

Running head: GENERAL EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE WITH RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

General Educators' Experience with Response to Intervention

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Ryan David Higbea

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

Lori A. Helman, Ph. D., Adviser

May 2010

GENERAL EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE WITH RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

© Ryan D. Higbea, 2010

GENERAL EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE WITH RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Abstract

Since the reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, “Response to Intervention” (RtI) has permeated the field of education. With this new educational framework, general classroom teachers are taking on many new responsibilities. They are teaching more than just core reading instruction and using assessments in ways that they did not before RtI. RtI also requires that they collaborate more intensely and participate in staff developments more intently. The current study aims to focus on classroom teachers and describing their experiences. The researcher provides a review of literature concerning RtI and specific implications for the context studied and includes a summary of descriptive research design. Using the framework created by the literature review, the author describes the experiences of fifteen classroom teachers in an early total immersion program. To conclude, the author specifies limitations of the study, as well as implications for practitioners and researchers.

Keywords: Education, Response to Intervention, RtI, classroom teachers, Descriptive Research Design

GENERAL EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE WITH RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Table of Contents

Abstract i

Understanding What Researchers Are Saying About RtI

 Planning and Delivering Tier-2 Reading Interventions 5

 Assessments 9

 Staff Development and Collaboration 11

 Contextual Implications for Early Total Immersion Programs 15

Implementing a Qualitative Research Design to Understand Teachers' Experience 23

Describing Classroom Immersion Teachers' Experience with Response to Intervention

 Planning and Delivering Tier-2 Reading Interventions 31

 Assessments 40

 Staff Development and Collaboration 44

 Contextual Implications for Early Total Immersion Schools 50

Limitations of the Study 55

Implications for the Future 57

Conclusion 60

References 62

Appendixes

 A. Sample Initial Interview Questions 67

 B. Online Questionnaire 68

 C. Sample Follow-Up Interview Questions 76

Since the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, “Response to Intervention” (RtI) has permeated the field of education as an alternative way for students with learning disabilities to qualify for special education services. Historically, students have qualified for these services through an IQ-achievement discrepancy model (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). Frustrations with this “wait-to-fail” model, along with overrepresentation of minority students in special education, has prompted educators and educational researchers to investigate the instructional and theoretical frameworks of RtI (Haager, 2007). Because IDEA is primarily a special education law, many in the education field focus on the fact that RtI will greatly affect the roles of those on the special education team, such as school psychologists and special education teachers. Although it is true that RtI’s implementation will undoubtedly alter the roles of those on the special education team, it is important to “think about how the general education teacher’s role is changing.” (Chamberlain, 2009, p.75).

From the perspective of general education and classroom teachers, RtI is an instructional framework used to give reading support to struggling students before they fall too far behind. Those in reading education have embraced RtI as a way to address the needs of struggling readers early on in their educational experience, particularly in kindergarten through third grade (*Q and A: Questions and Answers On Response to Intervention (RTI) and Early Intervening Services (EIS)*, 2007). However, RtI should be a comprehensive, systemic approach that provides support for *all* K-12 students (IRA

commission of RTI: Working draft of guiding principles, 2009). Three goals of RtI instruction that are relevant to the classroom educator in *all* elementary grades include: (a) differentiated instruction; (b) systematic assessment of student performance; (c) and high-quality professional development (Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). Collaboration between all school personnel is also a crucial element of RtI (Murowski & Hughes, 2009).

All kinds of educational settings are currently putting RtI into practice, but it presents distinct opportunities to those in early total immersion programs, where language majority students learn content and become literate primarily in a second language (L2) (Pesola Dahlberg, 1999). In these schools, classroom teachers are the primary providers of instruction in the L2. RtI empowers classroom immersion teachers to make decisions to implement research-based reading interventions that will assist those students who struggle with reading in their L2.

At present, there is no one comprehensive RtI model (James, 2004). However, schools across the country, including immersion schools, are investigating how to use this model in order to help those students with reading difficulties. Many states are in a transitional stage regarding RtI implementation (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Sanders, 2009, p. 87) so the discrepancy model may still be the way that students must qualify for special education services in many schools. In those particular schools, the roles of those on the special education team will not greatly change. However, classroom teachers within these schools have begun to look at how they can use the elements of RtI in order

to aid struggling readers. Whether schools are partially or fully implementing RtI, those working the closest with struggling readers still may see the positive effects, as well as the challenging consequences, of using the RtI framework.

Currently there is a scarcity of RtI research studies in general (Wright, 2007) as well as a lack of empirical studies that specifically explore RtI in the immersion context. Often times, those who investigate Response to Intervention are testing the effectiveness of particular interventions used in the RtI framework. Researchers seem to not be talking with classroom teachers, asking them what they think of this new educational framework. In a recent edition of *Reading Today* (2009), the International Reading Association's Commission on RtI did put out a call to educators to hear about their experiences with RtI to date. Whereas this request will surely allow educators to voice their attitudes and opinions regarding RtI, more in-depth research studies are needed to find out what educators are actually experiencing with regards to this framework. The scholarly and educational communities have waited long enough since the introduction of Response to Intervention; it is time to investigate classroom teachers' experience with this new theoretical and educational framework.

The purpose of this study is to explore the following research question: What are classroom teachers' experiences related to the responsibilities of RtI? I am especially interested in teachers' use of reading interventions with those students with reading difficulties. Other important aspects of RtI, which relate to the implementation of these interventions, are also the focus of this study: assessments, high quality professional

development, and collaboration. Furthermore, the unique experiences that classroom teachers in immersion settings face with RtI is of particular interest. My investigation will allow for an inclusive description of a group of classroom teachers' experiences with RtI.

I begin this report by reviewing the current research to understand what a classroom educator's role could be in a three-tiered RtI framework. I continue by outlining implications that would apply to classroom teachers in an immersion context. After synthesizing the current research on RtI, I then qualitatively describe general educators' experience in an immersion school with Response to Intervention using descriptive research design (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). By looking at teachers' experiences through the lens of the research literature, the educational and scholarly communities can better understand what is currently going on in the classroom. This, in turn, will better enable them to make informed recommendations that may improve the educational experience of all students, especially those who present the highest need for support in the area of reading.

Understanding What Researchers Are Saying About RtI

Since its introduction into the educational community, many researchers have been writing about RtI and its implications for teachers and students alike. In the sections that follow, I review what leading educational researchers have to say about Response to Intervention to create a framework through which I describe classroom teachers' experiences and attitudes regarding RtI.

Planning and Delivering Tier-2 Reading Interventions

Many proposed RtI frameworks include a three-tiered system. The first tier includes core reading instruction for all students, while the third tier represents intensive, individualized interventions for those students who struggle with reading the most (MN RtI Task Force, 2006). Students who struggle with tier-1 instruction, but do not yet require intense, individualized tier-3 interventions, receive tier-2 interventions. In the sections below, I highlight what current literature has to say about who will deliver tier-2 reading interventions, as well as characteristics of this level of intervention.

The general educator's role. As stated before, there is no one official model of RtI and many schools are implementing it in different ways. Consequently, the school will determine the personnel who deliver tier-2 reading interventions. Personnel may include a specialized reading teacher or other trained personnel, but it is highly likely that classroom teachers may be in charge of primarily or collaboratively planning and delivering tier-2 targeted interventions in the general education classroom (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). Haager and Mahdavi (2007) state that classroom teachers may not feel as comfortable with delivering these more intensive reading interventions, as they are usually only trained in and accustomed to planning and delivering the core reading instruction. These educational researchers go on to mention that little is known from the literature about how general education teachers view taking on the responsibilities associated with planning and delivering tier-2 interventions. As previously stated, it is my goal with this study to remedy, albeit partially, this lack of knowledge in the research

community. My hope is to better understand, through this study, what classroom teachers are experiencing and feeling.

According to the “Role Paper” on the topic of the general education teacher in RtI published by the National Educational Association (*New roles in response to intervention: Creating success for schools and children*, 2006) general education teachers provide tier-1 instruction, the foundation of RtI. But because general educators are knowledgeable in the content of reading, in addition to knowing their students well, the general educator may very well likely take on many responsibilities with RtI, including “identifying, implementing, documenting, and analyzing evidence-based academic interventions” (p. 42).

Murawski and Hughes (2009), in their article about collaboration, offer another important rationale for why tier-2 reading interventions should be delivered in the general education classroom:

We argue that if Tier II results in a small group of students removed from the general education classroom routinely for supplementary instruction – irrespective of label – that stigma will remain, regardless of the lack of an official Individualized Education Program or other documented label. ...[S]tudents would easily recognize the select group of peers who consistently leave the class for help. (p. 271)

To this end, one of the most important reasons to give the responsibility of delivering tier-2 reading interventions to classroom teachers is to avoid the experience of stigma related to receiving services outside the classroom.

Although there are reasons to have general education teachers deliver tier-2 reading interventions, including knowledge of both content and students, as well as the avoidance of stigmas, immersion schools may have an additional reason to place this responsibility on the shoulders of general classroom teachers. It is a common occurrence in full-immersion schools that the specialist or resource teachers outside of the classroom lack the ability to communicate in the L2, the language of instruction in the immersion program. If immersion programs wish to deliver these interventions in the L2, classroom teachers may be the best individuals for this responsibility.

What do RtI interventions look like? Regardless of who delivers interventions, certain questions remain: What do tier-2 interventions look like in RtI? How do they differ from standard, core reading instruction (Tier 1)? To begin to answer these questions, it is important to first understand the similarities between the two tiers of interventions. Tier-2 reading interventions must focus on the same research-based skill set around which core reading instruction centers. So with regards to content, these two tiers do not greatly differ. They both focus on skills, which include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (NRP, 2000).

Although the skills worked on in Tier 2 are the same as core reading instruction, tier-2 reading interventions given to students at-risk for reading failure differ from tier-1

instruction in a variety of ways. Foorman and Torgesen (2001) wrote about characteristics of small-group instruction and ways in which it differed from core reading instruction. Although they wrote their article before the reauthorization of IDEA and RtI became part of the educational lexicon, what they have to say about small group instruction applies to tier-2 reading intervention that classroom teachers may be in charge of delivering. Foorman and Torgesen explain that intensive, small group instruction should be more explicit and more comprehensive than the core reading instruction that teachers deliver to the entire class. Most children who experience reading difficulties are not able to independently discover knowledge that other children are adept at picking out when they interact with print. Teachers working with struggling readers then must be very direct and explicit as they work to improve their students' reading skills.

