ms. Engle serves as a literacy interventionist providing Tier 2 literacy interventions to a small group of five students in kindergarten and first

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grade (two girls and three boys), who were identified as lacking foundational skills, specifically phonological awareness and fluency with decoding words. Three students had the same S.M.A.R.T goals focusing on reading short vowel nonsense words fluently, one student is practicing reading short vowel words fluently, and one student is practicing decoding words within a text.

Table 8

Literacy S.M.A.R.T goals for students in Ms. Engle's intervention group

Student	Gender	Grade	S.M.A.R.T Goal
Student 1	F	K	Increase reading short vowel nonsense words fluently using Wilson Fundations by 10 words the end of the rotation (six weeks).
Student 2	F	K	Increase reading short vowel nonsense words fluently using Wilson Fundations by 10 words the end of the rotation (six weeks).
Student 3	M	K	Increase reading short vowel nonsense words fluently using Wilson Fundations by 10 words the end of the rotation (six weeks).
Student 4	M	K	Increase reading short vowel words fluently using Wilson Fundations by 10 words by the end of the rotation (six weeks).
Student 5	M	1st	Decode words within a text with 85% accuracy by the end of the rotation (six weeks).

Ms. Engle's espoused beliefs. Ms. Engle's espoused theories regarding her work with students having difficulty reading, her perceptions of RTI, and beliefs about literacy interventions are presented in this first section. A semi-structured interview was used to capture these beliefs. The interview lasted twenty-eight minutes and her responses were used to construct an overview of her espoused beliefs in the following subsections.

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Beliefs about students having reading difficulties. Ms. Engle shared her learning journey when confronted with students that she has suspected had a disability, her beliefs regarding potential causes, and what she believes should be done to remedy it. First, it has taught her to "change [her] teaching and use more small group instruction, and different types of strategies for [the students] to try to use to make them successful." If they are struggling or below grad*e*-level," [she] would recommend them for RTI or refer them to the Intervention and Referral Services Team." Small group instruction and multiple teaching approaches have been successful methods Ms. Engle has used with students having difficulty reading.

Ms. Engle believes that there are two main reasons students have difficulty reading, and if a student continues to struggle, she believes it warrants further investigation through a Child Study Team evaluation. First, she feels that "if they don't know the foundational skills, they don't know their short vowel sounds, or if they don't even have their letter identification or letter sound application, they're not able to put it all together to become a successful reader." Second, she feels that it is important to build a strong home and school connection. "Sometimes, [she] feels [that] the home and school connections can be lacking and [she] might want to bring a parent in and show them what [she] is doing in class in small groups that they can also keep consistent at home with their child." Lastly, "if a student goes through the RTI cycles and they are not making any progress based on the data collected, then something else is going on and would warrant looking into it a little bit further." Ms. Engle believes that the two main route causes for reading failure is a lack in foundational skills and lack of support from home.

Furthermore, if a student does not make any progress after receiving interventions through RTI, they should be evaluated for special education eligibility.

Perceptions of RTI. Ms. Engle's expressed beliefs regarding Sunny Brook Elementary School's RTI program are captured by presenting her overall perception of the RTI Program including the strengths and challenges she has had implementing RTI. Overall, Ms. Engle feels that [RTI program] works well by providing students that are struggling or need more reinforcement the opportunity to receive supplemental instruction. "We are really pin pointing and targeting [each student's] needed skills and bringing them up to where they need to be." In terms of the process, if a student is struggling or they are below grade level, "the teachers would just…suggest them for RTI. Being an RTI teacher, she sees it as being successful, because the students are able to catch [most students] up to where they need to be by the end of a rotation. If not, then we can switch them to another group that they might be more successful in or pin point their skills that they need."

In addition to Ms. Engle's overall positive impression of the RTI program, she highlighted a few of the strengths of the RTI program. First, she "definitely feels [the] small group instruction is awesome. She "thinks [her] school does a nice job of trying to keep each RTI intervention group small so that [she] is able to give individualized attention to the different students that are in the group." Another strength of the program are the materials and resources. "I feel we have plenty of foundation materials when we need them. I know that the reading specialist is very good about if I need more word cards she will make them up for me. We have a lot to pull from, and there's plenty of activities and interventions to do within each group. It really helps us to be able to use the

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data, engage whether or not we need to challenge [the students] more or vice versa." Assets to the RTI program include the small groups, resources, materials, support from a literacy coach, along with the ability to identify who is struggling, provide supplemental instruction, and close the achievement gap.

Conversely to the strengths of the RTI program, Ms. Engle shares her biggest challenge that she has come across as an RTI interventionist, which would be properly grouping students. She shared:

> We try to fit the students into a group that best fits them, but it's not always an exact fit. For example, in a LLI group sometimes we might have to group them together, the majority of the students in that group would be let's say on a level G, which might be a little difficult for one or two students but we try to fit them into the best group as closest to their level. Then I find sometimes we have students who are border line, we're not sure whether or not we should put them in an RTI group. Do they really need it? Then other times, we'll put them in there and they might be able to let go before a cycle's over because they're making so much progress.

Overall, Ms. Engle "does not really see a whole lot of challenges with our program, especially this school year, it's running really smoothly." Her biggest challenge is meeting the needs of the diverse group of students in her intervention group. In the next subsection, Ms. Engle's espoused beliefs about effective literacy interventions will be explored.

Beliefs regarding literacy interventions. To gain a deeper understanding of Ms.

Engle's espoused beliefs regarding literacy interventions, she shared a brief description of

one of her typical lessons. Ms. Engle starts each intervention with a warm-up. "Within

the … 40 minute (intervention), we always start with the warm up with sight words that

they need obviously, to be able to just know by rote. We do the letter sounds and letter

recognition as a warm up, I would say that will be the first five to ten minutes." During

the next ten minutes, the students "would be tapping out and blending words with letter

sounds using a blending mat. I model how to do it, practice it, and then let them practice

independently. Typically, I start with that or I sometimes have manipulatives with the

cubes that they would move up and down for each letter sound that they would blend

within the word." During the last ten to fifteen minutes, Ms. Engle would have the

students practice using fun, engaging games. "The remaining time I try to make it fun

and engaging with games, sometimes we'll do memory games, sometimes we'll do board

games. We'll do a lot of kill and drill. I'll have the word cards that the students are

currently working on and they'll chorally read them with me, or they'll echo read them

with me. It depends day to day, but those last 10 to 15 minutes are usually, like I said,

one of the games or so.

To provide further information regarding Ms. Engle's beliefs regarding effective

literacy interventions, Ms. Engle elaborated on the current interventions she is providing

to her small group of students. "My group is working on CVC words or words with

digraphs in them. It is more about building fluency… by being able to quickly read CVC

words or words with digraphs." She reiterated using "kill and drill" as a remediation

strategy. "I continue to do drills with them, embed it in their heads and give a lot of small

group support, maybe buddy support within the classroom, and just try to alter my teaching to their instructional level." Lastly, Ms. Engle espouses that she uses multi-sensory techniques and tries to make the lessons fun and engaging. "I try to think about how to make it engaging for them, make it fun, make them enthusiastic about learning. That's why I try to throw in the games, or instead of just constantly just having them read the words, I try to have more multi-sensory strategies to help them." Ms. Engle starts each lesson with a review. Next, she has the students practice decoding words using multisensory strategies, and afterwards, the students play an engaging game allowing them to practice reading one-syllable words.

As an interventionist, Ms. Engle believes that comprehension is the most important foundational skill that impacts a student's reading success. She shared:

I would say comprehension is huge, especially with the kids in the lower grades. Because I find that a lot of times, especially with the running records that … [we use to] collect the data and to help guide our instruction, I find that once we teach the students the letter sounds and the vowels and the digraphs, and different decoding strategies, they're still struggling to answer comprehension questions, they're not fully understanding what they're reading.

Interestingly, Ms. Engle believes that comprehension is the most important reading skill; however, she is teaching phonics as her intervention.

Ms. Engle's beliefs regarding effective literacy interactions for students in kindergarten and first grade focused on phonemic awareness and phonics. She noted following a "kill and drill" philosophy through repetitive practice. She starts each lesson with a quick review of letter sounds and sight words. For her current group of students,

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they are working on practicing CVC words with a specific focus on diagraphs. Ms. Engle believes in providing a modeled approach, a guided approach, and independent approach using multisensory methods and fun, engaging games.

Ms. Engle's instructional practices during tier 2. In the previous section, Ms. Engle described her typical intervention lesson. A brief vignette is provided to summarize the instruction observed during the Tier 2 literacy intervention lesson on March 28, 2018. I chose this particular vignette because it was representative of the three lessons observed. During each lesson, Ms. Engle provided a quick review (seven minutes), phonics intervention (ten to fifteen minutes), and game time (ten to fifteen minutes). The brief vignette is provided:

Five students entered the classroom and gathered on the carpet in front of the

Promethean board. Ms. Engle led the students through a review, specifically

naming letters, reading the alphabet backwards, and reading sight words. This

lasted approximately eight minutes. Then, the students took out their blending

mats and individual word lists (see Figure 2) and independently practiced reading

the words from the individual word lists by using their fingers to tap each

phoneme sound on the blending mat and blend the sounds to read each word. Ms.

