Response to Intervention:

A Model in Progress

Pamela J. Martín

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Ellen Oh

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Response to Intervention (RtI) is an educational model currently being piloted in elementary schools in this country. The model was first specifically mentioned in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) amendments of 2004 and was put forth in response to the move toward educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The principle behind least restrictive environment (LRE), also outlined in IDEA amendments of 2004, is that "students with disabilities are entitled to be educated with their nondisabled peers to the greatest extent possible" (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2010, p. 14). Prior to this, the options for students with special needs were bleak. They were typically excluded from the general classroom and placed in special classes made up of children of all ages, disabilities, and backgrounds where they received little support. The other option was being institutionalized (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2009, p. 4). LRE led to inclusive classrooms. "Inclusion encompasses students who are gifted and talented, those who are at risk for failure because of their life circumstances, those with disabilities, and those who are average learners" (Friend, 2008, p. 20). The Response to Intervention model was designed to meet the diverse needs of students in the inclusive classroom setting.

RtI was created to address the academic needs of students in a new way. It is a multi-tiered instructional model that begins in the general education classroom and utilizes research-based, graduated instructional strategies and interventions at all times. A student's level of ability and areas of weakness are tracked by continual assessments to determine what tier best suits each individual student. The student's progress is monitored and recommendations are made for movement between tiers or for special education evaluation.

Despite its positive intentions, the Response to Intervention instructional model is a controversial topic among educators, administrators, and researchers. Advocates point out that all students benefit from the excellent educational strategies that are implemented in the general
RtI education classroom with RtI. Others raise concern over issues such as whether general education teachers currently possess adequate knowledge and skills to implement those strategies (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005, p. 526). While Richards, Pavri, Golez, Canges, and Murphy (2007) suggested that the immediacy of the improved strategies and focused instruction provided to students throughout the RtI model may eliminate the need for identification and special education services for some students (p. 58), Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) asked "Is it possible that some children who are nonresponsive to Tier I instruction, but who become responsive in a second or third tier, still have a disability...?" (p. 97). While RtI was put into place to address the academic needs of students, specifically focusing on math and reading, the main thrust thus far has been on targeting reading problems (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 94).

This project was designed to determine how successful the Response to Intervention model currently is in meeting the needs of struggling readers. The overarching question that guided the research was "Is the Response to Intervention model effectively and efficiently meeting the needs of students struggling with reading in our elementary schools today?" Determining "success" required evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the model. Effectiveness would be determined by the outcome of the quality of instructional strategies and efficiency referred to the timeliness of attention to the students' needs.

Examining the Response to Intervention model and how it addresses students struggling with reading falls directly in line with my concentration, Literacy in Special Education. In fact, RtI is potentially the precursor to the identification of special education for some children. Drawing on literature from the three disciplines supporting my concentration: educational psychology, special education, and linguistics, the key components that support the acquisition of improved reading skills were identified. In addition, detailed information on the Response to Intervention model itself was provided. By examining articles and studies conducted in the field
of educational psychology, interventions that encourage and strengthen student motivation and engagement that can help support students struggling with reading were identified. The field of special education proved to be a rich source of information on the RtI model, including its structure and intended functions, as well as a resource replete with strategies to support the diverse requirements of students with special needs struggling with reading. An understanding of the basic components of language necessary for reading was gained by a study of works found in the discipline of linguistics. Studying research in all three disciplines helped determine, theoretically, if the critical components needed to support students struggling to read were being provided through the implementation of the RtI model.

To establish an even more robust picture of how effective and efficient the Response to Intervention model currently is in meeting the needs of students struggling with reading, the theoretical findings combed from the literature were compared and contrasted with insights and data derived from interviews of professionals in the field of education. The interviewees were chosen from three elementary schools in the southeast; two of the schools had officially begun RtI implementation and one was just beginning to explore some of the components of the model. The combined findings from the review of the literature and the interviews made one thing very clear; the commendable intention behind the Response to Intervention model is to meet the varied needs of students struggling with reading in a timely fashion. However, RtI implementation is in its infancy and in these early stages, challenges have arisen that have caused the model to fall short of its goal. As a result, I contend that the Response to Intervention model is not yet effective and efficient in meeting the needs of students struggling with reading in our elementary schools today.

In this paper, a discussion of reading and an interdisciplinary identification of key components needed to support reading instruction for all students will first be presented. From
there, an overview of the purpose, structure, and components of the Response to Intervention model will be presented followed by a discussion of some of the theoretical concerns that have arisen surrounding its implementation. Next, a summary of the results from the interviews will be provided succeeded by a discussion and analysis of both the review of literature and interview findings. The paper will conclude with reflections on limitations encountered while executing this project, implications of the findings, and suggestions for areas of further research.

