

TEACHERS' ENACTED AND EVOLVED BELIEFS ABOUT THE RESPONSE TO
INTERVENTION REFORM

by

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(Under the Direction of Cheryl Fields-Smith)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study centered on an intimate group of fifth grade teachers by examining their personal beliefs about evaluating, relating, and revamping instructional practices accordingly to manage the Response to Intervention initiative. Three fifth grade teachers participated with in-depth interviews, grade level meetings, and focus group discussions in order to determine how a collaborative effort influenced the Response to Intervention process. The multiple case study design initially focused on how these teachers evolved and enacted their beliefs about implementing RTI, then investigated how this same group enacted care into their classroom practices. The intention of the study was to contribute novel understandings concerning the implementation of Response to Intervention that occurred in authentic classroom settings from teacher practitioner perspectives.

INDEX WORDS: Qualitative, Teachers, Intervention reform

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Katy, and my father, Ray. They have been unfailing in their love, support, and encouragement during the entire doctoral process. I feel very blessed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative research study examined teachers' beliefs about evaluating, relating, and revamping their own classroom practices to manage the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Act [IDEA] (2004) and the Response to Intervention initiative. Response to Intervention (RTI), as it is conceived, aims to alleviate both the overly prescriptive measures of special education services and the perceived inadequate regular classroom strategies for teaching at-risk students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Gersten and Dimino (2006) indicated that the primary goal of RTI is to develop valid procedures for identifying and remediating struggling students within a regular classroom environment rather than relying on an IQ assessment or standardized test score to advocate special education assistance. In lieu of the proposed adjustments, Hilton (2007) maintained that regular education teachers largely carry the brunt of responsibility in verifying and substantiating the action RTI requires, which invariably leads to adjustment and change.

In this study, a team of fifth grade teachers worked to gain a better understanding of Response to Intervention and to implement the new measures of remediation necessitated by the directive. While Gersten and Dimino (2006) asserted that RTI asks educators to concentrate on specific academic outcomes and intellectual rigor, this study additionally examined how teachers promoted a social and realistic consciousness of teaching. By investigating RTI through belief systems and care ethics, the interconnectedness and responsibility of the teachers towards the students and the RTI authorization became apparent. Therefore, the basic purpose of this

research was to investigate how teachers' beliefs materialized and evolved through a lens of caring in relation to Response to Intervention.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers have been wedged between the very real directives of standardized education and our own convictions of effective teaching, a paradox that can be intensely personal and remarkably real. We are charged with guiding children to achieve high scores on standardized tests, yet we also want them to be cared for and nurtured in a developmentally appropriate manner. We want our students to learn a specific curriculum, and we also want them to be motivated, inspired, and autonomous in their instructional path. We want critical thinkers and risk takers in our schools, and yet we also want our students to act in a culturally consistent manner. All students deserve equal treatment and opportunity; however, we often give students “on the fringes” more attention and “average” students less. The distinctions are copious and certainly not limited to this shortlist, yet it is still the task of the classroom teacher to sift through the various tensions so established and perceived to provide what is best for children in their classrooms.

It is apparent that the complex arrangements between the authorized instructional practices and the epistemological positions of teachers are unsettled; however, they are also influential. Joram (2006) suggested that it is difficult for many teachers to find true merit in the habits and values held by policymakers and educational researchers. Fullan (1993) pointed out that officials handing down reforms from the federal or state level often ignore the complexity and circumstance that exist in schools and classrooms, thus producing disillusionment and instructional fragmentation. In terms of educational research, Girod, Pardales, and Cervetti (2002) maintained that few classroom practitioners read or make real use of educational

literature. Gitlin (2001) argued that teachers rarely have the time or the inclination to review traditional, behaviorist studies that are seldom helpful with their own classroom practices. Gerber (2005) suggested that teachers find both the mandates and literature to be overly technical, removed from the realities and context of their classrooms, and often requiring support that does not exist in public schools. Further, Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden (1995) contended that the current educational structure is organized under a belief system that values the technical aspects of teaching over the relational aspects of teaching, regardless of where the convictions of classroom teachers reside.

Research has indicated that teacher beliefs and experiences influence instructional practices and directly impact the education of their students (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). The RTI literature has yet to address these powerful constructs, preferring instead to discuss the procedural aspects of the authorization. In addition, few studies have looked at RTI implementation with a case study design in order to evoke teacher practitioner insight. Consequently, a gap exists in the RTI literature concerning the pragmatic viewpoints of teacher practitioners implementing and adjusting the reform within their school and classroom setting.

The challenges are to find connections between the RTI directives, the principles and practicality of the classroom teacher, and the genuine needs of the students. While Response to Intervention does authorize a set of ideas and convictions about teaching and learning, it is still the classroom teacher who has to determine and establish the program's effectiveness. Consequently, the basic purpose of this research was to investigate how teachers' beliefs materialized and evolved through a lens of caring in relation to Response to Intervention.

Purpose of the Study

Kennedy (2004) argued that teachers interpret classroom situations differently than reformers and policymakers; thus, they pursue practices that are different from those proposed by these other groups. Pajares (1992) indicated that for professional growth, the beliefs of teachers need to be made explicit to build a shared base of knowledge. Fives and Buehl (2008) maintained that the irony hence lies in that teachers' beliefs and assumptions are kept undisclosed to even their closest colleagues. In order to help them pragmatically sift through some of the clutter and misconceptions brought on by RTI, inquiry into teachers' beliefs brings to light accomplishments and realizations that can assist other classroom practitioners as they relate the research findings to their own situations.

Joram (2006) indicated that tinkering with personal ideas and beliefs is divorced from the everyday life of a practicing teacher. However, researchers indicated that when implementing an evidence-based initiative like RTI, teacher-centric research is crucial in executing a new policy (Loeb, Knapp, & Elfers, 2008). Teachers are best situated to investigate issues of practice and belief. Conducting educational inquiry from the analytical lenses and perspectives of the practicing and engaged teachers can be powerful and rewarding. Their views are certainly not free from opinion, and this research aimed to start with teacher epistemological beliefs. Rather than suppressing these convictions, or embracing others which may not be authentic, teachers naturally use the outlooks they have formed through their own experiences. By acknowledgment, these ideas become the foundational point for purposeful and personal inquiry and give insight into better ways to educate and support teachers and students for the reality of present day teaching and learning.

While researchers studying Response to Intervention examined the quantifiable application of the program (the results, procedures, groupings, time frames, etc.), few studies looked at the classroom practitioner's role in connection with this instructional reform. Even fewer inquiries researched the process through a caring lens when considering teachers' inherent principles. This study sought answers to the difficult, nebulous circumstances that can be overlooked or discounted when a new program is established. By examining RTI with such a teacher application, this research investigated how teachers' beliefs materialized and evolved through a lens of caring in relation to Response to Intervention.

Research Questions

The guiding research issue for this study was: What happens to teachers' beliefs when they implement the Response to Intervention initiative into their 5th grade classroom practices?

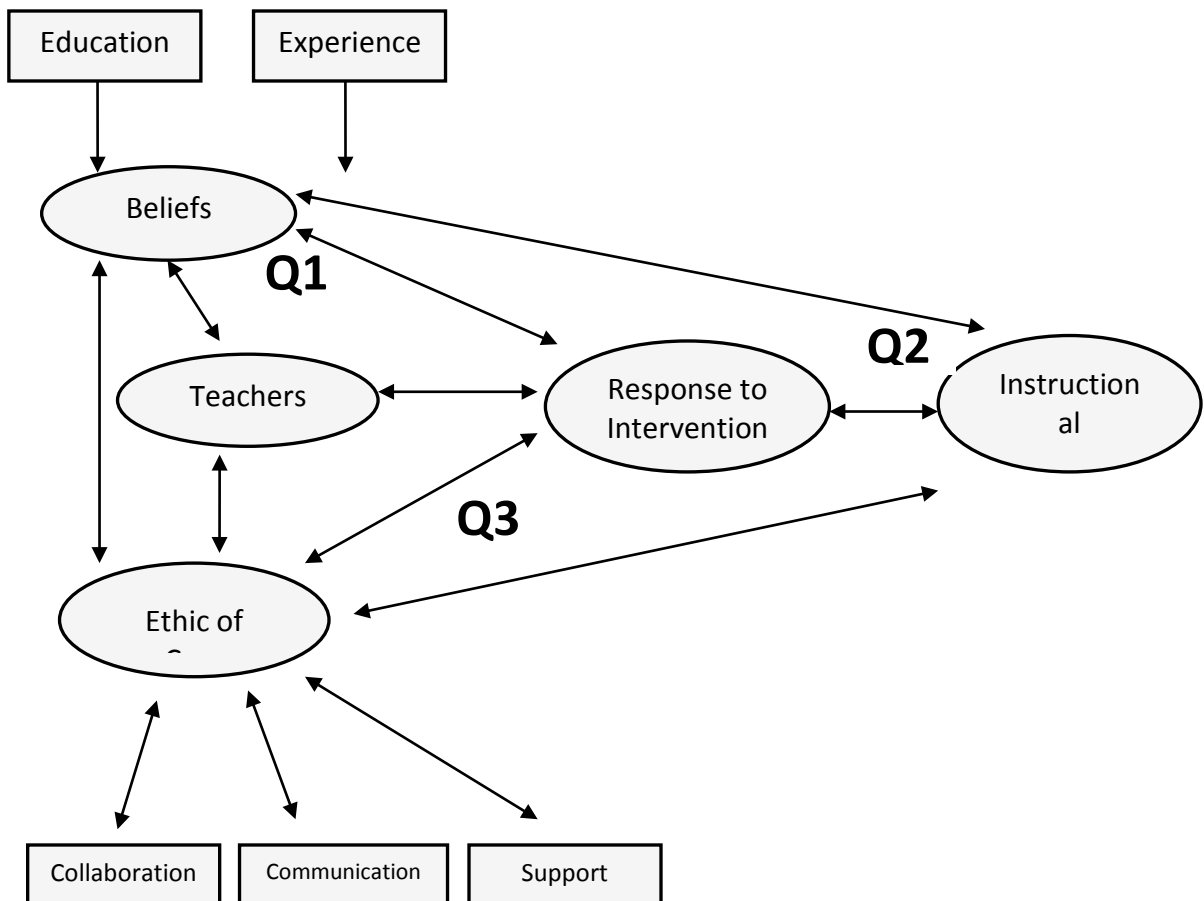
The specific research questions were as follows:

1. How do teachers' beliefs regarding RTI evolve in the process of planning and implementing RTI?
2. How do teachers enact their beliefs regarding RTI in their classroom practice?
3. How is an ethic of care reflected in the planning and implementation of RTI?

The answers to these three questions required the development of a conceptual framework for the three principal concepts involved, namely: RTI; teacher beliefs; and an ethic of care. This process is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Conceptual Framework

In reviewing Figure 1.1, it is necessary to consider the multi-dimensionality of the diagram. To begin from the far left of the illustration, the many influences that affect an individual's beliefs (i.e., education and experience) and caring qualities (i.e., collaboration,



Research Questions:

Q1. How do teachers' beliefs regarding RTI evolve in the process of planning and implementing RTI?

Q2. How do teachers enact their beliefs regarding RTI in their classroom practices?

Q3. How is an ethic of care reflected in the planning and implementation of RTI?

Figure 1.1. Conceptual framework of teachers' beliefs about RTI

communication, and support) are generally an indiscriminate collection of features. Beliefs and care ethics can be altered by a singular influence, but more than likely it is a collection of attributes, many more than are listed in Figure 1.1, that influence actions. However, a further review concerning these beliefs and caring concepts in the pages to come indicated that these thoughts are regularly kept concealed. As the diagram proceeds to the right, it is through a demonstration of some kind that individual sentiments are expressed to the rest of the world. In the diagram, Response to Intervention is considered to be this demonstration and represents the manifestation of teachers' ideals as their actions are explicitly realized and displayed. The three research questions (labeled Q1, Q2, and Q3) exhibit where the data were acquired along the continuum. Thus, Figure 1.1 is intended to help simplify the intricate nature of researching teacher beliefs and serves as a visual for the conceptual framework of the study.

Also, by considering RTI a reform, the intention was to situate the conceptual representation of this study under the umbrella of school change. In the following pages, I touched on considerations concerning the broader concepts of school reorganization and reform as they related to the beliefs of those executing the planning and implementing of a change. I then described what I mean by an ethic of care and explained how viewing the reform from the perspective of caring provided intimate insights into teacher pedagogy and practice. I concluded this introductory discussion of the study's conceptual framework by presenting the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) as the established model for analysis and a significant integrating component in the study.

Response to Intervention as a School Reform

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 2004 triggered schools and school systems to take a much closer look at the processes used for identifying

students with learning disabilities. IDEA advocated that educators move away from the customary IQ discrepancy-based model which determines special education services to students who have sizeable differences in their intelligence and academic achievement (Gresham, 2002; Hollenbeck, 2007; Reschly, 2005). Researchers realized that by relying on IQ scores as the major influence in special education assignment, a disproportionate number of minority children were labeled learning disabled, deficits were perceived in students rather than in instruction, and the information failed to recommend or support early interventions when dealing with the more deliberate learner (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Further inconsistencies have been found from state to state and district to district in which learning disabled students received special education services in one location but did not qualify for assistance in the other.

In response to these shortcomings, RTI has been presented to educators as a school reform dedicated not only to providing early services to students who are at-risk of academic failure, but also to offer a more comprehensive system to determine whether students have an actual learning disability versus an unexplained underachievement (Hilton, 2007). Fueled by literature indicating that children who struggle with reading in the primary grades remain that way throughout their academic lives (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Juel, 1988), RTI provides a more inventive approach to remediation within our schools. The process calls for making changes in the regular education classroom as soon as difficulties are noted, and then assessing the student's responses to such modifications to determine the possibility of making further changes. Therefore, researchers maintained that the decision for special education assignment is additionally and more comprehensively based on longitudinal classroom performance (Bradley, Danielson & Doolittle, 2005; Gresham, 2002). This progression from a process-oriented effort

to an outcome-oriented effort points to a school reform movement that now attends to all educational programs, not just special education.

Yet IDEA (2004) failed to pass along to educators a clear and concise arrangement for RTI, thereby presenting practitioners and researchers with the autonomy (and burden) to develop formulas that work in individual schools and situations. Such independence inevitably generated a mixture of practices, models, and philosophies. At the elementary school level where most RTI implementation has occurred, a small and growing body of empirical studies indicated that the approach is effective in identifying students who are at-risk for serious learning disabilities while also providing concentrated and successful interventions for those less critical (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Fuchs, 2003; Speece, Case, & Malloy, 2003; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Vellutino et al., 1996). However, the objectives of RTI point to a change in teacher pedagogy and routine that requires substantial effort to put into practice. Because of the intense responsibility and change that the initiative necessitates, considering RTI a reform is an appropriate consideration. Also, discussing past findings about planning and implementing a reform helps to inform the understanding of RTI and establishes the conceptual basis for this study.

Teacher Beliefs

Educators are committed to improving the basic and essential quality of classroom instruction in America, but channeling this commitment to demonstrate significant reform has been elusive at best (Schmoker, 2004). While different theories have been formed to explain the dilemma, some researchers suggested that teacher beliefs, values, and opinions have a heavy influence on the actual execution and success of a reform (Calderhead, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Pajaras, 1992; Richardson, 1996). This study applied a pragmatic inspection of teacher beliefs

and attitudes to generate an understanding of how the restructuring principles of RTI can lead to real educational reform. In Chapter 2, an in-depth discussion about teacher beliefs provides a background for my simple definition of beliefs as the judgments and considerations that are made about ourselves, others, and the world around us. Hopefully, this undemanding definition helps to bridge the already *messy construct* (Pajares, 1992) that exists in teacher belief studies and to uncover principles that can positively affect reform efforts.

To accomplish an inspection of beliefs as related to reform efforts, it must be recognized that teachers are overwhelmed and confused by top-down reforms and feel little autonomy over their work (Fullan, 1982). Hargreaves (1994) pessimistically characterized large scale conventional efforts to improve classroom instruction as “deeply anachronistic purposes within opaque and inflexible structures” (p. 3). From state decided curriculum, mandated testing, and comprehensive strategic plans, Guskey (2000) indicated that the bureaucratic programs aimed at improving student achievement had few reachable goals and no built-in mechanisms for transfer into the classroom. Fullan (1993) argued that these reforms wound up in committing far too many initiatives than could be reasonably monitored, and the plans have been disjointed and incoherent to teachers. Barth (1990) commented that when implementing a reform, procedural steps are important but may be taken too far. “Logic,” Barth maintained, “has become pathologic” (p. 41). To counteract teacher feelings of confounded dependence, school change must be directed towards the school’s center, towards the thinking and practice of the teachers who work directly with students. Lieberman (1995) asserted, “What everyone appears to want for students—a wide array of learning opportunities that engage students in experiencing, creating, and solving real problems, using their own experiences, and working with others—is for some reason denied to teachers when they are learners” (p. 591).

While outside knowledge does play an influential part in any reform, Wood (1992) suggested that crucial decisions about teaching and learning need to ultimately fall to the people closest to the students. Reform efforts, he affirmed, are more than simply learning and understanding the new program, rather, “good teachers do not teach subject matter, they teach who they are” (Wood, 1992, p. 71). Evans (1993) indicated that this human element recommends that change efforts include relationships and the dynamic interactions of people within the system.

Patterson (1997) noted that teachers who are targets for any new reform tend to question the motives of the change. Hall and Loucks (1978) suggested that the people within the system must have their own hesitations resolved before they can show concern for any new reform. They stated that teachers essentially want to know three basic factors: (a) what the change is about; (b) how the change will affect their job; and (c) what they have to give up to manage the new reform (Hall & Loucks, 1978). Harris (2002) warned reformers about ignoring teacher convictions by stating, “If they (beliefs) are not discussed openly, this will make the proposed change even more difficult to implement” (p. 37).

Evans (1993) argued, “Resistance is inevitable, the primary task of managing change is not technical but motivational: to build commitment to innovation among those who must implement it” (p. 19). Harris (2002) agreed in stating that school change and reform depends on “a transformation of the attitudes, beliefs, and values that operate in a school” (p. 61). Fullan (1982) affirmed by commenting, “Educational change depends on what teachers do and think; it’s that simple and as complex as that” (p. 107).

Therefore, effective school reform would seem to be about building teachers trust and confidence in their abilities to perform within the system. A methodology for analyzing the

effectiveness of this trust building is the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), which will be discussed after the next section on an ethic of care.

An Ethic of Care

A literature survey of care and an ethic of care are presented in Chapter 2. In that discussion, I explain how I arrived at my definition: Care involves an action that aims to help individual teachers and the collective grade level by facilitating professional work that is important to advancing and progressing instructional practices for students intimately involved in the RTI process.

The notion of how a comprehensive and conceptual view of care can be transferred to a reform such as Response to Intervention evolved as an important facet of this study. The key point of relating an ethic of care to RTI is the friction between the intellectual rigor presented by the new initiative and the concern with students' social adjustments. The strength of care ethics is its intimate understandings, whereas RTI's strength is in its systematic approach to educational improvement. Teachers, who live with and work towards developing the social, ethical, and intellectual needs of the students, must look to attend simultaneously to these basic and somewhat opposing needs. Lewis (1995) maintained that concentrating on a single outcome; either academic achievement or emotional well-being may have noble intentions but can actually damage the intellectual or social development of our children.

Girod et al. (2002) suggested that by situating research in a framework of care, there is a greater chance that the results of the inquiry will be influential and significant in advancing teacher pedagogy and practice. Noddings (2005) pointed out that our caring selves are neither innate nor fixed, but rather are constantly under a construction in which our encounters help shape our personalities. Bergman (2004) proposed that because of our many relationships, we

are thus searching for our true caring self not in a solitary fashion but through the interconnections we possess with the many we encounter. It would then seem that educators following an ethic of care in relation to teaching and learning would naturally open up dialogue for the reflection, deliberation, exchange, and action that can ultimately improve pedagogy. When I incorporated an intimate group of 5th grade teachers into my research studies, I was pleased to discover several different and unexpected perspectives that confirmed this observation.

My intentions were not to determine whether the fifth grade teachers I worked with were caring individuals, nor was I attempting to prove that my conception of care was an accurate or correct definition. Rather, I aimed to use the information I collected to provide more concrete and specific examples of how a conceptual model of caring can be used as an alternative perspective to understanding the nature of RTI in terms of teachers interactions and beliefs. As Costa (2008) quoted the famous economist Jacob Viner, “When you can measure it, when you can express it in numbers, your knowledge is still of a meager and unsatisfactory kind” (p. 94).

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model

Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall (1998) asserted that teacher concerns are generally explained as the feelings, thoughts, and reactions that affect a teachers’ practice when a new program is implemented. Christou, Eliophotou-Menon, & Phillippou (2004) maintained that concerns have a strong influence on the implementation of reforms and can help to determine what kind of assistance and adjustments teachers require when adopting the initiative. Developed at The University of Texas, the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) is a widely utilized theory and conceptual method developed in the 1970’s and 1980’s for studying teachers’ concerns as they carry out the process of educational restructuring. By studying the

dynamics of the change process, Hall and Hord (1987) indicated that the CBAM generates predictable patterns and themes that are repeatedly observed.

The use of the CBAM in diverse situations (described in Chapter 2) has helped to inform others about teachers' attitudes and behaviors in the process of learning to utilize new practices and requirements. Christou et al. (2004) pointed out that these self-concerns, which relate to teachers' own worries about their ability to perform the necessary tasks, are an important consideration when adopting complicated reforms like RTI. Thompson (1992) maintained that teachers are likely to resist the desired change unless they can be convinced that the reform will benefit themselves and their instructional outcomes. Thus, as an analytical tool to examine the planning and implementing of a reform, the use of the CBAM theory aims to gain recognition of potential teacher development to allay concerns and rectify any misunderstandings.

The CBAM is therefore an appropriate and tested tool with which to analyze the planning and implementation of RTI. Though developed decades ago, Anderson (1997) indicated that the CBAM provides an understanding of the affective and behavioral elements involved in implementing a reform that is as important today as it was twenty years ago. Furthermore, by considering RTI as a school reform, the conceptual framework of the CBAM provides a methodology to integrate and analyze both teacher beliefs about the effort it takes to implement the assorted duties and how an ethic of care can facilitate the planning and implementation effort involved.

Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter presented an overview of the proposed research study concerning teachers' enacted and evolved beliefs about the Response to Interventions reform. I began by explaining the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. I presented the

research questions and how they influenced the conceptual framework of the study. I then proposed that the Response to Intervention initiative should be considered a school reform and how the change process influenced the planning and implementing of RTI. To finish, I presented a brief synopsis of teachers' beliefs, care ethics, and Concerns-Based Adoption Model and how these three components helped to structure the conceptual framework for this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the present study in the available research literature. The topics I discuss in this chapter are guided by the background of the study. I begin by presenting the foundations of Response to Intervention and an overview of the prevailing components of the reform. I describe the common elements of the Response to Intervention model through tiers of intervention. I then look at the variations that have surfaced within the RTI paradigm, problem solving and standard protocol models, and discuss the research based on these two models. I also present a literature review on teacher beliefs and the influence they have on educators and instructional practices. To finish the chapter, I discuss how an ethic of care influences this study about RTI, and present some background on the Concerns-Based Adoption Model. It is my intention that this review of past research helps to position and inform my study about Response to Intervention.

Response to Intervention

RTI's basis originated in part on the separate corrective models developed by Stan Deno and John Bergan in the late 1970s. Deno's work primarily focused on improving the design of academic assessments to accurately measure student scholastic achievement (Deno & Mirkin, 1977). Bergan, on the other hand, researched behavioral interventions and used a problem solving method that determined a complete response to conduct issues (Bergan, 1977; Bergan & Kratochwill, 1990). While there are some similarities in their models, it may be best to think of them as developing in parallel literatures.

Deno's systematic and methodical research examined the technical features, logistical challenges, and the instructional effectiveness of progress monitoring (Deno & Mirkin, 1977). These assessments have come to be known as Curriculum-Based Measurements (CBM's), and they have been largely adopted by RTI procedure. The strength in Deno's assessment systems is that the evaluations correspond with the instruction happening in the classroom rather than an arbitrary assessment of basic skills. Espin and Wallace (2004) indicated that CBM's are: (1) easy to construct; (2) simple and succinct in administering; (3) reliable and valid based on immediate curriculum standards; and (4) provide alternative forms of collecting, charting, and analyzing student progress. Moreover, Fuchs, Deno, and Mirkin (1984) maintained that regular assessments, such as CBM's, provide a normative framework that can efficiently determine individual student progress by comparing scores on a class-wide basis.