Engle listened to each student and questioned them periodically. For example, she

questioned a student, "What's the diagraph in that word" The student responded,

"/th/." Next, Ms. Engle showed the students words on cards, read the word, and

students echo read the words. She probed the students to name the diagraph in

each word. Afterwards, she gave the students sentences to read to themselves.

Each student read her/his sentence. Ms. Engle had the group echo read the

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sentence together. This part of the lesson took approximately 16 minutes. Lastly,

Ms. Engle divided the students into groups of two and one student stayed with her

at the guided reading table. She gave teach group a game board (see Figure 3) and

sentence cards (see Figure 4). Each student rolled the die, moved their marker,

and read a sentence on one of the sentence cards. This lasted approximately
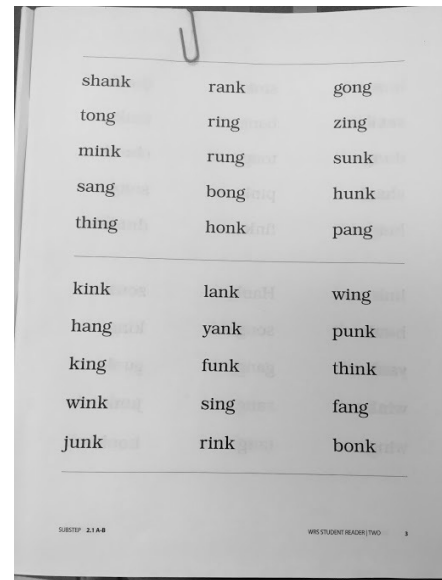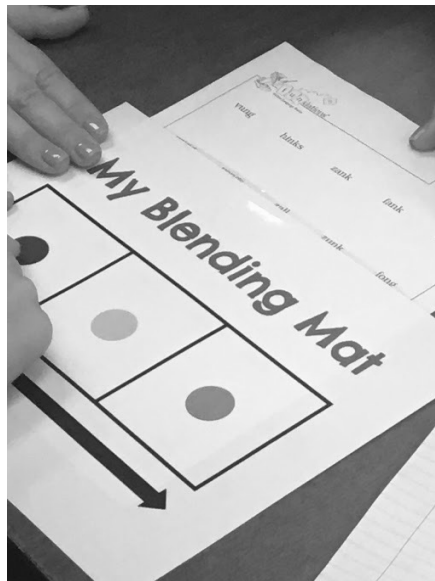
eleven minutes.

Figure 3. Example of blending mat and list of words used during Ms. Engle's lesson, March, 14, 2018
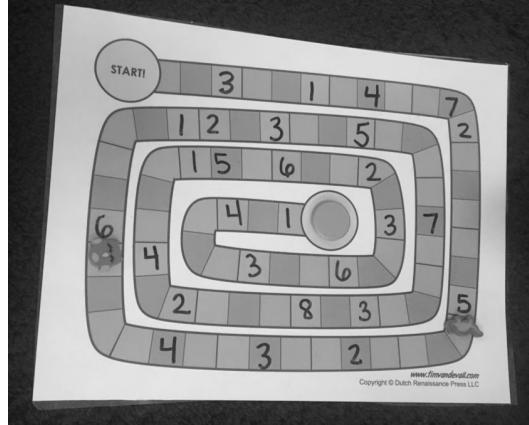
Figure 4. Example of game board used during intervention period in Ms. Engle's classroom, March, 28, 2018.

Figure 5. Example of sentences students practiced reading during intervention in Ms. Engle's classroom, March, 28, 2018

This lesson is representative of the individualized lessons observed. Ms. Engle provided a

brief review to activate prior knowledge, practice blending sounds in simple words, and

practice reading one-syllable words during guided practice and independent practice

using a game. This lesson provided an opportunity for four out of five of the students to

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practice his or her individual reading goal, which was increase ability to read short vowel words fluently. At no time during the observations did the fifth student practice decoding words within a text.

During the analysis of observation data from Ms. Engle's classroom, based on Ms. Engle's espoused theory regarding literacy interventions, I focused on the specific instructional approaches and pedagogy highlighted in Table 9. I used this list of espoused literacy instructional beliefs as a checklist to assess whether or not the actual practices were present in Ms. Engle's observed lessons. Upon careful analysis of each observed lesson, I noted whether or not I observed each instructional approach. Afterwards, I compared each espoused belief to the actual practices observed during three observations to either confirm or refute congruency between Ms. Engle's espoused theories and actual theories-in-use. Ms. Engle's espoused literacy instructional approaches were found to be congruent with her actual theory-in-use if it was observed at least one time over the course of three observations.

Table 9

Espoused beliefs regarding literacy interventions compared to actual instructional approaches observed in Ms. Engle's class

Espoused Literacy Intervention Instructional Approaches	Observation 1 3/14/18	Observation 2 3/26/18	Observation 3 3/28/18	Congruency Check
Warm-Up Activities:				
o Review Letter Sounds	X	X	X	X
o Review Sight Words	X	X	X	X
Model/demonstrate/and "think aloud"				
Provide guided and supported practice	X	X	X	X
Provide independent practice opportunities	X	X	X	X
Multisensory Approaches	X	X	X	X
Engaging, Fun Activities (Games)	X	X	X	X
Choral Reading		X		X
Echo reading	X		X	X
Phonemic Awareness (sounds):				
o Blending phonemes				
o Segmenting phonemes in words				
Phonics (letters):				
o Demonstrate knowledge of letter-sound correspondences by producing the sound		X		X X
o Blending/spelling sounds in simple words	X	X	X	X
o Reading one-syllable words fluently	X	X	X	

Ms. Engle fulfilled many aspects of her espoused beliefs regarding effective literacy interventions. First, Ms. Engle's espoused theories and actual theories-in-use were found to be congruent for eleven out of fourteen instructional approaches. This was determined if Ms. Engle's espoused theory was observed at least one time during any of the three observations. Her espoused beliefs regarding explicit instruction based on modeling and demonstrating the skill were not present during any of the observations.

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Furthermore, her espoused beliefs about teaching phonological awareness seem to be confused with phonics instruction. Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate sound structures in language; whereas, phonics is the understanding of how letters are linked to sounds to form words. The majority of the lessons focused on guided practice and independent practice activities, lacking explicit instruction, with a main focus on phonics. Therefore, several of her espoused beliefs are incongruent with her theory-in-use, namely the usage of explicit modeling and demonstrating and lack of teaching phonological awareness skills.

Ms. Clayton

This fourth case study illustrates the findings discovered through analyzing the data collected from Ms. Clayton. Ms. Clayton holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and she has taught as a special education teacher in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade for the past six years at Sunny Brook Elementary School. She has multiple certifications, including Elementary School Teacher, Teacher of Students with Disabilities, Dyslexia Specialist (Orton Gillingham Certified), and Science. Prior to implementing RTI, she attended a three day LLI training, two day Wilson Fundations training, and two days of training on how to use Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System to determine a student's reading level and observe student reading behaviors. Ms. Clayton continues to receive ongoing support and training from the reading specialist.

At the time of the study, Ms. Clayton was serving as a literacy interventionist providing Tier 2 literacy interventions to a small group of five Kindergarteners (four girls and two boys), who were identified as at-risk for increased reading difficulties. As listed

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in Table 10, each student has their own S.M.A.R.T goal. Two students are increasing their ability to read short vowel words, two students are improving their ability to segment words, and two students are improving their ability to identify words. The Tier 2 intervention sessions were held from 8:48 am to 9:28 am, for forty-minutes five days per week. Ms. Clayton used a research-based program, Wilson's Fundations, as her main resource and Fundations Word Identification Probes to monitor student progress towards meeting their goals.

Table 10

Literacy S.M.A.R.T goals for students in Ms. Clayton's intervention group

Student	Gender	Grade	S.M.A.R.T Goal
Student 1	F	K	Increase reading short vowel fluently using Wilson Fundations from 15 words to 20 words by the end of the rotation (six weeks).
Student 2	F	K	Increase reading short vowel fluently using Wilson Fundations from 15 words to 20 words by the end of the rotation (six weeks).
Student 3	F	K	Improve phoneme segmentation using the Fundations Phoneme Segmentation probe from 13 to 20 sounds by the end of the rotation (six weeks).
Student 4	F	K	Improve phoneme segmentation using the Fundations Phoneme Segmentation probe from 13 to 20 sounds by the end of the rotation (six weeks).
Student 5	M	K	Improve word identification using the Fundations Word Identification Probe from 5 to 10 by the end of the rotation (six weeks).
Student 6	M	K	Improve phoneme segmentation using the Fundations Phoneme Segmentation probe from 13 to 20 sounds by the end of the rotation (six weeks).

Ms. Clayton's espoused beliefs. Ms. Clayton's espoused theories regarding her work with students having difficulty reading, her perceptions of RTI, and beliefs about literacy interventions are presented in this first section. A semi-structured interview was used to capture these beliefs. The interview lasted thirty-two minutes and her responses were used to construct an overview of her espoused beliefs in the following subsections.