Though this project is directed to educators and administrators in the public school system, it also speaks to concerns held by many parents and caregivers of students learning and struggling to read. It should, in fact, be a topic of concern to all members of the community. A student's ability to read or not can be the difference between her/him becoming a productive, contributing member of society, reaching her/his full potential, or a possible burden of the state. How we educate our young, specifically how we teach them to read, is of critical significance to their attainment of scholarly success and potential life fulfillment. It is incumbent upon us all to provide our students with the most effective and efficient methods of instruction designed to meet their diverse educational needs.

**Background**

**Reading**

Reading is a very complex process that is one of the most important skills students can learn in school. Students access education by reading and comprehending information. While many children are introduced to books and basic concepts of print in their homes before entering school, other children are not as fortunate. For some children, learning the skills needed to facilitate reading comes easily, but the same skills can be a challenge for others. Bursuck and Damer (2007) indicated:
About 5% of students come to school able to read...[once in school], 20-30%...learn how to read with ease...for [another] 20-30% of students, learning to read will take hard work...an additional 30%...will only learn if they are given intensive support...[and] the remaining 5% of students have serious, pervasive reading disabilities and are served in special education (p. 3).

There is no "one size fits all" program or approach to instruction for teaching reading to our diverse population of young students. The challenge for our school systems lies in determining how best to address the broad range of needs of all students as they learn to read.

One successful route to identifying effective reading instruction has been derived using an interdisciplinary approach. For example, research from the three disciplines of educational psychology, special education, and linguistics has helped to identify topics and crucial components that support the acquisition of reading skills. In the field of educational psychology, researchers look at how humans think and learn and seek to identify best practices to support teaching and student learning in educational contexts. Motivation has been identified as one of the critical components needed by students learning the challenging sub-skills of reading. Alderman (2008) stated "Motivation is often described as having three functions: (a) energizing or activating behavior, (b) directing behavior, and (c) regulating persistence of behavior" (p. 23) and is such an important factor in student learning that the author asserted it must be definitively taught, not just left as an after-thought to address problems as they arise (p. 19). Encouraging students' desire to read, helping them to learn what courses of action will prove to be most successful in approaching areas of difficulties, and supporting their endeavors to reach their reading goals are some aspects of motivation that should be encouraged. Good motivation in a student will help propel her/him forward even when facing challenges like those experienced while learning how to read.
From the discipline of special education, strategies and approaches have been identified that support learning for students of diverse abilities and backgrounds often found in the inclusive classroom. Mastropieri and Scruggs (2010) point to a number of factors that can help support student learning. These include *teaching with enthusiasm* (p. 136) which models both a love for the subject and a positive attitude toward learning; *maximizing academic engagement* (p. 136) by using techniques such as active questioning (p. 138) and using materials that are meaningful and relevant to the students (p. 203); and effectively using praise (p. 215) for behaviors ranging from putting forth effort to accomplishing a specific task. *Differentiating instruction* is another critical practice necessary in the inclusive classroom. Individualizing instruction to meet the needs of each learner, providing more support if needed and more autonomy when warranted, for example, can maximize the rate of learning for students in the classroom. This can be accomplished by setting individually appropriate goals (p. 207), presenting materials in a variety of ways, and using assistive technology supports as needed. All of these strategies and approaches are useful tools when teaching a classroom of diverse learners how to read.

The discipline of linguistics offers the opportunity to explore the sub-units of language, the base of reading. O'Grady, Archibald, Aronoff, & Rees-Miller (2005) stated "Linguistics, [is] the study of how language works" (p. 1). Linguists break down language into parts that are then rigorously studied such as morphology where word formation is studied (p. 112); phonology or the study of the sound systems of language (p. 56); syntax where sentence structure is examined (p. 151); and semantics where the meaning behind the language is explored (p. 201). While young students are not required to learn the specific linguistic terminology and the precise meaning of these parts, an awareness of how language is constructed, used, and interpreted is necessary for successful and productive reading.
There are many layers of complexity involved in learning how to read. These are further compounded by the often diverse, individual needs of students struggling with reading. One of the ways to counter this complexity and meet the needs of all learners in the inclusive classroom was through the creation of the Response to Intervention model of instruction.