Tier-2 interventions are also more intensive than core reading instruction. Foorman and Torgesen point out that interventions can be more intensive than core reading instruction in two ways. First, teachers can decrease the number of students in a group to make the intervention more intense. Some interventions require that the teacher work one-on-one with a struggling student, although teachers may choose to work with a small group instead. Interventions can also be more intense if the amount of time spent instructing is increased. Teachers can work with students on a particular skill for a greater amount of time than they would in their core reading instruction, so that students who struggle with particular skills will have more opportunities to learn and practice those skills.

Finally, Foorman and Torgesen state that tier-2 reading interventions should be more supportive than core reading instruction. Again, teachers can increase support in two ways. First, teachers need to be more emotionally supportive by encouraging students as they tackle reading skills that are difficult for them. Teachers should also be cognitively supportive by scaffolding reading activities appropriately. When teachers gradually give over responsibility to their struggling readers, students are more likely to be independently successful.

Assessments

In the RtI framework, assessment plays an important part of the planning and delivering of tier-2 reading interventions. General educators, who work with struggling readers, need to know how to use assessment data in all stages of the intervention process. Formal assessments are useful in the identification of struggling readers, as well as in keeping track of their progress. In the sections that follow, I outline what educational researchers have to say about using assessment data at different stages in the intervention process.

How do teachers use assessments at the beginning of the process? Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) state that assessment is a key component of a three-tiered approach to intervention and it starts with identifying those students who struggle with reading. This first assessment is the universal screener, which teachers use to understand who is in need of a tier-2 reading intervention. This assessment is named such because teachers give it universally throughout the school and all students participate. School personnel can use

the assessment data to identify students who fall below a particular cut score. Teachers identify those students who do not make “the cut” as at-risk and schedule them to receive a tier-2 reading intervention.

Schools may choose a variety of assessments to universally screen their students. One tool used is a fluency probe. With this assessment, teachers quickly test students' fluency, a predictor of future reading ability. Teachers flag students who do not meet a particular cut score as being at-risk for reading difficulties, qualifying them for tier-2 reading interventions. These fluency probes are truly only used to quickly screen a large population, but do not give teachers the in-depth information needed to plan tier-2 interventions. Teachers in these schools then need to turn to other assessment data to inform their tier-2 reading instruction. Other schools may choose to use a more in-depth assessment. Results from those data not only identify the students who are struggling in the area of reading, but they also inform teachers about the particular reading skills that challenge these students. Teachers need to be comfortable reading formal assessment data so they can identify students and plan tier-2 reading interventions appropriately for those readers.

How do teachers use assessments during the process? Shinn (2007) echoes Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) when he recommends that teachers use assessments to universally screen the entire school population, but he adds that assessment should also be used to measure response to a particular intervention. In order for the intervention to be successful, students must respond positively to the intervention; it is from this

phenomenon that RtI, *Response to Intervention*, gets its name. Progress-monitoring information is essential so that if a student at-risk for reading failure does not respond to a particular tier-2 reading intervention, instruction needs to be adapted.

But, how do teachers know if a particular intervention is working? Shinn (2007) recommends using Curriculum-Based Measures (CBMs) to monitor the progress of struggling readers. As early as 1985, Stanley Deno began conducting research on CBMs. His research opened the door for special education teachers to use CBMs to write objective goals on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and continually monitor the progress of those students in special education (as cited in Shinn, 2007). Shinn purports that a CBM is a perfect tool to see if a student is responding positively to a particular tier-2 reading intervention. Educators can reliably evaluate a student's response to an intervention in as little as 4-6 weeks if, "a sufficient number of data points [are] collected" (Shinn, 2007, p. 608). If a student is progressing, the intervention can be continued as-is or scaled back, depending on the degree of response. However, if a student's reading skills are not improving with a tier-2 reading intervention, teachers can see this using a progress-monitoring tool (like a CBM) and can change the instruction as necessary.

Staff Development and Collaboration

Assessment plays a vital part in the planning and delivering of tier-2 reading interventions; however, classroom teachers must be confident in reading and using assessment data if it is to be effective. Teachers must also know how to match students

with specific, research-based tier-2 reading interventions that will address their particular needs. Staff development activities and collaboration consequently become important parts of any RtI model to keep teachers informed of all facets of planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions and help them enact these processes with their students. The sections below outline what educational researchers say about staff development and collaboration, which will set classroom teachers up for success as they plan and deliver intensive reading interventions to their struggling readers.

How will teachers stay informed? Most teacher preparation programs include instruction on pedagogy, methods, diversity education, content, and practice experiences in classrooms (Herner-Patnode, 2009). Teachers graduate from these programs ready to teach core reading instruction, which is tier-1 instruction within the RtI framework. However, with the new responsibilities that RtI presents, classroom teachers require more training to stay informed. Teachers need to be continually educated on the most effective reading interventions, matching their students with interventions that will best suit their needs, as well as giving assessments and interpreting the data to identify and monitor struggling students.

Herner-Patnode (2009) points out that typically, professional development takes on three forms: classes at the university level, conference attendance, or district in-service training. Although teachers can gain much knowledge from these types of professional developments, there are downfalls to all three. One drawback to these staff development activities is their cost. No matter what experts charge to speak at staff development

activities, economic hard times have meant that schools are making sacrifices on in-service trainings. Furthermore, university tuition increases have become a given at many schools, often making it more difficult for teachers to continue studies beyond their bachelor's degree.

Furthermore, these types of staff development activities often do not address specific topics that teachers are interested in learning about. There are many models of Response to Intervention and there are a great many nuances within each of these models. As teachers come with a variety of background knowledge, they often do not have their needs met by a traditional cookie-cutter delivery of professional development, which often includes a speaker talking at a group of teachers.

However, there is another type of professional development that some districts are turning to as a way to educate teachers on the topics that matter the most to them. Teachers use study groups as a way to further their own knowledge on using assessment data as well as planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions. This approach, which differs from the traditional top-down model of staff development, invites teachers to become onsite experts in the area of study (Herner-Patnode, 2009). These groups, sometimes called PLCs (Professional Learning Communities; Hord, 1997), should be set up carefully and intentionally to optimize their effectiveness. First, educational leaders need to gather data to discover which specific topics teachers need to explore. These leaders can survey teacher interests or look at student performance data to derive these specific learning topics. Next, teachers form themselves into groups according to similar

interests, identify a coordinator, and they schedule meeting times. Then, they organize group meetings. The format of these meetings can differ from group to group, but the coordinator needs to think about which materials would be most effective (e.g., books, research articles, videos). Just as it is important to assess the progress of a tier-2 reading intervention, Herner-Patnode (2009) also states that it is important to continually assess the group's progress. If something is not working, participants should make adaptations so that the study group can be the most effective it can be. Finally, researchers recommend that the group members share the information they learned with others. It is with this step that staff members become on-site experts and can share their expertise with others in the school building or in the district.

How will teachers work together? Herner-Patnode (2009) also states, "Educator study groups can be an effective tool to facilitate collaboration among special and general educators and thus help promote inclusion and access to the general education curriculum within a school environment" (p. 25). It is essential in the RtI model that general educators collaborate with fellow teachers and special educators in the building so that they can most effectively plan and deliver tier-2 reading interventions. Murawski and Hughes (2009) write that teachers should collaborate with colleagues for a variety of reasons. Teachers should collaborate to make sure that interventions are research-based, that they address the variety of needs in the general education classroom, and that they are accessible to a variety of learners. Teachers should also work with special educators when interpreting reading assessment data at the screening stage of the intervention

process and when they are measuring a student's progress with a particular intervention. General education teachers need to inform themselves about strategies that will work with struggling readers and they must be willing to try new methods that other team members have shared. Ultimately, Murawski and Hughes write that, "if the primary goal of RTI is to address the needs of all learners in the general education classroom by using research-based best practices in a proactive approach, it would be folly to imagine that individual teachers can accomplish this alone," (p. 270). For this reason, if classroom teachers want to ensure success with the RtI model, they must collaborate with on-site staff as they plan and deliver tier-2 reading interventions for at-risk readers.

Contextual Implications for Early Total Immersion Programs

Classroom teachers in early total immersion programs who have begun to implement Response to Intervention, take on the responsibilities set before them by RtI within the context of teaching L2 learners; ergo, it is important to understand what educational researchers have to say about RtI in immersion schools. However, as I stated before, there is a void in the literature specifically related to RtI in immersion education. In my review of the literature, I draw on work by researchers who have studied in contexts outside the immersion setting. Although using research from other areas and applying it to the immersion context is a risky practice, I have done so cautiously and thus was able to highlight important implications immersion educators should keep in mind.

There are many implications teachers should consider in this particular context, but a thorough review of all considerations is beyond the scope of this research study. Therefore, in the following section, I outline three important implications that I believe are important for classroom teachers to keep in mind when planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions to their struggling readers in the early total immersion context.

What should teachers of second language learners keep in mind when reading assessment data? One of the major reasons that those in the educational field started to look at Response to Intervention as an alternative for identifying students for special education services is because of the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. Some teachers may have traditionally referred students with minority-language status to special education because they struggle with core reading instruction, which teachers deliver in the L2 of these English language learners. Because the assessments given are also in their L2, English language learners (ELLs) often can qualify for services, although they may not actually have a learning disability. For both racial and language minority students, RtI promises to alleviate some of the overrepresentation of ELLs in special education by providing interventions that go beyond core reading instruction but do not yet involve special education: tier-2 reading interventions. However, for RtI to be an effective method of identifying which students need additional services because they struggle with reading, teachers need to carefully read assessment data.

The same phenomenon happens in immersion schools. Students who struggle with core reading instruction are often times referred to the special education team. This team assesses students in their first language (English), but not the language of instruction (Spanish), to identify a learning problem. It is often then determined that the child has a learning disability and special education services begin. Whereas it is important to get these struggling students extra help in the area of reading, identifying students as having a learning disability when they might not have one can be quite detrimental for a variety of obvious reasons.