Beliefs about students having reading difficulties. Ms. Clayton shared her experiences with teaching students that she has suspected had a learning disability. "What I've learned is never to give up, always do whatever it takes for them to understand it. It may be multi-sensory, it may be rewording, it may be modeling over and over again." When working with a student that continues to struggle with reading, Ms. Clayton feels there are several causes including exposure, environmental, and developmental readiness. She explains:

> "A lot of it nowadays is exposure. I think to some of it is what their life is
>
> like at home, do the parents read to them? Do they not read to them? I
>
> think some of it is developmental, they're just not ready yet. I have
>
> experienced so many times the light bulb coming on and it's the best
>
> experience I've ever had with students, but to get them there sometimes it
>
> takes a little longer and everybody's at a different time."

To paraphrase further, Ms. Clayton shared that she believes that teachers need to do whatever it takes to make each student successful. She believes in focusing on a few skills, exposing them in "little chunks" until they understand it, and then moving onto the next skill.

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When discussing with Ms. Clayton her beliefs about special education eligibility, she shared that she believes a child should be considered when they have made little or no progress in two RTI rotations it is our responsibility to look more deeply into it. For example, we need to start asking, "What's going on in the classroom? What's the teacher doing now?" I don't always want to say, hey go test them, and say they have a disability." Ms. Clayton shares some of her strategies for helping students who are having difficulty. She believes in small group instruction and drill activities. "Really, all you can do is pull them in smaller groups, and it's really just drill, drill, drill. Give it to them in many different ways. Again, I go back to the multi-sensory, they're tapping it out, putting it in word families, clapping it out, using magnets, practicing writing it, and saying it while they write it, that's a big one." Ms. Clayton believes in differentiating the instruction to meet the needs of individual students through various approaches.

Perceptions about RTI. Ms. Clayton expressed an overall positive opinion of the RTI program and provided a summary of the components and process. In addition, Ms. Clayton highlighted a few of the strengths and challenges when implanting the RTI program. First, she beliefs that supplementary instruction that the student receives in addition to their core instruction is highly beneficial and a strength of the program. "It is the best thing, I love it, [and] I want to sell it. I think we have a lot going on and everybody, every student, every individual, is getting something out of it every day for a forty-minute period, five days a week for six cycles. For a student to get that much beyond what they're getting in the classroom is pretty amazing." On the contrary to the strengths of the RTI program, Ms. Clayton shared her biggest challenges as an RTI interventionist, which are groups being too large or not having the right intervention for

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every student in the group. "The things that I've come up against is sometimes that students not quite fitting in that group or the groups get too big. I think eventually we'll be there but sometimes that's what I think our biggest challenge is, not having enough interventionists and that just right group." Overall, Ms. Clayton is very supportive of the program and extra instruction provided to students. She asserts the biggest challenge is maintaining small group sizes and meeting the diverse needs of every student.

Beliefs regarding literacy interventions. To better understand Ms. Clayton's espoused beliefs regarding effective literacy interventions, she depicted a description of a typical 40-minute literacy intervention. Ms. Clayton starts each intervention period by conducting a quick review.

> I feel that the letter names and letter sounds need to be drilled, so that's just a quick drill that we do. We go through our sight words really quick. All the ones that they know up to this point, where they're using multi-sensory approaches, whether it's kickboxing or basketball. They love volcano, where you go down and crunch and you say the letters as you go up and then you shout it loud. They love that. That's a quick minute drill.

After a quick review of letter names, letter sounds, and sight words, Ms. Clayton progresses to the main literacy lesson.

During the intervention, each student has his or her own folder, which organizes all the materials for the skills they are working on (see Figure 2). While students practice, Ms. Clayton assesses student progress. Ms. Clayton shared an example of what the students are working on during the literacy intervention:

We're working on /a/ words and /o/ words. While they are working on those, I will usually run through and test one or two students, and then I'll switch it up and then we'll work on our trick words. Then I'll hit the other side of the table and drill one or two of those students. So, I'm collecting data while I'm moving forward. What we're doing after that really it's like another seven minutes or ten minutes, -- we're working on digraphs -- We're writing those, saying the letters as they're writing them. We like to play a game it's called race it, where I'm just saying the sound and they're looking for that letter and bringing it down and [trying to get as many] as we can get in a minute. It's pretty fast pace, but with the age that I'm working with (kindergarten and some first graders), that's kind of what their attention span is.

During the intervention, Ms. Clayton shared that she has the students practice various skills, while she is assessing students. She mentioned having the students listen to sounds while finding the coordinating letters on their word mat, specifically using a game called "race it." Explored later in the section regarding the actual practices observed in Ms. Clayton's class, writing activities and the game were not observed.
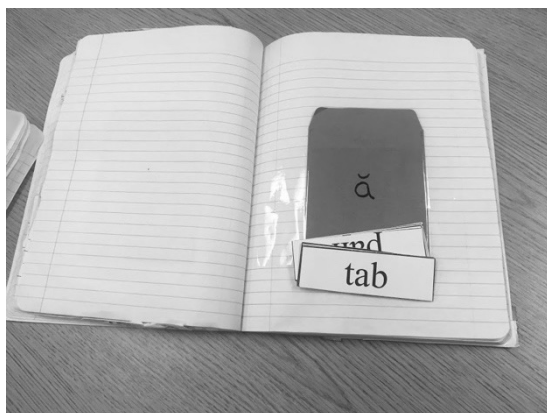
Figure 6. Student 1's journal in Ms. Clayton's classroom, March, 13, 2018

Ms. Clayton further shares what she constitutes to be an effective literacy intervention. First, she stressed that phonemic awareness is the most important aspect of reading in order to be an effective reader. "If they do not know the letter, if they can't identify, they can't give me a sound, pretty much they're done. That's really what my focus is, getting that phonemic awareness in place. Making a strong base with the letter sounds, letter names, and moving forward into blending and segmenting." Second, Ms. Clayton asserted that the intervention must be research based. "It's got to be researched based definitely. You have to look at it and it's been proven to work on all facets of students, whatever their ability is, if they are regular education or special education. They have to have that research saying, yes this does work. You just can't try it on a wing and a prayer and just say let's just try this." Third, Ms. Clayton believes that the instruction must be multi-sensory and provide "little tricks" to help them learn the skill. She stated:

> It's has to multi-sensory. You give them it as many ways as possible, whether
> they're stamping it out on their arm, … writing it, …tracing it, or they have like a
> little bumpy grid [and] tracing over it, saying it, or picturing it in their head. I'm

constantly coming up with little strategies to help them remember the words. The

big ones, for instance, another thing for are you are /ir/, /ur/, /er/, we came up with

little sayings like, "You go to church" so you know it's /ur/. "I am very firm," so

you know it's /ir/.

Lastly, Ms. Clayton shared that she believes in using explicit instruction for her literacy

interventions. "We use a lot of modelling of the strategies and I do, we do, you do

[approach] over and over." Ms. Clayton believes that effective literacy interventions need

to be delivered explicitly using multisensory instructional approaches, while teaching the

students strategies to remember the skills.

Ms. Clayton's instructional practices during tier 2. In the previous section, Ms.

Clayton described her typical intervention lesson. A brief vignette is provided to

summarize the instruction observed during the Tier 2 literacy intervention lesson on

March 15, 2018. I chose this particular vignette because it was representative of the three

lessons observed. During each lesson, Ms. Clayton provided a quick review (eight

minutes) and short practice activities lasting five to eleven minutes each. The brief

vignette is provided:

Six kindergarten students entered the classroom and gathered on the carpet in

front of the Promethean board. Ms. Clayton led the students through a review,

specifically naming letters, reading the alphabet backwards, and reading sight

words. For example, when reading the sight words, the students read the letters

out loud, read the word, and simultaneously *punched* the letters. This lasted

approximately eight minutes. Next, the students retrieved their journals and

gathered at the guided reading table. The students took out their short /a/ words

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and used a blending mat the read the words. This took eleven minutes. During that

time, Ms. Clayton had individual students read the sight word list (see Figure 7),

while she noted student progress. Then, students took out a word family list (see

Figure 8) and practice reading the words. Once they could read an entire list, Ms.

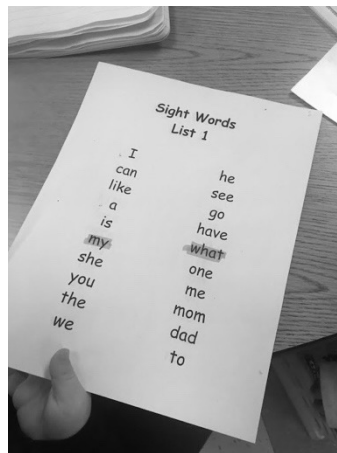Clayton highlighted the word family, and the student started reading a new list.

Figure 7. Example of student's sight words list in Ms. Clayton's classroom, March, 15, 2018
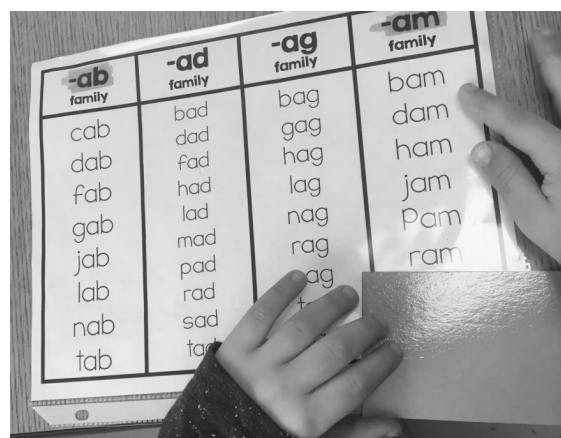

Figure 8. Example of student's word family list in Ms. Clayton's classroom, March, 15, 2018

This lesson is representative of the individualized lessons observed. Ms. Clayton provided a brief review to activate prior knowledge, practice reading short vowel words, and practice reading words in several word families, and practice reading sight words.