The Creation of Response to Intervention

For the past forty years, school systems used a wait to fail approach before providing services to students (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008, p. 1). This wait to fail approach is based on a discrepancy model to identify students with learning disabilities. Following this approach for identification, a student is entitled to services only if there is a considerable discrepancy between the student's abilities and her/his actual levels of achievement (Richards et al., 2007, p. 55). There are many criticisms of this approach. The focus of one group of criticisms lies in not being able to address students' needs efficiently, in a timely fashion. It is difficult to identify a significant discrepancy between a very young child's intelligence/aptitude and her/his ability. As a result, students are often not officially identified as having a problem until they are in third grade at which point they have already fallen significantly behind their classmates (Richards et al., 2007, p. 56). Instead of providing support services to the student as soon as a problem becomes evident, the student must "wait to fail" at which point it becomes necessary to begin remediation services. Another area of concern with the discrepancy model centers on the lack of the promotion of specific, sound instructional methods and strategies for teachers to use (Richards et al., 2007, p. 56). These are just a few of the problems that led to re-evaluating and re-thinking how to best meet the needs of students experiencing learning difficulties in areas such as reading.

In 1997, Congress assembled a team of experts in the field of education and parents to form the National Reading Panel. Their mission was to assess and evaluate present research-
based knowledge regarding reading including best strategies and methods of teaching (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 1-1). The Panel identified and analyzed five main areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness (the ability to identify and manipulate the individual units of language sounds in a word), phonics (the correspondence between the letters of written words to the sounds of spoken words), fluency (the ability to read with speed and accuracy), vocabulary (understanding the words used to communicate), and comprehension (the ability to understand what is being read) (National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read, n.d., pp. 7-16). From the Panel's research, conclusions were assembled regarding best practices of instruction in support of reading.

Recognizing that the existing discrepancy model was not working and armed with the documented research of best practices in support of reading laid out by the National Reading Panel, the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA provided a new approach to address the needs of students struggling to read. This new approach is generally referred to as Response to Intervention or RtI. Friend (2008) identified the two main purposes of RtI as:

1. To ensure that students receive research proven remediation and other supports as soon as they are identified as having academic difficulties, even in kindergarten...

2. To ensure that professionals gather clear data to document the effectiveness of the remedial strategies that have been implemented (p. 43).

Response to Intervention was not created to completely eliminate the discrepancy model but was enacted to provide schools with another viable method to help determine if a student has a learning disability.
Response to Intervention

How It Works

The 2004 amendment to IDEA identifies two key components of RtI: quality instruction and regular assessment of student progress.

To ensure that underachievement in a child suspected of having a specific learning disability is not due to lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math, the group must consider, as part of the evaluation...Data that demonstrate that prior to, or as a part of, the referral process, the child was provided appropriate instruction in regular education settings, delivered by qualified personnel...[and calls for] Data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal assessment of student progress during instruction (U. S. Department of Education, n.d., section b)

Implementation of Response to Intervention calls for high quality instruction at all times to maximize the opportunities for success in learning and to minimize the possibility that a student's difficulties may be due to poor quality of instruction. To establish where students are academically and to determine how well they are responding to the intervention being utilized, their progress is continually monitored through assessments. A baseline of student performance and identification of students who may be at risk for having academic difficulties is first established through the use of universal screening. This screening is typically administered three times per year: fall, winter, and spring and is made up of standardized or curriculum-based measures (VDOE, 2007, p. 8). In addition, progress monitoring is conducted continually throughout the year using a variety of brief assessment tools to establish how well the student is progressing through the core curriculum (VDOE, 2007, p. 11).
**Tier I.** RtI is a multi-tiered model of instruction. (See Figure 1). Tier I instruction takes place in the general classroom, is delivered by the general education teacher utilizing sound research-based interventions, and covers the core curriculum as identified by state learning standards per grade level per subject area. In Virginia, these are referred to as the standards of learning or SOLs. While it is anticipated that approximately 80% of the students in the general classroom will respond favorably to this high quality instruction, teachers also provide differentiated instruction for those students who are having difficulties (VDOE, 2007, p. 18). The structure of the general education classroom is fluid and at different times during the day, instruction may take place by the teacher addressing the whole class, pulling aside small groups of students to work with, or working on an individual basis with a student as needed. *Benchmark* (established expected levels of proficiency) assessments are typically conducted three times per year: at the school year's beginning, mid-point, and in the spring as a means to determine how well the students are responding to the instruction (VDOE, 2007, p. 18).