As teachers of ELLs can do with their students, immersion teachers can also use the RtI framework to avoid referring their students unnecessarily to special education services by reviewing assessment data carefully. In her article, Haager (2007) observes that teachers of L2 learners must remember that some of the assessment data may falsely identify particular students as needing additional reading interventions when, in fact, those particular students do not require additional support beyond core reading instruction. Thus, during the screening process, teachers must look at whom the universal screener is identifying as needing tier-2 reading instruction and judiciously decide if those particular students are actually in need of extra help. Similarly, assessment data may “miss” some students who are truly in need of support. For this reason, immersion classroom teachers should examine a range of assessment data, including their own informal observations, when identifying students who need tier-2 reading interventions. Above all, Haager writes, using assessment data to help shape

supplemental instruction is critical. When immersion teachers take into account all types of assessment data, they should not only properly identify the students in need of tier-2 reading interventions, but they will also be able to plan interventions that are uniquely appropriate for their particular students.

Teachers use formal assessments at the onset of the identification process. However, once students begin to receive extra reading instruction in the form of tier-2 reading interventions, teachers need to monitor their progress using formal and informal assessments. Again, Haager (2007) cautions teachers about using these assessment data with their L2 learners. She questions if CBMs (curriculum-based measures) are good progress-monitoring tools for L2 learners, as researchers have primarily studied them with *monolingual* learners. She writes that there is some evidence that CBM processes are useful with ELLs (Graves, Plasencia-Peinado, Deno, & Johnson, 2005; Wiley & Deno, 2005 as cited in Haager, 2007). She refers to a Linan-Thompson, Cirino, and Vaughn (2007) article that stresses the importance of selecting a progress-monitoring tool that is sensitive to growth of ELL learners. Immersion teachers, who also teach L2 learners, need to be sensitive to the unique type of language and literacy development that their students go through when selecting and using progress-monitoring tools. Those that are published and normed with monolingual learners might not always properly measure the progress made by L2 learners. As with analyzing the universal screener data, immersion teachers must be careful when reading data that show a student's

progress so that they can adapt the reading intervention as necessary to tailor instruction appropriately to each student's learning needs.

What should second language teachers keep in mind when selecting *research-based interventions*? One of the important features of interventions used within the RtI framework is that researchers have proven them effective in legitimate research studies. It is crucial that interventions have proven to be effective, because if teachers are going to use them with learners who have reading difficulties, they need to be confident that they will actually work. Hence, if a student fails to respond to the intervention and the intervention is research-based, teachers can confidently deduce that the student is in need of a different, if not more intensive, intervention.

Klinger, McCray Sorrells, and Barrera (2007) suggest that teachers of L2 learners must be careful when selecting "research-based" interventions. The authors write that although researchers have proven a particular intervention to be effective in research studies, they often only provide limited information about the participants of those research studies. Furthermore, there is usually a lack of information about the context in which they gave the intervention. If it is found that the intervention was proven to be effective using a sample of students that does not reflect the students in a particular teacher's classroom, that teacher may need to adapt or use the intervention in different ways with their own L2 learners. For this reason, teachers who select interventions to use with L2 learners should be cautious when applying research findings.

In their paper, Klinger et al. (2007) discuss the exclusion of ELLs from participation in studies that prove the effectiveness of a particular intervention. They write that researchers often leave out culturally and linguistically diverse students from sample populations. ELLs represent a growing proportion of the wider school-aged population; so, if researchers are excluding them from their studies, they are most likely excluding majority language students who are learning a L2 through an additive model (immersion) as well. Early total immersion teachers should most certainly heed the advice given to teachers of minority language students when they select intensive reading interventions that they will use with their struggling readers. Teachers must be acutely aware that researchers probably did not test many “research-based” interventions on students in contexts similar to the immersion setting. Consequently, classroom teachers in immersion schools must be particularly careful when selecting tier-2 interventions for *their* students. They must thoughtfully choose interventions that they believe will still have a positive impact on the reading abilities of their learners based on the formal and informal data they have collected. After choosing a particular intervention, immersion teachers may find that it is appropriate to adapt the intervention to the specific needs of their learners. In the section that follows, I outline what literature has to say about adapting research-based interventions and why teachers may want to consider doing this with utmost caution.

What should second language teachers keep in mind when adapting interventions? In the previous section, I described the need for immersion teachers to

adapt interventions to fit the particular needs of their learners. But as Lane, Bocian, MacMillan, and Gresham (2004) caution all teachers, regardless of their student population, teachers must consider “treatment integrity” when adapting tier-2 reading interventions (p. 37).

In their article, Lane, *et al.* (2004) discusses the idea of treatment integrity, which is the extent that teachers implement an intervention as originally designed. When researchers test the effectiveness of a particular intervention in a research study, they deliver the intervention in a specific way. If they prove the intervention effective, then teachers must deliver the intervention as intended to replicate the results of that study. Then, if students with reading difficulties are not responding positively to a particular intervention, it can be reasoned that it was not the intervention at fault, but rather that it did not meet the student’s needs and additional, different, or more intensive instruction is in order. Lane, *et al.* (2004) say that teachers must assess treatment integrity by self-monitoring. Simply put, teachers, who are adapting research-based interventions, must do so cautiously and must monitor themselves to make certain that they are delivering the intervention with the greatest amount of fidelity possible.

How can teachers adapt interventions in an immersion program to fit the needs of the learners that struggle with reading? Researchers seldom prove interventions effective solely on L2 learners and it is extremely rare to find interventions that researchers have proven to be effective specifically with majority language students learning through an L2. When early total immersion teachers adapt interventions then,

they must do so with great caution and try to implement the intervention as closely as possible to the original intervention to uphold the intervention's treatment integrity. Immersion teachers must also carefully adapt the interventions so that they can still deliver them in the L2, while not changing completely the format of the intervention. Lane, *et al.* concludes with a good point about the nature of interventions. They state, "the more materials and resources required to implement the intervention, the lower the treatment integrity, particularly when the intervention requires materials that are not typically found in the classroom setting" (p. 41). As more schools implement RtI, those in the educational community may come to believe that a tier-2 reading intervention is a kit that schools purchase and teachers deliver as instructed with a script. "RtI experts" who lead staff developments often promote these kits during their presentations and reinforce the belief that schools must *purchase* tier-2 interventions. Apart from being rather expensive, these kits do not represent all of what a tier-2 reading intervention can be. Tier-2 reading interventions can be simple; they simply need to teach the same skills as core reading instruction, while being more intense, supportive, and direct than tier-1 reading instruction. Therefore, if classroom teachers want to keep the treatment integrity of tier-2 reading interventions as high as possible, they may do well to *avoid* kits that require many materials and resources to deliver, and instead seek out simple interventions that include strategy instruction that teachers can use with almost any type of reading material.

From my review of what educational researchers are saying, key ideas have surfaced about delivering tier-2 reading interventions within the RtI framework. Still, what researchers opine and what actually happens daily in the classroom are often times two different things. There currently is a void of quality research studies that ask classroom teachers about their experiences with RtI implementation. In the next section, I describe my own qualitative study to understand the experiences of classroom teachers in an early total immersion program who have been delivering intensive reading interventions within the RtI framework to their struggling readers. It is the aim of this research study to better understand classroom teachers' experiences related to the responsibilities of RtI. With increased knowledge about classroom teacher experiences, those in the scholarly and educational communities may be better informed, thus being able to implement RtI more effectively with the ultimate goal of improving student learning.

Implementing a Qualitative Research Design to Understand Teachers' Experience

The central question of my research study is: What are classroom teachers' experiences related to the responsibilities of RtI? To answer this research question, I will use Descriptive Research Design, a qualitative research methodology. The purpose of this methodology is to accurately describe a situation or a phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 377). I use this methodology to answer the question "*what is*". Descriptive research is most appropriate when exploring a new topic before diving deeper (Shuttleworth, 2008). For instance, researchers can use descriptive research before

conducting a time consuming case study or before undertaking an expensive quantitative study. The goal of this study is to meaningfully explore the topic of classroom teachers' experience with RtI, as researchers in the scholarly community have not studied this topic in this unique context. Furthermore, I selected this methodology for my study because of the temporal and monetary limits of master's level research.

What Is The Context?

To find out the experiences of classroom teachers in an early total immersion program (grades K-5) who have been given the responsibilities of delivering tier-2 reading interventions, I surveyed classroom teachers from an immersion school in an outer ring suburb of a metro area of the upper Midwest. I selected this site because it was readily accessible to me. The language of instruction in this immersion school is Spanish and teachers teach the majority of curriculum in Spanish. As students progress through the school, instruction in the target language (Spanish) decreases and instruction in the students' first language (English) increases, however there is a continual emphasis placed on reading in the second language. Teachers deliver core reading instruction through the balanced literacy framework, which includes Reading Workshop, Writing Workshop, and Word Work (Teaching and Learning Services, n.d.). Students can work on reading strategies they learn during reading workshop during small group instruction, which comes in the form of guided reading, literature circles, and/or expository research study.

There are 350 students at this school, 80.2% of whom are white, 7.2% are Hispanic, 6.3% are black, 5.4% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.9% are American

Indian. Of the entire school population, 6.6% of the students are enrolled in the free-and-reduced-lunch program.

Although this typical demographic information may be important to understand the context of the school in which I conducted this study, a more important datum to know is the number of students who qualify for a tier-2 intervention. According to the most current assessment data, 27.1% of students in grades 1-5 qualify as readers in need of at least a tier-2 intervention (for information on which assessments were used to determine this number, see the section that follows titled "Assessments" on page 40). Although standardized assessment data do not give an accurate picture of how many kindergartners fall below particular "cut scores", teachers estimate that about 15% of their kindergarten students are in need of tier-2 interventions to improve their literacy skills.

Needing to understand more than just numbers, I continued to gather information about this school through an initial site interview where I was able to gain important insights on the implementation of RtI as well as other critical background information. I conducted this interview with a classroom teacher who was originally responsible for asking other teachers what they were going to do about the students who failed to be successful with core reading instruction. She told me that during the 2007-08 school year, "we originally formed a group of people that was just interested in students that were struggling. We created a watch list of students that we felt were struggling that needed interventions; kids that we weren't sure would qualify for Special Ed necessarily

but seemed to be below the bubble and were needing interventions,” (Initial Interview, December 14, 2009).