During the analysis of observation data from Ms. Clayton's classroom, based on Ms. Clayton's espoused theory regarding literacy interventions, I focused on the specific instructional approaches and pedagogy highlighted in Table 11. I used this list of espoused literacy instructional beliefs as a checklist to assess whether or not the actual practices were present in Ms. Clayton's observed lessons. Upon careful analysis of each observed lesson, I noted whether or not I observed each instructional approach. Afterwards, I compared each espoused belief to the actual practices observed during three observations to either confirm or refute congruency between Ms. Clayton's espoused theories and actual theories-in-use. Ms. Clayton's espoused literacy instructional approaches were found to be congruent with her actual theory-in-use if it was observed at least one time over the course of three observations.

Table 11

Espoused beliefs regarding literacy interventions compared to actual instructional approaches observed in Ms. Clayton's class

Espoused Literacy Intervention Instructional Approaches	Observation 1 3/13/18	Observation 2 3/15/18	Observation 3 3/27/18	Congruency Check
Warm-Up Activities:				
o Review Letter Sounds	X	X	X	X
o Review Sight Words	X	X	X	X
Model/demonstrate/and "think aloud"				
Provide guided and supported practice	X	X	X	X
Provide independent practice opportunities	X	X	X	X
Multisensory Approaches				
o Auditory	X	X	X	X
o Visual	X	X	X	X
o Tactile	X	X	X	X
o Kinesthetic	X	X	X	X
Phonemic Awareness (sounds):				
o Blending- combine separate phonemes to form a word				
o Segmentation- break a word in its separate sounds				
Phonics (letters):				
o Demonstrate knowledge of letter-sound correspondences by producing the sound				
o Associate the short sounds for the five major vowels	X	X	X	X
				X
o Read common high-frequency words by sight	X	X	X	
	X	X	X	X
o Know the spelling-sound correspondences for common consonant digraphs	X	X	X	

Ms. Clayton fulfilled many aspects of her espoused beliefs regarding effective

literacy interventions. First, Ms. Engle's espoused theories and actual theories-in-use

were found to be congruent for twelve out of fifteen instructional approaches. This was

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determined if Ms. Clayton's espoused theory was observed at least one time during any of the three observations. Her espoused beliefs regarding explicit instruction based on modeling and demonstrating the skill was not present during any of the observations. Furthermore, her espoused beliefs about the importance of teaching phonological awareness seems to be confused with phonics instruction. Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate sound structures in language; whereas, phonics is the understanding of how letters are linked to sounds to form words. The majority of the lessons focused on guided practice and independent practice activities, lacking explicit instruction modeling and demonstrating the skill. Therefore, several of her espoused beliefs are incongruent with her theory-in-use, namely the usage of explicit modeling and confusion between teaching phonological awareness and phonics skills.

This chapter focused on presenting the findings from each of the four case studies that were used to answer the research questions posed in this study: 1) How do literacy interventionists describe their work with students with reading difficulties; 2) How do literacy interventionists describe their espoused theories related to RTI and literacy interventions; 3) How do literacy interventionists enact RTI and literacy interventions? What does this indicate about their theories-in-use; and 4) What similarities and differences exist between each interventionist's espoused theories and theories-in-use?

Chapter five will examine the findings using Argryis and Schön's (1974) Theory-of-Action and explore the similarities and differences across the four case studies. Subsequently, conclusions are drawn, followed by implications for professional practice as they relate to the Tier 2 interventions used to support students having difficulty

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reading. Suggestions for further research will be provided to further enhance the

implementation of Tier 2 literacy interventions within the RTI framework.

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Chapter 5

Interpretation, Implications, and Conclusion

Response to Intervention is a framework used by schools to help students who are having difficulty reading. The multi-level prevention and remediation system uses data-based decision-making to prescribe supplementary interventions to accelerate struggling readers' rate of learning (Allington, 2009; Kilpatrick, 2015; Hall, 2018). Teachers face the challenge of identifying skill deficits and providing interventions, which requires them to be cognizant of the assumptions about their current teaching practices and alignment with their actual practices (Kilpartrick, 2015; Argyris & Schön, 1974). The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to examine whether literacy interventionist's espoused beliefs were congruent or incongruent to her actual theories-in-use regarding her beliefs about students with reading difficulties and knowledge and delivery of literacy interventions within the context of Sunny Brook Elementary School's RTI program. I sought to answer the question that was a catalyst for my study: Can Argyris and Schön's (1974) Theory-of-Action framework be used to guide educators through an inquiry process to better understand how they operate and uncover their underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that guide their practice? In turn, educators can determine how their thinking may be hindering or facilitating improved professional practice (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Savaya & Garnder, 2012). I will interpret my findings using Argyris and Schön's (1974) Theory-of-Action framework and explore the similarities and differences across the four case studies, followed by implications for professional practice, and suggestions for further research.

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Interpretation of the Findings using Argyris and Schön's Theory-of-Action

This study was grounded in Argyris and Schön's (1974) Theory-of-Action framework and whether or not it could be used as a tool to improve professional practice, specifically with improving literacy interventionists' practices while working with students having difficulty reading, providing Tier II interventions, and implementing RTI. While more research would need to be done, I was content to discover if the Theory-of-Action framework was a viable tool that could be used. I used the theory to examine the congruence or lack of congruence between the espoused theories and the theories-in-use of the literacy interventionists. If an espoused theory was observed at least one time during an observation, it was deemed congruent.

An examination of the interventionist's espoused beliefs and theories-in-use revealed instances of both congruency and lack of congruency (Harnett, 2007; Li, 2013; Savaya & Gardner, 2012; Yoshihara, 2011). If these two theories are congruent, it leads to better understanding of an individual's intentions, actions, and consequences (Argris & Schön, 1974). If the theories do not match, the individual may or may not be aware of any mismatch, thus less effective in many of his or her behaviors. Table 12 provides a summary of the number of espoused theories and theories-in-use examined during the study and the percentage and total number of theories found congruent and not congruent. In terms of the espoused theories and theories-in-use examined during this study, the majority of the participants' theories were aligned; however, for each participant, two or more theories were incongruent, which may prevent her from reaching the highest level of performance making it imperative to analyze Theories-of-Action and develop congruence between espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Scott,

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2004). Explanations for inconsistencies may include length of teaching experience, schooling and training experiences, school and classroom conditions, and school culture (Li, 2103).

Table 12

Summary of interventionists' congruent and not congruent theories

Participant	Espoused Theories and Theories-in-use Examined	Congruent	Not Congruent
Ms. Simmons	8	75% (6)	25% (2)
Ms. Henry	7	71% (5)	29% (2)
Ms. Engle	14	79% (11)	21% (3)
Ms. Clayton	15	80% (12)	20% (3)

One problem with examining teachers' beliefs is that they often remain hidden to the teacher and so they must be brought to the level of awareness by being articulated in some way. When teachers are given a chance to articulate their beliefs about teaching and learning, they soon discover that their beliefs are very complicated (Farrell, 2007). Consequently, if teachers are asked to think consciously about their teaching beliefs, they could learn not only about these usually tacitly held beliefs, but also about the importance of comparing their own beliefs with their practices through classroom observations (recorded and transcribed), semi-structured interviews, and discussion (Farrell, 2007; Harnett, 2007; Li, 2013). When a gap exists between the two theories, seeking congruency creates an impetus for reflection and dialogue. This reflective dialogue should be a part of the process to gain invaluable insight from the teacher (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Harnett, 2007; Li, 2013; Savaya & Gardner, 2012).

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Several studies have suggested that studying beliefs should involve the teachers in the process of understanding the relationship between their theories (Harnett, 2007; Li, 2013; Savaya & Gardner, 2012). For example, Harnett (2007) studied the effectiveness of classroom-based action research as a model for professional development and found that it resulted in small but incremental changes in teacher practices, and improved quality to their teaching and student learning. Participants watched video tapes or read transcriptions of classroom practices and reflected on whether or not they demonstrated evidence of their espoused beliefs. During each cyclical cycle of action research, the participants read professional resources in relation to the specific area of research. Li (2013) investigated the relationship between a set of beliefs and classroom practices by analyzing classroom interactions, in-depth, semi-structured interviews and video-based reflection, and allowed the teacher to review stretches of video interactions and was prompted to comment. It was recommended to focus on one particular collection of beliefs, while comparing them with specific classroom practices interaction data and eliciting the teacher's thinking to gain insight into their theories of action in the classroom. These studies support the idea of using the data collected as a baseline and furthering the study to involving the teachers in a cyclical classroom based action research process.

Similarities and Differences Between the Four Case Studies

The purpose of this section is to compare and contrast the four case studies regarding their beliefs about students having reading difficulties, beliefs about literacy interventions, and Tier II instructional practices. Information gained from these findings may identify systematic factors either hindering or facilitating successful implementation

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of the school district's RTI program, and guidance for leadership. Table 2 provides a

depiction of the similarities and differences between the four case studies. Following the

table is an examination of the information.