Bergan's behavioral model similarly established a collecting of baseline data in the classroom. The behavioral model used this baseline information and formed a committee (parents, teachers, and counselors) to evaluate the data from the current educational plan to help serve the student across home and school environments. This collaborative process generated a comprehensive plan that monitored short-term accomplishments and developed a safety net function to deter student failure (Bergan, 1977). The idea of consistently assessing and monitoring students' progress informed both instructional and behavioral decisions, and led to the RTI pedagogy of intervening early into the lives of struggling students.

Researchers expanded, modified, and combined the original conceptions of Deno (Deno & Mirkin, 1977) and Bergan (1977) into an RTI process for application in our schools. By targeting tiers of intervention to increase instructional intensity, improving collaboration with educators, establishing small group remediation, and integrating data to guide decisions at each

tier of service delivery, schools have made RTI an operational prospect with the resources available (Fuchs, 2003; Marston, 2005; Speece et al., 2003). The contemporary version of RTI now focuses its attention on general education development with the use of universal assessments as the initial indicator.

Tiers of Intervention

Hoover (2009) asserted that any essential RTI construct involves a multi-tiered arrangement in which at-risk students receive a series of interventions that steadily increase the purposefulness of the learning situation. In terms of the overall effort of RTI's tiers, Coleman, Buysse, and Neitzal (2006) indicated that implementing such a ladder of instructional concentration is to use: (1) tiers of intervention with increased intensity to strengthen the probability of success; (2) the approach to identify a problem, develop a plan, collect appropriate data, and evaluate the intervention in stages; and (3) a data generating system to guide instructional decisions in each higher tier. In past studies, these hierarchical levels amplified the duration and intensity of the interventions, depending on how well learners respond to the instruction they are receiving (Fuchs & Fuchs 1998; Speece & Case, 2001; Vellutino et al., 1996). Reschly (2005) pointed out that while several variations in tier hierarchy exist, most models of RTI implement a three or four-tiered approach.

Tier one, frequently referred to as "primary prevention", is the general classroom environment that includes all-purpose interventions and universal assessments for all students, whether the focus be on academics or behavior. The data provide baseline information that is normally collected three times a year for academics. These grade level assessments are part of the evidence-based instruction that consistently happen within the tier structure, and collaborative teams (generally the grade level teachers at this point) make decisions about

whether a student is making adequate progress. Yell (2004) suggested that a rule of thumb is that approximately 80% of the students learn efficiently enough in the regular classroom to remain positioned within tier one services. Martinez, Nellis, & Predergast (2006) indicated that students who are not mastering basic academic skills in tier one then require additional forms of instruction.

Based on tier one screenings and classroom measurements that show a lack of progress, some students may be considered at-risk (Hoover, 2009). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) indicated that tier two interventions provide a level of intensive support that supplements the regular classroom instruction and bases the remediation on the students' needs identified by ongoing monitoring. Tier two provides extra help for students in small groups and aims to give concentrated attention by limiting distractions and targeting instruction. Teachers conduct progress monitoring more frequently (i.e., monthly or weekly), and the tier two interventions employed usually last for a predetermined period or until the learner makes sufficient growth. The goal of the second tier is to return the remediated students back to regular classroom instruction; however, Yell (2004) stated that fifteen to twenty percent of all learners require tier two supplemental interventions during their schooling.

The third tier continues student assistance with even more supplemental services, markedly more intensive and individualized. Similar to tier two, the specialized interventions are implemented for a defined period, but the data collection happens more frequently. At this point, the problem solving team, now consisting of a school psychologist and other specialists, analyzes the data to determine the course of action. Marston (2005) indicated that it is in the third tier where serious consideration for special education is judged (tier four in some models) and whether further testing is warranted. Yell (2004) estimated that one to five percent of all

learners require tier three assistance or move to tier four interventions which include special education services.

An explanation of the tiers, or hierarchy, means much to the theoretical underpinnings of Response to Intervention. Educators can discover the inherent limitations of each learner through the systematic application of Response to Intervention and the data gathering procedures. Justice (2006) suggested that the process trusts the empirical accuracy that exists in substantiated evidence, and the RTI progression rests on quantifiable data to make further remediation justifiable. Special education identification then becomes an outcome-oriented approach coupled with process-oriented interventions (Hoover, 2009). In the next few pages, I discuss the differences in the RTI initiative and the two intervention models that receive the most attention in educational circles and throughout the current literature.

Response to Intervention Models

As an at-risk student advances up the ladder of tier interventions, the two common RTI approaches she will experience fall under a *problem solving* or a *standard protocol* design. There are perhaps more similarities than differences in the two approaches, yet the principal distinction is that the problem solving method uses a collaborative consultation model to determine distinctive interventions for individual children. The standard protocol method, on the other hand, exercises an empirically validated treatment designed for all students identified as at-risk. Marston (2005) suggested that both methods show promise in achievement gains and decreases in special education placement. However, in comparing the two approaches, the problem solving research data are limited (Fuchs & Deschler, 2007). Gerber (2005) suggested that the personal approach of the problem solving method and the fact that classroom teachers rarely write about their practice has hindered information sharing.

The problem solving approach to RTI. Gersten and Dimino (2006) specified that the problem solving model emphasizes scientifically-based instruction, consistent progress monitoring, and looks to augment individualized prescriptions for at-risk students. Fuchs (2003) argued that the exclusive nature of the problem solving approach bases its procedure on the belief that a successful intervention cannot be predetermined or predicted for all students. The popularity of the problem solving approach with school practitioners is “no doubt its idiopathic nature: for each child, an effort is made to personalize assessment and intervention” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 95). Also, the problem solving approach benefits from earlier school support teams (SST) that similarly relied on teachers and specialists to design and monitor the various remediation efforts. A team of educators meeting to help solve the troubles of an at-risk student is more familiar to teachers rather than the technical aspects of RTI (i.e., data gathering and analysis).

While these attentive actions have been strengths, they have also been matters of concern. Gerber (2005) pointed out that the problem solving approach demands considerable skill, expertise, and collaboration amongst its intervention team in terms of assessment, curriculum, remediation, and an established understanding of the child’s unique needs. Because of these various requirements at each educational agency, VanDerHeyden (2006) indicated that the problem solving approach has evolved into several hybrid models based on schools’ unique needs. Discussed below are the seminal investigations of the problem solving model implemented in diverse locations across the country.

Iowa’s Heartland Model (Ikeda et al., 1996; Tilly, 2003), a pioneer of RTI concepts by implementing the reform as early as 1988, used a three-tiered problem solving criterion to determine special education eligibility (Naglieri & Crockett, 2005). The Iowa model increased

the intensity of the resources and the instruction at each level and recognized that the “data about a student’s responsiveness to intervention becomes the driving force” (Grimes, 2002, p. 4). In their study of the Heartland Model that surveyed teachers and administrators, Ikeda et al. (1996) described four foundational components necessary for implementing the problem solving approach. The components included: (1) teacher collaboration; (2) forming assistance teams; (3) systematic progress monitoring; and (4) ongoing staff development. The data indicated that 75% of these educators recognized acceptable support in establishing the foundational components. Consultants for regular and special education teachers, it was found, helped in establishing support and expertise in implementing class-wide or individual interventions. The researchers suggested that improvements could be realized by increasing resources for teachers, lowering student/teacher ratios, and providing training to bring research to practice (Ikeda et al., 1996).

Public schools in Minneapolis adopted the problem solving approach and utilized the familiar three-tier structure for the past decade (Reschly & Starkweather, 1997). The results indicated that students received appropriate assistance at an earlier age, obtained special education services without the label (learning disabled identification remained at 7%), and opportunities for mainstreaming learning disabled students increased (Martinez et al., 2006). A case study (Lau et al., 2006) of the Minneapolis problem solving approach looked at the various perspectives of a school psychologist, a principal, and a special education teacher. The study reported that the school psychologist’s role focused on assisting teachers, the principal concentrated on being a change agent, and the special education teacher used data to inform instructional decisions. While this study did not directly address teachers’ reactions to

implementing RTI, the research strongly suggested that the classroom teacher required the most support in properly implementing the reform (Lau et al., 2006).

Schools in Ohio used an Intervention Based Assessment (IBA) process, a problem solving approach similar to the scientific method, to determine eligibility. In a study of the IBA process, Telzrow, McNamara, and Hollinger (2000) collected data from 227 multidisciplinary teams using a Likert scale rating of each RTI component and a best case description of one student's experience moving through the process. Results indicated that fidelity scores were highest in both defining behavioral concerns and establishing clear goals for the existing problem. Treatment integrity; however, had the lowest mean fidelity score. The authors recommended that establishing guidelines, directing coaching and feedback, and using baseline data to target instruction would improve the treatment reliability (Telzrow et al., 2000).

Pennsylvania's instructional support teams (IST's) are another example of the problem solving approach with experience under its belt. Kovaleski, Tucker, and Stevens (1996) evaluated the Pennsylvania's IST program and found that initially team members were trained in five components. These components comprised: (1) Collaboration and team building; (2) instructional assessments; (3) instructional adaptations; (4) student discipline; and (5) student assistance strategies. The researchers interviewed the team members, reviewed student records, observed classroom instruction, and monitored grade level meetings to determine if additional training would be necessary. The authors reported that 98% of the schools met the training requirements of the model. Numbers indicated that the students served in the RTI process increased from 7% to 11% while referral rates to special education dropped. Additionally, grade retention reduced in some Pennsylvania schools by 67% (Kovaleski et al., 1996).

Recent literature from researchers reflecting on their past problem solving experiences added additional insight. Tilley, Harken, & Robinson (2008), from Iowa's Heartland Agency, discussed the need to build consensus among the participating Iowa classroom teachers by considering their belief systems and core principles. These same researchers suggested that RTI must not be understood as a temporary fix but rather as a comprehensive system change. Also, they warned that the new instructional techniques of RTI must not be avoided for familiar or customary practices (Tilley et al., 2008). Elliot (2008), with extended RTI work in Long Beach and Portland, indicated that creating a culture of reform and a deep belief that all students can learn is essential for RTI success. Kovaleski and Glew (2006) determined from their research in Pennsylvania that initial training and adequate support for teachers was vital in implementing Response to Intervention. Kovaleski (2007) further asserted that educators need to break out of their comfortable routines or "silos" to accomplish success with RTI. Putnam (2008) similarly agreed by stating that "RTI is often mistakenly viewed as a special education initiative, when really it is an 'every ed' effort" (p. 15).

Summary of the problem solving literature. Though variations to the problem solving method have been constructed, early investigations indicated that RTI implementation can be effective in public school settings by lowering the numbers of learning disabled, providing more remedial services to a greater population of at-risk students, and creating a network between special education and regular classroom instruction (Martinez et al., 2006; Telzrow et al., 2000; Reschly & Starkweather, 1997). The literature also revealed that in order to have success, various levels of support are critical for realization (Ikeda et al., 1996; Kovaleski et al., 1996; Tilly, 2003). It can be inferred that collaboration is also a key factor when putting into practice the Response to Intervention problem solving method. Despite these benefits, Fuchs and

Deschler (2007) pointed out the importance of understanding the conditions or contextual factors of each school and classroom where RTI is successfully put into practice.

Contemporary reflection upon the seminal problem solving literature suggested that addressing the culture of the school site is of significant importance to successful RTI implementation (Elliot, 2008). Recently, other researchers indicated that RTI must be considered by teachers as a reform effort that is systematic and comprehensive in its efforts (Putnam, 2008; Tilly et al., 2008). Current opinion also recommended that professional development for teachers must center on expanding teaching practices in order to accomplish RTI success (Kovaleski, 2007; Kovaleski & Glew, 2006; Tilly et al., 2008). The information from these reflective pieces implied that for the problem solving method to be effectively realized, attention to school customs and norms is an important component. In the next pages, I discuss the subsequent alternative to the RTI development: the standard protocol model that rigorously regulates its procedures and sets precise standards for at-risk identification.

Standard protocol method of RTI. Employed extensively in recent years, Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) indicated that the standard protocol model of RTI follows a steady and predictable precedent. Emphasizing consistent scientifically-based classroom instruction, experimental group designs, and regular assessment of progress, Gerber (2005) pointed out that the standard protocol also advises frequent comparisons of at-risk students' data to normative information of their peers. The students who are initially identified by class-wide screenings then follow a predetermined path of instructional techniques and interventions to provide remediation and correction. Hollenbeck (2007) argued that the standard protocol method is straightforward and practical, and its fixed approach does a better job of providing quality control than the collaborative problem solving model. Though the fidelity of implementing these types of

interventions on a large scale remains indefinite, researchers have implemented the standard protocol model on smaller scales with success (Fuchs, 2003; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Vellutino et al., 1996).

One of the crucial points of following a standard protocol is to identify a criterion that directs educators into differentiating between “responders” and “non-responders.” Studies that compared the validity of RTI’s diagnostic determinants concluded that the standard protocol model and the use of normative comparisons (such as Curriculum Based Measures) accurately identified groups of students in need of more intensive services (Burns & Senesac, 2005; Case, Speece, & Molloy, 2003; Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Naguin, 2003). For example, researchers (Burns & Senesac, 2005; Case et al., 2003) used a 25% cut-off to identify at-risk students by comparing curriculum performance to their peers. They also measured the growth rate through post tests to determine progress. Conclusions about universal screenings, abiding by a set criterion, and frequent progress monitoring indicated that the standard protocol can be accurate and efficient in defining student levels rather than negligible teacher referrals (Fuchs et al., 2003).

Other standard protocol studies investigated reading difficulties to determine if they were cognitively or instructionally related through the application of RTI (Speece & Case, 2001; Vellutino et al., 1996). Vellutino et al. (1996), through an experimental design, studied first and second grade students by continually evaluating them with cognitive and performance-based assessments. The students determined to be at-risk were randomly grouped with those having “average intelligence,” and received 30 minutes of tutoring for one to two semesters at a time. These researchers determined that IQ scores were not predictive of reading performance within their sample. The researchers advised that assessing a student’s reading proficiency and

monitoring the progress was a better use of instructional time than conducting intellectual assessments. Speece and Case (2001) evaluated a dual discrepancy, utilizing Curriculum Based Measures for current test results and growth rates. The researchers formed a dual discrepancy group of low achieving students in test results and rate of growth, a group with a low rate of growth only, and a low test results group only as a means of identifying at-risk students. The results suggested that the dual discrepancy model, both growth rate and post test results, was valid in diagnosing students who were at-risk for a learning disorder (Speece & Case, 2001).

The majority of standard protocol studies, however, primarily focused on the treatments conducted at tier two levels. Foorman and Torgesen (2001) described four different RTI reading interventions used in four different Texas schools. The interventions included contrasting literary programs, distinct duration of instruction, and changing group sizes of at risk students. Interestingly, all four schools maintained satisfactory academic performance and made progress in primary grade reading regardless of the variations in program design and implementation. In another study of reading interventions, 323 first grade students received a grade level intervention with 56 students deemed “non-responsive” to the mediation (McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2003). These “non-responding” students were then remediated using three differing reading interventions. The results indicated that the various programs had no statistically significant differences in achievement. The conclusions suggested from these two studies is that to attain high response rates, a commitment to the selected research-based approach coupled with immediate feedback is of greater importance than the specific evidence-based program utilized (Coleman et al., 2006).

In another study, Vaughn et al. (2003) looked at the effects of group size within the RTI protocol. The researchers focused on at-risk students’ reading difficulties at a tier 2 level with

attention to student numbers in the remediation groups. The authors recognized that of the three students to teacher ratios studied (1:1, 3:1, and 10:1), second graders with 1:1 and 3:1 ratios made greater gains than the larger remediation group. Also of interest, the 1:1 proportion did not make higher gains than those receiving 3:1 instruction. Lennon and Slesinski (1999) also studied group size by providing additional instruction to kindergarten students with a 2:1 student to teacher ratio. The researchers found that a daily push-in design of 30-minute tutoring with the 2:1 group produced measurable student gains in beginning reading skills. Both of these standard protocol studies suggested that supplemental remediation with low student numbers leads to success at the tier two level.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) used an experimental design to determine the results of applying RTI to third grade math instruction. Thirteen schools participated as either control or experimental classrooms, with instruction ranging from combinations of the whole group, small group, and independent practice time. The researchers learned that increasing the amount of core instructional time plus adding tutoring time improved the student's math skills. They also determined that whole group instruction-only or supplemental interventions-only resulted in nominal growth. Additionally, when whole group and tutoring instruction utilized the same math program, the students' achieved the greatest growth (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Summary of the standard protocol literature. The reviewed RTI standard protocol literature concentrated on language and literacy as their center of focus, examining kindergarten through third grade student intervention methods (Case et al., 2003; McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton 2005; Torgesen et al., 1999; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Vellutino et al., 1996). The majority of the researchers used similar types of universal screening processes (standardized assessments or Curriculum-Based Measures) to identify the at-risk learners which

were then followed by various interventions performed at tier two treatment levels (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Lennon & Slesinski, 1999; McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2003; Vaughn et al., 2003). These researched interventions proved effective in the remediation of at-risk students (Coleman et al., 2006). However, it is noteworthy that these standard protocol studies carried out by individuals outside the public school realm involved human resources not often found in elementary schools. Nonetheless, the information from these standard protocol studies provided valuable data to support the use of RTI as both a remediation and special education identification instrument.

Teacher Beliefs

The seminal literature in the educational field explained that teacher beliefs, which are largely made up of past experiences, have a tremendous influence on classroom practices (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). Research also indicated that disregarding teacher beliefs while in the process of promoting change in classroom instruction leads to disappointing results (Richardson, 1996). For these reasons, Fang (1996) indicated that research into teachers' thinking, beliefs, and decision-making processes has replaced more directly observable teacher behaviors as the sole interest when addressing instructional reform and improvement.

In this literature review of teacher beliefs, I begin by providing an illustration (Table 2.1) to display the seminal authors and their contributions to this field. Pajares (1992) maintained that there still exists confusion in the literature concerning the definitions and meanings used to explain teachers' beliefs and so I then consider some of the explanations that attempt to define, describe, and manage teacher beliefs. I offer a clarification of beliefs versus knowledge as a way to understand the hidden nature of teacher principles. I also present a brief explanation concerning the influence of beliefs and the complexity of adjusting these principles. In addition,

Table 2.1 below lists the influential contributors to the belief literature. Though this list only scratches the surface of the mass of belief literature, these noted authors have influenced and shaped the belief literature in significant ways.

Table 2.1

Seminal Belief Literature

Author	Significance
Green (1971)	Green's book, <u>The Activities of Teaching</u> , ranks among the most thorough and illuminating examinations of the concept of teaching. This work remains one of the very best analytical treatments of the concept of teaching with several chapters devoted to the influence of teacher beliefs in classroom instruction.
Kagan (1992)	Kagan examined the significance of beliefs as they related to teachers' instructional practices in her noteworthy article "Implications of Research on Teacher Beliefs". Her analysis continues to be a seminal recount of the influence beliefs can have on teachers' practices.
Lortie (1975)	Dubbed by many as the best social portrait of the teaching profession, Lortie's book entitled <u>Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study</u> has been continually cited as critical literature into the social and authentic beliefs of the classroom teacher.
Nespor (1987)	Nespor's writings and influential two year study entitled <u>The Role of Beliefs in the Practice of Teaching</u> focused on the functions and structures of teachers' belief systems. Eight teachers were interviewed and videotaped to gather data on their beliefs which he deemed difficult to change.
Pajares (1992)	Pajares' significant article entitled "Teacher's Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning up the Messy Construct" provides a Contextual analysis of beliefs and the importance they carry in influencing teacher practices. Pajares defines beliefs, compares it to knowledge, and clears up the <i>messy construct</i> that is teacher belief systems.
Richardson (1996)	Richardson's chapter entitled <u>The Role of Attitude and Beliefs in Learning to Teach</u> suggested that a strong relationships exists between teachers' beliefs and practice and the importance of beliefs in the processes of fundamental change. This has led to some current reform programs acknowledge the importance of prior beliefs of the participants.
Rokeach (1968)	In his first book entitled <u>Beliefs, Attitudes, and Values: A Theory of Organization and Change</u> , Rokeach (1968) presented a philosophical argument for the importance and association of value to aspects such as beliefs and attitudes. Some beliefs, he contended, are more influential than others and thus harder to change.

Table 2.2 summarizes a selected contemporary representation of research examination of teacher beliefs influential to this study. The section concludes with a brief analysis of the studies listed in Table 2.2 and an abstract of the discussed teacher beliefs.

Table 2.2

Selected Belief Studies

Study	Context	Method	Significance
Bintz & Dillard (2007)	Three educators in a fourth grade classroom examining change required in implementing a new curriculum.	Classroom based action research project. Data gathered by classroom observations, sharing journals, and reflective conversations	Curricular change is highly complex, and beliefs had a major influence on implementation.
Buswinka (1993)	Thinking-in-action of one first grade teacher who changed instruction to a whole language approach in a Midwestern suburban school.	Participant observations in classroom, planning sessions, and other informal times. Interviews and videotaped instruction were used, including field notes and journaling.	Teacher practice altered because of incongruence with her understanding of emergent literacy. Change meant making critical decisions through beliefs, values, and goals.
Crawford (2004)	A case study of one first grade teacher whose pedagogy was challenged by a packaged and mandated literacy curriculum.	Informal conversations and semi-formal interviews were conducted.	Technical controls changed the participants' discourse on literacy instruction, and lack of decision making de-skilled the teacher's practice.
Geary (1998)	An ethnographic case study examining six elementary teachers and how they embraced and applied classroom management strategies via cooperative learning.	Site visits, questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions were used to gather data before, during, and after staff development sessions.	Teacher beliefs, more than theories, affected changing classroom management techniques, sometimes contradicting the collaborative goals of the study.
Griffin (1995)	Five elementary teachers at five different schools over a three year period shared their beliefs about the influence of teachers on educational policy.	Teachers were asked in interactive conversations about beliefs, feeling, perceptions, and descriptions of events and activities in their schools.	Change in teacher participation in school decision making. Little changed in the classroom, but school changes in curriculum, assessments, and discipline were realized.

Table 2.2 – *continued*

Study	Context	Method	Significance
Moss (1988)	A case study of four elementary teachers about how their attitudes and teaching approaches changed during the implementation of a processed writing approach.	Observations in the classroom, workshop documents, questionnaires, and reflective logs during the eight week study.	Individual teacher ways of approaching a writing task (attitudes and beliefs) affected the way they instructed their students. Changes in thought and behavior were noted.
Neapolitan (1999)	Six teachers (four elementary; two middle schools) examined beliefs about redesigning instruction to meet state standards.	Data gathered from action research projects included written reflections, focus groups, and follow-up survey.	Participant teachers gained confidence and autonomy through their adjusted efforts, but administrators and other teachers' effects were limited.
Wiebe Berry (2006)	Five teachers in two multi-age classrooms at elementary two schools in a midsize urban school district examined a new writing program.	Case studies examined different beliefs in inclusion classrooms through teacher interviews, observations, and field notes.	Contrasting teacher beliefs emerged in teaching writing with a structural approach vs. teachers advocating a more relational approach.

representation of the research on teacher beliefs influential to this study. The section concludes with a brief analysis of the studies listed in Table 2.2 and an abstract of the discussed teacher

Defining Teacher Beliefs

Agreeing upon any universal definition to accurately express a meaning is a difficult task, and the literature attempting to define teacher beliefs is no different. Researchers loosely explained beliefs as the personal constructs that provide an important understanding of a teacher's practice (Nespor, 1987; Richardson, 1996). Kagan (1992) defined teacher beliefs "as tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught" (p. 65). Pajares (1992) referred to beliefs as an "individual's judgment of the truth or falsity of a proposition" (p. 316). Years earlier, Rokeach (1968) defined a belief as

“any simple proposition, conscious or unconscious, inferred from what a person says or does” (p. 113).

Kagan (1992) stated, “There is no shared understanding of the use of the term *teacher belief*” (p. 64). Pajares (1992) warned that defining beliefs “is at best a game of player’s choice” (p. 309). However, Pajares also argued that the defining of beliefs is an imperative act and “it will not be possible for researchers to come to grips with teacher’s beliefs without first deciding what they wish a belief to mean” (p. 308). It is then clear that of the many definitions and synonymous terms for beliefs; clarity is necessary to begin a proper evaluation. For that reason in this study, I define beliefs simply as the judgments and considerations that are made about ourselves, others, and the world around us.

Beliefs versus knowledge. As a way to define and understand the unique characteristics of beliefs, a distinction with knowledge aims at placing both terms in a clearer context. Knowledge and knowledge systems, which tend to be openly discussed, can be easily modified with group agreement. Kagan (1992) stated, “Knowledge is generally regarded as a belief that has been affirmed as true on the basis of objective proof or a consensus of opinion” (p. 73). Beliefs and convictions, on the other hand, are highly personal and kept concealed; they are not openly reviewed or revised and so become highly entrenched. An example that can be considered is when a certain teacher is introduced to a new reading comprehension strategy. The adopting teacher may be aware of fellow teachers that use the method, and even conscious of success the strategy provides. Yet, if this teacher does not believe that the strategy can be a useful learning tool in her classroom setting, she will not embrace the strategy regardless of any peer endorsement. Fives and Buehl (2008) indicated that when we acquire knowledge of a certain idea, we are still free to accept it as true or not according to our belief systems.