Two more classroom teachers joined her efforts and together with a district-appointed data specialist and the school psychologist, they began to investigate Response to Intervention and how the teachers could use the RtI model to address the learning needs of students on that watch list. They looked at different interventions and categorized them as tier-1, tier-2, or tier-3 interventions. At that time, they noticed that instructors were strong with delivering core reading instruction and the special education team was strongly delivering what would be considered tier-3 interventions, but that there seemed to be a gap between the two. These teacher leaders held trainings for other teachers in the school on what the RtI framework looked like, they discussed some example tier-2 interventions, and forms were created to help track those students who were in need of tier-2 reading interventions.

At the onset of the 2008-09 school year, these three classroom teachers suggested the formation of a “Student Intervention Team”, made up of themselves, a fourth classroom teacher, the reading support teacher, and the school psychologist. This team met with two individual classroom teachers every two weeks to discuss students struggling with tier-1 reading instruction in order to plan tier-2 interventions for them. In the 2009-10 school year, the Student Intervention Team disbanded and the teacher leaders gave its responsibilities of discussing students in need of tier-2 interventions to individual grade-level teams. The idea was that teachers would be able to discuss more

students in their weekly grade-level meetings than they had been able to with the Student Intervention Team.

At the current time, RtI at this Spanish immersion school is still teacher-driven and the discrepancy model continues to be the way that students qualify for special education services. District officials and administrators currently do not play a role in the RtI implementation at this particular school; however, they seem supportive of the teachers' efforts.

At the time of the study (January-February, 2010), the school is attempting to fully integrate this intervention framework. Teachers are working towards the ultimate goal of improving instruction across all grade levels to help struggling readers early in their educational careers to overcome their reading challenges, so that they may read confidently and successfully. Although it is classroom teachers who are primarily responsible for identifying struggling students at this school, planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions, and tracking students' progress, teachers do have some support. Currently, six "language ambassadors," who work as teacher aides in the classrooms, assist the classroom teachers. These teaching assistants, who are from Spanish-speaking countries, work with students, including those who receive tier-2 reading instruction under the watchful eye of the classroom teacher. The classroom teachers also receive assistance from a reading support teacher. This teacher works with those students who most struggle with learning to read from kindergarten, first, and second grades. This

teacher consistently collaborates and works with the classroom teachers when making decisions about reading interventions.

Who Are The Participants?

In January 2010, the building principal allowed me to speak with the teachers at a staff meeting to explain my project. I gave the teachers the applicable background information on the study, explained the procedures of the design, and requested that all interested teachers sign a consent form, acknowledging their willingness to participate. Fifteen teachers, which comprise nearly all the teachers in the immersion school, participated in the study. All participants are currently classroom teachers, or had worked as classroom teachers at some point during the RtI implementation. They all speak Spanish fluently. The fifteen teachers represent all of the grades at the school, spanning from kindergarten to grade five. All but one teacher had less than fifteen years of teaching experience. Ten of the teachers had ten years of teaching experience or less and five of those teachers had less than five years of teaching experience. Whereas this group of teachers represents a *relatively* inexperienced group of professionals, nine of them reported having a master's degree, while another three are working towards one.

How Were Data Collected and Analyzed?

The research project began with an initial interview in December of 2009 (see Appendix A for sample questions) with a teacher leader who was instrumental in the original Response to Intervention implementation. I conducted this interview to get an understanding of the level of implementation of RtI at the immersion school as well as

other related background information. I recorded the interview and later transcribed it. I reviewed the transcript several times, looking for certain themes, or what Strauss and Corbin (1990) call concepts and categories.

Using these themes, as well as the framework created by a review of the current literature, I created a questionnaire (see Appendix B), which 15 individual classroom teachers in the immersion elementary school completed online in the month of January. The questionnaire consisted of eight different sections:

- *Tier-2 Reading Interventions*, which asked teachers about their past actions and opinions regarding the planning and delivery of this intensive type of instruction.
- *Tier-2 Reading Interventions in Immersion Classrooms*, which asked teachers to identify and comment on special implications that immersion teachers must face when planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions.
- *Advantages/Disadvantages*, in which teachers were asked to identify the good and the bad aspects of having classroom teachers deliver the tier-2 reading interventions.
- *Assessments*, which asked teachers about their past actions and opinions regarding using assessment data to plan and deliver the tier-2 reading interventions.
- *Collaboration*, which asked teachers about their preferences regarding working with others in the school building.
- *Staff Development*, which asked teachers about their attitudes regarding what types of staff development activities they find most effective.

- *Demographic Information*, which asked teachers to provide basic information about their grade level, years of service, as well as their level of education.
- *The Big Picture*, which allowed teachers to give opinions about the overall idea of RtI in their school as well as what RtI might look like in the future if it were up to them.

I collected the responses from this questionnaire over a two-week period, and afterward, I analyzed the data using the same open-coding techniques that I used to analyze the initial interview (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). I conducted a follow-up group interview in February (see Appendix C for sample interview questions) to allow participating teachers to clarify and expound upon the questionnaire results. Originally, the research design included conducting follow-up interviews with individual teachers. However, I eventually used a group format for two reasons. First, the majority of the teachers who filled out the questionnaire responded that they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Using a group format was simply a more effective way to interview the teachers, as opposed to interviewing each willing teacher individually. Second, the focus group format allowed teachers to listen to their colleagues and respond accordingly. They were not only responding to the questions put forth by the interviewer, but their comments were also reactions to what other teachers were saying. If something did not represent their opinions, they were able to respond to those statements. As I was able to collect richer data than had I individually interviewed all willing teachers, I was able to strengthen the dependability of the study.

After transcribing the follow-up group interview, I was able to analyze and categorize the comments made. Using these data, as well as data from the initial interview and questionnaire, I now describe the classroom teachers' experiences through the framework created by a review of educational researchers' work.

Describing Classroom Immersion Teachers' Experience With Response To Intervention

After reviewing the current research, I was able to create a framework in which I could ask teachers about their experiences with Response to Intervention. Using this same structure, I now describe teachers' responses. The synthesis of information taken from the initial site interview, the questionnaire results, and the follow-up group interview describe the overall experience of classroom teachers in one particular early total immersion school with Response to Intervention.

Planning and Delivering Tier-2 Reading Interventions

Planning and delivering intensive reading interventions to struggling readers is the heart of RtI implementation. Thus, it is important to first describe classroom teachers' responsibilities in this particular school, as well as provide a description of what these tier-2 interventions look like in this school.

Classroom teachers planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions.

Current literature tells us that there is no official model of RtI and that general education teachers may be responsible for delivering tier-2 reading interventions. In the school studied, classroom teachers are in charge of planning and delivering these more intensive interventions to their struggling readers. A group of teacher leaders began the process of

educating themselves and their colleagues on RtI and tier-2 interventions. Since the beginning, the general educators at this school have been the driving force behind the implementation and the delivery of tier-2 reading interventions.

Although it was the teacher leaders in the school who initially planned an implementation of RtI that gave classroom teachers the responsibility for planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions, I noted from the questionnaire data that classroom teachers shared in the willingness to help their struggling readers. In response to the statement, "I am willing to use tier-2 interventions with my struggling readers," all respondents said they agreed with that statement, with ten of them *strongly* agreeing with it. This group of teachers is willing to take on the responsibility of planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions with their struggling readers. Furthermore, 12 teachers reported that they are comfortable with doing so and are not hesitant to use this type of intense instruction to support those readers who need it the most (Online Questionnaire, January 30, 2010). Other questionnaire data might point to a reason they are so willing and comfortable with implementing these types of interventions. According to the data, 13 teachers think that the classroom teacher is extremely helpful when delivering tier-2 reading interventions. Compare this to the nine that responded that a support teacher is extremely helpful. Based on their responses, more teachers believe that the classroom teacher is more helpful than volunteers, peer assistants, computer programs, or audio recordings.

Teachers listed several advantages to having the classroom teacher deliver the tier-2 reading interventions. The most popular advantage, which 12 respondents mentioned, was that classroom teachers know their students. “The classroom teacher is likely to know more about that particular child’s strengths and struggles than a different teacher, volunteer, or assistant” (Online Questionnaire). Eleven other respondents agreed with that particular statement when they wrote about the advantages of having a classroom teacher deliver these interventions. However, knowledge of students was not the only advantage discussed by the teachers. Proximity was also a theme that came out in many teacher responses. Seven teachers mentioned either physical proximity or emotional closeness with the student. Because of the physical closeness, teachers believe they can pull students anytime during the day to work with them. Furthermore, because they can continually monitor students’ progress, participants believe that classroom teachers were better suited to deliver tier-2 reading interventions to struggling readers. Additionally, teachers share an emotional closeness with each reader that other school personnel might not have. Teachers wrote about the risk that students are able to take because of their emotional bond with their classroom teacher: “This relationship [between teacher and student] also helps students to feel safe making mistakes. They are provided an environment that is encouraging and fair without having them feel rejected or outside the pack” (Online Questionnaire). This response speaks to the advantage that classroom teachers have when delivering tier-2 reading interventions to their struggling readers. The emotional and trusted connection that students have with their teachers

allows them to take greater risks, which will ideally be advantageous to them in the learning process.

Although the teachers surveyed were overwhelmingly comfortable and willing to plan and deliver tier-2 reading interventions because they feel that they know the students and are physically and emotionally close with those students, teachers also feel burdened with the idea of working with struggling readers. Two-thirds of surveyed participants agreed with the fact that they are overwhelmed with planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions. When asked about the disadvantages to having a classroom teacher deliver these intensive interventions to struggling readers, thirteen teachers discussed a lack of time. Teachers mentioned that more planning time is involved in creating and managing interventions. They also mentioned that it is difficult to meet on a regular basis with the struggling readers and still find time to meet the needs of all the other students in the classroom. About half of the respondents mentioned this idea of equity: "The time it takes to deliver the intervention pulls that teacher away from the other students" (Online Questionnaire). During the follow-up group interview, one teacher mentioned another time-consuming activity involved in the RtI process: filling out paperwork.

"I love the idea [of RtI and delivering tier-2 reading interventions], and I enjoy working with those groups and implementing strategies. I loathe paperwork. And where I get that it is important to create these paper trails and document everything, the idea of documenting stuff; I hate it. So for

me, personally, sometimes that idea deters me from implementing it better than I could because I don't want to have to take that five minutes after I meet with them to document everything I did and the time I did it and the day I did it and that part bothers me," (Follow-up Group Interview, February 16, 2010).