Table 13

Similarities and differences within the four case studies

Espoused Beliefs	Ms. Simmons Case Study #1 General Education Teacher	Ms. Henry Case Study #2 General Education Teacher	Ms. Engle Case Study #3 General Education Teacher	Ms. Clayton Case Study #4 Special Education Teacher
Beliefs about Reading Difficulties	• If a student is not making progress after intensive interventions, suspects it might be a learning disability.	• Interventions may not work for every student – may have LD. • When a student continues to struggle and not make progress they may have a learning disability and should be evaluated by CST.	• If a student does not make any progress after receiving interventions through RTI, they should be evaluated for special education eligibility.	• "Need to do whatever it takes to get them [where they need to be]. Sometimes it just takes a little longer and everybody develops at a different time."
Biggest Challenge implementing RTI	• Identifying an intervention to support every student.	• Grouping students by skill deficit. • Difficulty identifying the skill deficit.	• Pin-pointing a student's specific deficit and selecting the right intervention.	• Identifying the appropriate intervention for each group.

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Table 13 (continued)

Espoused Beliefs	Ms. Simmons Case Study #1 General Education Teacher	Ms. Henry Case Study #2 General Education Teacher	Ms. Engle Case Study #3 General Education Teacher	Ms. Clayton Case Study #4 Special Education Teacher
Perceptions of RTI	Positive Impression: • It's a "phenomenal" program • Strong RTI framework • Organized • Materials • Support from colleagues and literacy coach • Time to review and discuss data • Small group sizes Areas to Improve: • More time; difficult to get through an entire lesson in forty minutes	Positive Impression: • Identifying students and diagnosing skill deficits • Focus on one specific skill • Many materials Areas to Improve: • More training • More interventions • More training on how to monitor progress and make appropriate changes to a child's intervention.	Positive Impression: • Small groups • Resources and materials • Support from a literacy coach • Ability to identify who is struggling • Ability to provide supplemental instruction	Positive Impression: • "The best thing, I love it, I want to sell it." • Every student is getting the type of instruction they need Areas to Improve: • Difficulty grouping the students • Need more interventionists

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Table 13 (continued)

Espoused Beliefs	Ms. Simmons Case Study #1 General Education Teacher	Ms. Henry Case Study #2 General Education Teacher	Ms. Engle Case Study #3 General Education Teacher	Ms. Clayton Case Study #4 Special Education Teacher
Beliefs about Literacy Interventions	• Identify clear objective and lesson goals • Review prior skills and knowledge • Organized and focused lesson • Provide examples • Model/ demonstrate/ and "think aloud" • Provide guided and supported practice • Provide distributed practice Teacher Feedback	• Identify clear objective and lesson goals • Review prior skills and knowledge • Organized and focused lesson • Model /demonstrate/ and "think aloud" • Provide guided and supported practice • Provide distributed practice Teacher Feedback	<u>Warm-Up Activities:</u> Review Letter Sounds Review Sight Words • Model/ demonstrate/ and "think aloud" • Provide guided and supported practice • Provide independent practice opportunities • Multisensory Approaches • Engaging, Fun Activities (Games) • Choral Reading • Echo reading <u>Phonemic Awareness (sounds):</u> • Blending phonemes • Segmenting phonemes <u>Phonics (letters):</u> • Demonstrate knowledge of letter-sound correspondences by producing the sound • Blending/spelling sounds in simple words • Reading one-syllable words fluently	<u>Warm-Up Activities:</u> Review Letter Sounds Review Sight Words • Model/ demonstrate/ and "think aloud" • Provide guided and supported practice • Provide independent practice opportunities • Multisensory Approaches <u>Phonemic Awareness (sounds):</u> • Blending phonemes • Segmenting phonemes <u>Phonics (letters):</u> • Demonstrate knowledge of letter-sound correspondences by producing the sound • Associate the short sounds for the five major vowels • Read common high-frequency words by sight • Know the spelling-sound correspondences for common consonant digraphs

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Beliefs about reading difficulties. As discussed in Chapter 2, mislabeling of students is one of the most controversial issues facing education today (Donovan & Cross, 2002), and an over-looked factor is how teachers' beliefs and values directly impact how they classify and characterize students making it imperative to examine this area (Anyon, 1980; Little, 2012). As far as beliefs about students having reading difficulties espoused by the four interventionists, all three general education teachers, Ms. Simmons, Ms. Henry, and Ms. Engle, espoused that if a student is not making progress (continues to struggle), they may have a learning disability and should be evaluated for special education eligibility. On the contrary, Ms. Clayton, the special education teacher, espoused to "never give up, and always do whatever it takes for [the student] to understand [the skill]. She further explained that, "if a student is not making progress, the teacher needs to start looking at what is going on in the classroom, and what they are doing to help the student" The first step should not be to say, "go test them, …they have a disability." This espoused belief demonstrates that Ms. Clayton believes that effective instruction plays a large role in a students' progress. The general education teachers and special education teacher differed in their espoused beliefs about the RTI process. Belief systems about the RTI process is worth studying further as it can have a direct impact on the success of the RTI program. Misclassification can have a long term negative impact on students as the stigma associated with being a child with a disability has historically lowered academic expectations and achievement for these students (Raj, 2016).

An over-looked factor in research is examining how teachers classify and characterize students (Little, 2012), and this is directly related to their interpretation of the data and appropriate instructional actions (Anyon, 1080; Little, 2012). This study

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corresponds with Orosco and Klingner's (2010) analysis, which revealed that effective implementation of RTI depends on understanding how teachers' perspectives influence decision-making and Ocheing-Sande's (2013) conclusion that belief systems must be aligned to the purpose of the program. The general education teachers in this study shared a similar philosophy about the RTI process and referral to special education. Ocheing-Sande (2013) had a similar finding that general education teachers tended to be confused about RTI's intended goal. Teachers that solely belief that poor performance represents a learning disability, are more likely to refer students to special education (Moran & Petruzzelli, 2011). Since poor readers are a direct result of instruction (Callender, 2007; D. Fuchs, L. Fuchs, & Copton, 2004), educators need to shift their focus on the student's learning and whether or not the instructional plan is working (Callender, 2007; Ysseldyke, 2005).

Beliefs about RTI. All four interventionists expressed a positive impression of the RTI, and noted areas in need of improvement. Ms. Simmons feels that the RTI program is "phenomenal." She feels it is organized, she has plenty of resources, plenty of time to collaborate and discuss data, and student groups are small. She wishes she had more time, as she felt it was difficult to cover an entire lesson in the forty-minute time slot. Ms. Henry shared a similar perspective and commended the program and being able to identify students struggling and diagnose skill deficits. Conversely, she noted this as one of her biggest challenges. She wishes she had more training, more options for interventions, and more training on how to monitor progress and make appropriate changes to a child's intervention. Ms. Engle shared similar sentiments and noted the positives, including small group sizes, abundant resources and materials, support from the

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literacy coach, and ability to identify who is struggling. Ms. Clayton feels that the RTI program is "the best thing." During RTI, she feels that every student is getting the type of instruction they need. She shares similar ideas on areas to improvement, including, better grouping practices and more interventions.

Overall, the interventionists share similar positive experiences and strengths regarding the RTI program. This information is important to explore when making system-wide changes to gauge aspects of the RTI program that are facilitating or hindering effective implementation of RTI. The biggest challenges uncovered in this study will be explored in the next section.

Biggest challenge implementing RTI. No two struggling readers are exactly the same; therefore, no single approach or program will meet the needs of all who are experiencing difficulty (International Reading Association, 2000). Across the four case studies, pin-pointing a student's specific deficit, selecting the right intervention, and grouping practices were noted as the most significant barriers to providing effective Tier II interventions. A key piece of an effective RTI framework are the assessments used to pinpoint the deficits (NCRTI, 2000) that are causing the reading difficulties and grouping students according to the skill deficit (Hall, 2018). A less effective grouping model is based on a student's universal screener composite score or based solely on a child's reading level. The most effective approach to placing students is by skill deficit, which means all the students in the group are working on the same skill, and the teacher knows how to clearly teach the skill. Ms. Simmons and Ms. Henry espoused using running records, and Ms. Clayton and Ms. Henry espoused using AIMSWeb and Fundations fluency probes to determine the student's skill deficit. These assessments are typically

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administered to all students for benchmarking purposes (universal screener), and to some students for progress monitoring to inform us on how students are responding to instruction (NCRTI, 2018). The assessments mentioned are effective in determining who is at-risk or struggling and how they are progressing; however, they do not diagnose the specific skill deficit(s) (Kilpatrick, 2015; NCRTI, 2018). In order to properly group students by skill deficit, it is essential to use a diagnostic assessment to identify why a student is struggling (Hall, 2018; NCRTI, 2018); therefore, the findings support further investigation into specific diagnostic assessment(s), which would improve the grouping practices and interventions provided to students.