Researchers (Kagan, 1992; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992) concluded, albeit with some controversy, that beliefs are far more dominant than knowledge in determining how teachers arrange duties and define problems. Nespor (1987) suggested that beliefs have emotional components that are stronger than knowledge, which primarily possess a cognitive element. Richardson (1996) pointed out that knowledge requires the truth to be confirmed, while a belief is accepted without such stringent conditions and thus more liberally. Similarly, Green (1971) described beliefs as a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding the belief. Green believed knowledge, on the other hand, is collectively contested and involves an investigation into the validity of the information.

The issues and inconsistencies with beliefs are that these principles tend to be implicit assumptions held tightly by the advocate. However, in a school setting that is implementing a reform “little will be accomplished if research into educational beliefs fails to provide insight into the relationship between beliefs, on the one hand, and teacher practices, teacher knowledge, and student outcome on the other” (Pajares, 1992, p. 327). The concern, it then appears, is twofold. First, one must begin by elucidating teachers’ core beliefs. Then, once these convictions are known, the goal is to determine which of these beliefs are influencing what actions when it comes to implementing change in instructional practice.

Beliefs in the Classroom

As noted earlier, empirical studies confirmed that past experiences shape beliefs that are significantly linked to behavior and performance (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). In Lortie’s (1975) pioneering study of schoolteachers, he consistently found that teachers cite their former instructors as major contributors who influenced their instructional practice. Taylor (2003), in a study of adult education, also found that the link between former role model teachers and the

present teachers' beliefs is analogous. Berry (2006) noted in her study of writing that teachers' deep beliefs do inform their orientations to instruction, and Beswick (2005) concurred within the context of mathematics. Fives and Buehl (2008) analyzed teachers' instructional beliefs in helping to improve teacher development and preparation; they concluded that a deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs with current instruction can help support teaching practices. Fang (1996), in his meta-analysis, cited a number of literacy studies that support the notion that theories and beliefs do shape instructional practices.

Some researchers; however, observed a contradiction between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. Fang (1996) described a number of studies in which there was little connection in beliefs and practice, suggesting that the contextual factors (the students, the organizations, and societal judgments) more heavily affected instructional practices than beliefs. Ertmer (2005) showed that constructivist classroom teachers infusing technology into their practices focused on project-based activities that they believed in, but also fell back into programs that practiced isolated skills to rehearse for standardized tests. Ertmer's research suggested that contextual constraints and curriculum pressures by administrators, parents, and peers kept the instruction traditional and contradicted teacher convictions.

So how can the influence of beliefs be altered or modified to support an educational reform? Pajares (1992) suggested that changing teachers' educational beliefs is an overwhelming task. Kagan (1992) indicated that the adjustment of teacher principles is a process that has predominantly eluded any direct evidence that demonstrates change. It was discussed earlier that beliefs shape practice (Kagan, 1992, Pajares, 1992); however, Guskey (1986) argued against such a claim, asserting that a change in beliefs follows or indeed may require a beneficial experience. As teachers adopt successful practices, Guskey (1986) reasoned, beliefs will change

according to the accomplishment. Apparently, implementing any reform demands a helping hand of some kind, whether supportive beliefs are considered a priori or whether an understanding and advancement of the new program are initially cultivated.

A question that remains central to this research is whether it is necessary to change teachers' beliefs in order to effectively implement Response to Intervention. Nespor (1987) suggested that instructional change and improvement does not require a discarding of beliefs, but rather a gradual and progressive replacement with new ideas filtered through actual experience. Though it may not be clear whether beliefs proceed or follow practice, Ertmer (2005) suggested that practice and beliefs are interwoven: one cannot be constructively changed without considering the other. Nonetheless, it is clear that teachers encounter teaching in different ways, through personal, peer, and cultural influences. In the next few pages, a selected review of previous studies helped to indicate the influence beliefs have on reform implementation.

Selected Studies of Teachers' Beliefs

The studies submitted into this research synthesis only scratch the surface of the immense body of the empirical literature that reports on teacher beliefs and how they affect teacher practice. However, the specific investigations have contextual similarities that helped influence this study. Table 2.2 summarizes the backgrounds of these investigations about teacher beliefs. The information is listed by authors with a brief description and number of participants, the methods for collecting data, and a brief extraction of the significance of the study. A total of eight empirical studies are included in the table, with the investigations involving elementary school settings and qualitative research practices. Two academic data bases were explored in constructing this review table (i.e., Education Full Text, ERIC), as well as manual and recommended sources not identified by an electronic search.

The literature about teacher beliefs is extensive; therefore, discipline was applied in keeping the selected studies limited to a manageable list. I conducted the search to find empirical studies relating to teacher beliefs only, while I excluded articles synthesizing teacher beliefs. As a criterion for inclusion into Table 2.2, the studies involved elementary school teachers, with only one investigation involving both elementary and middle school teachers. Qualitative research was also earmarked as a requirement. I selected studies that dealt with implementing an initiative or reform and the beliefs that related to this teacher change. Further, the submitted research involved all regular education teachers except for one inclusion investigation. Lastly, all of the investigations contained small participation numbers, with no more than six educators involved in the research. Table 2.2 listed the research studies which helped inform my study.

Explanation of the teacher beliefs' table. Of the eight studies included in this synthesis of teacher beliefs, four investigations followed a case study method (Crawford, 2004; Geary, 1998; Moss, 1988; Wiebe Berry, 2006), three used an action research design (Bintz & Dillard, 2007; Buswinka, 1993; Neapolitan, 1999), and one study practiced a traditional qualitative method by concentrating on interviews (Griffin, 1995). All of the eight studies reported beliefs as having an influence over proper implementation of an initiative or reform, with four of the studies claiming the convictions had a significant influence (Bintz & Dillard, 2007; Geary, 1998; Moss, 1988; Wiebe Berry, 2006). These four studies included information that suggested change is a complex act and securing the support of teachers is imperative.

The most striking revelation found in this collection of empirical studies on beliefs is the importance of teacher support and teacher autonomy. The literature suggested that the best way to implement a new program was not to persuade teachers of certain ideals, but rather to grant

them some measure of independence and support (Bintz & Dillard, 2007; Buswinka, 1993; Crawford, 2004; Moss, 1998). Crawford (2004) noted that a lack of autonomy de-skilled teachers and made them numb to curricular change. To counteract such complacency, Neapolitan (1999) observed that changing the way teachers see problems and concerns may help to bring about different solutions and ultimately greater progress. Buswinka (1993) similarly suggested that change is not about substitution, but more about assigning decision-making responsibility and support congruent with convictions about the new reform. Other researchers also found that curricular change was difficult for teachers to intermingle into their beliefs on teaching (Bintz & Dillard, 2007; Wiebe Berry, 2006). These studies suggested that supporting teachers and building autonomy can go much farther than teachers uttering the familiar phrase “just tell me what to do.”

An analysis of these studies confirmed that change is a difficult and complex endeavor, whether it is the modification of individual beliefs or adjustments in the curriculum. All eight of the selected studies indicated that assorted tensions arose from addressing teacher convictions about changing their practices or pedagogy. Whether these tensions were formed by substituting a different literacy program in the classroom (Buswinka, 1993), changing classroom management strategies (Geary, 1998), or including teachers in school-wide decisions (Griffin, 1995), the way the educators dealt with the change proved to be informative. In conclusion, the research findings suggested that the study of beliefs is particularly important if the goal is to achieve long-standing commitment and success of a reform.

Summary of Teacher Beliefs

The seminal works of Pajares (1992) and Kagan (1992) asserted that teacher’ beliefs, values, and perceptions profoundly influence their practice. Recent literature agreed with these

researchers' seminal work (Bintz & Dillard, 2007; Crawford, 2004, Weibe Berry, 2006). Still, some researchers suggested that uncertainty remains as to the true consequence of teacher convictions and the influence they carry (Fang, 1996; Guskey, 1986). The selected review of belief studies indicated that addressing teacher convictions can be an important function in implementing reform efforts. Further, the compiled investigations practiced making beliefs open for discussion and review, which proved to a revealing procedure. Interestingly, these investigations into teacher beliefs revealed that past experiences do influence instruction; however, so do a list of other factors including school culture, leadership, contextual factors, and teaching experience. In summary, this literature review indicated that tapping into the beliefs and convictions teachers hold can be a nontraditional and inventive approach to effective and long-lasting school reform.

An Ethic of Care

Smith and Emigh (2005) claimed that aspects of caring are largely overlooked when reform policies, such as Response to Intervention, are implemented. Hargreaves (1994) observed that while schools teach every student the desired curriculum, more attention focuses on the efficient instruction of groups of students rather than the necessary consideration of the student. Noddings (2005) agreed by suggesting "the greatest burden of schools, as a result, is trying to adequately teach intelligent students' things that they don't want to learn" (p. 42). This creates quite a challenge. Stipek (2006) pointed out that raising achievement among at-risk learners as RTI dictates should involve connecting these students with teachers who support them as people, not just learners. Osterman (2000) indicated that good teacher/student relationships are helpful predictors of effort and engagement. Therefore, the act of caring, both

in the personal (care) and the communal (an ethic of care), is to develop relationship practices that are relevant to any educational system involved in school change.

While care translates to assistance and attentiveness, this study recognized an alternative position of care that was considered purposeful and deliberate in reforming teachers' work of helping their students. Borowiec and Langerock (2002) argued that most educators accepting care for the private and an ethic of care for an educational staff helps to promote the necessary and productive change needed in schools. Goldstein (1998) suggested that it is sensible to work towards further developing and communicating an understanding of care that builds upon its principled and experiential roots. Feminist moral theory and its embrace of care ethics guide our understanding of these origins.

The following pages define care through the literature, relate these ideas to the Response to Intervention reform, and examine an ethic of care as envisioned in feminist thought. Though it might be difficult to transfer the features of feminists' care to the realities of a public elementary school, the suggestions still create a distinctive vantage point from which to examine the relationship of teachers and their beliefs, instructional practices, and the consequence of the new RTI reform.

Defining Care and an Ethic of Care

Rogers (2000) pointed out that when a discussion about care and an ethic of care in education transpires, the common assumption imagines warm smiles, kind words, and gentle hugs. Caldwell and Sholtis (2008) asserted that every year, teachers step into their classrooms with the intentions of making a difference in their students' lives by showing them care. Goldstein (1998) suggested that caring can be understood as a feeling, an innate personality trait, or an attitude that affects educators to act in a generous and sympathetic way. The paradigm is

that the teacher in the classroom is nurturing, flexible, supportive, and always ready to lend a helping hand.

In his research of primary school teachers, Vogt (2002), found that most educators' believe that an ethic of care is a commitment from the teacher to provide a happy and secure environment in which to teach the assigned curriculum. Noblit et al. (1995) suggested that an ethic of care is a value that quality teachers appreciate and develop over the years. Lewis (1995) indicated that care encourages a situation in which every child feels connected to others, involved in decisions, and valued. Bergman (2004) identified caring as a reciprocal action in that the cared-for must also display a mutual act of caring. Ferreira (2000), in her research of middle school students, found the teens indicating that caring teachers take more traditional roles by simply taking the time to help with and explain schoolwork clearly. Stipek (2006) implied a slightly harder line by suggesting that caring is not coddling, rather it involves the act of holding students accountable while providing adequate support for successful learning to happen. Clearly, depending on a teacher's personal teaching style, the act of caring can be demonstrated in numerous ways (Caldwell & Sholtis, 2008).

These past descriptions helped in defining both care and an ethic of care, and at times the terms appear to be synonymous. However, I acknowledge the term "care" to be understood as an individual action with an exclusive purpose. An ethic of care, on the other hand, involves actions that convey a collective and shared mindset to help the greater good. To simplify matters, I took note of both of these terms to develop one characterization for this study. Therefore, I define care as an action that aims to help teachers and the grade level facilitate professional work that is influential in advancing and progressing instructional practices for all students involved in the RTI process.

Development of Care Ethics

Gilligan (1982) introduced the concept of care ethics largely under a women's view of moral development. Her beliefs suggested that caring involves an alternative to standard and impartial views of morality that often sacrifice the interests of those that are familiar to you. Traditional ethical theories place morality as autonomous and independent, built upon the foundation of reason and a universal love for all humankind. Gilligan (1982), though, advocated that an ethic of care is mindful of one's close relationships and emphasizes the importance of such connections within a tight knit community. She suggested that caring includes assuming responsibility for another person, acting in a responsive and nurturing manner, and decreasing another's need in some form or fashion. In terms of a caring situation, the contextual details tend to be highly influential in determining a course of action, instead of following a controlled and standardized procedure. Gilligan (1982) designated that an ethic of care begins by cultivating the capacity to care for both ourselves and others, in which a social responsibility can then be established.

Noddings (1984) extended the thoughts of Gilligan (1982) , and her work has been the most influential in terms of care ethics in education. She contended that academic achievement is simply not enough, and the development of care in the classroom can be the pedagogical motivation necessary for any successful reform effort. When Noddings (1984) discussed the idea of care, she made it clear that caring is something you do and engage in, rather than something you were innately born with. Caring then alters one's classroom practices by guiding teachers and students towards actions of sensitivity and trust which leads to positive contributions and outcomes. Noddings (1984) suggested that situations are varied, guiding rules are obsolete, and predictable situations are personal in detail. Consequently, the practice,

experience, and resourcefulness of those involved all come into play when performing acts of care.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) advised that those functioning with care ethics look preferentially at the needs of individuals within the situation. The authors' claimed that an ethic of rights, which is followed by men, tend to rely on abstract laws and universal principals that aim to be fair, just, and impartial. An ethic of care, conversely, believes that an exchange of views and open dialogue enables individuals to be understood in their own terms. Goldstein (1998) pointed out that caring is a two way street and the give and take required in academic relationships transforms classroom instruction into something moral rather than the customary review of rote academic knowledge. As Belenky et al. (1997) articulated, "Authorities do tell you what is right, but they never tell you why it is right. Authorities bellow but do not explain" (p. 28).

A concern is that care ethics do not seem to have substantive norms, but rather consist of attitudes that attend to the cared-for-subject's wants and needs. In an organization such as an elementary school, with the sheer numbers of students, it is difficult to give the needed attention to all of the intimate relations that care ethics demands. Held (1995) suggested that the blending of care and justice is a compatible combination and improves social relations and public policy. Expanding the care ethic into a moral and political theory may make sense for public education. Some form of justice seems necessary, for not every person knows or feels obligated to care for each student. Moreover, without some established standards, care could then turn into everyone trying to "cultivate their own garden" and largely ignoring the rest of the "flowers" that deserve comparable attention. Thoughts such as these influenced Tronto (1993), and she proposed that care be a practice that places itself more in an overall social context. She broadly described care

as “a species of activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (p. 103).

Less grandly, Smith and Emigh (2005) suggested that traditional methods frequently fail teachers and students in obtaining a higher quality of life in schools, and the achievement measures we rely upon are ambiguous to such relationships. The relational aspect in education is naturally beneficial when dealing with at-risk students who are struggling with the general instruction, and an emotional and caring response can lead to creative, resourceful, and effective solutions to student issues. To form a proper conceptual framework for care; therefore, the structure must be related to an individual’s involvement in the situation, combined with transparent and comprehensible norms, to create a balanced model of care ethics. While some may criticize this conceptual model of caring as being less scientific than models based on rational principles alone, an ethic of care adds at the very least a dimension of humanity to the Response to Intervention initiative and its quantifiable forms of attention.

Summary of an Ethic of Care

Beyond the number of books and articles congratulating the virtues of care in the classroom, a more multifaceted concept of caring can be constructed beyond the sweet Mrs. Crabapple and her words of praise and encouragement. While care can and does translate to assistance and attentiveness, this study and its organization of care looked to include a professional position that incorporated a purposeful and deliberate work ethic. An educator who welcomes teacher collaboration, support, and communication with peers while applying nurturing and thoughtful classroom practices of a Mrs. Crabapple can be considered an exemplar of the conceptual framework selected for this study.

This review of the formative literature on care revealed the power of the caring relation which can move, inspire, and bring about change in a considerate way. The evolving notions identified a social conscience for the care ethic, in which more is considered than just the targeted recipient of the effort. Response to Intervention, in my opinion, is such a reform, requiring that other influential and communal characteristics be included in its purview rather than an exclusive emphasis on a student's academic or behavioral needs. It is an intention of this study, then, to look at RTI critically through a lens of caring in order to provide a better gauge of the breadth and thoroughness of the reform.

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model

According to Hall and Hord (2001), individuals faced with change have a natural tendency to protect themselves rather than embracing the reform. Applicable to the adjustments required for RTI implementation and explained earlier, CBAM is a theory and conceptual method developed in the 1970's and 1980's for studying individuals as they execute change (Hord et al., 1988). Hall and Hord (1987) evaluated the dynamics of the change process using the Concern-Based Adoption Model and their investigations generated patterns and predictable themes that were repeatedly observed. These researchers identified twelve key principles, with the following being most significant to this study: (1) change is a process; (2) change is accomplished by individuals; (3) change is highly personal; (4) change involves growth in feelings as well as skills; and (5) change can be assisted by directing interventions toward the individual.

The CBAM model contains three elements for conceptualizing and measuring change in teachers through Stages of Concern (feelings and motivations for change), Levels of Use (how the change is implemented), and Innovation Configuration (how the change is modified and

improved). These diagnostic tools produce information to develop strategies in helping to apply the reform. The advantage of using the diagnostic tools is that educators can begin implementing the innovation while also analyzing the change process from the onset of early adoption to the closing stages of execution (Loucks et al., 1975). CBAM cannot predict which interventions will work best, but it does include a framework to facilitate change in broader terms. Therefore, the idea behind CBAM is to understand teachers' concerns about a reform, and use this understanding to assist individuals and groups in implementing the change more effectively.

Of the diagnostic tools CBAM employs, the Stages of Concern application is most relevant to this study for it addresses teachers' perceptions and beliefs regarding a reform. The Stages of Concern focuses on seven kinds of anxieties ranging from the beginning awareness stage (I am not really concerned about it), to a middle range of consequences (how is it affecting my students), and to the highest stage of refocusing (I can make this work better). Interventions can then be carefully aligned as "movement through the stages of concern cannot be forced, but, with appropriate support and assistance, it can be aided" (Hall & Hord, 1987, p. 43).

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model Literature

CBAM has had wide application in many educational settings, and in the following short summary, I describe some of these studies. Van den berg, Slegers, Geijsel, & Vandenberghe (2000) examined teacher concerns with the implementation of adaptive teaching methods. The researchers found that teachers mainly focused on self-concerns (awareness stage) when first initiating the reform. Task-concerns (consequences stage) later replaced self-concerns and the researchers concluded that to implement the adaptive teaching change they desired, task-concerns must be ultimately reduced (Van den berg et al., 2000).

Researchers interested in assessing teacher concerns about technology implementation used the CBAM framework to evaluate the process. Giancola (2000) examined the use of computer software in the classroom and found teacher interest and capacity affected successful implementation. In another study, Rogers and Mahler (1994) found that teachers with no experience with implementing technology had higher concerns of self-awareness while others with more experience had higher concerns of collaboration and consequence. Chamblee and Slough (2002) combined two studies, one of science teachers using telecommunications and the other of math teachers using technology to teach algebra. By comparing the concerns of teachers across disciplines, the researchers found in both subject areas that teachers' concerns and anxieties affected the use of technology.

In terms of reforming the curriculum, Crawford, Chamblee, and Rowlett (1998) used CBAM to assess changes in mathematics. Teachers attended a 7-day workshop to learn the new algebra curriculum, and data were gathered during the training period and also a year into the actual implementation. The data indicated concerns diminished during the overall project awareness and information stages, but increased in the refocusing stage, which pointed to a successful and thoughtful progression.

Evans and Hopkins (1988) examined school climate and teachers state of mind in implementing aesthetic education. They found that teachers with a high level of self actualization in an open environment had success in putting the program into place. In another study, Anderson (1997) looked at the change-management strategies of two Ontario principals. Findings indicated that effective change was conditioned to the prevailing culture of the school, and attitudes toward reform and change reflected the existing "culture of change" prevalent in the school.

Summary of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model

By understanding the anxiety level of the teachers who implement a new initiative, the CBAM serves as a means to both determine the current use of the initiative and to distinguish a starting point to address and alleviate these concerns (Hord et al., 1988). Past studies demonstrated that addressing teachers' concerns help in advancing reform efforts (Crawford et al., 1998; Evans & Hopkins, 1988; Giancola, 2000). Though change is a complicated process, The CBAM initially focuses on the individual as the primary area of concentration. Subsequently, when the individual concerns are understood and addressed, the progression of CBAM then turns to the institutional issues that indicate the reform is heading in a promising direction.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to position this research study in relation to the available literature. I first presented a description of the Response to Intervention reform, the alternative models, and the research published on the two distinct models. Next, I discussed the influence of teacher beliefs and organized a selective presentation of past teacher belief studies. I then shared information about care and care ethics, defined the terms through the literature, and gave a brief summary of the development of care ethics through feminists' perspectives. Lastly, I presented the Concerns-Based Adoption Model as an analytical tool for learning of teacher beliefs and apprehensions. I concluded the chapter with a brief synopsis of CBAM investigations.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how fifth grade elementary teachers implemented the Response to Intervention (RTI) reform into their classroom practices. A multiple case study design was used for this investigation. The primary case was concerned with teachers' beliefs and how they evolved amid the planning and implementation of RTI. The secondary case examined how these same teachers demonstrated care within the reform's adjusted instruction. This "case within a case" design gathered information from three data sources within the confines of the selected elementary school. Weekly grade level planning meetings, teacher interviews, and focus group sessions documented the exceptional experiences of the teachers' involved. A final source, the researcher's journal, checked for subjectivities, facilitated researcher reflection, and helped bridge theory and practice. These data collection methods revealed the personal and elusive characteristics teachers faced when responding to the Response to Intervention initiative.

This chapter gives a description of the setting, the participants, and the methods used to gather and subsequently analyze the data. The first section begins with a description of the context of the study, a brief background of the participants, and my role as a researcher in the study. The chapter continues with a discussion of qualitative research and case study methodology. Next, there is a review of the research questions and an explanation of how the

data were specifically collected and analyzed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of my subjectivities and how reflexivity, or self-awareness, played a part in the validity of the study.

Context of the Study

The site selected for the study was based on the introductory condition of its RTI implementation process and my insider position as a fifth-grade teacher. The location of the elementary school was in a small suburban county outside of metro Atlanta that served approximately seven hundred-fifty students. The racial make-up of the student body consisted of forty-eight percent African-American, forty-four percent Caucasian, five percent Hispanic, and three percent other. In terms of socioeconomic numbers, sixty-seven percent of the school's student population received free or reduced lunch. Numbers from the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 state designed standardized test (CRCT) indicated scores slightly above the state averages in math, reading, social studies, and science. However, the school's CRCT scores were in the lower range compared with county averages.

The faculty consisted of fifty-two certified staff members teaching pre-k through fifth grade. The certified staff had between one and thirty-two years of teaching experience with the workforce averaging eight years of recognized classroom practice. Educationally, approximately half of the teachers earned a master's degree. The racial makeup of the school comprised of forty-four Caucasian teachers and eight African-Americans teachers. Of these fifty-two teachers, five of the staff members were men. In years past, teacher turnover hovered around ten percent; however, the 2009-2010 school year indicated that about a quarter of the teaching staff departed or transferred to other teaching positions or vocations.

In this inquiry, I asked three fifth-grade teachers to take part in a fourteen week study concerning Response to Intervention. The fourteen week time frame encompassed over a full

quarter of instruction time and corresponded with other eight to fifteen week RTI studies previously examined (Torgesen et al., 2001; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Vellutino et al., 1996). The sustained time was intended to ensure understanding of the RTI phenomenon and the context in which the study took place. Data gathering began in the late spring of the 2008-2009 school year (April) and resumed after the summer break in August of the 2009-2010 school year (concluding in October).

Research Participants

The teachers who contributed to this study were all volunteers from the 5th grade general education team and were specifically aware of the purpose of the study. Special education teachers could not participate due to whole school responsibilities and the inability to meet during grade level meeting times. Thus in choosing participants for the study, I centered my selection on regular education teachers with varied experience, backgrounds, and genders (the remaining 5th grade teachers were excluded from the interviews and focus groups but participated in the grade level meetings). The intent was to retain a small number of participants in order to keep the research intimate and the data manageable.

Before any data collection began, I presented the participants with a consent form that explained the study, clarified the responsibilities, and described the benefits they might receive (Appendix A is an example of this consent form). I assured confidentiality by strict discretion in keeping both informal and taped conversations limited only to the members of the study. In addition, I used pseudonyms at all times when discussion and analysis of the taped dialogue was constructed in written form.