This particular teacher is discussing the paperwork that the school requires all teachers who implement tier-2 reading interventions to do. The idea behind filling out paperwork is to create a "paper trail" so that enough documentation is available if another teacher ever needs to refer a student for special education services. However, as this teacher points out, and others in the focus group agreed, the paperwork associated with planning and implementing tier-2 reading interventions is a huge deterrent in this process. It is interesting to note that none of the literature outlined in this study discussed the importance of paperwork in the implementation of Response to Intervention. Accordingly, the teachers may find it helpful to look at the current research, weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the paperwork currently associated with planning and delivering tier-2 interventions, and reevaluate their plan. If the paperwork is getting in the way of effectively helping struggling students become more successful readers, something may need to change.

Tier-2 reading interventions used in this immersion school. After describing teachers' attitudes regarding the planning and delivery of tier-2 interventions, I now describe what the interventions looked like at this school. As educational researchers

have stated, to classify as a tier-2 reading intervention, the intervention should focus on the same elements as the core classroom instruction, but be more explicit, more intensive, and more supportive than core reading instruction. Furthermore, teachers should carry out these research-based interventions consistently, over an extended period of time.

A review of the data shows that all teachers who participated in this study are implementing interventions that target the same reading skills as core reading instruction. All teachers responded that at least some of their students struggle in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In other words, teachers are seeing students in this school struggle with the main areas of reading (NRP, 2000).

In response to a question asking them to describe the tier-2 interventions they have commonly used with struggling readers, teachers gave feedback on many different kinds of interventions used. All interventions mentioned focused on those five pillars of reading with which their students struggle. Many seemed more intensive than tier-1 core reading instruction. For instance, teachers mentioned the use of flashcards to intensely drill small groups of students on high frequency words or letters; repeated readings to improve fluency; and teaching reading strategies to understand a text more deeply. By reviewing the responses given by the teachers, I observe two additional understandings.

First, teachers did not mention whether or not their interventions are research-based. Additionally, no teacher mentioned from where they got their ideas for their interventions, so it would prove difficult for them to prove the interventions as research-

based or not. Being qualified as a research-based intervention is a paramount characteristic of a tier-2 reading intervention. For this reason in the follow-up interview, I wanted to know more about teachers' thoughts regarding this important characteristic of tier-2 interventions. At the beginning of this portion of the interview, a participating teacher challenged the group by asking them how they knew the interventions they were implementing were actually research-based:

Teacher 1: How do you know what you're doing is exactly research-based? And does it have to be if it works?

T2: Or are you researching in that moment and it's working? [*Laughter*]

T1: I'm the researcher!

T3: But that's our ongoing research.

T4: That's action research.

Researcher: So, how important *is it* that interventions are research-based? Is there anyone else that wants to speak to that?

T5: Well, I think that if you know they are research-based it gives you a sense that what you are doing is right.

T6: Yeah, but, playing the devil's advocate, whose GD research is it and why are they the authority in my classroom with my kids? That's the devil on my shoulder. Whose research? And why are they important? And what's going on right here? But that's just the rebel in me.

T2: But the idea of using research-based is that you're hopefully more on track than having to try five things that aren't research-based and not work. So the idea is using something that someone has already tested rather than something that no one has ever tested. So that you're more on track.

T6: Yes. I agree.

T2: And hopefully more successful, (Follow-up Group Interview).

By reviewing these data, it is clear that teachers really do understand the importance of research-based interventions, but there is also something else here. First, teachers question what it means to be researched-based, especially in relation to their unique students who are learning to become literate in a second language. Teachers also value action research and what it can mean within the Response to Intervention model. Researchers prove a particular intervention as "research-based" through multiple scrutinizing studies, most often quantitative. But these teachers remind the educational community that qualitative research, more specifically action research, can also inform decision-making and give teachers other "research-based" options when they are planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions with struggling readers.

Another important idea that I observed when looking at the data provided by classroom teachers when they were describing the interventions they have done, is the idea of skills versus strategies. In their descriptions, some teachers talked about building strategies that have students working toward independence. This is right in line with what Barbara Taylor (2005) states in one of her modules for the Minnesota Reading First

Professional Development Program: “Students must have strategies if they are able to read independently” (p. 1). Teachers should be working with students on strategies, which the students will then be able to apply when they are independently reading. For example, one teacher participant uses a reading-strategy bookmark so her students can independently decide which strategy to use when they come to unknown words they need to decode. Another teacher mentioned having students visualize by drawing out scenes on post-its. Yet another teacher talked about “Click-or-Clunk”, a comprehension strategy where the student needs to take breaks after reading a meaningful section of the text and decide if the text clicked (they understood it) or clunked with them (they did not understand it). Several teachers mentioned the use of graphic organizers to help students organize information in the texts they read in meaningful ways. These strategies work towards the student being able to independently use skills taught when reading.

Not all interventions mentioned by the teachers worked towards developing student independence. For instance, one teacher talked about pre-defining unknown words for her students to help with their comprehension of the text. Whereas that might help for a particular text, it does not help students generally know what to do when they are reading independently and they come to an unknown word that they need to understand. This is another area that this particular school may want to look at: streamlining all interventions so that they not only focus on the same reading skills as core reading instruction, but that they focus on teaching *strategies* that work toward student independence.

Assessments

As my review of Response to Intervention literature outlined, assessments play a significant role in the implementation and execution of RtI by identifying those students in need of extra support, but also in tracking the progress of identified students as they receive intensive interventions. I now describe how the participating teachers use assessments to identify students who struggle, as well as teachers' attitudes towards the use of these assessment data.

Using in-depth assessment data to identify students at-risk. General education teachers in the participating school use formal assessment data that they already collect from their students to make informed decisions about identifying students as struggling readers. Currently, kindergarten and first grade use structured Spanish assessments to identify the students considered at-risk for reading difficulties. They use Spanish letter name and sound identification tasks (Clay, Andrade, Basurto, Ruiz, Escamilla, 1995), a teacher-created phonemic awareness test, as well as data from the Evaluación del Desarrollo de la Lectura (EDL, the Spanish version of the Developmental Reading Assessment; Ruiz & Machado Cuesta, 2006). Second through fifth grade teachers use reading data from the Measure of Academic Performance, a computer-adaptive test used to measure reading and math skills in English (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2004) to identify students who may be the most at-risk for reading difficulties and thus were best suited for receiving tier-2 reading interventions. Although students take this assessment in English, second through fifth grade teachers also use the assessment data

from the EDL to better understand the Spanish reading needs that these learners possess. These general educators have chosen to not use a quick fluency probe to understand who would best benefit from tier-2 reading interventions, but rather they use more in-depth assessments to both identify struggling readers and inform their decision-making.

By returning to the questionnaire results, I was able to understand teachers' attitudes regarding using structured assessment results. Of the 15 teachers surveyed, all agreed that using structured assessment data is helpful when planning tier-2 reading interventions. Interestingly, the same 15 classroom teachers believe that informal observations are also helpful when planning tier-2 reading interventions with struggling readers. And so, when these teachers make decisions regarding their struggling students, they are not only consulting structured assessment results, but also they find it important to rely on their informal observations.

Just like with their willingness to plan and implement reading interventions, these teachers also report that they are comfortable (15 respondents) and not hesitant (12 respondents) when using assessment results to plan tier-2 reading interventions. However, eight of the participants surveyed voiced a feeling of being overwhelmed when using assessment data. To understand why this many teachers feel overwhelmed by using assessment data, I looked again at the responses teachers gave when outlining the disadvantages of having a classroom teacher plan and deliver tier-2 reading interventions. The number one disadvantage that teachers mentioned was the amount of time that these activities take up. Teachers feel that giving assessments and analyzing subsequent data

are time-consuming activities that take away from time they could use to be instructing all their students, especially those that struggle the most. On the questionnaire, one teacher responded, "I found this test [EDL] very useful, but also very difficult to give, since it is very time consuming, and also you are busy while giving the test, but you have to keep teaching the rest of the class" (Online Questionnaire). The majority of participating teachers find these assessments to be important tools when making decisions about tier-2 reading interventions. However, they are overwhelmed, primarily because of the amount of time taken to give the assessments and to read and interpret their results.

A lack of progress monitoring. Although teachers have assessments in place to identify students who are reading below expectations, the staff does not universally use the same progress-monitoring tool throughout the building. Educational researchers have described the use of Curriculum-Based Measures (CBMs) as a popular way to track progress. Nevertheless, this school has not yet implemented a system for all teachers to know if a child is responding or not to an intervention that they are using.

The lack of a universal tracking-tool at the site is evident in the responses I received in the questionnaire. Only three respondents described how they track student progress, although it is an important idea in the implementation of Response to Intervention. When describing the intervention that she implemented, one teacher talked about using high frequency words and how she "tracks progress for six weeks," however she did not mention how she tracked the student's progress or what she did with that

information (Online Questionnaire). Another mention of progress monitoring related to the advantages of having a classroom teacher deliver tier-2 reading interventions. Because classroom teachers are continually present with students in the classroom, she stated, they could “track information” and use that information to work on interventions at various points throughout the day. I assume that all teachers monitor and track progress through informal observations, as well as other classroom assessments used throughout the course of a school year; however, they are not using a formal, standardized tool.

When responding to a question regarding using assessment data to plan targeted reading interventions, one teacher mentioned using district assessments to track progress. However, in the school studied, teachers conduct district assessments three times throughout the year: once in the fall, another time in the winter, and a third time in the spring. Educational researchers suggest though that data points should be gathered several times within a span of four-to-six weeks to see if a student is responding to a particular intervention. To that end, using district assessments given three times during the school year might not be an adequate way to measure the progress of a struggling reader who is receiving tier-2 reading intervention.

Although progress-monitoring is an important part of implementing Response to Intervention, the participating school does not have a tool that all teachers can use to easily track the progress of their struggling readers who are receiving tier-2 reading interventions. One teacher’s comment about this lack of progress-monitoring

summarizes the situation best: "I would like to see more 'how to track the progress', because I think a lot of people, a lot of teachers, get nervous about how exactly they're tracking the progress and how to do it in a way so that they can actually see the growth better" (Online Questionnaire).

Staff Development Activities and Collaboration

I have described teachers' experiences and opinions regarding the planning and delivering of tier-2 reading interventions to their students who struggle with reading. I have also described how teachers use assessments in the participating school. Next, I describe teachers' thoughts regarding staff development activities and collaboration. These professional experiences allow teachers to be better informed about their teaching practices and their understanding of student needs, which in turn positively affect the students who are most in need of intense instruction.