This present study identified the most challenging factors hindering implementation of the RTI program at one elementary school, which included the interventionists' belief about their inability to accurately identify a students' specific skill deficit and properly group students by their individual skill deficit. These findings correspond with Balu, Zhu, Doolittle, Schiller, Jenkens, and Gersten's (2015) conclusions related to factors negatively affecting implementation of RTI, which included a mismatch of the reading intervention to individual student needs. Similarly, Callender (2007) found that a key to a successful RTI program was based on the school's capacity to make informed instructional decisions. Hall (2018) found two common issues school face include: 1) using the wrong assessment; and 2) failing to effectively use the progress-monitoring data to move students between groups. My study contributes to this research by confirming and clarifying potential barriers affecting successful implementation of RTI including and areas for a particular school to improve: 1) Diagnostic assessments to pin-point a student's specific lowest skill deficit; 2). Group students by specific skill deficit. By

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improving these two areas, interventionists may be able to improve the effectiveness of interventions (Kilpatrick, 2015; Hall, 2018). Therefore, this study adds to the current research and suggests ways for how a particular school might use Argyris and Schon's Theory-of-Action framework to refine their RTI framework and avoid factors that may have a negative impact.

Components of effective instructional practices within tier 2. It became very apparent during the study that in some instances there was a discrepancy between what the interventionists believed and what they were actually doing, particularly in relation to teaching explicit, systematic lessons, providing independent practice, and teaching phonological awareness skills. All four participants espoused these highly effective practice, but did not demonstrate these notions during classroom practices. Eraut (2000) confirmed this concept regarding the mismatch between espoused theories and theories-in-use, and explained that espoused theories are developed and taught in formal educational contexts, while theories-in-use develop from educators' implicit understanding of teaching through actual practice and their own personal experiences as students. Possible explanations for the interventionists sharing the same espoused beliefs may include the fact that all interventionists have received the same training, and the district's literacy coach provides job-embedded professional support. Since the literacy coach has a direct impact on improving practices, it would warrant exploring her espoused theories and theories-in-use since she plays a vital role in guiding the interventionists through reflective discussions and dialogue.

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Explicit instruction. First, in regards to the comparison between the
interventionist's espoused beliefs about explicit instruction, all four teachers espoused the
importance of providing explicit instruction, specifically sharing information or
knowledge with students through modeling, demonstrating, and thinking aloud; and
following a "I do, we do, you do" lesson sequence (see Table 14).

Table 14

*Summary of espoused theory regarding explicit instruction found to be incongruent with
theories-in-use*

Grade Level	Ms. Simmons (4) Fourth Grade	Ms. Henry (4) Sixth Grade	Ms. Engle (4) Kindergarten (1) First Grade	Ms. Clayton (6) Kindergarten
Espoused Theories not present in classroom observation	• Model/ demonstrate/ and "think aloud" • Independent practice	• Model/ demonstrate / and "think aloud" • Independent practice	• Model/ demonstrate/ and "think aloud" • Independent practice	• Model/ demonstrate/ and "think aloud" • Independent practice
	Statement: *"Effective literacy interventions are explicitly taught and demonstrated by the teacher and students are able to practice it and are guided through the practice with the interventionist, and opportunities to practice."*	Statement: *"An effective literacy intervention provides time for direct instruction to the students and time to practice independently."*	Statement: *"I use a lot of modeling and direct teaching of the skill. Afterwards, I make it fun and allow the students to play a game."*	Statement: *"I use a lot of modeling of the strategies, …and then …I do, you do, we do, and it is over and over again. After we practice a skill, the students practice and I assess their learning."*

However, this espoused instructional approach using explicit instruction was found to be
incongruent within all four case students. The majority of the lessons consisted of guided

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practice activities along with independent practice lacking any follow up to determine if the students had actually mastered the lesson objective. The interviews revealed that the teachers were able to use the educational jargon associated with best practices, but their practice was inconsistent with their stated beliefs (Argryis & Schön, 1974; Harnett, 2007). Explicit approaches to reading instruction that provides practice and application with connected text is associated with stronger effects on a students' reading skills (Allington, 2009; Denton, et. al, 2014; Kilpatrick, 2015; Snow, Burns, & Griffon, 1998). Therefore, analysis across all four case studies shows a significant need to provide the interventionists with professional development to effectively implement explicit instruction.

Phonological awareness training versus phonics. Phonological awareness skills heavily influence every aspect of word-level reading development (Kilpatrick, 2015; National Reading Panel, 2010), and inadequacy in these skills are a "universal cause" of word-level reading difficulty (Ahmed, Wagner, & Kantor, 2012; Velluntino, Flectcher, & Scanlon, 2004). The National Reading Panel (2000) recommended that phonological awareness training is a Tier I general education practice, along with additional Tier II phonological awareness instruction for at-risk students. Both Ms. Engle and Ms. Clayton agreed and espoused that phonological awareness training is the most important component of their literacy interventions. First, Ms. Clayton shared:

Since I am working with Kindergarten to second grade students, my intervention lessons focus on phonemic awareness. If they do not know the letter, if they can't identify [the letter], they cannot give the sound, pretty much they are done (i.e., will struggle to read). I need to focus on

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getting that phonemic awareness in place…[by] making a strong base with the letter sounds, letter names, and moving forward into blending and segmenting.

While letter naming and letter sound fluency are important pre-requisite reading skills, they are not phonemic awareness skills. Orally recognizing letter sounds is phonemic awareness. Second, Ms. Engle shared a similar belief. "I'm currently doing [teaching] phonological awareness, because we are working on CVC words and words with diagraphs in them, and being able to quickly read CVC words. Again, Ms. Clayton and Ms. Engle's espoused beliefs exposed some misunderstandings about phonemic awareness and phonics instruction.

In terms of a comparison between Ms. Engle and Ms. Clayton's espoused beliefs and theories in use in regards to phonological awareness training, both cases showed lack of congruency. While Ms. Engle espoused teaching phonological awareness skills, the interventions focused on phonics. For example, during the instruction observed during the Tier 2 literacy intervention lesson on March 26, 2018, the students used blending mats to tap on each letter and blend the letter sounds to read the words. Next, she showed flashcards with CVC words printed on them and had the student echo read the words. Lastly, she asked each student to read a word on the flashcard. These activities mimic oral phonological awareness activities, but since the letters are displayed for the student, these are actually phonics activities and are not phonemic awareness activities. The students can read the words using letter-sound-knowledge. This cross analysis of the two case studies has uncovered some concerns about the participants' lack of knowledge about phonological awareness. Ms. Clayton and Ms. Engle where both able to espouse

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that phonological awareness training is an effective literacy intervention and focus of their instruction, but their explanation and actual practices were misinformed and more phonics based. Since phonological skills play a central role in every aspect of word-reading development and most early reading difficulties can be prevented with explicit letter-sound skill and phonological awareness, it is imperative that staff is properly trained to provide phonological awareness training as a Tier 2 intervention (Cunningham, 1990; Kilpatrick, 2015; national Reading Panel). Therefore, this study has identified a serious need to provide professional development to the interventionists to understand the difference between phonological awareness and phonics, and how to use effective instructional methods to teach phonological awareness.

Since few studies have been published comparing intended RTI practices when delivering literacy instruction versus enacted practices as they occur in the actual school setting (Cavendish, et. al., 2016; Orosco & Klingner, 2010), this study adds to the current research by exploring how interventionists implemented Tier II interventions for students having difficulty reading in the context of a RTI program My findings reinforce Li (2013) and Harnett's (2007) call for classroom-based action research as a model for professional development. Since research has proposed common features of effective literacy instruction (Allington, 2002; Denton, et. al., 2014; Kilpatrick, 2015; National Reading Panel, 2000; and Snow, Burns, & Griffon, 1998), and a significant number of teachers do not use these effective components of instruction (Ysseldyke, 2005), my findings reinforced the importance of targeted, ongoing and intensive professional development focusing on effective literacy interventions (Bollman, Silberglitt, & Gibbons, 2007; Callendar, 2007; Orosco & Klingner). This study has shown that Argyris and Schön's

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(1974) Theory-of Action framework is a way for school districts to identify barriers affecting implementation of RTI and as a potential professional development tool to be used as a catalyst for reflective practice.

The comparison between the four case studies provides valuable information about factors hindering successful implementation of the school district's RTI program, and provides guidance for leadership. The examination of the findings revealed a possible lack of understanding over the purpose of RTI directly related to teachers' belief systems, components of the RTI program affecting implementation, and professional development gaps. The first factor that emerged was the teachers' belief systems in regards to placement decisions. Three out of four teachers felt that when a student was not making progress, it prompted a referral to special education, instead of focusing on the instruction. This area should be explored further to ensure all teachers understand the purpose of RTI and believe in pre-referral interventions (Moran & Petruzzelli, 2011). The second factor addressed components of the RTI program affecting implementation, which included selecting the appropriate diagnostic assessment and grouping practices based on students' specific skill deficit. Lastly, gaps in professional development were exposed. The four case studies shared similar espoused beliefs about effective literacy interventions; however, in several instances there was a discrepancy between what they espoused and their actual theories-in-use. These areas lacking congruency between the two theories are in need of targeted professional development, specifically, to effectively implement explicit instruction and phonological awareness training during Tier II instruction. These findings addressed gaps and extended the current literature on identified barriers by various studies regarding implementation of RTI.