**Tier II.** If a student is not responding well to the level of instruction received in Tier I as determined by the results of her/his benchmark assessments, s/he will receive Tier II level of instruction. The student will be taught in the general classroom for the majority of the day but will also participate in small group work, composed of one to five students, with more targeted interventions, for an additional thirty minutes per day. This instruction will take place either in the general classroom or in a separate resource room and may be delivered by the general education teacher, a special education teacher, or other trained personnel as determined by the individual school (VDOE, 2007, pp. 19-21).

At Tier II, the interventions in place address the specific areas of weakness the student is experiencing as disclosed by progress monitoring, which occurs more frequently at this tier than at Tier I; every two to three weeks. Based on the results of the assessments, instruction will be
provided by either the general education teacher or a more specialized instructor. This Tier II instruction is provided in addition to the core curriculum being taught by the general education teacher to the whole class (VDOE, 2007, pp. 19-21).

**Tier III.** If, after receiving Tier II instruction, a student is still having difficulties and is not responding well to the targeted interventions, s/he will begin Tier III instruction. At this tier, the delivery of instruction is even more tailored to the individual student's needs, takes place in addition to receiving core curriculum in the general classroom, is delivered by a trained specialist in reading, usually on a one-to-one basis, and typically takes place in a resource room separate from the general classroom. Just as the level of intensity of instruction is increased at Tier III so too is the frequency of progress monitoring. Assessments, both formal and informal (e.g. informal reading assessments, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Phonological Awareness Screening (PALS), Test of Work Reading Efficiency (TOWRE), and teacher constructed probes) may be conducted up to twice a week, enabling the instructor to carefully match the instruction to the identified need (VDOE, 2007, pp. 21-22).

At all three tiers in the RtI model, sound, research-based strategies and methods of instruction drawn from research in the field of education and special education are utilized to support students' learning of reading. The sub-skills of language required for reading are introduced and practiced with students being carefully monitored to assess how they are responding to the interventions used. Instruction is differentiated based on the students' needs and is designed to promote student success. Consequently, opportunities for students to gain a greater sense of competence and motivation are interspersed throughout. The RtI model, in theory, provides a framework to support student learning in a multi-dimensional manner addressing issues ranging from content acquisition to techniques that encourage and support lifelong learning.
Referral for special education evaluation. If a student continues to remain unresponsive at all three tiers within the RtI framework, a referral for special education evaluation will be made. This determination may be based on the student's inability to meet anticipated progress even with the implementation of specific research-based strategies and interventions tailored to meet the student's needs. It should also be noted, that at any point in the RtI process, a referral for special education evaluation can be made if either a parent or one of the educators working with the child suspects s/he may have a disability (VDOE, 2009, p. 6).

If the referral comes after a student has gone through the tiers of RtI, the special education eligibility group in the school would review all of the data previously gathered on the student during the RtI process and establish what additional data is needed (if any) to substantiate the need for special education services.
Where We Are Today with Response to Intervention Implementation

In 2007, Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, and Saunders (2009) conducted a search to find out how many states were developing plans for or were actually beginning implementation of Response to Intervention in their schools. Their findings were based on information provided by the states’ department of education websites and were confirmed by personal communications. Their results showed:

Fifteen states have currently adopted an RtI model and are implementing on large...or small scales. In addition, 22 states are in a development phase, 10 states are providing
guidance to schools and districts, and only 3 states are not currently in the process of developing a model or providing guidance regarding RtI or the information provided was unclear. (p. 87)

The authors also pointed out that some schools had begun researching and implementing RtI on their own, without specific state support.

These numbers demonstrate that states favor moving in the direction of the RtI model. Most agree that using a multiple tier approach is effective. However, there are areas of inconsistencies and weaknesses in the model that have arisen with these beginning cases of implementation that are causing concern within the field of education.

Concerns That Have Arisen- A Review of the Literature

There are aspects of the Response to Intervention model that are heralded by most in the field as desirable such as the ability to more quickly identify when a student is having difficulties and providing excellent research-based instructional strategies at all times to all students. However, inconsistencies in the actual implementation have surfaced. This lack of consistency in implementation is often due to the fact that many facets of RtI are not clearly laid out by law; instead they are left to the individual school systems to work out. Many of the concerns being raised rest with the lack of specificity of some of the key elements in its implementation. Unease has arisen for some who fear that without consistency and fidelity of implementation, the effectiveness of the model and ultimately student learning and progress, will suffer.