Educating teachers: Format and content. My review of the literature pointed out that the traditional model of staff development has become less popular and that the educator study group was becoming an important way for teachers to learn about the most current and effective practices.

During my initial site interview, I learned that at first, teachers completed many trainings on what RtI looked like, including the structure of some of the more popular models. They discussed the differences between interventions, modifications, and accommodations and talked about some examples of basic interventions in all three tiers of the intervention model. This staff had previously participated in on-site trainings on

RtI, but they were “peer-trainings,” conducted by the leaders who made up the “Student Intervention Team.” I classify these trainings as a combination of the educator study group and the more traditional model of staff development. Even though in these development activities teachers were educating each other, the “trainings” still took on the format of a lecture. In the trainings, someone on the staff imparted their knowledge on their colleagues, as opposed to the model of learning together. More recently, teachers at the site have participated in personal learning communities (PLCs) where they have studied and discussed comprehension strategies that they can use with their students. In addition, at the time of publication of this paper, this staff was forming new PLCs in which they will discuss tier-2 interventions in both reading and math. It is the goal of these recently formed PLCs to come up with a resource list of interventions that all grade levels can use with their students who struggle with concepts in reading and math.

When I surveyed teachers on the effectiveness of their staff development activities, I received information that suggested a staff that was not completely on the same page. When asked if they felt like they were better prepared to plan and use tier-2 reading interventions as a result of the staff development that has been delivered in the school, just eight responded that they agreed with that statement. Consequently, six of the teachers surveyed believe they are *not* better prepared to deliver reading interventions to their struggling readers because of staff development activities.

So, if about half of the teachers feel they are not better prepared as a result of staff developments that have already taken place, what would these teachers like to see in the future, that would better prepare them to service the students in need of the most assistance? To answer this question, I asked participants what types of staff development activities they would consider helpful and would therefore like to see offered at the school. Nine teachers responded that informal conversations with fellow school professionals and formal professional learning communities at school would be extremely helpful. Additionally, seven respondents stated that conversations with student support teams made up of teachers and other school professionals would be extremely helpful. It is important to note here that all of those types of “staff development” involve collaboration with their fellow staff members. They do not include an “expert” who would come in and lecture at them, but rather many of these teachers wish to learn from their colleagues who know them and their students as well. Additional data that are interesting, include the staff development that teachers did not believe would be as helpful as those listed above. The numbers after the descriptions of the following staff development activities represent the number of respondents that agreed that particular activity would be *extremely* helpful: professional workshops (three), continuing education classes at a university (two), books (two), professional journals (one), presentations by district leaders (one), and websites (zero). Although teachers responded that these types of staff development activities would be helpful, they did not believe they would be *as* helpful as those involving collaboration, interaction, and active participation.

When I asked teachers about what specifically they would like to learn about so that they could be better prepared to teach the students who struggle with reading the most, I learned that they are craving specific ideas for interventions. Eight respondents mentioned wanting more specific ideas of tier-2 reading interventions and participants reiterated this fact again during the follow-up group interview. Teachers need ideas of what specifically to do with readers when they see that students are struggling with a particular reading skill. One teacher's comment illustrates the need for specific ideas of what to do with readers who need extra help:

Ok, now I know there's this problem, now what intervention? What's right?
What's next? Is there a resource? I don't know. I feel like, is there like a book?
I feel like we talked about some sort of book, like a resource and you could look up and say, student is struggling with this, this is a potential thing you can use.
(Follow-up Group Interview)

Although these data show that teachers are in need of specific interventions to use with their struggling readers, I also learned that some teachers feel like they are still just learning how to teach reading in their current grade. From survey and interview data, some teachers communicated that they need to master tier-1 instruction first, before they can learn about specific tier-2 reading interventions to use with their struggling readers. One teacher, in particular, commented that she is still developing skills in terms of teaching reading and is trying to figure out what it means to be a reading teacher in her particular grade. A quick glance at some demographic information also sheds light on

the issue. Compared to other elementary school staffs, this group of teachers is *relatively* inexperienced (Online Questionnaire). Furthermore, the reading training that these teachers have received mainly came from a professional workshop or university class, with only one teacher having obtained a *license* in reading through university coursework. It is important to remember then that although this study focuses on meeting the needs of students with tier-2 reading interventions, some teachers are still working to develop their reading instruction at Tier 1.

Working with grade-level colleagues and others in the school building. In my literature review, the theme emerged about how general educators should collaborate with others as they plan and deliver their tier-2 reading instruction. From the survey and interview data, I learned that the participating teachers prefer types of staff development in which they collaborate with fellow staff members. Although teachers wish to collaborate, it is important to describe with whom they would most be willing to collaborate as well as current collaboration practices currently going on in the school.

Currently, classroom teachers have grade-level professional learning communities where they are able to collaborate and discuss student achievement. One teacher commented that their discussions on student progress in their grade-level PLC have been rare: “We haven’t even discussed that much. We haven’t even, I mean, we’ve brought up some students but it hasn’t been on a consistent basis” (Follow-up Group Interview). In their own PLCs, it appears as though classroom teachers are not discussing student progress and collaborating with others in their grade level on a consistent basis.

However, of the 15 teachers surveyed, 14 stated that they would be *extremely likely* to collaborate with grade-level colleagues. This shows a disparity between what participants said they would be likely to do and what they are actually doing.

Apart from grade-level colleagues, I also asked participants about the likelihood of collaboration with other school personnel. When asked about collaborating with the reading support teacher, all participants stated that they would be likely to work with her, with nine classroom teachers stating that they would be *extremely likely* to collaborate with this teacher. The likelihood of collaboration was not as strong for other school personnel, though. Six participants said they would be likely to work with paraprofessionals and only four said they would be likely to work with the building principal.

With regards to special education teachers, one teacher stated, "I have not discussed RtI with our Special Ed team. I don't know the willingness. I would assume that they would be really excited about this because it would take some of the pressure off of them and put it back on the teachers" (Initial Interview). Although lawmakers wrote RtI into a Special Education law, the special education team and the general education teachers in this study do not seem to be on the same page concerning the implementation of RtI. When asked the likelihood of collaborating with special education teachers, only three classroom teachers stated that they would be *extremely likely* to collaborate with them. The same number of respondents stated they would be *unlikely* to collaborate with special education teachers. An additional nine teachers stated

that they would likely collaborate with the special education team, but not extremely so. As mentioned in the literature review above, collaboration with special education teachers could really be advantageous to a classroom teacher as they plan and even deliver tier-2 reading interventions to their readers that struggle the most. It would be important to investigate why teachers are not as likely to collaborate with special education staff in their building to the same degree as they were to collaborate with their grade-level colleagues.

Contextual Implications for Early Total Immersion Programs

Every school is different because of its unique students, staff, and special challenges, and thus there will always be particular implications to consider when schools put a model like Response to Intervention into place. This is particularly true of early total immersion programs, when the model of immersion is distinct from other elementary school models. A review of literature led me to highlight three implications with which classroom teachers teaching in the immersion context may be concerned: cautiously reading assessment data, questioning which populations have tested particular interventions, and carefully adapting interventions to fit the unique needs of their learners. In the section that follows, I describe teachers' responses concerning these particular implications, as well as explain other implications that surfaced during a review of the data.

Using formal *and* informal assessment data in immersion schools. Educators must be cautious when analyzing assessment data, as some results may falsely identify a

L2 learner as needing extra help when in fact he or she does not. Consequently, other students may do well on formal assessments, while still being in need of a tier-2 reading intervention. For these reasons, immersion teachers should analyze assessment data carefully when they are indentifying and tracking the progress of their second-language learners.

As discussed in the section on assessments, teachers who participated in this study understand the importance of not only using formal assessment data, but also using informal observations as well. Teachers realize that formal and structured assessment data give just a snapshot of a student's progress and whereas it can provide a lot of good information, there is still more information that needs to be gathered. Through informal observations, teacher participants in this study notice cues that will inform their decision-making process as they plan, deliver, and adapt tier-2 reading interventions for their readers that struggle the most.

Research-base for second language learners? It is important to contemplate who participated in the studies that proved certain interventions successful and thus research-based. The data show that teachers in this study already have this warning in their minds. They are already questioning whose research has the authority to inform them of what they should do with their particular students, as mentioned in the discussion of tier-2 reading interventions above. Teachers in this study understand that their students are unique and that they probably will not look like the students who participated in the studies that prove interventions to be "research-based." Teachers continued to

discuss this topic in the follow-up group interview and discussed the place of action research in the classroom. Using interventions proven to be effective with different populations is a good starting point, agreed many teachers. "I think that if you know [tier-2 reading interventions] are research-based it gives you sense that what you are doing is right" (Follow-up Group Interview). The teachers also stated that one has to be continually doing research. If an intervention is not working for your classroom or your kids, something needs to be adapted. This leads to the third implication discussed in the literature review section: the caution classroom teachers must exercise when adapting interventions. A review of the data from this study indicate that teachers are not being sufficiently cautious when making changes to interventions.

Adapting interventions: A cautionary tale. When researchers test a certain intervention to prove its effectiveness, they follow a strict protocol. Once the intervention has proven to be effective, they recommend that teachers follow the exact protocol to get the same results of effectiveness. Adapting the intervention too much can compromise the treatment integrity and thus the results of the intervention may not be the same as researchers intended.

In my data, teachers discussed how they adapt interventions. One of the survey questions asked teachers to describe the process of adapting interventions that they have used when working with struggling readers. One teacher wrote, "I think that is something one constantly does. If something doesn't work you change your approach until you find something that does or ask a colleague for ideas on how to help a student"

(Online Questionnaire). However, it is important to remember what those in the research community, specifically Lane, *et al.* (2004), have to say regarding adapting research-based interventions. They caution teachers from flippantly making adaptations to research-based interventions. As teachers in an immersion school, they will inevitably have to change interventions that they learn about during staff development, but they should do so with caution to preserve the treatment integrity of the interventions.

More ideas for immersion schools. A comprehensive list of implications that immersion schools should consider when implementing Response to Intervention would require much more time than possible for this research study. The three implications outlined in this paper are a good start, but hardly encompass an exhaustive list of all things that immersion schools and their teachers should consider when working with students that struggle to read in their second language. However, it is important to describe additional implications that teachers mentioned in the research data.