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Implications

The main reason that some schools that have implemented RTI but have not seen tremendous results is because schools have left out the critical components – highly effective intervention methods (Kilpatrick, 2015; Hall, 2018). The main aim in this study was to address the almost total lack of research evidence on this particular area, specifically in a Preschool-6th grade elementary school embedded in the school's RTI framework. Argryis and Schön's (1974) research studied communication behavior between individuals, and has not been applied to the specific context in this study. Therefore, the findings from this research study have a number of implications for school leaders and teachers regarding prevention and remediation of reading difficulties at both the individual and organizational level and societal level.

Effective instruction is key to prevention and remediation. At the organizational level, for both school leaders and teachers, the results of this study may inform practitioners on ways to improve the RTI process and instructional supports provided to students at-risk and having difficulty reading. Teacher knowledge and expertise are the most important factors affecting student achievement (Shulman, 1987). This includes both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Ball, Thames, and Phelps, 2008; Shulman, 1987). A disparity exists between the reading research and actual practices when working with students having difficulty reading (Kilpatrick, 2015). We can improve professional development substantially if we build the capacity for teachers to learn about practice in practice. "Teacher knowledge is a messy kind of wisdom involving content knowledge, learning research, and teaching

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techniques as well as knowledge that can only be attained in social practice or by personal experimentation" (Duncan, 1998). Principals have a direct role in implementing successful school change and school improvement, which requires a focus on professional development (Bredeson, 2000).

The findings from this study revealed that the participants had at least two or more espoused theories incongruent with their theories-in-use, and the findings highlighted strong similarities in their lack of knowledge about phonological awareness and lack of explicit instructional practices. Teachers must be provided with targeted professional development on effective literacy interventions. The intention of this study presents an opportunity for teachers to investigate and analyze their own practice, allowing them to identify any discrepancies between their espoused beliefs and theories-in-use, and subsequently to allow them to change and improve the quality of the literacy interventions provided to students. Learning is more effective when combined with reflection and awareness (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Therefore, this study is a catalyst for involving the teachers in the process and collecting and analyzing data within their classrooms to facilitate reflection and change.

At the social level, the results of this study have implications for positive social change in regards to improving practice in schools across the nation. Given the centrality of excellent instruction and the importance of the teaching in the prevention of reading difficulties, it is strongly recommended that teachers at all grade levels have adequate knowledge about reading, understand the course of literacy development, and the role of instruction in optimizing literacy development (Snow, Burns, & Griffon, 1998). *"Unfortunately, current teacher preparation programs and professional development*

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practices endorsed by many states are insufficient for the preparation and support of the teachers and specialists who are responsible for enabling all students to read and write" (The International Dyslexia Association, 2018). Many studies have attempted to create tools to measure teacher's content knowledge and understanding of literacy instruction (Morrison & Luttenegger, 2015; Phelps & Schilling, 2018; Rowan, Schilling, Ball, & Miller, 2001). The International Dyslexia Association's Educator Training Initiative Committee endorses the *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading*, which explicitly sets forth the knowledge and skills that all teachers of reading are expected to possess to advance students' reading and writing profiles (The International Dyslexia Association, 2018). This may serve as a valuable tool to guide educators through a classroom based action research process, focusing on one skill at a time while providing professional development and time to reflect on theories of action through analysis of classroom observation data (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Harnett, 2007; Li, 2013). Therefore, the findings from this study support the idea of using a measure of teacher's content knowledge as a way to test educator's content knowledge (espoused believes), compare to actual practices, and create opportunities for classroom based action research to ensure alignment of theories.

Recommendations for Future Research

The intent of the research study was to gain an understanding of the challenges related to implementing RTI, interventionists' beliefs about students having reading difficulties, and interventionists' understanding of effective literacy interventions. The intent of this study was not to generalize the findings; however, the findings may provide a way to improve the supports provided to those students identified as having reading

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difficulties. Suggestions for future research include: 1) Conduct a longitudinal study including all interventionists and grade levels; 2) Research effective diagnostic assessments and monitor student outcomes; and 3) Focus on prevention of reading difficulties using targeted professional development of phonological awareness.

Longitudinal study. In various studies, Argyris and Schön (1974) found that gaps between espoused theory and theory-in-use were caused by inadequate training or organizational leadership. The findings from this study provide an empirical basis (baseline) to promote dialogue with literacy interventionists about the alignment of their current understanding and instructional practices when providing interventions to students with reading difficulties in the context of RTI. It would be beneficial to conduct a study with a larger group of teachers across various grade levels and over an extended period of time. First, this study was limited to four interventionists among eleven total interventionists in the school district, and the interventionists provided literacy interventions to students in kindergarten, first grade, fifth grade, and sixth grade. Since instructional methods and content differs in grade levels, it would be beneficial to examine the espoused beliefs and theories-in-use of all interventionists and all grade levels. Lastly, the study could be extended to include Tier I instruction to evaluate how effective literacy instruction is being taught throughout the district's literacy program.

In addition to conducting the study with a larger group of teacher spanning across kindergarten through sixth grade, it would be beneficial to follow the participants over an extended period of time beginning with their current Tier II instruction and continuing data collection of espoused beliefs and actual theories-in-use after subsequent training and support. In the current study, the number of research questions were limited to those

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easily covered in a one hour meeting. Expanding the questions and asking more in-depth follow-up questions would be beneficial in clarifying espoused beliefs. As was captured from the data in this research study, teachers who work in a same setting may share similar pedagogy (or uneven practices); therefore, it would be useful to research the beliefs and practices of a group of teachers through a longitudinal study (Breen, et. al., 2001), focus on one aspect of their teaching (Li, 2013), and adopt a classroom-based action research as a model for professional development (Harnett, 2007; Li, 2013). Additional training and support may continue to grow their beliefs and alignment between beliefs and practices (Harnett, 2007). By focusing on one aspect of effective literacy instruction, it would be easier to monitor the impact and adjust the professional development (PD) along with the possibility of differentiating the PD for teachers.

Diagnostic assessments and monitor student outcomes. The focus of this study was limited to literacy interventionists espoused beliefs and theories-in-use in regards to belief systems about reading difficulties, implementation of literacy interventions, and perceptions about the school district's RTI program. In the present study, there were no data collected to determine whether or not the literacy interventions had impacted student achievement; therefore, I recommend that further research include collection of data regarding student achievement. Furthermore, it was determined that the formative assessments currently being used by the four interventionists do not diagnose the specific skill deficits preventing the most effective grouping practices and interventions. This was noted as the most significant barrier to providing effective Tier II interventions. Therefore, I would recommend conducting further research in selecting appropriate diagnostic assessments to pin-point students' specific skill deficits and improve grouping

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practices and selection of appropriate interventions (NCRTI, 2010; Hall, 2018; Kilpatrick, 2015). The goal for the future research would be to improve the process for identifying why a student is struggling by using the appropriate diagnostic assessment, selecting the appropriate intervention, and allowing more accurate monitoring of student outcomes.

Prevention of reading difficulties: phonological awareness training.

Phonological awareness training should be central to any language arts curriculum in kindergarten and first grade, and phonological skills play a central role in every aspect of word-reading development (Kilpatrick, 2015; Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998; National Reading Panel, 2010). Findings in this study shed light on two primary grade teachers' lack of understanding between phonological awareness and phonics, which resulted in ineffective implementation of phonological awareness training during Tier II literacy interventions. Suggestions for future research include developing measures for testing primary grade teachers', most importantly kindergarten and first grade teachers, phonological awareness content knowledge and best instructional practices for training these skills.

Many studies have been conducted measuring teacher's various knowledge (Carlisle, Correnti, Phelps, & Zeng, 2009; Moats, 2003; Phelps & Schilling, 2004), but limited studies addressed phonological awareness training (Kilpatrick, 2015). It would be beneficial to design a tool to measure teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness and evaluation of effective instructional practices in the classroom, and how both aspects contribute to the academic gains (Carlisle, Correnti, Phelps, & Zeng, 2009). By having a better understanding of the knowledge and instructional practices of effective literacy

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interventions, school leaders can design better teacher preparation programs and professional development for teachers in schools. Studies could further explore how teachers espoused beliefs about content knowledge and effective practices are associated with differences in their theories-in-use.

As the principal at Sunny Brook Elementary School, this research study has shaped my role as an instructional leader in the school. My findings have identified instructional barriers and belief systems that may be impacting successful implementation of the RTI, therefore, affecting student outcomes. Personally, I shared a summary of my findings to each interventionist, and I will challenge them to use the classroom based action research approach proposed in this study. I will collaborate with staff and address the barriers identified by offering targeted professional development on explicit instruction and how to properly teach phonological awareness.

Conclusion

This qualitative, multicase study attempted to explore the relationship between the theories-of-action of four literacy interventionists through semi-structured interviews, artifact analysis, and classroom observations. These practices are likely to occur in similar settings (e.g., other schools implementing RTI; teachers working with students having reading difficulties). The data provide guidance for the kind of supports needed to allow interventionists to be effective in their school and district. The analysis of each individual case study and across case studies serves as a way to identify systematic factors needed to support improvement to the RTI program, specifically professional development. While the purpose of the study was not to evaluate or look at or for *best practices*; rather, the idea was to see how literacy interventionists espoused beliefs and

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theories-in-use were congruent or not congruent, and if Arygris and Schön's Theory-of-Action framework would serve as a viable professional development tool.