Below, Table 3.1 reveals the pseudonym of the participants and gives a brief background of the individual teacher's educational and professional experience. Two of the participants were

female while one was male. Actual classroom instructional experience ranged from “The Veteran” with thirty-two years, “The Specialist” with eight years, and “The Novice” with three. This was the first year in which all three participants (including myself) worked together on the 5th grade team.

Table 3.1

Experience of the Research Participants

Participants	Demographics	Experiences
“The Veteran”	55 years old (female) Caucasian B.A. Early Childhood Education	32 years teaching experience, previously taught all grades 1 st through 6 th . She has been the 5 th grade chair at this school for the past 7 years. She retired after 2009-2010 school year.
“The Specialist”	33 years old (female) Caucasian B.A. Special Education	8 years teaching experience. She specifically taught special ed. inclusion and resource models for elementary grades in her first 6 years. She was currently in the second year as a regular 5 th grade classroom teacher.
“The Novice”	30 years old (male) Caucasian B.A. Early Childhood Education	3 years teaching experience (his first year was a long-term sub position in third grade). This was his second year at this school location and in fifth grade.

Researcher’s Role

When the study began in April of 2008, I taught 5th grade as a member of the grade level team. My position at the school changed the following school year when I became an EIP teacher (Early Intervention Program) and my teaching responsibilities were broadened to include instruction for all grade levels. Though my close contact with the fifth-grade teachers was modified as an EIP teacher, the relationships previously formed with the participants were an

advantage brought to this study. I was fortunate to have selected participants who felt comfortable in speaking their minds and confident in calling out missteps. I believed these professional relationships assisted in accessing the truths and embedded realities not always disclosed to a researcher.

Glesne (1999) suggested that qualitative inquiry is not principally intended to serve the research participants, but it is research that can contribute to the professional lives of the participants along and the greater good of the educational field. I was better versed with the procedures of RTI than the participants; however, my knowledge about the specifics of RTI did not change the teachers' preceding convictions of teaching and learning. Though I organized the study to share the results with a wider population, my immediate role was to learn, grow, and experience RTI implementation with an intimate group of teachers as a member of the grade level team. This was my firm conception of how such research would be best demonstrated, and I directed my role in the process to remain respectful and modest by practicing the qualitative safeguards detailed later in the chapter.

Qualitative Research Design

Merriam and Simpson (1995) viewed qualitative inquiry as a process that helps researchers study how people make sense of and interpret their lives. Creswell (2007) maintained that qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human procedure and it should be centered on building a complex, holistic picture reporting detailed views of informants in a natural context. Glesne (1999) suggested that qualitative research tries to make sense of personal stories and the ways participants intersect with the selected phenomenon. Charmaz (2002) indicated that the sharing of beliefs, perceptions, and ideas is an integral part of qualitative teacher inquiry and gathering these personal thoughts leads to the rich

data and thick descriptions that are essential pieces to qualitative research. Further, Guba and Lincoln (2005) stressed that qualitative research helps to rectify the loss of contextual information missing from many quantitative studies. Following these thoughts, this qualitative research study aimed to construct an accurate portrayal of the participants interacting within their distinct social environment.

For the purpose of determining the teachers' beliefs about teaching and RTI, it was necessary to make individual ideas explicit. By understanding the characteristics of the educators, connections relating to the implementation process of the Response to Intervention initiative were comprehensively determined. The collected data and corresponding analysis should enable educators to use this information as a basis for comparison with their own or other studies. Such comparison, or transferability, can enhance future work by providing accounts and conjectures that add relevance to the context of RTI research.

Case Study Methodology

Patton (1990) defined a case study as a means to describe a situation in great depth, whether the event involves a specific group of people, a certain process, or a selected activity. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) indicated that a case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case. Yin (2003) maintained that case study research is an investigation of real-life phenomenon with a real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. The strength of a case study is to gain a multi-perspective in which the researcher considers not just the individual voice of the participants, but also the group relations and the interactions between them.

Bromley (1986) suggested that the idea is to get intimate, and the use of a case study design is a way to get closer to the subjects of interest by investigating the personal factors such

as beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. Response to Intervention was a new reform introduced to the teachers of the elementary school, and thus there existed a gap between understanding the basic procedures and realizing how to effectively implement the mandate. Rather than proving that a certain method worked best, I wanted to learn as a colleague about the applied and caring themes in RTI execution. Guba and Lincoln (2005) asserted that such an arrangement based on insider position has been successfully used to study the development of the participants' efforts within their context.

This study was designed to be understanding-oriented rather than action-oriented. Merriam (1998) suggested that a case study was an appropriate methodology in coming to grips with critical problems of instructional change and expanding the knowledge base in education. Case study methodology retains holistic and meaningful characteristics that position one to learn of human behavior beyond the governed acts. Flyvbjerg (2006) commented that case studies produce the type of context-dependent knowledge that research on learning shows is necessary to allow teachers to develop from rule following beginners to skillful experts.

In looking to answer the research questions posed in the present study, a single-case study was not sufficient. The research aimed at learning how the participating teachers' enacted and evolved their beliefs within the planning and implementation of RTI, and this can be considered the phenomenon of interest. Yet this investigator was also interested in how an ethic of care was reflected in the process, thus producing a second noteworthy point of interest. Consequently, the objective was to view each of the three participants as individual cases in addressing the research questions. Defining the proposed study as a "case within a case" study accurately describes the research design and intended goals.

Research Questions

The following open-ended question largely guided my study: What happens when teachers implement the Response to Intervention reform initiative into their 5th grade classroom practices? Questions that were more specific and pointed were: (1) How do teachers' beliefs regarding RTI evolve in the process of planning and implementing RTI? ; (2) How do teachers enact their beliefs regarding RTI in their planning practice?; and (3) How is an ethic of care reflected in the planning and implementation of RTI? The first two questions required data collection on the beliefs of the current RTI process and the evolution and enactment of these beliefs. The third question required information relating to the participants' current arrangement with care and how care extended in reaction to the Response to Intervention reform. Table 3.2 provides a visual aid in illustrating how each form of data helped in answering the research questions.

Data Collection Methods

Because this study focused on various perspectives defined by the participants, multiple research methods were used to collect data. The data collection methods allowed the information to emerge authentically as a process revealing how the implementation of RTI is realistically and conscientiously advanced through teacher discourse. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated that "the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p. 2). The study of beliefs certainly is not an exact science, and so the intention of allowing a broad range of teacher responses helped present the data within a richer and more interrelated condition.

Triangulation, in terms of transparency of the research, is a key strength and an imperative act in qualitative research. Hays (2004) stated that "it is most important that the

researcher remember that triangulation requires multiple sources of data and multiple methods in answering each question” (p. 230). The findings consisted of grade level meetings, participant interviews, focus group meetings, and a reflective researcher journal. Further, research literature was later compared to the findings to check for soundness. By using multiple data sources to understand RTI, I strengthened the internal validity of my findings.

Each of these data sources provided me with a unique contribution to answer the research questions. The grade level and focus group meetings offered group thought processes and collaborative efforts. The interviews and the researcher’s journal provided more personal and reflective descriptions. I believed the use of multiple points of opinion provided a clearness and transparency of information by honoring the results and conclusions of each data source. Once the data was organized into themes and written up accordingly, member checking occurred with each participant’s case to ensure that accuracy of judgment and belief was captured. Appendix B lists the dates of the individual interviews, focus group meetings, and grade level meetings in chronological order.

Bi-Weekly Meetings

An important source of data collection was the bi-weekly meetings where I obtained collective perspectives from the group effort. As noted earlier, the teachers assembled during planning times to deliberate on grade level issues, curriculum concerns, at-risk students, and other house cleaning matters. During the 2008-2009 school year, these meetings were initially directed to discuss RTI procedures and processes. In using what was already in place, I recorded the predetermined meeting that primarily focused on the discussion of Response to Intervention. I then transcribed these grade level meetings to help in capturing the participants’ exclusive points-of-view.

Table 3.2

Sources used to Collect Data for Each Research Question

Guiding Questions	Weekly Planning Meetings	Teacher Interviews	Focus Group Sessions with Vignettes	Researcher's Journal
What happens when teachers implement the Response to Intervention reform into their 5 th grade classroom practices?	YES	YES	YES	YES
1. How do teachers' beliefs regarding RTI evolve in the process of planning and implementing RTI?	YES	YES	YES	YES
2. How do teachers enact their beliefs regarding RTI in their classroom practice?	YES	YES	YES	NO
3. How is an ethic of care reflected in the planning and implementation of RTI?	YES	YES	YES	NO

The National School Reform Faculty organized data collecting strategies through what is referred to as a Critical Friends Group (CFG). Specifically, the CFG used protocols termed *charrettes* to embody a process in which a trusting group of individuals collaborate in order to improve upon a piece of work. A charrette is a procedure that can take place in many disciplines, but is primarily used when a group has trouble moving forward, or when the process of multiple perspectives can enrich a certain context. Two fundamental beliefs that follow a charrette are: (1) Groups working together usually produce better work than individuals working in isolation; and (2) the work can improve with more time, thought, effort, and collaboration.

For this study, I attempted to follow the arrangement of a charrette to help add rigor, attention, and thoroughness to an already existing group meeting.

Within the framework of a charrette, there was a process to follow. The following steps standardized the procedures that we considered at the weekly RTI meeting:

1. When the team (three to six people) reached a tension point and needed additional minds to move forward, or when a difficult or stopping point was realized.
2. The group selected a facilitator. This person recorded information, asked questions, and summarized to promote discussion.
3. The team listened when the facilitator reviewed the data. Clarifying questions were asked by the group.
4. The group then stated what it needed from the charrette, and by accepting responsibility, looked to make the situation better.
5. The group opened up dialogue while the facilitator took notes/recorded the discussions.
6. After the information was gathered, the facilitator briefly summarized what he/she learned.
7. The process as a whole was debriefed as a group.

Interviews

Glesne (1999) asserted that the strength of an interview is to have “the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see” (p. 69). In order to collect personal information and to obtain data not provided in the grade-level meetings, I recorded and transcribed three semi-structured interviews with each of the three participants, for a total of nine interviews. The three individual interviews per participant were

evenly spaced throughout the fourteen week study in order to display a progression of thought and practice. In these interviews, baseline questions led the discussion and the meetings were conducted on the school grounds. Appendices C and D are examples of the baseline and concluding interview questions.

Focus Groups

As another data source designed to uncover teacher beliefs and group dynamics, two focus group sessions were conducted approximately seven and fourteen weeks into the study. The purpose of these focus group sessions was to pose ethical vignettes that related to certain dilemmas faced within the planning and implementation of RTI in the classroom. The procedure for the focus group was to read a one page fictitious scenario about a struggling fifth grade student. The three participating teachers then discussed possible solutions, strategies, and explanations to help solve the predicament. I recorded these discussions and subsequently transcribed the dialogue. Appendices E and F are used to illustrate the ethical vignettes.

The case study strategy of analyzing these ethical vignettes made it possible for teachers to connect their beliefs and actual practices into an informed decision. Koballa and Tippins (2004) noted that such vignettes are “a particular form of narrative that can be used to explicate and clarify the professional knowledge of teachers” (p. 3). The vignettes also freed up dialogue to focus on RTI issues rather than discussions inhibited by previous knowledge of the students’ character. Though conversations concerning the vignettes pursued their own distinctive path, the ongoing focus targeted RTI issues and themes.

Researcher’s Journal

The concept of reflective practice by classroom practitioners has been a part of the education field since the writings of Dewey (1933). He reasoned that we should study what we

do so that we can change aspects in our teaching that are flawed and in need of correction. Valli (1997) stated that reflective thought “looks back on our assumptions and beliefs to be sure they are grounded in logic, evidence, or both, and looks forward to the implications or consequences of a particular course of action” (p. 68). In addition, reflection can help us to analyze the brash and/or routine activities we take for granted. In Dewey’s (1933) own words, “It (reflection) converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action” (p. 17).

The researcher’s journal proved to be a way to check my subjectivities. The journal represented an insight to my line of thinking and acted as a bridge to fill the gap between theory and practice of RTI. The researcher’s journal assisted the data analysis process of how I wrestled with and finally resolved the information acquired through the study. In addition, the journal successfully evoked another voice from the study, namely mine, and helped to break out of the one-dimensional habit of keeping my opinions implicit and thus unqualified.

Data Analysis

I interpreted the data holistically through the writing of the narrative cases, yet before composition began, data analysis was necessary. I practiced constant comparative methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) for encoding and developing themes within the cases. The exercise of constant comparison was a valuable tool in which the collection and analysis provided a persistent revision and refinement of thought (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

In the first phase of constant comparison analysis, I examined one piece of data (i.e. the initial interview) from an individual participant’s within case information. With this individual piece of data, I coded the transcript by actually writing the code on the side of the document. I practiced this coding procedure with each individual form of data as it pertained to each case. I then compared the codes within each case (i.e. comparing the interview, focus groups, and grade

level meetings of each participant). Table 3.3 on the following page illustrates a partial example of the codes used in this study. The number of the code is listed on the left, the next column indicates the name of the code, and the final column gives a brief description of the type of focus of the specific code.

Table 3.3

Developed Coding for Data Analysis

Number	Code	Description
01	Background	Home, education, and teaching experience
02	Personal pedagogy	Teaching style, classroom management
03	Teacher Buy-in to RTI	Enthusiasm for RTI, follow through, belief
04	Administrative tension	Difference in opinions, mandates
05	Support for RTI	Advise, answering questions
06	Resources	Difficulties/barriers, staffing, \$, materials
07	Understanding of RTI	Evolving, grasping of procedures
08	Procedures of RTI	Protocol, steps to follow
09	Documentation	Collecting evidence, data
10	Behavior	Student conduct
11	Student Apathy	Unmotivated, lack of care
12	Instruction and RTI	Classroom practices, EIP, inclusion, etc.

With the coding from each piece of data and each individual case, I next organized the various codes into categories as a stage of within-case analyses. Table 3.4 on the following page illustrates the categories that resulted from my analysis and organization of the material coded as indicated on the Table 3.3. The first column lists the name of the category, the middle column gives a brief description, and the last column on the right indicates the relevant code that corresponds with the category. Again, this is a partial example of the category generation that took place in the data analysis.

After the categories were established in this type of fashion in Table 3.4, I then analyzed data from all three participants for developing themes. Table 3.5 on the following page is an

Table 3.4

Resulting Categories in Data Analysis

Categories	Description	Relevant Codes
Accountability	(change in work, responsibilities)	01, 02, 09,
Support	(human assistance)	05, 12
Understanding	(current grasp of RTI)	07, 08
Buy-in	(Trust, reliance in RTI)	03, 04
Resource	(Assessments, interventions)	06, 12
Contextual Barriers	(CRCT, time, student apathy)	11
Autonomy	(decision making)	09, 10,

illustration of how I used this procedure to assign codes to comments of the participants and the relevant themes or categories that resulted from this organization. Table 3.5 is organized by providing the quotation or key word in the first column, the code name and number follows, a brief comment to explain the comment is then added, and the last column provides the emergent theme. Using these constant comparison techniques to analyze the within–case data, I was able to establish codes, categories and themes in which I established an inductive data analysis method.

This study used both open and axial coding. The practice of open coding took apart specific lines and gave a name or code to represent the comment (Merriam, 1998). The code words were grouped around concepts in the data and given category names. Axial coding

connected these categories into the key themes developed in the study. An example of a key theme was the idea of teacher buy-in and the importance of this proposition for effective implementation of the RTI reform

Table 3.5

Sample of Transcription Analysis to Assign Codes and Categories to Participants' Statements

Example of quotations or Key Words	Code	Comments	Emergent Theme
“The procedures encompass everything: try this, try that, try it standing on your head...and a lot of things aren't even possible to pull off.”	Teacher responsibilities of RTI (Code 01, 02, 09)	Additional Responsibilities without recognition	Accountability
“...but now I see that if it is done properly, it can be good and effective.”	Teacher responsibilities of RTI (Code 01, 02, 09)	With buy in, added responsibilities can be managed and are manageable	Accountability
“Individual (teacher) freedom and creativity is dismissed.”	Teacher Autonomy (Code 09, 10)	Laments about freedom relate to autonomy	Autonomy
“I wouldn't require all of the paperwork...”	Teacher Autonomy (Code 09, 10)	Objections to imposed structure	Autonomy
“Special ed. and now RTI will go to their grave saying inclusion works for every student.”	Teacher Buy-In (Code 03)	Participant looks for failure	Buy-in
“Education is about students taking responsibility for themselves.”	Teacher Buy-In (Code 03)	Participant blames others	Buy-in

The transcripts from the teacher interviews, the weekly meetings, and the focus sessions comprised the body of data for this study. I coded the transcripts and identified tentative categories. I completed the data analysis by hand. I read and reread each transcript line by line and identified themes. I made note of the theme or tension on a hard copy of the data, clearly marking the described statement. I then compiled a list of themes and sorted them accordingly on index cards. With these index cards in front of me, the visual representations helped me to analyze, arrange, and rearrange the data as I sifted through the information. In practicing interpretive analysis, the task was to generate assertions through inference and induction by finding linkages within the data (Erikson, 1986). This system proved to be valuable for my own thinking before the actual writing of the cases began, and viable in connecting me to the data of my participants.

Cross-Case Analysis

The initial process involved the within-case examination of each participant relating to their beliefs about RTI. I analyzed this information for themes and tensions. The generated themes were then compared and contrasted across all of the three participants' data in a cross-case analysis manner. The result was a narrative case study of teachers both individually (within-case) and collectively (cross-case) voicing their beliefs about planning and implementing the reform while displaying the care that is involved with putting RTI into practice.

The process of analysis was inductive and benefited from the participants' close connection with each other. The purpose of the cross-case analysis was to bring voices from the independent cases and place them in a larger context in which contrast and evaluation could be carried out. The reason for this was not to make generalized statements, but rather to explore the

research questions in the specific context. The cross-case analysis allowed thoroughness of ideas and consideration to flow naturally within the research study.

Subjectivity Statement

I acknowledge that my own subjectivity played a critical role not only in selecting my research topic, but also in elaborating my assumptions for this study. Qualitative research is rarely free from the biases and beliefs of the researcher, and by recognizing that my thoughts had been implicit in my work as a classroom educator, I hoped to show my preconceptions. I feel this act of bringing my thinking into consideration can help when interpreting the quality of the research findings. Here, I described the influences that affected my study of RTI and how I addressed them in the research process.

Scribner (1999) stressed how teachers' work influences how teachers learn, and it is clear that my personal context produced a distinctive awareness. My position in this study was somewhat unique in that I was a classroom practitioner and yet I was also a doctoral candidate. As a classroom teacher in the study, I wanted to understand the RTI protocol in order to serve the students I teach and to help ease my workload. As a researcher, I wanted to understand how RTI implementation affected teachers' beliefs. Thus, as a teacher and researcher, practice and theory were in a continued state of reorganization as new applications and ideas surfaced.

As a teacher, I witnessed RTI implementation at the selected site through a few preliminary meetings and an introductory training concerning the reform. My initial reaction to some of the coaching was one of caution: more responsibility was placed on the classroom teacher than what I found in the current literature. Little attention was made to discuss the pedagogy of RTI, and dialogue was targeted to classroom measurement procedures that provided a limited course of action. Assistance was not earmarked for the small group work RTI

advocated, and so the obligation to increase levels of tier intensity remained undefined and often unfulfilled. Though it was early in the implementation process, the trend of overlooking the assumptions of the classroom teacher and skimping on the professional development appeared to be a losing and inattentive proposition when vying for educational change.

Yet as a researcher, I believed all was not lost. My own purpose for conducting this research was based on my conviction that educational reform should ultimately be responsible to suggest, question, reflect, cope with, and consider alternate possibilities. Response to Intervention is a directed reform, and yet with a little stretching and adjusting, I felt it could be a beginning to increased teacher focus, teacher sincerity, and a distribution of educational decision making.

To prevent these personal subjectivities from influencing the opinions of the participants, I attempted to keep my views separate. During individual interviews, I followed the interview guide with the idea to focus opinions on the question at hand rather than a discussion of recent events. In group meetings, I acted primarily as a facilitator by allowing the participants to take hold of the discussions. I tried to intervene only at times of silence or when redirection was necessary. The researcher's journal also helped me as a sounding board for my subjectivities and was a resilient reflection piece. Though these processes were not flawless in checking my biases, they did help to obtain data that were less influenced by my position as the researcher in this study.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity, or self-awareness, brought to question whether the study measured and captured what I concluded it measured. In other words, did my collection and analysis of the research data reveal what was really happening within the study? I established validity through

the use of triangulation, as discussed earlier, whereby I collected and analyzed information from various participants, data sources, and methods. Individual interviews, grade level meetings, focus group meetings, and a researcher's journal were all utilized from this perspective. Member checks were also used to ensure proper identification of the participants' point-of-view. Further, the subjectivity statement helped to make clear my unique position in the research study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the research design of the study. I presented a description of the context of the study and a brief narrative about the research participants. I included an explanation of my role as a researcher. I also explained how the data were collected through grade level meetings, focus groups, interviews, and a researcher's journal. I then detailed how the collected data was analyzed by initially coding for themes and then through the writing of narrative cases found in the next chapter. Finally, I disclosed my subjectivities and described the processes which checked my biases during the research process.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Teachers must continually come to grips with school reforms that not only affect their educational practices, but also their philosophy on teaching and learning. Initiated by policy makers to improve instruction, reforms bring about a reorganization of thought and practice for classroom educators. Though their affects are understated, beliefs have an influential role in the continued instructional routines of classroom teachers and the implementation of new strategies. The purpose of this study was to make teacher beliefs explicit to help serve the advancement in the implementation of the Response to Intervention initiative.

In this chapter, I presented a synthesis of findings from the three primary participants who contributed to my study. Each participant served as an individual case and I presented an overview of each of the participants' particular context. Personal knowledge and data obtained from the three individual interviews were used to compose the background of each participant. I then sorted the relevant data from the case studies as they pertained to the three questions posed in this research.

Case One: The Veteran

I began my relationship with the Veteran teacher eight years ago when we worked in adjacent rooms as fifth grade teachers. At the time, she was the grade chair with many years of experience and I was beginning my third year of teaching (the first in the 5th grade). I quickly learned that the Veteran was a strong-willed educator who strongly voiced her opinions, yet she was also thoughtful and sharing with her expertise and teaching materials. In the classroom, she

worked diligently to give students a solid educational experience and expected the same dedicated effort from the children. The Veteran's teaching story, spanning over thirty years of classroom experience, is an interesting one and her encounters along the way have clearly influenced her practices and beliefs in teaching.

Professional Background

The Veteran began her teaching career in 1976 in rural Georgia. Having lived in Connecticut most of her life, she received her teaching degree from a local college but found jobs scarce in her New England surroundings. However, she was passionate about teaching and was willing to venture far from home in order to carry out her calling. When the Veteran began teaching in Georgia, she encountered critical situations that forged her teaching beliefs and practices. In her initial interview, the Veteran reflected on the daunting conditions she faced in her first year. She remembered, "When I got there, they had no books, no real resources, they had nothing. I was in a portable classroom and it was like the kids were rescued out of dumpsters. It was just horrendous but I wasn't going to give up."

The Veteran was poised to make differences in her students' lives. The difficult environmental conditions caused her to be resourceful and practical, traits which she possesses to this day. She believed in providing students with the necessary resources to become independent thinkers and learners. She worked hard to make sure they had the necessary background information to reference, even if she had to make it herself. When explicitly asked about her teaching approach, the Veteran mockingly responded, "I would say a traditional style, old school just because I have been around so long. . . but truthfully, I did whole language where I was really on my own as far as accountability."

When I questioned her as to why she wasn't continuing with the whole language model, she responded, "With all the testing like the benchmark assessments (given quarterly), every kid has to learn the same thing at the same time, so I can't realistically do whole language with those kinds of requirements."

She trusts that hard work undoubtedly affects learning outcomes, and she believes in the distinct roles of teacher and students. School, she considers, is intended to be demanding. She asserted, "Fun is not for school, fun is for when you go home."

Identified Themes

The within-case themes identified from the Veteran's data are listed below in Table 4.1. These themes are organized according to research question, though some overlap occurred. Somewhat unique to the Veteran was her unease with the identified theme teacher support. As an experienced teacher, she anticipated help to assist in implementing the various interventions. She shared her frustration as she stated, "It's pretty much thankless, but I will do what I can with the interventions because I know I am going to end up doing it myself anyway. You can't keep blaming the teachers all the time for not following through because the administration isn't giving us any help."

Also of interest to the Veteran was the negligible concern with student behavior as compared to the other two participants. This can be attributed to her steadfast attention to classroom management. She explained of the consistent structure she finds important to effective classroom management in the initial interview as she commented, "Well, something that I consider very important is that when go into someone's room and you see everything is in the right place. But, at first glance, I would say that it doesn't look like anybody lives there, and the kids must not be doing something but they are...they always know what is coming next."