Nine teachers mentioned that in an immersion school, one should consider the L2 development level of a child. When trying to deliver remedial instruction in the target language, teachers explained that you have to consider the vocabulary you will use to make sure you are matching the level of linguistic development of the children: “Is the vocabulary familiar to the student? The student’s target language comprehension would also be a factor. If that is low, that may need an intervention before the reading intervention can be successful” (Online Questionnaire). Hence, teachers in immersion

schools should even consider the particular words used to deliver a tier-2 reading intervention.

Two teachers also mentioned how first language literacy affects students' second language literacy. One teacher especially stated, "I want to know if they are struggling in both languages or just in the target language" (Online Questionnaire). This is a unique implication that immersion educators must consider when planning for and working with their struggling second language readers. However, immersion educators in this participating school have an advantage: they speak the first language of their students, English, and they have at their disposal, if they do not already use, assessments in the student's first language. At the immersion school studied in grades 2-5, the MAP test (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2004) is delivered in English, so immersion educators working in the classroom can very easily see if students struggle in their first language or if they only struggle in the second language, as measured by the EDL (Ruiz & Machado Cuesta, 2006). Such information is valuable and can lead to very different decisions when planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions.

"I would have to consider the materials used for the intervention. Is it in the target language or does it need to be translated?" was a question which one teacher posed in response to the question regarding the planning of tier-2 reading interventions (Online Questionnaire). Quality materials originally written in the target language are often hard to come by. When teachers need to translate materials, it is not only a time-consuming process, but also one that might negatively affect the treatment integrity discussed earlier.

When picking particular interventions to use, this is an important implication that immersion teachers must consider.

Finally, immersion teachers may be limited in their ability to collaborate with support staff, because support staff may not have knowledge of second language learners or of the second language itself. When implementing RtI then, immersion schools must consider how collaboration will be affected when some school staff do not speak the primarily language of instruction or lack certain knowledge of how second language students learn. This lack of knowledge may negatively affect teachers' abilities to collaborate when planning and delivering tier-2 reading interventions to their struggling second language learners.

Limitations of the Study

By using the qualitative research methodology of Descriptive Research Design, I collected data from classroom teachers at an early total immersion school. Through the framework constructed from a review of current research, I described the experience, opinions, and attitudes of general classroom immersion teachers in relation to Response to Intervention. This research design has allowed for an examination of teachers' experience, however there are several limitations to this study, both because of the nature of the design as well as some of the unique characteristics of this particular study.

First, I have used the Descriptive Research Design only to *describe*. I do not intend to form theory, or to test a hypothesis. It is not supposed to solve a problem. Its very nature is to describe; in this study's case, it allowed me to describe the RtI

experience of classroom teachers in one early total immersion elementary school. However, I used this methodology to complete a primary investigation, a probe into teachers' experiences with RtI. Although the description was comprehensive, because of monetary and temporal restraints, it was not exhaustively so. This is one of the major limits of this research study.

Furthermore, because I only surveyed and interviewed fifteen teachers at one school, the sample size is small. Thus, another limitation of the study is that readers cannot transfer the results to other contexts. There were comments made and situations described that may be similar to other schools. However, readers should be cautious; this research study is only describing the experiences and attitudes of the fifteen participating teachers. It is also important to remember that not all fifteen teachers who participated in this study share the same experiences. For the purpose of this paper, I tried to synthesize the data as concisely as possible. However, I had to remember, and urge readers to do the same, that I could not transfer one teacher's responses to any other participating teacher, as it is possible and perhaps likely that some of the descriptions do not coincide with all participants' experiences.

One final limitation of this study deals with researcher bias. As the primary investigator, I assured the participants that none of their comments would have any positive or negative effect on them personally or professionally. Nevertheless, as someone who has worked extremely closely with these teachers, it would be naïve to believe that their comments were not affected by the fact that they knew one of their

colleagues was reading them. Whereas a researcher must have rapport with participants so that trust can be established to obtain true and honest responses, it is preferable that there be some distance between the researcher and participant. This lack of “distance” may have lead to participants not being completely open and honest about their experiences and attitudes. This is a third and important limitation of this qualitative research study.

Implications for the Future

Although this research study does have its limitations, one of the most important characteristics of Descriptive Research Design is that it is meant to be a probe into a relatively unknown topic with the goal of producing implications for the future. In the concluding section, I outline implications for both practitioners and researchers with the hope of discovering more about classroom educators' experiences with Response to Intervention.

Implications for Practitioners

Those who are working in schools to implement Response to Intervention can learn a lot from the Descriptive Research Design, especially in the way I used it in this study. After asking questions and fully analyzing the responses of classroom teachers, I was able to see ways in which the teachers' experience line up with what research says is best practice. I also was able to see areas where these teachers should concern themselves as they work to improve upon the successes they have already had. The

following topics would be ones that the participants of this study should focus on as they continue to improve the implementation of RtI:

- Reevaluating the paperwork they use to track students during the intervention process.
- Selecting and using only *research-based* interventions.
- Teaching strategies, not skills, which work toward student independence in all tiers of the intervention process.
- Adopting a progress-monitoring tool to use throughout the grades to track student *response* to particular interventions.
- Strengthening tier-1 instruction.
- Collaborating with grade-level colleagues *and* those on the special education team.
- Adapting interventions with greater caution as to uphold treatment integrity.

Being able to meticulously look at and describe the experiences of these teachers allowed me to understand these certain areas where they most likely should focus their energies as they continue to improve implementation of RtI in their school.

Other school practitioners can learn a lot by asking their general educators questions and listening to their answers as I did in this study. Seldom do those in power to make decisions in schools ask the opinions of those whom their decisions affect the most. With consideration to Response to Intervention, or any other school-wide initiative, classroom teachers rarely are asked what their experience has been and what

their opinions are, although knowing their perspectives may very well be an essential part of the overall success of RtI implementation.

Implications for Researchers

As described before, I meant the Descriptive Research Design to only be a probe, an exploratory look at a new topic before other researchers commit more money and time to study this topic using other research designs. Looking at the classroom educators' experiences with RtI has been a relatively absent topic from current research on RtI, so using the Descriptive Research Design to take a first look at this topic was a good decision. Now, others in the research community have work to do. It would be useful to take the work that I have started here and continue it, using other research designs to learn more about this important topic.

Researchers, for instance, could implement the case study methodology to take a more in-depth look at immersion teachers' experience with RtI. Rather than focusing on all aspects related to RtI (the interventions, the assessments, the staff development activities, and collaboration) as I did in this study, future research projects should have greater focus on teachers' experience with only one aspect of RtI. Understanding the ways that teachers deliver interventions or how they use assessments to determine if a student is making progress would be important ways to concentrate a qualitative research study to learn more about teachers' experiences with RtI. Understanding the disparity between what teachers say they would be likely to do and what they actually do would be another interesting research topic. I hope that if other researchers take on more in-depth

studies, they can develop theories, which will then influence the greater educational and scholarly communities. However, before they can develop these theories, they must undertake more concentrated, focused studies.

In addition, researchers might also probe deeper into what current literature is saying about implications that classroom immersion teachers have to consider when implementing tier-2 reading interventions with their L2 readers. Although I outlined three implications in the literature review section of this paper, many more implications for classroom immersion teachers came out during data collection and subsequent description of those data. Furthermore, future researchers could investigate what immersion experts have written about regarding program-level implications that relate to RtI, such as in which language should immersion educators assess and in which language should classroom teachers deliver these tier-2 reading interventions. Future research projects should include looking specifically at those implications with the hope of understanding the nuances and the particular issues relating to those implications in early total immersion programs.

Conclusion

The bottom line is this: in scholarly research on Response to Intervention, there is a great absence of classroom teachers' voice. Researchers must address this absence, so that we all can better understand classroom educators' experiences, opinions, attitudes, and knowledge related to this promising process. The successes and failures of RtI are inextricably linked to the successes and failures of the students who struggle to read.

GENERAL EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE WITH RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Researchers and decision makers in schools must speak to those people who know those students best, the classroom teachers, so that the most effective ways possible to intervene are developed, to get all learners reading successfully.

References

- Berkeley, S., Bender, W. N., Gregg Peaster, L., & Saunders, L. (2009). Implementation of response to intervention: A snapshot of progress. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*(1), 85-95.
- Chamberlain, S. P. (2009). An interview with Diane P. Bryant and Manuel Barrera: Changing roles for educators within the framework of response-to-intervention. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 45*(1), 72-79.
- Clay, M.M., Andrade, A.M., Basurto, A.G.M., Ruiz, O.A., Escamilla, K. (1995). *Instrumento de observacion de los logros de la lecto-escritura inicial: Spanish reconstruction of an observation survey, a bilingual text*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Commission wants to hear from IRA members about their experiences implementing RTI. (2009). *Reading Today, 27*(2), pp. 3.
- Foorman, B. R., & Torgesen, J. (2001). Critical elements of classroom and small-group instruction promote reading success in all children. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 16*(4), 203-212.
- Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2007). The role of assessment in the three-tier approach to reading instruction. In D. Haager, J. Klingner & S. Vaughn (Eds.), *Evidence-based reading practices for response to intervention* (pp. 29-42). Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

- Haager, D. (2007). Promises and cautions regarding using response to intervention with English language learners. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 30, 213-218.
- Haager, D., & Mahdavi, J. (2007). Teacher roles in implementing intervention. In D. Haager, J. Klingner & S. Vaughn (Eds.), *Evidence-based reading practices for response to intervention* (pp. 245-263). Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.
- Herner-Patnode, L. (2009). Educator study groups: A professional development tool to enhance inclusion. *Intervention School and Clinic*, 45, 24-30.
- Hord, S.M. (1997). Professional learning communities: What are they and why are they important? Retrieved April/10, 2010, from <http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues61.html>
- IRA commission on RTI: Working draft of guiding principles. (2009). *Reading Today*, 26(4), pp. 1.
- James, F. (2004). *Response to intervention in the individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA), 2004*. Retrieved October/13, 2009, from http://www.reading.org.floyd.lib.umn.edu/downloads/resources/IDEA_RtI_report.pdf
- Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. B. (2008). Educational research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

- Klinger, J., McCray Sorrells, A., & Barrera, M. T. (2007). Considerations when implementing response to intervention with culturally and linguistically diverse students. In D. Haager, J. Klingner & S. Vaughn (Eds.), *Evidence-based reading practices for response to intervention* (pp. 223-244). Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.
- Lane, K. L., Bocian, K. M., MacMillan D.L., & Gresham, F. M. (2004). Treatment integrity: An essential - but often forgotten component of school-based interventions. *Preventing School Failure, 48*(3), 36-43.
- Linan-Thompson, S., Cirino, P. T., & Vaughn, S. (2007). Determining English language learners' response to intervention: Questions and some answers. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 30*, 185-195.
- Minnesota Response to Intervention Task Force. (2006). *Guidelines for a Minnesota model for responsiveness to intervention (RTI)*. Retrieved October/22, 2009, from <http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/SpecialEd/documents/Announcemen t/009253.pdf>
- Murawski, W. W., & Hughes, C. E. (2009). Response to intervention, collaboration, and co-teaching: A logical combination for successful systemic change. *Preventing School Failure, 53*(4), 267-277.
- National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for*

reading instruction. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

New roles in response to intervention: Creating success for schools and children.