The findings indicate that all participants showed instances of congruency and lack of congruency between their espoused beliefs and theories-in-use. Therefore, it supports the conclusion that the interventionists need to reflect on their existing beliefs and classroom practices. Furthermore, it supports the importance of helping educators to learn and gain insight into whether or not their espoused theories and theories-in-use are in congruence, and whether or not one's thinking is inhibiting and/or facilitating their growth and the growth of their students; and if needed, help individuals learn how to generate and test new theories of action (Argryis and Schön, 1974; Savaya & Garnder, 2012). This research study confirmed that espoused theories and theories-in-use are not always aligned (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Harnett, 2007; Li, 2013; Savaya & Gardner, 2012; Yoshihara, 2011) and both congruency and lack of congruency exists between the two theories. In sum, this study provided further support for the notion that exploring the connection or seeking the gap between espoused theories and theories-in-use creates a powerful tool for reflection and dialogue (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Li, 2013), so that educators can become more confident knowing that what they believe is being practiced in their classrooms.

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Interview Protocol

Title of Project: Helping Children Overcome Reading Difficulties Using Response to Intervention

*Principal Investigator: Dr. Beth Wassell

Notes to Share with Interviewee:
- Thank you for participating in my study. I believe your input will be invaluable in my research and help in improving professional development for everyone involved in the Response to Intervention Program and our school district's goal to support our students not reading on grade level.
- All safety measures will be taken to ensure confidentially. For example, pseudonyms will be used in my final report. Only a final summary of my findings and recommendations will be shared; I will not share your specific responses with anyone. If you wish, I will provide you with a summary of my interview responses to give your final seal of approval.
- Approximate Length of Interview(s): 1st Interview 40 minutes, and 3 classroom observation(s) during RTI.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study is aimed at providing an in-depth perspective of literacy interventionists' beliefs and practices when providing Tier II literacy interventions to students with reading difficulties within the context of the RTI program.

Survey Questions:

Working with Students with Reading Difficulties
1. Have you ever taught a student who you suspected had a learning disability? What did you learn from the experience?
2. When a student continues to have difficulty with reading, what do you feel may be some of the causes? Please describe these inhibiting factors that affect reading instruction. What do you think should be done?

General Descriptions of the RTI Program
3. Please tell me about the RTI model that is used in your school?
4. What are your general perceptions of the RTI process?

5. What are the challenges of implementing RTI?
6. What are the strengths of implementing RTI?
7. How do you use the progress monitoring data to make decisions about supports for students?
8. When should a student's intervention be terminated, modified, and/or intensified?
9. When should a student be considered for special education eligibility?

Literacy Interventions
10. How do you plan for the literacy intervention? Describe a 40-minute Tier II literacy intervention? What are the students doing during this time?
11. How much time is spent reading text during a 40-minute literacy intervention?
12. In your opinion, what aspect of reading instruction most positively influences a student's reading ability?
13. What constitutes an effective literacy intervention?
14. Explain how you teach fluency?
15. Explain how you teach phonological awareness?
16. Explain how you teach comprehension skills?
17. Explain how you teach vocabulary growth?

**Is there is anything else you would like to tell me that I have not asked that would be relevant?

Email to Solicit Participation

Title: Helping Children Overcome Reading Difficulties Using Response to Intervention
Principal Investigator: Dr. Beth Wassell
Co-Investigator: Corinne Mesmer

Email to Solicit Participation

As you are all aware, I am a doctoral student at Rowan University. I am

conducting a qualitative research study and would like to cordially invite you to

participate in my project. I am interested in learning more about your experience as a

literacy interventionist and work with students having reading difficulties. This study

will seek to explore your beliefs and practices when enacting RTI, working with students

not reading on grade level, and providing literacy interventions. I believe your input will

be invaluable in my research. My goal is to potentially identify an effective professional

development tool and improve the RTI program.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you accept, your participation will

entail one interview lasting approximately 40 minutes and three classroom observation(s)

during RTI, and collection of work assigned to students (not actual student work). Both

the interview and observation will be recorded, and upon request, I will provide you with

a summary of the main points drawn from the interview. This is **<u>NOT</u>** an evaluation of

your teaching practices or student outcomes, simply a narrative of your experience thus

far as an interventionist within the context of the school's Response to Intervention program.

There is a reasonable possibility of the breach of confidentiality in a research study, but the researcher will take every precaution to eliminate the possibility of breach of confidentiality. For example, I will use a pseudonym for you in my study, and I will not reveal any details or give information about where you work, and so forth. Only my dissertation committee will read my finished study, and I will only share a summary of my findings upon your request.

If I have any questions or concerns, you may contact me at (856) 769-0855 x1110 or e-mail mesmerc@southharrision.k12.nj.us or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Beth Wassell, at her office (856) 256-4500 x53818 or email wassell@rowan.edu.

If at any time during the study, either after agreement to participate or during the enrollment phase, you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the Rowan University Glassboro/CMSRU IRB, Office of Research Compliance at (856) 256-4078.

** As a thank you for your participation, each participant will receive a $10 gift card to Wawa.
Very truly yours,
Corinne Mesmer

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Appendix C

Participation Consent Form

Title: Helping Children Overcome Reading Difficulties Using Response to Intervention
PI: Dr. Beth Wassell

Rowan University

TITLE OF STUDY: Helping Children Overcome Reading Difficulties Using Response to Intervention
Principal Investigator: Dr. Beth Wassell

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you to decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study. If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask them and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form. You will be provided with a copy of the signed consent form to keep. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

The purpose of the research is to provide a framework for educators to reflect upon their conceptual understanding and specific behaviors when delivering literacy interventions and working with students not reading on grade level in the context of the Response to Intervention Program, which could potentially be used to improve practice and student learning outcomes. This is not an evaluation of teaching of teaching or student outcomes.

Currently eleven teachers serve as interventionists at South Harrison Elementary School in the RTI program. I am seeking approximately four to five volunteers to participate in this research study. It is estimated that each participant must be available for a total of approximately: 40 minutes for an initial interview and three classroom observations during 1st period teaching assignment. The interviews and review of transcripts/audio will occur over the next few months. Interviews will be scheduled for a time and place convenient for you.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You are free to request that your audio/transcription or interview not be used at any time. You may request a summary of the interview to approve, add to, or change. You are free to withdraw from the study at any point in time. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. There is no penalty for withdrawing from the study. You will receive no compensation for participating in the research study.

The benefits of taking part in this study may be assist in improving professional development for all current and future staff involved in the Response to Intervention Program and our school district's goal to support our students not reading on grade level. It may also benefit the wider educational community both locally and nationally.

Version # 1 and Date: 2/11/18

Rowan University APPROVED
IRB #: Pro2018002247/2015
APPROVAL DATE: 2/27/2018
EXPIRATION DATE: 2/27/2019

Title: Helping Children Overcome Reading Difficulties Using Response to Intervention
PI: Dr. Beth Wassell

Rowan University

However, it is possible that you might receive no direct personal benefit from taking part in this study. Your participation may help us understand which can benefit you directly, and may help other people to reflect upon their own congruence or incongruence between their conceptual understanding and actual practices when serving as literacy interventions in a K-6 school.

There are no potential risks to you as a participant.

There will be no cost to you to participate in the study. You will receive a $10.00 gift card for taking part in the study upon completion of the interview and observations.

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information. The researcher will take every precaution to eliminate the possibility of breach of confidentiality. For example, any information that is obtained throughout this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed for any reason. All data collected from you will be coded with a number assigned to you that will not be shared with anyone. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the dissertation. Your real name will never be used. The school district will also be assigned a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of all personnel at South Harrison. The identity of all participants will be carefully protected while I am conducting the research and when I report my findings. All data, including audio tapes will be stored on the recording device, which is password-protected. Once the audio tapes are transcribed, they will be erased. The transcriptions will be stored on the co-investigator's password-protected computer. The artifacts and research journal will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the co-investigator's office. All data will be destroyed upon completion of research.

If I have any questions or concerns, you may contact me at (856) 769-0855 x1110 or e-mail mesmerc@southharrision.k12.nj.us or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Beth Wassell, at her office (856) 256-4500 x53818 or email wassell@rowan.edu.

If at any time during the study, either after agreement to participate or during the enrollment phase, you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the Rowan University Glassboro/CMSRU IRB, Office of Research Compliance at (856) 256-4078.

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

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Thank you.

Sincerely,
Corinne Mesmer, Principal
Co-Investigator

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name:_____

Subject Signature:_____ Date:_____

CONSENT TO AUDIO TAPE

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Corinne Mesmer and Dr. Beth Wassell. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audio tape part of the research as described.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team. The recording(s) will not include any identifiable information. The recording(s) will be securely stored on a recording device. Once the audiotapes are transcribed and stored on the co-researcher's computer, the audiotapes will be erased.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record your child, Minor, as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject Name:_____

Subject Signature:_____ Date:_____

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:

Version # 1 and Date: **2/11/18**

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Title: Helping Children Overcome Reading Difficulties Using Response to Intervention
PI: Dr. Beth Wassell

Rowan University

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent:_____

Signature:_____ Date: _____

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