Questions over how many tiers there should be, what specific assessments are to be used, exactly which interventions should be employed, and by what means the fidelity of implementation is to be checked and maintained have surfaced. These questions reflect not only state-to-state concerns but also district-to-district and school-to-school concerns within a state (Berkeley et al., 2009, p. 94).
The laws currently do not specify how many tiers the RtI model should have and differing beliefs about the basic function of the model have caused conflicting opinions about what number of tiers should be present. Those who view the model as a means of providing early intervention and prevention for students advocate for as many as five or more tiers, while those who view RtI as a means of disability identification suggest fewer (Fuchs et al., 2008, pp. 73-74).

In addition to the number of tiers of instruction there should be, there are aspects within each tier that are not specified. How long a student should stay in any particular tier is not absolutely defined and may be dependent upon the quality of instruction s/he received in the previous tier (Vaughn, 2003, Summary of Findings section). Also within each tier, there can be variation in the teacher to student ratio. This ratio is determined not only by the students' needs but by the availability of the teachers/professionals, as well. Who the professionally trained staff will be and what their qualifications are at each tier can vary from school to school. Ideally, matches between the needs of the students and the training of the professionals working with them would be made but staff is sometimes taught "on the fly" to work with students. Additionally, students need supplemental intervention time to improve their reading proficiency. While pulling a student out of their set language arts time for Tier II or Tier III work does provide more targeted instruction, it does not increase the actual amount of time for reading instruction (Allington, 2009, p. 14).

Another area of concern concentrates on the amount of professional development that teachers receive. As teachers and educational professionals are called upon to use new research-based interventions, questions arise as to whether sufficient time is allotted for them to learn the interventions and how best to execute them. Without proper training, the fidelity of the interventions may be put at risk. That raises another issue; there is no consistent specific
protocol in place in schools to monitor the fidelity of intervention implementation. The overall findings in the review of the literature seem to suggest that with a lack of fidelity of implementation, the foundation and framework of the model could be made vulnerable.

Collaboration is another source of challenge and concern. While students often benefit from trained personnel coming together to address the students' diverse needs, building sufficient time into the teachers' schedules to provide that opportunity for collaboration is often difficult. Additionally, teachers who are used to working independently may be reticent to relinquish absolute control in planning and orchestrating their students' learning. Also, confusion over who is ultimately responsible for a student's progress can occur. In some cases the responsibility is viewed as falling on the general education teacher, in others, on the specialist or the whole team working in support of the student. These are just a few of the issues that have been raised and cause a sense of unease in educational communities contemplating and beginning implementation of the Response to Intervention model.

Interviews

The review of the literature revealed that there is considerable and ongoing debate concerning potentially weak elements in the Response to Intervention model. The experts' concerns seem to stem from the belief that while the framework of the model may in theory be well grounded, if it is not implemented with fidelity, it may fall short of its intended goals. While these concerns may be valid from a theoretical perspective, hearing what professionals in education who are actively involved in RtI implementation have to say about these same issues could provide another valuable perspective. To gain this additional viewpoint, interviews with two school principals, three general education teachers, one diagnostician, one special education teacher, and one reading instructor were conducted. School #1 and School #2 had officially begun implementation of RtI. School #3 was beginning its exploration of the model. All three
of the schools, representing three counties, are in the southeastern section of the United States (See Appendix A- B for interview questions.)

All of the interviews at School #1 were conducted with the principal present, interjecting comments throughout. At School #2 and School #3, the interviews were conducted one-on-one. The conversations were recorded with the researcher paraphrasing the interviewees' responses, asking for clarification as needed. The data was later reviewed to identify themes that seemed to emerge in response to the interview questions. The key questions posed are presented in Table 1. The findings were then summarized and are presented in Table 2.

Table 1

*Key Questions Posed*

| Q1. | At what stage of RtI implementation is your school? |
| Q2. | What is your overall philosophy or goal regarding reading for students in your school class? |
| Q3. | What do you see as the potential benefits of the Response to Intervention model in support of reading for students? |
| Q4. | What do you see as the potentially challenging aspects of the Response to Intervention model? |
| Q5. | Is there a collaborative effort among teachers in support of students with reading or do teachers work more independently? |
| Q6. | Is there sufficient professional development and training available for teachers in support of RtI and reading? |
| Q7. | Who is ultimately responsible for a student’s progress in reading? |
| Q8. | Do you feel that the Response to Intervention model is making it possible for you and other staff to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of students struggling with reading? |
Table 2

*Summary of Key Interview Findings*

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<td>Fluencya= level of fluency so student can focus on comprehension; Grade levelb= and encourage life long learning; Move forwardc= meet student where they are and teach from there; Student managementd= with so many students in Tier II and III, teacher found it difficult to keep track of each child's progress in reading; Identifying</td>
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*Note.*
weaknesses是指识别学生特定的阅读困难；Moving toward是指朝着合作迈进；General education teacher是指普通教育教师，与他人的支持相结合。
Discussion and Analysis