They know what to do when they finish assignments and it's not just sitting quietly and drawing.”

The majority of the Veteran's identified within-case themes are further recognized, explained, and analyzed through cross-case analysis. Data to support these themes are also presented in a similar fashion. The Veteran's within case themes are listed below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Identified Themes for the Veteran

Research Question	Case - The Veteran		
Question 1	Understanding of RTI	Teacher Autonomy	
Question 2	Teacher Responsibilities	Teacher Support	Collaborative Practices
Question 3	Pre-existing Beliefs	Beliefs about RTI	

Case Two: The Specialist

I first met the Specialist four years ago when she was a new hire working in the special education department. In time, our professional relationship was forged when we began co-teaching in an inclusion model during the 5th grade language arts block. My responsibilities for inclusion were initially focused on the instruction of the whole class while she concentrated on her caseload of six special education students that were integrated into the instructional routine. As our rapport, comfort level, and collaboration with each other improved, these defining lines of responsibility faded and we found greater student success in teaching flexible skill groups. I

have learned much from the Specialist with her knowledge and patience in dealing with struggling and hard to reach students.

Professional Background

The Specialist has been an educator for the past nine years in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. She previously taught special education for eight years and the present situation was her first year in a regular education classroom. The Specialist defined her personal teaching style as student centered and hands-on. When queried about the transition from special education to regular education, the Specialist stated,

Academically, I like regular education because it is broader. In special ed. I had to teach prescriptively and follow the plan very closely to give the kids exactly what they needed. But the transition has been hard, because in the past I haven't had to deal with such extreme behavior problems.

The Specialist perceives the ideal teacher as one who meets all the students' needs. Her ideal classroom is one with a comfortable and relaxing environment, but not "to the extent that kids think it's acceptable to be disruptive or rude to other kids."

Identified Themes

The identified themes generated from the Specialist's data are listed below in Table 4.2. As with the Veteran, these themes are organized according to each research question. The Specialist's identified themes shared aims of at least one of the two other participants, and so the data to support the subject matter is primarily represented in the cross-case analysis.

Interestingly though, The Specialist pre-occupation with student behavior and how conduct influenced RTI implementation is to be noted. She found it extremely challenging to curb disruptive behavior, and she voiced her concern throughout the study about the usefulness

of behavior interventions. The Specialist commented, “When the strategy is reduced to a behavior chart, you are not going about helping them change their behavior, you are just writing down what they have done.” The Specialist’s within case themes are listed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Identified Themes for the Specialist

Research Question	Case - The Specialist		
Question 1	Understanding of RTI	Teacher Autonomy	
Question 2	Teacher Responsibilities	Teacher Support	Student Behavior
Question 3	Pre-existing Beliefs	Beliefs about RTI	

Case Three: The Novice

The Novice was in his first year at the elementary school when the study began, and he came to his practice with large amounts of energy and passion. He was excited to get his career underway and establish some professional and personal stability, with plans of relocating his fiancée from Michigan to Georgia. Similar to the two other participants, the Novice held strong beliefs about teaching and learning, lacking simply the classroom experience of the Veteran and Specialist. His perspectives proved to be unique in the latter stages of the study as he became the fifth grade RTI coordinator and was assigned additional responsibilities concerning the reform process.

Professional Background

Before moving to Georgia, the Novice held various interim teaching positions at several school sites. He found it difficult to secure a tolerable job in Michigan where he grew up and went to college. His first permanent job came at a charter school in an inner city in Michigan. In describing his philosophy of teaching, the Novice emphasized the development of independent thinking with his students.

When asked if he was applying his problem solving beliefs in teaching to the classroom, he talked about the conflicts he had with required assessments and curriculum. He stated, “I can’t really do too many hands-on activities related to real life, because the students ultimately have to be able to do the paper and pencil tests like the CRCT (yearly standardized test) and the benchmarks.”

One of the teaching strategies that the elementary site employed to help improve student achievement was the use of two adults (predominately with a teacher assistant) in the classroom during math and language arts instruction. The Novice was a proponent of this co-teaching model because he saw kids today as lacking an adequate attention span because of television and computer games.

Identified Themes

The identified themes generated from The Novice’s data are listed below in Table 4.3. As with the other two participants, the themes are organized according to each research question. Unique to the Novice’s within-case data was his dedication in vying for parental support in the RTI implementation process. He stated, “I am just a huge proponent of getting the parents involved because you might get those few kids that you can change, that want to do more and feel better about their education. If the parents don’t want to be a part of that or are not

interested or whatever, that is a product of the environment and you can't do anything to move the kid then."

Another unique belief found in the Novice's data was his positive opinion about the evolution of the teacher collaboration in the study. His encouraging stance was evident as he remarked in the final interview, "The meetings are much more civilized and are more effective. There aren't as many people giving random opinions. Lately, we are having a general overview of the student and then we aren't being so quick to judge and gripe all the time. They (the meetings) are more focused because we don't immediately gripe about non-instructional stuff and it is more about helping the kid learn."

Again, the majority of these identified within-case themes are further recognized through cross-case analysis in the next few pages. Data to support these themes are also presented in a comparable fashion. The Novice's within case themes are listed below in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Identified Themes for the Novice

Research Question	Case - The Novice		
Question 1	Understanding of RTI	Parent Support	
Question 2	Teacher Responsibilities	Student Behavior	Collaborative Practices
Question 3	Pre-existing Beliefs	Beliefs about RTI	

Findings for Research Question One

The first inquiry of this research asked the following: How do teachers' beliefs regarding RTI evolve in the process of planning and implementing RTI? In sorting the data, I detected three themes with the participants' convictions about RTI implementation. The themes were: (1) Understanding the Response to Intervention Process; (2) Teacher Autonomy; and (3) Teacher Buy-In. In this next section, I have discussed each of these themes and revealed sub-themes based on the information taken from the data set that express the participants evolving beliefs about RTI.

Theme 1: Understanding RTI

The veteran. In the beginning of the study, the Veteran claimed she wasn't informed about the procedures of RTI, and what she did know she construed as complicated and poorly designed. She commented that no real communication lines were set up to advise the teachers about the procedures. She stated, "What used to be SST has been made so convoluted and so vague in RTI that engaging in it is almost like playing a game in which I don't know the rules."

By the midpoint of the study, the Veteran understood the mechanics of RTI implementation, but she still considered the reform laden with extra work with little return. Such expressed confusion and lack of professional development led to a grade level meeting with the RTI committee to clear up RTI misunderstandings. After this informational meeting, the Veteran remained pessimistic as to its successful adoption.

By the end of the study, the Veteran remarked that her understanding of the process had improved, but her opinion of RTI hadn't changed. She still held to the belief that the reform contained too many barriers in the form of extra work for the classroom teacher to implement consistently. She reasoned that these burdens eventually led to a stalling out of the entire

process. She remarked, “The (RTI) process is frustrating; it’s almost designed to do everything but help the kid. The procedures encompass everything: try this, try that, try it standing on your head. . . and a lot of things aren’t even possible to pull off.”

The Specialist. At the beginning of the study, the Specialist was similarly confused about the RTI processes. She indicated that this lack of understanding caused personal uneasiness about RTI, and she was unsure where to find clarification. On a scale from one to ten, the Specialist rated her understanding of the RTI reform as a two.

By the midpoint in the study, the Specialist could accurately explain the procedures. She described,

When a child is struggling in the classroom, we fill out the tier 1 paperwork and come to a GLS meeting. As a grade level we talk about and discuss strategies we can use in the classroom and fill out the tier 2 forms together as a team to come up with some strategies to help the student. We take those strategies back to our classroom for 4 weeks and use it until we talk about them again. Then we come back and report the results, discuss some more strategies, use them for 4 weeks, up to twelve weeks I believe. Then we can refer students that are still struggling and having problems to SST (tier 3).

In the exit interview, the Specialist reflected on her progression with understanding RTI. She stressed the importance of communication as well as teacher responsibility to the reform. She commented, “As teachers, we were not presented or did we take the time to learn about RTI because we were so busy doing everything else.”

The novice. As a first year teacher at the elementary school, the Novice was initially confused about RTI as well. He eventually came to a better understanding and appreciation for

the process, and believed that with more knowledge and experience with RTI interventions, operative remediation could occur.

The Novice's beliefs evolved into a confidence that if the teachers were explicitly taught about the RTI procedures, then the reform could be meaningful. He later discovered, as the RTI grade chair, that having a common understanding of the reform created smoother and more efficient meetings. In the exit interview, the Novice rescinded some of his earlier frustration. He remarked, "My opinions have changed somewhat. At first I thought RTI was a completely cover-your-butt procedure, but now I see that if it is done properly, it can be good and effective."

Theme 2: Teacher Autonomy

The veteran. The Veteran initially lamented the loss of teacher autonomy which she had experienced in previous years, before requirements associated with RTI were assigned. She reflected, "Going back a few years, teachers were given a folder with the curriculum guides that they had to teach for the year. They were left alone to deal with all the kids. . . even the low performing ones. Before RTI, the teachers would remediate the ones that struggle. That is what teachers do."

As the study progressed, she continued questioning the lack of teacher input as students advanced in the RTI program. In the exit interview she still maintained that RTI over-relies on "outside" individuals making decisions for the classroom teacher. The Veteran indicated, "Individual (teacher) freedom and creativity is dismissed."

The specialist. The Specialist initially had reservations about the counsel she was given for at-risk students. She felt the recommendations were often strategies that had already been attempted by previous classroom teachers. Subsequently, she began to generate her own creative ideas to help solve the unique issues of the at-risk students.

For example, she suggested an alternative use of teacher assistants (TA) for remediation purposes. She stated,

Some of the high classes don't need a TA as badly as the lower classes. . . we could take (a struggling) student and put him in the high class and the TA could work with her in that class where less students need individual help. . . even twice a week. . . anything would help.

In the concluding interview, the Specialist suggested ways to improve RTI. She remarked, "I wouldn't require all of the paperwork; as a teacher, one tries to find a strategy that will help a kid. I would try to find a strategy that works."

The novice. The Novice felt that mandating a reform such as RTI challenged his professionalism and conviction to help each student by programming instructional decisions. He questioned the standardizing of RTI procedures, noting that teachers, along with students, must find their strengths and weaknesses. Being obligated to instruct in a certain way, in his view, was not the best solution.

In the exit interview, the Novice's continued to stress that the personal knowledge teachers gained from the hours in the classroom was more powerful than the directives in understanding the students. He stated,

The bottom line is for teachers to do whatever they can for every kid to be successful all the time. If a strategy works, I'll follow it, but if it wastes my time and takes me away from what I can do myself to help the kids of my class. . . then I won't.

Theme 3: Teacher Buy-In

The veteran. It can be argued that the first two themes, RTI understanding and teacher autonomy, heavily affected teacher buy-in. Without teachers believing and

buying-in to the reform, the execution of RTI remained tenuous. The Veteran insisted that instructional barriers hindered the fifth grade teachers' motivation. She questioned whether the tier interventions of RTI and the practicality of small group supplemental would work, given the limited resources in public schools.

The Veteran pointed out that improper identification of at-risk students' wasted time and was demoralizing. She also questioned the RTI philosophy of merging regular education with special education services. She remarked, "Instead of inclusion, wouldn't these kids do better with some intense instruction on their level all the time? Special ed. and now RTI will go to their grave saying inclusion works for every student."

The specialist. The Specialist's preliminary buy-in of RTI seemed positive, but when she failed to observe interventions that actually helped the students, especially with complex fifth grade issues, she wavered. She commented, "I don't think the RTI process is better than a thorough cognitive and achievement assessment in diagnosing student's weaknesses."

In the exit interview, the Specialist expressed lingering doubts that RTI can be effective in the upper elementary grades. She remarked, "RTI would be more effective in primary grades where teachers have an opportunity to identify student needs earlier instead of waiting until fifth grade to where the issues are more severe."

The novice. In the initial interview in April, the Novice expressed reservations about the RTI reform which affected his buy-in. In May, he described the RTI philosophy as too limiting. He commented,

We are just putting a fresh coat of paint on things and calling it an intervention.

Education is about students taking responsibility for themselves, but with RTI they don't

have to do that because we, the teachers, are the ones who have to provide the required documentation.

In his final interview, the Novice reasoned that proper implementation of a system like RTI would require students arriving in grade levels with the prerequisite skills. The recurring sub-theme of social promotion continued, as he questioned, “How did some of these kids get to fourth grade reading at a pre-primer reading level? It’s ridiculous that some of these kids fall through the cracks.”

Review of Data for Themes and Sub-Themes

The three themes identified through the data involved the participants’ evolutions of (1) Understanding RTI, (2) Teacher Autonomy, and (3) Teacher Buy-In. Contained within these three main themes were several points of tension, and these sub-themes proved to be influential in the progression of teacher beliefs. I attempted to qualify these prevailing points in Table 4.4. Interestingly, the sub-themes presented themselves as external factors that affected the belief system of the participants. Table 4.1 illustrated the recognized themes and listed three of the significant sub-themes that caused friction with teacher convictions, indicating the complexity of changing belief systems. These sub-themes will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

CBAM and an Alternative Analysis

The structure provided by the Concerns-Based Adoption Model introduced earlier was used as a basis for presenting my findings and analysis of the research questions. In the structure of the CBAM, the Stages of Concern (SoC) consist of a progressive hierarchy of anxieties. How these anxieties evolve during the course of the study involve a development in the participant’s approach to and use of the innovation. How the change is implemented is what CBAM calls the

Levels of Use (LoU). The assertion of the CBAM is that there is a close relationship between the Stages of Concern and the Levels of Use and that it is possible to infer a great deal about the innovation (how it is being used) from listening to the participants' concerns.

The applications of the CBAM suggest that progression in the Stages of Concern may be looked upon as an indication of how the teachers' beliefs evolved in the process of adopting the

Table 4.4

Themes and Sub-Themes for Research Question One

Themes		Sub-Themes	
Understanding of RTI	Administrative Support	Professional Development	Communication
Teacher Autonomy	Administrative Pressure/Tension	Loss of Teacher Creativity	Discounting of Informal Judgments
Teacher Buy-in	Social Promotion	Added Responsibilities	Available Resources

RTI. For this question; however, I found the structure of the CBAM to be too restrictive to provide a complete and informative answer (the CBAM is more aptly applied to research questions two and three). It was my position that the feelings, attitudes, and motivations held by the participants make up a collection of beliefs, and that condensing them into a single allocation such as SoC would result in a loss of detail and distinction. While there may sometimes be an overriding belief that motivates teachers in their performance, in most cases there are many conceptual contributors to such a purpose.

I needed to identify these convictions more clearly and explicitly, so it was possible to summarize the progression of beliefs for the three participants by developing a Belief Evolution Matrix for each teacher represented in Table 4.5, Table 4.6, and Table 4.7. I have represented the five basic beliefs which were most influential in the study, which I listed as Basic Beliefs (in neither a progressive or hierarchical order) in the first column of each table. The second column provides the nature of these beliefs as they existed prior to the study and represents the preconceptions of the participants at the beginning of the study. I have labeled this second column as Initial Beliefs in the Belief Evolution Matrix

The case study data revealed the importance of external factors, as characterized by the sub-themes, in the evolution of beliefs (Table 4.4). I found it informative to introduce a new dimension to the subject by identifying and establishing many of the relevant external factors that influenced how the participants' beliefs evolved. I listed these external factors in the third column of the Belief Evolution Matrix - in an arbitrary manner. It must be noted that this distribution was made for clarity and did not suggest that a certain factor had influence on only one belief. The Belief Evolution Matrix was intended to be multidimensional in its representation of the participants' belief evolution, in contrast to the CBAM which suggests more of a two dimensional representation. Finally, a succinct description of the evolved belief is provided in the fourth column of the evolution matrix and is labeled Evolved Beliefs.

The Belief Evolution Matrix is a visualization tool designed for greater understanding of the complexity in belief development and has no specific operational role, although it is possible to envision such a process. In these cases, the evolution matrices represented a transition from the start of the study to the end (similar to that provided by the CBAM, but more prolific and

complex). The benefit of this representation was that it displayed starting preconceptions and the relevant external factors that influence the evolution of beliefs.

Conclusions of Evolving Beliefs and RTI

This qualitative research study was aimed at constructing an authentic reality formed by the individuals interacting within their distinct social environments. Although in this section I attempted to construct some generalizations and concise representations about this reality, an equally significant aspect of the study was the simple act of sharing by the participants of their

Table 4.5

Belief Evolution Matrix for the Veteran

Basic Belief or Instinct	Initial Beliefs	External Factors	Evolved Beliefs
Fear, apprehension of the new reform	Misconceptions about the theory and practice of RTI	More information communicated about RTI (professional development)	Better understanding; modest endorsement
Comfort in the status quo	Concern about added responsibilities	Additional responsibilities were imposed	Apprehensions remained
Trust that effective past practice is the best course	Concerns about lack of teacher autonomy.	RTI reliance on committees and objective evaluations rather than teacher judgments.	Concerns remained
Skepticism about change. Lack of confidence in organizations.	Uncertainties about school-wide support	Limited school and administrative support	Skepticism remained
Concerns about personal inadequacy or disempowerment	Worries about ability to remediate students with differing abilities and attitudes	Externalities such as social promotion, added responsibilities, and available resources	Belief evolved to one of a guarded participation

Table 4.6

Belief Evolution Matrix for the Specialist

Basic Belief or Instinct	Initial Beliefs	External Factors	Evolved Beliefs
Fear, apprehension of the new reform	Misconceptions about the theory and practice of RTI	More information communicated about RTI (professional development)	Modest endorsement
Comfort in the status quo	Concern about added responsibilities	Additional responsibilities were imposed	Responsibilities accepted
Trust that effective past practice is the best course	Concerns about lack of teacher autonomy.	RTI reliance on committees and objective evaluations rather than teacher judgments.	Mistrust of third party advise
Skepticism about change. Lack of confidence in organizations.	Uncertainties about school-wide support	Limited school and administrative support	Skepticism increased
Concerns about personal inadequacy or disempowerment	Worries about ability to remediate students with differing abilities and attitudes	Externalities such as social promotion, added responsibilities, and available resources	Belief evolved to one of a restrained participation

Table 4.7

Belief Evolution Matrix for the Novice

Basic Belief or Instinct	Initial Beliefs	External Factors	Evolved Beliefs
Fear, apprehension of the new reform	Misconceptions about the theory and practice of RTI	More information distributed about RTI	Endorsement
Comfort in the status quo	Concern about added responsibilities	Additional responsibilities were imposed	Responsibilities accepted
Trust that effective past practice is the best course	Concerns about lack of teacher autonomy	RTI reliance on committees and objective evaluations	Concerns remained, cooperation developed
Skepticism about change. Lack of confidence in organizations.	Uncertainties about school-wide support	Limited school and administrative support	Skepticism relieved but still remained
Concerns about personal inadequacy or disempowerment	Worries about ability to remediate students with differing abilities and attitudes	Externalities such as social promotion, added responsibilities, and rationed resources	Belief evolved to one of a more enthusiastic participation

beliefs, perceptions, and ideas. The gathering of these personal thoughts into this document has provided a rich and genuine data base from which to extract contextual information for future quantitative studies.

The Veteran largely refused to establish a personal motivation for sincere participation in the RTI implementation process. She admitted early at the outset of the study that she was not receptive to change and maintained a similar position throughout the study. She remained wary of what she considered another practice that was neither presented in a clear manner nor demonstrated to make learning gains with the students she taught. She considered RTI to be another educational fad that required too much fruitless paperwork from the classroom teacher. Thus, her beliefs evolved little to help in proactively implementing the reform.

The Specialist came to the study with the most experience in specifically modifying instruction for at-risk students. Yet her prevailing attitude proved to be one that was anxious and apprehensive about using and sharing the strategies her special education training provided. She did voice some creative ideas in the focus group meetings; however, she was reluctant to initiate or implement the strategies she suggested with her at-risk students. She was somewhat motivated to change her beliefs, but the reward or incentive from her participation was insufficient to produce significant belief evolution.

The Novice's belief system may have shown the greatest change about the RTI reform. By the end of the study, and aided by his RTI grade chair position, he seemed eager to put the reform into practice. Though he often referred to "a philosophical difference" between RTI tier practices and his ideas of how remediation should occur, the Novice's beliefs did positively evolve to becoming a supporter of the RTI methods. Presumably, his participation as a leader in RTI implementation process provided sufficient reward for some modification of his beliefs,

although his willingness, skill, and aptitude to carry out the reform's interventions remained lukewarm. It was interesting as his responsibility and autonomy increased in RTI execution, so did his beliefs about the reform despite the problematic external factors.

With that said, the data from this study strongly suggested that teachers' beliefs evolved slowly and carefully in regards to implementing a new reform. The initial preconceptions about RTI as listed in the evolution matrices for the participants presented a formidable barrier to changing beliefs. Secondly, the factors in which the implementation took place, also listed in the evolution matrices, did not provide sufficient reward or incentive to modify these initial preconceptions. Further elaborations will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Findings for Research Question Two

The second research question that guided the study asked the following: How do teachers enact their beliefs regarding RTI in their classroom practice? In analyzing the data from the participants, three themes emerged as points of concern in executing the Response to Intervention reform. The three themes were: (1) Instructional Responsibilities; (2) Enactment Barriers; and (3) Collaborative Practices. These three themes were further broken down to sub-themes listed accordingly.

Theme 1: Instructional Responsibilities

The veteran. The first theme involved the instructional responsibilities created by enacting Response to Intervention. In the Veterans view, the answerable work of documenting and providing evidence of student progress took time away from other teaching opportunities that could be beneficial. She commented, "It's hard to work RTI interventions into your classroom because there is so much to do." She added, "Also, documenting what you have done is very difficult and keeps you away from doing anything else."

In a later interview, the Veteran continued to point out the tension caused by the responsibilities of documenting for RTI. She asserted, “There would be things that you would try normally anyway without having to document everything.”

An intervention imposed on the Veteran was to accommodate a fourth grader who needed a safe place to “cool down”. In the second interview in May, she discussed her responsibility to deal with the intervention of the student. She stated,

For a good part of the day I got stuck with this kid who has a behavior problem. He can't attend to instruction, and what am I supposed to do when he runs out of work? I have stuff to do and a fifth grade class to teach. I mean is this the best place for a fourth grader?

In reflection, the Veteran could never find the incentive to enact the RTI interventions. In the final interview, she summed up her enactment performance with RTI. She commented, “Besides filling out the RTI paperwork, I honestly have not done many interventions besides signing agendas. I have been doing the things I always do and it has worked for me.”

The specialist. In the first interview, the Specialist agreed with the practice of documenting and providing evidence of student progress, but questioned whether the procured data were used competently. She asserted, “At the tier 3 meetings I have been to, discussion centered on benchmark scores or CRCT results. . . I was rarely asked for my documented and graphed evidence.”

Speculation on the effectiveness of documenting and organizing data about student behavior, as it turns out, was a major issue for the Specialist. She protested,

I don't know how you could graph behavior anyhow except for the frequency of behaviors. But the types of behaviors that we have are so wide ranging within the same kid. I mean what kind of graph could you create to show these behaviors?

The problems associated with carrying out the RTI teaching models and interventions with limited human resources were concerning for the Specialist. She observed,

We have three people (inclusion teachers) going from room to room to room. They are not spending the time that they need to help in planning with the teachers, or coming up with ideas to help them. Inclusion is more than just having somebody in the classroom.

The novice. While the Novice eventually grew to recognize the importance of documentation and evidence based interventions, initially he felt overwhelmed with the added instructional undertakings the reform generated. He considered his time could be better used in discussing and deliberating with experienced teachers to learn of alternative teaching techniques. In the first interview, the Novice pointed out the struggle with the additional duties. He remarked, "For a first year teacher, everything is new. I need to figure out how I would be able to teach a class while collecting and documenting the interventions."

The Novice continually labored with the directives of proper remediation for at-risk students. He was confused about whether to continue with work on grade level material or to teach more to the students' abilities. He questioned, "What is the difference between an intervention and an accommodation, or a modification?" Then, in answering his own question, he concluded, "Extra help is needed either way. If a student can't do fifth grade work, she won't be able to make any progress without having (been taught) the skill."

Theme 2: Enactment Barriers

The veteran. Enactment barriers were a recurring theme in this research, and the Veteran pointed out a sub-theme of student apathy. She shared, “Effort by the students makes a big difference. It’s difficult dealing with the ones that don’t care.” In the second interview, the Veteran discussed how the RTI system can get inundated with apathetic students. She stated, “Some of the kids that didn’t do well in fourth grade don’t need to be referred to RTI, just because they didn’t try. All these apathetic students bog down the system.”