(2006). Retrieved October 20, 2009, from

<http://www.sswaa.org/userfiles/file/NewRolesinRTI.pdf>

Northwest Evaluation Association. (2004). *Measures of academic progress*. Portland,

OR: Author.

Ruiz, O. & Machado Cuesta, V. (2006). *Evaluación del desarrollo de la lectura,*

segunda edición. Lebanon, IN: Pearson Learning Group.

Questions and answers on response to intervention (RTI) and early intervening services

(EIS). (2007). Retrieved October/13, 2009, from

<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/.root,dynamic,QaCorner,8>.

Pesola Dahlberg, C. A. (1999). Choosing an immersion model: The Moorhead

experience. *The ACIE Newsletter*, 2(2).

Shinn, M. R. (2007). Identifying students at risk, monitoring performance, and

determining eligibility within response to intervention: Research on educational need and benefit from academic intervention. *School Psychology Review*, 36(4),

601-617.

- Shuttleworth, M. (2008). Descriptive research design. Retrieved November/29, 2009, from <http://www.experiment-resources.com/descriptive-research-design.html>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Taylor, B. (2005). *Focusing on reading comprehension in the elementary grades*. Retrieved March/14, 2010, from <http://www.mnreadingfirst.org/mods/toc.html>
- Teaching and Learning Services (n.d.). *Balanced Literacy: Elementary Reading and Language Arts*. Retrieved May/15, 2010, from <http://www.sowashco.k12.mn.us/Departments/Curriculum/Elementary/BalancedLiteracy/readingLanguageArts.asp>.
- Vaughn, S., & Roberts, G. (2007). Secondary interventions in reading. *Council for Exceptional Children, 39*(5), 40-46.
- Walker-Dalhouse, D., Risko, V. J., Esworthy, C., Grasley, E., Kaisler, G., McIlvain, D., et al. (2009). Crossing boundaries and initiating conversations about RTI: Understanding and applying differentiated classroom instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 63*(1), 84-87.
- Wright, J. (2007). *RTI toolkit: A practical guide for schools*. Port Chester, New York: Dude Publishing.

Appendix A

Sample Initial Interview Questions

1. Tell me about the structure of RtI at your school.
2. Tell me about the history of RtI implementation at your school. Who was the driving force behind RtI Implementation?
3. What are assessments that you are using to identify kids as needing interventions?
4. Generally, what do you think the attitudes of teachers are regarding RtI?
5. Tell me about the role of the following individuals:
 - a. Administration
 - b. Special Education Teachers
 - c. Reading Support Teacher
 - d. Language Ambassadors
6. Tell me about how the professionals collaborate in your building.
7. What professional developments have been offered? In the future, what more will teachers need?
8. What do you think the ultimate goal of RtI is? Do you think you have reached that goal yet?
9. What does the future look like? What will be the next steps?

Appendix B

Online Questionnaire

Questionnaire to Immersion Classroom Teachers

The purpose of this questionnaire is to know more about the classroom teacher's experience with Response to Intervention (RtI), especially the implementation of tier 2 reading interventions. Other aspects of RtI which are related to the implementation of interventions are also the focus of this study: assessments, high quality professional developments, and collaboration. Furthermore, the unique experience that classroom teachers in immersion schools face with RtI is of particular interest. For more background, please see the Informed Consent Form.

Tier 2 reading interventions ...

- ... may be delivered by general classroom teachers to support struggling readers
- ... focus on the same elements as the core classroom instruction (phonemic awareness, phonemic decoding skills, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary)
- ... are more explicit and direct than core reading instruction
- ... target skills with which readers struggle the most
- ... are more intensive than core reading instruction (small groups or greater amount of time)
- ... are more supportive than core reading instruction
- ... are carried out, consistently, over an extended period of time (usually a minimum of six weeks)
- ... are research-based
- ... may be a packaged program or simply a reading strategy taught by the teacher

Please keep these characteristics in mind when answering the questions on this survey.

Thank you for your participation!

Tier 2 Reading Interventions

1. Students struggle with different reading skills. Below, check the appropriate boxes according to what you have seen in your classroom experience, in all your years of teaching at your current grade level.

	Many of my students struggle in these areas	Some of my students struggle in these areas	Hardly any of my students struggle in these areas
Phonemic Awareness			
Phonics			
Fluency			
Vocabulary			
Comprehension			

2. Tier 2 reading interventions focus on the same reading skills that are part of core literacy curriculum. Below, check the appropriate boxes.

	I often use interventions in these areas	I sometimes use interventions in these areas	I hardly ever use interventions in these areas
Phonemic Awareness			
Phonics			
Fluency			
Vocabulary			
Comprehension			

GENERAL EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE WITH RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

3. Briefly describe tier 2 interventions you have commonly used with struggling readers.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4. I am willing to use tier 2 interventions with my struggling readers				
5. When thinking about using tier 2 interventions to work with struggling readers, I feel ...				
a. comfortable				
b. hesitant				
c. overwhelmed				
6. I am comfortable matching readers with appropriate interventions.				

7. Which of the following do you feel would be helpful when delivering Tier 2 reading interventions to struggling readers? Check all appropriate boxes.

	Extremely Helpful	Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful at all
The Classroom Teacher				
A Support Teacher, in the classroom				
A Spanish-speaking volunteer				
An English-speaking volunteer				
Other students (in Peer-Assisted Learning)				
A computer				
Audio Recordings				
Other				

8. If you marked "other" for the question above, please explain here what you mean.

Tier 2 Reading Interventions in Immersion Classrooms

9. Have you adapted tier 2 reading interventions for your struggling second language readers? If so, describe that process.
10. When planning tier 2 reading interventions for struggling readers, what special considerations, if any, do immersion teachers have to consider?
11. As you deliver tier 2 reading interventions for struggling readers, do you have to take anything into consideration that general education teachers might not have to consider?

Advantages/Disadvantages

12. Describe the advantages of having classroom teachers deliver Tier 2 reading interventions to struggling readers.
13. Describe the disadvantages of having classroom teachers deliver Tier 2 reading interventions to struggling readers.

Assessments

14. Have you used the results of formal assessment to plan targeted reading interventions for your struggling readers? If so, describe that process.

GENERAL EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE WITH RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. Using formal assessment data is helpful when planning tier 2 reading interventions				
16. Using informal observations is helpful when planning tier 2 reading interventions				
17. I feel that I use data effectively when planning tier 2 reading interventions				
18. As I use assessment results to plan tier 2 reading interventions, I feel ...				
a. comfortable				
b. hesitant				
c. overwhelmed				
19. I am comfortable tracking students' progress with Tier 2 reading interventions.				

GENERAL EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE WITH RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Collaboration

20. Rate the likelihood of collaborating with the following personnel at your school as you plan Tier 2 reading interventions.

	Extremely Likely	Likely	Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Grade-Level Colleagues				
Teacher Leaders				
Reading Support Teacher				
Special Education Teachers				
Building Principal				
Students' Parents/ Family Members				
Paraprofessionals				
Others				

21. If you marked "other" for the question above, please explain here what you mean.

Staff Development

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
22. I feel that I am better prepared to plan and use tier 2 reading interventions as a result of the staff development that has been delivered in my school.				

GENERAL EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE WITH RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

23. Which types of resources do you feel would be most helpful when planning Tier 2 reading interventions? Check all appropriate boxes.

	Extremely Helpful	Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful at all
Websites				
Professional Journals				
Books				
Presentations by district leaders				
Informal conversations with fellow school professionals				
Formal Personal Learning Communities at school				
Student Support Team made up of teachers and other school professionals				
Continuing Education classes at a university				
Professional workshops				
Other				

24. If you marked "other" for the question above, please explain here what you mean.

25. What do you still need to know about delivering tier 2 reading interventions and implementing RtI in general that would be good topics of future staff developments?

Demographic information

- 26. What grade do you teach?
- 27. How long have you been teaching?
- 28. What is your highest degree of education?
- 29. What continuing education have you had in the area of reading/literacy?

The Big Picture

- 30. What is the ultimate goal(s) of RtI at your school?

- 31. What could be done to make delivering tier 2 reading interventions and implementing RtI easier for you?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
32. RtI is good for our school.				

- 33. What would the future of RtI look like in your school if it were up to you? (Think in terms of Tier 2 interventions in the general education classroom.)

- 34. If you have other comments regarding Tier 2 reading interventions in the general education classroom that you would like to share, please write them here.

Follow-up interviews will be conducted in order to learn more about your actions, attitudes, feelings, and thoughts regarding RtI. If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, please write your teacher code below.

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix C

Sample Follow-Up Interview Questions

Author's note to future researchers: I derived these questions from the data collected during this study. Those future researchers who wish to replicate this study should develop their own follow-up interview questions based on the data that they collect.

1. How do you think the school is doing with dealing with struggling readers? Do you feel like RtI and this idea of interventions is right for them? If it is right, do you feel like you are doing a good job at it?
2. The criteria for what research says is an intervention, was at the very beginning of the survey. According to those standards, do you think that what you are implementing are "interventions"?
3. How important is it that interventions are research-based?
4. How important is it that interventions are fun?
5. How important is it that all grade levels are on the same page?
6. Do the interventions used aim to have students do work independently?
7. What is the ultimate goal of RtI?