The goal of this research project initially was to determine if the Response to Intervention model was currently effective and efficient in meeting the needs of students struggling with reading. Partway through the research, however, it became evident that it takes three to five years before all of the elements of the model could be put firmly in place in any school. Though RtI was introduced six years ago, it is presently still in its infancy of implementation. Schools are just beginning to explore and slowly incorporate pieces of the model into their framework of instruction as they continue to train and learn more. At this point in time, it was not possible to answer the research question in the spirit with which it was posed. However, through a review of the literature and anecdotal evidence gathered from a small sampling of interviews, it was possible to gain an early indication of how professionals in the field of education regard RtI, what the possibilities for the future of the model may be, and the perceptions of the potential effectiveness and efficiency of the model in meeting the needs of students struggling with reading.

In place of trying to determine absolutely if the Response to Intervention model were measuring up to its creators' expectations, the focus of this study was shifted slightly to ascertain if there were indications that the model would work as hoped. Were schools and personnel within the schools getting on board and actively working to begin implementation? Was there cause for optimism or pessimism for the model's future? Most importantly, were there indications that students struggling with reading would ultimately benefit in a remarkable way from the framework and strategies put forth in the Response to Intervention model?

The culmination of the review of the literature on RtI led to an overall sense of skepticism with regards to the potential for success of the model. The researcher anticipated hearing reports of confusion, dissatisfaction, and resistance to change from the interviewees as
their schools began implementation of RtI. The reality of what was gleaned from the small sampling of interviews was surprisingly quite the opposite however. From this assembly of two principals and six educators from three different elementary schools came an overall sense of optimism and excitement about the potential that RtI held for supporting all students and improving their reading abilities. Administrators and teachers from the two schools that had officially begun RtI implementation (School #1 and School #2) expressed an understanding that RtI represented a real shift in how children were taught, evaluated, and how instruction was administered and monitored. Cutting across everything, was the realization that this shift would take time. They also seemed to share a belief that there were, in fact, clear plans of action for learning and implementing the model that would ultimately lead to successfully supporting students struggling with reading.

While the review of literature had raised concerns about scheduling difficulties, the principals from both School #1 and School #2 indicated that changes had been made to meet the additional scheduling needs. The principal from School #2 indicated school day schedules that had been in place for fifteen years in her school had been revised. Additional time for collaboration and continuing professional development for teachers had been created (personal communication, October 18, 2010). Also, additional time for students to receive targeted reading support had been built into the new schedules. Classroom doors were being opened and a new sense of "risk-free" dialogue among teachers was being promoted with opportunities for sharing of knowledge and experience being emphasized (Principal School #2, personal communication, October 18, 2010). A sense that a community of professionals was now shouldering the responsibility for each child instead of just one teacher was being embraced (Principal School #1, personal communication, October 5, 2010). Practices that previously had seemed unalterable were undergoing a metamorphosis.
The results of the sample of interviews also indicated that teachers, administrators, and specialists were not only being trained in research-based strategies but were actually using them in the classroom. Training for the interviewees from School #1 was provided by the state, their county's central office, administrators within the school, an RtI mentor who oversaw and supported personnel at several schools, and teachers teaching teachers (Diagnosisian, General education teacher, & Principal of School #1, personal communication, October 5, 2010). Faculty at a university that is studying RtI and working to support schools as they begin implementation conducted an intensive, five-day professional development session for faculty at School #2 and was in constant contact with staff to answer questions or provide booster sessions when needed (General education teacher & Principal of School #2, personal communication, October 18-19, 2010).

The professional development training received by faculty was being put to use in the classroom. The general education teacher from School #2 stated that *choral reading*, where all children read in unison, and the use of *response cards*, where children write their responses on small whiteboards, holding them up for the teacher to see, were two strategies being used to encourage low-risk, active participation and engagement by students (personal communication, October 19, 2010). Administrators and teacher leadership teams were not only establishing what strategies should be implemented but were also setting clear expectations of specific literacy elements that were to be included during instruction (Principal School #1, personal communication, October 5, 2010). The key components that make up the foundation of language and reading had been identified and were promoted in the reading programs that the teachers were using (Reading instructor, personal communication, November 1, 2010). In School #1, administration periodically sat in on classes being run by trained teachers to check the fidelity of the programs' implementation; that they were being properly executed including all
the key elements that had been embedded in the program (Principal School #1, personal
communication, October 5, 2010).