In the first interview, the Veteran asserted another tension point about the role of special education and RTI. Without perceived help, special education’s lack of assistance became a barrier to the Veteran. During the second interview, she discussed special education’s diminishing role in the RTI process. She remarked, “If special education pulled their kids out instead of pushing them into my class then there would be smaller groups for RTI and it would be possible to give the struggling students the attention they need.”

The specialist. The Specialist addressed student behavior as a difficulty to RTI enactment. In the first interview, she discussed feelings of isolation within the context of discipline and behavior. She shared that “it’s hard to do the interventions with other kids acting up.” Rarely did she object to academic interventions, yet the heavy load of behavior interventions in the fifth grade caused angst. She asserted, “It is so hard to stop instruction because I have to fill out a behavior chart.”

In the final interview in October, the Specialist continued to complain about the barriers of student behavior. She lamented, “The behavior thing just gets me because I have not seen anything, any kind of strategy that has been helpful or useful.”

The Specialist also brought up a barrier to RTI about the lack of psychological testing to provide further understanding of a student's struggles. She discussed one student as it related to additional assessments. She shared,

This student has been in SST since she has been in first grade and she is still in SST. The problem is she has been behind for years, but still (she has had) no testing to help with appropriate instruction. We have really just been doing the same things.

In another sub-theme involving teachers' enactment barriers, the Specialist discussed the lengthy effort that was required to get additional services. In the second interview, she asserted,

I have been appalled that some of these students have fallen through the cracks for so long. I really believe that if RTI is to work it should be able to fix things without an unreasonable amount of time required to get some extra help.

The novice. The sub-theme of student behavior also proved to be a troubling barrier for the Novice. Throughout his interviews and grade level meetings, the Novice commented on the poor conduct of the students in the grade level. He pointed out, "All we teachers really deal with and turn our focus on is behavior. I think RTI can deal with academic issues but behavior is the killer."

At the end of the study with his increased knowledge and experience with the RTI process, the Novice added concern over student apathy. He stressed that RTI interventions were not student-directed, but teacher directed. He quipped,

The (RTI) goal isn't helping to motivate the student or helping them to take responsibility for their own education. All the kids in my homeroom who are having a hard time are unmotivated. . . It's hard to find a really good candidate for the RTI process when the students are simply lazy.

The Novice also felt that lack of parental support was an enactment barrier. He remarked, “If the parents don’t want to be a part of (RTI), there is little that can be done to move the kid forward.” In the first focus group meeting in May, when discussing the ethical vignette about the fictitious student, the Novice repeated his dismay about lack of parent involvement. He reiterated, “If the parents don’t care, they won’t do anything to support us and it’s next to impossible to reach the kid.”

In the exit interview the Novice’s continued his commentary about the hurdles that parent apathy presents to RTI. He discussed the steps needed to gain parental involvement. He shared, “I think RTI can’t be as effective without the parents involved in the process. We need to sit down with the parents and tell them this is what we are going to do.”

Theme 3: Collaborative Practices

The veteran. The third theme that surfaced when analyzing the RTI case study data involved teacher collaborative practices. The Veteran felt that the collaboration by the grade level teachers was largely ineffectual. She claimed that teachers, “tell each other what they already know and most of it is (about) behaviors.”

During the second focus group in October, in discussing the ethical vignette, the Veteran crafted an idea with real collaborative possibilities. She envisioned, “Since her gaps in math are so pronounced, what about sending her to fourth grade math at a different time than we do. That would be a real double dip of math.” Interestingly, this idea of “double dipping” a fifth grade student into a fourth grade class has become an inventive intervention at the site.

The specialist. Commenting on teacher collaboration, the Specialist recognized the strength in sharing and discussing strategies. However, she also questioned the etiquette of meetings in which RTI was discussed, noting a lack of follow through at the grade level. To

improve the collaboration efforts, the Specialist recognized the importance of completing the prerequisites. She remarked,

Just following the procedures and filling out the paperwork. In order to get anybody to the RTI level 3 meetings, and get some testing done, we need to have all that paperwork done and evidence collected. . . we just can't say we have talked about it in grade level meetings.

In the exit interview in October, the Specialist failed to observe progress with the RTI process. She shared, "The (RTI) process is about the same as it was from last year. At the grade level meetings, all we did was just talk and complain with no note taking or anything else constructive."

The novice. The Novice was initially disillusioned by the grade level meetings that were intended to be an exchange of ideas and strategies, but often proved to be unproductive. He described the meetings as "vent-fests". He elaborated, "There is no cohesiveness or rationale to all the complaining. I think we would be better off being brutally honest."

Later, the Novice indicated that these meetings became more effective by means of constructive and useful dialogue through concurrently completing the necessary paperwork. He commented on his leadership in the final interview, as he stated, "Our meetings have gone better. There is a better understanding of the whole process, and with one person leading (the discussion), there is less complaining and more talking about what is going to be done for a particular student."

Comparing Grade Level and Focus Group Meetings

To illustrate the collaborative concerns that the research participants voiced about the effectiveness of the grade level meetings, Figure 4.1 gives the approximate breakdowns of the

time usage in those meetings. Effective implementation, inferred from the participants' dialogue, can be understood as helping the at-risk student with proactive interventions and completing the necessary paperwork so involved. In the first three meetings (April 2, April 23, and May 7), discussion centered on the participants' proper understanding of the processes. While some dialogue in these early meetings did concentrate on specific students and their individual interventions, the majority of the banter voiced confusion about RTI. It was in these first meetings that the grade level decided it needed further assistance in the form of two meetings with the RTI committee to clear up misconceptions. The two following grade level meetings (May 14 and May 21) primarily focused on debriefing both of the RTI informative meetings to get a better grasp of the reform's processes.

The four grade level meetings beginning the 2009-2010 school year (September 10th and 30th, and October 15th and 22nd) exhibited a greater focus of prescriptive help for individual students. Less time was spent in discussing and deliberating over RTI procedures and a clearer understanding of the reform's intent was evident. Off-task discussions, though, remained noticeable in these later meetings and consequently these misused minutes remained a significant concern during the duration of the study. Figure 4.1 breaks down the grade level meetings below.

The breakdown of the focus group meetings revealed a different application. These group meetings involved ethical vignettes about fictitious students and were open for deliberation about one specific student. The numbers indicate these discussions were better focused and involved less off-task behavior. Further, a greater amount of creative and inventive ideas surfaced during the consideration of the fabricated student and his/her troubles. When I

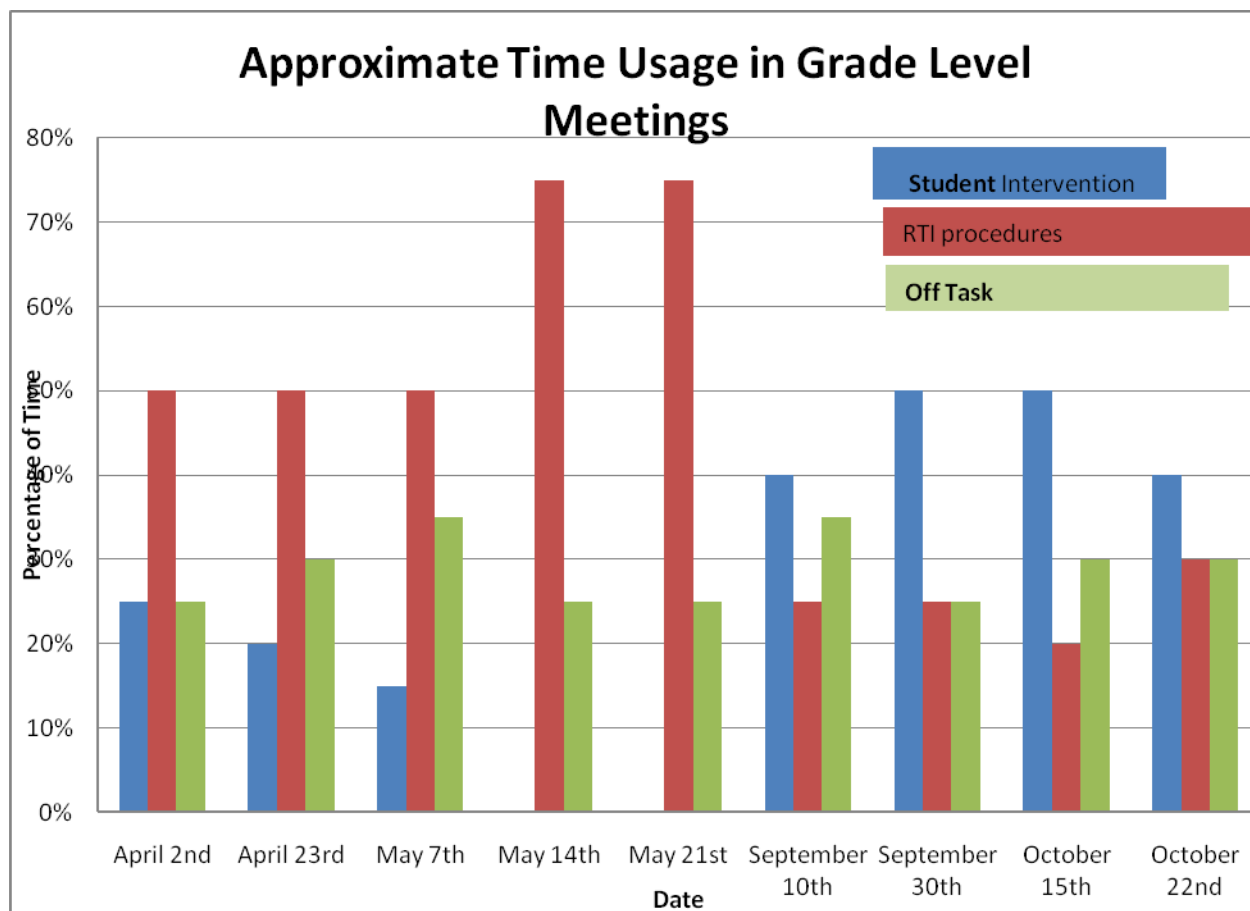


Figure 4.1. Approximate time usage in grade level meetings.

transcribed these meetings, it was evident to me that the dialogue moved progressively to help improve the situation for the at-risk student. Figure 4.2 gives the breakdown of approximate managed time in these focus group meetings.

Review of Data for Themes and Sub-Themes

The three themes identified through the data about RTI enactments were (1) Instructional Responsibilities, (2) Enactment Barriers, and (3) Collaboration. Contained within these three main themes were several points of tension, and these sub-themes were influential. An effort to illustrate these prevailing points is made below in Table 4.8. Table 4.8 displays the recognized themes and lists the sub-themes that caused friction with the participant's ability to enact the RTI interventions. These topics will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

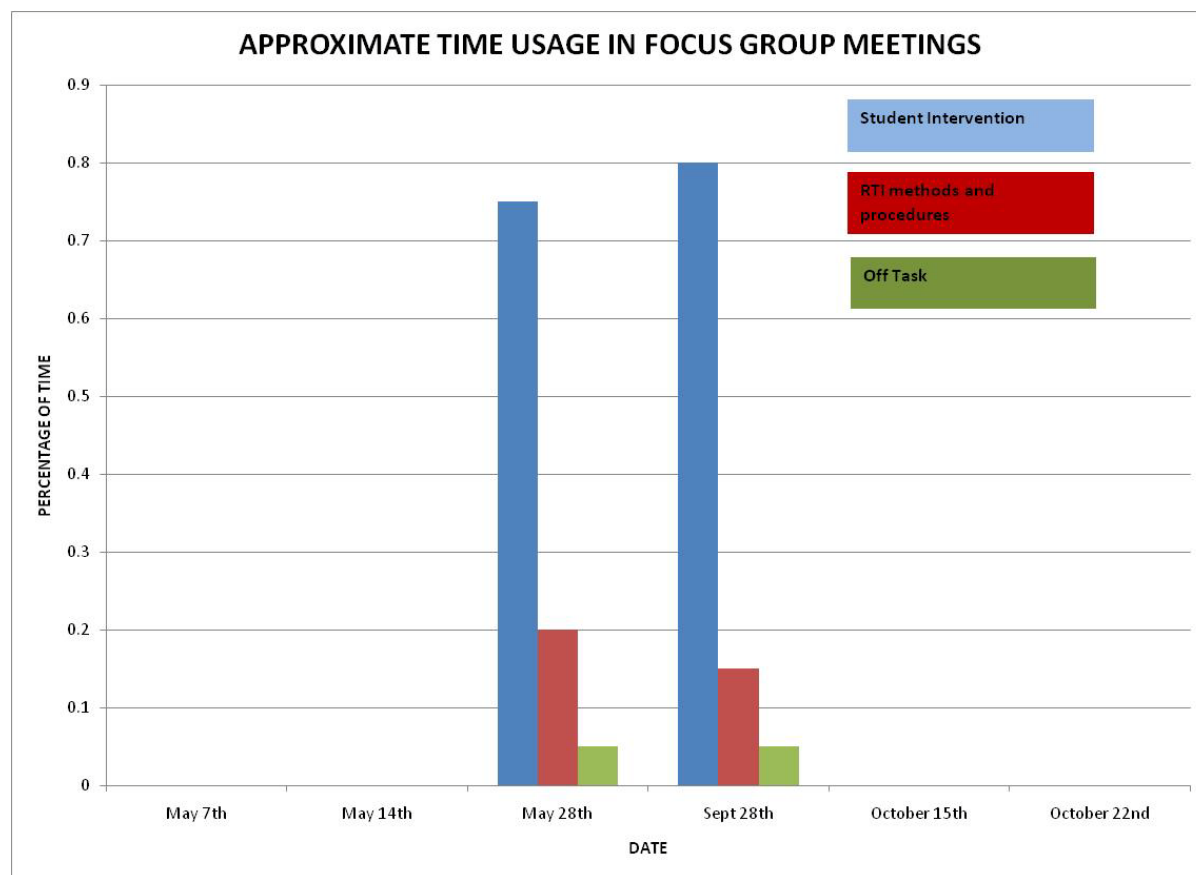


Figure 4.2. Approximate time usage in focus group meetings.

Table 4.8

Themes and Sub-Themes for Research Question Two

Themes		Sub-Themes	
Instructional Responsibilities	Documentation	Interventions	Remediation Concerns
Enactment Barriers	Student Apathy	Special Ed. Obstacles	Student Behaviors
	Psychological Testing	Time	Parental Involvement
Collaborative Practices			

The Concerns Based Adoption Model

Hall and his associates were concerned in the 1970's with how reforms were adopted in institutional settings (Hall, 1974). They observed that successful reforms could be categorized as passing sequentially through a series of levels, which they called Levels of Use (LoU). The categorization and definition of these Levels of Use is provided in Table 4.9.

Hall observed further that the participants associated with a reform had a variety of attitudes about the reform. He was able to categorize these attitudes for the purposes of his model into Stages of Concern (SoC), which are defined in Table 4.10 on the next page.

The crucial step for CBAM is based on the conclusions that when a reform is successfully adopted, a correlation exists between the SoC's and the LoU's. Basically, as a reform is adopted, the Level's of Use move progressively from Non-Use to Renewal. Along with this activity, the Stages of Concern's similarly move from Non-Use to Refocusing. Hall depicted this relationship on a graph of the SoC's versus the LoU's. I have provided my version of this graph as Figure 4.3. The essential point in Hall's graph is that as the reform is (successfully) adopted, the SoC's and LoU's move together in a generally diagonal direction. Hall went further by providing an envelope for successful adoption behaviors, as Figure 4.3 illustrates below.

The result of this analysis became known as the Concerns Based Adoption Model or CBAM, which I have discussed elsewhere. CBAM enables those who are introducing an innovation to assess its potential for successful adoption by interviews, questionnaires, and other feedback from the participants. For my purposes, CBAM provided a structure for presenting the results portrayed by the participants in this study in order to answer Research Question Two.

Table 4.9

CBAM's Levels of Use

Levels of Use	Description of Levels of Use
O. Non Use	The user does not know the innovation exists.
I. Orientation	The user is learning about the innovation and the responsibilities.
II. Initial Training	The user is trained about the logistics of the innovation.
III. Mechanical	The user is engaged in pilot use of the innovation.
IV. Independent	The user adequately handles the innovation independently.
V. Integrated	The user actively seeks collaboration with peers in the setting.
VI. Renewing	The user analyzes, modifies, and adopts innovation in the setting.

Table 4.10

CBAM's Stages of Concern

Stages of Concern	Description of Stages of Concern
0. Awareness	I am unaware of the reform.
1. Informational	I become aware of the reform.
2. Personal	How will the reform affect me?
3. Management	I need more specific information about the details.
4. Consequence	Am I having an effect on the learners?
5. Collaboration	Can I associate with others?
6. Refocusing	Can I make it better?

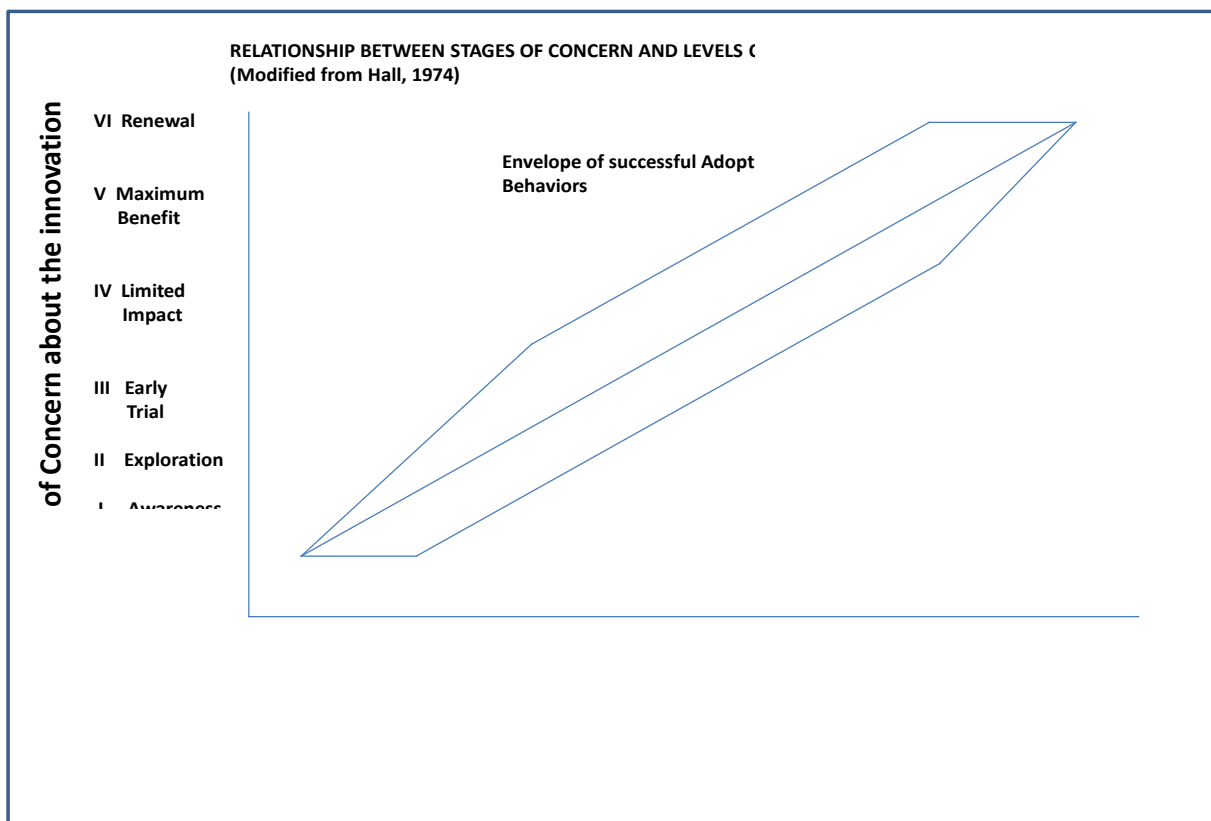


Figure 4.3. Relationship between Stages of Concern (SoC) and Levels of Use (LoU).

Findings generated through the CBAM. The enactment of teacher beliefs was concerned with how the RTI innovation was adopted by the participants, or what the CBAM calls Levels of Use. The limitations identified with the CBAM in the previous section remained, but the CBAM methodology did have value as a setting to formulate and express an answer to this second research question. For this purpose, I consolidated the sum of the participants' expressions of concern into the single metric of the CBAM, namely the SoC. Although the CBAM provides for elaborate ways of scoring pre-developed questionnaires to establish SoC's, I felt that the case study data gave me sufficient insight to assign values to the participants. My evaluations are shown in Table 4.11 below.

Table 4.11

Participants' Initial and Final Stages of Concern

Participant	Initial Stage of Concern	Final Stage of Concern
Veteran	Unaware	Awareness
Specialist	Unaware	Exploration
Novice	Unaware	Limited Impact

As I noted above, it is also the contention of the CBAM that there are observable differences in how individuals use an innovation. These differences are considered to be identifiable and measurable and the method goes to great length to explain them. In order to follow a consistent methodology in answering the research questions, I have constructed a table similar to Table 4.11 for the progression through the study of the participants' LoU's. Again, I felt that the information provided by the case study approach enabled me accurately to designate where each participant began and ended the study, and I have discussed my designation in the material that follows. My evaluations are shown in Table 4.12 below.

Tables 4.11 and 4.12 made it possible for me to plot the transition of the participants as the study progressed onto Hall's CBAM graph. This is shown in Figure 4.4, where I have used different colored arrows to indicate the development of the individual participants as the study progressed.

In referencing Figure 4.4, the graph shows that all of the participants progressed in their Levels of Use of RTI at least to the Initial Training Stage, with the Novice ultimately exhibiting Independent action. I did not feel that the progression from initial SoC to final SoC was uniform, thus I illustrated this non-linearity in Figure 4.4.

Table 4.12

Participants' Initial and Final Levels of Use

Participant	Initial Level of Use	Final Level of Use
Veteran	Non-use	Initial Training
Specialist	Non-use	Mechanical
Novice	Non-use	Independent-Integrated

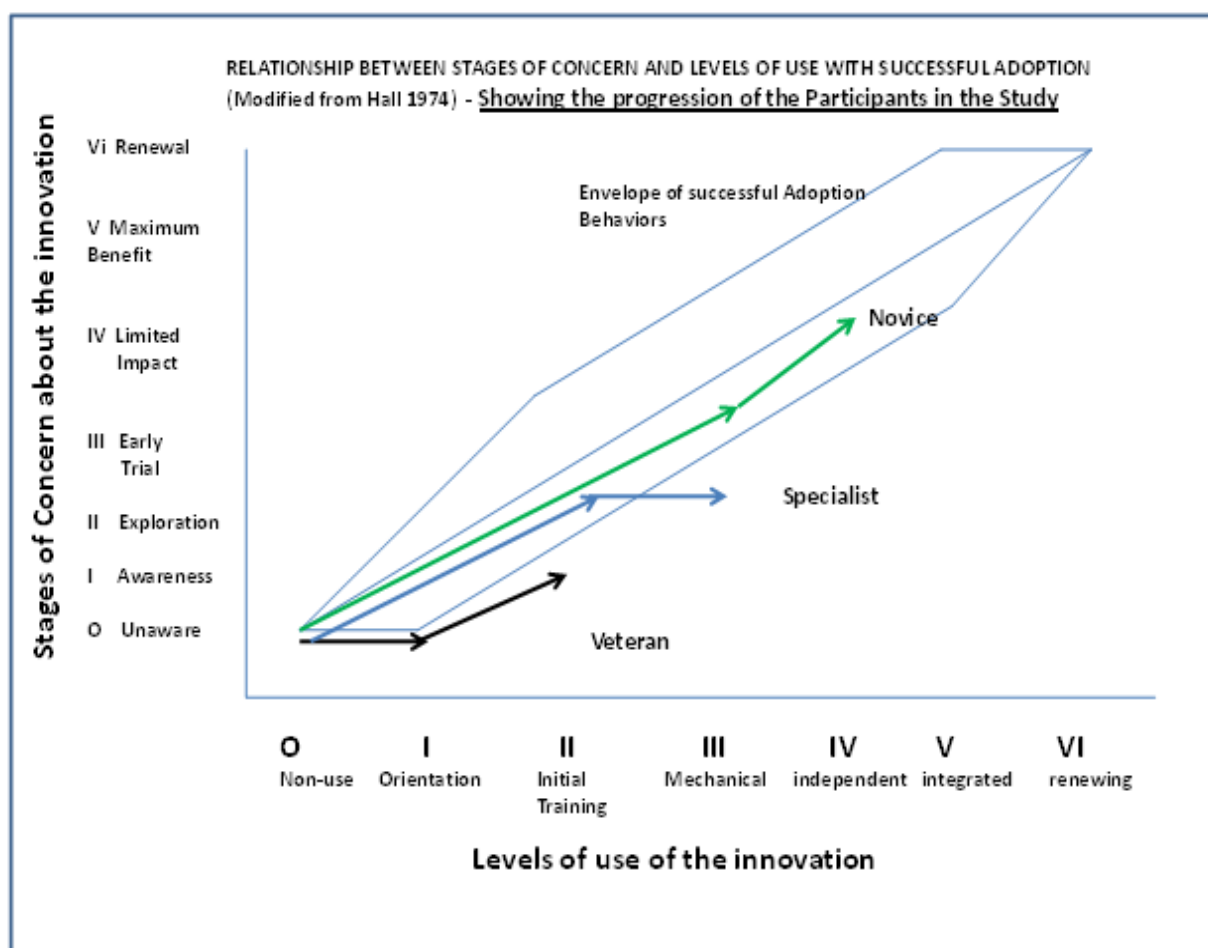


Figure 4.4. CBAM's progression of each participant.