The diagnostician from School #1 pointed out the differentiation of instruction that was
in place and how decisions about the types of interventions that were appropriate for a student
were determined by the results of the continual progress monitoring (personal communication,
October 5, 2010). Small group or individualized instruction in Tier II and Tier III was also
providing the opportunity for stronger teacher-student relationships, which according to
Alderman (2008) as revealed in the review of the literature "is associated with both academic and
social competencies" (p. 228).

From this acknowledged small sampling of administrators and educators from schools
beginning RtI implementation, there seemed to be a sense of optimism that the model could
ultimately provide the means to meet the needs of students struggling to read. While the
concerns that have been expressed by the experts appear to have been well founded, the group of
educators and administrators interviewed seemed to be willing to make the changes and
accommodations necessary to facilitate full implementation of the model.

In the future however, it would be beneficial to conduct interviews with many more
schools at varying stages of RtI implementation to gain perhaps a better informed view of how
the model unfolds and is maintained over time in schools. While the results of the interviews
conducted for this project reflected a very optimistic posture, it would be interesting to hear their
views after the model has been in place for a number of years. After the newness of the
implementation has worn off, perhaps some of the concerns that the experts have raised would
begin surfacing. Even during the current interviews, one could hear murmurings of other schools
having difficulties with teachers working together, a general reticence to change, and a sense that
the model was not being embraced as enthusiastically as in their school. In addition, an even
closer examination of the responses to some of the interview questions revealed that while there
was agreement philosophically on how things were to be done, there were hints at
inconsistencies in the realization of some of the components. Perhaps these will in the future
become the weak points in the model that have been foreshadowed by the experts. It may take
the passage of time to truly determine the validity of those concerns.

The Response to Intervention model provides a framework from which educators can
work. The basic structure has been defined but there are many details that are not explicitly
dictated. At these points, where there is a lack of absolute control in implementation, justifiable
concern has been raised by experts in the field of education. There is room for variation in the
implementation of particular elements of the model and if each school does not carefully monitor
these points, they could run the risk of the model losing its full, intended impact.

However, on a daily basis, teachers work under conditions that are not always explicitly
defined. They are often carefully balancing what is given and known and what may possibly be.
Educating children involves a teacher's ability to carefully balance between science and art: the
"science" is using knowledge of content and proven strategies to support student learning, the
"art" is knowing how and when to "tweak" those strategies to meet the individual and specific
needs of a student. Some of the very concerns about RtI expressed by experts perhaps may be
part of what could ultimately lead to Response to Intervention being a success. Without some
degree of flexibility, teachers cannot respond to individual needs and teach in the differentiated
ways that students often require. With quality professional development, teachers have been and
can continue to make well-informed decisions on a daily basis about what their students need
and how best to provide them with the appropriate support. With a pool of data from progress
monitoring and collaborative meetings where educational plans can be designed, the probability
of student success increases. Regardless of how well planned and orchestrated a model of
RtI instruction is, its success ultimately rests on the knowledge and expertise, the flexibility and responsiveness of the teacher. These attributes are potentially encouraged within the Response to Intervention model.

**Limitations, Implications, and Areas of Further Study**

This research project was completed in seven and one half months: four months developing a proposal and gathering preliminary articles and resources, three and one half months studying the literature, conducting interviews, and writing up the results. The Response to Intervention model and its implementation is such a complex topic that, given the time constraints, information that would provide more details and subtle nuances to the study had to be excluded. It was necessary to concentrate on a rather narrow interpretation of what the model is and how it is being implemented. Even so, it was possible not only to gain a clear sense and understanding of what the basic principles behind Response to Intervention are but also, to see the potential the model provides for supporting students who struggle with reading. The Response to Intervention model attempts to incorporate theories of student learning that promote student motivation and engagement, strategies that support learning for all students, and an understanding and inclusion of the basic sub-units of language, the foundation of reading; the end result ideally being that students of all abilities are appropriately supported as they learn how to read.

Additionally, given the limitation of time, it was possible to conduct only a limited number of interviews with educators and administrators. While the interviews did serve to provide some valuable insights, the scope was rather limited. It would be beneficial to access a much larger pool of interviewees from schools in the future to gain a greater consensus of what the perceptions are of the model.
As schools continue to explore and implement Response to Intervention, studies using data collected from longitudinal studies is advised. Students' assessments/testing results and the percentage of students struggling with reading at all grades in elementary school would be valuable sources of information. One significant source of evidence regarding the model's effectiveness could be derived from the test results of students prior to interventions promoted by RtI and their post-intervention results. If there were a consistent, marked improvement in the students' scores, the strategies and process of implementation could be viewed as being effective; if there were no consistent improvement in the scores, it would seem that the model was not proving to be successful as implemented. Another source of valuable information could be drawn from comparing student reading performance at various elementary grade levels prior to RtI implementation to student reading performance for each successive year after RtI implementation. If there were a trend toward a reduction in the numbers of students struggling with reading in the higher-grade levels, the early intervention promoted by the RtI model could be credited. Because RtI implementation is in its infancy, schools are just beginning to gather this valuable data. The true measure of the model will require a review of data from years of full Response to Intervention implementation in schools.