The CBAM-based representations on Figure 4.4 provide an easily visualized pathway within the framework of an established system for how the teachers' enacted their beliefs regarding RTI into their classroom practices. Presenting the results of this study within the CBAM framework enabled me to compare the behavior of the participants with the model's criteria for successful implementation. It appeared that two of the three participants fell outside the model envelope, and in an interesting manner. They were below the envelope, meaning that their use was ahead of their concerns, contrary to most respondents in a CBAM study. However, this is consistent with the privacy of teachers' beliefs and their sense of responsibility in enacting school reforms.

Summary of the CBAM Findings

In enacting her beliefs about RTI into the classroom, the Veteran found reasons to be guarded about RTI. Initially, the data suggested that her misunderstanding of the RTI process kept her from applying the process in her classroom. She indicated that much of the uncertainty stemmed from the lack of support she felt when following the RTI procedures, and the added responsibilities that followed. Because of the work required from the process, the Veteran enacted few of the proposed strategies and neglected from presenting her homeroom students to the tiers of intervention process. The Veteran's enacted beliefs concerning RTI suggested that she considered RTI to have limited success at the school and with her own students. Her enactment was deemed to be somewhere between the Initial Training and Mechanical levels.

The Specialist found the major hurdle in enacting RTI processes was the inefficiency in the grade level meetings. Instead of researching previous strategies that were implemented in prior grades, she found the discussions to be unproductive in constructing a plan to help the at-risk students. The Specialist attributed part of the wastefulness to the lack of school support,

which tended to prolong the RTI process. Further, the lack of legitimate suggestions by the tier 3 committee led to interventions that lacked perceived helpfulness. At this point in the process, the Specialist suggested that she had an expectation of greater use of school resources in the form of small group instruction to remediate these chronic low achievers, often in the form of behavior intervention. Her enactment was deemed to be hovering near the Mechanical levels.

The Novice, as was discussed earlier in this chapter, found the externalities of the teaching job to be major hurdles to enacting RTI into his classroom practices. He pointed out that student behavior, lack of support from the administration, and incomplete focus in RTI grade level meetings were distractions. Yet his enacted beliefs evolved reasonably, as he sifted through the various external factors of the teaching position. To his defense, as a teacher with limited experience, he expected to have been provided a better course of action in which strategies and procedures were better established to help the students. Nonetheless, the Novice's enactment can be considered at the Independent level.

In conclusion, the participants did not display an equal easing of their concerns, with the Veteran, for example, unable to negotiate past her preconceptions. Perhaps some aspect of the participants' belief system (other than the categories listed along the y-axis of Figure 4.4) was at work, whether it was respect, loyalty, duty, or responsibility. It was apparent that an attempt to discover this aspect of their belief systems was open ended and very likely impossible to discover directly. However, I believed the multi-faceted nature of this study provided additional insight into how these beliefs were enacted, and much was learned by the case study approach in which the participants were allowed to have a free range in expressing their concerns.

Findings for Research Question Three

The third and final research question that guided this study was: How is an ethic of care reflected in the planning and implementation of RTI? The concluding interviews and focus groups proved to be the most helpful in giving information about each teacher's ethic of care. The following pages centered on how the participants saw an ethic of care playing out in their personal belief system and also how care was reflected in the implementation of Response to Intervention.

The Planning and Implementation of Care

The veteran. In discussing care, the Veteran related how she had not spent much time reflecting on how it related to RTI. She believed the children she taught were cared for, even though the Veteran did not consider herself an affectionate person. She remarked, "I would like to think that the kids know I care about them, I praise them, I reward them, and I do stick up for them though that doesn't have anything to do with RTI. Care doesn't have to be warm and fuzzy." To the Veteran, caring meant that she executed her teacher responsibilities along with being upfront and truthful with her students. She stated, "I believe it is more important that they learn the curriculum rather just catering to their feelings. Following the curriculum is my job after all."

An ethic of care was not much of a conscious factor in the Veteran's application of RTI. She felt that she and other teachers "are doing what they have to do to get the kid some help. Isn't that caring for them?"

As a final thought during member checking, she suggested that it wasn't that she didn't care enough for the students to follow RTI; it was just that she felt this type of work was ineffective. The Veteran commented, "The RTI interventions aren't really that much different or

successful than an EIP class.” She concluded pointedly, “Care is in the teaching not just in documenting the interventions.”

The specialist. The Specialist, more of an outwardly compassionate person than the Veteran, worked hard to show her students that she cared in her classroom. It was her belief that demonstrating care created a positive environment in which the students achieved greater success. The Specialist suggested, “Care is very important. If the kids know you care for them they are going to work harder for you in the classroom. If they think you don’t care they aren’t going to care either.”

Though the data were limited about an ethic of care in the RTI process, the Specialist commented that teachers brought students to RTI because they do fundamentally care. She also indicated that an ethic of care can be demonstrated in different ways. She maintained,

If you are very caring as a person you will be very caring as a teacher. But teachers also show care in different ways. Some may be firm and strict, but it is their way of doing things that doesn’t necessarily mean they care less.

The unfortunate part, repeated by the Specialist, was that the lack of flexibility and timely actions adversely affected the establishment of care within the construction of Response to Intervention. She asserted,

A teacher that brings a student to RTI does care for that student and is worried about him and wants him to succeed. But (RTI) ends up being such a long process with so many details that some of the caring aspects are lost.

The novice. The Novice considered himself to be a conscientious and watchful teacher when it came to expressing care in his classroom. He made concerted efforts to handle classroom situations constructively through the relationships and understandings he developed

with his students. He remarked, “You need to just know the kid. I am not mean or harsh. I just adjust, and that works with a lot of the power kids.” He indicated that he did not see a very strong connection between a care ethic and Response to Intervention. When asked if the Response to Intervention process was an innovation that lent itself to care, the Novice responded, “No, I don’t think so. Because if it was about care then it would be about getting the kids what they needed as soon as possible. But there are so many loopholes.”

Problems that affected care fulfillment included the over concentration of teaching to grade level norms instead of addressing true learning gaps, he maintained. The Novice stated, “My view is that meeting the student at his learning level shows care.” He also felt that the small group work endorsed by RTI exhibits another form of teacher care. He commented, “Small group work can really help the motivation of struggling students because the feedback and attention is right up front. That might be how RTI can best serve these students who need care more than just purely academics.”

Findings Generated through the CBAM

To provide my concept of care and the broader interpretation of an ethic of care with specific interpretation, I have followed the pattern of the CBAM and introduced a measure for care called Stages of Caring. While it may seem presumptuous to assign stages or points to caring, in a sense it was no more arbitrary than the CBAM’s assignment of Stages of Concern to express the users’ needs, motivations, problems, and requests in the original formulation of the CBAM. Moreover, an important trend was explained by categorizing participants in the Stages of Concern by demonstrating that early concerns were more self-oriented than later, more developed interests. This same premise can be attached to caring in that the larger the sphere of

influence affected, the more valuable the caring. I have proposed a set of Stages of Caring, listed in Table 4.13, with the individual categories identified by the definition of their focus.

Table 4.13

Stages of Caring and Typical Expression/Acts of Caring about the Reform

	Stages of Caring	Expressions and Acts of Caring
Caring	O. Indifference	What is Caring anyway?
	I. Business as usual.	I do my job, but can caring be something that could help my teaching?
	II. Care as a personal enrichment to the teacher	If I carry out the innovation with dignity, I may be able to become a better teacher.
An Ethic of Care	III. Care as a benefit to the special student	If I carry out the innovation with special attention to the struggling students, we may both benefit.
	IV. Care as a benefit to the class	It is not just the special students, but the class as a whole will benefit from my attention.
	V. Care as a benefit to the school	Cared for students will be better situated to enrich the entire school and the people involved.
	VI. Care as a benefit to the community	Ultimately, society benefits when students are well educated and provided with care.

It was then possible to represent how caring was reflected in the adoption of RTI in the same manner that the CBAM indicated how concerns were reflected. Modification of Hall's graph (Figure 4.3 displayed earlier) was used as a format to express possible relationships between Stages of Caring and Levels of Use.

Participants' stages of caring and the CBAM. I maintained that care involves *an action* that *aims* to help individual teachers and the collective grade level by facilitating professional work that is important in advancing and progressing instructional practices for students intimately involved in the process. By this definition, care was made distinct from concerns in that care demanded both a will and an action. This explicit nature and requirement of caring then made the relationship with Levels of Use one that was straightforward and unambiguous. Moreover, since the Levels of Use were already determined previously by using the CBAM, a certain Stage of Care would not change the already established Level of Use.

I included an expanded explanation as to what is meant by the various Stages of Caring in Table 4.10. Following this interpretation, I then went on to review the individual participant's case study data from this caring perspective.

I considered each participant to have begun the study in the Stage of Caring identified as indifference (as far as the adoption of RTI was concerned). As the study progressed, the participants moved into other Stages of Caring as they became involved in the reform.

I have categorized the Veteran's eventual Stage of Caring as somewhere between Indifference and Business as Usual. As in the preceding examinations with regard to planning and implementing RTI, the Veteran was unwilling or unable to modify her views to embrace the new reform. Her caring focus was closely personal, and she never broadened her perspective.

The Specialist's ultimate Stage of Care was determined to be somewhere between the Special Student and The Class. The Specialist had both the disposition and the training to exhibit much caring, but her reservations about RTI prevented her from elevating her Stage of Caring much beyond the classroom setting.

I have categorized the Novice's final Stage of Caring as being focused on the Community as a Whole. His concern about the influence of parents on the RTI process, his recognition that indifferent students pose unique challenges, and his persistent differences with administrative policies suggest he was an independent thinker as far as RTI was concerned, whose actions would be of value to the community as a whole – the definition of an ethic of care.

With these categories assigned, I then followed the CBAM procedure to depict my representation of the three participants. Figure 4.5 illustrates the relationship between the Stages of Caring and the Levels of Use in this manner, with different colored arrows again indicating the development of the individual participants as the study progressed.

The relationship of care and the CBAM. I did not believe that I could assign an envelope of successful adoption behaviors for caring in the same manner in which the CBAM was configured. (Hall and his collaborators had a great deal of data and experience to steer their construction of such an envelope.) The Stages of Concern are largely based on beliefs and concepts that are lodged in one's mind. CBAM hypothesizes that there is a middle range of relationship between concerns and use, and a moderately stronger stage of concerns or level of use still promotes a successful adoption process because of the hidden and unresolved nature of beliefs. This envelope, then, takes into effect any unknown intentions that can often lead to success. In this study, care involved an action. Thus, an action would be explicit and known would not need an envelope to anticipate the effect.

Nor have I tried to draw any broad interpretation from the representation of Figure 4.5. It appeared that the Stage of Caring increased with the Level of Use, which is natural as the participants in the reform became more familiar with the procedures and hence moved away from their own self-interests. This observation provided a clue for describing how an ethic of

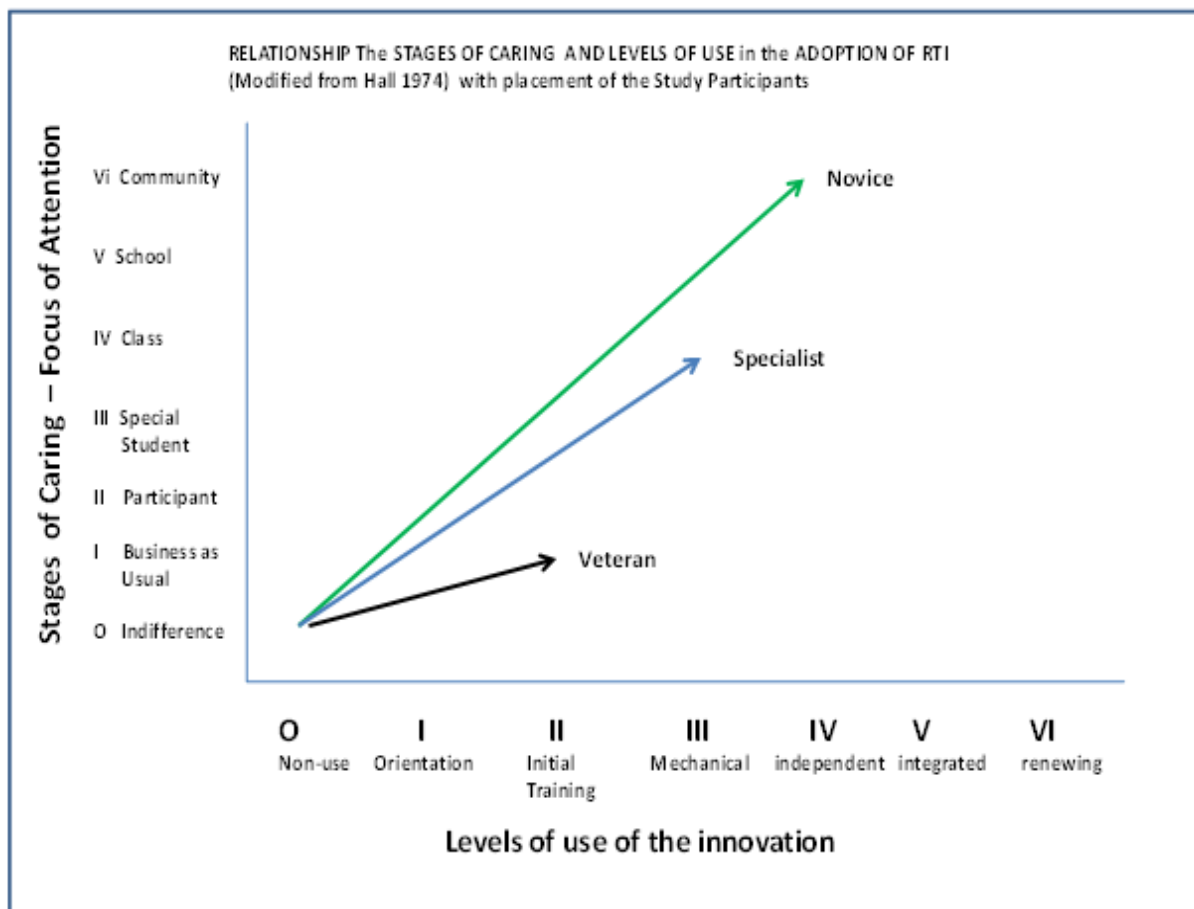


Figure 4.5. Participants' relationship between Stages of Caring and Levels of Use.

care was reflected in the planning and implementation of RTI. Caring was reflected in the decisions of the teachers whether or not to participate enthusiastically in the program, whether to go beyond personal concerns for the sake of the reform and for the benefit of community as a whole.

Chapter Summary

The participants' Level of Care paralleled their Stage of Concern in the CBAM application. The Veteran was less concerned with care and RTI, the Specialist had care interest at the classroom level, and the Novice displayed an ethic of care as he looked towards the community. My categorizations of the Stage of Caring displayed by the participants may be

construed as arbitrary and perhaps generous, but the process of determining the Stage of Caring was no more arbitrary than that in determining the Stage of Concern for the previous question. As in the CBAM, the Stages of Caring represented a complex mixture of beliefs and actions that may not even be obvious to the users themselves. The same can be said about the motivation to execute caring (which, while not expressly addressed in the Stages of Caring, is implicit in the actions involved). As noted above, the case study approach used in this research provided ample information for making these determinations.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I presented a discussion of the research data and analysis used to provide answers to the specific questions. A review of the literature was also provided when it pertained to the line of reasoning. Concluding comments were made after each discussion section. Near the end of the chapter, I included a brief section on my changing role in the study from a classroom to an EIP teacher. I also included a discussion of the limitations of the study and a final piece suggesting recommendations for future policy and practice concerning the Response to Intervention reform. Final thoughts completed the chapter. A review of the specific research questions listed below helped to focus the chapter.

1. How do teachers' beliefs regarding RTI evolve in the process of planning and implementing RTI?
2. How do teachers enact their beliefs regarding RTI in their classroom practice?
3. How is an ethic of care reflected in the planning and implementation of RTI?

Insight into Research Question One

It has been discussed that teachers' beliefs tend to be private affairs mostly unaffected by outside ideas and authority. Ironically, these secretive ideas were highly influential in how teachers executed their duties and characterized their problems (Kagan, 1992, Nespor, 1987). In this study, even though the participants were willing to share their convictions with me, these beliefs proved resistant to change or modification insofar as the present study was concerned. Similar to the literature on teacher beliefs reviewed earlier (Green, 1971; Kagan, 1992; Lortie,

1975; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Rokeach, 1968), this study concluded that the participants' beliefs evolve slowly when implementing a new school reform such as RTI.

In general, the participating teachers' morale can be described as restrained during the study cycle, and this lack of zeal may have hindered a positive modification of beliefs. Greater support from the administration may have helped in serving the teachers with the leadership and knowledge necessary for positively evolving RTI practices and beliefs. Personal attention to the participants could also have been a stimulus necessary for accelerating the advancement of their beliefs (Evans, 1993). Additionally, an increased awareness of the initial apprehensions from the teachers could have paved the way for sincere and genuine growth with Response to Intervention (Hall & Loucks, 1978). Yet the greatest hindrance to a positive evolution of teacher beliefs, perhaps, was the additional duties the implementation of RTI imposed on the participants without garnering their approval. The added responsibilities were an important factor that failed to create a sufficient reward or incentive for optimistic teacher buy-in to RTI.

However, it was not the purpose of this study to provide causal relationships between the transition of beliefs and the influential factors, tempting as that may be. Still, it was important to recognize that the context in which the change was implemented can and does have a strong influence on the evolution of beliefs. Fang (1996) concurred by suggesting that contextual factors heavily affect classroom practices. Fuchs and Deschler (2007) specifically pointed out the importance of understanding the conditions or contextual factors of each school and classroom where RTI is put into practice. Nespor (1987) suggested that emotional components, such as teacher buy-in, have strong components and are difficult to modify. In this study, contextual factors significantly affected teacher buy-in, which was determined to be a make or break issue.

Teacher Buy-In

The modification of beliefs can be looked upon as a learning process whereby the teacher implementing RTI would have (or lack) a motivation to participate enthusiastically in the process, which in turn will (or will not) create a productive tension. Relief of this tension encourages learning and reinforces the response patterns that follow active participation. Whether relief of this tension upon participation in RTI produced a change in beliefs depended upon a number of items, including the context of the participation and the external factors identified through the themes and sub-themes. Findings suggested that the establishment of teacher buy-in, in the form of motivation and interest into RTI, was the overriding factor that determined whether teacher beliefs could be altered to one of constructive change. The study revealed several external factors that deterred teacher buy-in and attraction to the reform.

External factors affecting buy-in. The findings of this study, from a perspective of school reform, made it clear that the selected site did not have a suitable understanding and clear direction of RTI to begin implementation. Sub-theme tensions related to inadequate administrative support, awkward professional development, and uncooperative communication lines confused the participants and complicated their adoption of the reform. These conclusions were consistent with past suggestions that for reasonable reform implementation to occur, teachers must have their hesitations resolved before or even during the execution of the initiative (Hall & Loucks, 1978). Further, the participants lacked the opportunity to experience and be engaged in the reform as learners (Lieberman, 1995). Thus, the teachers failed to become proficient at RTI's procedures.

In that the reform was coming down from the state level and neglected classroom situations raised another concern. The difficulty with top down mandates, pointed out by

Hargreaves (1994), was that large scale reform efforts were difficult to transfer into the classroom. The case of RTI implementation at this site was no different. Yet the participants felt a strong sense of obligation to address the RTI requirements, even though their belief system did not agree with the adjustments. Whether the sense of obligation was deserved or not, I detected that the participants believed that the tension created by this top down mandate hindered positive teacher buy-in and diluted teacher ownership of RTI.

The added responsibilities created by RTI overwhelmed the participants, and the interventions that were implemented failed to display to them a beneficial experience that could change their beliefs about RTI. Guskey (1986) reasoned that if teachers could see that certain practices were advantageous, then their beliefs would undergo realignment. In the present instance, few of the RTI experiences proved to be positive contributors to the teachers' instruction. Instead, most of the interventions were viewed as additional teaching burdens.

A final noted factor that obstructed teacher buy-in was the failure to provide for teacher autonomy and decision making in the process of implementing RTI. The participants in this study felt compelled and obliged to adhere to the prescriptive procedures, even though much time was lost in discussing "what was expected of RTI." Crawford (2004) stated that lack of decision making tends to deskill teachers, and the participants in this study lacked the aptitude to confidently carry out the interventions. Rather than teachers experimenting with and adjusting the RTI process in a cooperative and supportive manner (achieving a Level of Use V in the CBAM structure), meetings often turned adversarial: us (teachers) versus them (administrators) – a hostility that constrained the development of constructive beliefs. Though this conclusion pointed to the already established school culture of teacher apprehension in decision making, it was still an influential factor in the study.

Conclusions about Research Question One

The literature reported on the influence that beliefs can have on the proper implementation of an initiative and that tapping into the convictions of teachers could be an inventive approach to effective and long-lasting school reform (Calderhead, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Pajaras, 1992; Richardson, 1996). However, in this situation, challenging preconceptions such as false impressions about RTI, uncertainties about school-wide support, concerns over the lack of teacher autonomy and decision making, and the failure to garner teacher buy-in proved to be daunting obstacles to the successful modification of teachers' beliefs about the RTI reform.

Insight into Research Question Two

I concluded from this study that the participants enacted their beliefs concerning RTI slowly and carefully into their classroom practices, with initial preconceptions again playing an influential role and the external factors difficult to ignore. Since the concerns for two out of the three participants fell outside of the envelope for sustainability of the reform (by the standards of the CBAM), it could be said that these two participants at least did not expect the RTI reform to last and were reluctant to become too proactive. This short-term attitude about RTI coupled with student resistance towards instruction proved to be two major barriers to enactment. Also, the participants repeatedly identified the lack of human resources as a prevalent hindrance to enacting RTI into their classroom practices.

Social Promotion

The literature indicated that RTI implementation can be effective in public schools by providing more remedial services to a greater population of at-risk students (Martinez et al., 2006; Telzrow et al., 2000; Reschly & Starkweather, 1997). While the results of the study did not contradict this statement, the actual numbers of at-risk students proved to be overwhelming.

The sheer quantity of at-risk students (predominantly defined by failing standardized test scores in 4th grade) caused the intervention load to be beyond what the participants felt they could adequately address. Much of the blame from the participants was directed at social promotion, or grade level promotion, in which students were passed to the next grade despite their unsuccessful academic accomplishments.

Social promotion affected the beliefs and practices of teachers that enacted Response to Intervention. The participants found that many of the at-risk students came into 5th grade with pre-requisite skills several years behind the grade level standards. The teachers were not equipped to carry out the RTI procedures and the remediation necessary for these students' years behind in core subject skills. The literature revealed that in order to have success, various levels of support would be critical for realization (Ikeda et al., 1996; Kovaleski et al., 1996; Tilly, 2003). Unfortunately, the research participants could not depend on additional backing and largely felt unsuccessful in teaching the challenging grade level material and re-teaching past skills. While it can be viewed as a positive that more students received additional services, the quality of the interventions remained suspect.

The familiar fifth grade RTI candidate was one that came to the grade level at least a year or more behind in math or reading proficiency, with behaviors that masked or hid these shortfalls, and an apathy that complicated remediation. Interestingly, social promotion added to the academic issues of these at-risk students by requiring them to perform demanding tasks. Students promoted in such ways felt frustrated and lacked confidence to progress, and often their classroom behavior then became a concern. Lewis (1995) maintained that concentrating on a single outcome; either academic achievement or emotional well-being may have noble intentions but could actually damage the intellectual or social development of our children. Thus it seemed

when RTI interventions focused heavily on academics, the success was short lived as the students fell back into academic and behavioral transgressions. As a result, these at-risk students were rarely dismissed from the second or third tiers of the Response to Intervention hierarchy in fifth grade.

Instructional Practices

A significant amount of the RTI research focused on the younger grades (kindergarten through 3rd grade) and the results reported have been promising (Case et al., 2003; McMaster et al., 2005; Torgesen et al., 1999; Vaughn et al., 2003; Vellutino et al., 1996). Their scheme of RTI was to place available resources into the primary grades to catch up the at-risk students early when they were still within sight of grade level requirements. This study revealed that in 5th grade many of the students' academic abilities and emotional states were beyond the simple interventions that were useful in the lower grades. Therefore, for RTI to be effective in the 5th grade, the participants believed that small group settings would be the best chance to reach these students that had years of unsuccessful school experiences.

Again, the issues of these fifth grade students were complex as compared to younger grade students. Fuchs (2003) argued that the exclusive nature of the problem solving approach based its procedure on the belief that a successful intervention cannot be predetermined or predicted for all students. Most of the common strategies were tried with fifth grade RTI students over the years, but academic achievement was not accomplished. In a regular group setting, student apathy and behavior issues proved to be daunting barriers in fifth grade. The immediate feedback found in the small groups helped with student engagement, and the limiting of distractions and antagonists curbed poor behaviors. While the participants in this study

argued for the small group work which RTI endorsed (Hoover, 2009), again, the resources necessary to facilitate the intimate groups were unavailable.

Designating a RTI Model

The standard protocol model of RTI for the younger grades appeared to be reasonable as a best practice strategy, and that as such, its use could often show success. Hollenbeck (2007) argued that the standard protocol method was straightforward and practical, and its fixed approach did a better job of providing quality control than the collaborative problem solving model. Having a set of standard procedures for the early grades with RTI could catch up many of the struggling students by optimistically leaving a smaller load for the upper grade teachers. Further, most of the students needing special education services for academics could be caught in these earlier years.

However, as the issues became multifaceted in the upper grades, the interventions needed to be creative and original. Research findings from this study indicated that the use of the problem solving approach was necessary in the 5th grade as the common RTI candidate came to fifth grade with several issues impeding academic achievement. VanDerHeyden (2006) indicated that the problem solving approach has evolved into several hybrid models based on schools' unique needs. It then would be realistic to implement the standard protocol with its fixed approach in grades kindergarten through second grade, and the flexible and creative problem solving method for grades three through five. Implementing this hybrid model would regulate the younger grade RTI procedures and produce valuable data for the problem solving approach and its inventive change in the older grades.

The problem solving model could then be constructed to be inventive and resourceful, providing teachers with procedures to remove or decrease the barriers presented by student

apathy and misbehavior. Strategies to create interest with students who lack such appeal could be an approach to RTI enactment. Tapping into student attraction, the use of technology, greater student input into the curriculum, or providing ample incentive could be creative solutions to students' lack of interest.

Conclusions of Research Question Two

Gerber (2005) pointed out that the problem solving approach demands considerable skill, expertise, and collaboration amongst its intervention team in terms of assessment, curriculum, remediation, and an established understanding of the child's unique needs. Fifth grade at-risk students require considerable RTI proficiency for their issues tend to be complex. It can be reasonably recommended that a combination of RTI models be used for whole school implementation. The primary grades would utilize the standard protocol for immediate fixes and data collection while the older elementary grades would use the problem solving approach to address concerns that are deeper rooted.

Interestingly, no students were referred to special education in the first year of RTI implementation in the 2008-2009 school year at the selected school. The participants in the study were not surprised about learning of this piece of information. It can be concluded from the indifferent responses that if at-risk students were to be advanced, the classroom teachers expected they themselves would have the responsibility to remediate the students. Enacting the RTI principles was, consequently, troubling to and perceived as somewhat futile by these teachers who were regularly dealing with the struggling students in a general education classroom. This slightly pessimistic attitude prevailed throughout the study and hindered the enactment process.

Insight into Research Question Three

The benefit from implementing care and an ethic of care into the RTI program may be highest for at-risk fifth grade students. Fifth grade students, for whatever reason, become somewhat distant from the inspirations that held their attention when the school experience was new and fresh. Utilizing care to form relationships, creating alternative methods of instruction, building connection with parents, or finding the resources needed to set up intensive small group work may be an answer for these difficult to reach students.

A caring approach to RTI then makes the remediation effort into one of shared responsibility through the mutual efforts of teachers, parents, and students. The study suggested that it is important to establish incentives for teachers to implement RTI via autonomy, support, and self-direction. It can also be important for the reform to help students find success through similar aspects of enticement and accountability while also encouraging parents to recognize their influence in the total process. It was discovered in enacting RTI that finding an incentive or reward for the students proved to be an unformulated component needed for success. This kind of search seems worthy of consideration because the results of this case study indicated that procedural RTI was often unsuccessful in moving teacher and student alike.

Teacher Collaboration

The act of caring, both in the personal (care) and the communal (an ethic of care), is to develop relationship practices that are relevant to any educational system involved in school change. With this in mind, I felt it necessary to discuss the collaboration efforts evidenced in this study through a lens of caring to express the act through professional cooperation.

For example, I concluded in Chapter 4 that the grade level meetings were limited in their ability to enact RTI practices effectively. In the grade level meetings, teachers vented about

misunderstandings associated with and the added responsibilities required for RTI. While the data displayed improvement in the later meetings of the RTI protocols (Figure 4.1), these developments were, in my opinion, still relatively slow to advance. Little professionalism or caring processes were established at these meetings, despite the attempt at practicing charrette procedures, and the dialogue often turned to chitchat and banter.

The focus group meetings, comparatively, demonstrated an efficient use of time by the participant teachers. The focus group meetings created a trusting atmosphere in which participants could easily share their ideas. The participants were seemingly less constrained by the lack of informal background knowledge of a student and free to voice their professional beliefs before subjectivities took hold of reasoning. Moreover, the focus group meetings helped to inspire and generate creative conversation than the one-on-one interviews. The piggy-backing of suggestions from these meetings was a refreshing change from the rather mundane and nitpicking grade level meetings.

It was in the focus group meetings that care ethics were realized and advanced Stages of Caring were sometimes achieved. For example, a suggestion for RTI paperwork or procedure would be to report on a student without identifying the child by name. This practice may challenge the care literature and everyday reason, as intimate knowledge of a student has been generally considered advantageous, but the teachers could then offer insight without the restriction of detracting prior knowledge. Whether knowledge and first-hand experience about a student's personality affected teacher professionalism was unclear, but the practice of using ethical vignettes with fictitious students proved to be effective and could be a caring boost to effectively implementing the problem solving method.

Level of Caring and Care Literature

As had been reviewed earlier in this study, care research has given the educational community a new perspective about the actions and methods that are commonly used in our classrooms. It was informative to inquire how the proposition of identifying Stages of Caring correlates with this work.

For example, Gilligan (1982) launched the movement with her views that challenged standard and orthodox educational decisions and advocated the importance of building relationships within our schools (hypothetically categorized somewhere between Stages of Caring V and VI). Noddings (1995) suggested care gives educators a heightened sensitivity towards the individual which ultimately leads to greater trust and accomplishments (a Stage III). Belenky et al. (1997) endorsed dialogue to enable the involved people in a situation to understand the influential conditions more thoroughly and forcefully (Stages IV or V). Held (1995) and Tronto (1993) extended care literature to consider the full social context. Their belief in a far-reaching ethic of care extends nicely to public education where many students can be overlooked because of the sheer numbers (Stage VI).

Conclusions of Care Ethics

Because RTI asked for evidence-based authentication, the requirements of the reform elicited data that relied upon factual information, which might be interpreted as mirroring the reform in a low Stage of Caring category. But as my explanations of the Stages of Caring suggested, caring can be found, indeed it is imbedded, in the actions required to carry out the program. It is this objectivity combined with compassionate outreach that enables teachers to exhibit care ethics in their everyday practices.

This study did not intend to suggest that RTI promoted caring; however, RTI did provide a methodology for advancing instructional practices, which made it receptive to caring. By developing the Stages of Caring design, I have been able to describe and analyze the behavior of the participants in a somewhat objective although arbitrary way as they responded to this opportunity. This in turn expanded the concept of care and began to quantify it in some manner. It may be suggested, as a result, that the teachers in this study were more caring than might be inferred from casual examination.

Contribution to the RTI Literature

The purpose of this research was to investigate how teachers' beliefs materialized and evolved through a lens of caring in relation to Response to Intervention. The contribution to the RTI literature is that his study shared an intimate account of teachers' evolved and enacted beliefs as they influence the practice of Response to Intervention. Few, if any, of RTI literature has attempted to garner teacher beliefs as they related to RTI implementation.

Another contribution to the RTI literature is the fact that this study concentrated on fifth grade teachers. As was mentioned earlier, the RTI literature has mostly discussed language and literacy as their center of focus, examining kindergarten through third grade student intervention methods (Case, Speece, & Malloy, 2003; McMaster et al., 2005; Torgeson et al., 1999; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Vellutino et al., 1996). Presenting intimate details of teacher beliefs set in a fifth grade environment is a valuable contribution to the RTI literature. Additionally, the findings from this study can then supplement other quantitative examination by providing personal beliefs and accounts often abandoned with number studies.

Conclusions as a Teacher/Researcher

As was previously discussed, my role changed from a fifth grade classroom teacher to an EIP teacher after the 2008-2009 school year. While this change did not alter the structure of my research into RTI, my own responsibilities with the RTI program were enlarged as I worked with all grade levels within the school. I became accountable for implementing many of the interventions necessary for the EIP students on my case load, and I was a key advisor on the tier 3 school committee that held the meetings to discuss these same at-risk students. The positional move gave me an interesting and different perspective to observe the RTI procedures than I had as a regular 5th grade teacher. As an EIP teacher and RTI tier 3 school committee member, I had more of a point of view from “the outside” of the classroom to influence my judgment.

I concluded from this experience that, within the RTI process, the classroom teachers were the individuals who exerted the greatest influence on the remediation effort with at-risk students. Of the different grade levels that I witnessed, it was apparent that the teachers who believed in the system, followed the interventions, and had a good relationship with the students and parents, ended up having the most success in advancing these children according to RTI principles. As an EIP teacher supporting the classroom teacher with RTI procedures, I felt that I lacked the intimate knowledge and relationship with the identified students to pinpoint and remediate their needs. Conversely, the classroom teachers with their abundant face time and familiarity had an enhanced opportunity to catch the students’ motivated selves in order to help in bringing them to higher levels of accomplishment. Thus, it was my reasoning that for struggling students to be best served in an RTI model, the classroom teachers must accept the brunt of the responsibility in carrying out the implementation. I felt this realization to be an important foundational point in effectively implementing the RTI reform effort.

Limitations of the Study

Hall (1974) hypothesized that the Stages of Concern describes the individual's needs, motivations, and issues as she is progressing in implementing the innovation. The Levels of Use recognized the knowledge level and the degree of understanding the individual has about the innovation. The Levels of Use also looked to identify the observable behaviors exhibited with the innovation, and these are hypothesized as the action points. While this study did witness the participants' behaviors and opinions with the interviews, grade level meetings, and focus group sessions, the study did not have any direct observation of the participants while they implemented the innovations in the classroom or with the students. Such direct observation of the participants implementing the tier interventions could have provided additional data, though this information may have also been distracting to the true study focus on teacher's beliefs. Direct observation might have proven to be inhibiting to the discourse between myself and the participants and could have diminished the candor and breadth of the process.

Also of note, the duration of the study was interrupted for summer break. This summer gap of approximately two months did not outwardly affect the study, yet the break may have had an influence on the participants. It can be conjectured that the time off revitalized teachers' attitudes about RTI and school in general. Additionally, when the participants came back after summer, new RTI candidates were then presented for the RTI process which released teacher beliefs from past problems.

In addition, this study provided somewhat limited data in that there were only three primary participants involved in the research. The small number of participants was deliberately set to create a manageable study, yet a larger research base could have provided a greater point-of-view through additional perceptions. Still, I believed when originally conceiving the study

that a larger sample size was unnecessary. As a past professor often stated, doing more with less data is of greater importance in the final analysis of a qualitative study.

Recommendations for Future Policy and Practice

On the basis of the findings from this research study on Response to Intervention, the following recommendations were offered. Please note that these recommendations were not listed in any order of importance, as that ladder would be based on the individual's needs.

- It is important to properly and comprehensively educate and coach teachers in the theory and procedures of the Response to Intervention initiative.
- The initiating site should develop clear procedures to be initially followed with RTI. These procedures can, of course, be amended and developed with time in order to meet the unique needs of the school site.
- When implementing a reform innovation such as RTI, it is essential to keep teachers informed about the process of change.
- An appreciation of the individual needs of teachers is necessary for successful implementation of RTI.
- An early and complete understanding of the resources and expertise available to support the teachers is a crucial ingredient for success.
- The value of professional development that includes strategies such as the use of ethical vignettes to stimulate dialogue, reflection, and active collaboration with RTI must be recognized.
- Every effort should be made to involve students and their parents in the process.
- Everyone involved would benefit immeasurably if caring were to be encouraged at all levels of the process.

It is also recommended that additional research be carried out to help in implementing Response to Intervention in a teacher friendly manner. The research findings from this study indicated that classroom teachers are the most important piece in successfully enacting the RTI reform. Their burdens must be understood and their needs supported. Hearing the voices of these practicing teachers will be necessary to learn of their compliments and concerns with the change process, which, as we have seen, is directly related to the levels of adoption of the reform. Lastly, continued research and practice using concern-based tools such as the Concerns Based Adoption Model and the Levels of Caring can give the RTI initiative the totality it needs to help the classroom teachers in modifying and adjusting the procedures into a comfortable, reliable, and useful reform for all that practice its techniques.

Concluding Thoughts

Hilton (2007) maintained that regular education classroom teachers largely carried the brunt of responsibility in verifying and substantiating the action required by RTI. The findings from this study suggested that this is where the responsibility of RTI remediation should reside, for these educators can make the greatest gains with at-risk students. It became clear that for effective implementation of RTI to happen at the selected site, the classroom teachers needed to be the individuals to remediate these hard to reach learners.

Gerber (2005) pointed out that reform efforts are often overly technical, removed from the realities and context of their classrooms, and requiring support that does not exist in public schools. This RTI case study found Gerber's opinions to be quite accurate. This research also determined that in order to support the regular education teacher adequately, assistance in the form of available human and tangible resources must be readily available. Professional development should be offered that is practical and grade level appropriate. Teachers must be

given the time and autonomy to learn and develop the procedures of RTI through trial and error. A model of RTI that combines the standard protocol for use in the primary grades while utilizing a problem solving approach for the difficult cases in the older grades should be helpful. Finally, the results suggested that it is necessary to bring care and an ethic of care into the RTI initiative. It is my confidence that if both teachers and students feel supported and nurtured in a developmentally appropriate manner, only positive results will occur with the beliefs and instructional practices concerning the Response to Intervention reform.

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APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Participant Consent Form

Ray Zahradnik
2111 Weatherstone Circle
Conyers, GA 30094

Under the direction of:
Dr. Cheryl Fields-Smith
University of Georgia
427 Aderhold Hall
Athens, GA 30602

January 26, 2009

I, (print name in full) _____ am a fifth grade teacher at _____ Elementary School in _____ Georgia. In signing this letter of consent form, I agree to volunteer in the doctoral research project titled 'Teachers' Beliefs about Planning, Implementing, and Caring in Relation to Response to Intervention.'

The purpose of the study will be to learn how fifth grade teachers' beliefs are enacted and evolved when implementing the RTI mandate, and how an ethic of care is performed throughout the process. I understand that the research being conducted will ask myself and two other fifth grade teachers to participate in three individual interviews lasting no longer than one hour per interview, bi-weekly meetings (already in place), and two focus group meetings also lasting no longer than one hour. The purpose of these meetings will be to look at how teacher beliefs about evaluating, relating, and revamping their own instructional practices will meet the new federally mandated Response to Intervention (RTI) initiative. I understand that excerpts from my tape-recorded verbal communications with the researcher, in individual interviews and group discussions, will not be publicly disseminated and quotes will not be directly attributable, for the participant will be protected by the use of pseudonyms in any future publications written by the researcher.

I also understand the study will last fourteen weeks beginning in early April and ending in the first week in June (10 weeks) when school commences for the 2008-09 school year. The research will then resume the first week of August and ending in late August (4 weeks) in the 2009-10 school year to complete the planned duration of the study. Benefits from the study may include a greater understanding of RTI procedures and an improvement of instructional practice. Also, teachers may gain knowledge through the reflection and professional practices carried out in the study. Any risk or discomfort should be kept minimal through attention to confidentiality and respect for similar and differing opinions with the small number of teacher participants.

I grant authorization for the use of the above information with the full understanding that confidentiality will be preserved at all times. I understand that my full name or other identifying information will never be disclosed or referenced in any way in any written or verbal context. I understand that transcripts, both paper and electronic versions, will be secured in the privacy of the researcher's home office and that any audio tapes of my conversations with the researcher

will be erased no later than January of 2010. I also understand that the researcher will be limited in maintaining the strict confidentiality within the grade level meetings and focus groups that will be observed with the individual interviews.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate in this study or withdraw my consent to participate without explanation at any point during the duration of the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I also understand that failure to remain confidential about the research can cause a participant to termination by the researcher. If I withdraw or am withdrawn from the study, the researcher will make every effort to protect my privacy during the bi-weekly meetings by turning off the recorder when I speak, or deleting any portion of my speech accidentally recorded from the transcripts. If there remain any questions, I can contact the listed researcher at the appropriate numbers and locations.

Additional questions or problems regarding my rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

Data Collection Timeline

Data Collection Method	Date Completed
1 st Round Interviews	April 1, 2008 (The “Novice”) April 2, 2008 (The “Veteran”) April 9, 2008 (The “Specialist”)
2nd Round Interviews	May 26, 2008 (The “Specialist”) May 30, 2008 (The “Novice”) June 6, 2008 (The “Veteran”)
3rd Round Interviews	October 14, 2008 (The “Novice”) October 15, 2008 (The “Specialist”) October 22, 2008 (The “Veteran”)
Focus Group Meetings	May 28, 2008 September 28, 2008
Grade Level Meetings	April 2, 2008 April 23, 2008 May 7, 2008 May 14, 2008 May 21, 2008 September 10, 2008 September 30, 2008 October 15, 2008* October 22, 2008 *Denotes meeting taped without my presence.

APPENDIX C
BASELINE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Baseline Interview Questions

1. Can you think back on your educational history and tell me a little about your schooling experience?
2. Was there a teacher in your life that influenced you? What kind of things did the teacher do? What kind of teaching style did the teacher have?
3. How would you describe your teaching style? How have you improved your teaching through the years?
4. Explain your idea of an ideal teacher. What practices does this ideal teacher use? What experiences in your life have influenced your image of an ideal teacher?
5. What kind of an environment do you think is most conducive for children to learn? Describe that environment.
6. How would you describe a caring teacher? How do you demonstrate care in the classroom?
7. What are your initial perceptions of RTI? What do you see are the reforms' strengths and weaknesses?
8. How do you see RTI affecting your classroom instruction?
9. In what ways do you find collaboration with your teaching peers helping the implementation of RTI?
10. What aspects of the RTI process have been successful or difficult?

APPENDIX D
CONCLUDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Concluding Interview Questions

1. How, as a teacher, do you show care in the classroom? How important is the act of caring important to you as a teacher?
2. In learning about and implementing RTI, do you think the process sets high expectations for our at-risk students?
3. Do you think RTI is a process in which care for the students is actively pursued?
4. One of the things RTI tries to accomplish is to gather evidence from at-risk students and their actual classroom performance to better evaluate and remediate them. Do you feel this approach has been effective for pinpointing student's weaknesses? Do we gather the right data? Do we use this data effectively?
5. We talk about strategies and interventions in RTI. To you, what is a valuable intervention for students that are struggling with the regular education curriculum?
6. Behavior has been a hot topic of ours. Have there been any ideas or strategies that have helped with fifth grade behavior problems?
7. In this study, I have interviewed, held focus group meetings, and discussed RTI processes in our grade level meetings. Have these helped you in understanding and implementing RTI in your classroom? If so, which one worked best?
8. What has been different about RTI this school year?
9. What do you see as the fundamental strength of the RTI process? A weakness?
10. Is RTI doing enough to help struggling students?
11. Have you found enough support in our school to effectively implement RTI?
12. Do you think your opinions have changed about RTI since we started this study?
13. Are we doing a good job of involving parents in the RTI process?

14. In listening to past interviews, social promotion has been brought up as a big issue. Why is this affecting RTI implementation?
15. A philosophical issue has been discussed about EIP students and the type of instruction they should receive. Should the missing gaps be filled in at the learners pace or should teachers move ahead with the fifth grade curriculum?
16. Do you think RTI is expanding or narrowing your instructional possibilities as a teacher?
17. What do you think needs to be done to really help the at-risk students...as RTI intends?
18. How much do you think teachers' beliefs come into play when implementing the interventions?
19. In your mind, is the idea behind RTI doable? Can it be effective?
20. What would really help YOU implement RTI at this very moment to the students that are at-risk and need remediation?
21. I have heard that no students were referred to special ed. last year at Hightower. Does this surprise you? Do you think RTI has had an effect on this?
22. Is RTI an improvement from the SST process we used to use? Does it do a better job of trying to improve the major barriers to student learning?

APPENDIX E
ETHICAL VIGNETTE #1

Ethical Vignette #1

James is a new student to our school entering the fifth grade. He recently moved from New Jersey and his records have been slow to arrive from his old school. Through the first four weeks of school, various assessments such as the STAR test and the BLT have indicated that James is reading on a third grade level. Because of the overcrowding in the EIP language arts class, he has been grouped in the class just above. A beginning of the year formal math assessment, and teacher observation, has again placed James in a class just above the EIP math class. James has had troubles in the beginning of the year in both classes, often failing to turn in homework and frequently asking for help on even the easiest of assignments. Teachers are aware of James' cognition issues, and are waiting on his permanent records to arrive to see if he does require an EIP class assignment. Assessments given to James by the academic coaches have been inconclusive, stating that his reading is a little below grade level but no "red flags" in terms of a chronic struggling reader. No such math assessment was administered by the academic coaches.

Behaviorally, James struggles to have both normal fifth grade relations with his peers and responds poorly to teacher redirection. He tends to withdraw in situations that are confrontational, mumbling under his breath, and appears to have low self-esteem. In brief conversations with his mother, she has stated that she is aware of James' academic and behavioral problems, but also has other issues in her life to deal with. They moved down from New Jersey to live with her parents, and she is currently looking for a job. She has remarked that this is the fourth school in three years James has attended, and that she has been divorced from James' father for that same amount of time. She has said that whatever academic decisions are made for James, she will support them the best she can and she know James needs some help.

What would you do as an educator to catch James up both academically and behaviorally/emotionally? James needs some help given the brief explanation of his current status, but what can be done within the confines of this school and RTI to address his stated needs? How can James feel like he is cared for? How can James feel more confident in his school work? And finally, how can James catch up to pass both the math and reading portions of the CRCT using the Response to Intervention model?

APPENDIX F
ETHICAL VIGNETTE #2

Ethical Vignette #2

Susan has come to fifth grade as a very low performing student. She enrolled at our school last year in October with out of state test score information, and she consequently failed both the math and reading portions of the fourth grade CRCT in April. She was in both the EIP math and reading classes in fourth grade, and she did receive small group and some one-on-one instruction from the academic coaches. She is considered to be at a tier 2 or tier 3 levels in the RTI hierarchy, and she was recently tested by the school psychologist. His assessments determined that Susan has an IQ in the low to low-average range, struggles with reading comprehension, and has little skill in math numeracy. His assessments determined that she is a slow learner, but has offered a few strategies to both teachers and parents that can help strengthen her organization and independent learning skills. She was strongly considered a retention candidate, but her parents were against that course of action claiming, "Her sister did the same thing until she got until middle school and really began to get it and now she is an Honor Roll student."

This year, the practicing EIP teachers in math and reading have determined that Susan has many gaps, especially in math. She is reading independently on a beginning third grade level, her writing is poor and she has difficulty writing even half a page on a subject of her choice, she has trouble regrouping in subtraction, does not know her multiplication tables, and has the bad habit of relying on other students for much needed assistance and/or answers. She often complains of the work being too hard for her, and asks for help at every available opportunity. Susan is not a behavior problem.

The math EIP teacher has discussed Susan with the administrators. The teacher has explained that the plan has been to get Susan in small group work to fill in the subtraction and multiplication gaps to give her some self-confidence and to attack lost or forgotten third and fourth grade objectives in math. Susan has made some progress with this approach. Yet the administration has cautioned the EIP teacher against this, claiming that a fifth grade student needs to be primarily instructed in fifth grade curriculum since that is what she is expected to know for the benchmark tests and CRCT. Again, the administrators warned against providing modifications and instruction that lacked the fifth grade "rigor" necessary to help ensure success on the CRCT.

Teachers have begun the RTI process of documenting and gathering evidence of Susan's performance, and the preliminary numbers are all failing. Her class work and test results are below that of her peers, and she is losing what little confidence she has left. Her teachers believe she needs remediation to fill in the gaps and then some progress can be made, but now she is foundering in an environment too difficult for her. What, as fifth grade teachers determined to help her, would you advise for Susan's academic well-being?