Furthermore, identification of specific programs, interventions, and strategies being used within the framework of the model in support of learning to read could be compiled and their effectiveness evaluated. Collaborative endeavors in schools implementing RtI could be documented and reviewed as well as a study of the types and frequency of professional development models that are in place. All aspects of the model's implementation should be studied and documented so that professionals in the field of education can make well-informed decisions on how best to continue moving forward in support of students struggling with reading.
Conclusion

Response to Intervention is a model of instruction that provides a new framework and pedagogical approach for schools to follow in the mission to support students learning how to read. Though the model is in its infancy of implementation in schools in this country, this project revealed a sense of how the model is currently being regarded. While the sample of interviews was admittedly small, it was beneficial to hear opinions of administrators and educators who have actively begun RtI implementation in their schools in addition to the opinions of experts in the field. What became very clear from both the review of the literature and the interviews was the importance that all involved placed on establishing how best to support students learning how to read.

RtI is not without critics. As was evident in the review of literature, many facets of the model are currently being hotly debated. While these high profile arguments may be disconcerting to some, intensive reviews and critiques of the model by experts and professionals in the field of education who are truly seeking what is best for students can be a healthy practice. These debates can potentially result in improvements and a strengthening of the model.

The children of today are the foundation of our society of tomorrow. The better equipped they are to meet the demands placed on them in both school and in their community, the better able they will be to reach their highest levels of personal achievement. Reading is a critical skill needed to access their education today, and to live in the society of tomorrow. While the Response to Intervention model was designed to meet the varied needs of students as they learn how to read, any time a large-scale shift in an organization is begun, there will be challenges to be met. Response to Intervention is no exception. However, with continued healthy discussion and debate from committed teachers, professionals, and parents, Response to Intervention does seem to hold great promise for the future to successfully support students struggling to read.
References


Appendix A

Interview questions for Administrators

1. What is your position and what are your general responsibilities?

2. What is your overall philosophy or goal regarding reading for students in your school?

3. At what stage is your school with regards to implementing the Response to Intervention model of instruction in support of reading?

4. What support have you received to facilitate the implementation of RtI?

5. At this stage, do you feel the RtI model is making it possible for you and your staff to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of students struggling with reading?

6. What do you see as the potential benefits to using the RtI model in support of reading?

7. What do you see as potentially challenging aspects of the RtI model that may lead to difficulties?

8. What approaches to/strategies for reading instruction are being utilized?

9. Do all teachers use the same strategies?

10. Is there a collaborative effort among teachers in support of students with reading or is it more compartmentalized?

11. In general, do you feel that the approach in support of reading as set forth by RtI in your school is proving to be as effective as you would like?

12. What might you like to see being done differently and why?
13. What would you like to see additionally that would enable you and your staff to better meet the needs of students struggling with reading?

14. Do you believe that these things can be realized within the RtI model?
Appendix B

Interview questions for GenEd/SpecEd/Reading Teachers

1. What is your position and what are your responsibilities specifically regarding supporting students with reading?

2. What do you understand the school's overall philosophy or goal for reading to be for students in your school?

3. At what stage of Response to Intervention implementation is your school?

4. What support have you received to help you prepare for the implementation of RtI in your school?

5. Is there specific professional development in place to support you and other teachers re: reading instruction/strategies?

6. How will you be functioning within the new RtI model?

7. What approaches to/strategies for reading instruction will you be using?

8. Do all teachers use the same strategies?

9. Is there a collaborative effort among teachers/specialists within the RtI model to support students struggling with reading or is it more compartmentalized?

10. At this point, do you feel the RtI model of instruction will make it possible to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of students struggling with reading?

11. What do you see as the potential benefits of RtI in supporting students struggling with reading?
12. What do you see as potentially challenging aspects of the RtI model that you have concerns about?

13. What would you like to see additionally that would enable you to better meet the needs of your students struggling with reading?

14. Do you believe these things can be fulfilled within the RtI structure?